

Denominal suffixal verbs in Bistrāja Even: evidence for the typology and diachrony of noun incorporation

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Apart from denominal verbalizers with abstract semantics like *-la/-ra* ‘use x’ (1, 2), Bistrāja Even¹ exhibits much rarer verbalizing constructions. In these constructions the verbalizing element is a bound morpheme (affix) that conveys «lexically-heavy» meaning (3) which is traditionally considered to pertain to verbal roots. Such root-like affixes have been studied in detail for Eskimo-Aleut languages (Fortescue 1983; Johns 2007), North American Native languages and especially languages of North-Western Coast (see Mithun 1997; Gerdtz & Marlett 2008), and Chukotian languages (see Kurebito 2001; Kurebito 2017) under the labels of lexical affixation (see Mithun 1997) or incorporation (see Johns 2007). The relationship between structures involving lexically-heavy denominal verbalizers and noun incorporation involving two independent stems is a matter of discussion (see Mithun 1984; 1986). In this paper we label Bistrāja Even denominal verbs with semantically rich suffixal component as affixal verb constructions (see Muro 2008 for a related term).

- (1) *učik-la-či-d-de-Ø*

riding.reindeer-USE-RES-PROG-NFUT-3PL

‘They rided reindeer.’

- (2) *i tak-ra-ri-š sup-u?*

you salt-USE-PST-2SG soup-acc

‘Have you salted the soup?’

- (3) *olla-ma-ri-n*

fish-GO.HUNT-PST-3SG

‘He went fishing.’

The goals of this paper are twofold. Firstly, we study the function of nine suffixal verbs and deepen the understanding of their semantics as compared to previous descriptions such as Cincius (1947). The results of this semantic study enable us to claim that suffixal verbs in Bistrāja Even indeed share semantic properties with the formal class of \sqrt{ROOT} (see Harley 2005). For instance, they denote a specific manner (see 4) or state in which an event unfolds. This means that Bistrāja Even suffixal verbs cannot be regarded as light verbs following Johns’ (2007; 2009) analysis of similar constructions in Inuktitut. On the contrary, Bistrāja Even suffixal verbs have important commonalities with noun-incorporating roots in other languages.

¹ An Eastern Even (Tungusic) dialect spoken in Bystrinsky District of Kamchatka, Far-Eastern Russia (see Packendorf & Aralova (2020) for an overview of Even and its dialects). If the source for language examples is not offered, then the data is obtained by the authors during 2021 fieldtrip to Esso and Anavgay villages in Bystrinsky District.

(4) #olla-ma-ri-n magazin-teki

fish-GO.HUNT-PST-3SG store_{RES}-DIR

Intended: 'He went to buy a fish in the store'.

Interpretation: 'It is like he went fishing to the store'.

Secondly, after establishing the semantic similarities between suffixal verbs in Bystraja Even and noun incorporation constructions in other languages, we test how well the morphosyntax of Bistraja Even constructions match the functional-typological generalizations on the diachrony of noun incorporation constructions' syntax formulated by Mithun (1984). We argue that the commonly assumed development path of affixal verb-like construction from morphologized noun incorporation constructions (see Mithun 1984; 1986; 1997) cannot account for the presence of doubling (5) and stranding (6) syntactic patterns in Bystraja Even suffixal verb constructions. According to Mithun (1984), constructions like (5)-(6) are expected in languages where noun incorporation-like constructions promoting a discursively-salient participant are also present. However, they are virtually absent in Bistraja Even.

(5) ewečə-l-bu olla-mi-ri-n

chinook.salmon-PL-ACC fish-HUNT-PST-3SG

'He caught a chinook salmon'.

(6) egde-m olla-mi-ri-n

big-ACC fish-HUNT-PST-3SG

'He caught a big fish'.

On the basis of available comparative Tungusic data (such as Cincius (1975, 1977)), we argue that while at least some suffixal verbs in Bystraja Even can be traced to noun-incorporating verbs, structures like (5)-(6) cannot be attributed to noun incorporation source-constructions. Nor does the presence of such constructions follow the diachronic hierarchy of NI-like constructions formulated by Mithun (1984). However, we claim that Bistraja Even is not an outlier. The presence of «unexpected» structures like (5)-(6) can be attributed to the influence of abstract denominal verb constructions (such as (1)-(2)) upon certain incorporation-like suffixal verb constructions. Thus, suffixal verb constructions in Bistraja Even inherit properties of more than one source constructions (see Sommerer 2020).

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 — 1, 2, 3 person; ACC — accusative; DIR — directive; GO.HUNT — verbalization 'go to hunt x'; HUNT — verbalization 'go to hunt x'; NFUT — nonfuture tense; PL — plural number; PROG — progressive; PST — past tense; RES — resaltative, SG — singular number, USE — verbalization 'use x'.

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