

Destinative in Nganasan: what is being tensed?

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Nganasan, a Samoyedic language of Taimyr, has a peculiar grammatical category co-involving nominal possession and verbal TAM meanings. The category is commonly called destinative and is exemplified by the following sentences:

- (1) $\eta\text{əmsu-}\delta\text{i-}\acute{\eta}\text{ə}$ $\text{tətu}\eta\text{uru?}$
 food-DEST-1SG.PL give:IMP:2PL
'Give me (some) food', 'give me something to eat'
- (2) $\text{xunsə}\text{ə}$ ma-tə-mi $\text{mejku}\delta\text{ə}\text{m}$
 another house-DEST-1DU make:IMP:1SG.S
'I am going to make another house for us two'

The construction is also attested in the two other North Samoyedic languages, Nenets and Enets, but not in their closest relative, South Samoyedic language Selkup. It also finds partial functional parallels in some Tungusic languages.

There are two views of the construction. According to the first view, the destinative is a special type of possessive marking. Semantically, the difference with the regular possessive construction is the prospective character of the relation (Creissels 1979, followed in Daniel 2005). Destinative is thus a way to 'shift' the possessive relation into the future, and is typologically related to the discussion of the relation between possessive and beneficiary marking. According to the second view, destinative marking on Nganasan nouns qualifies as tensing nominal morphology, where a tensed noun is a noun exhibiting morphological predicative properties: combinability with verbal grammatical meanings, such as tense, aspect or mood; this interpretation is supported in (Leisiö 2009) who follows the line suggested in (Helimski 1994). To the best of the present author's knowledge, these two interpretations have never yet been confronted, and this is exactly the aim of this paper.

The arguments in favor of the first view may include the following:

- destinative is used in constructions structurally similar to regular possessive constructions
- destinative is always strongly associated with possessive meaning; in fact, possessive relation is bound to be expressed morphologically, either by a possessive marker on the Possessum or by a genitive marker on the Possessor, and rare exceptions may be explained by the Possessor being implicit in the context

The argument in favor of the second may include:

- the availability of a recently discovered (Goussev 2005) and even more elaborate counterfactual destinative marker, synchronically unanalyzable but most probably historically segmentable into nominal destinative marker + counterfactual marker found in verbal morphology, as in the following example:

- (3) $\acute{\eta}\text{ilu-}\delta\text{ətə}\delta\text{ə}\delta\text{əd'}\text{ə}\text{ə-mə}$
 life-IRR.DEST-1SG
'life that was supposed to be mine', 'what was supposed to be my life'

- even more convincingly, the fact that destinative and counterfactual destinative may be considered as forming one paradigm with the ‘ex-’ suffix which is a more sound parallel to nominal tense in typological perspective (‘late wife’, ‘former reindeer’), as suggested in (Leisiö 2009)

Whose side is stronger? While regular destinative is a purely nominal marker not attested on verbs, the counterfactual destinative marker is in close material connection with predicative morphology – and, unlike regular destinative, does not have known typological parallels in ditransitive / prospective Possessor constructions worldwide. In addition, it has not been clearly confirmed (or disproved) that the prospective Possessor and the Possessum in a destinative construction form single NP. On the other hand, the connection with possessive marking is too obvious to be simply dismissed. In Even, the construction which is also called destinative has never been claimed to be nominal tense, probably because, according to (Malchukov 1995), the prospective Possessor marked with a destinative forms a single NP with its Possessum.

I suggest that a reconciliation of all facts is possible if one follows the interpretation suggested in (Creissels 1979) and (Daniel 2005) and re-capitulated in (Creissels, Daniel 2005). It does not treat the destinative in terms of tensing; however, if one looks from this point of view, it is not the noun (nominal reference) but the possessive marker (possessive relation) which is tensed (and “mooded”) in Northern Samoyedic. This is supported by the fact that destinative can never convey the meaning of the type ‘what is going to be a house’ or ‘what could have been a happy husband’, naturally expected for tensed nouns, while destinative constructions mean more specifically ‘what is going to be *your* house (still under construction)’ or ‘what could have been *my* coat (but the materials were spent in some other way)’. In these examples, the scope of the tense-mood marking does not include the noun itself (mere property of being X) but the relation between an object and the person.

That leaves us with the examples of past-tensed nouns provided in (Leisiö 2009) in support of the paradigmatic view of the nominal tense in Nganasan. Interestingly, some of them may also be interpreted as retrospective Possessors (‘(someone’s) late wife’, ‘father’s former reindeer’), which makes it tempting to reconsider the whole nominal tense paradigm suggested in this study as tensed possession paradigm; but that needs additional field research.

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