

Possible historical aspects of the cultural explanation of evidentiality in the Northern Samoyedic languages

The aim of the current paper is to examine whether the cultural explanation of evidentiality (primarily based on Bernárdez 2017) is supported by the development of the complex evidential system in the Northern Samoyedic languages. It can be stated that the actual speaker's perspective is one of the most relevant features in the course of an utterance, and evidentiality is a typical means of perspectivization. The significance of the speaker's point of view – taking responsibility for the truth of the statement – is also shown in the fact that there is no shift of deicticals, so there is no biclausal indirect speech. This, in turn, favors the development of complex evidentiality, in which it is also important for the speaker to keep the perspective. Based on the descriptions of the languages of Northern Siberia, it seems that the speaker takes increased responsibility for statements and this is more or less reflected in the evidential system as well. One of the main causes for this is an environmental effect caused by the harsh geographic and climatic conditions.

A hypothesis can be formulated about the syntactic changes of the Uralic languages. The complex system of evidentiality of the Samoyedic languages differs from the languages of the Finno-Ugric branch. In Western Finno-Ugric languages, there is no complex evidential system, but complex subordinating indirect speech constructions do exist. In the Proto-Samoyedic language, originally spoken further south, the evidential system could not have been as complex as in the Northern Samoyedic languages today. In the light of the cultural explanation, it can be explained that the syntactic features reconstructed for the Uralic protolanguage can serve as a starting point both for the development of indirect speech constructions characteristic to Western Finno-Ugric languages, expressed in subordinate complex sentences, and for the lack of complex evidential systems. Furthermore, structural features of the protolanguage have been better preserved in the Samoyedic branch, reinforced by environmental influences and the development of complex evidential systems.

Keywords: evidentiality, cultural explanation of evidentiality, Northern Samoyedic

SÁNDOR SZEVERÉNYI