

# Tense in Nganasan narratives

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Sándor Szeverényi (University of Szeged)

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ETHNOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF SIBERIAN URALIC  
LANGUAGES (K129186)



NEMZETI KUTATÁSI,  
FEJLESZTÉSI ÉS INNOVÁCIÓS HIVATAL

# objectives

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(1) Tense, aspect, mood, evidentiality – and PERSPECTIVITY.

(2) Narratological/textological approach: narrative perspectivization

(3) External motivation in the use/development of TAME categories.

□ Tense/aspect is less cultural-sensitive than evidentiality.

□ The Nganasan has a special tense/aspect system.

**(4) Temporal morphosyntactic „patterns” in personal stories.**



# The corpus

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*Corpus building and corpus-based grammatical studies on Nganasan (2014-2017) - DFG-Projekt WA3153/2-1*

Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus: Brykina et al. 2018

- 176 transcriptions
- 33 speakers
- 21,723 utterances / 142,455 tokens / 35,131 types
- The majority of the texts were recorded in the 2000s.

Online: <https://inel.corpora.uni-hamburg.de/NganasanCorpus/search>

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The corpus consists of texts of various genres:

- (1) folklore texts (tales, myths etc.),
- (2) narratives (everyday stories, biographies etc.),**
- (3) songs,
- (4) spontaneous and stimulated conversations.

**narrative subcorpus: 56 texts/19 speakers (4,363 sentences).**

# The narratives

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- Oral, spontaneous, monologic narratives (sometimes in interaction with another speaker).

The following types can be distinguished:

- narrative of a single event based on the speaker's own experience, e.g. travel, childhood experiences, family etc.
- narrative of a single event told by others, typically a story about a deceased close relative,
- narrative of descriptive, regular, recurring events (*mostly excluded*),
- narrative of remote past events.

# 3. Narrative vs. Non-narrative Discourse Types

(Lee 2020)

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- defining feature of narratives: temporal relations matching the clausal order
- the deictic function of tense in everyday use of language is lost in narrative genres, forcing tense to take on an anaphoric role
- „The loss of deictic temporal reference in narratives is offset by the construction of an **imaginary narrative timeline** whose existence depends entirely on the discourse itself.”

## In this analysis:

- only PERSONAL NARRATIVES: the narrator has a special role:
  - The speaker's own experience
  - Experience of story-teller's relatives, friends etc.
    - > > > to exclude possible "folklore" features
    - > > > use of evidentials

# The Foreground vs. Background Distinction

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narrative clauses (Labov 1972) ~ **foreground** (Hopper 1979):

= series of temporally ordered event clauses („skeleton” or „actual story-line”)

free clauses (Labov 1972) ~ **background** (Hopper 1979):

= „any number of clauses that elaborate, evaluate, or comment on the narrated main events can come between two narrative clauses.” (or „supportive material”)

(Lee 2020)

The temporal frame of foreground and background.



# 4. Narrative perspectivization (Zeman 2020)

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**Perspectivization:** vantage point taking, holding evidential origo, viewpoint of the subject of consciousness, etc.

Tense and aspect are key components in most approaches to “point of view” in texts (or “focalisation”).

A) The narrator’s role (as a central parameter and as a linguistic problem)

B) which factors indicate whether a proposition can be ascribed to the narrator’s or to a character’s viewpoint

„the *narrator* can be reduced to an abstract deictic vantage point and lose its *communicative voice*, so that the perspectival relation between subject and object can be effaced” (Zeman 2020: 24)

# 5. Morphological means of perspectivity and subjectivity in Nganasan

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Fundamental role of the actual speaker' perspective:

- The story is always told from the actual speaker's perspective.
- The original (quoted) speaker's perspective is constructed in direct quotations.

TAME:

- evidentiality system: 3-4 choices (source of knowledge)
  - (1) the direct source (eye-witnessed)
  - (2) inferential
  - (3) sensitive (auditive)
  - (4) reportative (renarrative, quotative)
- 12 moods (incl. evidentials)
- Unique tense-aspect system

# The basic tense system in Nganasan

<b>Aorist</b>		<b>Past</b>	<b>Pluperfect</b>	<b>Debitive Past</b>	<b>Future</b>
<b>Perf.</b>	<b>Imperf.</b>				
-ʔa/-ʔə	-NTU	-SUə	-SUəd'əə	-ʔSUTəd'əə	-ʔsUTə
- ʔi/-ʔīa	-NTA <sub>1</sub>	-SÜÜ	-SUəd'ai	-ʔSUTəd'ə	-ʔSÜTÜ

Based on Wagner-Nagy 2019.

## 6. typical dominant TAME suffixes in story-telling (in foreground):

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- **simple past tense** **TENSE**
- **perfective aorist** **ASPECT**
- narrative evidential EVID (NARR)
- simple past tense + narrative evidential EVID (NARR)
- perfective aorist + narrative evidential EVID (NARR)
- iterative suffix + imperfective aorist ASPECT
- (direct reported speech)

# Background

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- (1) Non-finite forms.
- (2) Other tenses (general future tense, relative tenses), evidentials, moods.
- (3) nominal predicates

If there is a rigid temporal frame in a story, the backgrounding information can be expressed by another of the main „strategy”, typically:

## **FOREGROUND**

PAST

PERF. AORIST

## **BACKGROUND**

PAST + NARRATIVE

AORIST or PAST + NARRATIVE

(Engagement?)

(Engagement?)

- ❑ If the skeleton in past or perfective aorist, the backgrounding information in narrative.
- ❑ The marking of the narrator’s perspective depends on the strategy choice of the beginning.

## SIMPLE PAST: KECh\_080224\_Idol\_nar

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1. Miŋ təi **s'üə** koj-kəmu? We had an idol.
2. Koj-kəmu? i **s'üə** huālə, d'üjhuākaʔa huālə. This idol was a stone, a round stone.
3. Mənə id'aʔanə d'a munu **d'üə**n: I told to my father:
4. [DQ Maagətə..., kuni ɲətəd'üəd'əərə tətihuālə, ...koj-kəmu?? Where have you found this stone, our idol?"
5. Id'aʔamə munu **ntu**: My father says:
6. [DQ Manüi? hüətini mənə d'ügu **suə**n. "One day I got lost..."
- ...
- ...
- ...

## PERFECTIVE AORIST: SEN\_061025\_Moose\_nar

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(2)

Manu numan̄ku ihüʔetu, ɲadʼatunanu dʼoðürsʼüəgəj ɲüülʼəmuɲ, huāađitʼi huursi

When he was young, he went with his brother to make tent poles.

Təə tʼuhəni nʼilidʼiəgəj Kotujbikaa nanu.

At that time, they lived not far from the river Kotuj.

(3)

Təti konaʔagəj mun̄kuʔ dʼa ɲütʼitʼi lət̄itəʔh̄ias̄i.

They went into the forest to make tent poles.

Kuə hirəgüəɲ ɲütʼitʼi lət̄idʼi, hursəʔkiʔəgəj mađuti dʼa.

They made some poles and went home.

Təgətə lakariarīaiʔ maagiä saü dʼind̄iʔəgəj.

Then, suddenly they heard a noise.

Tətirə kəujkiä heđitihiäđi.

It seemed it was a moose.

Nʼinibtiʔiä mununtu:

«Katʼəmətə, takəə kəujkiä.

The elder brother says: „Look at that moose.”

## KES\_061020\_MyLife\_nar

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Tə, mənə tahariāa kaŋgüt'əküə əmd'ümə kai d'a tuu<sup>ʔə</sup>ni abaʔanə nanu L'etəmd'ə d'a.

And once we traveled with my mother to Letovye.

Abaʔamə miāiðiad<sup>ʔə</sup>i.

My mother got married.

Mənə, kanə sestnadcat', biiʔmətümü? is'üom **ibahum**.

My mother had 16 children, people said.

Mənə samij posl'ədn'a.

I am the latest one.

Təti L'etəmdə t'üi<sup>ʔə</sup>ni.

We reached Letovye.

FOREGROUND: **PERF. AORIST**

BACKGROUND: **PAST + EVID.NARR**



# Tense in narrative perspectivization

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## CHANGES OF TENSE IN A STORY

- ❑ The aspectual class of the verb.
- ❑ The aspectuality of the situation/story-line.
- ❑ Interruption and turning points: e.g. speech verb with quotation (high proportion!), interruption by the audience etc.
  - in reported speech any TAM suffix can occur from the perspective of the original speaker, but poor in evidentials
  - in reported speech the deictic past tense is more usual than the perfective aorist

# Texts: KECh vs. KES

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## TAME of the predicate

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	KECh	KES
1	PAST	PAST
2	PAST	NEG+INTERROGATIVE
3	PAST	ITER-AORIST
4	IMPERFECTIVE AORIST	PF / PAST
5	PAST	CONNeg
6	PAST	PERFECTIVE AORIST
7	PAST	INFERENCE EVID.
8	PAST	INFERENCE EVID.
9	PAST PERFECT	ITER+AORIST
10	ITER-AOR.IMP	ITER+AORIST
		(...)

# 9. Conclusion

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- *mission not completed...*: direct cultural effects can not be detected.
- There are some tense/aspect strategies in foreground (that can be combined with narrative evidentiality).
  - Two basic story-telling temporal-frame: perfective aorist and past.
  - Two evidential frame: past + narrative and perfective + narrative.
  - Other tenses occur in background and in quoted clauses.
- Possible shifts in the quoted clauses.
- Depending on the speaker's individual "ability"
- More narrative evidential, more perfective aorist, less deictic past tense.
- More Russian influence, more indirect speech constructions (with person shift), less use of the aorist but more of the deictic (past) tense.

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Thank you for your attention!