

North Sámi Ambipositions: Radial Category Profiling and Typological Comparisons

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We use radial category profiling (Nesset et al. 2011) to investigate the behavior of ambipositions in North Sámi in comparison with other languages known to have ambipositions (Russian, Finnish, and Estonian). This technique enables us to explore the behavior of ambipositions and suggest a typological generalization.

North Sámi (~30,000 speakers in contiguous regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland) faces a unique situation in Europe as a minority language in contact with majority languages from two different language families: Indo-European (Norwegian, Swedish, and Russian) and Finno-Ugric (Finnish; Ylikoski 2009:201-202).

Ambipositions (Hagège 2010:114) are adpositions that can appear both as (a) prepositions and as (b) postpositions, as in these North Sámi examples:

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| 1. | a. <i>miehtá dálvvi</i>
[over winter-GENITIVE]
'during the winter' | b. <i>dálvvi miehtá</i>
[winter-GENITIVE over] |
| 2. | a. <i>čad̥a áiggi</i>
[through time-GENITIVE]
'through time' | b. <i>áiggi čad̥a</i>
[time-GENITIVE through] |
| 3. | a. <i>rastá joga</i>
[across river-GENITIVE]
'across the river' | b. <i>joga rastá</i>
[river-GENITIVE across] |
| 4. | a. <i>maŋŋel soađi</i>
[after war-GENITIVE]
'after the war' | b. <i>soađi maŋŋel</i>
[war-GENITIVE after] |

While many languages have ambipositions, they are usually a marginal phenomenon (cf. *over* in English *all over the world/the world over*). It is typologically unusual for a language to make systematic use of ambipositions (Hagège 2010:116-124). In North Sámi 22% of adpositions are ambipositions, as opposed to 13% and 10% in Finnish and Estonian respectively (Nickel & Sammallahti 2012:171-196; Grünthal 2008:57; Karlsson 2008:313-320).

Examples 1-4 give the impression that the position of ambipositions is arbitrary, but two factors argue against this: regional variation and expression of meaning. We carried out empirical studies based on a 10-million word corpus extracted from newspapers, plus literary texts. We found that prepositional use predominates in southwestern North Sámi (parallel to predominance of prepositions in Indo-European), whereas postpositional use predominates in the northeast (parallel to predominance of postpositions in Finno-Ugric), however this pattern is not uniform.

Corpus data was tagged for the types of meanings expressed and radial category networks were established for each ambiposition. While radial category profiling shows that each ambiposition contains the same submeanings for both preposition and postposition, we find strong differences in the distribution of meanings expressed according to position. Results for both regional variation and differences in meaning are confirmed significant by statistical models (chi-square and effect size).

The use of North Sámi ambipositions is more complex than in other European languages known to have ambipositions. Russian has few ambipositions (*radi* 'for the sake of', *spustja/pogodja* 'later') and a corpus analysis reveals no use of position to express different meanings. Finnish and Estonian have systematic use of ambipositions, and here there are consistent tendencies, such as use of preposition to express time vs. postposition to express space (Huomo forthcoming a & b; Erelt 2003). However, in North Sámi *miehtá* 'over' is more likely to express spatial meanings as a preposition, but temporal meanings as a postposition, but this tendency is reversed for *čad̥a* 'through'. We hypothesize that languages with more extensive use of ambipositions also use them in more complex ways.