Nominal tense in Tundra Nenets and Northern Samoyedic

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Nominal tense in Tundra Nenets and Northern Samoyedic
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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I address the meaning and basic syntax of the Predestinative forms of nouns in Northern Samoyedic (Uralic), with the focus on Tundra Nenets. I will argue that these forms indicate future possession and therefore serve to express nominal tense with the NP-bound scope.

2. PREDESTINATIVE AND THE CASE SYSTEM OF TUNDRA NENETS

Nenets has 7 grammatical cases (Nomina tive, Accusative, Genitive, Dative, Locative, Ablative and Prolative) and three numbers (SG, DU, PL). In possessive constructions the possessed head noun hosts agreement in person and number with the pronominal possessor. The expression of case and possession is often cumulative. For instance, the 2SG Accusative form of the word ‘boat’ is ŋəno-m, and the Genitive is ŋəno-n, while for the 1SG the respective forms are ŋəno-w and ŋəno-n.

In addition, Nenets has the so-called Predestinative forms of nouns, whose meaning can be roughly described as ‘X (meant/destined) for Y’. I will refer to X as ‘Predestinative’ per se and to Y as ‘Beneficiary’. The Beneficiary may be overtly expressed within the same NP, but is usually absent if it corresponds to a pronoun. The Predestinative hosts the Predestinative marker -d°/-də and may additionally contain an agreement morpheme indicating the person/number of the Beneficiary, for example: s'ay°-də-m ‘tea for me (1SG)’ and wada-də-da ‘a word for him (3SG)’. In some cases there is no agreement affix after the Predestinative morpheme, e.g. mal°-c’ a-d° ‘coat for Y’; this will be discussed later in Section 4.

In should be noted that forms with a similar structure and function exist in a number of Tungussic languages, e.g. Udihe, Nanai, and Evenki. In these languages Predestinative is not compatible with case affixes and is usually analyzed as case. The structure of the nominal form is ‘root-(case)-(possessive)’. For example, in Udihe the following oblique case forms of the word ugdə ‘your...
boat’ (boat-2SG) exist (Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001): Accusative ugda-wa-i,
Dative ugda-du-i, Locative ugda-la-i, Ablative, ugda-digi-i, Lative ugda-tigi-i,
Prolative ugda-li-i, Instrumental ugda-zı-i, and Predestinative ugda-na-i.

However, in Tundra Nenets the syntactic function of (agreeing) Predestinatives
is expressed by three different cases. These are illustrated below for 1SG, 2SG and
3SG Beneficiary. Like for simple possessives, case and agreement often cumulate.

Table 1
Case forms of (agreeing) Predestinatives in Tundra Nenets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1SG</th>
<th>2SG</th>
<th>3SG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>ugno-da-w°/ugno-da-m’i</td>
<td>ugno-da-r°</td>
<td>ugno-da-da</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>ugno-da-w°/ugno-da-m’i</td>
<td>ugno-da-m°/ugno-da-mta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>ugno-da-n°</td>
<td>ugno-da-n°</td>
<td>ugno-da-n°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This suggests that the Predestinative morpheme itself does not indicate case and
raises the question of its categorial status. This question will be addressed in
Section 5, but first, in session 4, I will describe the syntactic functions of
Predestinatives.

3. SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS OF PREDESTINATIVE FORMS

I will start with agreeing Predestinatives. The Nominative is used in two
functions: it either indicates the subject (1a) or the imperative object (1b). These
are the usual functions of the Nominative case in Nenets.

(1) (a) xasa-wa n’a-da-m’i soya°
man child-PRED-1SG be.born.3SG
‘A son was born for me.’
(1b) r’es’ka-da-w° yabc°-q
cake-PRED-1SG bake-IMP.2SG
‘Bake a cake for me.’ (T 513)

Like regular Accusatives, Accusative Predestinatives serve as direct objects of
non-imperative verbs.

(2) (a) pedara-xad° terpi-ta-waq xos° yaqma-s-waq
forest-ABL exit-PRED-ACC.1PL find.AN cannot-OBJ.SG.1PL
‘We cannot find the exit from the forest (for ourselves).’ (T 637)

Genitive Predestinatives function as predicates in combination with some verbs
(3a), or adjuncts meaning roughly ‘as, for, instead’ (3b).
(3) (a) *t’uku* *wen’ako* *mən’aq* *wen’ako-d°-naq* *xaya*
   this dog we dog-PRED-GEN.1PL become.3SG
   ‘This dog became our dog.’

(b) *t’uku°* *ti-m* *pəmcəd°-d°-naq*
   this reindeer-ACC food-PRED-GEN.1PL
   temta-we-waq
   buy-NARR-OBJ.SG.1PL
   ‘We bought this reindeer as food for ourselves.’ (T 380).

Non-agreeing Predestinatives have only one case form functioning as the object.

(4) *pane-n’i* *n’i-d°* *temta-d°* *mon*
   trousers-GEN.1SG belt-PRED buy-1SG
   ‘I bought a belt for my trousers.’

In other relevant syntactic roles a different form is used: the Essive in -qe. The Essive is required if the Beneficiary is a lexical noun (more on this in the following section) and fulfills the same functions as the Predestinative Nominative and Genitive. That is, can be an adjunct (5a), a predicate (5b), or a subject (5c).

(5) (a) *Wata-h* *pəmo-qe* *s’erta-w°*
   Wata-GEN boat-PRED-ACC.2SG make-OBJ.SG.1SG
   ‘I made this as a boat for Wata.’

(b) *xada-nta* *ye°nəbc°-qe* *tara-* *s°*
   Grandmother-GEN.3SG Support-ESS Be-PAST.3SG
   ‘He was a support for his grandmother.’ (T 95)

(c) *shkola-h* *lyekər-qaq* *t°*
   school-GEN doctor-ESS arrive.3SG
   ‘A doctor arrived for the school.’

Unlike Predestinatives, the Essive is not compatible with possessive affixes.

4. PREDESTINATIVE AS POSSESSIVE

Siegl (2008a, b) argues that in closely related Forest Enets Predestinative affixes are actually applicative markers hosted by nouns instead of the verb. This analysis implies that the Beneficiary functions as the verbal argument and assumes a clause - level status, as is normally the case in applicative constructions.

However, in Tundra Nenets the Beneficiary is clearly NP-internal: it cannot be separated from the Predestinative and has no affect on clausal syntax. It is not an
argument of the verb, which is especially clear in the predicative use of the Predestinative in (3a) above and in ditransitives. As example (6) shows, in some cases the Beneficiary expressed by agreement on the object Predestinative is coreferential with the unexpressed goal argument. Presumably such examples led Siegl opt for the applicative analysis.

(6) ŋə mkexwə pad°r-tə-mi ta°-daq
some paper-PRED-1SG give-IMP.2PL
‘Give me some paper / Give some paper for me.’ (T 377)

However, as argued above, the Predestinative does not have to be the object, see example (7a) where it functions as an adjunct so that the Beneficiary can hardly be interpreted as the goal argument of the verb. Moreover, even if it does function as the object, the goal argument does not have to be coreferential with the Beneficiary (7b).

(7) (a) t’uku° pad°r xayobc’on-tə-n° ta-d°
this book memory-PRED-GEN.1SG give-IMP.2PL.OBJ.2SG
‘Give me this book as a memory.’ (T 722)

(b) Masha-n° (pidər°) kniŋ’da-mt° m’iŋa-d°m
Masha-DAT you book-PRED-ACC.2SG give-1SG
‘I gave Masha a book for you.’

Another important point is that the Predestinative phrase shows remarkable structural parallelism with the regular possessive construction. The Beneficiary, when overtly present, stands in the same case as the possessor: Nominative on pronouns or Genitive on lexical nouns. The distribution of agreement affixes on the head is also the same: agreement is obligatory if the possessor or the Beneficiary are pronominal, but absent when they correspond to a noun. This distribution is shown below for the Nominative only, but is goes through the whole case system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive Predestinative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(pidər°) ḥəno-r°  ‘your boat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wata-h (GEN) ḥəno  ‘Wata’s boat’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the Beneficiary and the regular possessor are in complementary distribution, so that expressions equivalent to *my gift for you are ungrammatical.

I therefore suggest that the Predestinative phrase is a subtype of possessive construction. Note that the semantics of the possessive construction in Nenets is extremely broad. As argued in Nikolaeva (2003), it renders a two-place relation with a very vague meaning, X related to/associated with Y, and has a wide variety
of ‘non-possessive’ uses. For example, in (9) the speaker has the choice to use the possessive construction to indicate some kind of loose association between ‘soldier’ and ‘me’, although obviously this relation cannot be characterized as ownership.

(9) [Context: I entered the house. There was a soldier sitting in the house. I came to this soldier and raised my gun.]

soldat-h / soldat-n’i  s’ey-da  xaya.
soldier-GEN / soldier-GEN.1SG  heart-3SG  went.3SG

‘The/my soldier got frightened (literally: the/my soldier’s heart was gone).’

The Predestinative construction also expresses a two-place relation, X which is meant/destined for Y or X for the benefit of Y. In the next section I will argue that its meaning can be described as future possession.

5. PREDESTINATIVE AS FUTURE POSSESSIVE

According to Nordlinger & Sadler (2004), in language that exhibit ‘nominal tense with nominal scope’ nouns are marked for tense but their temporal interpretation does not depend on the tense of the clause. The tense takes the scope over the NP and is deictically interpreted in relation to the time of utterance. Nominal tense has the following properties (after Nordlinger and Sadler 2004: 778): (i) nouns show a distinction in tense; (ii) this distinction is productive across the whole word class; (iii) it is not restricted to nominals functioning as predicates, and (iv) the tense marker is a morphological category of the nominal word and cannot be treated as a syntactic clitic. In a number of languages, for instance, in some Salishan languages, nominal tense serves to temporally locate the nominal independently of the possessive relation. In other languages, for instance, in Hixkaryana, nominal tense with nominal scope is only active in possessive constructions and is not expressed in non-possessive NPs.

I suggest that Tundra Nenets exhibits a two-way system of nominal tense in possessive phrases: present and future (Ø and -də/-d°-). This goes against Nordlinger & Sadler’s (2004: 790) typological observation that ‘if a language has independent nominal TAM at all, it will encode minimally a distinction between past and nonpast tense’. Note, however, that closely related Nganasan has a three-way temporal distinction in possessive constructions which still does not include past: present, future and irrealis/future-in-the-past (Ø, -də- and -dəxə-də-, respectively).3

3 I thank Laria Leisiö for the Nganasan data.
(10) (a) *Kolï-gü-ðə-mə Nindi-m hu’*
    fish-EMPH-PRED-1SG NEG-1SG want
    ‘I don’t want any fish for myself.’

(b) *səďə:-δə-hə:-mə nu-nt heiti-ndi-m məno.*
    Road-PRED.IRR-PROL-2SG walk-PRES-1SG I
    ‘I am walking along the road which was meant to be your road.’

Importantly, there may be two interpretations of tense in a possessive phrase: either with respect to the nominal referent itself or with respect to the possessive relation. For instance, in Halkomelem the possessive constructions are ambiguous in the past (Burton 1997: 67-68): *tel xeltel-elh ‘my pencil-PAST’* can mean ‘my former pencil, the pencil that used to be mine but is no longer mine’ and ‘my destroyed pencil, what used to be my pencil’. In the former case, the possessive relation is relativized with respect to time, i.e. tense takes scope over possession. In the past and present this implies that the referent of the possessed noun is pragmatically presupposed to exist. I understand the pragmatic presupposition of existence as the mental representation of the relevant entity which the interlocutors can evoke in a given discourse (Lambrecht 1994: 78-79). It does not necessarily imply the actual existence of the referent in the real world. In the latter case possession takes scope over tense. The past tense indicates that the referent no longer exists at all and, consequently, no longer exists as somebody’s possession. The same holds for the future. A non-possessive NP with nominal tense has one interpretation, where the reference time is future. For instance, *I met a future doctor* can only mean that the relevant person is not a doctor at the time of speech, i.e. the entity that can be referred to as ‘doctor’ does not (yet) exist. This situation is only observed in languages where temporal distinctions may be expressed in non-possessive NPs (i.e. every NP has to have a temporal specification). However, in *I met my future doctor* the future tense can be interpreted with respect to two different semantic predicates. In the first interpretation, the relevant person is not a doctor at the time of speech (possession takes scope over tense: ‘somebody who will be a doctor and also my doctor’). In the second, he is already a doctor at the time of speech, but not ‘my doctor’ (tense takes scope over possession).

As mentioned above, in Tundra Nenets tense is intrinsically linked with possession. The question is then what scopal interpretation is available for it. Below I argue that in Predestinative constructions the (pragmatic) existence of the possessed entity is not presupposed at the time of utterance, but is only predicated for the future with respect to the speech time.

First, we saw that Genitive Predestinative only have a non-referential interpretation: they are available as predicates or ‘as’-type adjuncts whose meaning does not presuppose referentiality. Nominatives and Accusatives function as subjects as objects, respectively, and can in principle refer, but
crucially, their availability is restricted: Predestinative subjects and objects are only compatible with verbs which tend to introduce a novel entity into the discourse and therefore the interlocutors do not have a mental representation of the respective referent at the time the utterance is produced. To put it differently, although the respective NPs are referential they are not associated with the pragmatic presupposition of existence. Predestinative subjects are only allowed on intransitive verbs of appearance.

(11)  
\[
\text{n’ enec}’’\text{n-da-waq} \quad m’\text{at}’\text{h} \quad t’u’ \\
\text{man-PRED-1PL} \quad \text{yurt-DAT} \quad \text{enter.3SG}
\]
‘A man entered a yurt for us (while we were waiting for him).’

My consultants also accepted Predestinative subjects in the Nenets equivalents of the following sentences: A grandson was born for me, A doctor arrived for us, A mug fell down for you (while you were waiting for it), and the like. However, Predestinatives are impossible with the verbs that evoke the pragmatic presupposition of existence of their subjects (unlike the regular possessive constructions).

(12)  
\[
\text{soldat}’\text{-waq} / *\text{soldat}’\text{-d}’\text{waq} \quad y\text{nkuma} \\
\text{soldier-1PL} / \text{soldier-PRED-1PL} \quad \text{die.3SG}
\]
‘Our soldier died / The soldier died for us.’

Other impossible structures are *The boy went to the city for us, *The bag became heavy for us, *The girl is baking for us, *The man is walking for us, *The man smokes for us and *The medicine works for you.

In a similar manner, Predestinative objects are only possible with the so-called transitive ‘definiteness effect verbs’. According to Szabolcsi (1986), these verbs have the component EXIST in their semantic interpretation and, under normal discourse conditions, are not compatible with definite objects. This is because a definite noun is usually analyzed as falling under the scope of the existential operator, so the application of the logical predicate of existence to definites would lead to tautology. These are verbs of creation or change of location (ditransitives), which typically introduce a new participant into the discourse,

(13)  
(a)  
\[
\text{yimpit}’\text{d°-m}’\text{i} \quad \text{sada’} \\
\text{dress-PRED-ACC.1SG} \quad \text{sew.3SG}
\]
‘She has sewn a dress for me.’

(b)  
\[
\text{ŋən-də-mt}’\text{temtə-d}’\text{m} \\
\text{boat-PRED-ACC.2SG} \quad \text{buy-1SG}
\]
‘I bought a boat for you.’

Other transitive verbs such as, for instance, verbs of destruction do not allow Predestinative Accusatives.
(14) ŋə'eki° x'id'a-mt° / *x'id'a-da-mt° taxabta°
child  cup-ACC.2SG / cup-PRED-ACC.2SG break.3SG
‘The child broke your cup /*the cup for you.’


Second, Predestinatives are totally excluded from the constructions which, by their nature, require pragmatically presupposed NPs. For instance, object agreement in Nenets is triggered by topical objects and topicality involves the pragmatic presupposition of existence (Lambrecht 1994). Predestinative Accusative objects never control agreement on the verb (15a). But a close meaning can be rendered by the construction where the object is null, the Predestinative stands in the Genitive and functions as an adjunct (15b). Agreement is obligatory with null objects.

(15) (a) ŋəno-da-mt° s'erta-d°m / *s'erta-w°
boat-PRED-ACC.2SG make-1SG / make-SG.OBJ.1SG
‘I made a boat for you.’

(b) ŋəno-da-mt° s'erta-w° / *s'erta-d°m
boat-PRED-GEN.2SG make-SG.OBJ.1SG / make-1SG
‘I made a boat for you (literally: I made this as a boat for you).’

Similarly, Predestinatives cannot be relativized. Briefly speaking, Nenets uses prenominal gapped relatives headed by non-finite verbal forms. Non-Predestinative possessed nouns are easily relativizable.

(16) [məny° s'erta-we-m'i] (pidar°) ŋəno-r°
I make-PART-1SG you boat-2SG
‘your boat which I made’

However, Predestinative nouns cannot be relativized with this strategy, cf. (16) and (17a). To render the closest possible meaning, a ‘null-headed’ relative clause may be used, where the Predestinative phrase does not function as semantically modified (relativized) noun, but must be expressed as a Genitive adjunct within the relative clause (17b).

(17) (a) *[məny° s'erta-we-m'ɪ] (pidar°) ŋəno-da-r°
I make-PART-1SG you boat-PRED-2SG
‘the boat for you which I made’

(b) [ŋəno-da-mt°/*ŋəno-da-mt° s'erta-we-m'ɪ] boat-PRED-GEN.2SG / boat-PRED-ACC.2SG make-PART-1SG
‘the boat for you which I made (literally: the thing which I made as a boat for you, what I made as a boat for you)’
This is because in restrictive relative clauses the referent of the relativized noun has to pragmatically exist when the situation denoted by the relative clause is actualized. Under the assumption that Predestinatives do not denote pragmatically existing entities, this precludes them from being relativized and the null anaphora is used instead, pretty much like in (15b) above. I suspect that similar considerations apply to passives, too. A Predestinative object cannot be turned into a Predestinative subject via passivization presumably because passivization in Nenets is triggered by topicalization of the theme argument. Again, the relevant meaning can be rendered if the subject is null and the Predestinative object of the corresponding non-passive construction because a Genitive adjunct.

\[(18)\]  
\[
\text{kniga-d} - n^3 / *\text{kniga-d} - r^3 \\
\text{book-PRED-GEN.2SG} / \text{book-PRED-2SG} \\
\text{pad-wi}^3 \\
\text{write-PART.3SG}
\]

‘The book is written for you (literally: This is written as a book for you).’

The facts discussed in this section suggest that the entity denoted by Predestinatives does not pragmatically exist at the time of speech, but its existence is predicated for the future as somebody’s possession. In other words, possession takes scope over tense. Note that Alexiadou et al. (2007: 279-280) argue for the intrinsic link between possession (person feature) and tense, but suggest the following structure for Somali: TP > PossP > DP. The Nenets data appear to suggest the opposite hierarchy of projections: PossP > TP > > DP.

6. CONCLUSION: CATEGORIAL STATUS OF PREDESTINATIVE MARKERS

I have argued that the Predestinative forms in Tundra Nenets indicate the future tense with nominal scope and that the expression of nominal tense in this language is related to possession. Syntactically it is restricted to three grammatical cases (Nominative, Accusative and Genitive). The Predestinative morpheme can be analyzed as a marker of tense followed by the cumulative case/agreement affixes. However, its categorial status is less clear when the Beneficiary is lexical and there is no agreement. Since non-agreeing Predestinatives only function as objects, the Predestinative morpheme appears to cumulate three meanings: possession, Accusative and future tense.

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