

General noun modifying clause constructions in Northern Khanty: from semantics to syntax

Introduction Northern Khanty non-finite forms are found in a range of syntactic environments (Nikolaeva 1999, Bikina et al. 2022). In this study, we focus on the adnominal use of Northern Khanty non-finite forms. We show that they allow for a wider set of head-modifier relations than mere relativization. Following Comrie (1996), we define them as General Noun-Modifying Clause Constructions (GNMCC). While Matsumoto (1997) defines prototypical GNMCCs as modifying clauses that are only linked to the head noun semantically and pragmatically, we found several syntactic restrictions on the GNMCC use in Northern Khanty, and claim that GNMCCs are structurally diverse.

Non-finite clauses as adnominal modifiers Northern Khanty makes use of non-finite clauses in the following adnominal contexts: argument and non-argument relative clauses (RCs), clausal complements of complement-requiring nouns, and attributive modifiers of non-argument nature. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate argument and adjunct relativization.

- (1) waśaj-en [jaj-əλ wəjt-əm] tutχot šiwal-əs
Vasya-POSS.2SG brother-POSS.3SG find-NFIN.PST wallet see-PST[3SG]
'Vasya saw the wallet found by his brother.'
- (2) waśaj-en [jaj-əλ tutχot wəjt-əm] lapkaj-aλ-n wə-s
Vasya-POSS.2SG brother-POSS.3SG wallet find-NFIN.PST shop-POSS.3SG-LOC be-PST[3SG]
'Vasya was in the shop in which his brother found a wallet.'

Non-finite clauses can occur as clausal complements of content (3) or perceptual nouns (4):

- (3) [jaj-əm lapka pənši] ajkel χəl-s-en
elder.brother-POSS.1SG shop open.NFIN.NPST news hear-PST-2SG>SG
'Did you hear news that my elder brother opens a shop?'
- (4) [aśem puškan əλ-ti] sij ewəlt amp-əm pāl
father.POSS.1SG shotgun shoot-NFIN.NPST sound from dog-POSS.1SG be.afraid[NPST.3SG]
'My dog is afraid of the sound when my father shoots the shotgun'.

It is worth noting that examples like (3) and (4) cannot be analyzed as relativization, as the head noun does not correspond to any syntactic position within the dependent clause (5):

- (5) *aśem puškan ewəlt əλ tām sij-ən
father.POSS.1SG shotgun from shoot[NPST.3SG] this sound-LOC
Intended meaning: 'My father shoots the gun with this sound'.

Finally, non-finite constructions can modify a noun that does not require an argument. In (6), the relation between the head noun and the non-finite clause is purely semantic/pragmatic:

- (6) [kər laŋəλ wər-əm] wuχ-λ-an χeś-s-ət
stove roof do-NFIN.PST money-PL-POSS.2SG rest-PST-PL
'Do you still have money for fixing the roof?'

However, GNMCC in Northern Khanty is not unrestricted, and not every head noun can be modified with a non-finite clause (7).

- (7) *lapkaj-ən [woj-ət junt-ti] χur-ət tini-λ-aj-ət
shop-LOC animal-PL play-NFIN.NPST image-PL sell-NPST-PASS-PL
Intended meaning: 'Images of playing animals are sold in the shop.'

Syntactic restrictions in Northern Khanty NMCC. In languages with "prototypical" GNMCCs, like Japanese, the relation between a head and *any* modifying clause is established on semantic or pragmatic grounds (Matsumoto 1997). Therefore, relativization-like contexts

that are pragmatically inadequate are ungrammatical, rather than having an unnatural meaning. (8) is an example of an object RC that is pragmatically strange, as tomatoes do not eat cities. It completely disallows the RC interpretation. It contrasts with the languages with syntactically-based relativization English; cf. the intended English translation of (8).

- JAPANESE
 (8) ??[tookyoo o **tabeta**] tomato
 Tokyo ACC ate tomato
 Intended meaning: ‘the tomato which ate Tokyo’ (Matsumoto 1997: 83)

In contrast, in Northern Khanty, speakers are consistently able to interpret pragmatically strange RC-like examples, even if the extended NMCC interpretation is available. The adnominal clause in (9) is interpreted as a subject RC (b), even though it could have a much more pragmatically natural interpretation (a). This distinguishes Northern Khanty from languages with semantic/pragmatic interpretation of GNMCCs, in which the intended meaning would be the only attested one (Matsumoto 2017: 30). In this way, in Northern Khanty, the relation between the head and the noun modifying clause is not purely semantic.

- (9) #[wuj-əŋ-a ǎn **ji-ti** maw-ət] λε-λ-əm
 fat-PROP-DAT NEG become-NFIN.NPST candy-PL eat-NPST-1SG
 a. Intended meaning: ‘I eat sweets that are such that one does not gain weight.’
 b. Actual meaning: ‘I eat sweets that are gaining weight (as if they are alive).’

Internal syntax of NMCCs. Clausal adnominal modifiers in Northern Khanty are not syntactically uniform. Non-finite forms are voice-neutral, and the fact that a relative clause is passivized can only be seen from argument encoding: the demoted argument is locative 0. Only argument RCs allow for passivization 0, while adjunct RCs cannot be passive (11).

- (10) waśaj-en [jaj-əλ-ən **wəjt-əm**] tutχot šiwaλ-əs
 Vasya-NFIN.2SG brother-POSS.3SG-LOC find-NFIN.PST wallet see-PST[3SG]
 ‘Vasya saw the wallet that was found by his brother.’
 (11) *waśaj-en [jaj-əλ-ən tutχot **wəjt-əm**] lapkaj-aλ-n wə-s
 Vasya-POSS.2SG brother-POSS.3SG-LOC wallet find-NFIN.PST shop-POSS.3SG-LOC be-PST[3SG]
 Intended meaning: ‘Vasya was in the shop, where a wallet was found by his brother.’

However, non-relative GNMCCs seem to align with argument RCs, allowing passivization:

- (12) ?[jaj-əm-ən λapka **punši**] ajkeλ χəλ-s-en
 elder.brother-POSS.1SG-LOC shop open.NFIN.NPST news hear-PST-2SG>SG
 ‘Did you hear news that a shop was opened by my elder brother?’

In the talk, we will demonstrate that non-relative GNMCCs in Northern Khanty (i) are subject to certain syntactic restrictions, (ii) differ in their syntax from RCs. Our arguments come from subject properties, adverbial modification, and a more detailed discussion of voice alternations.

References

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