

Enets object cross-reference: syntactic marking of information structure

Eastern Uralic languages (Ob-Ugric and Samoyedic, see Helimski 1982) are well-known for their optional object cross-reference on the verb. Nikolaeva (2001) and Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011) suggested that it was information status of direct object which controlled the presence of the cross-reference in these languages: topical direct objects trigger agreement in the verb, while focal direct objects cannot do it. Among Samoyedic languages, Nenets was analyzed in details in (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011) with the help of numerous elicited examples, Nganasan and Selkup were discussed only in general terms by Tereščenko (1979) and Kuznecova et al. (1980), correspondingly. Properties of Forest Enets object cross-reference have been discussed in (Siegl 2013: 253-255, 375-377): not in contrast with the descriptions of the other Samoyedic languages, Siegl noted that transitive verbs cross-referenced their objects only when these objects were secondary topics. However, only little evidence was provided to prove the point which was, thus, rather a comment than a solid descriptive claim.

This paper aims to continue the discussion of Enets and, broader, Samoyedic object cross-reference and its function. We claim that Enets object cross-reference operates at the sentence level and not at the discourse level: it is rather topic of a clause than topical discourse referent who triggers object cross-reference (see Lambrecht 1994 for a theoretic definition of clausal topics). We use data from our own corpus of glossed natural texts to support the claim. Both Enets varieties, Forest Enets (FE) and Tundra Enets (TE), are included; 32 hours of recordings containing ca. 40 000 clauses or ca. 200 000 tokens.

The central methodological discovery of our Enets object cross-reference research are naturalistic transitive interrogative clauses. Question-answer pairs are indeed commonly used to illustrate prototypical contexts for the topic vs. focus distinction within a clause: *wh*-word and its structural correlate in the answer are always in focus. Since Enets questions to objects never show verbs with object cross-reference (see ex. (1)-(2)), it entails the impossibility of focal objects to trigger the cross-reference in a verb. In contrast, the overwhelming majority – 83% – of all other questions (to subjects, to other arguments and adverbs, as well as yes-no questions, see ex. (3)-(5)) feature verbs with object cross-reference. So in these interrogative sentences, objects are never in focus, and most often are indeed in topic. Further we find several other sentences types where there are evident formal ways to delineate topic and focus of a clause, and in all such cases focal objects do not trigger verbal cross-reference: e.g. direct objects with morphological focal markers (meaning ‘only’ and ‘even’) never co-occur with cross-reference on the verb, see ex. (6)-(7), or direct objects in linear focus position trigger cross-reference much rarer than direct objects in other positions.

It is normal for a clausal topic to be also a topic of discourse, primary or secondary. Direct objects expressed by zero anaphora are discourse topics by definition, and among clauses with non-zero direct objects triggering verbal cross-reference, only 5% of our corpus feature objects which are not topics of discourse. However, the very existence of these exceptional 5% supports the hypothesis that Enets object cross-reference is triggered by clausal topics, which can be different from discourse topics, as shown by Lambrecht (1994: 119). E.g. interrogative clauses show the contrast quite well: referents of objects in ex. (8) and (9) have not been introduced before, but this fact does not impede the speaker to form a question where they belong to topic and not to focus.

(1)	ɔbu	oo-bi-d,	ɔbu	oo-bi-d?
FE	what	eat(ipfv)-PRF-2SG.S	what	eat(ipfv)-PRF-2SG.S ¹

¹ The following abbreviations are used: 1, 2, 3 – 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; CAUS – causative; CONN – connegative; CONT – ‘contrastive’ series; EVEN – ‘even’ marker; FUT – future; ipfv – imperfective; LOC – locative; MULT – multiplicative; NEG – negative verb; NOM – nominative; OBL – oblique; PEJ – pejorative; pfv – perfective; PL – plural; PLC – placeholder; POOR – ‘poor’; PRF – perfect; PROL – prolative; PST – past series; Q – interrogative; RESTR – restrictive; S – subjective cross-reference; SG, sg – singular; SONsg – subjective-objective cross-reference for non-singular object; Sopl – subjective-objective cross-reference for non-plural object; SOsg – subjective-objective cross-reference for singular object; TRANSL – translative.

modj man-? nie-zu?, gribi
 I say(pfv)-CONN NEG-1SG.S.CONT mushrooms
 oo-bi-z?, gribi
 eat(ipfv)-PRF-1SG.S mushrooms

'What have you eaten? – I say: I have eaten mushrooms, mushrooms.'

(2) miiro kinu-ta-**zo?** ese-ni? mu mu-da-**zo?**
 TE what sing(ipfv)-FUT-1SG.S father-OBL.SG.1SG PLC do(ipfv)-FUT-1SG.S
 'What shall I sing, shall I sing the songs (lit. the ones) of my father?'

(3) nixu? kare jio ɔ-da-**za?**
 TE three fish who eat(pfv)-FUT-3SG.SOsg
 'Who will eat the three fishes?'

(4) ɔ, pogu-ni? ani ɔbu-uf mɔdisu-ŋ-e-z u
 FE oh fishing_net-PL.1SG and what-TRANSL see(pfv)-MULT-SOpl-2SG.SOng you(sg)
 'Oh, why do you check my nets?'

(5) ne-do kaza-ba-**ro?**
 TE woman-OBL.SG.2SG kill(pfv)-Q-2SG.SOsg
 dʒigua, ne-j? dʒu?a-bo
 be_absent(ipfv).3SG.S woman-NOM.SG.1SG loose(pfv)-1SG.SOsg
 '(What has happened?) Have you killed your wife? – No, I have lost my wife.'

(6) pivɔ-dʒa-reo ɔma-**zodji**
 TE beer-PEJ-RESTR eat(pfv)-1SG.S.PST
 'I have drunk only a beer.'

(7) tʃi kaza-ni? ni-goreo, ni-goreo dʒaxara-**zo?**
 TE so grandmother-OBL.SG.1SG name-EVEN name-EVEN not_know(ipfv)-1SG.S
 'So I do not know even my grandmother's name.'

(8) ɛɛ-kuji-ni? <...> baza-an mense-d kunʃ
 FE mother-POOR-OBL.SG.1SG word-PROL.SG old_woman-OBL.SG.2SG how
 tari-sa-r ?
 steal(pfv)-Q-2SG.SOsg
 'As my mother said, how did you steal your wife?'

(9) [Some of our people are interested only in vodka.]
 ni-i-za mii-gone ɔ-ta-d-e-**za?**
 TE child-NOM.PL.3SG what-LOC.SG eat(pfv)-CAUS-FUT-SOpl-3SG.SOng
 'What will he feed his children with?'

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