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57th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea
Demonstrative Frames of Reference in Norton Sound Kotlik Yup'ik (NSKY)

In August 2024, I attended the 57th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea (SLE) in Helsinki, Finland. I participated in one of the workshops called "WS24 Typological approaches to non-canonicity in demonstratives" and presented my work in a talk under the title "Demonstrative Frames of Reference in Norton Sound Kotlik Yup'ik (NSKY)." Participating in this workshop was of immense value as it allowed me to meet and network with researchers interested in the same topics, but in different languages and linguistic approaches.

The Yup'ik language has one of the world's most exuberant demonstrative inventories, but the system is obfuscated through its canonical description (Miyaoka, 2012; Toler, 2024a). My work describing this seemingly complex demonstrative system begins with a corpus-based analysis of spoken narratives in the underdescribed Norton Sound Kotlik dialect. Within my NSKY corpus, demonstratives account for 30% of the word tokens. Using Frames of Reference as a descriptive lens, I demonstrate how the language embeds its all-pervasive demonstrative inventory into the physical, metaphorical, and cultural landscape by using three distinct frames of reference, each employing a different distance-based typology with particular attention paid to the nature of the ground and the shape of the figure. In contrast to the canonical typology, the Yup'ik language utilizes three demonstrative systems: (i) an intrinsic 1-term system, (ii) a relative 1-term system, and (iii) a multifaceted absolute system that presents four distinct grounds—direct, elevation, riverine, interiority—each with a 2-term peripersonal-extrapersonal distance contrast. This research and analysis calls for a reanalysis of demonstrative typology to embed the system within the contemporary frame of reference literature before describing the canonical distance contrasts (Toler, 2024b).

As a participant in this demonstrative workshop, I also learned about other languages that challenge canonical descriptions in ways similar to my research in Yup'ik. In Nivkh, demonstratives are used as sentence connectives (Gruzdeva, 2024); in Estonian, demonstratives are grammaticalized into personal pronouns (Pajusalu and Taremaa, 2024); and in Äiwoo, demonstratives appear with an unusually high frequency (Næss, 2024). Participation in this workshop and all of the associated talks will benefit my research and my future collaboration throughout my linguistic career.

However, this workshop was only one of many that intersected with my interests. I also attended workshops and networked with researchers interested in construction grammar, lexical affixes and polysynthesis, and psycholinguistic approaches and their intersections with fieldwork. Beyond the workshops, this was also my first time in Finland and the conference provided ample opportunities to explore the city of Helsinki and its outskirts. I participated in several excursions, including a city tour and a day exploring Suomenlinna fortress and its endless mazes of tunnels and islands. Finally, I was able to meet with friends, mentors, and colleagues from around the world. The conference lunches, banquets, and ceremonies were elegant and provided the perfect places to reconnect and make new friends. I am grateful to CIPL for their support in attending this annual conference and supporting my career as a linguistic researcher and educator.

References

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