

NANAI ARGUMENT STRUCTURE: RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

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Abstract. The paper investigates two classes of verbs in the Naikhin dialect of Nanai (Tungusic; spoken mostly in the Russian Far East) that demonstrate a certain instability with respect to their argument structure in a situation where there is contact with Russian, the dominating language of the region. The avalent verbs tend to acquire a subject, thus turning into intransitives, while ditransitive verbs reduce the original number of possible argument encoding strategies and preserve the dative-accusative pattern only. The general claim of this article is that although there might be some other reasons (structural, typological, etc.) for the argument structure change in an endangered language, language contact also contributes to the process.

Keywords: argument structure, avalent verbs, ditransitive verbs, language contact, Nanai, Tungusic languages

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1. Introduction

Nanai is a Tungusic language spoken in the Russian Far East and in China. The estimated number of speakers is 1390, cf. Lewis et al. (2013), out of which 1347 people are those who claimed to speak Nanai during the 2010 census in Russia. The language is severely endangered, since all of the Nanai speakers are also fluent in either Russian or Chinese and the younger generations do not acquire the language any more.

The contact between Nanai and Russian became very close in the middle of the 19th century, when Russian settlements appeared on the Amur, cf. Avrorin (1959: 5), and this contact has led to a number of changes in all spheres of the Nanai language, i.e. not only in terms of its lexicon and phonology, but also its morphology and syntax. This paper investigates the impact of Russian in one of such structural areas of Nanai grammar, namely the verb argument structure.

There are some clear instances of direct Russian influence on the argument structure of certain Nanai verbs in the speech of Nanais. For example, the transitive verb *uləsi-* ‘to like’, which used to have the experiencer in the unmarked (nominative) form and the stimulus in the accusative, cf. (1a), is occasionally influenced by the syntax of the

corresponding Russian verb *nraivit'sja* with roughly the same meaning, cf. (1b), and thus becomes able to combine with the dative experiencer, leaving the stimulus unmarked, cf. (1c), which is indeed an instance of argument structure borrowing, and not a pure calque of the Russian sentence, since the word order does not switch to the Russian one, despite being a phenomena that is very likely to be affected by language contact, cf. Heine (2008: 34) for references.

- (1a) *mi təj mašena-wa uləsi-əm-bi*
 1SG that car-ACC like-ASSERT.PRS-1SG
- (1b) *mne nraivitsja ta mašina*
 1SG.DAT pleases that car.NOM
- (1c) *mindu təj mašina uləsi-əm-bi*
 1SG.DAT that car like-ASSERT.PRS-1SG
 'I like that car.'

Some of these changes are verb-specific, which seems quite natural, cf. Goldberg et al. (2004: 292), but what is more important, there are also two classes of verbs which tend to alter their argument frames. These are meteorological verbs investigated in Section 2, and ditransitives that are accounted for in Section 3. Section 4 provides the summary of the results and a brief discussion.

The findings presented in this paper are based primarily on my own fieldwork in Khabarovsk Krai in 2007 and 2009. The fieldwork was carried out in the villages of Naikhin, Dayerga, Dada and Troitskoye, where the Naikhin dialect of Nanai is spoken, which served as the basis for the standard language, cf. Avrorin (1959: 8). It should be noted that since I only obtained data from Naikhin dialect speakers, the conclusions drawn in this paper can only be accurately attributed to this language variety. I worked with 9 fluent Nanai speakers, whose age varied between 63 and 81 years, and 10 Nanai people who had some basic conversational skills but could not be regarded as full speakers. Half of these semi-speakers used to be fully-competent but their competence has eroded as a result of language attrition, while the others never became fluent in Nanai. However, the attrition currently experienced by Nanai is so severe that even the language of most fluent speakers is affected, so the situation described in this article is a case of language attrition in a whole community, not just a number of instances of individual language attrition, cf. Andersen (1982: 85).

Unless specified otherwise, the examples cited in the paper were obtained through elicitation. Some, however, are taken from the corpus of spoken texts collected during the fieldwork, which comprises

14 texts from 6 speakers (approximately 500 sentences altogether, more than one hour of recorded speech) representing different genres, such as a fairy tale, a legend, a personal experience story, and an autobiography. Another valuable source of the Naikhin dialect data also used in the article are the folklore texts collected by Avrorin in the late 1940s and published as Avrorin (1986).

2. Argument structure change in meteorological verbs

There are two ways of encoding meteorological events in Nanai, which can be classified as the atransitive verbal type and the cognate type in the typology introduced by Eriksen et al. (2010). In the first type, which is more common in Nanai, the only obligatory element is a predicate with a syntactic valency of zero arguments (an avalent verb), cf. (2):

- (2) *siksə-gu-xə-ni*, *tugdə-lu-xə-ni*
 grow.dark-REF-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG rain-INCH-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘Evening came and it started raining.’

The second construction, where the subject and the predicate are lexically cognate, cf. (3), can only be used with a limited number of verbs (all of them allowing the atransitive construction as well), namely with the verbs denoting precipitation, while other verbs expressing calendar and meteorological phenomena do not combine with any subjects, cf. (4):

- (3) *tugdə* *tugdə-lu-xə-ni*
 rain rain-INCH-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘It started raining.’
- (4) (**siksə*) *siksə-gu-xə-ni*
 evening grow.dark-REF-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 Intended meaning: ‘Evening came.’

The verbs attested in the cognate construction are also sometimes used with the expletive subject *boa* ‘place, nature, God’, cf. (5):

- (5) *čisanə* *boa* *bono-xa-ni*
 yesterday nature hail-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘It hailed yesterday.’

In the situations when both constructions are possible, the most fluent speakers tend to prefer the atransitive one, while less fluent speakers make extensive use of the cognate construction. Moreover, in the speech of semi-speakers, the latter is the only option for expressing precipitation events, and some of them even consider sentences with avalent verbs ungrammatical, cf. (6):

- (6) *čisəniə* *(*bono*) *bono-xə-ni*
 yesterday hail hail-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘It hailed yesterday.’

The observed shift itself is not at all striking, since the use of the cognate construction in meteorological expressions is quite common for the Tungusic languages, see Kolesnikova (1966: 128) for Evenki, Nikolaeva and Tolskaya (2001: 508–509) for Udihe, and Malchukov (2008: 46) for Even. The construction is also attested in Ulch, earlier considered a dialect of Nanai, cf. Petrova (1935: 3), and Manchu, cf. (7) and (8) respectively.¹

- (7) Ulch (Sunik 1985: 56)
ti puksin=də puksin-dzi, xədun=də xədun-dzi
 that storm=CONN storm-PTCP.NPST wind=CONN blow-PTCP.NPST
 ‘It is storming, the wind is blowing.’
- (8) Manchu (Cincius 1975: 11)
aya aya-mbi
 rain rain-PRS
 ‘It is raining.’

If taken together with the general typological tendency of verbs to have subjects, this can adequately explain the change that is happening. It should be mentioned, though, that in none of the related languages is it obligatory for meteorological predicates to have subjects, so this feature can be considered a peculiarity of Nanai argument structure.

In addition to the above-described constructions, there is one more way of expressing calendar and meteorological events frequently used by semi-speakers, cf. (9):

- (9) *siksə dzi-dzu-xə-ni*
 evening come-REF-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘Evening came.’

1 The glosses in the examples (7) and (8) are mine, based on Zaxarov (1879) for Manchu and Sunik (1985) for Ulch.

This nouny type, according to Ogawa (2006), or intransitive argument type in the classification by Eriksen et al. (2010), where the subject is responsible for the semantics and the predicate is semantically somewhat superfluous, is not characteristic of the Tungusic languages. It is, however, the most common type of Russian meteorological expressions,² cf. the Russian translation of (2) given below in (10):

- (10) *nastupil večer, pošël dožd'*
 came evening went rain
 'Evening came and it started raining.'

Thus, the general trend in the coding of the natural phenomena in Nanai is that it switches from the atransitive type, which is employing avalent verbs, to the intransitive type. The growing obligatoriness of the cognate subject with the precipitation verbs can in principle be explained without referring to the language contact, while the emergence of the 'nouny' construction is clearly the result of the Russian influence. On the whole, it seems that less fluent Nanai speakers tend to avoid avalent verbs, so they add a cognate subject where it is possible, and change the whole construction when the cognate subject cannot be used.

3. Argument structure change in ditransitive verbs

Field data obtained from the most fluent Nanai speakers and the language description provided by Avrorin (1959, 1961) show that Nanai used to have three possible strategies of coding the arguments in ditransitive construction³: indirective alignment, neutral alignment and a construction with the internal recipient.

In the indirective strategy, the theme and the recipient are treated differently. The theme receives the accusative case marking, while the recipient can occur in both in the dative, cf. (11), and in the allative case, cf. (12), generally used for coding direction, cf. (13):

2 The atransitive verbal type is also available in Russian for encoding some natural events, cf. such predicates as *večeret'* 'grow dark' and *doždít'* 'rain', but the number of events that can be encoded by such verbs is very limited, as is their distribution.

3 A ditransitive construction here is understood semantically, following the definition by Malchukov et al. (2010), as a construction consisting of a (ditransitive) verb, an agent argument, a recipient-like argument, and a theme argument.

- (11) *bun-du kolxoza-d dzobo-j-du-pu-ə*
 1PL.DAT kolkhoz-DAT work-PTCP.NPST-DAT-POSS.1PL-OBL
dzexa-w buu-re-si bi-či
 money-ACC give-NEG-PTCP.NPST be-PTCP.PST
 ‘When we were working in the kolkhoz they did not give us any money.’ (corpus)
- (12) *taj tamu-d bi-j gurun-səl=təni wajla*
 that raft-DAT be-PTCP.NPST people-PL=CNTR on.the.bank
bi gurun-səl-či mora-j-či
 be people-PL-DIR shout-PTCP.NPST-POSS.3PL
 ‘And those people on the raft shouted to the people on the bank.’ (corpus)
- (13) *mi jəru-či i-rə ao-dzam-bi*
 1SG lair-ALL enter-CVB.NSIM sleep-ASSERT.FUT-1SG
 ‘I will go to the lair and sleep.’ (corpus)

The distribution of the two constructions is not totally clear. The allative marker on the recipient tends to occur more frequently with the verbs of speech (*gusəɾə-* ‘to tell’, *nejman-* ‘to tell a fairy tale’) and the verbs implying motion (*naygala-* ‘to throw’, *ujgu-* ‘to send’) than with other verbs, which is typical for Tungusic languages, cf. Malchukov and Nedjalkov (2010), but none of the forms is ever considered ungrammatical with any ditransitives.

In the neutral strategy, both the theme and the recipient are in the accusative case, cf. (14):

- (14) *mi nuči gurun-səl-b tačeoče-xam-bi*
 1SG small people-PL-ACC teach-PTCP.PST-POSS.1SG
matematika-wa
 mathematics-ACC
 ‘I taught children mathematics.’ (corpus)

In the construction with the internal recipient, the recipient is coded as a possessor in the construction where the possessee (the theme) takes the designative marker⁴, cf. (16):

4 The designative case is a common feature of the Tungusic languages. It is mostly used to code the direct object in the constructions with beneficiaries, cf. (15):

(15) *mi enda-i omo-go-a-ni ango-xam-bi*
 1SG dog-POSS.1SG nest-DES-OBL-POSS.3SG make-PTCP.PST-POSS.1SG
 ‘I made a doghouse for my dog.’

- (16) *si Majla tətua-gu-ə-ni xodase-xa-si,*
 2SG Majla dress-DES-OBL-POSS.3SG sell-PTCP.PST-POSS.2SG
Majla ogda-go-a-si xodase-xa-ni
 Majla boat-DES-OBL-POSS.2SG sell-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
 ‘You sold Majla a dress, and Majla sold you a boat.’

Although all these constructions can in principle serve for coding the arguments of ditransitive verbs in various Tungusic languages, cf. Malchukov and Nedjalkov (2010), in Modern Nanai they differ greatly with respect to their distribution and availability for the speakers of different levels of competence.

Thus, the construction with the internal recipient is the most restricted one regarding both parameters. Semantically, it can only be used if the theme is a tangible object and the recipient actually becomes the owner of it, cf. (16), and is, thereby, not possible with the verbs of speech. Furthermore, there are no verbs with which this construction is required: it can always be replaced by one of the two remaining options. No speakers of Nanai seem to use this strategy in their spontaneous speech nowadays. The examples of its use can hardly even be elicited and are only confirmed by two of the most fluent speakers.

The neutral alignment strategy is much less restricted. Although it is regularly produced by fluent speakers only, all semi-speakers recognize it when given an example in Nanai. In addition to that, this coding strategy is quite common with a number of verbs. However, all but one of these verbs are derived ditransitives⁵, namely causatives of transitive verbs, so the accusative marking of the causee is morphologically determined, cf. (17):

- (17) *mi škola-wa nuči-kən-dzuəm-bə*
 1SG school-ACC small-DIM-COLL-ACC
icə-wəŋ-kim-bi
 see-CAUS-PTCP.PST-POSS.1SG
 ‘I showed the school to the children.’

Moreover, the neutral alignment tends to be replaced by the indirective alignment in syntactically ‘complicated’ sentences, like the ones containing causative constructions, cf. (18), or those in which the theme or the recipient are heavy noun phrases, cf. (19):

5 The only nonderived verb following the neutral pattern in coding its arguments is the verb *tačeoče-* ‘to teach’, cf. (14).

- (18) *dalamdzi alosemdze-wa* [?]*nuči-kən-dzuəm-bə / nuči-kən-dzuən-du*
 principal teacher-ACC small-DIM-COLL-ACC / small-DIM-COLL-DAT
matemateka-wa tačeoče-waŋ-ki-ni
 mathematics-ACC teach-CAUS-PTCP.PST-P.3SG
 ‘The principal made the teacher teach children mathematics.’
- (19) *Polokto əjniə matematika-wa* [*čisəniə Buri-du*
 Polokto today mathematics-ACC yesterday Khabarovsk-DAT
saa-xa-ni [?]*arčokan-sal-ba / arčokan-sal-du*]
 know-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG girl-PL-ACC / girl-PL-DAT
tačeoče-j-ni
 teach-PTCP.NPST-P.3SG
 ‘Polokto is already giving maths lessons to the girls he met yesterday in Khabarovsk.’

The indirective alignment strategy is, consequently, the least restricted one in the Nanai spoken today. It is used for coding the arguments of the basic ditransitive verbs, such as *buu-* ‘to give’, *gusəɾə-* ‘to tell’ or *gadzo-* ‘to bring’, and in some cases, as shown above in (18) and (19), also for coding the arguments of the derived ditransitives and the verb *tačeoče-* ‘to teach’, which normally prefer the neutral alignment. This is also the only coding strategy that is regularly produced by all speakers irrespective of their language proficiency, and for some semi-speakers it seems to be the only possible option at all.

Thus, it can be inferred that Nanai is gradually losing all but one strategy of coding the arguments of ditransitive verbs, retaining the indirective alignment alone. The most obvious explanation, again, does not seem to need any reference to language contact. The use of Nanai is very restricted in the Nanai society of today, as Russian is the main language of communication for all speakers and, as it has been previously assumed, a reduced use of a language leads to a reduced form of that language, cf. Dorian (1977: 24). It is shown, for example, by Andersen (1982) that in a situation of language attrition, the receding language becomes simplified by reducing the number of categories and constructions and by expanding other categories and constructions to a broader range of contexts. The choice of the indirective strategy in the case of Nanai is also quite understandable and can be explained by a couple of reasons.

Firstly, this strategy, as was demonstrated above, is originally less restricted than the others with respect to semantics and combination with different verbs. In addition it is the strategy employed by the prototypical nonderived ditransitives such as *buu-* ‘to give’ or *xodase-* ‘to sell’. Secondly, as predicted by Andersen (1982: 99), a dying lan-

guage preserves a syntactic construction that more transparently reflects the underlying semantic and syntactic relations. And indeed, the indirective construction in comparison with the internal recipient construction expresses all the participants in a more transparent way as separate lexemes, and unlike the double-accusative construction, makes clear the distinction between the theme and the recipient.⁶

The above-mentioned evidence, however, does not yet give an adequate explanation as to why the allative-accusative indirective construction is not used by the semi-speakers along with the dative-accusative construction. Grenoble (2000: 110) reports the loss of the allative case in Evenki, but in Nanai this marker is still widely used, cf. (11), and it is only in the ditransitive construction that it gets displaced by the dative.

According to one of Andersen's hypotheses, the most likely candidate for overgeneralization in the situation of language attrition is the morpheme that occurs frequently, cf. Andersen (1982: 103–104). In the corpus collected during the fieldwork in Khabarovsk Krai, there are 130 instances of the dative case marker in various functions, while the allative case marker occurs only 48 times, which is 2.7 times less frequent. This might contribute to the explanation of the dative being the preferred recipient marker in the ditransitive construction, but this is also the point where the contact should probably be taken into account.

The basic ditransitive construction in Russian is the indirective construction, with the dative marker on the recipient, cf. (20):

- (20) *Makto rasskazal Majl-e skazk-u*
 Makto told Majla-DAT fairy.tale-ACC
 'Makto told Majla a fairy tale.'

At the same time, there is some evidence that less fluent Nanai speakers tend to associate the Nanai dative case with the Russian dative and use this connection while copying syntactic constructions from Russian, cf. (21), which was already used for illustrating the occasional argument structure change:

- (21) *mindu tāj mašina uləsi-əm-bi*
 1SG.DAT that car like-ASSERT.PRS
 'I like this car.'

6 It is also interesting to note that in a situation of language attrition, the only ditransitive alignment strategy retained by a dying language is the most common type cross-linguistically: according to Haspelmath (2011), 50% of languages (189 out of the 378 languages' sample) employ this strategy for coding the arguments of ditransitive verbs.

It should be noted, however, that the change in question is not an instance of simple copying but a fundamental restructuring of the coding system. As a result of Russian influence, Nanai promotes the whole indirective dative-accusative pattern, and switches to this pattern even in cases when Russian might employ a completely different strategy. Consider the elicited example (22a) from Nanai, where the indirective alignment is used instead of the neutral one with the causative verb, and the sentence (22b) in Russian, which was used as a stimulus for elicitation and where the recipient is in the accusative and the theme bears the instrumental marking:

- (22a) *Makto Majla-du amtaka-wa sea-waŋ-ki-ni*
 Makto Majla-DAT apple-ACC eat-CAUS-PTCP.PST-POSS.3SG
- (22b) *Makto nakormil Majl-u jablok-ami*
 Makto fed Majla-ACC apple-INSTR.PL
 ‘Makto fed Majla with apples.’

Thus, even though the observed shift in the coding of the arguments of ditransitive verbs can to some extent be explained by the general principles, the exact choice of the only surviving strategy is best accounted for by taking the contact between languages into consideration⁷.

4. Conclusions

Quite a number of aspects of Nanai grammar have been strongly influenced by Russian, which is the dominating language of the region. One such aspect is the verb argument structure. Apart from some minor individual cases of the argument structure change, there are also two verb classes in Nanai that appear to be quite unstable in this respect, namely the avalent verbs and the ditransitive verbs.

Both classes seem to have their own reasons for altering their argument structure. Thus, the avalent verbs themselves are not very common cross-linguistically, so they might use the opportunity to accede to the more common intransitive type provided by the exist-

7 As pointed out by one reviewer, it would also be interesting to look at some data on Hezhen (a nearly extinct variant of Nanai that used to be spoken in China), since the primary contact language during its attrition phase was Chinese and not Russian. If Hezhen has undergone different realignment or no realignment at all, this would provide additional support for the contact-induced explanation of the changes in the Naikhin Nanai dialect. If, however, Hezhen has undergone similar realignments, this might either be due to the similar influence of Chinese, which also has some sort of indirective alignment, cf. Liu (2006), or suggest that these changes are the result of some language-internal processes. Unfortunately, available Hezhen sources are extremely limited and do not provide sufficient data for comparison.

ence of the intransitive constructions with the same meaning in the related languages. Likewise, it is quite natural for the ditransitive verbs in the situation of language attrition to get rid of the excessive coding strategies preserving the most polyfunctional one.

However, as was demonstrated in this paper, language contact does play a role in the argument structure change as well. In the case of meteorological expressions, it does not directly influence the argument structure of the avalent verbs, but contributes to the general shift from the atransitive (0-valent) to the intransitive (1-valent) type of encoding by introducing a new construction of a completely different nature. In the case of ditransitive verbs, though, Russian causes an immediate impact on the choice of the argument coding, being one of the sources for the dative-accusative pattern, which is employed extensively in the Nanai language of today.

As noted by Grenoble (2000: 106–107), it is quite often impossible to say whether certain changes in an endangered language are the result of contact, language attrition or internal processes, but as I have shown in the article, sometimes the contribution of the language contact is quite apparent, even in such a basic aspect as argument structure.

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Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ACC	accusative
ALL	allative
ASSERT	assertive
CAUS	causative
CNTR	contrastive particle
COLL	collective
CONN	connective particle
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DES	designative
DIM	diminutive
EMPH	emphatic particle
FUT	future
IMPS	impersonal
INCH	inchoative
INSTR	instrumental
NEG	negative
NSIM	nonsimultaneous
NPST	nonpast
OBL	oblique
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
REF	refactive
SG	singular

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Kokkuvõte. Ksenia Shagal: Nanai argumentstruktuur ja vene mõju. Artiklis analüüsitakse kahte muutumises olevat verbiklassi nanai keele naikhini dialektis (tunguusi keelkond, kõneldakse peamiselt Venemaa Kaug-Idas), mis on kontaktis vene keelega. Nendes klassidesse kuuluvaid null-valentseid verbe on hakatud kasutama intransitiivselt, samas kui ditransitiivsete verbide puhul on erinevatest kodeerimisstrateegiatest alles jäänud ainult daativ-akusatiiv kodeerimisskeem. Artikli põhiväiteks on, et kuigi sellel protsessil võib olla ka muid põhjuseid (nt struktuuraalseid, tüpoloogilisi), mängib selles kindlasti rolli ka keelekontakt.

Märksõnad: argumendstruktuur, null-valentsed verbid, ditransitiivsed verbid, keelekontakt, nanai keel, tunguusi keeled