

The concept ‘half’ in Selkup language

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1. Introduction

The theoretical frame of this article is the field of cognitive linguistics. The past decades have witnessed a progressive increase in writings on cognitive structures. A special focus is laid thereby on concepts that are considered as mental organisational units reflecting the external world (Pörings/Schmitz (Hrsg.) 1999: 15). With the help of concepts, humans organise their perceptions and experiences in order to be able to understand and act. Different lexical forms can therefore represent a concept – the forms have a bundle of features in common that classifies the objects associated with the lexical forms as belonging to a concept (cf. Schwarz³2008: 108–110).

In the last decades, some works were published concentrating on concepts in Selkup language and culture, like ‘space’ (see e.g., Polyakova 2006). In this article I will analyse a concept that is subject to many everyday activities in Selkup culture. The concept ‘half’ is a fundamental cognitive organisational unit, based on dividing, partitioning and subdividing things, like splitting an apple, a fish or a log of wood, with a knife or an axe in two halves. The aim of this paper is to extract the structure of the concept ‘half’. This extraction is done by an analysis of the use of different Selkup words meaning ‘half’ and to contribute by doing so to a deeper understanding of a mental organisation unit underlying everyday actions of the Selkup.

The Selkup live between the rivers Ob and Yenisey in Western Siberia – according to the 2010 census there are 3,649 people, of whom 1,024 (28.04%) speak Selkup as their mother tongue.¹ The Selkup language is divided into three major dialect areas – Northern, Central and Southern Selkup with further dialects (cf. Glushkov – Bajdak – Maksimova 2003). The great dialectical diversion of the Selkup language has to be considered in analysing the linguistic data.

The linguistic data consists of four words with the meaning ‘half’, extracted from various dictionaries, and 34 sentences, extracted from two Selkup language corpora in which words with this meaning are used. Due to the semantic connotations and the utilization of the word

¹ https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm (last access on 15.032020).

in certain contexts I propose six conceptual domains that are analysed in regard to their lexical representation and the bundles of features characterising the objects belonging to this domain.

The present paper is divided into three sections. After a short presentation of the lexical material, found in the common dictionaries of Selkup (Erdélyi 1969, Alatalo 2004, Bykonya 2005 and Kazakevich – Budjanskaya 2010) I present six domains of the concept ‘half’ in Selkup language, based on the analysis of 34 sentences of two Selkup language corpora (Brykina et al. 2020 and Budzisch et al. 2019)², in which words meaning ‘half’ are used. The corpora were searched in the following ways: as a first step, the meaning ‘half’ was searched in the English and Russian glosses and secondly, the loose translations were checked for the mentioning of ‘half’ respectively ‘половина’. When examples are taken from the corpora, I give the reference presented in the corpus, hence all examples can be clearly identified. The naming indicates the speaker, the year of the recording, a short-given title and the genre. Both corpora use the same transcription system (see Orlova et al. 2018 and Budzisch 2018), the findings from other sources were adapted to that system to keep the data comparable.

2. Words meaning ‘half’

In the main Selkup dictionaries (Erdélyi 1969, Alatalo 2004, Bykonya 2005 and Kazakevich – Budyanskaya 2010) I found three words meaning ‘half’ that are distributed dialectally as follows:

Table 1

North (N)	Central (C)	South (S)
<i>pelän/peläk</i> ‘half, part, side’ (Kazakevich – Budyanskaya 2010: 111, Erdélyi 1969: 181; Bykonya 2005: 186; Alatalo 2004: 101–102)	<i>pälek/pälekka</i> ‘half, side’ (Bykonya 2005: 184, 186; Alatalo 2004: 101–102)	<i>päleka/pleka</i> ‘half, side, part’ (Bykonya 2005: 184, 186, 187, 188, 189; Alatalo 2004: 101–102)
<i>kəš/kuəš</i> ‘half, part’ (Kazakevich – Budyanskaya 2010: 39; Bykonya 2005: 59, 107; Alatalo 2004: 317)	<i>kuəš</i> ‘half’ (Alatalo 2004: 317)	<i>kis/kəs</i> ‘half, part’ (Bykonya 2005: 59) <i>qweška</i> ‘half (transversal)’ (Bykonya 2005: 83)
<i>kəš</i> ‘half (transversal)’ (Erdélyi 1969: 91)		

² Both corpora display all three main dialect groups, having a total of 408 texts, 17,009 sentences and 97,021 tokens.

<i>c'onti/c'ondi</i> 'middle, half (longitudinal), half (distance, path), middle (time)' (Bykonya 2005: 286, Erdélyi 1969: 239)	<i>c'ondi</i> 'middle, half (longitudinal), half (distance, path), middle (time)' (Bykonya 2005: 286)	<i>c'onži</i> 'middle, half (longitudinal), half (distance, path), middle (time)' (Bykonya 2005: 286)
	<i>tənd</i> 'middle, half (transversal)' (Bykonya 2005: 236)	<i>tənz/tənz̃</i> 'middle, half (transversal)' (Bykonya 2005: 236)

What becomes immediately apparent from this data is that the Selkup differentiate linguistically between a division of a thing into two parts and divisions done by a transversal and a longitudinal axis.

In his grammar of the Northern dialect of Selkup language Prokof'ev stated, that three words can be used in a partitive function: *peläk* (N) meaning 'half, part', *kəš* (N) to denote halves in a transverse/horizontal division and *c'onti* (N) meaning 'half (at distances)' (Prokof'ev 1935: 42). In addition, Prokof'eva declared that *kes'* (N) marks a transverse/horizontal division and *c'onti* (N) a longitudinal division (Prokof'eva 1952: 104).

The first word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S), represented in all dialect groups, refers to a simple division of things into two halves, whereas the word *kəš* (N) / *kis* (S) describes in the Northern and Southern dialects a transversal division. The third word, represented in different phonetic variants is most interesting: in all dialect groups the form *c'onti* (N) / *c'ondi* (C) / *c'onži* (S) indicates a longitudinal division, whereas the variant *t'ond* (C) / *t'onz* / *t'onž* (S) indicates the opposite: a transversal division.

Moreover, it is important to underline, that all words are polysemous:

- 1) *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S) 'half, side, part'
- 2) *kəš* (N) / *kis* (S) 'half (transverse/horizontal), part, proportion'
- 3) *c'onti* (N) / *c'ondi* (C) / *c'onži* (S) 'middle, half (longitudinal), half (distance, path), middle (time)' / *t'ond* (C) / *t'onz* (S) 'middle, half (transverse/horizontal)'

The meanings 'side' and 'middle' are motivated by the underlying concept 'half', which is based on a division of concrete and abstract things in two even parts.

Based on the words and expressions found in the dictionaries and the utilisation of these words meaning 'half' in the two language corpora, I propose six domains, that are concluded in the concept 'half' (division of things into two halves, transversal/horizontal division of things into two halves, longitudinal division of things into two halves, division of locations into two halves, division of time into two halves and division of paired entities). In the following, I will present these domains and illustrate them with examples. At the end of each domain, I will analyse the linguistic representation and the main features of the objects belonging to this sphere.

2.1. Division of things into two halves

The focus of this section is on things that can be cut or divided into two halves without considering the direction of the division (transversal or longitudinal). In the life of the Selkup the division of concrete things into two halves is a daily procedure, like the division of a log of wood into two halves or a fish into two parts.

In the dictionaries I found some expressions that describe this undefined kind of division by using the word *peläk* (N), like *kol'at peläkhti* (N) ‘semi-circle’ (Erdélyi 1969: 181) or *bulkan pilanġ* (S) ‘half a bread’ (Alatalo 2004: 101).

In the corpora the same structure can be found, whereas food is the main topic in connection to this kind of division, as shown by the following examples:

- (1) *okkir kurapaška pläka-t am-di-də* (S)
 one partridge.[NOM] half.[NOM]-3SG eat-INFER-3DU.O
 ‘They ate half of their partridge.’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: PVD_1964_Tyssyja_transl.028 (001.028))
- (2) *päleka-m-də am-ba-t t'ek or-he e:žə-mba* (C)
 half-ACC-3SG eat-PST.REP-3SG.O fast force-INSTR become-PST.REP.[3SG.S]
 ‘He ate half, became strong quickly.’
 (Budzisch et al. 2019: SDP_1964_FairytaleBlackZar_flk.196)

The word *peläk* (N) is also used to denote the equal division of dimensions and weights as the following examples show:

- (3) *ukkir litrit peläk* (N) ‘halber Liter’ (Erdélyi 1969: 181)
- (4) *pu:d-o-t pelek-ka ??? pitča* (C)
 russian.pound-EP-GEN half-DIM.[SG.NOM] ??? pike.[SG.NOM]
 ‘An eight-kilogram pike.’ (Budzisch et al. 2019: MNN_1977_Hunt_nar.014)

In example 4 the Russian dimension *nyð* ‘pud (~16kg)’ is used that refers in connection with the word *pelek* (C) to things, that weigh eight kilograms.

In addition to these concrete things, like food, meat or liquids, groups of living beings can also be divided into two halves by the use of the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S) as the expression *na milit pelämhti* (N) ‘the half [acc.] of this herd’ displays (Erdélyi 1969: 181). Furthermore, the social community of the Northern Selkup is divided into two large groups. These groups – phratries – are an elemental social classification, because the belonging to one group – either *kössil' peläk* ‘cedar phratry’ or *limpil' peläk* ‘eagle phratry’ – destines the group of the marriage partner of a person (Prokof'eva 1952: 103).³

³ In the dictionary of Alatalo the word *kössil'* is not translated as ‘cedar’, but is connected with the word for perch (Alatalo 2004: 316).

Summarising, we can state the linguistic representation of this domain is homogeneous: the Selkup use it in all dialects and in all examples – referring to bread, meat, a litre of water or groups of living beings – the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S). With regard to the objects used in this domain we have to declare, that they have no distinct features in common.

2.2. Transversal division of things into two halves

In this section, I will analyse the lexical representations of things that can be divided transversally into two parts. As extracted from the dictionaries and grammatical descriptions such a division is expressed by the word *kəš* (N) / *kis* (S) in the Northern and Southern dialects and by the word *tənd* in the Central dialect (see Bykonya 2005: 59, 236; Prokofev 1935: 42). Erdélyi illustrates this kind of division with the following example:

- (5) *qorqi-p kəšti ki:ri-ŋ-iti* (N)
 bear-ACC half skin-VBLZ-3PSSGO
 ‘he pulled the bear (the skin) off to half’ (Erdélyi 1969: 91)

The skinning of a bear starts with a longitudinal cut from the pelvis to the throat. Incisions ensue to the end of each paw and at last the skin is pulled of, starting from back to front. This procedure illustrates that a half-skinned bear is divided transversally.

Other examples show that particularly long things, like a rope, are conceptualized as cut in half transversally.

- (6) *ija te:mni-m-ti kəš minto na tot-qil-pi-nti-ti* (N)
 guy.[NOM] rope-ACC-3SG half to.the.extent.of INFER put-MULO-PST.NAR-INFER-3SG.O
 ‘The young man collected the half of the rope.’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: TVP_1965_ThreeBrothersLapta_flk.022 (003.018))

In his grammar, Castrén gives the expression *wedran kues* ‘half a bucket’ that is based on a mentally done transversal division of a container (Schiefner (Hrsg.) 1854: 204). The following example also deals with a container, but the linguistic representation contradicts the previous utilisation of *kəš* (N) as a designation for a transversal division of things.

- (7) *teb-nan šari-bidi tudo-la-t je-za-ttə i*
 (s)he-ADES fry-PTCP.PST crucian-PL.[NOM]-3SG be-PST-3PL and
wad'i-t čugun p'läka pot-pədi je-s (S)
 meat-GEN cauldron.[NOM] half.[NOM] cook-PTCP.PST be-PST.[3SG.S]
 ‘He had fried crucians and half of a cauldron with boiled meat.’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: PVD_1964_AtHome_nar.013 (001.013))

In this special case the use of *p'läkä* (S) instead of *kis* may be motivated by the content of the cauldron – meat – and not the container. As I have shown above, the half of food

is often marked with the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S) (c.f. 2.1 Division of things into two halves).

The following example, originated from the Southern dialect, at first glance gives no hint, why the word *kwəšte* (S) is used to designate the half of something.

- (8) *okər kwəšte wač'ə-ka-m inne aw kwište*
 one half.[SG.NOM] rise-ITER-1SG.O up other half.[SG.NOM]
wač'e-gu ne mogu sačem e-k (C)
 rise-INF not can.1SG hard be-3SG.S
 'I lift one half, I can't lift the other half, it is too heavy.'
 (Budzisch et al. 2019: PAV_NN_HowIBearCatch_nar.077)

The solution lies in the context of the sentence. The text from which this example is extracted deals with the catching of a bear and in this case talks about the lifting of the transversally divided bear on a sledge, so that the speaker can transport the meat and the skin home.

Summarizing we can state that the linguistic representation of this domain is not consistent. In cases of transversally divided animals, like bears, and long things like ropes the Selkup speakers of the Northern dialect use the word *kəš* (N) to designate a transversal division. The example from the Southern dialect with the word *p'läka* (S) seems to be an exception, caused maybe by an interference of the word *wad'* (S) 'meat', which is usually used with the word *p'läka* (S) to designate a division in two halves.

2.3. Longitudinal division of things into two halves

As described above the word *c'ontì* (N) marks a longitudinal division. In connection with a division of concrete things, only one example showed up in the corpora.

- (9) *asi midì-ŋ t'onč'o-ndə ki-ke-γən (S)*
 NEG achieve-3SG.S half-ILL river-DIM-LOC
 'It does not reach the middle of the river.'
 (Budzisch et al. 2019: KKA_NN_HazelGrouse_flk.023)

In this case, one can easily imagine a boat, that starts to cross the river from the shore and due to strong wind or heavy waves cannot even reach the middle of the river or traverse half of the river. This sentence underline also the fact that the underlying concept 'half' is responsible for the given meaning 'middle'.

Due to the lack of examples in this domain I cannot make a statement about the kind of linguistic representation or features.

2.4. Division of locations into two halves

In the everyday life of the Selkup people, the dwelling is an important locality, that is divided into certain areas. The divisions are based on the fact that several people of different ages use the room and the fact that different activities (sleeping, living and cooking) are carried out in this place by different people. This division becomes apparent in the behaviour of the acting persons, who do not enter certain areas of the dwelling. Linguistic data shows a division of the dwelling into two halves or sides: *av plekat* (S) ‘that half/side’ and *na plekat* (S) ‘this half/side’ (Tuchkova 2014: 89).

In the corpora the examples dealing with a location divided in two halves are based on the fact that a person has walked half of a path — *wattət pelekamdə m’andəgu* (S) ‘go half of the way’ (Bykonya 2005: 186) — or that a territory is split in half and that a source is divided in two halves, one containing water, the other blood.

- (10) *tap kəš-ti č’ap tü:-ŋɔ:-tɪn naš kurali:ti.* (N)
 this half-ILL hardly come-CO-3PL numerous %%%
 ‘They made half of the road [and then they saw]: (only skulls)?.’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: IF_196X_WomanAndDevil_flk.031 (032))

- (11) *päleka-p onek amdu-lgu-l me-le:-bi jes’i*
 half-ACC myself horn-ADJZ-person-ADJZ give-OPT-1SG.O if
man ne:-m spacai-lli (C)
 I.[NOM] daughter-NOM/ACC.1SG save-RES.[3SG.S]
 ‘I will give him half of my tsar territory if he saves my daughter.’
 (Budzisch et al. 2019: SDP_1964_FairytaleBlackZar_flk.294)

- (12) *A soj nil’di oqqir pl’eqa-γint qam au*
 and source.[NOM] such one half-LOC.3SG blood.[NOM] other
pl’eqa-γint üt (S)
 half-LOC.3SG water.[NOM]
 ‘And the source was like this: there was blood in one half, and there was water in the other half.’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: PMP_1961_ThreeBrothersAndPriest_flk.376 (001.376))

The given examples demonstrate clearly, that a location, like a house, a territory or a source, are divided into two halves by using the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S). Only in case of a way or path the word *kəš* (N) is used. This incoherent linguistic representation can be explained by the fact that a way or path may be considered a long thing, in which case the speakers of the Northern dialect use the word *kəš* (N) to mark a transversal division. It has also to be mentioned that the meanings ‘half’ and ‘side’ are not always distinguished clearly in these cases which may also be responsible for the incoherent linguistic representation.

2.5. Division of time into two halves⁴

This domain deals with the division of short temporary entities as well as long temporary entities into two halves. The material, collected from dictionaries and two language corpora, displays that the division of most temporary entities into two halves is expressed by using the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C): *časit pelänti kunti* (N) ‘during half an hour’ or *ukkir irätit peläktit kunti* (N) ‘during half a month’ (Erdélyi 1969: 181) and *ponda pälek* (C) ‘half-year’ (Bykonya 2005: 184).

In the corpora I found also evidence of the fact that sometimes the Selkup use other lexical items to express half a temporary entity.

- (13) *topi-ti čüše-l'ä aša u:č'i-mpa po:-n-ti kəš kunti* (N)
 leg.[NOM]-3SG be.sick-CVB NEG work-PST.NAR.[3SG.S] year-GEN-3SG half.[NOM] during
 ‘[While] his leg hurt, he didn’t work for half a year.’

(Brykina et al. 2020: KMG_1976_BriefVacation_nar.007 (002.005))

- (14) *Na n'o:-mmi-nti-t na n'o:-mmi-nti-t qäli-t-i-p*
 INFER catch.up-PST.NAR-INFER-3SG.O INFER catch.up-PST.NAR-INFER-3SG.O Nenets-PL-EP-ACC
mont to: qäli-t monti č'e:li kəš näč'ča ɔ:mti-ka
 apparently there Nenets-PL.[NOM] apparently day.[NOM] half.[NOM] there sit-HAB.[3SG.S]
qapij č'e:li-t kät tina təp-i-t-i-n qəl-la pula (N)
 supposedly day-ADVZ %% that (s)he-EP-PL-EP-GEN go.away-CVB after
 ‘He was pursuing the Nenets (“the Nenets are there, just half a day [ahead of me]”), he sat there in the daytime, when they had already left.’

(Brykina et al. 2020: NEP_196X_SecondFairytale_flk.173 (173))

These examples, both originated from the Northern dialect, show that a day can be divided by using the word *kəš* (N), that in the first-place marks a transversal division, but also possesses the connotation ‘part, portion’, that may interfere in the two last examples and explain the disorder of an otherwise coherent linguistic representation of this domain.

2.6. Division of paired entities

In this last domain the focus lies on concrete things that consist of two parts and are considered as an entity – like eyes, legs, arms or skis. Referring to one part of this entity, the Selkup use an adjective form of the word *peläk* / *pelänj* (N), e.g., *peläl' saji* ‘one-eyed’ or *peläl' tol'či* ‘with one ski’ (Prokof'eva 1952: 104; Kuznecova – Chelinskij – Grushkina 1980: 168). Bykonya gives further examples, referring to wings and antlers as paired entities (Bykonya 2005: 186) and the concrete use of this phenomenon is shown by the following examples:

⁴ In this section I will not focus on examples with the word *čonti* (N) / *čondi* (C) / *čonži* (S) and the semantic connotation ‘middle (time)’.

- (15) *imilimil'a* *pälä-sai-l'* *peča-tqo* *esa-ni* (N)
 grandmother[SG.NOM] half-eye-ADJZ roach-TRL become-AOR.[3SG.S]
 ‘The grandmother becomes a one-eyed roach.’
 (Budzisch et al. 2019: BIV_1941_KonMytyke_flk.002)
- (16) *tə:q-al-ai-mmi-nti-ti* *pela-j* *uti-n-ti* *tə:q-al-ai-mpa-t* (N)
 caress-MOM-PFV-PST.NAR-INFER-3SG.O half-ADJZ hand-GEN-3SG caress-MOM-PFV-PST.NAR-3SG.O
 ‘He stroke [=caressed] with one hand (with a half of his hands), he stroke
 [=caressed] [him].’
 (Brykina et al. 2020: NEP_196X_OrphanBoyAndPanOldMan2_flk.133 (131))

To summarize, we can say, that the linguistic representation of this domain is homogenous and well known in some Uralic languages.

3. Conclusion

The study of the concept ‘half’ in Selkup has shown that this mental unit of organisation has a complex structure with six different domains. Some domains are represented linguistically homogenous (e.g. division of things into two halves and division of paired entities), whereas other domains are expressed linguistically by more than one word (e.g. division of location or time in two halves). Sometimes this incoherent linguistic representation is caused by dialect differences or the fact that all word meaning ‘half’ in Selkup are polysemous and the different meanings might eventually interfere.

Table 2 presents once again the different domains with their linguistic representations.

These results provide clear evidence that the word *peläk* (N) / *pälek* (C) / *päleka* (S) is used most frequently in almost every domain. The word *kəš* (N) / *kis* (S) shows up in three domains: as expected to denote a transversal division, but also in referring to a division of locations and time into two halves. A contradiction to the picture extracted from the dictionaries is the use of the word *tənʒ* (S), which should express a transversal division, but in the presented case, and it is only one case, it refers to a longitudinal division. The word *c'onti* (N) / *c'ondi* (C) / *c'onži* (S) is used in the corpora only with the meaning ‘middle (time)’, so that it does not appear in Table 2.

The main purpose was to examine the structures of the concept ‘half’ in Selkup. The analysis has shown that the speakers use the words meaning ‘half’ a little bit different from the facts presented in the dictionaries and grammatical descriptions. And it has also become clear, that further work is required to understand the exact use of different words in one domain or to find additional examples for a longitudinal division of things into two halves. Especially the fact, that a word can denote a longitudinal and a transversal division needs further research. I think that insofar only one ‘half’ of this analysis is done.

Table 2

domain	linguistic representation	divided things	main components
division of things into two halves	<i>peläk</i> (N) <i>pälek</i> (C) <i>päleka</i> (S)	circle, partridge, litre, pud, herd, society	food, groups of persons
transversal division of things into two halves	<i>kəš</i> (N) <i>kis</i> (S) <i>päleka</i> (S)	bear, reindeer, rope, bucket, cauldron	slaughtered animals, vessels
longitudinal division of things into two halves	<i>t'onʒ</i> (S)	river	location
division of locations into two halves	<i>pälek</i> (C) <i>päleka</i> (S) <i>kəš</i> (N)	house, way, territory, source	locations
division of time into two halves	<i>peläk</i> (N) <i>pälek</i> (C) <i>kəš</i> (N)	hour, month, year, day	short and long temporary entities
division of paired entities	<i>peläk</i> (N) <i>pälek</i> (C)	eye, leg, hand, wings, antlers, human being	body-parts, human being

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