Focus position in SOV ~ SVO-varying languages

Evidence from Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan

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Agenda

• Terminology: Information structure, focus and focus position
• Word order in Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan
• Interaction of focus position and word order

• Focus position in Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan
• Negative auxiliaries and focus position
• Russian influence?

• Further questions
Terminology

• information structure: “The information structure of a sentence is the formal expression of the pragmatic structuring of a proposition in a discourse.” (Lambrecht 1994: 5)

• levels of information structure (cf. Molnár 1991: 58ff.)
  • topic-comment (what the sentence is about)
  • theme-rheme (old vs. new; given vs. new etc.) → in other terms: information status, reference tracking
  • focus-background (what is important for the speaker in the given context)
Levels of information structure

A: What are your plans for the evening?
B: I don’t know yet.
A: Well, Diana and Mary wanted to go to the cinema. Nick will have a party at home. And Peter hasn’t answered my messages yet.
B: And where are you going?
A: I’ll probably go to the cinema.

• topic: I; comment: will probably go the cinema
• information status: I, cinema both given
• focus: to the cinema; background: I’ll probably go
Scope of focus, focus position

• focus can be minimal, intermediate and maximal

• *Peter studies* \([_{FOC} \text{linguistics}]. \rightarrow \text{What does Peter study?}*
• *Peter* \([_{FOC} \text{studies linguistics}]. \rightarrow \text{What does Peter do?}*
• \([_{FOC} \text{Peter studies linguistics}]. \rightarrow \text{What’s up? What’s happening?}*

• “focus position” means the syntactic position of a minimally focused constituent
Focus position and word order

- SVO-languages → focus position at the right periphery, e.g. Estonian (cf. Lindström 2017, Sahkai 2017)

(1a) Kes söö-b õuna?
    who eat-3SG apple.PART
    ‘Who is eating an apple?’

(1b) Õuna söö-b [FOC naine].
    apple.PART eat-3SG woman
    ‘A/the woman is eating an apple.’
    (Sahkai 2017: 356)
Focus position and word order

• SOV-languages → focus position immediately preverbal (cf. Kim 1988), e.g. Turkish:

(2a) \textit{Para-}yi \textit{kim çal-di?}
\hspace{1cm} \text{money-ACC who steal-PST.3SG}
\hspace{1cm} ‘Who did steal the money?’

(2b) \textit{Para-}yi \text{[FOC} \textit{Emre}] \text{çal-di.}
\hspace{1cm} \text{money-ACC Emre steal-PST.3SG}
\hspace{1cm} ‘Emre stole the money.’ ~ ‘It was Emre who stole the money.’
\hspace{1cm} (Erguvanlı 1984: 48)
Data

• published Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus (NSLC), Universität Hamburg, Brykina et al. (2018)

• (yet) unpublished INEL Dolgan Corpus, Universität Hamburg, Däbritz et al. (201X)

• Digital Corpus of Enets; IJa RAN, Olesya Khanina and Andrey Shluinsky; partly published within the project “The Endangered Languages and Cultures of Siberia”

• from each corpus approx. 50 texts, 3,000-5,000 sentences ~ intonation units, 20,000 tokens

• annotated for Semantic Roles, Syntactic Functions, Information Status, Topic-Comment, Focus-Background
Word order in Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan

• traditionally both Samoyedic (cf. Tereščenko 1973: 283ff.) and Turkic languages (cf. Johanson 1998: 57) are claimed to be SOV-languages

• seems to hold true for Enets (cf. Siegl 2013: 361)

• Nganasan and Dolgan are claimed to be more complex; show variation of SOV and SVO (cf. Wagner-Nagy 2002: 170f.; Stapert 2013: 247)
Instances of SVO in Nganasan and Dolgan:

(3) Təti taharìaa n’akəl’i-ʔə əmsu-ðə-mtu,
that now take-PF.3SG.S meat-DST-ACC.3SG
huəntu-ə-bta-ʔa təndə-j ənaʔsan-ə-j.
trickery-VBLZ-CAUS-PF.3SG.S that-ACC.PL human-EP-ACC.PL
‘Now he took his meat, he tricked those people.’
(Ng, JSM_080212_Hibula_flkd.091)

(4) Bu icaːn berke ahin-ar hamaj-i-n.
this clairvoyant very feel.sorry-PRES.3SG Nganasan-3SG-ACC
‘This clairvoyant felt very sorry for the Nganasan.’
(Dlg, BaR_1930_DaughterOfNganasan_flk.013)
Focus position in Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan

• Expectations:
  
  • Enets exhibits quite rigid SOV → preverbal focus position
  
  • Nganasan and Dolgan exhibit to some extent SOV~SVO-variation → variation of focus position (preverbal ~ postverbal/right periphery)
Focus position in Enets

(5) [...] \([\text{FOC } \textbf{Sal’\text{\text’}nij-\chi\text{\text’}n}] \ aabi-a.\) \([\text{FOC } \textbf{D’eru-\chi\text{\text’}n}] \ aabi-a.\)
    Sol’onyj-LOC.SG be-1PL.S  forest-LOC.SG be-1PL.S
    ‘[Sometimes we go up the river.] We are (then) in Sol’Onyj. We are in the Forest.’
    (EnT; TuSU_20090816_MovingFromVoroncovo_nar.085-087)

(6) [...] \(\textbf{kan’e-\delta}c? \) \([\text{FOC } \textbf{ribak-\textbf{\text’}a}]\).
    leave-1SG.S  fisherman-TRL
    ‘[Then, when I worked at the collective farm ‘Northern’,] I became a Fisherman.’
    (EnT; TuZA_20080723_Life_nar.021)

• Examples like (6) are rare!
Focus position in Nganasan

category: speaker tells about her childhood and education

(7) Təni [Foc biiʔ klasə] s’ati-d’iə-m hoðə-tə-sa.
there ten class finish-PST-1SG.S write-IPFV-INF
‘There I finished ten CLASses.’
(Ng, ASS_161024_Life_nar.014)

(8) […] ŋanuə mað-ə-ʔə-ʔ malə-baðə-təʔ [Foc turku]
real tent-EP-AUG-PL build.tent-INFER-3PL.R lake.GEN
bərə].
edge.LAT
‘[Big tents are standing there.] The tents are apparently standing on the SHORE of the lake.’
(Ng, ChND_041212_Girl_flkd.042)
Focus position in Dolgan

context: the speaker tells about his children, where they work

(9) Onuga ühüs emie üol-um [FOC avijPOR-ka] üleli:-r.
then third again son-1SG airport-DAT/LOC work-PRS.3SG

‘Then my third son works at the AIRport.’
(Dlg, AnMS_1972_GoodSovietTimes_nar.055)

context: a man has found an ice hole

(10) Ojbon-ton bik-pit [FOC w’ ičči-te].
ice.hole-ABL lean.out-PST 2.3SG water master.3SG

‘Out of the ice hole the master of WAter leaned out.’
(Dlg, AkEE_1990_PearlBeard_flk.014)
Focus position in Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan

• 417 preverbal foci (95.2%) in Enets, 21 postverbal (4.8%)

• 204 preverbal foci (86.4%) in Nganasan, 32 postverbal (13.6%) (NB: Nganasan data in progress)

• 584 preverbal foci (86.2%) in Dolgan, 93 postverbal (13.8%)

• tendency:
  • rigid SOV → rigid preverbal focus position
  • SOV~SVO-variation → preverbal ~ postverbal focus position
Negative auxiliaries and focus position

• Nganasan and Enets form their standard negation with negative auxiliaries

• in Enets auxiliary verb and connegative are mostly adjacent (cf. Wagner-Nagy 2011: 101)

• in Nganasan constituents can be placed between auxiliary and connegative (cf. Wagner-Nagy 2011: 107f.)

• what does this mean for minimally focused constituents?
Negative auxiliaries in Nganasan

case: a woman has got workers, she treats them badly, doesn’t give them food

(11) [FOC] ŋəmsə-ʔku-kəl’it’ə]  n’i-nţi  mi-tə-ʔ,  maa-gəl’itə.
meat-DIM-EMPH.ACC  NEG-PRS.3SG.S  give-IPFV-CNG  what-EMPH.ACC
‘She gives them no MEAT, NOthing.’
(Ng, KH_960811_TwoWomen_flkd.007)

context: on every day two animals go hunting, it is told what they are bringing

(12) Helɨnɨ  n’itə-gə-ti-ʔ  [FOC]  maa-gəl’itə]
sometimes  NEG-ITER-TR-3PL.S  what-EMPH.ACC  bring-CNG
‘Sometimes they bring NOthing.’
(Ng, KNT_960809_Animals_flkd.036)
Russian influence?

• if the variation SOV~SVO in Nganasan and Dolgan would be Russian influence, then one would expect:
  • Nganasan and Dolgan had more and closer contacts with Russians than Enets
  • the variation SOV~SVO is increasing in newer recordings of speakers with good proficiency in Russian
  • the variation SOV~SVO is more present in contexts where other Russian influence is present (topics like school, work, collective farms etc.)
Russian influence?

- If the variation SOV~SVO in Nganasan and Dolgan would be Russian influence, then one would expect:
  - Nganasan and Dolgan had/have more and closer contacts with Russians then Enets → no clear evidence for that; contradicts the fact that Enets is most endangered
  - The variation SOV~SVO is increasing in newer recordings of speakers with good proficiency in Russian → especially the Enets data are from 2000s; in Nganasan and Dolgan there are also older (1930s-1980s) recordings where SVO and postverbal focus can be observed
  - The variation SOV~SVO is more present in contexts where other Russian influence is present (topics like school, work, collective farms etc.)
Conclusion and further questions

- Enets is much more rigid SOV than Nganasan and Dolgan
- Focus position in Enets is immediately preverbal; focus position in Nganasan and Dolgan is mostly immediately preverbal, but varies (preverbal ~ postverbal/right periphery)

- How do negative auxiliaries and focus position interact in Nganasan?
- How the syntax of pre- and postverbal foci can be reconstructed in those languages?
- What could be a/the reason that there is a higher degree of SOV~SVO-variation in Nganasan and Dolgan than in Enets?
- What about other Samoyedic languages? Nenets and Selkup?
References


- Stapert, Eugénie. 2013. Contact-induced change in Dolgan: an investigation into the role of linguistic data for the reconstruction of a people's (pre)history. Utrecht: LOT.

