

Wayfinding in West Greenlandic

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In West Greenlandic the orientation system demonstrative stems denote absolute directions, north, south, west and east, but also near, distant, uphill, downhill etc. directions. In wayfinding these directional demonstratives are used as adverbial nominal phrases in allative, ablative or vialis case and as incorporated stems in verbalized motion verbs. Motion verbs in general are agentive and in motion of vehicles, where the subject is the vehicle, the verb stem *ingerla-* ‘move’ is used.

The present study is based on a pilot project, where the informant, 82 years of age, tells two sailing routes from a settlement, Kangersuatsiaq, to a small city, Upernavik, situated to the north of Kangersuatsiaq, on the west coast of Greenland. A route in the sheltered waters used in bad weather, and a route on open waters used in good weather. While the route on open waters shows ‘a simple’ orientation along the coast from south to north relying on the absolute directions to north and east (coastline), the route in the sheltered waters shows a complex map, where the sailor has to remember landmarks and place names. The lexical items used in this description include demonstrative adverbs showing an orientation relying on the ‘front side’, ‘back side’, ‘along the shore’ of an island etc., where ‘front side’ seems to be to the west, and the ‘back side’ is to the east. The demonstratives used can be modified by nominal modifying affixes as – *kanneq* ‘more or less’, as in *avannamu-kanneq* ‘more or less to the north’. Verbs for movement include verb stems as *ingerla-* ‘move’, and verbalizing affixes as – *qqup-* ‘pass by, move through’, which incorporates the landmarks as in *ikerasa-qqil-* ‘move through the strait’. This presentation will show that the landmarks and place names are very important for the navigation in the sheltered waters.