

Eugen Hill, Unregelmäßigkeit als Chance: anomaler Plural vs. Topic/Focus-Unterscheidung in Jukagir

The aim of the talk is to show how the analysis of synchronic irregularities in the inflection of nouns in the isolated Paleosiberian language Yukaghir can help to acquire information about the prehistory of its inflectional system. It examines the formation of the plural where a strange discrepancy between the possessive and the non-possessive declension patterns can be observed. While the plural marker in the possessive inflection always has the shape $-p(\partial)$ -, its non-possessive counterpart has an allomorph $-pul$ - which seems without synchronic motivation. This paper shows that $-pul$ - is best analysed as an amalgam of the plural marker $-p(\partial)$ - and some unknown element for which the underlying shape $-l(\partial)$ - has to be assumed. For structural reasons the creation of $-pul$ - has to be attributed to the nominative case. This helps to identify the origin of $-l(\partial)$ -. In the inflection of the personal pronouns $-l(\partial)$ - is a marker of the special topic form in the nominative case. A close inspection of the synchronic behaviour of Yukaghir nouns ending in l in the singular identifies them as fossilised nominative topic inflection forms, from which it is inferred that $-l\partial$ - was originally used also in the declension of nouns. This makes the origin of the allomorphic variation $-p\partial$ - ~ $-pul$ - in the non-possessive plural obvious. The allomorphy is a trace of the former overt topic-marking in the nominative of Yukaghir nouns. This insight bears important consequences also for the prehistory of the Yukaghir conjugation system.