Areal patterns of topic marker in Northern Eurasia: demonstrative, possessive suffix and topic particle

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Chingduang Yurayong
Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies
• Besides word order, languages in Northern Eurasia can also modify topic-comment structure morphologically by clause-second topic markers that have been grammaticalised from various lexico-grammatical sources.

• Their functions are, above all, to express topicality, contrastiveness and bridging reference (cf. Bonnot 1990, 1991).

• This areal-typological study classifies three micro-areas within Northern Eurasia, which clearly show common grammaticalisation paths, and discusses methodological challenges in each particular areal context.

• The primary data include the agglutinative languages of Ural-Altaic type (Uralic, Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Koreanic, Japonic) as well as Slavic languages (especially Russian) and Chinese.
TOPICHOOD & INFORMATION STRUCTURE

**Topic** is ‘*what the discourse is about*’ (Dik 1989, Lambrecht 1994, Erteschik-Shir 1997, Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011)

- **Topic** vs. **Comment** (Andrews 2007)
- **Presupposition** vs. **Assertion/Comment** (Lambrecht 1994, Andrews 2007)
- **Given information** vs. **New information** (Dik 1989)
- **Background** vs. **Completive** (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011)
- **Link** vs. **Tail** (Vallduví 1992)
- **Theme** vs. **Rheme** (Halliday 1994)
TOPIC CONSTRUCTION

- The topic – be it whatever part of speech (except conjunction) – is placed in the initial position of a clause.

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• The topic – be it whatever part of speech (except conjunction) – is placed in the initial position of a clause.

• Topic is, then, followed by an unstressed marker that indicates a boundary between topic and comment articulation thereafter (cf. *Boundary marker* à Bauer 1982, Jenny 2009).

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DEMONSTRATIVE AS TOPIC MARKER
• In Northeastern Europe, most Finnic languages, several Saami languages and Russian can mark topic with the clause-second demonstrative.

1. Karelian (Finnic, Uralic)

minum akku se kuwndel-ow, a sinun akku ei kuwnell-uh

[my lady DEM] listen-3SG but thy lady NEG.3Glisten.CNG

‘My wife listens, but your wife did not listen [to her husband].’ (Makarov & Rjagoev 1969: 45)

2. North Russian dialect (Slavic, Indo-European)

vodá ta idj-éd, dak vot vodá to éto koljësó to i vert-it

[water DEM] go-3SG so so [water DEM] it wheel DEM also spin-3SG

‘The water flows, so the water also spins that wheel.’ (Russian National Corpus)
• Demonstrative can follow a topic in any part of speech: noun, pronoun, adjective verb, adverb.

3. Votic – noun

mo·nikover se· on tē·, a ke·rittū pe·rze se· on peŋnō sā·ŋki·

‘Der Krumme [dies] ist ein Weg, der gescherte Arsch aber ist der Stoppelacker.’ (Mägiste 1959: 150)

4. Finnish – noun.plural

minunkin lapseni ne pisti jo kädet suoraksi kun ne näki että, …

‘My children, too, stretch their hand when they saw that …’ (Mikkeli dial., Mielikäinen 1980)

5. Lude – pronoun

ku mi·na se suaim me·ttišat kävümäi ka, hi·muoi̱ṯi̱, interešo·vatse a·mbuda he·iD, …

‘When I got to hunt, I was pleased and interested to shoot them [the bears], …’ (Virtaranta 1984: 43)

6. Veps – adverb

Duñan Kuudunjan vaiheţno kunaŋ, a šigoupşa se mida pagiţep ka ei kunu.

‘I listen to D-K, but from there, what he says, I do not hear.’ (Central Veps, Zaitceva & Mullonen 1969: 186)
Beside Finnic and Russian, the similar grammaticalisation path is observed in Mordvin, Scandinavian and Balkan Slavic languages, in which enclitic demonstratives has further developed into definite articles.

The use of demonstrative to as topic marker is also reported in Polish (Cegłowski & Tajsner 2006).

However, such phenomenon is not extensively used in the closely related Belarusian and Ukrainian. Therefore, some scholars consider this development as contact-induced change in this Finnic-Russian context (Stadnik-Holzer 2006, Kasatkina 2007).

Although Finnic languages have long been in contact exclusively with the North Russian dialect, such use of demonstrative is present in the entire Russian dialect continuum.

Yet, Finnic languages without direct contact with Russian (e.g. Finnish and Livonian) also follow this tendency, which rules out the potential of Russian being a donor language and speaks in favour of a wider areal pattern that had already emerged relatively early (Late Proto-Finnic stage?).
• Not only the modern dialects but also the Old Novgorod Slavic dialect (11th–15th century) frequently use this type of markers.

• It seems to be a writing convention to using sentence clitics (e.g., že, ti, etc.) as topic marker in the majority of Birch Bark documents.

7. Old Novgorod Slavic

prisъli  mi  grivъnu  a  Davyдъ  ti  mi  ne  въdalъ
come.PST.PL 1SG.DAT grivna.ACC and [Davyd  ti] 1SG.DAT NEG give.PST.M
velitъ  възjati  u  веънъikъ
order.3SG take at guard.PL.GEN

‘(They) sent me the money: Davyд did not give me, but orders to take from the guards.’

(Birch Bark Document №664, ca. 1160–1180, Zaliznjak 2004: 365)
EARLY ATTESTATIONS

8. Old Novgorod Slavic

\[ \text{jasь } \underline{\text{ti}} \quad \text{pridу} \quad \text{po} \quad \text{velikъ} \quad \text{dъni} \]

\[ [1\text{SG } \underline{\text{ti}}] \quad \text{come.PRS.1SG } \quad \text{after} \quad \text{great.LOC} \quad \text{day.LOC} \]

‘I will come after Easter.’ (Birch Bark Document №380, ca. 1140–1160, Zaliznjak 2004: 301–302)

• Is the clitic \textit{ti} originated from the Slavic distal \textit{t}-demonstrative series? The etymology still remains unclear (cf. Zaliznjak 2008).
POSSESSIVE SUFFIX AS TOPIC MARKER
Across Eurasian belt, possessive suffixes are a common device for marking topic, which was already attested, e.g., in Old Turkic and Mongol, and is still common in modern Uralic, Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic languages (Tauli 1966), e.g.

9. Kazakh (Kipchak Turkic, Turkic)

\[ \textit{mina} \textit{jeki qız-ðɨŋ qaysi-ðɨ źigit?} \]
\[ ['this two girl-GEN which-3.P.x] boy \]

‘Which of these two girls is a boy?’ (SNS)

10. Khalkha Mongol (Mongolic)

\[ \textit{tom ah žolooč, dund ah edijñ zasagč, baga-n barilgačny} \]
\[ ['big brother driver middle brother economist [small-3SG.P.x] labourer'] \]

‘A big brother (is) driver, a middle brother is economist, (as for) the small (one) is labourer.’ (Course material, INALCO)
Most languages employ a 3rd person form, but some languages also use other person forms to control referential deixis, e.g., in Komi (Leinonen 2006), Nganasan (Zayzon 2015) and Dolgan (Stachowski 2010), e.g.

11. Nganasan (Samoyedic, Uralic)

\[
\text{baarbe-ðuŋ hon-ti kobtua. kobtua-re četuami ńeəniaŋku}
\]

master-3PL have-AOR.3SG girl.ACC [girl-2SG.P\_x] very beautiful

‘Their master has a daughter. The girl is very beautiful.’ (Tereščenko 1979: 95)
Most languages employ a 3rd person form, but some languages also use other person forms to control referential deixis, e.g., in Komi (Leinonen 2006), Nganasan (Zayzon 2015) and Dolgan (Stachowski 2010), e.g.

12. Komi (Permic, Uralic)

\[\text{Palaď} \quad \text{pöć-yd-lön} \quad \text{matynźyk} \quad \text{kerka-ys, da} \quad \text{setć-ō, könkō mun-}\text{is.} \]

[\text{Palaď aauty-2SG.P.x}\text{-GEN nearer house-3SGand it-ILL probably go-3SG.PST}]

‘Aunty Palaď has a house nearer hear, and she probably went there.’

\[\text{mi} \quad \text{ordo} \quad \text{oz} \quad \text{ñin} \quad \text{lok.} \quad \text{aćis} \quad \text{mövpyšt-}\text{is} \]

1PL PostP NEG anymore come.CNG self think-3SG.PST

‘To our place, she no longer comes. He thought to himself: …’

\[\text{med} \quad \text{palaď pöć-ys} \quad \text{oz} \quad \text{nerşy} \quad \text{daj} \]

then [\text{Palaď aundy-3SG.P.x}\text{ NEG insult.CNG PTCL}]

‘May they not insult Aunty Palaď.’ (Kozlova 2002: 7)
`The possessive suffixes functionally replaced the attributively used genitive form of a personal pronoun. The suffixes denoting one owner, especially sg. 3., were probably also used as general defining elements.‘ (Janhunen 1982: 32)

• As for the choice of person for possessive suffixes, there is no clear geographical distribution, despite some attempt to propose contact-induced origin for the use of 2\textsuperscript{nd} person form in Tundra belt (Stachowski 2010).
EARLY ATTESTATIONS

13. Old Uyghur (Siberian Turkic, Turkic)

\[
\begin{align*}
built-\ddot{i} & \quad \ddot{u}r-\ddot{ar} & \quad qar-\ddot{i} & \quad u\ddot{c}-ar & \quad q\ddot{i}d\ddot{i}y-\ddot{i}-n & \quad bi\ddot{g}\ddot{a}l\ddot{i} & \quad bol-maz \\
\text{[cloud-3.P\(_x\)]} & \text{blow-AOR} & \text{[snow-3.P\(_x\)]} & \text{whirl-AOR} & \text{frontier-3.P\(_x\)-ACC} & \text{recognise be-NEG}
\end{align*}
\]

‘The clouds blow, the snow whirls, (the mountain’s) end and frontier are unrecognisable.’ (Xuanzang’s biography)

14. Classical Mongol (Mongolic)

\[
\begin{align*}
tere & \quad qoyar-aca & \quad nigen & \quad k\ddot{o}beg\ddot{u}n & \quad t\ddot{o}r\dddot{o}-j\ddot{u}k\ddot{u}. \\
\text{that} & \text{two-ABL} & \text{one} & \text{boy} & \text{be\_born-RES} \\
tere & \quad k\ddot{o}beg\ddot{u}n & \quad inu & \quad \ddot{o}c\ddot{g}\ddot{u}ken\_e\ddot{c}e & \quad gegen & \quad oyutu \\
\text{[that} & \text{boy 3SG.P\(_x\)]} & \text{small-ABL} & \text{enlightened} & \text{intellectual} \\
yeke-s\_\ddot{u}n & \quad yabudal\_iyar & \quad yabu\_yi\ddot{c}i & \quad nigen & \quad bol-bai \\
\text{big-PL-GEN} & \text{actor\_INSTR} & \text{act\_AGENT} & \text{one} & \text{become\_TERM}
\end{align*}
\]

‘One boy was born of those two (parents). That boy became enlightened and intellectual like adults since he was small.’ (The story of Young Brahman)
OTHER TOPIC PARTICLES
• In the Far East, the use of topic particles was already attested in archaic Chinese, Manchu, Old Korean and Old Japanese (e.g. Pulleybank 2010), e.g.

15. Classical Chinese

fu er ren zhe Luguo sheji zhi chen ye
DEM two person TOP Lu nation GEN minister DECL

‘These two men (will become) ministers of Lu at the national level.’ (Zuo zhuan, Cheng 16)

16. Manchu (Jurchenic, Tungusic)

etuhun urse-oci ehe-be yabu-me fafun be neci-mbi
powerful people-TOP evil-ACC make-CONV law ACC violate-IPF

‘As for powerful people, (they), making evil, violate law.’ (Pashkov 1950: 44, MB)

17. Korean (Koreanic)

sayngsen-un tomi-ka mas-i iss-ta  ...所貴乎人者，以其有五倫也。  (Tongmong sŏnsŭp 童蒙先習)
fish-TOP red_snapper-NOM taste-NOM exist-DECL -nun

‘As for fish, red snappers taste good.’ (Sohn 1999: 291) ... what is noble in man (it) is his possession of the Five Human Relationships (it is).’
Sociolinguistically, Middle Chinese as a widely used written language in the Far East is a good candidate for the source of innovation.

The archaic Chinese system of topic particles has been renewed in modern Sinitic languages, but the tendency is still there.

However, the remaining task is to discover what etymological sources for each topic particle exactly are, which should clarify the question of source language.
DISCUSSION

- Archaic Chinese topic markers: 也, 唯, 者, 夫 (Pulleybank 2010)
- Other neighbouring languages in the Far East:
  - Solon Evenki bikki(wi) (< bi- ‘to be’); si (← Chinese shi 是)
  - Manchu oci (< o- ‘to be’); seci, seme, serengge (< se- ‘to say’)
  - Udege tene (< distal demonstrative t- + 3rd person possessive suffix -n?)
  - Nanai tanii (< distal demonstrative t- + 3rd person possessive suffix -n?)
  - Khalkha Mongol & Buryat bol (< bol- ‘to become’)
  - Khamnigan Mongol baigaad (< bai- ‘to be’)
  - Old Korean (n)ʌn 者, 隱, 焉, (픥) > Middle Korean (n)ʌn / (n)un (< ?)
  - Old Japanese pa 波, 知, 也 > Middle Japanese wa / ha (< ?)
Mongolic and several Southern Tungusic languages still use possessive suffixes along with other topic particles.

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<td>Udege:</td>
<td>-ni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solon Evenki:</td>
<td>-nin</td>
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Presumably, the use of other topic particles emerged later than that of the prototypical possessive suffix.

This is also subject to the Chinese influence, which has created a transitional zone between the area of possessive suffix and other topic particles, approximately covering Manchuria.
• Other areas outside Northern Eurasia where similar topic markers are observed:

- **Demonstrative**: Southeast Asia (Green Hmong, Mon, Thai, Phan Rang Cham), Sikkim (Denjong)

19. Green Hmong (Hmongic, Hmong-Mien)

\[
\text{crang}^{55} \quad \text{cra}^{11} \quad \text{nua}^{35} \quad \text{ku}^{35} \quad \text{yua}^{35} \quad \text{tua}^{41} \quad \text{tao}^{214} \quad \text{ka}^{55} \quad \text{tua}^{41}
\]

[CLF knife DEM] 1SG buy come at market come

‘This knife, I bought it from the market.’ (Kunyot 1984: 121)

20. Mon (Monic, Austroasiatic)

\[
\text{hmọn} \quad ?\text{ọewi?} \quad \text{kọh} \quad \text{nùm} \quad \text{kọ} \quad \text{kọọ.cọh} \quad \text{hnọk} \quad \text{tao} \quad \text{pùe.me.lòn} \quad \text{ra?}
\]

[king Alawi DEM] exist OBL glory big stay exceedingly FOC

‘This king Alawi was of great glory.’ (Jenny 2014: 576)
AREALITY VS. UNIVERSALITY

• Other areas outside Northern Eurasia where similar topic markers are observed:
  - Possessive suffix: Nusantara (Old Javanese)

21. Old Javanese (Malayo-Polynesian, Austronesian)

\[
\text{ri} \quad \text{tirah-nya} \quad m\text{-akweh} \quad \text{ka-kayw-an-ya} \\
\text{[in} \quad \text{shore-3SG.P}_x \quad \text{INT-many} \quad \text{PASS-tree-LOC-3SG.P}_x \\
\text{sēkar-nya} \quad \text{sugandha} \quad m\text{wang} \quad \text{ma-phala} \quad \text{ma-tōb}. \\
\text{[flower-3SG.P}_x \quad \text{fragrance} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{INT-fruit} \quad \text{INT-luxuriant}
\]

‘At the river shore, many (plants) have grown into tree. The flowers are a luxuriant fragrance and fruits.’ (The Tale of the Heron and the Crab, Mardiwarsito 1983)
• The agglutinative type of Northern Eurasian languages favours the use of clause-second topic marker (?)


- Verb-final languages, but in the verb-preceding space basically free word order
- Free word order controlled by information structure prominence

• The presence of clitics in clause-second position blocks or disfavours the use of clause-second topic marker (?)

E.g. West and South Slavic languages
The agglutinative type of Northern Eurasian languages favours the use of clause-second topic marker.


- Verb-final languages, but in the verb-preceding space basically free word order
- Free word order controlled by information structure prominence

V2-syntax in Western European languages makes such topic-comment boundary markers less significant.

Cf. Scandinavian V2-languages which use the demonstrative as an enclitic definite article but not as a clause-second topic marker like in Finnic and Russian
Demonstrative

• The use of possessive suffixes and *izafet* requirement in modern Finnic and Saami languages is no longer strict or even have become obsolete, compared to the rest of Uralic languages.

• Russian does not have possessive suffix in the first place.

• After the change from SOV to SVO order under the Germanic influence, the Finnic and Saami languages have a free word order, as in Russian, but in any case no compulsory V2.
Other topic particles

• Sinitic, Japonic and Koreanic languages do not have the grammatical category of possessive suffix.

• The use of possessive suffixes and *izafet* requirement in Southern Tungusic languages seem to be less strict than in Northern Tungusic languages.

• To encode topic in the other way, these languages in the Far East have chosen to grammaticalise other elements, e.g., verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to say’.

• This micro-area could even be divided into smaller micro-areas, based on the source words of topic particle.
CONCLUSIONS

• Neighbouring languages in the aforementioned micro-areas share a preference of what to grammaticalise into topic marker.

• The prototypical topic marker in Northern Eurasian languages is probably the possessive suffix, which is used across the languages of Ural-Altaic agglutinative type and has a stronger tendency in the nuclear Northern Eurasia (Eastern Uralic, Turkic, Mongolic and Northern Tungusic).

• Lacking or obsoleting of the use of possessive suffix might have given a way for other sources of topic marker, i.e. demonstrative in Northwestern Eurasia and grammaticalised verbs in Northeastern Eurasia.
REFERENCES 1/2


Stachowski, M. 2010. On the article-like use of the Px2Sg in Dolgan, Nganasan and some other languages in an areal Siberian context. *Finnisch-Ugrische Mitteilungen* 32(33). 587–593.


