

### **Specific system of spatial orientation in the Uralic languages of Western Siberian river valleys**

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the cultural background of a unique spatial orientation system found in some Uralic languages spoken in Western Siberia, namely in Khanty, Mansi and Selkup. This paper is partly based on former research, but our main aim is to also present new data from native speakers and recently assembled language corpora. And, last but not least, we make an attempt to identify similar phenomena in other languages of the area in order to give an explanation of the phenomena. Several sources have been used for this investigation. In the case of Selkup – beside the lexicographical sources, the Selkup Spoken Language Corpus was used. In the case of Khanty and Mansi, in addition to the dictionaries, an Ob-Ugric Database was used, which contains analyzed and annotated folklore text corpora. Besides, we collected data from the Mansi newspaper and from native speakers of Mansi. We can state that the investigated Khanty, Mansi, and Selkup orientation subsystems (an adverb/preverb pair meaning 'toward/away from the river(bank)'; 'up to/down from the hill' and 'toward/away from the fire(place)') are results of independent but contact induced parallel development – however, following Fortescue 2011 – the language contact cannot be the only explanation, because similar systems can be detected in North-American languages as well.

The development of these orientation systems was motivated by the particular geographic circumstances of the speakers, namely, living on steep river banks, furthermore fire and water play an important role in the way of thinking as well. Speakers of the investigated languages seem to divide the world into two parts: one of them is the safer zone, the direction towards the water, believed to be more positive, whereas the other one is its opposite, pointing towards the forest, which is considered dangerous. The analogy of the outer world was reflected inside the house: the fireplace, which is usually found in the middle of the house, is analogous to the river of the outer world. This is the safe zone, and going towards the wall from it is analogous to going from the river to the forest. The orientation system is in correlation with the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples of Western Siberia. The source concepts of the system are connected to the rivers and the dwellings, namely, the ancient cave dwellings on the upper part of the river bank.

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