

The correlation of syntactic position and semantic function of wh-phrases in Tundra Nenets multiple questions

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3rd Budapest Linguistics Conference

Budapest June 6–8 2019

Research Institute for Linguistics

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Theoretical and experimental approaches to dialectal variation and contact-induced change: a case study of Tundra Nenets

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- a comprehensive description of interrogative clauses in TN
- a comparative analysis of interrogatives in TN dialects

Background

- In Tundra Nenets (SOV) genuine content questions, the *wh*-phrase either remains *in situ* (1), or it is (optionally) fronted (2); (Nikolaeva 2014):

(1) Sergei xíba-m? meńe?
Sergei who-ACC love.3SG
'Whom does Sergei love?' [wh *in situ*]

(2) xíba-m? Sergei meńe?
who-ACC Sergei love.3SG
'Whom does Sergei love?' [wh fronted]

- Although the clauses in (1) and in (2) represent different word orders, there seems to be no difference in their discourse-pragmatic interpretation.

→ the order of the constituents in content questions is free

Background (cont.)

- Similarly, the relative order of wh-phrases in multiple questions is free (Nikolaeva 2014):

(3) xíba xíba-m? meńe?
who who-ACC love.3SG
'Who loves whom?' [wh *in situ*]

(4) xíba-m? xíba meńe?
who-ACC who love.3SG
'Who loves whom?' [wh fronted and *in situ*]

- The discourse-pragmatic interpretation of (3) and (4) is the same, so they are said to be equal.

→ there is no asymmetry in multiple questions

Background (cont.)

- This is, however, not the case in certain multiple questions:

(5) η amge-mʔ xanzérʔ pær- η a-nʔ
what-ACC how do-CO-2SG
‘How did you do what?’ [multiple question]

(6) xanzérʔ η amge-mʔ pær- η a-nʔ
how what-ACC do-CO-2SG
#‘How did you do what?’
‘How did you do something?’ [single question]

- It is only the clause in (5), that is interpreted as a multiple question, while the clause in (6) – exhibiting the reversed order of the wh-phrases in (5) – represents a single content question.

Q1: Do the multiple questions really exhibit free word order in TN?

Q2: What motivates the order of the question words in TN multiple questions?

- Is it sensitive to the status of the wh-phrase?
- Is it sensitive to the semantics of the wh-phrase?
- Or something else...?

The Tundra Nenets language

Experiments

Evaluation of data

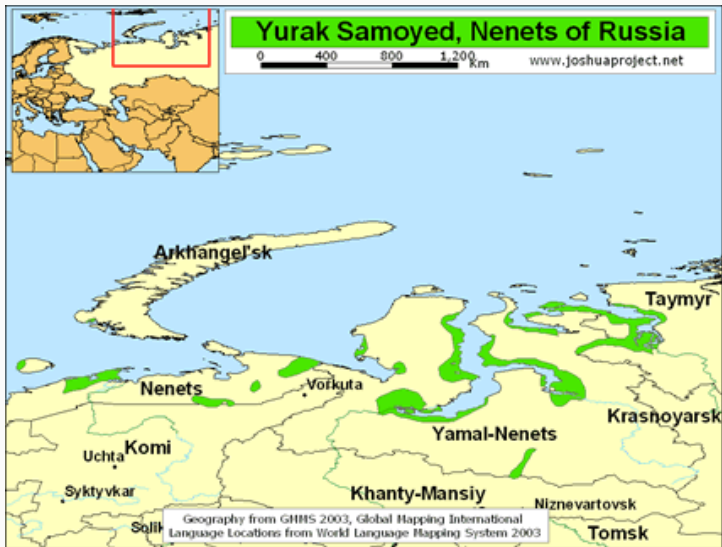
Conclusions

The Tundra Nenets language

The Tundra Nenets language

- Uralic > Samoyedic > Northern Samoyedic >
- c. 20.000/c. 45.000 speakers (bi-/multilingualism c. 80 %)
- threatened
- the Arctic regions of Russia
- three dialectal groups

The Tundra Nenets language (cont.)



Map Source: Joshua Project / Global Mapping International

The Tundra Nenets language (cont.)

- strict head-final, V-final

(7) *Sergei meńe Polina-m?
Sergei love.3SG Polina-ACC
'Sergei loves Polina.'

(8) *Sergei meńe xíba-m?
Sergei love.3SG who-ACC
'Who does Sergei love?'

- time adjunct – subject – place adjunct – indirect object – direct object – manner adverb – verb

Experiments

- Moscow, May 2019, Khadry Okotetto (27, m)

Experiment 1

- grammaticality judgement test
- designed to investigate whether the possible orders of the wh-phrases are grammatical
- input: TN clauses without context
- randomized question pairs
- fillers: single questions, existentials, locatives, belong-constructions
- repeated 2 times

Experiment 2

- situational context test (acceptability test)
- designed to test the substitutability of the possible orders in different contexts
- input: TN texts/pictures & TN words and question pairs

Experiment 3

- consultation
- a (short) questionnaire based on the results of E1 and E2
- designed to verify and clarify the results

Evaluation of data

Possible orders

- The wh-phrases appear in the question in any relative orders.
- There is an exception: the manner adverbial wh-phrase cannot be fronted.

S O

S IO

IO O

Time/Place S

Time/Place O

S Manner

O Manner

Time/Place Manner

O S

IO S

O IO

S Time/Place

O Time/Place

*/#Manner S

*/#Manner O

*/#Manner Time/Place

Superiority effect

- There are languages in which the multiple question is more acceptable if the higher *wh*-phrase moves and the lower one remains *in situ* (Kuno & Robinson 1972).

- (9) a. Who read what?
b. *What did who read?

- Superiority effects depend on the discourse status of the *wh*-phrase.
- The effects do not survive if the *wh*-expressions are D-linked DP-internal *wh*-elements (Pesetsky 1987).

- (10) a. Which student read which book?
b. Which book did which student read?

Superiority effect in Tundra Nenets (?)

- Does SE explain the Tundra Nenets data?

(11) *xanzer? xańaŋi ŋaćekei torta-m? xarwobta?
how which child cake-ACC like.3SG
'Which child likes the cake how?'

- time adjunct – **subject** – place adjunct – indirect object –
direct object – **manner adverb** – verb

→ The manner adverb is lower than the subject and therefore it cannot precede it in multiple questions.

Superiority effect in Tundra Nenets (?)

- However, the order of subject and object is free.

(12) xíba ŋamge-mʔ pírembí?
who what-ACC cook.3SG
'Who cooked what?'

(13) ŋamge-mʔ xíba pírembí?
what-ACC who cook.3SG
'What did who cook?'

→ The choice of which wh-expression is fronted is not sensitive to its status.

- The higher wh-expression (that has a wider scope) cannot be represented by a nonspecific wh-phrase (É.Kiss 1993).

- (14) a. *Miért/ ??hogyan kit választottak meg?
why how whom elected.they PERF
*‘Who did they elect why/how?’
- b. Kit miért/ hogyan választottak meg?
whom why how elected.they PERF
‘Why/how did they elect who?’

Specificity of the wh-expressions

- 'Which' phrases appear to bear the relevant relation discourse inherently.
- There are wh-phrases such as 'who' and 'what' that can get specific interpretation from the discourse.
- There are typical nonspecific wh-phrases such as 'how'.

Specificity in Tundra Nenets multiple questions

- The manner adverbial wh-phrase cannot precede a wh-object.

(15) Igor ŋamge-m? xanzer? tolaŋo-sa?
Igor what-ACC how read-INT.3SG
'What did Igor read how?'

(16) Igor xanzer? ŋamge-m? tolaŋko-sa?
Igor how what-ACC read-INT.3SG
'How did Igor read something?'
'What did Igor read how?'

- The wh-expression 'how' in (15) cannot be specific.

Specificity in Tundra Nenets multiple questions (cont.)

- Certain order still seems to be free.

(17) Igoŕ xańana xíba-m? jadabtaḿbi?
Igor where who-acc meet.3SG
'Where did Igor meet who?'

(18) Igoŕ xíba-m? xańana jadabtaḿbi?
Igor who-acc where meet.3SG
'Whom did Igor meet where?'

- The wh-expressions 'who', 'what', 'where' etc. lend themselves to the relevant discourse reading in appropriate contexts.

Supporting evidence: object agreement

- The fronted wh-object may trigger agreement on the verb.

(19) xañaŋi kńiga-m? xurka xasawa temda-sa(-da)?
which book-ACC what man buy-INT.3SG(-SG.3SG)
'What man did buy which book?'

- If the wh-object is not fronted, the agreement is not possible.

(20) xurka xasawa xañaŋi kńiga-m? temda-sa-*da?
what man which book-ACC buy-INT.3SG(-3SG.SG)
'What man did buy which book?'

Object agreement in Tundra Nenets

- In Tundra Nenets, the 3rd person lexical objects may trigger agreement on the verb.
- The agreement depends on the topicality of the object (Nikolaeva 2014).

- (21) a. What did a/the man do to the/a reindeer?
b. xasawa ti-m? xada-*(da)?
man reindeer-ACC kill-3SG
'A/the man killed a/the reindeer.'

- Agreement is not possible with interrogative objects in single questions (Dalrymle & Nikolaeva 2010).

(22) Waña xíba-m? lada-*da?
John who-ACC hit.3SG/-SG.3SG
'Whom did John hit?'

Object agreement in Tundra Nenets (cont.)

- Agreement is not possible with indefinite objects (Nikolaeva 2014).

(23) mań ŋamke-xewa-m? xo-dm/-*w.
1SG what-CONC-ACC find.-1SG/-SG.1SG
'I found something.'

→ The first wh-phrase in multiple questions behaves as the topic in Tundra Nenets.

G: The first wh-phrase is specific in the multiple questions in Tundra Nenets.

Q: Is the first wh-phrase always specific?

Answering multiple questions

- The question in both orders of the wh-phrases request answers identifying multiple pairs.
- The answer does not specify values for the fronted wh-phrase but it pairs X and Y.

- (24) a. xíba ŋamge-m? temda-sa?
who what.ACC buy.INT.3SG
'Who bought what?'
- b. Eduard Garri Potter kńiga-m? temda-ś
Eduard Harry Potter book-ACC buy.3SG-PST
Ołga gazeta-m? temda-ś
Olga newspaper-ACC buy.3SG-PST.
'Eduard bought the Harry Potter book, Olga
bought the newspaper.'

Answering multiple questions(cont.)

- The order of the elements of the multiple pair list has to follow the order of the wh-phrases.

- (25) a. ɲamge-m? xíba temda-sa?
what.ACC who buy.INT.3SG
'Who bought what?'
- b. Garri Potter kńiga-m? Eduard temda-ś,
Harry Potter book-ACC Eduard buy.3SG-PST
gazeta-m? Ońga temda-ś
newspaper-ACC Olga buy.3SG-PST
'Eduard bought the Harry Potter book, Olga
bought the newspaper.'

G': The first wh-phrase is specific in the multiple questions in Tundra Nenets in all possible orders.

Q: What is the position of the first wh-phrase?

- A focussed expression cannot precede the wh-phrases in multiple questions in either of the orders.

(26) *Igoń-ři xańana xińa-m? jadabtamńi?
Igor-ONLY where who-ACC meet.3SG
'Where did only Igor meet who?'

(27) *Igoń-ři xińa-m? xańana jadabtamńi?
Igor-ONLY who-ACC where meet.3SG
'Where did only Igor meet who?'

- The focussed expression is prohibited from occupying a surface position that c-commands a Wh-phrase.

Focus and multiple wh-phrases (cont.)

- A focussed expression may intervene between the two wh-phrases.

(28) xañana Igoř-ři xíba-m? jadabtambi?
where Igor-ONLY who-ACC meet.3SG
'Where did only Igor meet who?'

(29) xíba-m? Igoř-ři xañana jadabtambi?
who-ACC Igor-ONLY where meet.3SG
'Where did only Igor meet who?'

- The intervening focussed element blocks the LF movement of the first wh-phrase to an operator position.

→ At least the first wh-phrase undergoes wh-movement.

Conclusions

Conclusions

- The order of the wh-phrases in multiple questions is not free, but it depends on the specificity/topicality(?) of the wh-phrases.
 - It explains the ungrammaticality of the /*manner adverb – object/subject order.
- The first wh-phrase is always specific, even though the wh-phrases seem to appear *in situ* on the surface structure of the clause.
 - It explains the requirement of the pair-list answers.
- The first wh-phrase undergoes movement.
 - It explains the *focus – wh-phrase – wh-phrase order.

Thank you for your attention!

The support of the research project “Theoretical and experimental approaches to dialectal variation and contact-induced change: a case study of Tundra Nenets” (NKFI 129235) is gratefully acknowledged.