

# Low Preverbs in Northern Khanty<sup>1</sup>

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**Introduction.** The current talk is aimed to introduce a subclass of Northern Khanty preverbs<sup>2</sup> (NKh, Uralic > Ob-Ugric) that pose a problem for linguistic theory. I will show that existing accounts cannot straightforwardly capture NKh data in the view of syntax-semantics interface.

**Previous studies.** Ugric preverbs have been studied within typological perspective (Kiefer 1997, Virtanen 2014 (Mansi), Burykin & Solovar 2017 (Kazym Khanty), Solovar 2018, 2019, Zakirova & Muraviev 2019 (Shuryshkar Khanty), cf. Kiefer & Honti 2003 for an overview of Uralic preverbs). The current study has new data on morphosyntax of Kazym Khanty preverbs and compares to accounts of Hungarian (É. Kiss 2008, 2006, Suranyi 2009, Kardos & Farkas 2021).

Preverbs are a non-homogenous class in Northern Khanty. Among them, there are directional particles (1) and predication elements (2).

- (1) ma      **nuχ**      ajλta      mǎn-λ-əm  
1SG      **up**      slowly      walk-NPST-1SG  
'I'm going up slowly' [but walk down fast]
- (2) ma      ow-en      **lǎp**      tǎj-əλ-əm  
1SG      door-POSS.2SG      **tightly**      hold-NPST-1SG>SG  
'I hold the door tightly shut'

The uses given in (1)-(2) have two common features. Syntax-wise, they can be moved freely. Semantics-wise, they are interpreted compositionally. However, there are uses of these words that do not exhibit these properties. These are low preverbs (3).

- (3) was'aj-en      amp-eλ      (**nuχ**)      jir-λ  
Was'a-POSS.2SG dog-POSS.3SG      **up**      tie-NPST[3SG]  
'Wasya is tying the dog'

**Low preverbs** are a subclass of directional particles and predication elements that are interpreted idiomatically. In (3), Wasya's movement is not directed upwards. Semantics-wise, they can have an idiosyncratic meaning (e.g. *nuχ* can mark telicity) or be vacuous (free to omit).

One preverb that does not belong to directional or predication class is *ara*. It differs from other preverbs because it is compositional. *ara* denotes distributivity (Kaksin 2010, Solovar 2018).

- (4) Aj      wøj-λ-an      ara      porλ-əs-ət.  
small      beast-PL-POSS.2SG      DISTR      fly-PST-3PL

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<sup>2</sup> The data comes from elicitation conducted within joint HSE University and MSU fieldtrips to Kazym Khanty (Kazym) in 2023-2024.

[The dog scared the birds], 'And they flew to different directions'

Syntax-wise, low preverbs generally cannot be moved. For example, topicalization is banned in (5).

- (5) \***nuχ**    amp-eλ            jir-s-əλλε  
      **up**     dog-POSS.3SG   tie-PST-3SG>SG  
      exp. 'He tied the dog' {but he let go deer}

In German and Hungarian, low preverbs have similar semantic and syntactic properties (Wurmbrand 2000, Svenonius 2004). This typological fact suggests that compositionality and movement freedom are interrelated and there is a need of theoretical account that would predict it.

**Complex head approach.** Susi Wurmbrand (2000) argues that non-compositional preverbs form complex head with the verb in German. The problem for extending this account for NKh data is the prediction once a complex head is formed, its parts are invisible to syntax. In NKh, however, focus particles can separate low preverbs from the verbal complex (6). Therefore, low preverbs and verbs do not form a complex head in NKh.

- (6) %λəw    nuχ    **pa**    amt-əs  
      3SG    up     **EMPH** be.glad-PST[3SG]  
      'She rejoiced, too'                    (Teveleva 2021)

**Special head approach.** The alternative to complex head approach is assuming a special head for low preverbs. Svenonius (2004) assumes for Russian that it is a res head merged below V while Kardos & Farkas (2022) suggest that in Hungarian all preverbs are InnerAsp (Travis 2010) sandwiched between v and V.

The problem with this approach is semantics. Both res and InnerAsp are heads that are independently argued to mark telicity. In NKh, however, only one low preverb *nuχ* does it so it would be a morphological stipulation. The problem for res head approach is *ara*. *Ara* marks distributivity and must have scope over the internal argument, hence, it cannot be merged below V. The problem for InnerAsp head approach is that the verb is supposed to head-move to Inner Asp and form a complex head by Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984), which is not a plausible option because of particle intervention.

## Literature

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