

Werk

Titel: Typology of Languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia (LENCA)

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Ort: Wiesbaden

Jahr: 2012

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?666048797_0016 | LOG_0018

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Report

Typology of Languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia (LENCA)

Thomas E. Payne

Payne, Thomas E. 2012. Typology of Languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia (LENCA). *Turkic Languages* 16, 139–144.

A workshop entitled “Typology of Languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia” (LENCA) was held during the 45th Societas Linguistica Europea conference 2012 in Stockholm, Sweden. In this workshop, thirteen papers were presented representing languages from Turkic, Uralic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Indo-Iranian, Indo-European and Dardic languages. This report describes the background, history and motivations for such “LENCA” gatherings, the activities of the workshop, and some possible future directions.

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Background

A broad band of typologically similar indigenous languages stretches from Japan and Korea, across Asia and into Eastern and Northern Europe. These languages belong to several genetically distinct language stocks and families, notably Japanese-Ryukyuan, Korean, Mongolic, Palaeo-Siberian, Yeniseyan, Tungusic, Turkic, Uralic, and Indo-European, as well as several unclassified languages, and languages for which genetic relationships are controversial. In Central Asia, the area interfaces with Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, Indo-Iranian, Dravidian, and Austro-Asiatic languages. During the course of history, this huge area has been a meeting place of many cultural and linguistic strands, and represents a fertile field for typological, comparative and sociolinguistic research.

For the past several decades, much important linguistic work has been done, and is still being done, in Russia and other countries where these languages are spoken. Unfortunately, because of political, economic and language barriers, much of this research has been unknown to the international community. For this reason, about the turn of the millennium, Pirkko Suihkonen and Bernard Comrie organized a series of three international symposia to bring together researchers working in various countries to coordinate typological linguistic research in a broad geographic area

defined as “Europe and Northern and Central Asia” (ENCA). No language in this region was excluded, and no *a priori* assumptions made as to whether the area constitutes a unified *Sprachbund* or not. The intent was not primarily historical reconstruction, though historical and comparative papers were welcome. Rather, the motivation was to foster and disseminate typological, descriptive and documentation work between Europe and the vast territory of Russia and other republics, countries and regions east of Boğaziçi and the Ural Mountains.

One principle of the original LENCA concept was that symposia should be held in various locations where indigenous languages of the region are actually spoken, rather than in major capital cities. Though this made travel to and from the symposia more challenging for international participants, it was hoped that convening symposia closer to the homelands of local languages would make it easier for speakers and scholars without institutional funding to participate.

Thanks largely to the efforts of Suihkonen and Comrie, support for three symposia was obtained from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Department of Linguistics, the University of Helsinki, and several other institutions in Finland and Russia, and the first symposium was convened on 21 May, 2001, at Udmurt State University, Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic, Russia. The theme of the first LENCA symposium was Deictic Systems and Quantification in Languages Spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia, and featured contributions by well-known scholars from both sides of the Urals. Selected proceedings from that symposium were published in a proceedings volume edited by Suihkonen & Comrie, and published in 2003 (see references cited, below).

The second LENCA symposium convened at Kazan State University, Kazan, Russia, in 2004. The theme of “LENCA II” was “Typology of Argument Structure and Grammatical Relations in Languages Spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia”. Again, linguistic typologists working in indigenous languages across Eurasia participated. Among the keynote speakers was Anna Siewierska, whose importance to language typology in general, and specifically to research on languages spoken in Europe and Northern and Central Asia cannot be overestimated. We are deeply grateful for her, her work as a linguist and typologist, and also her work in various administrative duties involved in linguistic research. The proceedings volume from LENCA II (Suihkonen, Comrie & Solovyev 2012) is dedicated to Anna, and contains one of her last publications (Siewierska & Bakker 2012).

The third and last LENCA symposium took place in Tomsk, Siberia, Russia, in June, 2006, with the theme “Clause Combining in Languages Spoken in Europe and North and Central Asia”, with selected papers published by John Benjamins (Vajda 2008).

Since 2006, linguistic research has continued in the indigenous and minority languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia, but unfortunately, the original funding dried up years ago. Therefore creative approaches need to be devised in order to bring together researchers in the area. One such approach was to organize a gathering under the umbrella of an existing linguistics conference. In 2012 an orga-

nizing committee consisting of Thomas E. Payne (University of Oregon and SIL International), Pirkko Suihkonen (University of Helsinki, General Linguistics), Andrey Filchenko (Tomsk State Pedagogical University), and Lindsay Whaley (Dartmouth) proposed a workshop at the annual *Societas Linguistica Europea* meeting. This workshop was informally dubbed the “Daughter-of-LENCA”, or “Neo-LENCA”, symposium, as it seemed a bit presumptuous to call this very limited gathering “LENCA IV”. Continuing in the tradition of the original three LENCA symposia, the workshop consisted of presentations and discussions dealing with the typology of languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia, with emphasis on understudied indigenous languages. The location of SLE 2012 in Stockholm seemed particularly auspicious for this workshop since several minority language varieties in Sweden meet the LENCA profile, among them at least four varieties of Saami, Meänkieli (a minority variety of Finnish also known as Tornedalen), all belonging to the Uralic stock, and Romani. In recent decades, as a result of active immigration, Sweden hosts a large number of “new” minority languages.

Topics addressed

The workshop proposal listed the following research questions for the languages of the region:

1. What are the similarities and range of variation among tense, aspect, modality, and evidential systems in the region?
2. To what extent is locational and directional marking used to express aspectual and modal categories?
3. How are medial clauses, converbial clauses and other dependent clause types used in discourse?
4. Is constituent ordering more sensitive to pragmatic categories, semantic roles or grammatical relations?

Over 40 abstracts were received in response to the call for participation, which indicates that the level of interest in linguistic studies in Eurasia is still high. Unfortunately, only thirteen abstracts could be accepted therefore not all of the original questions were addressed in the workshop. But of course, this means that there is still much work to be done, and provides additional motivation for future gatherings of this sort. Other areas we had hoped to include were sessions on phonological typology, and the creation and maintenance of electronic databases, both of which are potential fruitful areas for future research and future workshops.

There were three topically organized sessions within the workshop. These were: 1) Verbal Categories, specifically tense, aspect and modality, 2) Participant reference and Clause combining in discourse, and 3) Negation and Copular clauses.

Session one consisted of an introduction by the organizers, and two papers dealing with tense, aspect and modality: 1) Benjamin Brosig (Stockholm University): “Tense and evidentiality in Mongolian in an areal perspective”, and 2) Irina

Nevskaya (Freie Universität Berlin): “Locational and directional relations, and their extension to tense and aspect in South Siberian Turkic”.

Session two, on participant reference and clause combining in discourse, attracted the largest number of abstracts. Eight papers were presented in this session: 1) Monika Rind-Pawłowski (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt): “The function of Dzungar Tuvan – (*lptlr* and *irgin* in relation to the speaker’s perspective”, 2) Oleg Belyaev (Russian Academy of Sciences and Sholokhov Moscow State University): “Towards an anaphoric approach to Ossetic correlatives”, 3) Brigitte Pakendorf (CNRS and Université Lumière Lyon 2): “Information structure in a situation of language contact: Sakha influence on Lamunxin Even”, 4) Andrej A. Kibrik, (Russian Academy of Sciences): “Origins of the Russian referential system: alternative scenarios”, 5) Natalia Serdobolskaya (Russian State University and Sholokhov Moscow State University): “Semantics of complementation in Ossetic”, 6) Lenore Grenoble (University of Chicago): “Clause combining in Evenki”, 7) Carina Jahani (Uppsala University): “Participant reference in original and translated text, examples from English, Swedish, Persian and Balochi”, and 8) Henrik Liljegren (Stockholm University): “The linguistic identity of the Greater Hindu Kush, a transit zone between South and Central Asia.”

The paper by Oleg Belyaev won a prize as one of the best presentations by a graduate student at the conference-concluding ceremony.

Finally, session three consisted of three papers on “negation and non-verbal predicates”: 1) Martine Robbeets (Universität Mainz): Negation in the Transeurasian languages from a historical-comparative perspective. 2) Éva Ágnes Csató (Uppsala University): Areal features of copular clauses in Karaim. 3) Birsal Karakoç (Uppsala University): Typology of copular clauses and copular markers in modern Turkish.

The last slot in session three consisted of a general discussion conducted by Lindsay Whaley, of Dartmouth. In that discussion informal evaluations of the workshop were solicited, and ideas for future collaborative efforts discussed. Topics raised included:

1. What constitutes a LENCA language?
2. Future conference venues.
3. A possible proceedings volume of papers from the current workshop.

As for the first topic, we were reminded by Andrej Kibrik that the original intent was to unite linguistic typological work in Europe and the former Soviet Union. All languages that are in or around that region were considered “LENCA languages”. At LENCA II, Andrej was even allowed to give a paper on an Athabaskan language because of the intercontinental cultural and linguistic connections between Asia and Alaska. Support was voiced for keeping the definition open-ended, rather than restricting it typologically (e.g., only verb-final languages), or geographically (e.g., to a narrow definition of Eurasia), or genetically (e.g. only to particular language families). No one voiced an opinion in favor of limiting the scope of LENCA.

Some discussion ensued concerning the possibility of convening a dedicated LENCA symposium. Those who spoke in favor of such an idea expressed regret at

the relatively small number of papers that were given in the SLE workshop. Such a limited setting did not begin to do justice to the breadth and scope of linguistic research in the region. Then again, others reminded us of the fact that there are so many conferences that not many linguists would be able to afford or make time for yet another one. Also, the fact that the LENCA workshop took place within the larger SLE meetings meant that the papers were available to a wide range of scholars. Many attended the workshop sessions who were at the SLE for other reasons. Thus there was “cross-fertilization” and exposure to the wider linguistic community that would not have occurred in a dedicated LENCA symposium. The general conclusion was that, yes, a future LENCA workshop or symposium would definitely be worthwhile, but that at this point the best approach would be to hold it as a sub-conference to a larger conference, such as the SLE or the ALT (Association for Linguistic Typology). Thomas Payne was tasked with the job of approaching the SLE with a proposal for a larger symposium associated with the SLE, but outside the normal SLE workshop structure.

Finally, the possibility of a proceedings volume was raised. It was generally agreed that, with only thirteen papers, a non-peer-reviewed proceedings/work papers volume would be appropriate. Lindsay Whaley and Pirkko Suihkonen expressed their willingness to be involved in editing such a volume.

Conclusion

In summary, the LENCA workshop at the SLE 2012 meeting brought linguists working on minority languages of Europe and Northern and Central Asia together to discuss typological trends in a large region extending from Japan to Norway. The languages that formed the subject matter of the workshop clearly belong to several distinct language families and stocks, and the workshop did not address the many unresolved questions of genetic relationships in the region. Rather it was a typological workshop, aimed at documenting the degree of linguistic similarity and range of diversity in a very important area, and providing, insofar as possible, substantive explanations for better-than-chance similarities. By interfacing with other linguists attending the SLE, the workshop stimulated research on many linguistic projects in Eurasia, while at the same time promoting the unique characteristics and value of LENCA languages within the larger, international linguistics community.

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