

Environmental constructions in Tundra Nenets and Hungarian

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1. This talk will focus on a sentence type often briefly mentioned together with weather-sentences, which can be called environmental constructions (EC) (e.g. English *It is warm (here/today)*) in two Uralic languages: Tundra Nenets and Hungarian. It will be shown that the two languages rely on what may be seen as two opposite grammatical strategies to express environmental conditions in copular clauses: while in Tundra Nenets the Nominal (categorically adjectival or nominal) element describing the environment functions as a predicate, in Hungarian it functions as a grammatical subject.

2. Tundra Nenets meteorological sentences typically combine the noun *num* ‘sky, weather, universe, god’ (sometimes bearing a possessive suffix) with adjectives such as *sawa* ‘good’, *wæwa* ‘bad’, *jiba* ‘warm’ etc. (1) (Nikolaeva 2014).

- (1) t'uku ja'a-ʔ num jiba ηæ-ηku.
this day-GEN sky warm be-FUT
'It will be warm today.'

Environmental conditions at a certain location may be expressed by sentences in which instead of *num*, the adjective is preceded only by a locative (2a). Nikolaeva (ibid.) suggests that this locative may be an alternative to *num* in some sense. To maintain a structurally uniform approach, we analyze the absence of *num* in terms of a zero third person pronoun in the place of the quasi-argumental *num*. (2a) patterns with its Hungarian equivalent (2b). This construction in (2), in turn, looks similar to existential sentences, such as (3), in the sense that both constructions have a locative or temporal topic combined with a comment that involves a non-referential element preceding the copula.

- (2) a. labe-kana jiba ηæ-ηku.
room-LOC warm be-FUT
'It will be warm in the room.'
- b. A szobában meleg volt.
the room.INE warm was
'It was warm in the room.' [environmental construction]
- (3) a. labe-kana xasawa taña-ηku.
room-LOC man be-FUT
'There will be a man in the room.'
- b. A szobában kosz volt.
the room.INE dirt was
'There was dirt in the room.' [existential construction]

3. Despite the surface similarities that ECs bear to existential sentences in Tundra Nenets, a number of empirical differences distinguish the two types. First, while the copula/existential verb (*taña-*) is obligatory in existential sentences even in the present tense (Nikolaeva 2014), the EC does not require a copula in the present (4). This is a property that the EC shares with copular clauses containing a Nominalpredicate.

- (4) t'uku ja'a-ʔ (num) jiba.
 this day-GEN sky warm
 'It is warm today.'

Another property that the EC shares with predicational copular clauses is that in negated sentences the negative auxiliary may occur either before the adjective or between the adjective and the copula (5).

- (5) labe-kana (ni) jiba (ni) ŋa-ʔ.
 room-LOC NEG.AUX.3SG warm NEG.AUX.3SG be-CNG
 'It won't be warm in the room.'

These similarities to predicational copular clauses suggest that the adjectival element functions as a predicate in the EC (for this typological option, see Eriksen et al. 2010). In vivid confirmation of this, when the EC is in the past tense, tense-marking appears on the adjective (6). Finally, the copula used in the EC is the same element as the one used in predicational copular clauses (*ŋa-*), and not the one used in existential sentences (*taña-*).

- (6) t'uku ja'a-ʔ (num) jiba-ś.
 this day-GEN sky warm-PST
 'It was warm today.'

4. The Hungarian EC illustrated in (2b) appears to be strikingly different from the EC in Tundra Nenets; the behavior of the former renders it similar to existential predications like (3b). One difference from Tundra Nenets is that, even though an overt copula is also obligatorily absent from predicational sentences with Nominal predicates in Hungarian, an overt copula is mandatory in the EC:

- (7) a. A szobában meleg *(van).
 the room.INE warm is
 'It is warm in the room.'
 b. A szoba meleg (*van).
 the room warm is
 'The room is warm.'

Another property setting Nominal predicates apart from the element describing the environment in the Hungarian EC is that while the former receive dative case-marking in raising contexts, the latter generally do not (Kádár 2011):

- (8) a. A szobában meleg látszik lenni.
 the room.INE warm seems be.INF
 'It seems to be warm in the room.'
 b. A szoba meleg-nek látszik lenni.
 the room warm-DAT seems be.INF
 'The room seems to be warm.'

For these reasons we follow Kádár (2011), who argues that the environmental Nominal functions as a subject in Hungarian ECs. We propose, departing from Kádár (ibid.) on this, that the reason why the copula must be present in the EC is the same as in existential clauses (9): namely, in existential clauses the subject is predicated of a (possibly unpronounced) locative predicate (Freeze 1992).

- (9) a. (A szobában) kosz *(van). cf. (3b)
 the room.INE dirt is
 b. [Subject=*dirt* Predicate=*in the room/(T)HERE*]

5. In sum, while the Nominal element functions as a grammatical predicate in Tundra Nenets, in Hungarian it functions as a grammatical subject. We suggest that the reason why the Hungarian EC differs from the EC type found in Tundra Nenets is due to two properties of Hungarian: (i) the absence of both a subject expletive (like English *there*) and a quasi-argumental subject (like Tundra Nenets *num* and its zero-pronominalized counterpart), and (ii) the availability of complex predicate formation in its syntax through the incorporation of non-specific arguments into the verb (É. Kiss 2002). As the verbal element in Hungarian ECs is a semantically empty copula, the environmental Nominal can not only function as the sole semantic predicate while being a grammatical subject, but it can also be syntactically marked as being the semantic predicate via incorporation into the copula.

References: É. Kiss, K. 2002. *The Syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: CUP. • Eriksen, P., S. Kittila, L. Kolehmainen. 2010. The linguistics of weather: cross-linguistic patterns of meteorological expressions. *Studies in Language* 34(3): 565–601. • Freeze, R. 1992. Existentials and other locatives. *Language* 68(3): 553–595. • Kádár E. 2011. Environmental copula constructions in Hungarian. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 58(4): 417–447. • Nikolaeva, I. 2014. *A Grammar of Tundra Nenets*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.