

# Forest Nenets relativization: non-finite forms and their many faces

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## Introduction

Forest Nenets (< Nenets < Samoyedic < Uralic) offers several relativization strategies which employ different non-finite forms. Forest Nenets (henceforth FN) lacks relative pronouns and thus relies on participles, nominalizations and converbs to form relative constructions. The choice of a non-finite form depends on the position of the target on the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977):

(1) Subject > Direct Object > Indirect Object > Obliques > Possessor > Standard of comparison

All the data presented were elicited in Kharampur village, Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, in July 2024.

## Description

Forest Nenets uses participial strategy to relativize subjects, direct, and (unlike Tundra Nenets, see Nikolaeva 2014; Ackerman & Nikolaeva 2014) indirect objects. The participial clause may both precede and follow its head noun.

Subject:

(2) [[wiŋ    ní-m°ńá    čil-**ta**]<sub>RC</sub>    xala<sup>h</sup>ku-m]<sub>DP</sub>    mani-ŋa-t°  
tundra   on-PROL   fly-PT.IPFV   bird-ACC.SG   see-GFS-1SG  
'I see the bird which flies over the tundra' {But not the one over the forest}

Direct object:

(3) [[wera-\*(ŋ)    píł'i-wanta-(ta)]<sub>RC</sub>    wid'i-(**ta**)]<sub>DP</sub>    kał'a-xat°    ŋæ-ti  
V.-GEN.SG    boil-PT.FUT-POSS.3SG    soup-POSS.3SG   fish-ABL.SG   be-FUT  
'The soup which Vera is about to make will be fish [soup]'

As can be seen from (3), the head noun gets possessive agreement with the embedded genitive-marked subject: obligatorily if the subject is pronominal (4) and optionally otherwise (3). Participles, like FN adjectives, may optionally agree with the head in possessivity and/or case.

(4) [[(**pi<sup>h</sup>ta**)    píł'i-wanta-(ta)]<sub>RC</sub>    wid'i-\*(**ta**)]<sub>DP</sub>    kał'a-xat°    ŋæ-ti  
3SG(.GEN)    boil-PT.FUT-POSS.3SG    soup-POSS.3SG   fish-ABL.SG   be-FUT  
'The soup which s/he will make will be fish [soup]'

RCs whose target is lower than IO but higher than Possessor on the scale in (1) cannot be headed by a participle. Instead, a RC is headed by perfective nominalization or converb (some speakers allow variation with imperfective nominalization), depending on temporal reference:

Past, temporal adjunct relativization:

- (5) [[pét'a škola-n° kaj-ʔma]<sub>RC</sub> d'aλ'a-xana]<sub>DP</sub> saša puran° tæmta-°  
P. school-DAT.SG go-NMLZ.PFV day-LOC.SG S. Buran buy-GFS  
'On the day when Petya went to school, Sasha bought a Buran'

Non-past, locative adjunct relativization:

- (6) [[néma-j<sup>1</sup> d'il'e-š°]<sub>RC</sub> kaλwat°]<sub>DP</sub> čukæ-xæt° kuptaŋa  
mother-POSS.1SG live-CVB town here-ABL.SG far  
'The city where my mother lives is far away from here'

Interestingly enough, nominalizations which head the RCs can optionally agree with their heads just like the participles.

The possessors can be relativized with both strategies according to their syntactic functions, but with resumptive possessive affix instead of a gap:

- (7) [kasama [čej tapta-maj-(ta) kaλ°-\*(ta)]<sub>RC</sub>]<sub>DP</sub> to-ŋa  
man yesterday break-PT.PFV-POSS.3SG knife-POSS.3SG come-GFS  
'The man whose knife broke yesterday came'

### First steps towards a unified theory

In this study, I attempt to determine the internal structure and size of participial and nominalized RCs. This proved to be a hard task, as many conventional diagnostics (such as adverbial or temporal tests) failed to produce definitive results.

Despite the fact that participial and nominalized RCs have many common features, they show different island effects. Furthermore, the nominalizations found in RCs have different properties from the more prototypical nominalizations, specifically in agreement and island effects. This may reflect the differences in their structure. I believe this can be interpreted and analyzed in a fashion similar to Northern Khanty non-finites (see Bikina et al. 2022, Bikina 2019, Бикина & Старченко 2019, a.o.).

The Forest Nenets data thus contain both typologically rare phenomena (i.e. simultaneous use of converbs, participles and nominalizations for relativization) and offer several puzzles concerning the structure of relative clauses.

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<sup>1</sup> Forest Nenets nouns look identical in nominative and genitive in possessive inflection

The results of the project “Crossmodular interaction in the grammatical theory: modeling grammatical features based on the data of the languages of Russia”, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University) in 2024, are presented in this work.

### List of abbreviations

Glossing conventions: 1 – first person, 2 – second person 3 – third person, ABL – ablative case, ACC – accusative case, CAUS – causative, CVB – converb, DAT – dative case, FUT – future tense, GEN – genitive case, GFS – general finite stem, IPFV – imperfective, LOC – locative case, NMLZ – nominalization, PFV – perfective, PL – plural number, POSS – possessive agreement, PROL – prolative case, PT – participle, SG – singular number.

### References

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