Aspects of the grammar of Tundra Yukaghir
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5. Information structure

5.1 Topic

Realization of topic has, to my knowledge, not yet been a subject of academic research on TY, at least not nearly as extensive as the studies on focus. The following basic overview certainly does not encompass all manifestations of this pragmatic category, being only an initial step in studying it.

Judged by the impact topic has on the morpho-syntactic shape of clauses in TY, it is far less significant than focus, never leading to alignment splits or directly determining conjugational patterns as focus does. In the great majority of cases the topic remains unmarked, apart from being placed at the beginning of the sentence. This can be seen in a multitude of examples in this chapter and throughout the grammar, therefore unmarked instances of topic are not illustrated here.

There exist a few devices in TY which do mark contrastive topics. These are the particle *ŋodayane* (835), the suffix –*uolde* (836) and the adversative conjunction *tan* ‘and’, ‘but’ (837).

(835)  *Rjukzakpegi ŋodayane me jukuoluŋi! ‘Jukud’ęya rjukzakpegi!’ čuŋdeγan mod’ę ayal’wejčireŋ. Anaape ŋodayane juorpure me pojuolŋi!*

*  rjukzak-pe-gi ŋodayane me=juku-ŋol-nu-ŋi! jukud’ęya
  rucksack-PL-PERT TOP.CNTR PF=small-be-DUR-3PL.INTR ITJ
  rjukzak-pe-gi! čuŋde-γa-n mon-jeŋ ayal’we-čii-reŋ.
  rucksack-PL-PERT mind-LOC-PROL say-INTR.1SG laugh-DIM-SIM
  anaa-pe ŋodayane juorpure me=pojuol-ŋi!
  mountain-PL TOP.CNTR tundra PF=be.numerous-3PL.INTR

(The father has just explained to his inquisitive son that the newly arrived people were geologists searching for stones in tundra.) ‘But their rucksacks are small. “What small rucksacks [are] theirs!” I thought smiling. And mountains are numerous in tundra.’ (Kurilov 1994:9)

(836)  *Metuolde pudečaaŋle lolya-s-nu-meŋ aq puguodaya.*

*  met-uolde pude ćaaj-le lolya-s-nu-meŋ
  SG-TOP.CNTR outside tea-FOC.ABS boil-CAUS-DUR-TR.3SG.OF
  aq puguol-daya.
  excessively be.warm[GER]-3SG.DS

‘And I was cooking tea in the yard because it was very warm.’ (Kurilov 2001:391, *puguo-*)

(837)  *Tan akaa Semenn’eŋ maarqan qand’e-γa*

*  Tan akaa Semenn’eŋ maarqan qand’e-γa
  and elder.brother Semyon-COM one.GEN cold-LOC

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265 One of the few statements about formatives presumably having to do with the pragmatic function of topic is the conclusion by Krejnovič (1982:228) that the complex suffix –*lede* accentuates the topic of an utterance. In his view this suffix simultaneously gives prominence to the comment, or rhema in Krejnovič’s terminology. I regard this suffix as the marker of relational adverbs (see 3.7.2.3) and do not associate it with the pragmatic function of topic.
‘And with [my] elder brother Semyon I herded one winter.’ (from a narration about one’s relatives)

Emphatic topics can be marked by the modal particle *goll’elk*:\footnote{See also the discussion of emphatic forms of personal pronouns in 3.5.1.}

\begin{verbatim}
(838) Tuŋ köde-ŋa idaraa-neŋ neme-n čuul köjle ewl’et.
      ADL.PROX     person-LOC  future-ADV  what-GEN   meat piece  NEG.be-FUT[3SG]
  Sayane-l-gi   goll’elk    taat ban-te-j.
     sit-GER-PERT  EMPH    so   be-FUT-INTR.3SG

together     herd-INTR.1PL

‘This man won’t have a piece of meat in future. His whole life will be like that.’
\end{verbatim}

(Kurilov and Odé 2012:168)

A clause can have a primary and a secondary topic in TY. The first clause in (839) opens with a proper name denoting a person who becomes a primary topic of the clause. This primary topic recedes, however, immediately, making place for a secondary topic, the person’s stature, to be resumed in the following clause in the form of an emphatic pronoun:

\begin{verbatim}
(839) Iidie, amungi čamuod’erukunek, tudeejelede kötinej.
  Iidie  bone-PERT    čama-ŋol-je-sukun-ek tudel-ejlede kötine-j

  Iidie amun-gi čama-ŋol-je-sukun-ek tudel-ejlede kötine-j
  Iidie bone-PERT  big-be-PTCP-thing-COP  3SG-EMPH  be-fat-INTR.3SG
‘Iidie was tall and stout.’
‘Iidie, her bones were long (lit. “big”) and she herself was fat.’
(Kurilov and Odé 2012:108)
\end{verbatim}