

Chris Lasse Däbritz

University of Hamburg

Focus position in SOV ~ SVO-varying languages – Evidence from Enets, Nganasan and Dolgan

“Focus” is a term coming from research on information structure. It shall be conceived hereafter as “that piece of information within a given sentence which the speaker regards as most important within the given context” (cf. Junghanns & Zybatow 2009: 688). “Focus position” means the structural position within the sentence that a minimally focused constituent takes. If focus is expressed by syntactic means in an SVO word order language, then it is assumed to take a post-verbal, sentence-final position (e.g. in Slavic languages, cf. Junghanns & Zybatow 2009: 689). SOV word order languages, in turn, are assumed to exhibit an immediately pre-verbal focus position (Kim 1988: 150).

Samoyedic and Turkic languages are traditionally assumed to be rigid SOV languages, i.e., exhibiting a rigid verb-final syntax. This seems to hold true for Enets (cf. Siegl 2013: 361), but not for Nganasan (cf. Wagner-Nagy 2002: 170f.) and Dolgan (cf. Stapert 2013: 247), as the latter exhibit also regular instances of SVO word order (ibid.). Hence, Enets is expected to show a pre-verbal focus position, whereas Nganasan and Dolgan are probably not that straightforward. The following examples show that the latter exhibit both pre-verbal ((1a) and (2a)) and post-verbal ((1b) and (2b)) constituents which are minimally focused:

- (1) a. [FOC *Beləčankə*] *d'a min-di-m.*
Volochanka.GEN to go-AOR-1SG
'I go to VoloCHANKa.'
- b. *Čenimtiguj-či* [FOC *pos'alkə-nu?* *kolə-tənu*].
learn-AOR.3SG village-GEN.1PL school-LOC
'He studies in our village's SCHOOL.'
- (Nganasan; both examples: Wagner-Nagy 2002: 171)
- (2) a. *Ojbon-ton bik-pit* [FOC *u: ičči-te*].
icehole-ABL lean.out-PST2.3SG water master-3SG
'Out of the icehole the master of WATER leaned out.'
- (Dolgan; INEL Dolgan Corpus; AkEE_1990_PearlBeard_flk.014)
- b. *Centr-bit* [FOC *Valačanka*] *e-t-e.*
center-1PL Volochanka be-PST1-3SG

‘Our center was VoloCHANka.’

(Dolgan; INEL Dolgan Corpus;

AkNN_KuNS_200212_LifeHandicraft_conv.005)

The aim of this study¹ is to describe this variation in SOV ~ SVO-varying languages in contrast to a fairly rigid SOV language. The theoretical framework of the study is the Leipzig Model of information structure (cf. Junghanns & Zybatow 2009) which works within the generative minimalist framework.

The data for the investigation is taken from the unpublished Digital Corpus of Enets of Olesya Khanina and Andrey Shluinsky, the Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus (Brykina et al. 2016) and the Dolgan Corpus which is being compiled within the INEL project at the University of Hamburg².

References:

- Brykina, Maria; Gusev, Valentin; Szeverényi, Sándor; Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2016. *Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus (NSLC)*. Archived in Hamburger Zentrum für Sprachkorpora. Version 0.1. <http://hdl.handle.net/11022/0000-0001-B36C-C>, last access: 17.01.2018.
- Junghanns, Uwe; Zybatow, Gerhild. 2009. Grammatik und Informationsstruktur. In: Kempgen, S. (eds.). *Die slavischen Sprachen*. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft. Bd. 32, 1. Berlin: De Gruyter, 684–707.
- Kim, Alan. 1988. Preverbal focusing and type XXIII languages. In: Hammond, Michael; Moravcsik, Edith; Wirth, Jessica (eds.). *Studies in syntactic typology*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 147–169.
- Siegl, Florian. 2013. *Materials on Forest Enets, an Indigenous Language of Northern Siberia*. Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia 267. Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- 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.
- Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2002. *Chrestomathia Nganasanica*. Studia Uralo-Altaica, Supplementum 10. Szeged: SzTE Finnugor Tanszék.

¹ This study is supported by the Academy of Sciences of Humanities in Hamburg.

² INEL = Grammatical Descriptions, Corpora and Language Technology for Indigenous Northern Eurasian Languages, https://inel.corpora.uni-hamburg.de/?page_id=920, last access: 29.03.2018.