Grammatical strategies of predication in environmental constructions:
A view from Hungarian and Tundra Nenets

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1. This talk will focus on a sentence type often briefly mentioned together with weather-sentences, which can be called environmental constructions (EC) (e.g. English *It is warm (here/today)*) in two Uralic languages: Hungarian (1a) and Tundra Nenets (TN) (1b).

(1) a. A   szobában   meleg   lesz.   b. labe-kana   jiba   ŋæ-ŋku.
       the   room.INE   warm   be.FUT.3SG   room-LOC   warm   be-FUT.3SG
       'It will be warm in the room.'   'It will be warm in the room.'

It will be shown that despite the apparent similarity of basic EC examples, the two languages rely on what may be seen as two opposite grammatical strategies to express environmental conditions in copular clauses: while the Nominal (categorially adjectival or nominal) element functions as a grammatical subject in Hungarian, it functions as a predicate describing the environment in TN. We propose that the subject-strategy is licensed in Hungarian through incorporation, an operation that is independently unavailable in TN ECs.

2. We begin by reviewing evidence that the Nominal functions as the grammatical subject in Hungarian ECs, precisely as assumed by traditional descriptive grammars of the language and Kádár (2011), and contra the alternative view according to which it functions as the Predicate (see Komlósy 1994, who takes ECs to be subjectless, and Tóth 2001, who analyses ECs as having a quasi-argumental subject). After critically evaluating some arguments for the subject analysis that we ultimately find inconclusive, two conclusive arguments are presented. First, while the copula is obligatorily dropped in predicative copular sentences with Nominal predicates in Hungarian (2a), an overt copula is mandatory in the EC (Kádár 2011) (2b), just as it is in non-existential and existential locative clauses (2c). This is also the reason behind the fact that negated ECs contain the 'negative existential verb' *nincs* (= not.be) rather than simple clausal negation *nem*. This parallelism is explained on the subject analysis of the Nominal on the assumption that both in (existential) locative sentences and in ECs this Nominal is predicated of by a locative, which may be silent (Freeze 1992).

(2) a. A   szoba   meleg   (*van).
       the   room   warm   be.3SG
       'The room is warm.'

    b. A   szobában   meleg   *(van).   c. János   a   szobában   *(van)
       the   room.INE   warm   be.3SG   John   the   room.INE   be.3SG
       'It is warm in the room.'   'John is in the room.'

Second, with *seem*-type verbs the Nominal cannot bear the case that canonically marks secondary predicates of *seem*, namely, Dative.

(3)   Péter   tehetős   ember-nek   látszik.   (4)   *Meleg-nek/*köd-nek/*reggel-nek   látszik.
       Peter   wealthy   person-DAT   seem.3SG   warm-DAT / fog-DAT / morning-DAT   seem.3SG
       'Peter seems to be a wealthy person.'   'It seems warm / foggy / evening.'

3. Next we show that TN ECs like (1b) are only seemingly parallel to their counterparts in Hungarian. First, TN ECs differ from both non-existential and existential locative clauses. While the locative phrase is obligatory in locative clauses, and in broad focus sentences it occurs immediately before the copular verb (6), in ECs the locative is optional and in broad focus sentences it can only appear to the left of the Nominal (5). This latter word order is characteristic of existential sentences. ECs are nonetheless distinct from existential sentences too: while ECs employ the copula *ŋæ-*, the copular element in existentials is the existential verb *taňa-* (7). Further, the verb is obligatory in existential clauses, while it does not occur in ECs present and past tense indicatives (8), (13) (Nikolaeva 2014).

(5) (labe-kana) jiba (*labe-kana) ŋæ-ŋku.
room-loc warm (room-LOC) be-FUT.3SG
'It will be warm (in the room).'

(6) tol *(labe-kana) ŋæ-ŋku.
table room-LOC be-FUT.3SG
'The table will be in the room.'

(7) (labe-kana) tol taṅa.
room-LOC table exist.3SG
'There is a table in the room.'

(8) (labe-kana) jiba.
room-LOC warm
'It is warm.'

These differences from both non-existential and existential locative constructions are explained if in ECs the Nominal functions as the predicate, rather than as the subject (as in locative constructions); in other words ECs are predicational copular clauses. Indeed, just as in predicational copular clauses, when ECs are negated the negative auxiliary may occur either before the adjective or between the adjective and the copula (9).

(9) labe-kana (ṅi) jiba (ṅi) ŋa-ʔ.
room-LOC NEG.AUX.3SG warm NEG.AUX.3SG be-CNG
'It woṅt be warm in the room.'

The analysis of the Nominal as the predicate receives striking support from the fact that the Nominal carries past morphology, just like Nominal predicates in copular clauses do.

(10) m'a-kana jiba-ś.
tent-LOC warm-PST
'It was warm in the tent.'

(11) maṅa śem'a-waʔ ŋarka-ć.
1PL family-3PL big-PST
'Our family was big.'

Finally, ECs may optionally feature the overt subject *num*. Nikolaeva (2014) suggests that this element, a noun meaning 'sky, weather, universe, god' and sometimes bearing a possessive suffix, is an expletive and it is an alternative to the locative in some sense. But *num* may co-occur with a locative (12), thus it may only be treated as a genuine subject expletive if we posit that it also has a null expletive counterpart in examples like (13). We suggest *num* is a quasi-argument, which is supported by two facts. First, it cannot occur when the locative is pragmatically incompatible (such as 'in the room') and it can only appear as an object.

(12) juṅ -ʔ jirij-xana (num) jiba-ś.
June-GEN month-LOC sky warm-PST
'It was warm in June.'

(13) jiba-ś.
warm-PST
'It was warm.'

4. In sum, while the Nominal element functions as a grammatical predicate in TN, in Hungarian it functions as a grammatical subject. A variety of strategies are known to be exploited in the world's languages to form ECs (Eriksen et al 2010); yet, which language opts for which strategy is not wholly accidental. We argue that the independent property that makes available the subject strategy in Hungarian, but not in TN, is the availability of complex predicate formation in its syntax through the incorporation of non-specific arguments into the verb (É. Kiss 2002). The subject Nominal of Hungarian ECs can function as the semantic predicate, despite being a grammatical subject, precisely because it incorporates into the semantically empty verbal copula, located above the Small Clause of which the Nominal is the subject. As we show, this incorporation is not only possible but it is obligatory in ECs to license the non-specific subject, in the same way as in the case non-specific subjects on complement Small Clauses in general. The same incorporation is not licensed in TN because in TN it would involve lowering, due to the low (strictly sentence-final) position of the copular verb.

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