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Polar interrogatives: Typological and Uralic perspectives

This paper gives an overview of what is known about the typology of polar interrogatives (yes/no-questions), and examines the domain in Uralic languages in view of this typological knowledge.

I will first focus on the type of marking encoding polar interrogation. In typological studies of the domain (e.g., Ultan 1978; Dryer 2005, Miestamo 2007), the following types of interrogative marking have been identified: intonation, interrogative particles, disjunction (A-not-A), order of constituents, verbal inflection, and interrogative auxiliaries. I will also pay attention to the position of the interrogative marker. The structures encoding polar interrogatives will be examined in a more holistic perspective as well, paying attention to structural asymmetry between interrogatives and declaratives, i.e. whether and how the structure of interrogatives differs from the structure of declaratives. In my ongoing work (Miestamo 2007, 2009), I have found structural asymmetry in the marking of, e.g., focus and tense-aspect-mood. A further topic to be addressed in the paper are the different functions of polar interrogatives and their structural correlates.

The Uralic part of the paper will try to answer the question whether and how the different types and phenomena discussed in the typological part are attested in Uralic languages. The data come from published materials.

I will conclude by proposing a preliminary list of features that the database should take into account concerning the domain of polar interrogation.

References

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