THE PLURAL FORMATION OF NOUNS IN YUKAGHIR.
IN SEARCH OF A HISTORICAL EXPLANATION FOR A SYNCHRONIC IRREGULARITY

The paper shows how the analysis of synchronic irregularities in the inflection of nouns in the genetically isolated Paleosiberian language Yukaghir can help to acquire information about the prehistory of its declension system.

Traditionally two dialects of Yukaghir are distinguished, which are often viewed as two different languages: the Tundra Yukaghir (TY) which is spoken on the lower Kolyma river and its tributaries, and the Kolyma Yukaghir (KY) spoken in the upper Kolyma district. Yukaghir is a language with a rich inflectional morphology in the nominal and the verbal system. Morphological categories are mostly marked by means of agglutinating suffixes. Yukaghir nouns are inflected for number (singular ~ plural), third-person-possession (possessive ~ non-possessive), and case. The marker of the possessive inflection is inserted between the stem and the case endings (cf. app. 1). In the formation of the plural a strange discrepancy between the possessive and the non-possessive inflection patterns can be observed. While the plural marker in the possessive inflection always has the shape -pə- or -p- depending on the rhythmical structure of the preceding word segment (app. 2), its non-possessive counterpart has an allomorph -pul- which seems without synchronic motivation (app. 3). This paper shows that -pul- is best analysed as an amalgam of the plural marker -p(ə)- and some unknown element for which the underlying shape -l(ə)- has to be assumed. For structural reasons the creation of -pul- has to be attributed to the nominative case (app. 4). This helps to identify the origin of -l(ə)-. In the inflection of the personal pronouns -l(ə)- is a marker of the special topic form in the nominative case (app. 5). A close inspection of the synchronic inflectional behaviour of Yukaghir nouns ending in -l in the singular identifies them as fossilised nominative topic inflection forms (app. 6), from which it inferred that -lə- was originally used also in the declension of nouns. This makes the origin of the allomorphic variation -pə- ~ -pul- in the non-possessive plural obvious. The allomorphy is a further trace of the former overt topic-marking in the nominative of Yukaghir nouns.

This analysis of the synchronic irregularities in the plural formation of Yukaghir nouns bears consequences on the prehistiry of the conjugation system of Yukaghir. In the inflection of the intransitive verbs a special form in -l is found which is used to indicate that the agent of the intransitive verb is in focus. This agent-focus form of the intransitive verbs is in general not capable of inflection neither for person nor for number. It makes the impression of a former nominal. One may hypothesize that the verb forms in -l originally were topic-forms of verbal nouns formed with the same topic-marker -l(ə)- which is synchronically observed in the nominative of the personal pronouns and can be now assumed for the prehistory of the noun inflection as well.

App. 1: inflection of nouns in the dialects of Yukaghir (KY āčə, TY ilə 'domestic reindeer')

NOM	*āčə*	*ilə*
COM	*āčə-n'e*	*ilə-n'e*
DAT	*āčə-ŋin*	*ilə-ŋin'*
COM POSS	*āčə-de-n'e*	*ilə-de-n'e*
DAT POSS	*āčə-de-ŋin*	*ilə-de-ŋin'*

App. 2: inflection of the possessive plural in the dialects of Yukaghir
(KY *n'ēr* 'garment', *šoromə* 'person')   (TY *nime* 'dwelling', *t'amd'ə* 'oar')

NOM	*n'ēr-pə-gi-Ø*	*šoromə-p-ki-Ø*	NOM	*nime-pə-gi-Ø*	*t'amd'ə-p-ki-Ø*
LOC	*n'ēr-pə-de-ge*	*šoromə-p-te-ge*	ACC	*nime-pə-da-hane*	*t'amd'ə-p-ta-hane*
ABL	*n'ēr-pə-de-get*	*šoromə-p-te-get*	PROL	*nime-pə-da-han*	*t'amd'ə-p-ta-han*
COM	*n'ēr-pə-de-n'e*	*šoromə-p-te-n'e*	LOC	*nime-pə-de-ha*	*t'amd'ə-p-te-ha*

App. 3: inflection of the non-possessive plural in the dialects of Yukaghir

	KY			TY	
NOM	*n'ēr-pə-Ø*	*šoromə-pul-Ø*	NOM	*nime-pə-Ø*	*t'amd'ə-pul-Ø*
LOC	*n'ēr-pə-ge*	*šoromə-pul-ge*	ACC	*nime-pə-hane*	*t'amd'ə-pul-hane*
ABL	*n'ēr-pə-get*	*šoromə-pul-get*	PROL	*nime-pə-han*	*t'amd'ə-pul-han*
COM	*n'ēr-pə-n'e*	*šoromə-pul-n'e*	LOC	*nime-pə-ha*	*t'amd'ə-pul-ha*

App. 4: underlying structure of the non-possessive PL NOM in -pul

PL NOM	KY	*šoromə-p-ul*	=	/*šoromə-p-lə-Ø*/
	TY	*t'amd'ə-p-ul*	=	/*t'amd'ə-p-lə-Ø*/

cf. in verbs KY *šørilə-* 'paint' → *šørilə-* + *-š-* + *-mə-* → 3SG. in *-Ø šørilə-š-um*
                                        CAUS + TRANS

                            → *šørilə-* + *-š-* + *-tə-* → 3SG. in *-Ø šørilə-š-ut*
                                        CAUS + FUT

App. 5: information structure in the NOM of Yukaghir personal pronouns
(a) NEUTRAL KY, TY 1SG *met* 'I', 1PL *mit* 'we'   subject
(b) FOCUS KY, TY 1SG *met-ek* 'me', 1PL *mit-ek* 'us'   object of a transitive verb
(c) TOPIC KY, TY 1SG *met-ul* 'me', 1PL *mit-ul* 'us'   object of a transitive verb

1SG TOPIC *met-ul* = /*met-lə*/ cf.   3SG NEUTRAL *tudə* ~ TOPIC *tudə-l*
1PL TOPIC *mit-ul* = /*mit-lə*/   3PL NEUTRAL *tittə* ~ TOPIC *tittə-l*

App. 6: inflectional behaviour of nouns with NOM SG in -l in the dialects of Yukaghir

KY

NOM SG	NOM PL	GLOSS	NON-POSS	POSS	GLOSS
odul	*odu-pə*	'Yukaghir'	*anil*	*ani-gi*	'fish'
qojl	*qoj-pə*	'god'	*laqil*	*laqi-gi*	'tail'
šāl	*šā-pə*	'tree'	*čul*	*čū-gi*	'meat'

cf. TY   *t'ūl* 'meat' ~ POSS ABL *t'ū-da-hat*
          loqil 'tail' ~ POSS PROL *loqi-da-han*
          sāl 'tree' ~ PRED PL *sā-pə-leŋ*