Contact-induced change in relativization strategies in Eastern Khanty

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Relative clauses in Eastern Khanty, an SOV language, are pre-nominal modifiers and clause-initial. Most of the examples discussed in my talk represent non-finite (participial) relative clauses and are by far more frequent than finite relative clauses which are more recent and very rare. Eastern Khanty allows relativization of subjects, direct objects, locatives, instrumentals. Some of the sentences in Eastern Khanty data resemble a string of clauses, loosely linked, often without any overt syntactic indication of subordination (like overt linkage markers, for instance).

Most of the archival texts we analyzed (recorded in 1960s-1970s) reveal the tendency in Eastern Khanty towards the use of nominalized (embedded) subordinate clauses. The majority of the Eastern Khanty examples demonstrate the nominalization strategy when the matrix clause has fully finite syntax while relative clauses are nominalized. These complex sentences gave rise to nominalizers in Eastern Khanty which now serve to productively express neologisms and highly abstract ideas like "childhood", "the past", etc. for which Eastern Khanty lacks nouns.

However, in modern sociolinguistic context Vasyugan Khanty tends to avoid complex sentences and reveals some recent tendencies formed under the influence of Russian. In my talk I will discuss the cases of grammatical convergence which are exemplified by the four recent contact-induced tendencies in relative clause formation.

1) One of the recent tendencies is the relative pronoun strategy of relative clause formation. This relative clause forming strategy places the relative clause at the beginning of a sentence and introduces it by a relative pronoun, which may be case marked. All clausal arguments tend to precede the verb. These relative clauses are headless and this strategy does not seem to mark the grammatical function of the missing head in the matrix clause.

2) The use of demonstrative and deictic particles as an argument of one clause to refer to another whole clause is an important device for indicating some relationship among sentences. The second recent tendency is the introduction of the relative clause by the resumptive pronoun t'u that refers to an antecedent or marks the return to the matrix clause. In prototypical examples we find no trace of the missing head noun while in the latter this position is occupied by the demonstrative pronoun t'u which corresponds to the highly-referring and definite head noun. Probably the head has very specific

semantic content and requires this argument that is referentially identical to it and introduces the relative clause.

3) There are also occasional examples showing embedded posthead but prematrix non-finite relative clauses with no relativizer. Increasingly in the recent data there are examples of the relative clauses not only following the head but also coded by the finite dependent clauses. In these examples of the finite relative clauses their syntactic and semantic features show that these clause-size nominal modifiers bear systematic identity to full-fledged independent clauses.

4) The fourth recent tendency allows overt presence of the head noun both in the subordinate and the matrix clause and is another important device for indicating interdependence of clauses.