

## The Northern Samoyedic predestinative: Quantitative and areal evidence of grammaticalization

Elia Calligari – University of Pavia

This work analyses the predestinative suffix of Northern Samoyedic languages — Nenets, Enets, Nganasan (Uralic; Russia) — through a corpus-based approach combined with areal and diachronic evidence.

This suffix has attracted the attention of typological and Uralic linguistics alike due to its atypical behaviour and debated history, which has earned it the label of typological *rarissimum* (see Creissels & Daniel 2006 and Khanina & Shluinsky 2014). Most always combined with core grammatical cases, it has been variously defined as a benefactive (Prokof'ev 1937, Khanina & Shluinsky 2014) or nominal TAM marker (Nikolaeva 2015, Leisiö 2014), as endorsed by prototypical uses like (1) and (2). In the latter, the recipient is encoded inside the predestinative-marked NP expressing the theme, whereby the ditransitive transfer verb is formally turned monotransitive (Creissels & Daniel 2006, Malchukov et al. 2010).

- (1) Tundra Nenets (Nikolaeva 2015:103)  
*ŋəno-də-mt°*                      *temtaə-d°m*  
boat-PRD-ACC.2SG      buy-1SG  
'I bought a boat for you [/your future boat].'
- (2) Nganasan (Wagner-Nagy 2018:211)  
*mənə kniga-ðə-mtu*                      *mi-s'iə-m*  
1SG      book-PRD-ACC.3SG      give-PST-1SG  
'I gave him/her a book.'

The corpus-based analysis draws from the INEL Northern Samoyedic corpora (Brykina et al. 2018 for Nganasan, Shluinsky et al. 2024 for Enets, and Budzisch & Wagner-Nagy 2024 for Nenets), extracting 200 occurrences of the suffix from each to investigate, through distributional evidence, the semantic features of predestinative-marked nouns and of co-occurring verbs. The crosslinguistic trend shows that the suffix generally combines with the accusative case to encode recipient-benefactive or proper recipient values. The occurrence of the predestinative suffix with nominative and genitive, instead, displays language-dependent features: Nenets has the lowest score of nominative predestinative forms and the highest of genitive predestinative ones while Nganasan displays the opposite distribution; Enets stays in between.

Considering areal data for the Enisej zone of Northern Siberia, it is observed that Evenki (Tungusic; Russia) features a case suffix, labelled *indefinite accusative*, which encodes recipient-beneficiaries inside the theme's noun phrase like the Northern Samoyedic predestinative as can be seen in (3).

- (3) Evenki (Nedjalkov 1997:147)  
*d'av-ja-v*                      *o:-kal*  
boat-ACCIN-1SG              make-IMP.2SG  
'Make a boat for me.'

Unlike Northern Samoyedic, however, the Evenki suffix fits in the language's case system and has close functional cognates across many Tungusic languages. Therefore, a case of pattern borrowing (Sakel 2007) from Tungusic to Northern Samoyedic can be postulated. The native Samoyedic item targeted by pattern borrowing is internally reconstructed as Proto-Samoyedic *\*-tə*, resulting from Proto-Uralic *\*-ksi* (Janhunen 1989). A grammaticalization path is thus reconstructed (Figure 1) based on Luraghi's (2016) paths for beneficiaries. Northern Samoyedic languages would have first featured the reconstructed Proto-Samoyedic suffix *\*-tə* < P.U. *\*-ksi* as a translative marker combinable with possessive suffixes, which synchronically corresponds to the genitive form of the predestinative declension pattern (Salminen 2014). Subsequently, pattern borrowing from Tungusic would have prompted a reanalysis of this suffix into a non-prototypical marker for recipient-beneficiaries encoded NP-internally. Such a reanalysis ultimately led to the back-formation of accusative and nominative predestinative forms.

This study represents the first attempt to a corpus-based study of the predestinative suffix for all Northern Samoyedic languages, combining new corpus data and evidence from historical linguistics to shed light on the grammaticalization of this suffix.

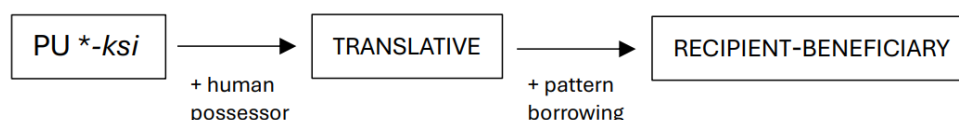


Figure 1. Proposed grammaticalization of the predestinative from P.U. *\*-ksi*.

## References

- Brykina, Maria & Gusev, Valentin & Szeverényi, Sándor & Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2018. *Nganasan Spoken Language Corpus (NSLC)*. Version 0.2. Archived in Hamburger Zentrum für Sprachkorpora. Publication date 2018-06-12. (<http://hdl.handle.net/11022/0000-0007-C6F2-8>) (Accessed 2025-01-05.)
- Budzisch, Josefina & Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2024. *INEL Nenets Corpus*. (Unpublished working version.)
- Creissels, Denis & Daniel, Michael. 2006. Monotransitivity in ‘give’-constructions (exploring the periphery of ditransitives). (Paper presented at the Rara and Rarissima Conference, Leipzig, 29 March - 1 April 2006.)
- Janhunen, Juha. 1989. Samojedin predestinatiivisen deklinaation alkuperästä [On the origin of the Samoyedic predestinative declension]. *Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja* 82. 298–301.
- Khanina, Olesya & Shluinsky Andrey. 2014. A rare type of benefactive construction: Evidence from Enets. *Linguistics* 52(6). 1391–1431.
- Leisiö, Larisa. 2014. Imennye kategorii vremeni v nganasanskom i drugix severnosamodijskix jazykax [Nominal tense categories in Nganasan and other Northern Samoyedic languages]. *Voprosy jazykoznanija* 1. 39–59.
- Luraghi, Silvia. 2016. The mapping of space onto the domain of benefaction and some unpredicted trends in semantic change. *Linguistics* 54(2). 339–389.
- Malchukov, Andrej & Haspelmath, Martin & Comrie, Bernard. 2010. Ditransitive constructions: a typological overview. In Malchukov, Andrej & Haspelmath, Martin & Comrie, Bernard (eds.), *Studies in ditransitive constructions*, 1–64. Berlin / New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

- Nedjalkov, Igor. 1997. *Evenki*. London: Routledge.
- Nikolaeva, Irina. 2015. On the expression of TAM on nouns: Evidence from Tundra Nenets. *Lingua* 166. 99–126.
- Prokof'ev, Georgij Nikolaevič (ed.). 1937. *Jazyki i pis'mennost' narodov severa – Čast' I*. (Jazyki i pis'mennost' samoedskix i finno-ugorskix narodov.) [Languages and literature of the peoples of the North – Part I (Languages and literature of Samoyedic and Finno-Ugric peoples)]. Moscow / Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe učebno-pedagogičeskoe izdatel'stvo.
- Sakel, Janette. 2007. Types of borrowing: Matter and pattern. In Matras, Yaron & Sakel, Janette (eds.), *Grammatical Borrowing in Cross-Linguistic Perspective*, 15–30. Berlin / New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Salminen, Tapani. 2014. Suomalais-samojedilaisia muotovertailuja [Comparison of Finnish and Samoyedic forms]. In Inaba, Nobufumi & Luutonen, Jorma & Hamari, Arja & Ahola, Elina (eds.), *Juuret marin murteissa, latvus yltää Uraliin: Juhlakirja Sirkka Saarisen 60- vuotispäiväksi 21.12.2014*, 291–302. Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- Shluinsky, Andrey & Khanina, Olesya & Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2024. *INEL Enets Corpus*. Version 1.0. Archived at Universität Hamburg. In: The INEL corpora of indigenous Northern Eurasian languages. (<https://hdl.handle.net/11022/0000-0007-FE1D-C>) (Accessed 2025-02-10.)
- Wagner-Nagy, Beáta. 2018. *A Grammar of Nganasan*. Leiden: Brill.

## Source

- Calligari, Elia. 2024. *A corpus-based contribution to the debate on the Northern Samoyedic predestinative suffix*. University of Pavia: MA Thesis. (<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14239/26525>) (Accessed 2025-08-30).