

The identification of narrative genres in Upper Tanana Athabascan: a preliminary study

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ABSTRACT: This paper is an investigation into the local classification of narrative genres in Upper Tanana. After reviewing genre-distinguishing diagnostics developed in the relevant literature, I apply them to a text collection by Upper Tanana speaker Mrs. Cora David and show that only two of them can be successfully applied. Two important additional findings are the fact that the boundary between myth and history is not as clear-cut as the speaker suggested and that genre diagnostics developed for the stories from one cultural group cannot be transferred to a different cultural group without careful investigation.

KEYWORDS: *Upper Tanana, Athabascan, narrative, genre*

1. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the local classification of narrative genres in Upper Tanana Athabascan. The idea for this paper stems from editing a collection containing narratives by Mrs. Cora David from Tetlin (David 2011).¹ Mrs. David identified three genres which she called *Nidhihshyqq niign* ‘stories of how I grew up’, *Łqy ət t’eeey hutshyaak niign* ‘stories that really happened’, and *Ts’exuushyqqk niign* ‘stories that make us smart’. Mrs. David’s primary criterion was the content of the narrative. Drawing on the literature on Northern Athabascan storytelling, I investigate whether there are formal (linguistic) markers corresponding to her distinction. In order to limit the analysis to manageable proportions, I only discuss issues of spatial, temporal, ethnic, and evidential framing.

I use the term *genre* in a loose, non-theoretical fashion to indicate a text classification system; I use the term *local* to indicate that this classification was done by a member of the speech community and not by an outsider like myself. I agree with Briggs & Bauman (1992:164) when they say that, due to the existence of intertextual relations, “no system of genres as defined by scholars can provide a wholly systematic, empirically based, objective set of consistently applied, mutually exclusive categories”, and thus expect overlaps between categories as well as fuzzy category boundaries. (A similar observation has been made much earlier by Boas 1914:377 who points to the problems of distinguishing myths from folk-tales using content diagnostics). The goal of the present paper is to uncover, in the terms of Hymes (1974:440) relevant framing differences between different kinds of texts. Hymes (ibid.) already points out that there is no mechanical correlation between linguistic features and speech styles, but certain features are, if not indicative, then at least typical of particular genres.

This lack of clarity in genre distinctions is caused by a number of different reasons. First, speakers do not always agree about the classification of a given narrative. The same story may be

¹ Mrs. David passed away on November 18, 2013, shortly before this paper was published. She is missed greatly by all of us.

considered a history by one speaker and a myth by a different speaker. The story of the Tailed People, for example, is classified as a history in David (2011), while a similar narrative about the Tailed People in the close-by communities of Northway and Scottie Creek is part of the ‘Traveler’ cycle, a mythical story cycle about a man who travelled all over the world, shaping it into what it is today (published versions of this cycle in related languages can be found in Atlla 1990 for Koyukon and Demit & Joe 2010 for Tanacross). While we know that stories may change as they are being diffused over a large area, we have to remember that this may impact their classification in the native system: one group’s history may be another group’s myth. We need to bear in mind that speakers have distinct personal styles and may use certain devices creatively. A rhetorical means such as repetition may be typical of myths, but a speaker can choose to use it in a personal narrative for dramatic effect. It follows thus that if a story with certain characteristics is classified a a myth, then the presence of the same set of characteristics in a different narrative does not necessarily mean that the second narrative is also a myth, even if both narratives come from the same cultural group. It is for this reason that we cannot expect a one-to-one correlation between genres and genre diagnostics.

This is closely associated with another methodological pitfall. Moore (2002:45) shows that the mention of ethnicity or language constitutes the most reliable diagnostic for distinguishing Kaska (also Athabascan) histories from myths. I will show later that this is not the case in Upper Tanana narratives, since language and ethnicity are never mentioned. Thus, identifying genre diagnostics for one cultural group and then applying these diagnostics to narratives by a different group may lead to erroneous results. In the same way, application of diagnostics identified in the stories of one speaker to those of a different speaker may lead to skewed results. At this point in time, we have individual observations on storytelling in Northern Athabascan, but we do not yet have a comprehensive understanding of genre categories and diagnostics, as evidenced by the very careful remarks of de Laguna (1995:285–291) on Koyukon or Moore (2002:37–49) on Kaska storytelling. Until we have reached such an understanding, it will be necessary to establish for each telling of a narrative how it would be categorized by the storyteller. Once a body of narratives is gathered that has multiple tokens in each speaker-established genre, it is possible to analyze the narratives for shared features which may support the storytellers’ classification. The present paper is intended as a first step in that direction.

For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to work with the narratives and classifications of one speaker only. I accept her classification of the narratives as the foundation of my analysis, and I investigate how genre diagnostics discussed in the literature on other Northern Athabascan groups are realized in her narratives. Despite the availability of other material, I will only occasionally draw comparisons to other speakers of Upper Tanana Athabascan to show that a particular diagnostic seems to be more a matter of personal style than a true indicator of genre. A more systematic comparison to other Upper Tanana storytellers will have to be postponed until the extant material is better organized and more research can be conducted.

This paper is structured as follows. In §2.1, I give background information on the language, §2.2 introduces the speaker. Her genre identification is discussed in §2.3, while diagnostics identified in other Athabascan groups are discussed in §2.4. These diagnostics are applied to the narratives in §3. The findings are discussed in §4 and a brief summary is provided in §5.

2. Background

2.1. The language

Upper Tanana is a Northern Athabascan language spoken in eastern interior Alaska and the western Yukon Territory. Speaker estimates vary, but it is certain that there are fewer than 90 speakers now, most of them elderly. Minoura (1994) identified five distinct dialects: Tetlin, Nabesna, Northway, Scottie Creek, and Beaver Creek. The first four of these dialects are spoken in Alaska, the last one in the Yukon Territory. The stories under discussion here are all in the Tetlin dialect of Upper Tanana.

Upper Tanana is set apart from the other Alaskan Athabascan languages by the development of its stem vowels (Leer 1977; Minoura 1994) conditioned by the loss of stem-final coronal non-lateral consonants (see also Tuttle & Lovick 2008). As a result, most Upper Tanana dialects distinguish 7 vowels and two diphthongs in addition to phonemic vowel length, nasality, and low tone. The Tetlin system distinguishes only 6 vowels and one diphthong plus length and nasality (Lovick 2011), and low tone has been lost apart from occasional vestigial tone (Minoura 1994:178). The consonant inventory of Upper Tanana is shown in Table 1, the vowel system in Table 2. Both tables contain IPA symbols and their orthographic representations, following the conventions set out by James Kari in Tyone (1996:xiii). For the remainder of this paper, only orthographic transcription will be used.

	Labial	Interdental			Alveolar			Post-alveolar			Palatal	Velar			Glottal
Oral stop	p				t ^h	t	t'					k ^h	k	k'	ʔ
					<t	<d	<t'>					<k	<g	<k'>	<ʔ>
Affricate		tθ ^h	tθ	tθ'	ts ^h	ts	ts'	tʃ ^h	tʃ	tʃ'					
		<tth>	<ddh>	<tth'>	<ts>	<dz>	<ts'>	<ch>	<j>	<ch'>					
Nasal stop	m				ṅ	n									
	<m>				<nh>	<n>									
Fricative		θ	ð		s			ʃ	ʃ ^j		ç	x			h
		<th>	<dh>		<s>			<sh>	<shy>		<yh>	<x>			<h>
Lateral					ɬ	l									
					<ɬ>	<l>									
Lateral affricate					tɬ ^h	tɬ	tɬ'								
					<tɬ>	<dl>	<tɬ'>								
Glide											j				
											<y>				

Table 1: The consonant inventory of Upper Tanana (Tuttle, Lovick, & Núñez-Ortiz 2011:286)

Table 2 shows the monophthong inventory of Upper Tanana. /ʌ/ has merged with /a/ in the Tetlin dialect. Upper Tanana also has the two diphthongs /ia/ and /io/; in the Tetlin dialect, /io/ has merged with /õ:/ (in noun stems) and /u:/ (in verb stems). All vowels can be oral or nasal. In the practical orthography, nasality is indicated by an ogonek.

i:	i			u:	u
<ii>	<i>			<uu>	<u>
e:	e	ə:	ə	o:	o
<ee>	<e>	<üü>	<ü>	<oo>	<o>
					ʌ
					<ä>
		a:	a		
		<aa>	<a>		

Table 2: The oral monophthongs of Upper Tanana (Tuttle, Lovick, & Núñez-Ortiz 2011:301)

A map of the Alaskan languages can be found in Figure 1.

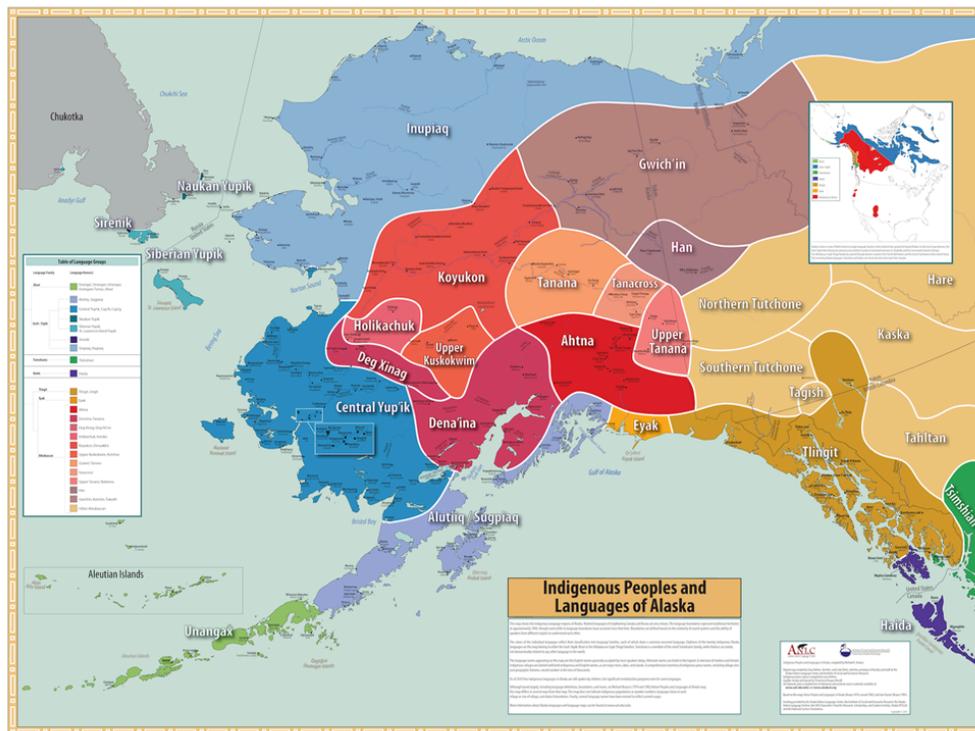


Figure 1: Indigenous peoples and languages of Alaska (Krauss et al. 2010)

The linguistic groups of Upper Tanana, Tanacross, and Upper Ahtna form a cultural complex sometimes called the ‘headwaters country’² (Kari 1986) sharing family and ceremonial ties. The region also had a reputation for being linguistically and culturally conservative (Kari 1996:viii). This has changed in the last few decades, and linguistic and cultural knowledge are being lost rapidly.

2.2. *The storyteller and her stories*

All narratives discussed here are included in a collection of Tetlin narratives by Mrs. Cora David (David 2011). Mrs. David was born in 1935 and grew up in *Nahk’ade* ‘fish trap’ (Last Tetlin; a formerly continuously inhabited village site now functioning mainly as fish camp). She comes from a multilingual family; her father was from Dawson and spoke Han, her mother from the Tetlin area, and her maternal grandfather from Mentasta, which belongs to the Ahtna language area. Mrs. David herself speaks the Tetlin dialect of Upper Tanana. She does not speak Han, but can understand and make herself understood in Ahtna and Tanacross (her assessment of her fluency varies somewhat). Mrs. David was brought up in ‘the old way’. Her family was semi-migratory and followed a seasonal round through the Nahk’ade area to make use of the land’s resources. When she and her siblings reached school age, the family moved to Tetlin. Mrs. David’s father always stressed the importance of schooling and of learning English while her mother taught the children through storytelling in Upper Tanana. Today, Mrs. David is an accomplished storyteller and a renowned expert in Upper Tanana language and culture. Because of her reputation, other Elders often tell me that I should take a particular question to Mrs. David or ask her to tell me a particular story. Her mother, Mrs. Lucy Adam, had the same reputation of cultural expert, and Mrs. David often acknowledges her in her stories. All narratives represented in David (2011) were told, transcribed, and translated between October 2007 and August 2009. The titles were added later, when the stories to be included in the book had been selected. The Upper Tanana titles are descriptive of the narratives’ content; the English titles are translations of the Upper Tanana ones.³

2.3. *Upper Tanana genres as explained by the speaker*

The genre classification underlying this paper stems from the publication process of David (2011). When I consulted Mrs. David regarding the order of the narratives in the book, she explained that they were different kinds of stories and organized them in three categories. The stories (listed in the order in which they appear in David 2011) and their categories is shown in Table 3. Table 3 also contains a column ‘short title’ which indicates how the narrative will be referred to in the remainder of this paper.

² Both the Tanana and the Copper River originate in this area.

³ Most of the story titles contain the verb form *xa nahogndak* ‘I talk about’ or ‘I tell the story of’. Exceptions are the two stories where Mrs. David relates events from her mother’s life (both of which contain *shnqq (nee’et) naholndak* ‘my mother told (us)’ and the final story in the collection, where the relativized verb form *xa nahoholndag* ‘that which they tell about’ are used. Only one story does not contain any form of this verb, I do not know why.

Category	Upper Tanana title	English title	Short title
Nidhihshyaq niign 'Stories of how I grew up'	<i>Nee'et stsakijeexal xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about how the boat capsized with us	Boat
	<i>Neetsay choh shitthiishnihshyay xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about how a big bear really scared me	Bear
	<i>Sh'aat Niign negn natsetneegn xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about moving about in the area of 'my wife creek'	Wife Creek
	<i>Nan' na'etnaa xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about the [1944] earthquake	Earthquake
	<i>Ihtsuul dq' nts'a' ts'eneeshyaan xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about being young and growing up	Growing up
	<i>Shyi' ts'e'aal xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about the food we eat	Food
	<i>Meł dzelxoo xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about toys	Toys
Łqy et t'ee y hutshyaak niign 'Stories that really happened'	<i>Shnqq naholndak niign</i>	A story that Mom told	Volcano
	<i>Shnqq nee'et naholndak tuu niihaan xa</i>	Mom told us about the flood	Flood
	<i>Ts'iit Tl'oo Ddhal' xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about 'porcupine grass mountain'	Porcupine Grass
	<i>Ts'ist'e' dicaay iin et nahembaa iin k'ii hitdeet</i>	The old lady and her granddaughters met with warriors	War
	<i>Che' t'iin xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about the Tailed People	Tailed People
	<i>Deet xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about cranes	Crane
Ts'exuushyaqk niign 'Stories how we can become smart'	<i>Nedzeegn xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about Nedzeegn	Nedzeegn
	<i>Yamaagn Teeshyaay xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about Yamaagn Teeshyaay	Camprobber
	<i>Yamaagn Teeshyaay Nahtsiq xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about Yamaagn Teeshyaay and Wolverine	Wolverine
	<i>Yamaagn Teeshyaay Naadodi xa nahogndak</i>	I talk about Yamaagn Teeshaay and the Ant People	Ant People
	<i>Stsqq Kelahdzeey xa nahoholndag</i>	The story they tell about Grandmother Spider	Grandmother Spider

Table 3: Genres and narratives in David (2011)

The first genre, *Nidhihshyq̄q̄ niign*, is that of the personal narrative or memoir: the storyteller narrates events from his or her life. Some of them are anecdotes relating particular incidents, others are more general recollections about growing up ‘the old way’. These stories are easy to distinguish from other narrative genres since they by necessity are told from the perspective of the storyteller, i.e. in the first person. Most of them also do not contain an explicit lesson beyond the general lesson of being prepared for anything. This sets them apart from the other two types, the delimitation of which is considerably more challenging. These two types have in common that they describe events that took place before the narrator was born, and that they are intended for education of the young. Many of them contain lessons (with varying degrees of explicitness) such as the necessity of being helpful and considerate, or the strong injunction against treating animals in a disrespectful fashion.

When discussing the stories informally in English, Mrs. David usually referred to *Łq̄y et t’eēy hutshyaak niign* ‘stories that really happened’ as ‘history’ and to *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* ‘stories that make us smart’ as ‘fairy tales’⁴. These labels reveal the basis for Mrs. David’s classification: The difference between the types lies in how true they are (see also Boas 1914:377ff. for discussion along similar lines). Classifying a story as *Łq̄y et t’eēy hutshyaak niign* means that the storyteller is very certain that the events really did happen, either exactly as described or as what Fogelson (1989:143) terms *epitomizing events* that “condense, encapsulate, and dramatize longer-term historical processes” that have such “such compelling qualities and explanatory power that they spread rapidly through the group and soon take on an ethnohistorical reality of their own”. Classifying a narrative as *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* ‘stories how we become smart’, on the other hand, shifts the focus from the description of events (and their truth) to the lesson contained therein, which is valid independently of whether the events did or did not take place. While Mrs. David acknowledges the importance of *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* ‘stories how we become smart’ as teaching tools, she has a much greater interest in historical accounts and sometimes is a little dismissive of myths, as evidenced by her use of the word ‘fairy tale’. In this paper, stories of the category *Łq̄y et t’eēy hutshyaak niign* will be referred to as ‘histories’ and stories categorized as *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* will be referred to as ‘myths’.

2.4. Existing classifications in Northern Athabascan

While many researchers take it as given that Northern Athabascan narratives can be classified in several different genres, there is little systematic and very little linguistic inquiry into the topic. In the Upper Tanana area, histories and myths seem to have a tradition as different genres. In his ethnography of the Upper Tanana, the fieldwork for which took place in 1929, McKennan (1959:170) states that “[s]ince the Indians clearly make this distinction I have separated their historical tales from their myths”. He does not mention any diagnostic beyond speaker judgments for this distinction. Tyone (1996), the only other text collection in Upper Tanana, does not contain any discussion of narrative genres. Kari (1986:9), in the introduction to a collection of

⁴ In using this term, Mrs. David differs from other Upper Tanana Elders, who object to this term and who consider stories similar to the ones included in David’s *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* to be ‘true’ stories as well. There is however agreement among Elders that *Ts’xuushyq̄q̄k niign* and similar stories are different from *Łq̄y et t’eēy hutshyaak niign*.

narratives in Ahtna Athabascan, only briefly touches on the classification of narrative genres in that language. He names place names as *the* diagnostic for the distinction between historical and legendary accounts. Perhaps the most fine-grained classification for an Alaskan Athabascan language is that of Fall (1990:4) for Dena'ina, who identifies “songs, place names, biographies, personal narratives, war stories and other historical accounts, and a large category of tales called ‘tsukdu’”. He defines *tsukdu* as stories set in the past, with usually unnamed characters, and unspecified exact locations (*ibid.*), although they are implicitly located in the Upper Cook Inlet, where this dialect of Dena'ina is spoken. Again, the presence or absence of place names is named as a distinguishing feature. A second diagnostic of *tsukdu* is the fact that they are located in remote, or distant time (Fall 1990:5). In their ethnography of the Nondalton Dena'ina Ellanna and Balluta (1982:39) use a wider definition of *sutdu* (the Inland Dena'ina dialect form of *tsukdu*) as all narratives which serve an instructional purpose. Again, temporal distance is a genre distinguishing diagnostic. In her discussion of Koyukon Athabascan storytelling, de Laguna (1995:76) compares the genre of *kk'adonts'idnee* ‘in Distant Time it is said’ (translation from Nelson 1983:16) to biblical stories in that these stories provide the Koyukon with moral guidelines, and points out that Distant Time is so remote from our time that “its realities are not those of today”. These narratives differ from ‘histories’, stories that took place “*yoogh dona*” (de Laguna 1995:76; the expression is written *yooghe done* in Jetté and Jones 2000:716 and glossed there as “a long time ago, many years ago, in the historical past”). Thus temporal framing seems to be a genre diagnostic. An additional diagnostic is mentioned by de Reuse (2003:87) who observes that historical and autobiographical accounts in Western Apache (a Southern Athabascan language) differ from all other kinds of narrative in that they lack the evidential marker *lɛk'eh* ‘quotative’. All diagnostics so far involve ways of framing the narrative in space, time, and source of knowledge.

Several publications touch on the role of special prosody in distinguishing genres in Alaskan Athabascan. (Berez 2011b) shows that there are statistically significant prosodic differences between two Ahtna texts representative of different genres. Lovick and Tuttle (2011) note that one of the speakers of their study of conversational patterns uses a special register to signal that she is now telling a story. Jetté (1908:298-299), in his discussion of the peoples from the (lower) Tanana, Koyukuk, and Yukon valleys states that “[t]he story-teller speaks slowly, in a sort of mysterious undertone, which contributes, together with the darkness and the wonderful character of the facts presented, to cast a sort of awe on the audience”. Special prosody is thus a possible diagnostic of genre, albeit a problematic one, for two reasons. First, a ‘mysterious tone of voice’ is hard to operationalize as an object of investigation. We know it when we see (or rather hear) it, but we cannot identify what, exactly, makes a particular narration ‘mysterious’, nor can the absence of mysteriousness be demonstrated. Second, our knowledge of Alaskan Athabascan prosody is so far limited to either impressionistic accounts or, in the few quantitative studies, to the speech patterns of individuals. Berez (2011b) considers data from one speaker only, which means that considerable further research will be necessary to establish whether the patterns found by her are typical for the language in general, or whether they may even be transferred to other linguistic groups. The same holds for the studies of Lovick and Tuttle (2011) for Upper Tanana and Lovick and Tuttle (2012) for Dena'ina, which both contrast two speakers but do not comment on patterns prevalent in the larger speech communities. As long as we do not have reliable information on baseline prosody both for individual speakers and for linguistic

groups, any discussion of stylistic, generic, or performance effects is premature. For these two reasons, special prosody is not considered in this paper.

All the scholars cited so far opine that there is a (more or less rigid) genre distinction in Athabaskan language, and that clear diagnostics can be found. The opposite view, that of genre distinctions being vague and flexible, is put forward by Osgood (1959:150) for Ingalik, who states that different genres are hard to identify in this group, and that they “merge from one into another and sometimes involve mixtures.” A similar idea is expressed by Moore (2002), probably the most detailed study of genre in any Northern Athabaskan language. In his study of Kaska narratives, Moore (2002:39) finds that there is a consistent distinction between songs and stories, but also states that a rigid distinction between myths and histories cannot be maintained (p. 41, 45) and, crucially, that “Kaskas differ in their opinions as to whether a story is a *sa’ă t’ene gudeji* ‘story of recent times’ or a *sa’ă gudeji* ‘long ago story’” (p. 42). He explains this with the belief that the events in ‘long ago stories’ shaped the world as it is today (p. 43f.), a thought that can also be found in Nelson (1983:18) and in Ellanna and Balluta (1982:39–50). The diagnostic put forward by Moore (2002:45) that seems to capture the Kaska distinction best seems to be that if the language or ethnicity of some of the story’s participants are explicitly mentioned, the story is a historical account. If language and ethnicity are not mentioned, the story is more likely to be a myth.

Taking Mrs. David’s classification as starting point, we will see which, if any, of the criteria put forward by other researchers support her distinction. The complete list includes: (1) spatial framing, (2) temporal framing, (3) source of knowledge, (4) linguistic and ethnic framing. These diagnostics will be evaluated in the following section.

3. Genre indicators in Upper Tanana narratives

3.1. Spatial framing

In the Introduction to *Tat’ahwt’aenn Nenn’* ‘The Headwaters People’s Country’, Kari (1986:9) observes the following:

“(…) in Ahtna, Tanaina, Koyukon, and several other Athabaskan languages with which I am familiar, I find that there is one fundamental difference in types of stories. Stories that are regarded as history take place at specific named places, whereas stories that are mythical or legendary usually are not set in specific locations. (...) I suggest that it is this geographical context that forms the basis for the Ahtna distinction between myth and history.”

In his introduction to Ahtna travel narratives, Kari (2010:x) elaborates that point by stating that the genre of *yenida’a* ‘long ago’ stories in that group “always lack[s] place names **or any local geographic references**” (emphasis mine). A similar statement can be found in Fall (1990:4) with respect to narrative genres in Dena’ina, who states that, while the location of events in myths is typically implied to be the Cook Inlet area, exact locations are not usually named. Andrews, Zoe, and Herter (1998:311) observe for Dogrib that stories set in floating time (more on that notion below) never contain any place names. By contrast, Moore (2002:46) considers this diagnostic

for the classification of Kaska narratives, but finds that in this cultural group, place names occur in both histories and myths. Basso (1996:48ff.) points to the significance of place names in Western Apache histories, but does not comment on their use in mythical accounts.

In Alaskan Athabascan languages, spatial reference can be established in two ways: through the use of place names, and through the use of spatial-directional adverbs. Geographic knowledge is highly valued among these peoples, and has been a focus of documentation as evidenced in Kari and Fall (2003) for the Upper Inlet Dena'ina, or in Kari (2010) and Berez (2011a) for the Ahtna, to name only a few recent publications. A comprehensive list of Upper Tanana place names has been compiled in Kari (1997a) and added to by my own research. Since there is no account of the Upper Tanana directional system elsewhere, it will be briefly introduced in the following paragraphs.

Upper Tanana employs the riverine directional system common in the Athabascan language family (Kari 1985, 1989; Leer 1989). Spatial relations are expressed using adverbs formed from roots meaning 'upriver', 'downriver', 'waterwards', 'inland', 'up (vertically)', 'down (vertically)' and 'away; out'; the last of these is also the unspecified directional often translated by speakers as 'out there'. These roots can take one of several prefixes indicating distance from the speaker, and one of four suffixes indicating allative, ablative, areal, or punctual reference. The resulting forms constitute a lexical class usually called directionals (see also Leer 1989:575f.). In Upper Tanana, the root and suffix have fused and undergone further phonological developments, so they are now best analyzed as semantically complex stems. Several contemporary speakers use ablative forms interchangeably with areal forms + the postposition *nts'ä* 'from'. The inventory of forms is shown in Table 4. Proto-Athabascan (PA) forms are from Leer (1989). Question marks indicate that the form is not attested in the available data and could not be elicited.

Meaning	PA root	Allative	Ablative	Punctual	Areal
'up above'	*dəG	<i>degn'</i>	<i>dq̄q ~ doo</i>	<i>daa</i>	<i>dogn</i>
'down below'	*yəG, yex	<i>shyign'</i>	?	<i>shyit</i>	<i>shyuugn</i>
'upstream'	*niʔ	<i>ne'</i>	<i>nq̄q ~ noo</i>	<i>noot</i>	<i>nuugn</i>
'downstream'	*daʔ	<i>da'</i>	<i>dq̄q ~ doo</i>	<i>daat</i>	<i>duugn</i>
'upland'	*nəG	<i>negn'</i>	<i>nq̄q ~ noo</i>	?	<i>nogn ~ nuugn</i>
'downland'	*cənʔ	<i>tthän'</i>	<i>tthq̄q</i>	<i>tthiit</i>	<i>tthuugn</i>
'ahead'	*nəsd	<i>noo' ~ noo</i>	?	?	<i>noogn</i>
'across'	*ŋa'nʔ	<i>naan'</i>	<i>nq̄q</i>	<i>naat</i>	<i>nuugn</i>
'away'	*ʔənʔ	<i>'än</i>	<i>'q̄q</i>	<i>'aat</i>	<i>'ogn ~ 'oogn</i>

Table 4: Directional forms in Upper Tanana Athabascan

Different Athabascan groups use different river drainages as reference objects for this system. If we project the system onto the Upper Tanana landscape, the result looks somewhat like Figure 2. The large arrow represents the course of the Tanana river, which begins at the confluence of the Chisana and Nabesna rivers in the southeastern corner of the map and runs to the northwest.

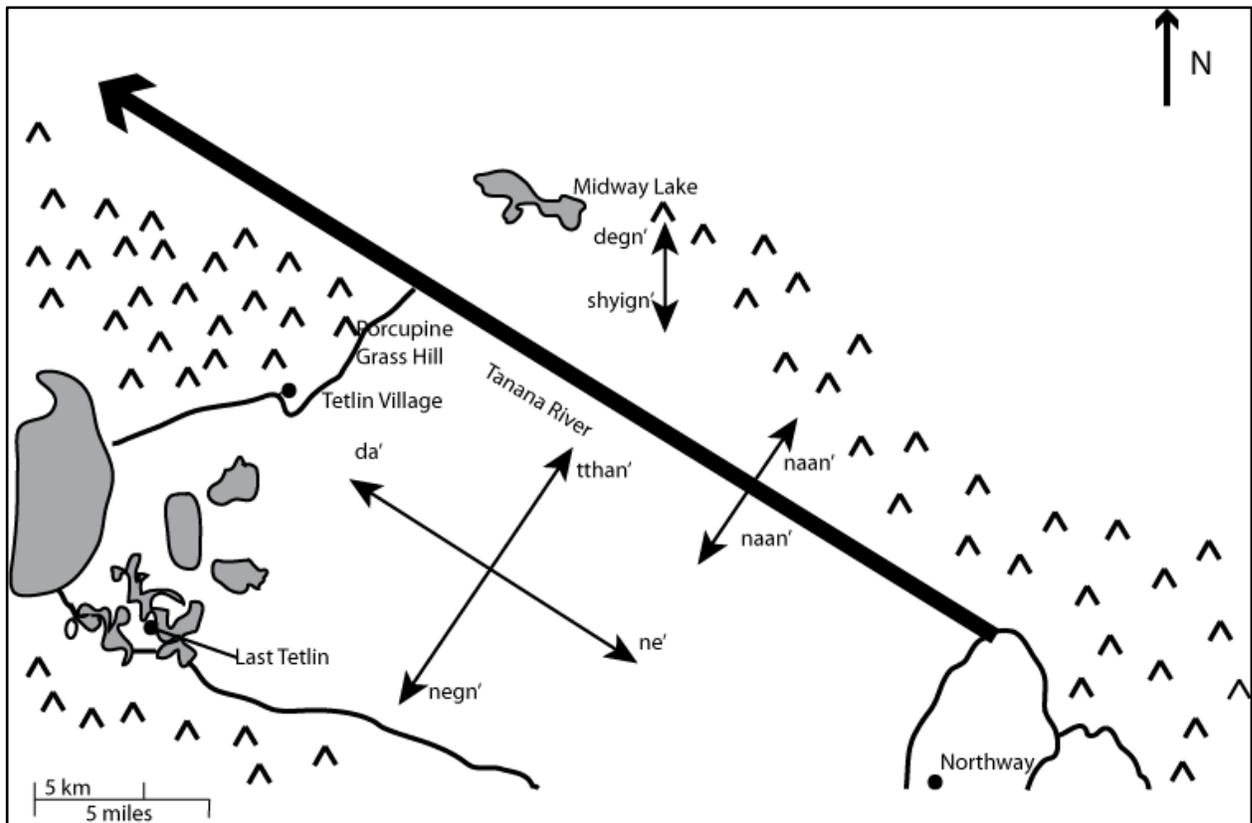


Figure 2: Schematic map of part of the Upper Tanana language area, illustrating the application of the directional system.

The personal narratives as well as most of the histories in David (2011) contain a number of place names establishing spatial reference. Twenty-two different names are explicitly mentioned in the stories and many of them are mentioned multiple times. While this density is low compared to that used by other Alaskan Athabascan travelers such as the Dena'ina speaker Shem Pete (see e.g. Kari and Fall 2003) or several Ahtna speakers in Kari (2010), it illustrates that many of these stories are located explicitly in the Tetlin area. A typical example of the combination of place names and directionals to achieve spatial reference is shown in (1). Place names and directionals are bolded:

(1) Porcupine Grass Story⁵ (David 2011:58)

1. Ts'iit Tl'oo.
porcupine grass:POSS
'Porcupine Grass [Mountain].'
2. Ay chih ch'ale'
and too FOC
- ahthtuugn,** ahthtuugn nts'a'
waterwards:AREAL waterwards:AREAL from
- Toochin'** nts'a' nahatdał tah
sticks.in.water from they.return when
- hii'aa'an ch'uutnel'iik tah
they.pass.him they.sneak when
- ha guuy nts'a' hooniign t'eeey detth'iik
EMPH little and noise even he.hears
- yahiidegn'** ddhał tthiit'aagn nts'a'.
up.vertically.ALL mountain top and

‘‘Porcupine grass’. And [that one], too, from the area towards the water, when they return from ‘sticks in water’ (Midway Lake), when they try to sneak by, he hears every little noise they make, from on top of that hill.’

With the spatial expressions in (1), the narrator carefully locates her discourse in the local geography. The story is about an evil presence that used to exist on *Ts'iit Tl'oo Ddhal'* ‘Porcupine Grass Hill’ and killed people traveling past. Two spatial expressions serve to indicate the route that was traveled: *ahthtuugn nts'a'* ‘from the area towards the water’ (= away from the Tanana River) and away from *Toochin' Mann'* ‘sticks in water lake’, called Midway Lake on official maps of Alaska. The verb form *nahatdał* ‘they return’ indicates that the goal of the travel is Tetlin village (or possible Last Tetlin), not mentioned explicitly in this story. This use of place names and directional elements is typical of personal narratives and of some of the histories in Mrs. David’s story collection.

Other narratives lack place names and establish spatial reference exclusively through the use of directionals. An example for this is the story of Nedzeegn, classified as a myth:

⁵ Examples are presented in three-line format. The first line contains an orthographic transcription of the text, the second line a word gloss. Some grammatical categories cannot be translated readily into English. Abbreviations used in the glosses include: ALL=Allative, AREAL=Areal, CT=Contrastive Topic, EMPH=Emphatic, FOC=Focus, PL=Plural, POSS=Possessed, PROH=Prohibitive, PSSOR=Possessor, REFL=Reflexive. The third line contains a free English translation.

Line breaks usually correspond to pause groups. Punctuation marks reflects intonation; a falling intonation is represented by a period, rising or steady intonation by a comma or (when the utterance was identifiably a question) by a question mark.

- (2) Nedzeegn (David 2011:90)
1. Jan Nedzeegn ha'.
this Nedzeegn EMPH
'This is Nedzeegn.'
 2. Nak'eet doodjijij
it.happened

neenaattheh da'.
long.before.us when
'This happened at a time long before us.'
 3. Neenaattheh da' uxa ts'exushyaq ch'a
long.before.us when for.it we.become.smart FOC

nee'eł nahoholniik.
to.us they.used.to.tell.stories
'They used to tell us stories of long before our time in order to make us smart.'
 4. Ts'ist'e' dits'iikeey, ts'exeh gaay iin eł
old.lady REFL.PSSOR:children woman small PL with

dogn tah hihdelth'ih.
uphill:AREAL among they.stayed
'An old lady and her children, young girls, were living up there.'
 5. Łaakeey ts'exeh gaay shyji' udehtth'ih.
two woman small alone stayed.with.her
'Just two girls were staying with her.'
 6. Eł natehxak tah ts'iniin etsaa
and it.got.dark when child he.crying

hihdehtth'ik **hah'ogn** nts'a'.
they.heard out.there and
'When it got dark, they could hear a baby crying outside somewhere.'
 7. Hiikah tetdak tah ch'ikol.
they.for.him started.off when nothing
'When they started [to look] for him, [there was] nothing.'
 8. "Ukah unah'ij," hu'ehniik tah.
for.himyou.guys.look she.told.them when
'And she told them, "You guys look for him."'
 9. **Hah'ogn** hiikah nanetaak da' k'at'eeey hiyudih'aay.
out.there they.for.him walked.around.when not they.did.not.find.him
'They walked around for him outside, but couldn't find him.'

The first three units introduce the story as having happened long ago (see also the next section) and explains its significance. The action begins in unit 4 where the old lady is introduced and where the story is situated *dogn* ‘in the uphill area’, i.e. somewhere in the Tetlin hills (the story was told Mrs. David’s house in Tetlin). The remainder of the introductory section contains the even more vague directional *hah’ogn* ‘out there’, which does not indicate a specific direction. When I asked her where the stories had happened, she stated ‘right here, in Tetlin’ (personal communication, 8 August 2011) but did not elaborate on the exact location, as she would usually do when I ask her a geographic question. Mrs. David is a major source for place names, and ‘right here in Tetlin’ covers an area of about thirty named places.⁶ Crucially, this very long story about Nedzeegn does not contain a single named place. It is located somewhere in the Tetlin hills through the use of directionals, but the exact location is not known, which fits with its classification as a myth.

Surprisingly, there is one story classified as a history that has the same characteristic. (3) illustrates the first few lines of the Crane story:

(3) Crane story (David 2011:82)

1. Deet.
crane
‘Cranes.’

2. <<Ishyit da’>> **ahnoo’** ts’ist’e’ et
there when **up.ahead.ALL** old.lady with

ts’exeh gaay et dihisyyi’ hihdelth’ih.
woman small with alone they.stayed

‘At that time, an old lady and a young girl were staying out there all by themselves.’

The directional *ahnoo* ‘up ahead’, loosely translated as ‘out there’ in (3), has the most complex semantics of any directional (see e.g. Kari 2010:132 or Berez 2011a:80–112 for detailed accounts of this directional in Ahtna). Its meanings include ‘out into the open (water)’, ‘forward’, ‘ahead’, and ‘a long way away’. Since the story was told in Fairbanks, AK (about 200 miles downriver of Tetlin), it is likely that the intended meaning of *ahnoo* here is ‘a long way away’; during several discussions of this story Mrs. David never specified the location more accurately than ‘right there in the Tetlin area’. A different telling of the same story (UTOLVDN08Mar1309 in Lovick 2006–present; the recording again took place in Fairbanks) uses the even more vague directional *hah’ogn* ‘out there’ for spatial framing. Neither version of the narrative contains a place name.

⁶ When she told me the story of the Tailed People for the first time, she also said that it happened ‘right here in Tetlin’, but refined this statement by naming not just the place where the Tailed People live (*Naatayhneetkayh* ‘dried up hill’) but also two additional landmarks (*Teedlqy* ‘current flows = the Tetlin river and *Tl’oh Oogn Mann* ‘among the grass lake’ = Skate Lake, a lake in the immediate vicinity of Tetlin village).

This lack of explicit directionals and place names can also be observed in the remaining four narratives classified as myths, where the vague directional *hah'ogn* 'outside, out there' is used for spatial framing. This is demonstrated in (4):

- (4) Grandmother Spider (David 2011:119)
1. Nenaattheh dā'
 long.before.us when
- ts'exeh gaay
 woman small
- ħaakeey iin
 two PL
- hihdelxoo **hah'ogn.**
 they.playing **out there.**
 'Long ago, two girls were playing out there.'

This narrative about two girls who follow a butterfly is not explicitly located in the Upper Tanana area. If it were, a more specific directional element such as 'in the upriver area' or 'in the area across the river' would have to be used. Once the story situation is established vaguely as 'somewhere out there', directionals are used to track the participants' movements through space: the two girls introduced in (4) will later travel *dogn* 'uphill / up into another world', *negn* 'upland', and then the one surviving girl will run *noo* 'ahead', *naann* 'across the river', *hanoogn* 'in the area ahead', *adaat* 'downriver / into the back of the house', and finally she will return *nahshyiign* 'down / back into the world'. The same pattern—spatial framing by *nah'ogn* 'out there', complete lack of place names, and use of directionals to describe the movements of characters within the story—is found in the remaining three myths of the collection as well.

The evidence surveyed so far shows that spatial framing is indeed a useful diagnostic in the identification of genres. Place names are typical of histories, even though not all histories contain them. Vague spatial framing through *hah'ogn* 'out there' is typical of myths. Two of the stories in the collection are framed with a specific directional indicating that the story is located in the Tetlin area, even though the exact location may not be known anymore. This could suggest a fuzzy boundary between the genres, or an intermediate genre that has not been described yet; I will return to this in section 4. below.

3.2. Temporal framing

One aspect that features frequently in the classification of narrative genres is the time at which the narrated events took place. Thus, Ellanna and Balluta (1982:39) state the following:

“Included in these stories [i.e. *nanutset nakenaghech' sutdu'a* 'stories and history before our time'] are tales of long, long ago, when people became animals and animals became people. There are also accounts of more recent times, when humans and animals had mutual respect and provided mutual assistance but were usually distinct from one

another. Lastly, they describe historic times, when inland Dena'ina travelled to visit, trade, and war with other people and when the *Tahtna* (Russians) came from the bottom of the sea.”

Ellanna and Balluta thus distinguish three eras: the oldest, where humans and animals could change into one another, the middle, where they were distinct but interacted differently than they do today, and the historic. In his discussion of Upper Inlet Dena'ina storytelling, Fall (1990) makes a similar observation, pointing out that “the setting of many [myths] may not be so “distant” in terms of the quantity of time that separates them from the present as in the quality of the action that is possible in contrast with today” (Fall 1990:5; emphasis in the original). The distance is thus not just temporal but rather spiritual, although it is worth noting that the line dividing natural from supernatural events is generally drawn differently in Athabascan groups than it is in mainstream American culture. Working on Koyukon, de Laguna (1995:290f.) distinguishes *kk'adonts'idnee* ‘in distant time it was said stories’ or myths, from *yoogh dona* ‘times long ago’ stories, or histories. *Kk'adonts'idnee* are set in Distant time “which is so remote that no one can explain how long ago it was” (Nelson 1983:16), “when Animals were Men, with the power of human speech, and the stories about them are intended as true stories of events that actually occurred then, although they could not occur now” (ibid.). De Laguna (1995:291) implies that *yoogh dona* stories are set in later time, but does not offer an exact delineation between the two eras.

This delineation problem is tackled explicitly by Helm and Gillespie (1981) in their work on Dogrib histories. They observe that while there is a class of narratives where “the Dogribs evince a firm comprehension of both historical actualities and their temporal succession”, many Dogrib narratives do not (p. 9). Among these narratives we find the origin stories of the Dogrib, and narratives where magical occurrences are common (Helm & Gillespie 1981:11). The era of those stories is called ‘floating time’ by the authors, in contrast to ‘linear time’ (p. 9). Linear time reckoning begins before contact with white people but after their existence has been known; in the case of Dogrib, this takes place in the early 18th century (ibid.). Narratives located in ‘linear time’ can be identified as histories, while narratives located in ‘floating time’ may relate mythical or historical events.

The time depth of linear time reckoning in many if not all Northern Athabascan groups is quite shallow, but particularly so in Alaska. De Laguna (1995:289), discussing Athabascan groups along the Yukon river, cites Chapman (1914:3) who identifies the smallpox epidemic of 1829 and the first steamboat on the Yukon river (1869) as anchoring events. McKennan (1959:111) notes that the Allen Expedition (1885), the Klondike Gold Rush (1896-1899) and the Chisana Stampede (1913) serve this function in the Upper Tanana area. He also observes that reckoning of linear time is done frequently by personal anchoring events (i.e. the narrator’s childhood or marriage) or by similar events of their ancestors, such as a grandparent’s childhood or marriage (ibid.). In the present corpus of Upper Tanana narratives, all of the strategies are identified by McKennan (1959:111) are used. In the personal narratives, temporal setting is usually explicit, by an adverbial such as *niithaad (dq)* ‘a short time ago’, by indication of the year of an event (the year is then always cited in English), or by a phrase like *ihtsuul dq* ‘when I was small’. Some of the histories are similarly grounded. This is shown in the opening paragraph of the Volcano story in (5), a narrative about the great fire caused by a volcanic eruption:

(5) Volcano (David 2011:44)

1. Shnaḡa
my.mother

ishyiit dḡ' k'et'iin teldak dḡ' nineteen twelve⁷
at.that.time volcano it.erupted when 1912

shnaḡa ntsuul.
my.mother was.small

'My mother, at the time that volcano erupted in 1912, my mother was small.'

2. Sheḡ naholndak niign ch'a dihnay.
to.me she.told the.way FOC I tell it
'I tell this the way she told it to me.'

(5) contains a number of temporal adverbials. *Ishyiit dḡ'*, literally 'there when', usually translated as 'at that time' is often used in all types of narratives. This rather vague adverbial is clarified by the phrase *k'et'iin teldak dḡ'* 'when the volcano erupted' and the exact year of the event. Further temporal detail is added by the clause *shnaḡa ntsuul* 'my mother was small'. This very explicit way of temporal framing is typical for Upper Tanana histories in linear time. Exact temporal framing contributes to the reliability of the narrative, as does the statement in line 4 that Mrs. David will tell the story as she has heard it from her mother (more on this in the following section). The Porcupine Grass story does not contain any temporal adverbial. Temporal framing is instead achieved genealogically, through the fact that the protagonist of the narrative is Mrs. David's greatgrandfather Chief Luke. By contrast, both tellings of the Crane story contain no temporal framing whatsoever. In the version edited for publication, Mrs. David inserted only the vague adverbial *ishyiit dḡ'* 'at that time' during the transcription process. The two remaining histories (the War story and the Tailed People story) are introduced by the adverbial *neenaattheh dḡ'* 'long before us'. *Naattheh* is a postposition glossed by Kari (1997b) as 'anciently, long ago'; the prefix *nee-* indexes the first person plural. The same adverbial is used in three of the myths (the story of Nedzeegn, the Ant People story, and the story about Grandmother Spider). The remaining two myths, the Camprobber story and the Wolverine story contain no temporal framing at all. The beginning of the Camprobber story is shown in (6):

⁷ The temporal reference here is problematic. 1912 was the year of the (very large) Katmai eruption. While this was likely visible from the Upper Tanana area, it is doubtful that the fires described by Mrs. David were caused by that eruption—the distance is too great. The 1911 eruption of Mt. Wrangell, however, could easily have impacted the Upper Tanana area in the manner described in the story. A description of the both volcanic events is available from <http://avo.alaska.edu>.

(6) Camprobber (David 2011:103)

1. Jan ch'a
this FOC

Jq̄q̄ et Ch̄j̄ht̄theel et
Camprobber and Woodpecker and

xa nats'iholnak niign.
about we.tell story

'This is the story we tell about Camprobber and Woodpecker.'

2. Jq̄q̄ dishȳj̄j̄'
Camprobber alone

hah'ogn eedah
out.there he.sat

et
and

Yamaagn Teeshyaay huts'a' aahaat et .
Yamaagn Teeshyaay to.them he.walked and

'Camprobber was sitting by himself out there and Yamaagn Teeshyaay walked up to them.'

3. Uxa niishyah,
to.him he.walked.up

Ch̄j̄ht̄theel et .
Woodpecker and

'He walked up to him and Woodpecker.'

The complete lack of temporal framing in this and other stories, and the very vague framing of others by adverbs like *neenaattheh dq̄* 'long before us' or *ishyit dq̄* 'at that time' suggests that these stories are set outside linear time, which corresponds to Helm & Gillespie's (1981) observations about Dogrib. Being inside linear time is a clear indicator of historicity, but a narrative set in floating time may be conceived of as a history or as a myth.

3.3. Evidentiality and source of knowledge

Implicit in the literature on evidentiality in Athabascan is the assumption that, in the languages with a grammaticized evidential system, inferential markers are typical of the genre of traditional narratives, or myths, and that source of knowledge generally plays an important role in Athabascan storytelling. This is formulated as a strong claim by de Laguna (1995:291):

Athabaskan languages allow, or rather necessitate, that the narrators indicate how they learned what they are telling: for example, there is a form that indicates that the statement is based on personal experience; another form if it was deduced, as one would deduce

the movement of an animal from its tracks; and lastly, “they say” or “it is said,” indicating that one is repeating hearsay, which is particularly appropriate to the myths of Distant Time. These distinctions suggest one way in which narrations may be classified.

Unfortunately, de Laguna herself includes no examples of such forms in any of the languages she has worked on (and certainly Koyukon, the language that much of the data from de Laguna (1995) comes from, is generally not considered to have a fully grammaticized evidential system), but there is some evidence from related languages. In Western Apache, for example, the inferential marker *lék'eh* “occurs with this distribution [at the end of every sentence] in traditional stories, myths, or tales, or in anything that is not considered historical or autobiographical” (de Reuse 2003:87). The Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache texts in Hoijer and Opler (1938) contain numerous examples of the ‘narrative’ marker *-naʔa*; since all texts in this collection are mythical however, we cannot determine whether *-naʔa* is indeed an indicator of genre in these languages. The only discussion of evidentiality in Northern Athabascan is Holton and Lovick (2008:295) who note that the inferential marker *tu* in Dena’ina Athabascan is extremely common in traditional narratives and that its use “signals that the information has been passed down to the speaker (and is hence particularly reliable)”. For our current purposes, it is important to note that Dena’ina storytellers exhibit considerable variation in their use of this evidential marker.⁸ Accounts of evidentiality in other Alaskan Athabascan languages are not available at this time.

Although Upper Tanana does not have a grammaticized evidential system, source of knowledge is indicated regularly, although not always in the way stated in de Laguna (1995:291). In two of the histories by Mrs. David, the source of knowledge is indicated in the story title: *Shnqq naholndak niign* ‘A story that Mom told’ and *Shnqq nee’et naholndak tuu niihaan xa* ‘Mom told us about the flood’ in addition to being referenced several times throughout the text. Mrs. David’s mother is cited as the source of knowledge in several other stories, e.g. in English commentary to the Tailed People story or to the Crane story. In that last history, the last paragraph also contains verb forms indicating that the story has been handed down through the generations, as illustrated in (7):

⁸ To illustrate this, I compared the use of *tu* in Raven stories by the Dena’ina speakers Antone and Alexie Evan. It turns out that Alexie Evan uses *tu* not only more frequently (52 uses in four pages of printed text as opposed to 31 uses by Antone Evan) but also in more constructions; Antone Evan uses *tu* almost exclusively in story-unit final position following a verb of saying, whereas Alexie Evan uses *tu* in story-unit medial position following noun or verb phrases. While a more thorough count is certainly warranted, this suggests that speakers have some leeway in their use of evidential markers. The stories used were *Chulyin Sukdu’a* ‘Raven Rescues His Wife’ by Alexie Evan in Tenenbaum (2006:90–101) and *Chulyin Sukdu’a* ‘Raven Story’ by Antone Evan in Tenenbaum (2006:110–131); Raven stories were chosen for this count since they (impressionistically) have the highest density of *tu* occurrences.

(7) Crane story (David 2011:86)

26. Jah
this

nts'ą' dihnay ay
and I.say and

uxa ts'ehuushya' xa ch'ale **neehenay**.
for.it we.should.be.smart for FOC they.tell.us
'This, I tell this so we become smart; that's why they tell us.'

27. "Nah'ogn
out.there

"ts'ugaay eł
birds and

"diniign *whatever* nah'ogn
moose whatever out.there

"sq' meh dalxoo," *they told us*⁹.
PROH with.it you.PL.not.play

"'Out there, birds and moose, whatever out there, don't play with it," they used to tell us.'

In the 'lesson' part of the story, the third person plural subject prefix *h-* in the forms *neehenay* 'they tell us' and English *they used to tell us*, backtranslated to *neehinih*, indexes the ancestors who passed down the story, and Mrs. David is careful to acknowledge this twice. There are however several histories where no source of knowledge is indicated at any place during the telling (Porcupine Grass story, War story). Source of knowledge also is not indicated in the three segments of the Yamaagn Teeshyaay story cycle, all of which are classified as myths. The story of Nedzeegn (myth) however contains an overt reference to the ancestors in the introduction, as shown in (8):

(8) Nedzeegn (David 2011:90)

1. Jan Nedzeegn ha'.
this Nedzeegn EMPH
'This is Nedzeegn.'

2. Nak'eet doodiłłi
it.happened

3. neenaattheh da'.
long.before.us when
'This happened long before us.'

⁹ The use of angled brackets indicates that the word was originally in English and was translated into Upper Tanana during the editing process.

4. Neenaattheh da' uxa ts'exushyaq ch'a
 long.before.us when for.it we.become.smart FOC

nee'eł **nahoholniik.**

to.us they.used.to.tell.stories

'They used to tell us stories of long before our time in order to make us smart.'

In the Grandmother Spider story (classified as a myth), the ancestors as source of knowledge are indicated in the title: *Stsqq Kelahdzeey xa nahoholndag*, lit. 'what they tell about Grandmother Spider'. Within the story, source of knowledge is indicated exactly once. When the devil is introduced, his name is followed by English 'they call him', later back-translated as *henih* 'they say'. This is shown in (9):

- (9) Grandmother Spider (David 2011:120)

14. Ndegn' hteedeel eł t'eeey
 upland they.starting.to.go and really

ch'itay
 old.man

ch'itay dishyjj' eeday ha hihnijideeł.
 old.man alone staying EMPH they.came.to

'They started walking upland and an old man, they came to an old man staying all by himself.'

15. Ts'ant'ay łan, **they call him.**
 devil truly
 'Devil truly, they call him.'

While this may be surprising to someone familiar with other Alaskan Athabascan stories, it appears to be not unusual in the Upper Tanana region. The most renowned Upper Tanana story teller, the late Mary Tyone, apparently indicated source of knowledge as sparingly as Mrs. David does. Her classic rendering of the Butterfly story (very similar to Mrs. David's Grandmother Spider story) contains only two citations of source of knowledge. Interestingly, both of them (examples (10) and (11), respectively) are very similar to that in Mrs. David's telling of the story:

- (10) Mary Tyone, Butterfly story (Tyone 1996:24)¹⁰

T'aat Ts'ant'ay **wuts'enay** eedah.
 under devil we.call.him he.stayed

'The one we call Devil [an evil man] was staying beneath there.'

¹⁰ Mrs. Tyone spoke the Scottie Creek dialect of Upper Tanana, which distinguishes /ʌ/ <ä> from /a/ <a>. Her dialect marks low tone, but this is not indicated in the original source.

- (11) Mary Tyone, Butterfly story (Tyone 1996:25)
 Ay Ttheedzaan **wuts'enay** du' ... yehnih.
 and devil we.call.him CT ... he.told.her
 'And the one we call Devil said to her, ...'

A reviewer of this paper suggested that this may be a recent development, and that likely older story tellers would have indicated source of knowledge more consistently. It appears that this is not the case. In the two traditional stories by Mr. Titus David recorded by SIL linguist Paul Milanowski in or about 1963 contained in David (2006), source of knowledge is also not indicated once. Mr. David was born in 1904, before the Tetlin area was exposed to prolonged contact with white people (in the late 1920), so it can be assumed that he learned the traditional patterns from his teachers. It thus appears common for Upper Tanana storytellers to not indicate source of knowledge as persistently as may be done in other groups.

Nevertheless, some Upper Tanana speakers do indeed mark source of knowledge consistently, suggesting that this may be an indicator of personal style. An excerpt of a myth told by the late Mrs. Darlene Northway of Northway is given in (12). Mrs. Northway was a niece of Mrs. Tyone and learnt much of her storytelling skills from her aunt. In the brief segment in (12), she uses *hiiyehnih* 'they said it' twice, indicating that this story has been handed down to her.

- (12) Darlene Northway: The woman who married a Bear (told on 27 July 2010, in Lovick 2006–present)

24. Tsüh shyj̄' nii'elshyeek, **hiiyehnih**.
 roots only he.brought they.said.it
 '[The Bear] brought only edible roots, they said.'
25. Tädn tah
 night when
 tädn tah hahnoo' <nach'ihii'aa>.
 night among at.front they.are.eating
 'At night, they're eating at the front there'
26. *Bones*, dziin tah *bones* hii'iił
 day among they.always.eat
 hanoo' kon' shyiit hiidehthay
 front fire in they.throw
 'During the day they always eat bones and they throw them into the fire.'
27. Dikay' k'ineetaq, **hiiyehnih**.
 REFL.PSSOR.husband she.recognized.him they.said.it
 'She figured her husband out, they said.'

From the examples surveyed here, it is clear that de Laguna's (1995:291) claim that the storyteller *must* indicate where she learned the story is not true for the Upper Tanana at least. This may or may not have been different in the past: there is not enough time depth of research

on Upper Tanana for us to be able to answer this question, although the available stories suggest that source of knowledge did not use to be an important category in this language. It certainly appears that source of knowledge is also not a reliable indicator of genre for this storyteller. While many histories by Mrs. David do indicate where she learned the story, not all of them do, and this marking is similarly inconsistent in her myths. For the present collection of narratives at least, this diagnostic can be discarded.

3.4. *Language and ethnicity*

Moore (2002:45–47) finds that the only thing systematically distinguishing Kaska histories from legends is that in the former, the language and ethnicity of the participants is usually spelled out, whereas they are not mentioned in myths. This criterion has to my knowledge not been mentioned by other scholars of Athabascan oral literature.

Applied to the Upper Tanana stories, this diagnostic does not yield any results. Ethnicity and language seem not to play the role that Moore (2002) finds in the investigation of Kaska narratives. None of the narratives discussed in David (2011) mention the participants' ethnicity. This absence is particularly striking in the story *Ts'ist'e' dicaay iin et nahembaa iin k'ii hitdeet* 'The old lady and her granddaughters meet with warriors', where the two girls are taken south to the ocean as the result of an intertribal war. When Mrs. David and I discussed the story during the transcription process, she said that she was not sure about the ethnicity of the warriors. While four out of the five narratives classified as histories in McKennan (1959:170–174) mention the ethnicity of the enemies (and none of his myths mention it), there is no instance of this in the present collection.

4. Discussion

Applying the possible genre diagnostics (geographic framing, temporal framing, evidential framing, and linguistic/ethnic framing) to the small corpus of Upper Tanana narratives considered for this study, we find that the first two are largely applicable to our present corpus whereas the last two are not. I will first discuss the successful diagnostics and then turn to some implications of the fact that evidentiality and linguistic/ethnic framing are not applicable to the stories in David (2011).

We find that spatial framing by either place names or directionals appears to be the most reliable indicator of genre. Stories grounded through place names are histories, those grounded by the vague directional *hah'ogn* 'out there' or not grounded at all are myths. Between these two extremes, we find stories that are framed by specific directionals; these stories are set "in the upland area" or "ahead" from the reference point (the speaker's location). One of the two stories thus grounded was classified as a myth, the other as a history. Temporal framing yields somewhat weaker results. In many histories, temporal framing is achieved explicitly by indicating the year when something happened, or by pointing to the age of the participants and to their place in the genealogy. Several histories and all of the myths however are set beyond linear time reckoning, in floating time. In these narratives, temporal framing is either achieved by vague adverbials such as *ishyit dq'* or *neenaattheh dq'* or left out altogether. It is interesting that this temporal distinction corresponds neither to the storyteller's classification of narratives nor to

the distinction achieved by spatial framing. This is shown in Table 5 (only histories and myths are included here):

Category	Short title	Spatial framing	Temporal framing
<i>Lqy et t'eeey hutshyaak niign</i> 'Stories that really happened' Histories	Volcano	place name	year, age of mother
	Flood	place name	age of mother
	Porcupine Grass	place name	great-grandfather
	War	place name	<i>neenaattheh dq'</i>
	Tailed People	place name	<i>neenaattheh dq'</i>
	Crane	specific directional	[<i>ishyit dq'</i>] (added later)
<i>Ts' exuushyqqk niign</i> 'Stories how we can become smart' Myths	Nedzeegn	specific directional	<i>neenaattheh dq'</i>
	Camprober	vague directional	--
	Wolverine	vague directional	--
	Ant people	vague directional	<i>neenaattheh dq'</i>
	Grandmother Spider	vague directional	<i>neenaattheh dq'</i>

Table 5: Framing of narratives and the relation to genre

Table 5 shows that the distinction between histories and myths is not as clearcut to the linguist as it is to the storyteller. Some stories are set in Linear Time in specific named locations; they are good examples of histories. Others are set in Floating Time “somewhere out there”; they are good examples of myths. But a number of stories is set in Floating Time with varying degrees of spatial framing: some are set in named locations, others in named directions. These stories are on the boundary between the two genres. It is possible that other heuristics would mesh more clearly with the storyteller’s intuition, but such heuristics still need to be identified.

It is worth thinking about the two stories on the boundary between myth and history in a bit more detail. The Crane story (history) as well as the story of Nedzeegn (myth) share geographical framing (specific directionals but no place names) and temporal framing (set in floating time). A third thing they have in common is that they are not unique to the Tetlin people, just as the myths are not unique to the Tetlin people but are shared across much of Northern Athabascan and possibly beyond (the fact that myths have a wide distribution over North America has been observed already by Boas 1914:380ff.). The story of Grandmother Spider is contained under the name Butterfly Story in Tyone (1996) and also in Kari and Tuttle (to

appear), a collection of Ahtna stories. The story cycle of Yamaagn Teeshyaay is known under different names by the Koyukon (Attla 1990), the Tanacross (Demit and Joe 2010), the Dogrib (Andrews, Zoe, and Herter 1998), the Kaska (Moore 2002) and the Dane-zaa (Jung et al. 2004-2010), and probably in many more groups. Both the Crane story and the story of Nedzeegn are known to other Alaskan Athabascan groups as well; both were told in the 1970s by Mrs. Katherine Nicolie, a Dena'ina storyteller from Talkeetna and are published in Nicolie (1976). Neither narrative contains place names in Mrs. Nicolie's telling and would, applying the diagnostic applied by Fall (1990:4) be classified as *tsukdu*, roughly equivalent to the myth discussed here. Nicolie (1976:8) specifies at the end of the Crane story that "this story is from Kroto Creek", the community where she grew up, indicating that Kroto Creek is either the place where the story took place or where it used to be told. Elements of the Crane story can also be found in the Koyukon story of Keeysoofinh, the Frog (Attla 1983:7-30). Elements of the story of Nedzeegn exist in several different groups; while a complete survey is beyond the scope of this paper, parts of it exist in Han (Osgood 1971:121f.), Koyukon (Attla 1995), and Scottie Creek Upper Tanana (Tyone 1996:77-87). The fact that both stories exist beyond the immediate vicinity of Tetlin in addition to the formal diagnostics of framing suggests that both of them are myths, which, in the case of the Crane story, is at odds with the classification done by the storyteller herself.

This mismatch could be interpreted in a number of different ways. One of them could be to ascribe incompetence to the storyteller: She does not know the stories, the classifications, or maybe she does not know much about storytelling. I suggest here a different interpretation: Mrs. David's genre classification has nothing to do with formal markers such as spatial or temporal framing, and instead has everything to do with perceived truth. The Crane story is a 'true story' because of the important lesson against cruelty to animals contained therein, and less so because of it being situated firmly in time and space; for some reason, the storyteller does not consider the story of Nedzeegn to be as true. The line between a myth and a history may be hard and fast in the mind of each speaker, but that does not mean that stories on either side of that line may not share characteristics nor that characteristics have to be applied unfailingly. Tetlin Upper Tanana is not unique in this, since similar observations have been made by Boas (1914), Hymes (1974), Briggs and Bauman (1992) for other North American groups. A prototypical Tetlin history will contain place names and additional grounding through directionals as well as some indication of when the events took place; a prototypical Tetlin myth will contain none of these. But there are stories that are somewhere between these two poles in that they relate events that the storyteller knows to be true, even if specific details such as place or time are not available anymore. As our understanding of Northern Athabascan storytelling evolves, it may be necessary to refine the very simple genre classification provided here using comparative data. This brings me to the final point I wish to make.

One of the most striking results of this study is that two diagnostics identified by researchers working on other groups did not function as genre indicators in Upper Tanana. Moore (2002) finds that in Kaska, place names are not a reliable indicator of genre, since both histories and myths may contain them. He does however find that explicit mention of ethnicity and language is a reliable indicator that a given narrative is a history rather than a myth. In Upper Tanana, we find the exact opposite. Ethnicity and language are never mentioned, and the existence of place names is a fairly reliable indicator that a given narrative is a history. Similarly,

de Laguna (1995:291) claims that Athabascan storytelling, and in particular ‘Distant Time stories’ as opposed to historical accounts, requires indication of source of knowledge, and de Reuse (2003:87) makes a similar claim about Western Apache. In Upper Tanana, however, source of knowledge is indicated irregularly, and more so in histories than in myths. These two observations demonstrate the importance of considering each cultural group on their own terms. The similarities between Athabascan groups, both linguistic and cultural, are often overwhelming, but this does not mean that differences do not exist. We need considerably more in-depth studies of storytelling in Northern Athabascan groups before sophisticated comparison or the formulation of strong claims about Athabascan storytelling will be possible. Currently we simply do not know enough to identify beyond reasonable doubt whether a particular feature such as consistent indication of source of knowledge is characteristic of an individual storyteller, of a particular genre, or a particular cultural group, or whether it is maybe the result of repeated performance. The systematic study of different *ways of speaking* is a promising avenue for Northern Athabascan research, especially as more data becomes accessible to a wider audience. The current study is only a first step in this direction, and I hope that it will generate further interest in such issues.

5. Summary

After reviewing several genre diagnostics cited in the literature, we have seen that the most reliable diagnostics for Tetlin narratives are spatial and temporal framing. We observed furthermore that the genre classification by the storyteller does not correspond clearly to the divisions established by these diagnostics. Some of her stories are clearly histories, others are clearly myths, still others seem occupy a space on the boundary between history and myth. It is possible that an intermediate genre exists, or that the dividing line between history and myth is not as hard and fast as the storyteller’s classification suggests. We have also seen that while many Athabascan groups distinguish histories from myths, the realization of this distinction may take different forms; place names, ethnicity and language, or evidential markers are indicative of genre in some cultural groups but not in all of them. It is not possible to automatically apply a set of heuristics identified in the stories of one group to the stories of a different group. Instead, we need to relearn a lesson that linguists and anthropologists already know: Each set of stories needs to be considered and analyzed on its own terms. Before we can make global assumptions on Northern Athabascan genre classifications, we need to understand the local classifications first.

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