



Beyond *Frog Stories*:
Speakers' Attention to Path and Location in
Ahtna Discourse

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Today's questions

How does Ahtna fit into the research on motion event typology?

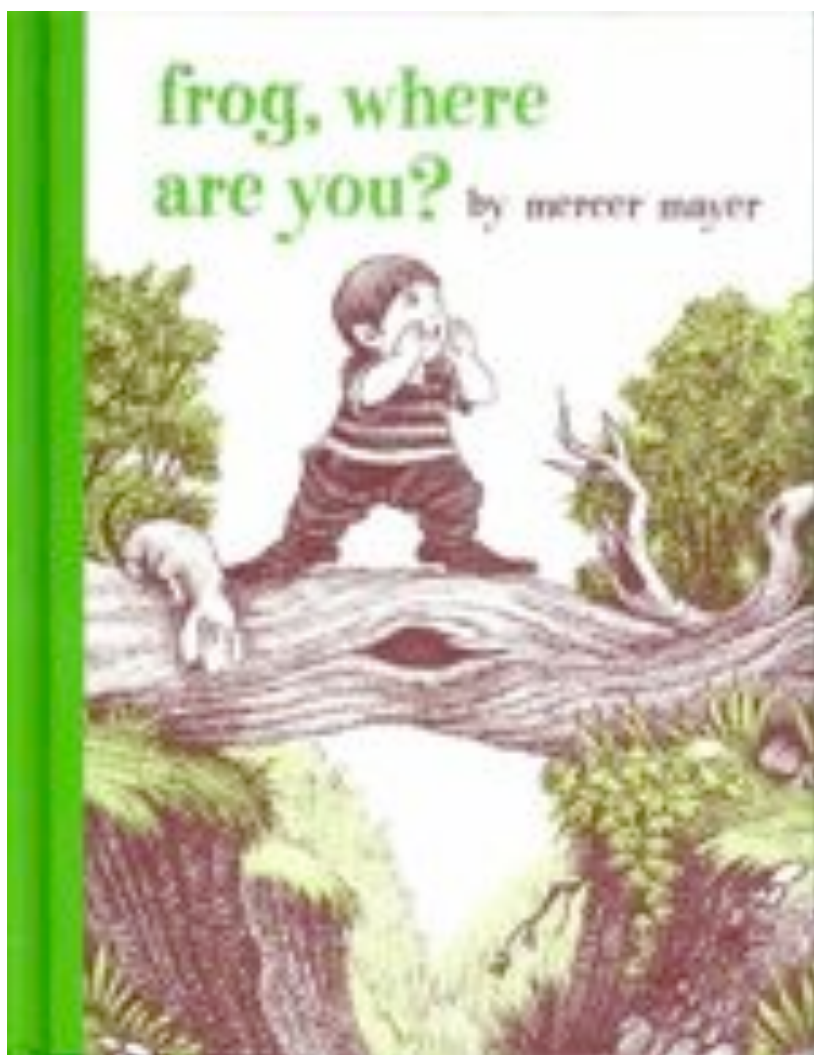
And

How well do Ahtna Frog Stories reveal Ahtna grammar of path and location?

Introduction | Ahtna and the typology | The role of culture |
Comparisons | Conclusion



What are *Frog Stories*?



- Research paradigm for studying motion events
- Spearheaded by Berman and Slobin, culminating in 2 volumes (Berman & Slobin 1994, Strömquist & Verhoeven 2004)
- Stems from Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000): lexicalization of semantic units and patterns of conflation of those units
 - MOTION + MANNER
 - MOTION + PATH
 - MOTION + FIGURE

What are *Frog Stories*?



- Subjects are shown wordless picture book *Frog, Where Are You* (Mayer 1969) and asked to tell the story in their own words.
- Language are classified based on where the element PATH is encoded.
- Slobin (1994) presents a two-way typology based on English, German, Spanish, Hebrew and Turkish:

What are *Frog Stories*?

- Satellite-framed languages (**s-langs**)

- PATH is encoded in a “satellite.”

- e.g. English:

*The bottle floated **out** of the cave.*

FACT-OF-MOTION,
MANNER

PATH

- Verb-framed languages (**v-langs**)

- PATH is encoded in the verb word.

- e.g. Spanish:

*La botella **salió** de la cueva flotando.*

FACT-OF-MOTION,
PATH

MANNER

What are *Frog Stories*?



- Flurry of experiments in more diverse languages
 - Warlpiri, Tzeltal, Greenlandic, Chontyal, Icelandic, Arrernte, ASL...
- Slobin (2004) revises to a three-way typology:

What are *Frog Stories*?

- Equipollantly-framed languages (**e-langs**)
 - PATH and MANNER are expressed by “equivalent grammatical forms”.
 - 3 types:
 - MANNER verb + PATH verb
 - Serial verb langs (Niger-Congo, Hmong-Mien, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Mon-Khmer, Austronesian)
 - MANNER preverb + PATH preverb + verb
 - Jaminjungan languages
 - and...

What are *Frog Stories*?

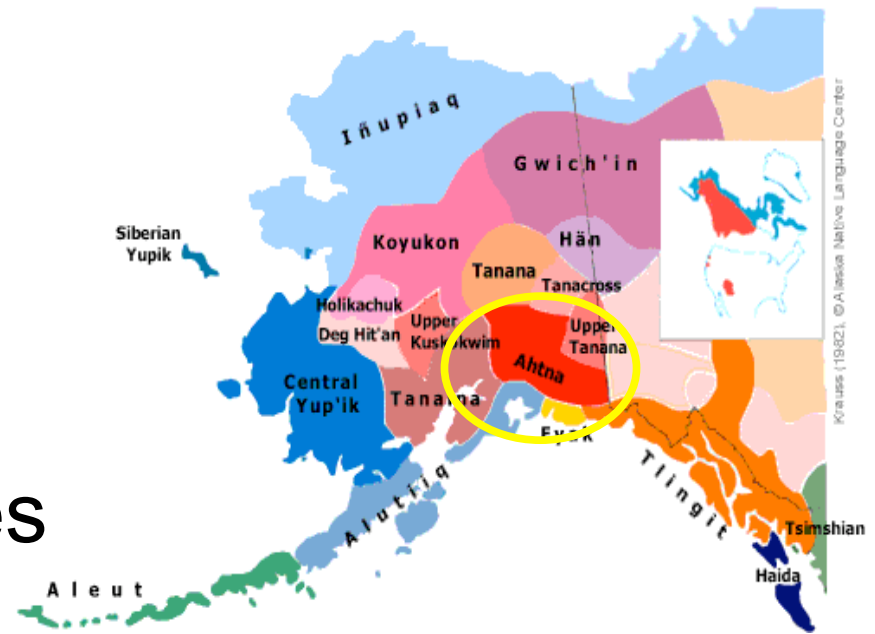
- [MANNER + PATH]_{verb}
 - “Bipartite verb languages”
 - Tantalizing (but unsupported) p.c. from Richard Rhodes:

“[...] such constructions are typical of the American Indian languages [*sic*] Algonquian, Athabaskan, Hokan and Klamath-Takelman.” (Slobin 2004:247)

- Is this right? Are Athabaskan languages e-langs?
- Let's look at Ahtna.

Ahtna Athabaskan

- Pop. ~2000
- 30-50 elderly speakers
 - All bilingual with English
- 8 villages
- 63 000 km² territory
- 3 major mountain ranges
- 2 major river drainages
- Countless tributaries



Ahtna grammar

- Polysynthetic, head-marking, head-final
- Example *par excellence* of templatic verb morphology

3 pl. sub	PP object	Thematic	Various	3+y	Objects	1 pl. sub	Indef sub/obj	3 pl sub	Qualifiers	Conj	1, 2 Sub	Classifier	Stem
11b	11a	10	6 – 9	5e	5d	5c	5b	5a	4	3	2	1	0

18 Łuk'ae ni- ts'- e- ł- cet.
 fish up- 1PL.SUB-ASP- CLF- classify.food
 9 5c 3 1 0

'We habitually put up fish.'

((Hunting; Speaker: Adam Sanford))

- Noncontiguous dependencies in lexical entry (“**theme**”):

ni#ł+cet 'put up fish'
 9 1 0

Ahtna grammar

19 Xona xa'atle hw-de-z-e-l-tiy.
Then almost THM-GEN-ASP-ASP-CLF-be.strong
'Then I was almost a teenager.'
(*Hunting*; Speaker: Adam Sanford)

Lexical entry ("theme"):

hw + d + l + tiy 'be a teenager'
10 8 1 0

- Stem *-tiy* (roughly 'be strong') contributes some semantics, but the actual meaning isn't clear until the level of theme.
 - In fact, most morphemes have only rough semantic content (especially inner morphemes).
- Inflectional and (optionally) derivational morphology is added to theme to reach spoken form.

Ahtna grammar

- Aspectual stem allomorphy: 'eat'

(Kari 1989)

	Impf	Pf	Fut	Opt
Dur	yaan	yaan'	yiił	yaan'
Dur-cust	yiiix	yiiix	yiiix	yiiix
Mom	yiis	yaan'	yiił	yaan'
Mom-cust	yiis	yiis	yiis	yiis

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Ahtna as an e-language

- Recall that as an e-lang, Athabaskan is supposed to have the structure [PATH + MANNER]_{verb}.
- It is possible to find potentially supportive examples with a PATH morpheme that is not the stem but still part of the verb word.

141 Xona yihwts'en ɫu xona deniigi ka
then from.there EVID then moose BENEf

di-na-ts'e-naes.

in-ITER-1PL.SUB-move.nomadically

'Then from there we went in again for moose.'

((Hunting; Speaker: Adam Sanford))

Ahtna as an e-language

20 Yihwts'en xona,
from.there then

21 nen' **ta-'s-te-deł** łu,
country **up-1PL.SUB-ASP-pl.go** EVID

22 debae ka,
sheep BENEF

23 deniigi 'eł,
moose CONJ

24 udzih 'eł.
Caribou CONJ

*'Then from there we would go up into the
country for sheep and moose and caribou.'*
(*Hunting*; Speaker: Adam Sanford)

Ahtna as an e-language

- Definition of an e-lang requires that PATH be encoded in a morpheme **of equal status to the stem.**
- In Athabaskan “equality” of morphemes is difficult to discern.
- Recall this example:
nits'ełcet 'we hab. put fish up suspended'
ni#ł+cet 'put up fish'
9 1 0
- In some sense, by calling theme morphemes obligatory for a lexical entry it **may be possible to view them as of equal status** to the stem.

Ahtna as an e-language

- But it's difficult to know which prefixes should be included in the theme, and which should not.
- Ahtna themes from stem *-daetl'* :
 - si#ł+daetl' 'plural run in fear, flee'
 - yes#d+0+daetl' 'plural walk in snow'
 - c'+d+l+daetl' 'fish jump'
 - ca#n+l+daetl' 'plural lie down exhausted'
 - na#c'+n+ł/0+daetl' 'blink' (Kari 1989)
- **But NOT:**
 - ta+daetl' 'plural go up'
 - as in
 - ta'stedeł 'we habitually go up'
- **Not a separate lexeme, just a derivation of**
 - 0+daetl' 'plural go'

Ahtna as an e-language

- We have seen 3 PATH morphemes in the same slot:

dinats'enaes 'we went **in** again'

nits'ełcet 'we hab. put fish **up suspended**'

ta'stedeł 'we hab. went **up**'

- But in only one is the PATH morpheme obligatorily part of the theme: $ni\#\lambda+cet.$
- Not possible to predict on structural grounds when PATH is “of equal status” (=obligatory) to the stem.

Ahtna as an e-language

- Obligatoriness may have to do with fixedness, frequency, distributional flexibility.
 - *ta-* 'up' and *di-* 'in' occur with a wider range of stems than *ni-* 'up suspended'.
- Do we want to claim Ahtna is an e-language but only on a lexeme-by-lexeme basis?
- Mithun (1997):
 - Morphemes are the building blocks of polysynthesis but **words** matter a great deal to speakers.

“[...] productivity is ultimately a lexical matter, not fully predictable on grammatical or even semantic grounds” (1997:7).

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

- Let's put aside Ahtna as an e-lang for now and return to the earlier two-way typology.
- Let's try to make a claim that Ahtna is a **v-lang**.
 - (whereby PATH morphemes are inside the verb, with no judgment about “equality”)
- Observe the following excerpt of discourse:

- 49 Du' yihwts'en,
exactly from.there
- 50 **ts'inats'edeł** dze' 'ungge.
we.would.go.again.**from** thus distant.upland
*'From there, then we would start out again
to uplands.'*
- 51 'Utggu daagha ngge',
distant.upland.general top upland
- 52 ngga Ts'itaeł Tl'aa ts'e',
upland straight.water.rushes.headwaters CONJ
*'Up above the tree line upland to
Headwater of River That Flows Straight,'*
- 53 yihwts'en 'unggat,
from.there distant.upland.point
- 54 Tsaani 'Aeł Na',
grizzly.bear trap stream
- 55 yet **ke**ts'edeł.
There we.would.go.**against.a.place**
*'from there on upland we reached Bear Trap
Creek.'* ((Hunting; Speaker:Adam Sanford))

- 49 Du' **yihwts'en**,
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- 50 **ts'inats'edeł** dze' **'ungge**.
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*'From there, then we would start out again
 to uplands.'*
- 51 **'Utggu** **daagha ngge'**,
 distant.upland.general top upland
- 52 **ngga** Ts'itaeł Tl'aa ts'e',
 upland straight.water.rushes.headwaters CONJ
*'Up above the tree line upland to
 Headwater of River That Flows Straight,'*
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 from.there distant.upland.point
- 54 Tsaani 'Aeł Na',
 grizzly.bear trap stream
- 55 **yet** **kets'edeł**.
 There we.go.against.a.place
*'from there on upland we reached Bear Trap
 Creek.'*

((Hunting; Speaker:Adam Sanford))

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

- To say Ahtna speakers encode PATH within the verb seems a poor description of Ahtna discourse...nearly every word here describes path!
- Most of the detailed path-describing work is being done with what are ostensibly **satellites**.
- Different semantic range
 - Prefixes indicate **simple trajectories** involving motion in relation to the subject

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

Verbal PATH prefixes:

ka-	'up'
kana-	'turning back'
ke-	'against a place'
na-	'back'
na-	'across'
ni-	'up suspended'
ts'i-	'from'
ta-	'out'
ta'-	'up from shore'
t'a-	'into an enclosure'

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

- PATH satellites can be very precise.
- Class of directionals with tri-morphemic structure:
 - Riverine (mostly) stem ,
 - Optional prefix expressing relative distance,
 - Optional suffix expressing point-v-area or a path toward or away.
- In discourse speakers can “pile up” PATH satellites to pinpoint locations and trajectory changes.

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

'u-ngge

distant-upland

'distantly upland'

'u-ngga-t

distant-upland-point

*'a point distantly
upland'*

na-naa

intermediate-across

*'an intermediate
distance across'*

ka-naa

general.area-across

'an area across'

'u-daa'a

distant-downriver

'distantly downriver'

'u-tsii-t

distant-downland-point

*'a point distantly
downland'*

'u-tsuu-ghe

distant-downland-generalarea

*'a general area
distantly downland'*

da-nii

near-upriver

'nearby upriver'

25 Niłdenta łu, ((Summer; Speaker: Jake Tansy))
sometimes EVID

26 yet,
there

27 Tl'ahwdicaax Na',
headwaters.be.valuable stream

28 'udaa'a,
distantly.downriver

29 'unaa daa'a ts'its'edeł
distantly.across downriver we.would.go.from

dze' dae',
thus

30 Nts'ezi Na hwts'e',
N. stream to

31 tes ninats'edeł.
pass we.would.go.back.against.a.place
'Sometimes then, we would come out
downstream and across and downstream of
Valuable Headwaters Stream and we would
come back to a pass at Nts'ezi Stream.'

Ahtna as an s- or v-language

- So maybe Ahtna is an **s-lang**
 - more accurately represents how speakers capitalize on PATH-related grammar in discourse...?
- What is a satellite? (briefly)
- Definitional ambiguity:
 - “[Satellites are] certain immediate constituents of a verb root other than inflections, auxiliaries, or nominal arguments”* (Talmy 1985:102).
 - ...but acknowledges that it is **difficult to determine what counts as a satellite** in different languages. Words? Clitics? Affixes?

What is a satellite?

- “Word” is sometimes an **arbitrary distinction** at the left edge of Ahtna verbs.
- Implications for postpositional phrases, which hang out there.
- Gramm'izing onto the verb:

What is a satellite?

93 'Unaats'en
DIR:from.distantly.across

94 cu **debae gha**
EMPH **sheep in.relation.to**

95 yet 'sdelts'iix.
there 1PL.sit/stay

*'On the other side there we stayed for
sheep.'*

((Hunting; Speaker: Adam Sanford))

20 Ciil ca'an **u-gha-niyaa.**
boy hole **3S.PPOBJ-PP-3s.goes**

'The boy goes to/near/around a hole.'

((Frog Story; Speaker: Markle Pete))

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Culture and genre

- Maybe the high frequency of PATH satellites we've seen is caused by the genre of discourse.
 - Culturally-specific genre of [Ahtna Travel Narratives](#).
- What is the role of culture in *Frog Stories* research?
- Australian example: Arrernte (Wilkins 2004).
 - Showed that culture is a better predictor than language type of motion event segmentation.

Culture and genre

- Hypothesis: because Arrernte is a v-lang, speakers should devote **less time to the dynamic description of path** than speakers of s-langs like English.
- Counterhypothesis: because Arrernte culture is nomadic,
“[t]he special Arrernte concern for motion and orientation will manifest itself even in elicited narratives [...] Arrernte-speakers should deploy spatial language to construct **more elaborated paths** and journeys than English-speakers” (Wilkins 2004:145).

Culture and genre

- Counterhypothesis wins.
“[t]hus it is the areal ethnographic observations [...] which here appear to be more predictive of the findings [i.e., than the typology]” (Wilkins 2004:155).
- Ahtna culture is traditionally semi-nomadic as well.
- “Travel talk” plays large role in ethnic identity and assertion of the connection of one's social group to the land (e.g. Moore and Tlen 2008 on Kaska Athabaskan).
- Prominence of **Travel Narratives** in Ahtna society (Kari 1986, Tuttle and Kari to appear).

Ahtna Travel Narratives

- Data so far: two Travel Narratives
 - “**Summer**” (*Nen' ta'stghideł de' c'a saen ta 'we went out in the country during the summer'*) by Jake Tansy, 1980.
 - Virtual tour of riverine hunting route from mouth of Brushkana River to Yanert Fork to Valdez Creek.
 - “**Hunting**” (*C'uka ts'ulaen'i gha nen' ta'stedeł dze' 'how went went hunting out in the country'*) by Adam Sanford, 1986.
 - Epic description of yearly hunting routes, often into extreme mountainous highlands.

(many thanks to Jim Kari)

Travel Narratives vs. Frog Stories

- In some ways, Travel Narratives and Frog Stories are similar.
 - Animate referents travel about the countryside in pursuit of animal(s).
- But in many ways they differ
 - Imaginary vs. real landscape
 - Unusual events
 - Heads get stuck in jars
 - People fall out of windows and trees
 - Owls and gophers pop out of holes in a startling manner
 - A boy takes a ride on the antlers of a buck
 - vs. normal events
 - Going, going nomadically, hunting, staying, boating.
- So what does an Ahtna Frog Story look like?

Travel Narratives vs. Frog Stories



Recorded October
2008 with Markle
Pete in Tazlina AK.

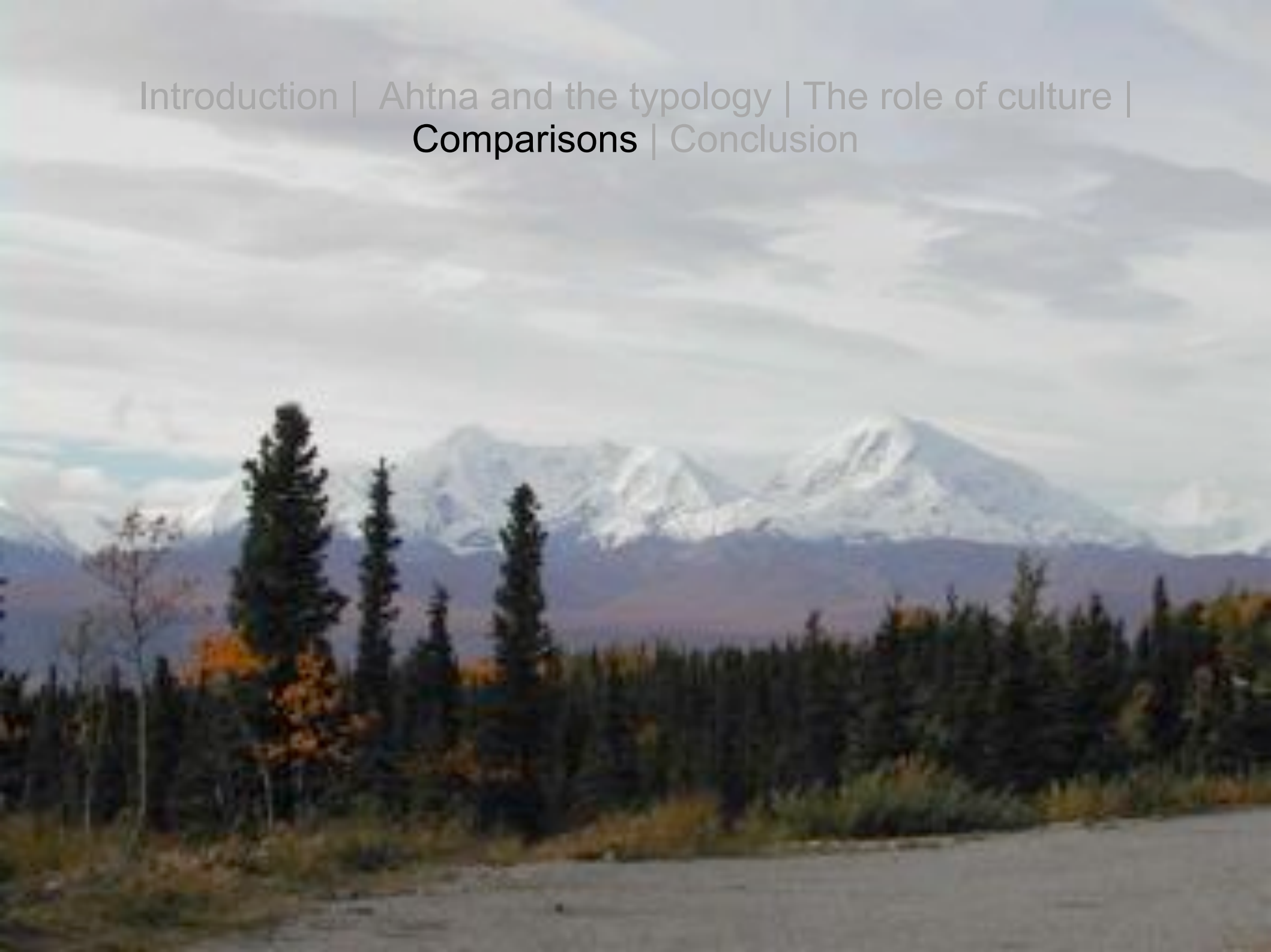
**Naghaay,
ndaane zidaa?**



Ahtna text by Markle Pete

**Edited by Andrea L. Berez
and Jeannie Maxim
Illustrations by Mercer Mayer**

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Similarities: prefix use

- All speakers in both genres make extensive use of PATH prefixes.
- Only 8 of 72 motion verbs do not contain a PATH prefix.
- Density is consistent across both genres.

13 ʔic'ae gilok'ae **naghalts'**et.

Dog window compact.object.falls.**down**

'The dog falls down from the window.'

[...]

22 Dligi kaghiyaa,

squirrel SG.goes.up

23 ʔic'ae ngga' t'ox **nadighic'**etli

Dog DIR:up nest the.one.that.hangs.**down**

gha'itse.

SG.dog.barks

'A squirrel comes up, the dog barks at the nest that is hanging there.'

[...]

44 ʔic'ae 'eʔ ts'iɫden'aa tu**ji**taxghidaek.

Dog CONJ at.once they.went.**in**.water

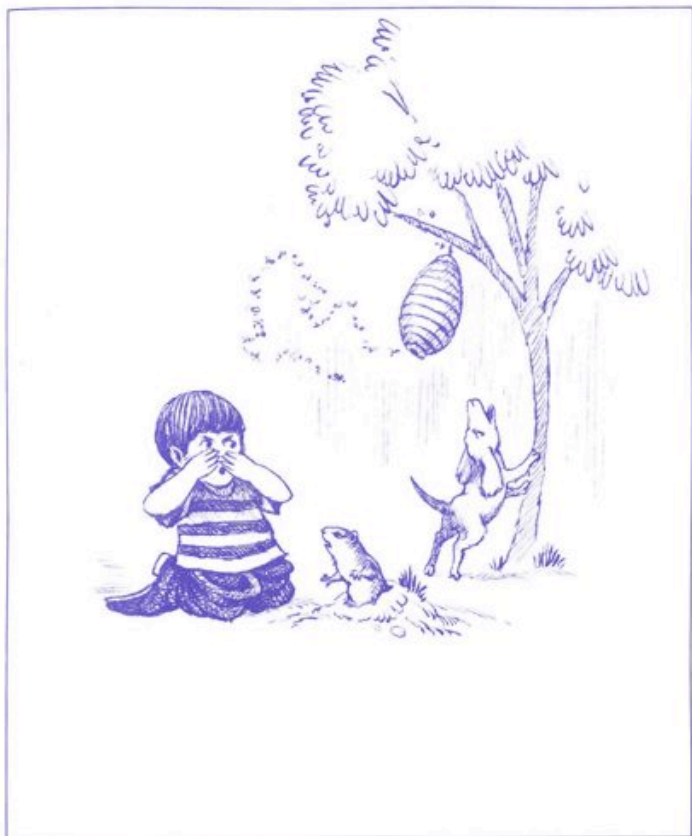
'All at once with the dog they went in the water.'

((Frog Story; Speaker: Markle Pete))

Differences: directionals

- *Summer*: 22 directionals.
- *Hunting*: 26 directionals.
- *Frog Story*: 5 directionals.
- Some pages do have a river but Mr. Pete does not use directionals there.
- Where does Mr. Pete use directionals in *Frog Story*?

Differences: directionals



- *Ngga'* 'upland from river' used to describe bees' nest
- No river in these pages, instead means 'up that-a-way'
- Accompanied by a backhand wave gesture.

19 **Ngga'** t'ox nadighic'etl.
upland nest 3S.hangs.down
'Up (over there, in the woods)
the nest is hanging.'

((*Frog Story*; Speaker: Markle Pete))

Differences: directionals

- Otherwise uses nonriverine directionals '*uttge*' 'up vertically' and *unaan* 'across':

39 Besiini '**uttge**' adazdaa.

owl DIR:up 3s.sits

'The owl is sitting up there (i.e., high on a branch).'

[...]

54 **Unaan** tl'ogh ta naghaay k'i

across grass on frog

ukanasitelyaesi kuts'e' niłc'ayiłyaal.

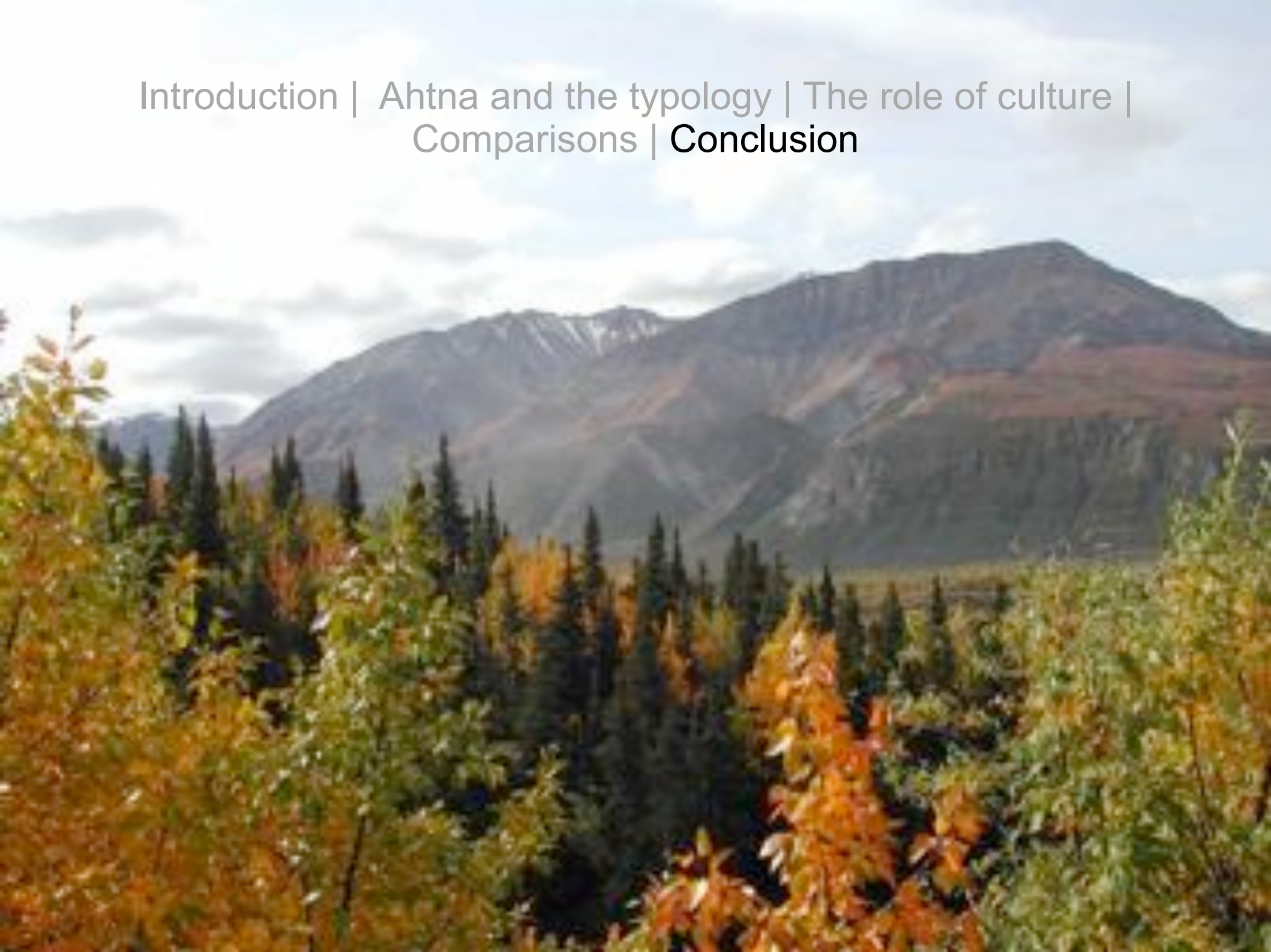
the.one.they.look.for to.them animal.jumps

'The frog they are looking for is jumping across to them on the grass.'

Differences: toponymy

- Ahtna toponymy is systematic, near-paradigmatic. (e.g. Kari 2008)
- An obvious difference of of real vs. imaginary landscape.
- Nonetheless extremely prevalent in Travel Narratives, provides a cognitive coordinate system speakers can use to orient listeners to paths between locations.
- Mr. Sanford: 23 named places in 140 IUs.
- Mr. Tansy: 34 named places in 102 IUs.

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Conclusions

- Frog Story research is not intended to fully exemplify a language's resources for elaborating PATH.
 - Provides unified semantic content for cross-linguistic comparisons.
- But we have seen that Frog Stories alone do not reveal the richness present in discourse.
- Both Ahtna genres have PATH prefixes in common, but not much else.
 - Does this mean prefixes are “basic”? Do they “count” more?

Speakers' attention is elsewhere

- Speakers are trying to convey a story, not provide samples for linguistic research on motion events.
- For Mr. Sanford, **physical progression through the Alaskan landscape** is important.
 - Use of deictic PP *yihwts'en* 'from there' as discourse connector.
- For Mr. Tansy, **temporal progression between episodes** is important.
 - Use of *xona* 'then' as discourse connector.
- For Mr. Pete, **reference tracking** is important.
 - Use of relative clauses to track boy, dog, frog, owl...

Spatial discourse connector in *Hunting*

30 Duu **yihwts'en**,
[4 lines about Natii Mouth]

35 **Yihwts'en** xona Natii Na' Ngge',
[14 lines about Natii River Uplands]

49 Du' **yihwts'en**,
[3 lines about Headwaters of River That Flows
Straight]

53 **yihwts'en** 'unggat,
[10 lines about Bear Trap Creek]

65 Duu **yihwts'en** xona,
[...]

((Hunting; speaker: Adam Sanford))

Temporal discourse connector in *Summer*

- 1 **Xona,**
[21 IUs about highest upriver streams]
- 23 Ghenaay 'eł **xona,**
[16 IUs about caribous and meat caches]
- 69 **Xona** yet łu' ye c'a ye łu
 Łuyinanest'aani Na',
[28 IUs about a rock at a cliff]
- 90 **Xona** yet xu,
[5 IUs about a particular lake]
- 96 **Xona** some,
[6 IUs about reaching terminus of trip]

Referent tracking in *Frog*

21 ʔic'ae ngga **t'ox nadighic'etli**
gha'itse.

*'The dog barks at **the nest that is hanging up there.***

50 **Tadedze' nahditaani** k'edaxdelts'i.
*They sit by the driftwood that they **found.***

54 Unaan tl'ogh ta **naghaay k'i**
ukanasitelyaesi kuts'e' niłc'ayilȷyaakł.
*'The frog they are looking for is jumping
across to them on the grass.'*

((*Frog Story*; Speaker: Markle Pete))

Conclusions

- Differences between Frog Stories and Travel Narratives:
 - Imaginary vs. real landscape,
 - Unusual events vs. normal events,
 - *A highly contrived elicitation vs. a natural speech act firmly seated in the culture of the narrator.*
- We need to cast a very wide net in fieldwork.
 - There's spontaneous, and then there's *spontaneous*.

Conclusions

- Cross-linguistic comparisons are great but not if we sacrifice language-specific facts to make them fit.
- We must take care that our notion of “basic” tendencies takes discourse into consideration.
 - Discourse is the locus of grammatical development.
 - As prefixes gramm'ize and bleach, speakers pull in other more semantically vivid PATH items.
- Slobin's motion event typology needs to be expanded to accommodate
 - templatic morphology,
 - different genres of data.
 - (I think Slobin would like that!)

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'A xona.



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