The quasi-copula *omǝs-* in the Synya dialect of the Khanty language

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: in spite of the universal physical experience regarding the basic postures sitting, standing and lying, languages do not exploit the possibilities related to the verbs expressing these three postures. Semantic changes resulting in secondary and tertiary meanings, figurative uses, grammaticalizational processes are all influenced by language-internal and language-external factors. This is why it is important to describe the quasi-copula use of languages belonging to various language families, areas, and cultural regions.

Objective: to identify the specific features of the use of the quasi-copula use in the Synya dialect of the Khanty language.

Research materials: the linguistic material used in this article is represented by the units extracted from a multimedia corpus of field research collected among the Synya Khanty people.

Results and novelty of the research: the study reveals multiple patterns of use of the quasi-copula *omǝs-* 'sit'. It can be used with objects of different sizes. A marked horizontal expansion of usage is expressed with the quasi-copula *ŏl-* 'lie'. The position of the background compared to eye level and the ratio of height to width are of little importance. As for big objects, such as furniture, the presence of a leg (table, chair, stand) does not preclude the choice of the unit *omǝs-* 'sit'. Positions in which the Figure cannot perform its function (e.g. container turned on its side) cannot be expressed with *omǝs-* 'sit', they require *ŏl-* 'lie'. The use of *omǝs-* 'sit' is tied to a person's area of activity. The use of *omǝs-* 'sit' in reference to vehicles implies a position without movement, in contrast to the use of *loj-* 'stand', which expresses a temporary halt and contrasts with movement.

Key words: posture verbs, quasi-copula, locative sentence, Khanty language, Synya dialect

Квазикопула *omǝs-* в сынском диалекте хантыйского языка

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Введение. Несмотря на универсальное выражение физического опыта относительно основных поз сидя, стоя и лежа, языки зачастую не используют возможности, связанные с глаголами, выражающими эти позы. Семантические изменения, приводящие к вторичным и третичным значениям, фигуративным употреблениям, процессам граммати-кализации, – всё это находится под влиянием внутренних и внешних языковых факторов. Вот почему важно описать квазикопулу языков, принадлежащих к разным языковым семьям, районам и культурным регионам.

Цель: выявить специфические особенности употребления квазикопулы в сынском диалекте хантыйского языка.

Материалы исследования: лингвистический материал представлен единицами, извлечёнными из мультимедийной базы данных полевых исследований, собранных среди сынских ханты.

Результаты и научная новизна. В исследовании выявлены многочисленные закономерности употребления квазикопулы *otəs-* 'сидеть'. Её можно использовать с объектами разного размера. Заметное горизонтальное расширение употребления вызывает использование квазикопулы *ŏl-* 'лежать'. Положение фона по сравнению с уровнем глаз и соотношение высоты и ширины не имеет большого значения. Что касается значительных предметов, например, мебели, то наличие ножки (стола, стула, подставки) не препятствует выбору единицы *otəs-* 'сидеть'. Положения, в которых фигура не может выполнять свою функцию (например, контейнер перевёрнут на бок), не могут быть выражены с помощью *otəs-* 'сидеть', они требуют *ŏl-* 'лежать'. Употребление *otəs-* 'сидеть' привязано к зоне деятельности человека. Использование *otəs-* 'сидеть' в отношении транспортных средств подразумевает положение без движения, в отличие от использования *loj-* 'стоять', которое выражает временную остановку и контрастирует с движением.

Ключевые слова: глаголы положения, квазикопула, локативное предложение, хантыйский язык, сынский диалект

Introduction
To the background

One of the verbal elements of locative sentences in the northern Khanty language is described in detail. The work of G. L. Nakhračeva [13] is devoted to the semantics and functioning of Khanty verbs expressing destruction. The structural and semantic features of Ob-Ugric verbs with different preverbs, the change in the valency system of verbs in combination with preverbs, as well as the modification of their semantics while maintaining the system of valency are studied by V. N. Solovar [24; 25]. Some verbs in question, in particular, the semantics of Khanty positional predicates, are described by E. V. Kaškin. His research is carried out within the framework of lexical typology, and focuses on verbs describing the position of the subject of prominent vertical orientation, as well as verbs with the semantics of functional position (prototypically for subjects not stretched vertically) [11].

The present paper aims to describe the use of the quasi-copula *otəs-*, that goes back to the posture verb 'sit', on the basis of the Synya dialect of the Khanty language.

Theoretically, the verbs 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie' provide the speakers of every language with the same meaning, metaphorisational, and grammaticalizational possibilities. Besides the diverse spatial and dimensional experience they evoke, the three states can be maintained with different kind and amount of physical control [12], which is also a universal experience for every language user. However, despite the similar conditions, the world's languages do not exploit these possibilities in the same way, which makes it important to describe the practice of languages belonging to various areas and cultures.

Posture verbs belong to the set of verbs expressing basic actions. Each denotes a posture without referring to its mode or any further circumstance [17, 81]. E. g. the English verb *sit* belongs to this set, however, the verbs *ride* or *huddle* do not. Generally, each basic posture is expressed by one verb, e. g. English *sit, stand, lie*, Hungarian *ül* 'sit', *áll* 'stand', *fekszik* 'lie'. However, there are languages in which more than one verb denote the same posture [28].

It is typical that posture verbs have further meanings, which can be metaphorical (Hungarian *Magasan állt a tejszínhab a torta tetején* 'The whipped cream stood high on the top of the cake', metonymic (English *sit on a board* 'be a member of a board), or idiomatic (Hungarian *Könny ül a szemében*; 'There are tears sitting in his/her eyes'. In addition, they often have further functions due to grammaticalization. According to the results of [9], the verbs 'stand' and 'lie' often serve as a starting point to grammaticalization during which various elements marking continuity, durativity etc., as well as quasi-copulas come into being. Furthermore, the verb 'sit' can be a source of habitual markers [10, 322, 325].

On the basis of Newman's introduction [16], the particular importance of the verbs 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie' can be proved with the following facts. These are the posture verbs that, in basic meaning, are used most frequently. These are the posture verbs that make a source for quasi-copulas in locative and existential sentences. It is also typical that these three verbs become markers of tense or aspect. They may also serve as a source of markers of nominal classes [15, 31–34].

The significance of posture verbs in relation to the locative sentences was exhibited by a monograph discussing them considering the English language [15]. Later, in Max Planck Institute, the typology of quasi-copulas used in locative sentences was elaborated [1]. This research rests on a set of photographs that makes a uniform base for processing the locative structures in various languages [2]. The descriptions of the individual languages revealed the diversity of locative sentences considering the quasi-copula use in them. With his co-author, Ameka set up several groups on the basis of the number of quasi-copulas the given language tends to use in locative sentences [1].

It is important to note that it is not only quasi-copulas that can serve as verbal elements in locative sentences. In this function, languages often use neutral verbs, situational verbs, as well. Furthermore, locative sentences can also employ motion verbs as verbal elements, which results in locative sentences expressing fictive motion. In addition, the verbal element of the clause is sometimes a resultative construction, indicating that the present situation is a result of some kind of human action [4], e. g. Hungarian (*Hol van a létra?*) – *A falnak van támasztva* '(Where is the ladder?) – It is / has been put against the wall.' This is why it is a complex task to describe the whole repertoire and rules of the use of verbal elements in the locative and existential sentences, even in the case of stylistically neutral texts.

Locative and existential sentences

The quasi-copulas, as opposed to the copulas, are not semantically bleached elements.

According to numerous case studies, two thirds of the languages use the same set of copulas and quasi-copulas in the locative and existential sentences [5]. This must be related to the fact that these two types of sentences are quite similar concerning their constituents, viz. Figure, Back–ground, and a verbal element. A locative sentence defines the location of the Figure, which has already been mentioned in the course of the conversation, in other words, the Figure is the topic of the given sentence. In turn, in an existential sentence, it is the Figure that has not been mentioned earlier and is introduced as a new element. In a locative sentence, the locative element is obligatory as it gives an answer to the question *Where is X*? In existential sentences, the locative element may be missing from the sentence. In these cases, the Background may have been known from the conversation, it can be evident in the given situation[1], or it can belong to our common knowledge [5; 6]. In the present paper, locative sentences are preferred to existential ones.

Copulas and quasi-copulas

Pustet's definition of copulas is: «A copula is a linguistic element which co-occurs with certain lexemes in certain languages when they function as predicate nucleus. A copula does not add any semantic content to the predicate phrase it is contained in» [19, 5]. However, as she emphasises, semi-copulas, unlike copulas, do add meaning to the predicate phrases to which they belong. At the same time, they cannot function as a predicate independently, which differenciates them from lexical verbs.

The most characteristic sources of copulas and quasi-copulas are verbs and pronouns[2], and in some cases, the starting point of the grammaticalisation was a prepositional phrase. Quasi-copulas typically derive from verbs like «"do/make/build", "happen/occur", "go/turn into/come–/become", and "act (like)"» [26, 92]. In numerous Indo-European languages, the copula is homo–nymous with the verb 'be, exist'.

The diversity in the outcome of the metaphorizational and grammaticalizational processes regarding posture verbs is due to both linguistic and extralinguistic reasons, not to mention the unpredictability factor of language change. To illustrate this point, let us see an example of the verb 'sit' in several languages. One would assume that sitting is a state or activity having positive associations, e. g. rest, comfort, calmness etc. However, if sitting takes more time than had been planned, it will evoke inactivitiy, waste of time, resulting in negative connotations. According to the investigations of Vidaković-Erdeljić, in the English, German, and Croatian languages, when the verb 'sit' is used with [–live] subjects, it will definitely imply inactivity [29]. At the same time, there have been described a lot of languages in which the verb 'sit' is also used with [–live] objects in locative

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[1] It is evident that the interpretation of the statement 'There is no milk' depends on whether we are standing in front of the fridge at home or just meeting a neighbour at the entrance of a supermarket, as the Background is determined by the given situation. In the case of the existential sentences like There is a God, the Background is the whole world, or the universe.

[2] E. g. Mandarin Chinese shi.

sentences, i.e. as a quasi-copula, e. g. Goemai [9], Trumai [8], Seri [18], Khanty [21], Mansi [14].

In the Introduction to his monograph, Newman presents further illustrative differences in the ways languages operate with quasi-copulas. The translation of the Hungarian sentence *A számítógép nálunk az asztalon áll* results in a weird sentence in English? *The Computer stands on a desk in our house* because neither the vertical extension of a computer is prominent, nor does a computer have legs. In the English language, whether the object, e. g. a piece of furniture, has parts that can be construed as legs seems an important aspect when choosing the quasi-copula 'stand'. Finally, in French, posture verbs are used exclusively with animate subjects [15].

Geometrical characteristics of the Figure

The rules governing the use of the quasi-copula that go back to posture verbs are generally connected to the spatial and geometrical characteristics of the given object [15; 1]. Although this is a natural consequence of the origin of the verbal elements in question, they are still not predictable. There has been described a language[3] in which the quasi-copula going back to the verb 'lie' can be used with, among other things, balls «which lack any differentiation in terms of vertical or horizontal shape on the ground (earth)» [3].

The size of the Figure

The preference for a quasi-copula can also be determined by the size of the Figure. According to Lemmens, in Dutch, the sentence expressing the location of a large ball contains the quasi-copula 'stand' [12, 122]. In turn, in Gurenɛ, size has no significance in this regard, i. e. if the object does not have a prominent extension, its location can be expressed with the quasi-copula 'lie' [3, 192].

Background-related rules

There can be restrictions connected to the Background. In Gurenɛ, the quasi-copula 'lie' can only be used with inanimate subjects if the location described by the sentence is at or near floor-level [3, 193]. In turn, in the German language, the verbs *sitzen* and *setzen* are reported to be used in case of a location that can be found somewhere high, i. e. it is not the features of the Figure that count but certain characteristics of the background [7, 137–138].

Function and position

Among other things, the preference for a certain quasi-copula can also be influenced by the relation of the object's function to the object's actual position. In the German language, it is the quasi-copula *stehen* that is used when the object has a functional part and it is positioned in the right direction; even if the form of the object in itself would not require it, e. g. server, ashtray [7, 137–138].

Earlier results

The use of the quasi-copula 'sit' has been analysed on the basis of the linguistic material collected two decades ago by Eszter Ruttkay-Miklián [20]. This is a language material consisting of semi-spontaneous texts that explain the meaning and use of all the Synya Khanty stems that are listed in Steinitz' dictionary [27]. As the explanations are primarily of describing character, numerous locative (and existential) sentences can be found among them. This research revealed that in this dialect, the verb *oməs-* 'sit' has deep significance in the locative sentences. The paper listed numerous sentences containing the quasi-copula *oməs-*, as well as presented a list of objects that trigger the use of the quasi-copula in question. However, the material was not suitable for exhibiting the whole range of its use or revealing all the rules governing its use [21]. As far as Kazym Khanty is concerned, on the basis of the language of schoolbooks and further publications, we can assume that similar rules work in that dialect concerning the quasi-copula use in locative and existential sentences [22; 23]. In addition, the Mansi language also seems to follow a similar practice [14].

Objectives

In spite of the universal experience, the rules and restrictions connected to the use of the quasi-copula going back to posture verbs are diverse across languages. Consequently, the description of them proves to be very important regarding every language. The present paper aims to describe the [basic rules of the use of *oməs-* in the Synya Khanty dialect.

Materials and methods

Materials are based on those collected by E. Ruttkay-Miklian [20]. Linguistic materials collected in different periods (1995–2000) among the Synya have also been involved.

To achieve the stated goal, along with a comprehensive study of the use of Khanty quasi-copula *oməs-*, a complex approach is used. The material is investigated using the functional

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[3] Gurenɛ [3].

method, which makes it possible to identify the functional significance of the verbal element in question, and its semantic potential; a special kind of system, involving the interaction of grammatical form, vocabulary and context, as well as a set of patterns and rules of the use of this language means are revealed.

Results
The semantics of the Sinya Khanty
quasi-copula *oməs-*
Size

In general, small, compact objects that have no prominent extension, trigger the use of the quasi-copula 'sit' in locative and existential sentences (1) (2) (3):

(1) *χŭl   paŋka   nŭm   nŏrəm-ən   oməs-əl.⁴*
fish   can   top   shelf-LOC   sit⁵-PRS.3SG
'The fish can is on the top shelf.'

(2) *jontəs-ti   jiŋl-em   śŭŋ-ən   oməs-əl.*
sew-PTCP.PRS   box-1SG   corner-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'My handwork box is in the corner.'

(3) *sakkar   an   păsan-ən   oməs-əl.*
sugar   bowl   table-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'The sugarbowl is on the table.'

The location of various tabby cups, mugs, bowls, pots, and casseroles are also given with a sentence containing *oməs-* as a verbal element (4) (5) (6):

(4) *pŏšχ-ije-m   an   păsan-ən   oməs-əł.⁶*
son-DIM-1SG   cup   table-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'My little son's cup is on the table.'

(5) *aśe-m   kurška năŋ   an-en   pŭŋəłən   oməs-əł.⁷*
father-1SG   mug   2SG   cup-2DU   next_to   sit-PRS.3SG
'My father's mug is next to your cup.'

(6) *šaj   pŭt-em   kur   lŏŋəłən   oməs-əl*
tea   pot-1SG   stove   on_top_of   sit-PRS.3SG
'My teapot is on the stove.'
Not only small tools and dishes but also fair-sized objects trigger the use of *oməs-*, (7) (8):

(7) *ńań   an   păsan-ən   oməs-əl.*
bread   container table-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'The bread container is on the table.'

(8) *šaj   laraś-ew   rat-χăr   pŭŋəłən   oməs-əl.*
tea   case-1PL   fire-place   near   sit-PRS.3SG
'Our cupboard is situated near the fireplace.'

Similarly, the location of houses, villages, and towns are also expressed with the quasi-copula in question (9) (10) (11):

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⁴ Or: xŭl   panka nŭm nŏrəmən (zero copula).
⁵ Although the verb oməs- could be glossed as 'be', we decided to exhibit the original verbal meaning. As it is the quasi-copula function that is discussed in this paper all along, this way allows us to present the examples in a reader-friendly way.
⁶ Or: pŏšχijem an păsanən (zero copula).
⁷ Or: aśem kurška nin anan puŋələn (zero copula).

(9) *jaraś*   *χot*   *lapka*   *pŭŋəłən*   *oməs-əł.*[8]
      Gerasim   house   shop   next_to   sit-PRS.3SG
      'Gerasim's house is (situated) next to the shop.'

(10) *ma*   *kurt-em*   *śăńa*   *jŏχan*   *pitar-ən*   *oməs-əł.*[9]
      1SG   village-1SG   Synya   river   bank-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
      'My village is at the bank of Synya River.'

(11) *un*   *juš*   *jŏχart*   *šăšən*   *un*   *woš*   *oməs-əł.*[10]
      big   way   bend   behind   big   town   sit-PRS.3SG
      'Behind the bend of the wide road there is a big city.'

In addition, the location of a mountain range can also be given by the help of the quasi-copula *oməs-* (12):

(12) *kew*   *ur*   *as*   *šăš*   *pelək-ən*   *oməs-əł.*[11]
      Ural   ridge   Ob   back   side-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
      'The Ural Mountains are situated over the Ob River.'

Axis

First, it is important to draw the line between the uses of the quasi-copulas 'sit' and 'lie'. When the Figure has a prominent extension, and it is parallel with the Ground, it is typical to use the quasi-copula *ŏl-* 'lie' (13) (14) (15) (16):

(13) *nepek*   *păsan-ən*   *ŏl-əl*
      book   table-LOC   lie-PRS.3SG
      'The book is (lying) on the table.'

(14) *ŏpe-m elti*   *jŏχt-əm*   *pis'ma păsan-ən*   *ŏl-əl*
      sister-1SG   from   arrive-PTCP.PRS   letter   table-LOC   lie-PRS.3SG
      'The letter from my sister is (lying) on the table.'

(15) *χăš-ti*   *jŭχ*   *păsan-ən*   *ŏl-əl.*
      write-PTCP.PRS   wood   table-LOC   lie-PRS.3SG
      'The pencil lies on the table.'

(16) *keši*   *păsan-ən*   *ŏl-əl.*
      knife   table-LOC   lie-PRS.3SG
      'The knife is on the table.'
      Similarly, a noose or an iron-trap etc. *lie* on a surface.

Height; height and width ratio, immobility

When trying to establish how spatial properties determine the use of the quasi-copula 'sit', it is not easy to distinguish the aspect height from the ratio of height and width.

Talking about small objects of various height situated on the same surface, if they have a base providing stability, the height and width ratio does not seem to be crucial. Cups, glasses and wine bottles unanimously take the quasi-copula 'sit' (17) (18) (19):

(17) *an*   *păsan-ən*   *oməs-l.*
      cup   table-loc   sit-PRS.3SG
      'The cup is on the table.'

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[8] Or: jaraś χot lapka pŭŋəłən ul (be.PRS.3SG). Or: jaraś hot lapka pŭŋəłən (zero copula).

[9] Or: ma kurtem śăńa jŏχan pitarən ul (be.PRS.3SG). Or: ma kurt-em śăńa jŏχan pitar-ən (zero copula).

[10] Or: un juš jŏχart šăšən un woš (zero copula).

[11] Or: kew ur as šăšən (zero copula).

(18) *ăstakan   păsan-ən   omǝs-l.*
glass   table-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'The glass is on the table.'

(19) *ŭrti   wŭna   kewan   păsan-ən   omǝs-l.*
red   wine   bottle   table-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'The bottle of red wine is (standing) on the table.'

Large but mobile objects basically take the quasi-copula 'sit'. Their height may considerably exceed their width (20) (21):

(20) *tăm   păl   ăškap   lapka   śŭŋ-ən   omǝs-l.*
this   high   wardrobe   shop   corner-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'This high wardrobe is (standing) in the corner of the shop.'

(21) *tăm   păl   χolod'iľńik-ew   kuχńaj-ən   ipuša   śŭŋ-ən*
this   high   fridge-1PL   kitchen-LOC   always   corner-LOC
omǝs-l.
sit-PRS.3SG
'This high fridge of ours is always (standing) in the corner of the kitchen.'

In general, with sizable and immobile objects, although both the copula *ul-* and the quasi-copula *loj-* 'stand' can be used, it is *omǝs-* that is most naturally employed (22):

(22) *budapešt   woš-n   šek   ar   uməš   pamjatńik   omǝs-l*[12]
Bp.   town-LOC   SUPL many beautiful   monument   sit-PRS.3SG
'There are a good deal of beautiful monuments in Budapest.'

However, when the memorial we are talking about is extremely high but relatively narrow, the quasi-copula will be *loj-* 'stand'.[13]

If an average sculpture stands on an average pedestal, the quasi-copula used with it is normally *omǝs-* (23):

(23) *woš   kŭtəp-n   puškin   pamjatńik   omǝs-l*
town   middle-LOC   P.   memorial   sit-PRS.3SG
'In the centre of the town, there is a Puškin memorial.'

Similarly, the location of a common Khanty (log)house is expressed with the quasi-copula 'sit' (24). In turn, if it is a two-, three-, or ten-storey building, *loj-* 'stand' will be used as a verbal element (25):

(24) *ma   χot-em   stantsija   pŭŋələn   omǝs-l.*[14]
1SG   house-1SG   station   next_to   sit-PRS.3SG
'My house is (situated) next to the station.'

(25) *ar   jăt-pi   χot   woš   kŭtəp-n   loj-l.*[15]
numerous   part-ADJ   house   town   middle-LOC   stand-PRS.3SG
'The multi-storey house is situated in the middle of the town.'

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[12] Or: ul (be.PRS.3SG) / loj-l (stand-PRS.3SG).
[13] The subject of the picture that made it clear was the Washington Monument near the White House.
[14] Or: ul (be.PRS.3SG). However, loj- is not acceptable.
[15] Or: ar jătpi χot woš kŭtəpn ul (be-PRS.3SG).

Legs

In Synya Khanty, in contrast with many other languages, the fact that an object has legs does not prevent the use of the quasi-copula 'sit'. Even a "labaz", which is a high, loghouse-like wooden building standing on four legs, primariliy for preserving food, is used with *oməs-*. cf. also chairs and tables as Figures of locative sentences (26) (27):

(26) *šŭkaləm   ulas   iśńi   pŭŋələn   oməs-l.*
broken   chair   window   next_to sit-PRS.3SG
'The broken chair is/stands at the window.'[16]

(27) *păsan   in   kamən, sŭmət jŭχ   ilpijn   oməs-l.*[17]
table   now   outside   birch tree   below sit-PRS.3SG
'Now the table is outside, below the birch tree.'

In addition, a photo of three flowerstands having long and thin iron legs also helped elicit a sentence with *oməs-* as a verbal element. The pieces of furniture in question, following minimalist design patterns, not only have extremely long legs but also lack a compact part serving as a container. They practically consist of three iron legs, the only solid part is exhibited by the flower pots in them (28):

(28) *χuləm pal   kŭr-əŋ   jaləp   lipət   potstavka   jŏln*
three high   leg-ADJ   new   flower   stand   at_home
oməs-lət.
sit-PRS.3SG
'The three high-legged, new flower stands are (standing) at home/inside.'

Sledges have runners, and they behave similarly to chairs and tables in determining the choice of *oməs-* in locative sentences (29):

(29) *ŭli   χot   pŭŋələn   aśe-m   uχəl   oməs-əl.*
reindeer   house   next_to   father-1SG   sledge   sit-PRS.3SG
'Next to the čum, there is my father's sledge standing.'

In the sentences presented above, the location of a wide range of objects having legs are expressed with sentences containing the quasi-copula 'sit'. This points to the fact that the construction of the object is not of primary importance in defining the verbal element in a locative sentence.

(30) *śi   ăstakan   χotχar-ən   oməs-l.*
that   glass   floor-LOC   sit-PRS.3SG
'This/the glass is on the floor.'

(31) *an-en   tŏrən elti   oməs-l.*
cup-2SG   grass on   sit-PRS.3SG
'Your cup / the cup is in the grass.'

Eye-level, function

If a cup is standing on an untypical surface, or below the level required by its normal use, e. g. in the grass, it will not change its general preference for *oməs-* (30) (31):

_____

[16] Only if the broken chair can stand in its normal position.
[17] Or: păsan in kamən, sŭmət jŭχ ilpijn. In other words, this sentence is also grammatical with a zero copula.

However, if the very same cup is turned on its side, i. e. is not able to play its role, it is not *oməs-* that is required but *ŏl-* or *kerətlij-* (32):

(32) *an   χotχar-ən   ŏl-əl   /   kerətlij-l.*
cup   floor-LOC   lie-PRS.3SG   lie_around-PRS.3SG
'The cup is lying around on the floor.'

Similarly, if a broken chair is not able to stand straight on its legs, *oməs-* cannot be used with it. Instead, the quasi-copula *ŏl-* is required, which expresses nonusability or inactivity by means of evoking another position (33):

(33) *šukaləm   ulas   iśńi   pŭŋələn   ŏl-əl*
broken   chair   window   next_to   sit-PRS.3SG
'The broken chair is/lies at the window.'

If we can specify neither the location nor the precise position or orientation of an object that would normally require *oməs-*, there can be used various quasi-copulas or verbal elements in the locative or existential sentences (34):

(34) *pasoľ   paŋka   χŏľša   ŏl-əl /   oməs-l /   kerəl-əl.*
bean   tin   somewhere   lie- PRS.3SG   sit-PRS.3SG   lie_abandoned-PRS.3SG
'The can of beans lies around somewhere.'

Discussion and conclusions

Our paper aimed to present the typical use of the quasi-copula 'sit' in the Synya dialect of the Khanty language. During the work, it was considerable value that the elicitation and interpretation of the data was based on the native Khanty competence of one of the co-authors, as well as further excellent speakers of Khanty.

The investigations revealed that, in northern Khanty, the quasi-copula going back to the posture verb *oməs-* 'sit' plays an essential role among the possible verbal elements of locative and existential sentences. In other words, its high frequency is salient compared to the verbal elements that have similar functions.

However, its use is excluded if the prominent extension of the Figure is horizontal (e. g. pencil, knife, letter, book). In such cases, it is the quasi-copula *loj-*, going back to the posture verb 'lie' that is required.

The quasi-copula *oməs-* can be used with small and larger mobile objects, various dishes and containers, as well as with immobile ones (monuments, houses, buildings, settlements). In addition, the location of a mountain range can also be expressed with this element. On this basis one can conclude that *oməs-* can be used with objects of any size or form, and the ratio of width and height

has no significance as this quasi-copula cooccurs with e.g. high objects of small bottom area (e. g. refrigerator).

However, with the choice between quasi-copulas 'sit' and 'stand', the Khanty language can express the contrast between the zone of human activity and the space above it (one-storey house, multi-storey building). In other words, the semantics of *oməs-* implies that the sentence is about an object that can, in some way or other, be reached for average people. This is why *oməs-* is used even in the case of prominent verticality (refrigerator). Evidently, if the object is extremely high and narrow, the quasi-copula 'stand' is preferred (obelisk).

In addition, this makes it clear why, as opposed to many other languages, it is not evident to use the quasi-copula 'stand' in sentences in which Figures have legs (chair, table, flower stand).

Furthermore, similarly to many other languages, the quasi-copula can express the relation of position and function. If the Figure is in an atypical position in which it is impossible to fulfill its task (i.e. to contain something, e. g. a bowl lying on its side), *oməs-* cannot be used in the sentence.

Besides, among its numerous functions, *oməs-* can also express inactivity. If a vehicle is not ready

for starting (e. g. a boat on land, a sleigh without harnessed reindeer), its location can be given with a sentence containing *omǝs-* as a verbal element. In turn, it is the quasi-copula *loj-* 'stand' that has to be used if we want to contrast it with moving or transport, i. e. if it is in a condition suitable for starting.

Naturally, there are a great number of questions concerning the rules governing the use of *omǝs-,* as well as the division of tasks among the quasi-copulas originating in the three basic posture verbs, furthermore, the rules concerning optional and compulsory uses, etc. These questions can only be answered by means of further investigations, based on photos and questionnaires.

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