

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

Veronika Hegedűs¹, Nikolett Mus¹ & Balázs Surányi^{1,2}

¹Research Institute for Linguistics, ²PPCU

Environmental Constructions

A variety of strategies are known to be exploited in the world's languages to form environmental constructions (ECs) (Eriksen et al 2010).

(1) It is warm (here/today).

Our focus is on ECs in two Uralic languages: Hungarian (2) and Tundra Nenets (3). Despite the apparent similarity of (2) and (3), the two languages employ two opposite grammatical strategies.

(2) A szobában **meleg** lesz.
the room.INE warm be.FUT.3SG
(Locative) **Nominal**_{SUBJ} BE
'It will be warm in the room.'

(3) labe-kăna **jiba** ɲæ-ɲku.
room-LOC warm be-FUT.3SG
(Locative) **Nominal**_{PRED} BE
'It will be warm in the room.'

Claim: The subject-strategy is licensed in Hungarian through (pseudo-)incorporation, an operation that is independently unavailable in TN ECs.

Explaining the difference

Hypothesis 1 (to be rejected): Bundling of subject role and topic role is generalized in TN.

If all subjects are interpreted as topic in TN (compare Ob-Ugric, Filchenko 2007, É. Kiss 2019), it follows that the subject of ECs cannot be a non-specific NP.

But: The subject role is not bundled with a topic role in TN; see the existential construction.

(18) Zooparkxăna ti? tăăna?
Zoo.LOC reindeer.PL exist.3PL
'There are reindeer in the zoo.'

Hypothesis 2: The subject of certain types of predication, including locative predication, must be specific (in the absence of any further operations). This precludes the subject-strategy in TN. Hungarian employs incorporation to skirt the restriction.

▷ Subjects of certain predications must be specific.

(19) Samlámdej ɲəporejxăna ɲamdaś ɲa.
fifth row.LOC seat be.3SG
#‘There is a vacant seat in the fifth row.’
'The vacant seat is in the fifth row.'

Hungarian

Komlósy (1994), Tóth (2001): Nominal = predicate. Traditional gr., Kádár (2011): Nominal = subject. We adopt a version of the traditional **subject-analysis**, based on the following arguments:

(i) Nominal is an NP; it cannot be an AdjP.

(4) [_{NP} Nagy köd] / *[_{AdjP} Nagyon ködös] van.
big fog / very foggy is
'It is very foggy. [lit. There is big fog.]'

(ii) Nominal can be plural, with plural AGR on copula.

(5) Hideg(-ek) / Fagy(-ok) lesz(-nek).
cold-PL / frost-PL will.be-3PL
'It'll be cold/frosty (repeatedly).'

NB. impersonal weather-sentences (and impersonal passives) cannot be plural.

(6) *Villámlani fog-nak.
lightning.VB.INF will-3PL
'There'll be lightnings repeatedly.'

(iii) Case in the *seem*-construction: dative impossible

(7) Orvos lesz. (8) Orvos-nak látszol.
doctor will.be.2SG doctor-DAT seem.2SG
'You will be a doctor.' 'You seem to be a doctor.'

(9) Köd lesz. (10) *Köd-nek látszik.
fog will.be.3SG fog-DAT seem.3SG
'It will be foggy.' 'It seems to be foggy.'

(iv) Copula is obligatory; unlike copular clauses with Nominal predicates and like existential (and other locative) sentences.

(11) A szoba meleg (*van).
the room warm is
'The room is warm.'

(12) A szobában meleg *(van) / egy légy *(van).
the room.INE warm is / a fly is
'In the room, there is warmth / a fly.'

⇒ The Hungarian ECs examined here behave like existential constructions, analyzed as underlyingly involving locative predication (à la Freeze 1992, Moro 1997; cf. Partee & Borschev 2007).

Tundra Nenets

The Nominal is the **predicate**. (Cf. Nikolaeva 2014 on weather expressions.)

(i) A quasi-argumental expletive subject is possible (*num* 'sky, weather', (13)).

(ii) Nominal takes predicate morphology (subject agreement and tense, (13)).

(13) Moskvaxăna (num?) jiba-θ-ś.
Moscow.LOC sky warm-3SG-PST
'It/The weather was warm in Moscow.'

(iii) Copula drop is obligatory (Nominal predicate).

(14) labekăna jiba (*ɲa).
room.LOC warm.3SG be.3SG
'It is warm in the room.'

(15) Igoí labekăna *(ɲa) / pírcă *(ɲa).
Igor room.LOC be.3SG / tall.3SG be.3SG
'Igor is in the room / tall.'

(iv) In the absence of an overt copula, the Nominal is strictly clause-final, otherwise it is immediately pre-verbal.

(16) *jibaś labekăna. (17) jiba *ɲaíi ɲæɲku.
warm.3SG.PST room.LOC warm.3SG again be.FUT.3SG
'It was warm in the room.' 'It will be warm again.'

⇒ TN ECs are Nominal copular clauses, not locative (or existential) sentences.

▷ The subject of locative predication is salvaged in Hungarian by phrasal pseudo-incorporation into the verb (Massam 2001, Barrie & Mathieu 2016; É. Kiss 2002), resulting in a **Nominal**_{SUBJ}+V complex predicate (Farkas & de Swart 2003). (23) =(22)

(21) [[_{PredP} [_{NP} légy]+[_{Pred+V} esett] [_{SC} [_{NP} —] [_{PP} a levesbe]]]]
[[_{PredP} [_{NP} fly]+[_{Pred+V} fell] [_{SC} [_{NP} —] [_{PP} into the soup]]]]

(22) [[_{PredP} [_{NP} köd]+[_{Pred+V} van] [_{SC} [_{NP} —] [_{LOC} kint]]]]
[[_{PredP} [_{NP} fog]+[_{Pred+V} is] [_{SC} [_{NP} —] [_{LOC} outside]]]]

Summary

⇒ While the Nominal element functions as a grammatical predicate in TN, in Hungarian it functions as a grammatical subject.

⇒ The independent property that makes available the subject strategy in Hungarian, but not in TN, is the availability of complex predicate formation via pseudo-incorporation.

Acknowledgment:

The support of the research project "Nominal Structures in Uralic Languages" (NKFI 125206) is gratefully acknowledged.

Contact: hegedus.veronika@nytud.hu, mus.nikolett@gmail.com, balazs.suranyi@gmail.com

