

## Enets object cross-reference: syntactic marking of information structure

### 0. Enets

two dialects: Forest Enets (FE), Tundra Enets (TE) [< Samoyedic < Uralic]

A corpus of texts recorded in 1960s-2000s – 32 hours of glossed texts (25 for FE, 7 for TE) containing ca. 40 000 clauses or ca. 200 000 tokens, prepared in terms of the project ‘Documentation of Enets: digitization and analysis of legacy materials and fieldwork with the last speakers’ supported by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme in 2008-2011 at MPI-EVA and by MPI-EVA in 2011-2013:

- modern recordings done by the authors, Maria Ovsjannikova, Natalya Stoyanova, and Sergey Trubetskoy in 2005-2010

- legacy recordings of the previous generation of Enets speakers, kindly provided by the Dudinka branch of GTRK ‘Noril’sk’, Tajmyr House of Folk Culture, Dar’ja S. Bolina, Oksana E. Dobzhanskaja, Irina P. Sorokina, and Anna Ju. Urmanchieva

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### 1. Introduction

Object cross-reference in Ob-Ugric and Samoyedic that has common origin (Helimski 1982)

- |        |                    |    |                          |    |                         |
|--------|--------------------|----|--------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| (1) a. | <b>pən'iŋa-r</b>   | b. | <b>pən'iŋ-i-z</b>        | c. | <b>pən'iŋa-xu-z</b>     |
| FE     | use(ipfv)-2SG.SOsg |    | use(ipfv)-SOpl-2SG.SOpl  |    | use(ipfv)-SOdu-2SG.SOpl |
|        | ‘you (sg) use it’  |    | ‘you (sg) use them (pl)’ |    | ‘you (sg) use them(du)’ |
| d.     | <b>pən'iŋa-d</b>   | e. | <b>d'aza-d</b>           |    |                         |
|        | use(ipfv)-2SG.S    |    | go(ipfv)-2SG.S           |    |                         |
|        | ‘you (sg) use’     |    | ‘you (sg) go’            |    |                         |

Object cross-reference is almost obligatory if a clause contains no overt object NP.

- |     |                                    |            |              |                             |
|-----|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| (2) | <b>ese-jʔ</b>                      | <b>tʃi</b> | <b>periʔ</b> | <b>baziʔ-ubi-zaʃ</b>        |
| FE  | father-NOM.SG.1SG                  | so         | always       | tell(ipfv)-HAB-3SG.SOsg.PST |
|     | ‘My father always told about him.’ |            |              |                             |

The problem: what influences presence vs. absence of the object cross-reference if the direct object is overtly expressed by a full NP.

- |        |                           |                     |                     |
|--------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| (3) a. | <b>rosa</b>               | <b>baza</b>         | <b>təne</b>         |
| FE     | Russian                   | language            | know(ipfv).3SG.S    |
|        | ‘He knows Russian.’       |                     |                     |
| b.     | <b>ker-ta</b>             | <b>baza-da</b>      | <b>təne-za</b>      |
|        | self-OBL.SG.3SG           | language-OBL.SG.3SG | know(ipfv)-3SG.SOsg |
|        | ‘She knows her language.’ |                     |                     |

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 triggered object cross-reference of the verb,
- focus direct objects did not trigger object cross-reference of the verb.

To a significant extent this system functions in Samoyedic by now.

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.

In (Khanina & Shluinsky 2015) we checked if object cross-reference of the verb correlates with the following parameters:

- verbal aspect – perfective vs. imperfective,
- verbal aspectual derivation markers and tense-modality markers,
- animacy, definiteness and specificity of the subject,
- animacy, definiteness and specificity of the object,
- possessive markers on the object,
- length of the object NP (number of words),
- full NP vs. pronominal object,
- linear order of S, O, V,
- presence of additional stuff (an adjunct or an indirect object) between verb and direct object that are normally close.

Only some features of direct objects significantly correlate with the presence of object cross-reference, and these are only trends:

- direct object's definiteness and possessive marking,
- linear order features related to the direct object: mutual linear order of O and V and presence of additional stuff between them.

This shows indirectly that object cross-reference is related to the information structure. Cf. the literature on Enets: 'logical stress' (Tereščenko 1973: 188; Sorokina 2010: 310–311), breaking 'neutral information structure' (Siegl 2013: 253–254).

## 2. Object cross-reference in interrogative clauses

What are formal correlates of the information structure?

⇒ question-answer pairs that are traditionally used as illustration of the sentence focus

“**The topic of a sentence** is the thing that which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about. The definition of topic in terms of the relation of “aboutness” between an entity and a proposition has been adopted in one form or another by various contemporary linguists.” (Lambrecht 1994: 118)

“**The focus of a sentence**, or, more precisely, the focus of the proposition expressed by a sentence in a given utterance context, is seen as the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ from each other.” (Lambrecht 1994: 207)

Focus vs. topic distinction is related to the **assertion vs. presupposition** distinction: “Just as a topic is included in the presupposition without being identical to it, a focus is part of an assertion without coinciding with it”. (Lambrecht 1994: 206)

**Discourse topic** is different from the sentence topic: “The notion of discourse topic ... has more to do with discourse understanding and text cohesion than with the grammatical form of sentences...” (Lambrecht 1994: 117)

In question-answer pairs, we are sure what is focus topic:

- wh-word in an interrogative clause;
- its structural correlate in the answer.

Our corpus contains ca. 1000 questions + ca. 200 answers different from *yes/no*<sup>1</sup>

- FE: 600 questions + 120 answers from 2/3 of FE subcorpus,
- TE: 450 questions + 80 answers from the whole TE subcorpus.
- (naturalistic answers are not always the same as structural correlates to wh-words, cf. e.g. *Where did she go? – She was taken by those people.*)

1000 questions include 87 transitive interrogative clauses with a non-zero direct object (65 FE, 22 TE) + sometimes answers:

- 42 questions to the object (33 FE, 9 TE): **no cases of object cross-reference!**

Questions and answers always had the same model of cross-reference and therefore were always counted as the same token.

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

<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Larisa Leisiö and Irina Nikolaeva who asked us to fill a questionnaire on interrogative sentences in Samoyedic that led us to making a database on Enets interrogative sentences.

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

‘What did you eat, what did you eat? – I say: I ate mushrooms, mushrooms.’

- (5) miiro kinu-ta-zo?, ese-ni? mu mu-da-zo??  
 TE what sing(ipfv)-FUT-1SG.S father-OBL.SG.1SG PLC make(pfv)-FUT-1SG.S  
 ‘What will I sing, I will sing the songs [= those] of my father?’

- 47 questions to other constituents (subject, other arguments and adjuncts, verb): **39 with object cross-reference** vs. 8 without it (**83 %** vs. 17%)
  - including 8 questions to the subject: all of them have object cross-reference

- (6) kudji-mi? mu-da-za eke, eke dia?  
 FE which-NOM.SG.1DU take(pfv)-FUT-3SG.SOsg this this land  
 ‘Who of us will take this land?’

- (7) nixu? kare fiɔ ɔ-da-za?  
 TE three fish who eat(pfv)-FUT-3SG.SOsg  
 ‘Who will eat these three fishes?’

One exceptional example that is a question both to the object and to the subject at the same time: by absence of cross-reference we conclude that information structure status of the object is more important than the information status of the subject.

- (8) bu i-bu-ta ko-?,  
 FE s/he NEG-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3SG find(pfv)-CONN  
 fee ɔbu ɔ-da?  
 who what eat(pfv)-FUT.3SG.S  
 ‘If he does not find (it), who will eat what?’

- 20 questions to other arguments and to adjuncts: 15 with object cross-reference vs. 5 without it (75% vs. 25%)

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

- (10) n'ii-za mii-gone ɔ-ta-d-e-za?  
 TE child-NOM.PL.3SG what-LOC.SG eat(pfv)-CAUS-FUT-SOpl-3SG.SOng  
 ‘With what will he feed his children?’

- (11) — taxara-go-ze mii-gone nexa  
 TE dilute(pfv)-DUR-PTCP.SIM what-LOC.SG take(pfv)-3SG.S  
 ‘With what did he buy alcohol?’

— bese-one  
 money-PROL.SG  
 ‘With money.’

- 19 yes/no-questions: 16 with object cross-reference vs. 3 without it (84% vs. 16%)

- (12) ani mu ŋa-j, kɔde?ɔ ŋa-j  
 FE and PLC exist(ipfv)-3SG.S.IMP owl exist(ipfv)-3SG.S.IMP  
 tʃike, kɔde?ɔ n'ie-ru? tene??  
 this owl NEG-2SG.SOsg.CONT know(ipfv)-CONN  
 ‘This, for example, the owl, you know the owl, after all?’

- (13) ne-do kaza-ba-ro?  
 TE woman-OBL.SG.2SG kill(pfv)-Q-2SG.SOsg  
 dʒigua, ne-j? dʒu?a-bo  
 there\_is\_no(ipfv).3SG.S woman-NOM.SG.1SG lose(pfv)-1SG.SOsg  
 ‘(What happened?) Have you killed your wife? – No, I have lost my wife.’

(14) u te nado məruta-sa-d?  
 FE you reindeer antler break(pfv)-CAUS-Q-2SG.S  
 ‘Did you break the reindeer antlers?’

⇒ if the object is in focus, object cross-reference IS NOT possible  
 ⇒ if smth. else is in focus, USUALLY THERE IS object cross-reference

In other words, based on the interrogative sentences:

- **object cross-reference is possible only with a topical object,**
- **with a topical object, object cross-reference is present most frequently, but is not obligatory.**

#### 4. Restrictions on object cross-reference in non-interrogative sentences

##### 4.1. No examples of object cross-reference, if an object NP contains an **explicit marker of the indefiniteness or an indefinite pronoun**

(15) jefə ɔbu-xoɔ bare kinuʔɔ-xitʃ ɔlʲesʲka-nʲʔ nɔʔ  
 FE still what-TOP song sing(ipfv)-3DU.S.PST Oles’ka-OBL.SG.1SG with  
 ‘They also sang a song with my Oles’ka.’

(16) kunadʲu, neɔ-d mii-goɑ sazu-da-do  
 TE how child-DAT.SG what-TOP sew(pfv)-FUT-2SG.S  
 ‘Well, you will sew something for your child.’

⇒ indefinite NPs are not possible with object cross-reference

##### 4.2. No examples of object cross-reference, if an object NP contains **the morphological marker ‘even’**

(17) kare lizi-xuru bunʲi-d tadu-t  
 FE fish bone-EVEN NEG.EMPH-2SG.S trample(pfv)-FUT.CONN  
 ‘You even would not step over a fish’s bone.’

(18) tʃi kaza-nʲʔ nʲi-goreo, nʲi-goreo dʲaxara-zoʔ  
 TE so grandmother-OBL.SG.1SG name-EVEN name-EVEN not\_know(ipfv)-1SG.S  
 ‘So I don’t know even my grandmother’s name.’

⇒ focus NPs are not possible with object cross-reference

##### 4.3. Except for isolated instances, no examples of object cross-reference, if an object NP contains **the morphological marker ‘only’**

(19)-(21) are standard examples, (22) is the only exception

(19) ɔnɛj ɛntʃeu nɛ-xoo-ʔ tezaʔ bi-lʲu oor-ʔ nʲi-mʔ  
 FE Enets person woman-TOP-PL now water-RESTR eat(ipfv)-CONN NEG-3PL.S.CONT  
 ‘As for Enets women, they only drink vodka now.’

(20) pivɔ-dʲɑ-reo ɔma-zodʲi  
 TE beer-PEJ-RESTR eat(pfv)-1SG.S.PST  
 ‘I have drunk only (one) beer.’

(21) neɔ name-reo ɔɔ-da  
 TE child breast-RESTR eat(ipfv)-FUT.3SG.S  
 ‘The child will eat only the breast.’

(22) prɔduktɑ-ru-naʔ tʃi pɔnʲim-ubi-naʔ tʃi ke  
 FE foodstuff-RESTR-PL.1PL so ude(ipfv)-HAB-1PL.SOnsg this  
 ‘We buy only this foodstuff.’

⇒ focus NPs are not possible with object cross-reference

4.4. From 1413 non-interrogative clauses with a non-zero direct object WITHOUT object cross-reference, in 1345 (95%) instances the direct object directly precedes the verb, i.e. the object is in the linear position of focus.

Compare: from 1122 non-interrogative clauses with a non-zero direct object WITH object cross-reference, only in 847 (75%) instances the direct object directly precedes the verb. Such a high rate is influenced by the fact that most frequently a sentence contains nothing else than an overt direct object and a verb, and given this it is significantly lower than in clauses without object cross-reference



(30) [My late father lived with us at that time in the back part of **the tent**, in the uninhabited part of the tent {i.e. behind the stove}. <...> I went out outdoors.]

təxu-nʲ?                      **padi-ʔ**                      tʃuktʃi                      nɛte-n  
 FE    lap-OBL.SG.1SG    flap-PL    all                      open(pfv) -1SG.SOnsg  
 ‘I opened all the flaps of the tent.’

(31) [When I lived in tundra long ago, I rode, rode on reindeer along the forest. The prow of **the sledge** that I used <...> stroke against a tree. <...> And then, when I got home,]

kədo-nʲ?                      **ezoʔə**                      kaʔa-ra-a  
 FE    sledge-OBL.SG.1SG    runner    come\_down(pfv)-CAUS-1SG.SOsg  
 ‘I took off **the runner** of the sledge.’

(32) [I scrape the skins.]

peda                      nə-ta-ro  
 TE    kamus    scrape(pfv)-FUT-2SG.SOsg  
 ‘You will scrape a kamus [then you will sew something].’

(33) [On the opposite bank of the Yenisey, there is Kodla lake, there is Kodla hill. <...> A Russian man **fished** there. <...> Well, there was a fish-factory there in Dudinka, a fish-factory. <...> And once a man came with him, his mate.]

kare,                      nar-noju                      **kare**                      nəʔə-g-e-ziʔ  
 FE    fish                      spring-ADV    fish                      grasp(pfv)-DISC-SOpl-3DU.Sonsg  
 ‘Fish, in spring they get fish.’

(34) [Her husband was Nenets.]

**nʲi-da**                      anʲeʔ                      dʲurta-bo,                      dʲaxara-bo  
 TE    name-OBL.SG.3SG    and                      forget(pfv)-1SG.SOsg    not\_know(ipfv)-1SG.SOsg  
 ‘I also forgot his name, I don’t know it.’

**5.4.** Still, there are more rare instances where a direct object is not an evident discourse topic and has no evident tight semantic relation with a discourse topic, but still is cross-referenced on the verb.

We claim that in such cases **we still deal with sentence topics**. In other words, a speaker chooses such an information structure where the direct object is a sentence topic, although this choice cannot be predicted from any trivial factors.

(35) [We went together for cloudberries. I installed my net, I had a tent. I installed a tent. I installed my net. We got fish. We got it, well, the fish. The bonfire, well... We sat down drinking tea. And the dog was near us.]

axa,                      tʃike-r                      dʲadokoon,                      mədee-bu-nʲ?                      dʲadokoon                      texe  
 FE    yeah                      this-NOM.SG.2SG    carefully                      see(ipfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.1SG    carefully                      there  
 bemo-da                      ke-xoz                      **kirba**                      kada-za  
 chief-OBL.SG.3SG    side-ABL.SG    bread                      take\_away(pfv)-3SG.SOsg  
 ‘Well, it carefully, I see, carefully, took **the bread** from near her boss.’

(36) [As for big shoes, of course, she cannot sew them. She can do mittens, bottoms of the shoes. And her home is really fine. She would always cook the food, the husband also always... The meat is ready.]

**baʔa-d**                      nʲe                      periʔ                      kəltə-goo-za  
 FE    bedding-OBL.SG.2SG    surface    always                      wash(pfv)-DUR-3SG.SOsg  
 ‘She always washes **the bedding**.’

(37) [My son kills geese. He also has a gun. My son has luck at hunting. He kills many wild reindeer.]

i                      **sezoko**                      anʲe                      kaza-obi-za,                      kare                      anʲeʔ  
 TE    and    polar\_fox    and                      kill(pfv)-HAB-3SG.SOsg    fish                      and  
 ‘He kills both **polar foxes** and fish’

(38) [Noine has come, Noine. She brought a child, a boy. It was Zhen’ka, small Zhen’ka. He was white, a small child... So we played with my grandmother’s child instead of a doll.]

**pagi-ku-ʔ**                      sero-to-obi-nʲiʔ  
 TE    clothes-DIM-PL    tie\_up(pfv)-CAUS-HAB-1DU.SOnsg  
 ‘We dressed him in clothes.’

An example with an interrogative sentence where the object (the children) was never mentioned, but the speaker structures the clause in the way it becomes a topic.

(10) [Some our people look only at vodka.]

nii-za                      mii-gone                      ɔ-ta-d-e-za?  
 TE    child-NOM.PL.3SG    what-LOC.SG    eat(pfv)-CAUS-FUT-SOpl-3SG.SOnsg  
 ‘With what will he feed his children?’

	object cross-reference, when the object is a discourse topic	object cross-reference, when the object has a tight semantic relation with a discourse topic	object cross-reference elsewhere	unclear cases	TOTAL
FE	743 81,38%	121 13,25%	43 4,71%	6 0,66%	913 100%
	864 94,63%		43 4,71%		

Table 1

TE	171 75,33%	38 16,74%	16 7,05%	2 0,88%	227 100%
	209 92,07%		16 7,05%		

Table 2

FE+TE	914 80,18%	159 13,94%	59 5,18%	8 0,7%	1140 100%
	1073 94,12%		59 5,18%		

Table 3

If one adds to the counts in Tables 1-3 very numerous clauses with zero objects that are always discourse topics, the difference will be even many more significant.

## 6. Presence of object cross-reference vs. absence of object cross-reference

Object cross-reference, though significantly more rarely, MAY BE ABSENT with direct objects that are discourse topics.

(39) kasa-za                      sɔjee?    tʃike    nɛ                      mɔdiʔɛ  
 FE    man-NOM.SG.3SG    just    this    woman    see(pfv).3SG.S  
 ‘His brother already saw **this woman**.’

(40) [Then at some time the witch got a child. <...> And the other one got a white-haired boy. <...> They moved from that place, and the witch said. She said about that girl: let her leave him, let him stay on the bank of the river. And as for my child, let her leave my child instead of hers. I will take her child. Well, the girl left him.]

pɔrne-da                      nʲe    muɔ  
 FE    witch-OBL.SG.3SG    child    take(pfv).3SG.S  
 ‘She took **the child** of the witch.’

⇒ presence of object cross-reference vs. absence of object cross-reference

**is a privative, not equipollent opposition**, presence of object cross-reference being the marked member

This is true both morphologically and semantically.

Morphologically, we deal with subject cross-reference vs. cumulative subject&object cross-reference:

- for verbs in general, including intransitive verbs, subject cross-reference is more frequent,
  - historically, subject cross-reference formed earlier
- e.g. Havas (2004): subject-object cross-reference in Proto-Uralic is a result of morphologization of object clitics of 3<sup>rd</sup> person
- in many cells of the subject-object cross-reference paradigm there is more phonological stuff than in the corresponding cells of the subject cross-reference paradigm; dual object has separate non-cumulative markers.

Semantically, object cross-reference is a possibility to express object's topicality on the sentence level, but the speaker is not obliged to use it.

“If the topic is seen as the matter of current interest which the statement is about and with respect to which the proposition is to be interpreted as relevant, it is clear that **one cannot always point to a particular element in a proposition, let alone to a particular constituent of a sentence, and determine that this element and nothing else is the topic of the sentence.** <...> And as a corollary, it accounts for the fact that in those languages that do have formal topic marking **this marking reflects only imperfectly the relative degrees of topicality** of given referents” (Lambrecht 1994: 119)  
In other words, not-hundred-per-cent correspondence of topical referents of discourse and of sentence topics is expected from the notion of a sentence topic itself.

## 7. Conclusion

- A sentence topic (e.g. as marked by object cross-reference) cannot be always found on semantic grounds.
- But when there are formal features correlated with a sentence topic or sentence focus, all of them indicate that object cross-reference is a correlate of a direct object that is a sentence topic of a transitive clause.
- There are no other formal correlates of the object cross-reference (that would be redundant).
- Discourse topics are close to a semantic correlate, but the correlation is just a very strong trend.
- Data of the interrogative sentences show that a discourse topic may be different from a sentence topic, and object cross-reference follows the sentence topic, not the sentence topic.
- **Based on our corpus data, Enets object cross-reference encodes direct objects that are sentence topics.**

## Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> person; ABL – ablative; ADV – adverbial marker; CAUS – causative; CONN – connegative; CONT – ‘contrastive’ series; CVB.COND – conditional converb; DAT – dative; DEST – destinative; DIM – diminutive; DISC – discontinuative; DU, du – dual; DUR – durative; EVEN – ‘even’ marker; FUT – future; HAB – habitual; IMP – imperative; ipfv – imperfective; LOC – locative; MULT – multiplicative; NEG – negative verb; NEG.EMPH – emphatic negative verb; NMLZ – nominalization; NOM – nominative; OBL – oblique; PEJ – pejorative; pfv – perfective; PL, pl – plural; PLC – placeholder; POOR – ‘poor’ derivation; PRF – perfect; PROL – prolativ; PST – past series; PTCP.SIM – simultaneous participle; Q – interrogative; RESTR – restrictive; S – subject cross-reference series; SG, sg – singular; SO<sub>ng</sub> – subject-object cross-reference series for non-singular object; SO<sub>pl</sub> – plural object marker; SO<sub>sg</sub> – subject-object cross-reference series for singular object; TOP – topic marker; TRANSL – translative

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