1. Introduction

Nivkh (Paleosiberian, isolate) is a moribund language spoken by ca. 500 people of the older generation in the Far East of Russia. Typologically, Nivkh is an agglutinating nominative synthetic language with SOV word order.

2. Collective plurality

3. Semantic types of plurality of situations

Criteria of distinction [Xrakovskij 1997]:

(a) The repeated situations referred to by a predicate occur:

(i) at the same period of time,
(ii) at different periods of time.

(b) The repeated situations referred to by a predicate are performed by:

(i) identical participants,
(ii) non-identical participants.

Multiplicative plurality: the repeated situations are performed at the same period of time by identical participants.

Iterative plurality: the repeated situations are performed at different periods of time by identical participants.

Distributive plurality: the repeated situations are performed at the same period of time by non-identical participants.

4. The semantic representation of distributive plurality

The semantic representation of a prototypical distributive construction (DC) [Birjulin 2003]:

(i) a predicate has a set of variables (= argument/adjunct) with the same semantic role;
(ii) a predicate is successively distributed over variables comprising a set;
(iii) a predicate is universally quantified.
• Mono-distributive construction: a predicate is distributed over one set of variables.
• Poly-distributive construction: a predicate is distributed over two or more sets of variables.

Semantic types of DC [Dressler 1968, Xrakovskij 1997, Birjulin 2003]:

• Actor DC
• Undergoer DC
• Partitive DC
• Instrumental DC
• Locative DC: Ambulative DC, Diversative DC, Cislocative DC, Dispersive DC

5. Mono-distributive constructions

5.1. Actor (= Agent/Experiencer) DC

Meaning: each of Actors performs the action successively.
Markers: Actor-argument in the plural; reduplicated verb stem; distributive adverbial (optional).

‘When people went hunting to the forest they disappeared (one after another).’

‘The tree leaves are falling down one after another.’

‘All sea-gulls came flying one after another.’

5.2. Undergoer (= Patient/Theme) DC

Meaning: action is performed successively with each of Undergoers.
Markers: Undergoer-argument in the plural; reduplicated verb stem; distributive adverbial.

(10) formData[dog:PL:3] bite+bite:COMPL-IND
‘A dog bit children (all of them, one by one).’

(11) formData[mother:PL:3] wash+wash:IND
‘Mother washes the cups one after another.’

(12) formData[pour:OUT:3] crush:COORD:3PL
‘Pouring out fat (in portions, one by one) [they] crushed [berries]…’

5.3. Partitive DC

Meaning: action successively divides a whole Actor/Undergoer into parts.
Markers: reduplicated verb stem.

‘Being caught, the big fish tore up the whole net.’
5.4. Instrumental DC

Meaning: action is successively performed with each of Instruments.
Markers: reduplicated Instrument-argument.

(14) Azm$\text{t}_e$y$\text{l}$h i-roy paz+vay-kis paz-d.
boy he-DAT stone+stone-INSTR throw-IND
‘A boy throws the stones at him (one by one).’

5.5. Ambulative DC

Meaning: action successively affects each of Spatial Points.
Markers: reduplicated Locative-argument; ambulative adverbial.

(15) Tolvøt-$\text{q}a$n q’otr eri+eri-in t’o—$\eta$ny-$r$
summer-CONV:when bear river+river-LOC fish—look.for-CONV:MAN:3SG eat-COORD:3SG
‘In summer, looking for fish in (different) rivers, a bear ate...’

(16) $\text{To}$-uye hur+hur-ux naŋ-$d$.
coast-PERL that.place+that.place-ABL walk-IND
‘[He has] walked everywhere on the coast.’

6. Poly-distributive constructions

6.1. Actor & Undergoer DC

Meaning: each of Actors performs the action successively with each of Undergoers.
Markers: reduplicated Undergoer-argument; distributive adverbial.

(17) Orbotn$\text{i}$y$\text{n}$-gun ře-$\eta$ŋ+ňe-$\eta$ŋ seta—myo-$q$ţ+myo-$q$ţ—kil—bo-$d$-yun.
‘The workers took 10 kilos of sugar one after another.’

6.2. Actor & Instrumental DC

Meaning: each of Actors performs the action successively with each of Instruments.
Markers: reduplicated Instrument-argument; distributive adverbial.

(18) ɛz$\text{q}$-gun ře-$\eta$ŋ+ňe-$\eta$ŋ pařk p’-mu+p’-mu-$\gamma$iř vi-$d$-yun.
host-PL one-CL:HUM+one-CL:HUM only REFL-boat+REFL-boat-INSTR go-IND-PL
‘The hosts went away one by one, each by his own boat.’

6.3. Dispersive DC

Meaning: each of Actors/Undergoers spreads/is spread successively over each of Spatial Points of a spatially extended object or substance.
Markers: reduplicated verb stem; dispersive adverbial.

(19) Mif hus+huz-ux sik pơt+vøt-$\eta$ar-$d$.
earth that.place+that.place-ABL all crack+crack-COOP:IND
‘The whole earth has cracked in different places.’

(20) K$\text{a}$sk ja-nø$\text{ŋ}$k—$\gamma$arp+q’arp-$\gamma$ar-$d$.
cat 3SG-face—scratch+scratch-COOP:IND
‘A cat has scratched his face (in different places).’
6.4. Diversative DC

Meaning: each of Actors/Undergoers moves/is moved successively from one central Spatial Point toward each of Spatial Points or Spatial Directions.

Markers: reduplicated Locative-argument; reduplicated verb stem (optional); diversative adverbial.

(21) Diwun-gun p’-rčf+p’-rčf-toɣ vi-šar-d-ɣun. (Actor DivDC)
man-PL REFL-house+REFL-house-DAT go-COMPL-IND-PL
‘People went to their homes (each to his/her own one).’

(22) J-aki tol—milk—kuɣ zosq-ɣ
3SG-elder.brother sea—devil—kill-CONV:MAN:3SG cut-CONV:MAN:3SG
hukɤ+hukɤ-toɣ t’ux+t’uɣ-d. (Undergoer DivDC)
that.direction+that.direction-DAT sacrifice.throw+sacrifice.throw-IND
‘Killing a sea-devil, his elder brother cut [him] into pieces and threw [them] in different directions as a sacrifice.’

6.5. Cislocative DC

Meaning: each of Actors/Undergoers moves/is moved successively from each of Spatial Points or Spatial Directions toward one central Spatial Point.

Markers: reduplicated Locative-argument; reduplicated verb stem (optional); cislocative adverbial.

(23) Puina-gun hukɤ+hukɤ-ux taf-toɣ pui+vui-t (Actor CDC)
bird-PL that.direction+that.direction-ABL house-DAT fly+fly-CONV:MAN:3PL
p’rčd-ɣun. come-IND-PL
‘The birds came to the house flying from different directions.’

7. Conclusion

The main device of expressing distributive plurality in Nivkh is reduplication, which is widely used in different lexical categories. The reduplication of a verb stem seems to mark obligatorily only the distribution of a predicate over a set of Actors or Undergoers. The distributive interpretation may be also supported by distributive adverbials. The reduplication of a non-temporal argument always provides the distributive reading.

References


