

“Upwards towards the forest and away from the riverbank” The Upper Negidal orientation system and the role of rivers in the expression of direction

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1 Introduction

- **Orientation systems** have been **studied in many languages**: Austronesian (Blust 2013, Nagaya 2020), Sino-Tibetan (Post 2019, Shirai 2020, Honkasalo 2019), Mesoamerican (O'Meara & Pérez Pérez Báez 2011), languages of the North Pacific Rim (Fortescue 2011)

- **Spatial Frames of Reference (FoR)** (Levinson 1996, 2003)
 - Relative - relative to the observer
 - Intrinsic - inherent characteristics of an object
 - Absolute - abstract fixed bearings (ex. cardinal points)

- **Redefinition of the absolute FoR** (Palmer 2015) to better account for the diversity of systems **beyond cardinality**: *landmarks, path of the sun, prevailing winds, rivers and sea* (Brown 1987)

- **Additions to the typology of spatial FoRs**:
 - Geocentric subtype (François 2015)
 - **Geocentric macrotype** (Hoffman, Palmer & Gaby 2022)

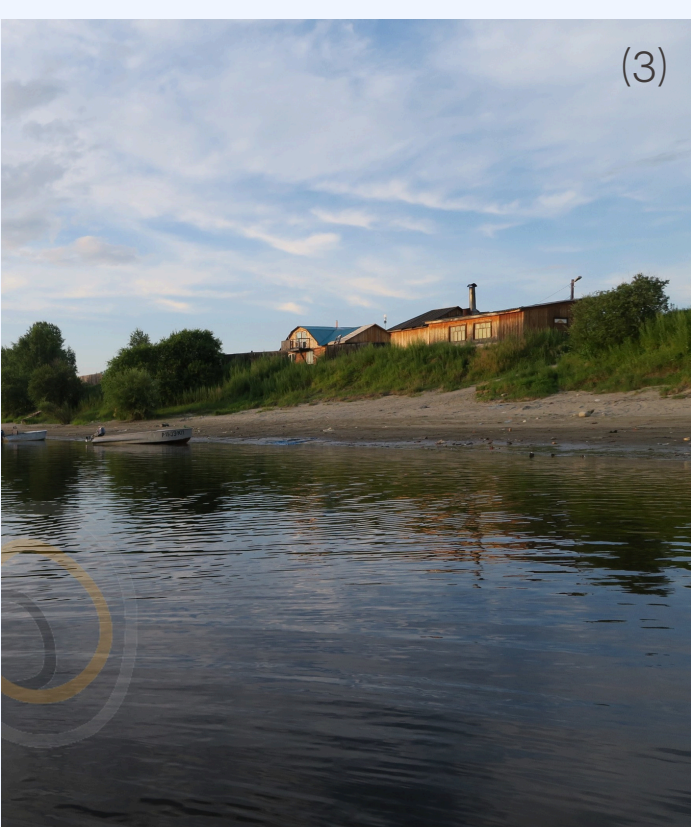
- Development of studies on orientation taking into account **salient topographical-features** (Palmer 2007, Palmer 2015, Palmer et al. 2017)

2 Upper Negidal

- Established **along the the Amgun River** (Russian Far East), **semi-sedentary, fishing and hunting** (Zgusta 2015: 186-187)
- A region of interconnected **lakes and rivers** surrounded by **Taiga Forest uphill from the riverbeds**
- **North-Tungusic** language (Whaley & Oskolskaya 2020: 91)
- **Upper Negidal & Lower Negidal** (†) (Pakendorf & Aralova 2018)
- **4 speakers** in two villages (Vladimirovka & Polina Osipenko)
- mainly head-final, SOV, agglutinative type
- The spatial grammar of Upper Negidal is **underdescribed**



(1) Daria Nadeina fishing on lake Starikovskoe
(2) Starikovskoe lake, on which Vladimirovka is situated
(3) A view of Vladimirovka from the lake
Source of the images : Pakendorf & Aralova 2017
<http://hdl.handle.net/2196/b644db81-725c-4031-935c-f33c763df152>



Research Questions

1. To what extent does riverine vocabulary play a particular role in the spatial grammar of Upper Negidal?
2. How is it embedded in the orientation system?
3. What are the spatial Frames of Reference of Upper Negidal?

Hypothesis: geocentric orientation system

- Traditional economy and cultural practices
- Ethnogeographic studies on **Even** (Krivoschapkina & Prokopleva 2016), **Evenki** (Lavrilier & Gabyshev 2017, Mamontova & Thornton 2022) and **Nivkh** (Fortescue 2011: 88-92): *hydrographic networks, prevailing winds, path of the sun*

3 Methodology

- Corpus of **206 Upper Negidal narratives** (Pakendorf & Aralova 2017) (archived on the **ELAR repository**)
→ different genres, 9 different speakers, glossed, Ru & Eng translations, 14 146 utterances
- **Working corpus of 3 729 utterances** expressing **translational spontaneous motion**
- Berkeley manual “Coding of Motion Events in Texts” (Slobin 2005)
- **Fixed semantic codes** are determined by frequency of situation using a **three-steps approach**:
 - i. Definition given in Cincius’ Negidal-Russian lexicon (1982)
 - ii. Utterance-by-utterance check of the context of narration
 - iii. Russian translation provided by the speakers themselvesEx. *tesa-* ‘move away from riverbank’ – *V:psog[riverbank]*
- **58 additional utterances** by targeted concordance search of riverine directionals (*adverbs, relational nouns*) in non-translational and non-spontaneous contexts (*static location/posture & caused-motion*)

4 Results

Salience of rivers in the Upper Negidal linguistic practices

- **Designation ‘Negidal’** – *ŋe:-* ‘bottom of the riverbank’ + deriv. *-gida:-* ‘side’ + plural *-l* (used by the Evenki); self-designation *amgun bajanin* (lit. ‘people of the Amgun’)
- **Content of the narratives** – frequent references to rivers and lakes as key elements of the narration (landmarks, goals of motion, travel routes)
- **Types of Grounds** – riverine-related topographical features represent 16% of all overtly expressed Grounds in the working corpus

Riverine verbs and riverine adverbs in translational spontaneous motion events

Category	Lexeme	Translation	Nb. occ.	Definition (Cincius 1982)	FoR
Verb	<i>solo-</i>	move upriver	14	to go or sail upriver against the current	Geo
	<i>oja:n-</i>	move downriver	20	to go down the river with the current	Geo
	<i>tesa-</i>	move away from riverbank	1	to swim away from the shore	Geo
Adverb	<i>sola:ki</i>	upriver	9	up the river against the current	Geo
	<i>oja:ki</i>	downriver	7	down the river with the current	Geo
	<i>ŋe:-ski</i>	towards the bottom of the riverbank, downwards	10	down the hill or the mountain to the riverbank	Geo
	<i>di:-ski</i>	towards the top of the riverbank (lit. forest), upwards	9	up the hill from the riverbank to the taiga	Geo
	<i>bad-gi-ski</i>	towards the opposite side of the riverbank	9	to the opposite side of the river or the road, across the river	Int

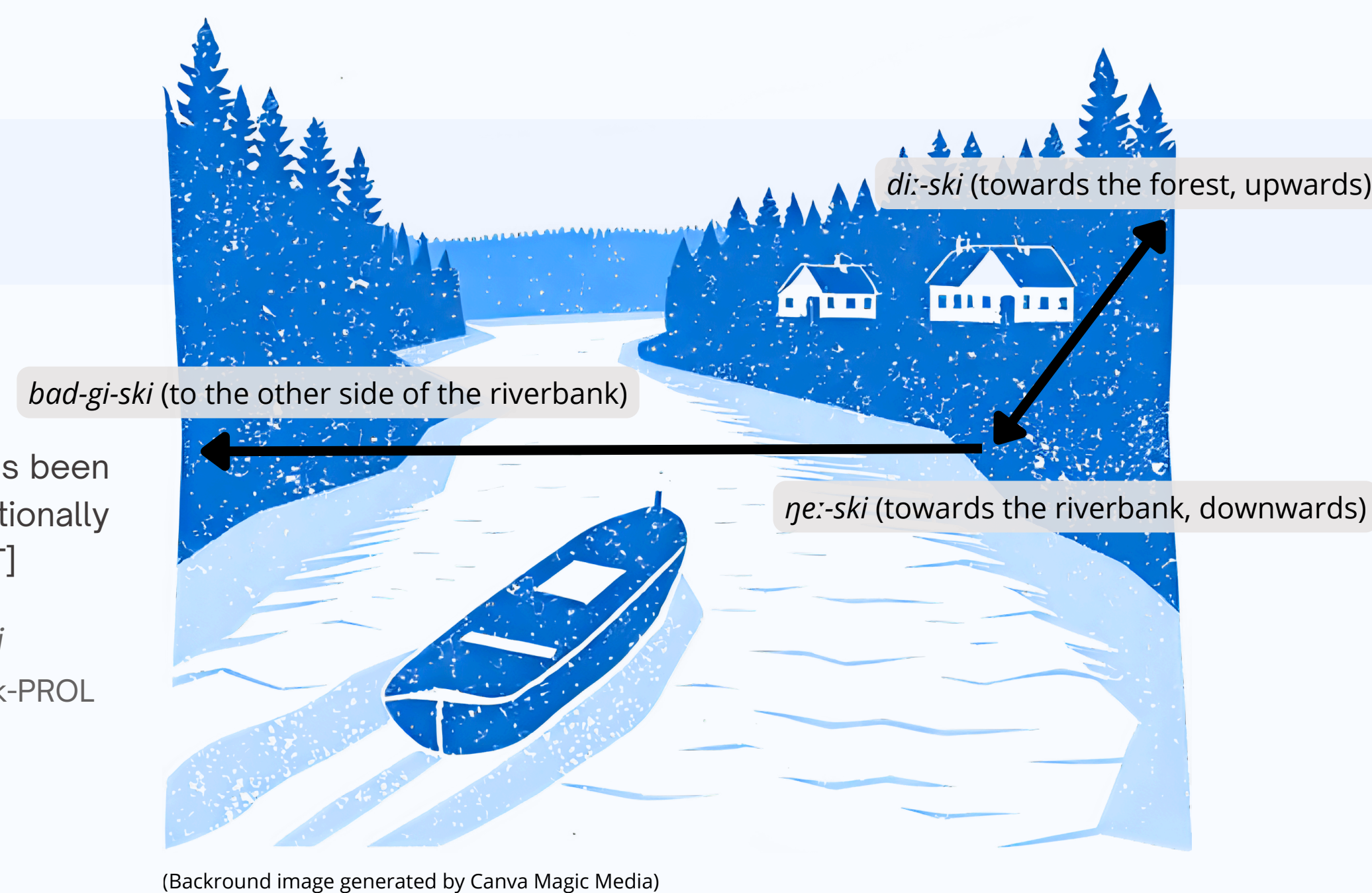
Path of the sun instead of abstract terms of cardinality (12 utterances from the archive)

1. *ŋana-kal siβun ju:-ji-tki-n*
go-IMP.SG sun exit-PRS.PTCP-ALL-3SG
‘Go towards the sunrise.’
(Pakendorf & Aralova 2017, DIN_berloga_medvedja-cincius: 30)

5 Discussion

A riverine directional system based on topographic features

- *ŋe:-ski/di:-ski* ‘to the riverbank/forest’ axis orthogonal to the riverflow [GEO]
- *bad-gi-ski* ‘to the opposite side of the riverbank [from where the settlement has been set]’ extended vector with respect to the inherent front of the dwellings (traditionally facing the river), as **described in varieties of Evenki** by Lavrilier (2005: 123) [INT]
- 2. *bad-gi-ski daβ-βa-βun ŋana-sin-e-βun oja-li*
opposite-side-ADVB.ALL cross.water-NFUT-1PLEXCL go-TAM1-NFUT-1PLEXCL track-PROL
‘We crossed to the other side [of the river] and went along the road.’
(Pakendorf & Aralova 2017, AVK_crossing_stream: 22)



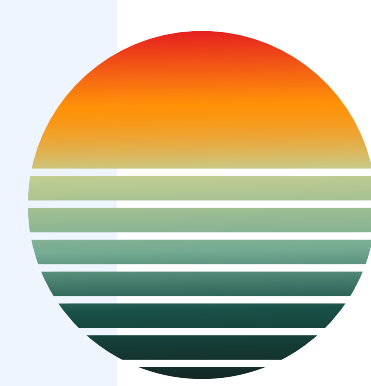
(Background image generated by Canva Magic Media)

External uses of the riverine directional system inside houses

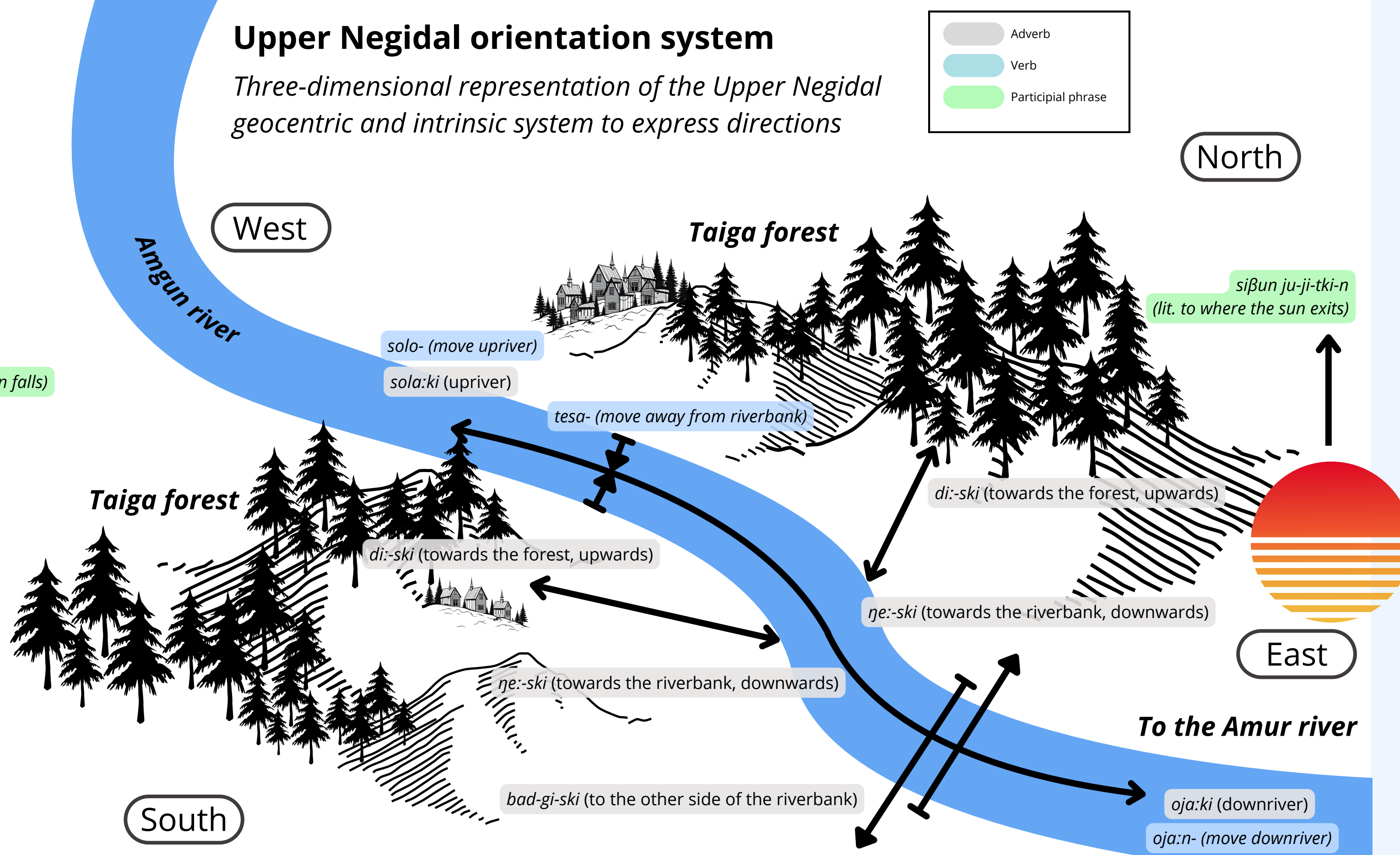
- **58 additional occurrences of the riverine directionals**: non-translational (N=49) (static location including posture) (ex.3) or caused-motion contexts (N=9) (ex.4)
- They occur as **adverbs** (often adverbial allative marker *-ski* or case markers) or **relational nouns** (dative, locative, allative case marker)

3. *di-gida-tki-n a:-sin-la:-ja-n*
top.of.riverbank-side-ALL-3SG sleep-TAM1-VR.AM-NFUT-3SG
‘He lies down behind her.’
(Pakendorf & Aralova 2017, APN_gaki: 13)
4. *ta-du jo:-du-βaj jalum ula-βa bad-gida-du-βaj ojoβ-βa*
DIST-DAT.ESS house-DAT.ESS-PRFL.PL full meat-ACC opposite-side-DAT.ESS-PRFL.PL stack-NFUT
‘There they fill their house, stack the meat at the wall opposite the door.’
(Pakendorf & Aralova 2017, APK_frog_tale: 105)

6 Summary



siβun tik-ki-tki-n
(lit. to where the sun falls)



7 Conclusion

- Various **riverine directionals** are attested. The **path of the sun** is used to express directions mainly for ritual-related spatial relations. No directionals based on prevailing winds are found.
- A mainly **geocentric FoR** is attested using directionals based on the **river flow** and topographical features such as **riverbanks and forests uphill from the riverbeds**.
- An **intrinsic FoR** also seems to be used to describe **directions across rivers**, with respect to the **location of dwellings**, traditionally facing rivers.

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