

Focus position in SOV ~ SVO-varying languages

Evidence from Nganasan, Enets and Dolgan¹

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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



- 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} *linguistics*]. → *What does Peter study?*
- *Peter* [_{FOC} *studies linguistics*]. → *What does Peter do?*
- [_{FOC} *Peter studies linguistics*]. → *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) *Para-yı kim çal-dı?*
 money-ACC who steal-PST.3SG
 ‘Who did steal the money?’

(2b) *Para-yı* [_{FOC} *Emre*] *çal-dı.*
 money-ACC Emre steal-PST.3SG
 ‘Emre stole the money.’ ~ ‘It was Emre who stole the money.’
 (Erguvanlı 1984: 48)



- 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

Data

EXMARaLDA Partitur-Editor 1.6.1 [C:\Users\Chris\Desktop\AsKS_19XX_Amulet_nar.exb]

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	[08:06.5]	605 [08:07.1]	606 [08:08.2]	607 [08:09.4]	608 [08:10.5]	609 [08:11.1]	610 [08:12.8]	611 [08:13.9]	612 [08:15.1]	613 [08:16.1]	614 [08:16.5]
ref	14 (001.114)	AsKS_19XX_Amulet_nar.115 (001.115)			AsKS_19XX_Amulet_nar.116 (001.116)			AsKS_19XX_Amulet_nar.117 (001.117)			
ts		Ogonn'or men'itin kötöktö.			"D'ürbuō dur", – dir ogonn'or.			D'ürbartin kittā uōlkana kahan da araksa:			
tx	te.	Ogonn'or	men'itin	kötöktö.	"D'ürbuō	dur",	dir	ogonn'or.	D'ürbartin	kittā	uōlkana
mb	t-e	ogonn'or	men'i-ti-n	kötök-t-ö	D'ürbuō	du:	di-r	ogonn'or	D'ürba-ti-n	kittā	uōl-ka:n-a
mp	-T1-tA	ogonn'or	men'i-ti-n	kötök-T1-tA	D'ürbuō	dūō	dīe-Ar	ogonn'or	D'ürbuō-ti-n	kittā	uōl-kA:N-tA
ge	-PST1-3SG	old.man.[NOM]	head-3SG-ACC	raise-PST1-3SG	Dyurbuo.[NOM]	Q	say-PRS.[3SG]	old.man.[NOM]	Dyurbuo-3SG-ACC	with	son-DIM-3SG.[
gg	en-PST1-3SG	alter.Mann.[NOM]	Kopf-3SG-ACC	heben-PST1-3SG	Djürbuo.[NOM]	Q	sagen-PRS.[3SG]	alter.Mann.[NOM]	Djürbuo-3SG-ACC	mit	Sohn-DIM-3SG
gr	ать-PST1-3SG	старик.[NOM]	голова-3SG-ACC	поднимать-PST1-3SG	Дюрбо.[NOM]	Q	говорить-PRS.[3SG]	старик.[NOM]	Дюрбо-3SG-ACC	с	сын-DIM-3SG.1
mc	:tense-v:poss.pn	n-n:case	n-n:poss-n:case	v-v:tense-v:poss.pn	propr-n:case	ptcl	v-v:tense-v:pred.pn	n-n:case	propr-n:poss-n:case	post	n-n > n-n:(poss)
ps		n	n	v	propr	ptcl	v	n	propr	post	n
SeR	:A	np.h:A	0.3.h:Poss np:Th					np.h:A			np.h:A
SyF	:S v:pred	np.h:S	np:O	v:pred	n:pred		v:pred	np.h:S			np.h:S
IST	iv-active	giv-inactive	giv-inactive		new-Q		quot-sp	0.giv-active	giv-active		giv-inactive
Top	pp.int.concr	top.int.concr							top.int.concr		
Foc			foc.int			foc.ver					
fg		Der alte Mann hob seinen Kopf.			"Ist es Djürbuo?", sagt der alte Mann.			Von Djürbuo hat sich sein Söhnchen nie			
ltr		Старик голову поднял.			"Дюрбо что-ли", – говорит дед.			С Дюрбой сыночек никогда не расстает			

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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 tahariaa n'akəl'i-ʔə ɲəmsu-ðə-mtu,*
 that now take-PF.3SG.S meat-DST-ACC.3SG
huan̄tu-ə-bta-ʔa təndə-j ɲanaʔsan-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 ičə:n berke ahin-ar hamaj-i-n.*
 this clairvoyant very feel.sorry-PRS.3SG Nganasan-3SG-ACC
 'This clairvoyant felt very sorry for the Nganasan.'
 (Dlg, BaR_1930_DaughterOfNganasan_flk.013)

- 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)



- (5) [...] [_{FOC} *Sal'ɔnij-χɔn*] *aabi-a?*. [_{FOC} *D'eru-χɔn*] *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) [...] *kan'e-ðɔ?* [_{FOC} *ribak-ʔa*].
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

context: speaker tells about her childhood and education

(7) *Təni* [_{FOC} *bii?* *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-baða-tə?* [_{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)



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

- (9) *Onuga ühüs emiē uōl-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 *u*] *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)

- 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

context: a woman has got workers, she treats them badly, doesn't give them food

- (11) [_{FOC} *ŋəmsə-ʔku-kəl'it'ə*] *n'i-nti* *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) *Helini* *n'itə-gə-ti-ʔ* [_{FOC} *maa-gəl'itə*] *təðu-ʔ*.
 sometimes NEG-ITER-TR-3PL.S what-EMPH.ACC bring-CNG

‘Sometimes they bring NOthing.’

(Ng, KNT_960809_Animals_flkd.036)



- 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 than 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?



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