

The development of aorist markers in Nganasan

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The Nganasan TAME system differs from the rest of Uralic by one essential property: the obligatory overt marking of lexical aspect via a suppletive paradigm of tense markers in the indicative aorist. All Nganasan verb stems are either perfective or imperfective, and the aspectual class of the stem can be changed only by way of derivation. In the indicative aorist, imperfective stems receive the markers *-NTU* or *-U* (with various allomorphs), while perfective stems take the marker *-²a / -²e*. Etymologically, the imperfective suffixes have been identified with Proto-Samoyed imperfective participles **-ntÅ* and **-rÅ* (Mikola 1996), while the perfective is said to have developed from a co-affixal form combining the Proto-Samoyed tense markers **-j* and **-ŋÅ* (> **-jŋÅ*) (Gusev 2013: 72–73). The latter etymology is problematic, however, since the development PS **jŋ* > Ng *ʔ* is without parallels and seems implausible, considering the general tendencies of Nganasan historical phonology.

A better etymological match for the perfective aorist can be found in a type of deverbal marker with perfective semantics, traces of which exist in lexicalized derivatives in Nganasan, Enets, and Nenets, found in dictionary data. The semantics of said derivatives are most often resultative or instrumental in meaning in relation to the source verb: Ng SNg *kentiʔe* ‘frost’ – compare *kenti-* : AOR.PRF.3SG *kendiʔe* ‘to freeze’ < PS **kəntä-* id.; NgSl *holiʔe* ‘top of the head; uvula’ < PS **pälä-* ‘to swallow’; TN T65 *nəqjə^o* ‘a hide for processing’, – *nəq-* ‘to process an animal hide’; TE EnSl *noduʔe* ‘the one which is heard’ – *nodo-* ‘to hear’; FE LES *tidoʔə* ‘washing (process)’, – *tidoʔə* ‘to wash’. The most striking example is Ng SNg *honuʔe* ‘plait,’ phonologically identical to the aorist of the verb *hon-* ‘to plait’ : AOR.PRF.3SG *honuʔe*. The relationship between the verb and the derived noun has become unproductive due to lexicalization. The irregular variation in vowels, displayed by the fossilized derivatives, is remarkably similar to that of the Nganasan perfective aorist suffix, which offers further support for the etymology.

The creation of new finite verb paradigms from nominalized forms is a process extremely common in the languages of Northern Eurasia (Janhunen 2020: 376–392). It involves the reinterpretation of nominalized verbal forms as finite, which is the most likely to happen in

contexts where word class borders become permeable. In the Samoyed languages, such a context is found in the realm of predication, where nominal predicates may receive person marking just like prototypically finite verbs, allowing for a semantic transition of the type *honu-ʔe* [plait-NMLZ] '(a) plaited (thing)' → *honu-ʔe* [plait-AOR.PRF.3SG] 's/he plaited'. Alternatively, the realm of the so-called object conjugation, which uses markers phonologically identical to those of the possessive paradigm for nouns, could be considered: *honu-ʔe-me* [plait-NMLZ-1SG.PX] 'my plaited thing' → *honu-ʔe-me* [plait-AOR.PRF-1SG.OBJ.SG] 'I plaited it.' The etymology calls for question the conventional view of Nganasan as exceptional with regards to the development of its TAME.

A suffix phonologically identical with the lexicalized resultatives is used in Nganasan, Enets, and Nenets to form augmentative derivations, with varying degrees of productivity, and thus, it could be claimed that the augmentative suffixes have also developed from the same Proto-Samoyed form. The reconstruction of a uniform Proto-Samoyed shape of the suffix, however, proves to be a difficult task due to the unexplained vowel variations, apparently present at the proto language level already.

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