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Conditional converb in Forest Enets: functions and change over time¹

This study aims at a corpus-based description of the functions of the conditional converb with the suffix *-bu?* / *-bune* in Forest Enets and the analysis of their relations as well as the change in the use of this converb over time. The data for the study come from a corpus of oral texts in Forest Enets (ca. 115 000 words), comprising archive and modern recordings.

The main function of the Enets conditional converb is to head the protasis clause in conditional constructions (1)–(2). The conditional clauses headed by this converb can refer to unreal (2) or real events in the past, present or future (1). Another prominent group of uses includes independent clauses that function as rhetorical questions (3) or express supposition (4), cf. [Urmanchieva 2016: 126–127]. Conditional clauses and independent clauses constitute two opposed well-outlined groups of uses, while the other types can be viewed as adjacent to one or the other of them.

First, there are two types of uses that group together with the conditional constructions, concessive conditional constructions (5) and constructions with the main clause containing the predicates ‘good’, ‘bad’ and sometimes ‘necessary’ (6). The latter type is unusual in that the conditional clause corresponds to the subject argument of the predicate and the temporal relation between the two forms does not correspond to the one expected for the regular conditional construction with the future time reference in the apodosis.

The use of conditional converbs in rhetorical questions (3) presumably served as the basis for the development of complement clauses with conditional converb (7). In the older texts these constructions feature verbs meaning ‘not know’ and display some properties of the direct speech construction. In the texts by younger speakers they also combine with the verbs ‘forget’ and ‘see’, indicating gradual loss of the connection to the direct speech.

The changes in the distribution of functions were studied by comparing two groups of speakers, born before and after 1940. The corpus data shows that the younger group of speakers use concessive conditional constructions and independent clauses with rhetorical questions less frequently than the older speakers. With minor decrease in the frequency of some other types, in the texts by the younger speakers the conditional constructions become the major type of contexts featuring the conditional converb.

The differences between the two generations of speakers also involve the distribution of the two morphological variants of the conditional converb suffix, *-bu?* (2)–(7) and *-bune* (1). In general, there seem to be no categorical restrictions on the use of either of the variants in any of the functions discussed above. Still, in the texts by the older generation of speakers *-bune* is mainly used to mark the verbs denoting habitual and on-going situations in the present. In the texts by the younger speakers, this association gets weaker and this variant becomes more evenly distributed in terms of functions. At the same time, it largely becomes lexically-conditioned. Thus, the distribution of these two morphological variants in Forest Enets is different from the picture described for Nenets in [Burkova 2004].

In the talk, I am also going to discuss two other grammatical parameters of the use of the conditional converb, viz. the expression of subject of the clause headed by the converb and the marking of the converb with possessive markers cross-referencing the subject.

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References

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- Urmanchieva A. Yu. 2016. Analiticheskie formy “modal’nogo inferentiva” v lesnom eneckom [Analytical forms of “modal inferential” in Forest Enets]. *Linguistica Uralica* LII (2), 122–140.

Examples

- (1) onej dʹa-d tɛkru-bune-da,
Enets place-DAT.SG hide(pfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3SG
nʹe-r mɔdit
NEG-2SG.SOSg see(pfv)-FUT.CONN
‘If it hides into the ground, you will not see it’.
- (2) ti-nʹʔ i-bu-nʹʔ ɲɔda-ʔ,
reindeer-PL.1DU NEG-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.1DU collect(pfv)-CONN
te-kutʃi-nʹʔ kada-ra-nʹi-zutʃ
reindeer-DIM2-PL.1DU take_away(pfv)-CAUS2-CONJ-3SG.M.PST
‘If we had not gathered our reindeer, they would have taken away our reindeer’.
- (3) lɔbi-za, mana, korse ε-bu-tuʔ
ski-NOM.PL.3SG say(pfv).3SG.S which be(ipfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3PL
‘Her skis, she thinks, of what kind could they be?’
- (4) ɔdiz-ʔ oka-an bazezɔ-bu-tuʔ toni-n
verdure-PL many-PROL.SG grow(ipfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3PL there(dir)-LOC
‘Many plants might grow there’.
- (5) ɔbu dʹiodʹi-gon tʃike nɛ-r ner-e-zʔ,
what time-LOC.SG this woman-NOM.SG.2SG get_up(pfv)-M-3SG.M
kuni-ri kade-bu-ta ɲo
how-RESTR be_ill(ipfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3SG even
‘And at some point the woman stood up, however ill she was’.
- (6) ʃee-xon εke nʹe-kutʃa εzta-bu-naʔ sojza
who-LOC.SG this child-DIM2 send(pfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.1PL good
‘We’d better send the child with someone’.
- (7) ani kanʹe-bu-tuʔ, i-bu-tuʔ,
and leave(pfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3PL NEG-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3PL
dʹɔxara-u modʹ
not_know(ipfv)-1SG.SOSg I
‘I don’t know if they go again, if they don’t’.