

On the position of wh-phrases in languages of Northern Siberia: an explanation of the *V-WhP order

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Keywords: *in-situ/ex-situ* wh-phrases; intervention effects; compositional wh-expressions; postverbal constituents; OV > VX(*) word order change

Two possible explanations for the ungrammaticality of postverbal wh-expressions in languages spoken in Northern Siberia -- the Tundra Nenets, Forest Enets, and Nganasan languages (Samoyedic, Uralic), and the Dolgan language (Northeastern Turkic) -- will be discussed in this talk.

According to the first explanation (A), wh-expressions in these languages are composed of a wh-operator and a wh-indefinite (as suggested by Sloan 1991, Watanabe 1992, Malhotra 2009 for e.g. Hindi and Japanese), and the wh-phrase cannot be bound by its (preverbal) operator in postverbal position. As suggested, for example, by Tanaka (2001) for Japanese, the other (B) requires that the post-verbal constituents (PVCs) must have an (overt or covert) clause internal correlate, that cannot indicate a wh-phrase.

(A) Wh-phrases. In Uralic and Turkic languages spoken in Northern Siberia (such as Tundra Nenets, Enets, Nganasan, and Dolgan) wh-phrases can remain *in-situ* or may appear *ex-situ* in the sentence. The *in-situ* and *ex-situ* positions of wh-phrases are said to be free variations (Nikolaeva 2014, Wagner-Nagy 2018, Däbritz 2022). There is evidence from Tundra Nenets that the *ex-situ* position is a repair strategy in cases when an intervening operator would block the LF movement of the wh-operator (Mus 2020). The fact that wh-movement is indeed mandatory in specific situations, suggests that wh-phrases are compositional. Thus, in a V-WhP order, the verb is an intervening element that blocks the relation between the wh-operator and the wh-indefinite.

(B) PVCs. The languages spoken in this region are described as (relatively) strict verb-final languages. Yet, there is an ongoing (S)OV > (S)VO (or more precisely OV > VX(*)) syntactic change in (almost) all of them (Grenoble 2000, Stapert 2013, Asztalos et al. 2017, Däbritz 2018). The availability of postverbal constituents (PVCs) has been found to be influenced by information-structural factors; that is, given/backgrounded PVCs have been observed to appear first, later followed by new/focused PVCs (Borise et al. 2022). Since a wh-phrase induces (new-information) focus in the sentence, it should be (at least in theory) conceivable for it to be postverbal in these languages. The PVC however is always associated with a clause-internal correlate, that can be a pro, as it has been shown in Tundra Nenets (Mus & Surányi 2021). A pro cannot indicate a wh-phrase. This hypothesis may, nevertheless, have limitations since the discourse-pragmatic patterns displayed by the PVCs vary significantly across the languages examined (Däbritz & Mus 2019).

Acknowledgment

The research presented here has been supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office under grant No. NKFIH_129235 Theoretical and experimental approaches to dialectal variation and contact-induced change: a case study of Tundra Nenets.

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