

Diachrony of spatial postpositions in Uralic languages

All Uralic languages use postpositions to express spatial, temporal and other relations. Saamic and Finnic languages may display prepositions, a characteristic of SVO languages. However, even these two Uralic branches clearly prefer spatial postpositions to prepositions. In addition to fully grammaticalized adpositions, Uralic languages display relational nouns in expressions of spatial relations (see 1b and 2b). Syntactically, a standard postpositional phrase consists of a complement in the genitive and the head which often shares the inflectional properties of nouns. These characteristics align the spatial postpositional phrase with a possessive noun phrase and increases the complexity of postpositions (cf. Hagège 2010: 38–39). Consequently, a typical spatial postposition in Uralic consists of the postpositional stem and a local case affix denoting the function of Locative (see 1a-2b), Ablative or Lative, in some languages also Prolative.

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(1a)	<i>xarad-ʔ</i>	<i>ʔaxə-na</i>	(1b)	<i>xarad-ʔ</i>	<i>xew-xəna</i>
	house-GEN	behind-LOC(PP)		house-GEN	side-LOC
	‘behind the house’			‘beside the house’	

Finnish

(2a)	<i>talo-n</i>	<i>taka-na</i>	(2b)	<i>talo-n</i>	<i>viere-llä / viere-ssä</i>
	house-GEN	behind-ESS		house-GEN	side-ADE / side-INE
	‘behind the house’			‘beside the house’	

In this paper we take a closer look at the diachrony of postpositions and inner morphosyntax of the postpositional phrases in Uralic languages with a special emphasis on spatial postpositions. On one hand, adpositional phrases in these languages typically emerge from noun phrases expressing spatial relations. On the other hand, in many individual Uralic languages and language groups, like in many other languages of the world, postpositions have served as basis for local cases, e.g. Hungarian local cases based on the stem *bel-* ‘inner’ and Finnic *l-* cases (such as adessive in (2b)) descending from the postposition **ül-* ‘above’ (Aikio & Ylikoski 2007).

The focus of our study is on the long-term stability of grammatical units constituting the postpositional phrase in Uralic languages. Firstly, we will assess the stability and change of lexical items (postpositions and relational nouns), and secondly, the diachrony of the inflection of the head and complement. Our preliminary findings suggest that the postpositions used most frequently in the basic spatial meanings such as ‘above’, ‘under’ and ‘behind’ may preserve inherent lexical and morphological features. More concretely, in many languages postpositions that derive from Proto-Uralic **wülä-* ‘above’ and **ala-* ‘under or below’ having contemporary forms in all Uralic languages, or **miŋä* ‘a place behind’ (> Hungarian ‘behind’) and **taka* ‘behind’ (cf. Finnic and Samoyedic ‘behind’ in (1a and 2a)) (UEW: 6, 276–277, 506–507 573–574) preserve an archaic set of a tripartite local case system. As for other spatial postpositions in individual Uralic languages, they typically originate from earlier relational nouns and are adjusted to productive case morphology of the given language (see 1b and 2b for case inflection of relational nouns).

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- Hagège, Claude. 2010. *Adpositions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- UEW = Rédei, Károly (ed.). 1988–1991. *Uralisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 1–3. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.