

# **A syntactic change in Tundra Nenets: from a wh-verb to a wh-adverb**

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## Introduction

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- A set of wh-words is identified in Tundra Nenets of which there are so-called minor semantic categories.
- The members of this group are morphologically/syntactically compound, and they are derived from one of the major wh-words (lexicalized/historically analysable wh-words).
- In most of the Tundra Nenets dialects, the semantic category of REASON/GOAL is derived from the wh-word ‘what’ (i.e., the NON-HUMAN semantic category).

- (1) a.  $\eta\text{amge}$  ‘what’ >  $\eta\text{amgee}(\text{?})$  ‘why’ / ‘what for’  
b.  $\eta\text{amge}$  ‘what’ >  $\eta\text{amge? je?em\acute{n}a}$  ‘why’ / ‘what for’

## Introduction (cont.)

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- In the Taz, Yamal, and Taymyr (sub)dialects of Tundra Nenets (Eastern group), a non-finite (converb) form of the wh-verb ‘say what’ is used as a wh-adverb meaning ‘why’:

(2) xăman-č      tuko-nʔ to-nʔ  
what.say-cvb here-dat come-2sg  
‘Why did you come here?’

(3) níša-r      Saša-n      xăʔmanʃa?  
father-2sg Sasha-dat what.say.3sg  
‘What has your father said to Sasha?’

- There are some solid syntactic evidences for a wh-object incorporation: the wh-verb is a complex stem consisting of the wh-object incorporated into the verb meaning ‘say’ (see, e.g. Nikolaeva 2014: 265).

## Introduction (cont.)

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- Syntactic evidences:

(i) the wh-verb does not display object agreement:

- (4) pidar xǎʔmanɲa\*-r?  
2sg what.say-2sg.sg  
(‘What have you said?’)

(ii) the wh-verb cannot combine with the regular past tense morpheme:

- (5) pidar xǎʔma-na\*-ś?  
2sg what.say-2sg-pst  
(‘What did you say?’)

(iii) the wh-adverb ‘how’ cannot precede the wh-verb (due to the *Specificity* restriction):

- (6) \*pidar xǎnzerʔ xǎʔman-ɲa-n?  
2sg how what.say-co-2sg  
(‘How did you say what?’)

## Hypothetical path

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1. wh-object + 'say' > wh-verb

object incorporation

2. wh-verb > wh-adverb

⇒ What are the internal syntactic processes in Stage2?

• Hypothesis:

head of complement clause > head of adverbial adjunct clause (> truncated clause) > adverbial wh-adjunct

1. The wh-verb as the head of complement clauses

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2. The converb form of the wh-verb



# Outline

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1. The wh-verb as the head of complement clauses
2. The converb form of the wh-verb
3. Adverbial adjunct clause OR adverbial adjunct

- The data are from the Monolingual Tundra Nenets Corpus (c. 500K tokens written texts; Mus & Metzger 2021).
- There are 46 occurrences of the wh-verb in total of which 28/18 is the ratio of wh-verb/wh-adverb.

## The wh-verb as the head of complement clauses

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- The wh-verb is standardly used as the head of adverbial complement clauses.
- The wh-verb takes the ending of action nouns, and can be inflected for number, and case.

(7) níša-nd            xǎʔma-ʔma-mʔ   namda-ra-ś.  
father-gen.2sg what.say-an-acc hear-2sg-pst  
'You heard what your father says.'

## The wh-verb as the head of complement clauses (cont.)

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- The wh-verb can combine with possessive suffixes indicating the person and number of its subject.

(8)    níša-nd            teńana    xăʔma-ʔma-xada-ndaʔ  
         father-gen.2sg yesterday what.say-an-abl-poss.3sg  
         teńewa-n?  
         know-2sg-pst  
         ‘Do you know what your father said yesterday?’

- The embedded subject appear in Nom/Gen case.

⇒ The non-finite parading of the wh-verb does not seem to be defective.

## The converb form of the wh-verb

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- The wh-verb can take the suffix of the (general) converb.
- Then, it appears as an adjunct.

(9) **xăman-č** ja-ʔ xora-mʔ xadaʔi-nʔ  
what.say-cvb earth-gen reindeer-acc kill-2sg  
'Why did you kill the mammoth?'

- In the construction, the non-finite wh-verb is morphologically invariant: there is no number, case, or agreement expressed on it.

⇒ The converbs in Tundra Nenets are generally not inflected.

## The converb form of the wh-verb (cont.)

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- The non-finite wh-verb follows the matrix subject (no negative data in the corpus).

(10)    ńa-ńi       xăman-č       pădara-n? xaja?  
          friend-1sg what.say-cvb forest-dat go.3sg  
          ‘Why did my friend go to the forest?’

- The non-finite wh-verb precedes the matrix object (both pronominal and lexical objects) (one negative data (?) in the corpus).

(11)    xăman-č       śirni       xadabi-n?  
          what.say-cvb 2sg.acc kill-2sg  
          ‘Why did you kill me?’

## The converb form of the wh-verb (cont.)

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- The non-finite wh-verb precedes a locative adjunct.

(12) *xăman-č*      *fuko-nʔ to-nʔ*  
what.say-cvb here-dat come-2sg  
'Why did you come here?'

⇒ This (relative) freedom of ordering is expected of adjuncts.

## The converb form of the wh-verb (cont.)

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- The non-finite wh-verb can modify the verb (or VP), see above, or an adverb.

(13) fiki ná-rími xăman-ž tařem laxana?  
this friend-1sg what.say-cvb this.way talk.3sg  
'Why does your friend talk like this?'

⇒ This syntactic behaviour is typical of adjuncts.



## Adverbial adjunct clause OR adverbial adjunct

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- There are some weak (syntactic) evidences that the wh-verb behaves as an adjunct.
  1. The converb form of the wh-verb does not have an overt complement (subject), although converbs in Tundra Nenets standardly allow an overt subject.

⇔ BUT! a truncated clause is structurally reduced.
  2. Truncation can cause intervention effect, i.e., it blocks certain movements (Elordieta & Haddican 2017).

⇒ It is to be tested in multiple questions.
  3. It indicates the interrogative interpretation of the sentence.

⇒ If it is an embedded question, it does not necessarily effect the main clause.

## Summary

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- The converb form of the wh-verb in some Tundra Nenets dialects is used as a wh-adverb meaning ‘why’.
- The syntactic position of the non-finite wh-verb seems to be free.
- The non-finite wh-verb form is invariant (not inflected) and do not take any complements.
- The hypothetical path of the change involves the following steps:
  1. wh-object + ‘say’ > wh-verb
  2. wh-verb > wh-adverb

# **Thank you for your attention!**

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