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Uralic object agreement on the verb
Enets evidence for a topic-marking strategy[1]

1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to present a description of Enets verbal object agreement based on corpora. This is realized on the background of other Uralic languages featuring object agreement.

1.1. Object agreement in Uralic languages

Some Uralic languages are known to cross-reference on finite verbs not only subject, but also one more argument. This possibility is usually restricted to direct objects, and so this phenomenon is known and will be referred to here as object agreement. All languages with object agreement use a dedicated paradigm which encodes both subject and object, but they are uniform neither in the object's features that are marked, nor in the types of objects that can trigger the agreement.

1. We thank the audiences of the Memorial conference of Ariadna I. Kuznecova (Moscow, 2017) and "Syntax of Uralic languages" (Budapest, 2017) for their valuable comments; our presentations at these conferences laid the foundation for this paper. We are also grateful to Larisa Leisiö and Irina Nikolaeva who asked us to fill out their questionnaire on interrogative sentences back in 2016; our interest to interrogative sentences, crucial for this study, arose from that request. Special thanks go to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. Though, needless to say, only we remain responsible for the final version of this paper.

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In Hungarian and Southern Samoyedic (Selkup, Kamas),[2] only the presence of a direct object can be marked on the verb; in Ob-Ugric (Khanty, Mansi) and Northern Samoyedic (Nenets, Enets, Nganasan), the argument's number can be marked; in Mordvin (Erzya, Moksha), the number and the person of the direct object can be marked. While Hungarian, Mordvin, and Kamas allow only definite direct objects to trigger object agreement (with additional interplay with the telicity of the clause in the case of Mordvin), Ob-Ugric and Tundra Nenets opt for arguments which are secondary topics at the clause level. In Ob-Ugric, verbs can show agreement with noun phrases whose semantic roles are different from those typical for direct objects in other Uralic languages, if these NPs are contrived as referring to topics (such as goals, causes, beneficiaries, locations, or instruments); Mansi allows for more semantic roles than Khanty in this respect. Selkup seems to have grammaticalized object agreement to the extent that it is present for most transitive verb uses (though in few cases when direct objects are non-topical and non-specific, it is indeed missing). Finally, some Uralic languages set a restriction on the person of objects that can trigger the verbal agreement, see Table 1.

As one can see from this brief overview (see also Klumpp & Skribnik 2022), the variation in the domain of Uralic object agreement is quite extensive.[3] Therefore, one cannot take for granted that languages which still lack a dedicated description of this phenomenon will be like their immediate relatives or neighbors in this respect. At this time, most Samoyedic languages – in particular Forest Nenets, both Enets languages, Nganasan, and Kamas – lack such descriptions. For these languages, all we know is that Siegl (2013: 375) and Urmanchieva (2017) proposed that Enets could be similar to Ob-Ugric, Wagner-Nagy (2019: 338) described the general trends of Nganasan object agreement as "determined on the discourse level and not on the sentence level", and Kamas texts contain examples where object agreement is seen not only with definite and given NPs, but also with direct objects such as 1st/2nd person pronouns, accessible focal NPs, or formally definite focal NPs (Klumpp 2016: 70).

In addition, the very nature of Uralic object agreement, rooted in pragmatics and information structure, implies that corpora-based research could be significantly more reliable than elicitation. However, for Samoyedic

2. The referenced division into Southern and Northern Samoyedic is meant here as only geographic; the same is true for the reference to Ob-Ugric languages.

3. And this overview is not even complete: e.g., it does not include information on the compatibility of object agreement with various TAM forms, cf. Kamas object agreement is restricted to present, future, and imperative; Samoyedic object agreement is not used with auditive; etc.

Table 1: Overview of Uralic languages with object cross-reference

Language	What is marked on the verb in case of object agreement?	What kind of arguments can trigger object agreement?	Restrictions on the person of the object that can trigger agreement	Source
Hungarian	only the presence of the object	definite direct objects	not 1st or 2nd person, unless the subject is 1st person and the object is 2nd person	É. Kiss 2002; 2010; Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011
Mordvin (Erzya, Moksha)	person & number of the object	definite direct objects (and the clause is perfective)	–	Grünthal 2008; Bernhardt 2020; Toldova 2017
Mansi	number of the object	topical direct objects (secondary topics); including unusual semantic roles	–	Skribnik 2001; Virtanen 2014
Khanty	number of the object	topical direct objects (secondary topics); including unusual semantic roles	–	Nikolaeva 2001; Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011
Tundra Nenets	number of the object	topical direct objects (secondary topics)	not 1st or 2nd person	Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011; Nikolaeva 2014
Selkup	only the presence of the object	any direct objects (though occasionally non-topical and non-specific direct objects do not trigger agreement)	not 1st or 2nd person	Budzisch 2021; Kuznecova et al. 1980
Kamas	only the presence of the object	direct objects, particular properties unclear (though evidently accessible or formally definite focal objects also qualify)	–	Klumpp 2016
Nganasan	number of the object	direct objects, particular properties unclear (though evidently some discourse level properties)	not 1st or 2nd person	Wagner-Nagy 2019
Enets (Forest, Tundra)	number of the object	see below	not 1st or 2nd person	this paper; Siegl 2013: 375; Urmanchieva 2017

languages, only Budzisch (2021) presents such a study for Selkup. (Däbritz 2021: 272–286), which examines whether the accessibility status of direct objects (given vs. accessible vs. new) predicts the presence of object agreement in Khanty, Forest Enets, and Nganasan, is another such study. However, the latter does not provide any conclusive description of the functions of object agreement beyond stating that the accessibility status is clearly not the only parameter in play.

With this paper, we aim to fill the descriptive gap for Enets and to provide a methodological incentive to study Uralic, in particular Samoyedic, object cross-reference in corpora.

1.2. The Enets language and Enets corpora used for this study

Enets is a branch of Samoyedic with two languages: Forest Enets (FE) and Tundra Enets (TE); they are also sometimes analyzed as dialects. Within Samoyedic, its closest relatives are Tundra Nenets and Forest Nenets, and it shares some features with Nganasan due to contacts. Both Enets languages are heavily endangered; at present, only a couple dozen elders are able to speak them.

We have been compiling corpora of the two Enets languages since 2008. They include audio files of naturalistic texts recorded in the 1960s–2010s. The earlier time frame is represented by digitized legacy recordings made in the 1960s–1990s by linguists and Enets speakers alike.[4] The more recent time frame is represented by our own field recordings from 2005–2015, made jointly with Maria Ovsjannikova, Natalia Stoynova, and Sergey Trubetskoy. By the time of the study reported here, the glossed part of the FE corpus consisted of 25 hours (ca. 30 000 clauses and ca. 150 000 tokens) and the glossed part of the TE corpus consisted of 7 hours (ca. 10 000 clauses and ca. 50 000 tokens).[5] All examples in this paper come from these corpora.

4. These recordings were kindly shared with us by the Dudinka branch of GTRK 'Noril'sk', the Tajmyr House of Folk Culture, Dar'ja Bolina, Oksana Dobzhanskaja, Irina Sorokina†, and Anna Urmanchieva.

5. We express our deepest gratitude to all people who have contributed to this collection and to the Enets speakers with whom we have had the privilege to work. The funding for our work of compiling, transcribing, translating, and glossing the corpus was provided by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme in 2008–2011 (at the MPI-EVA) and by the MPI-EVA in 2011–2013.

1.3. Enets object agreement: the forms

In Enets, only object number can be signaled on the verb, and only 3rd-person objects can trigger object agreement at all. Except for direct objects and subjects, no other argument can be signaled on the verb.

Table 2: Two subject agreement paradigms available for transitive verbs in Enets (commas separate free variants, while phonologically conditioned variants are given in brackets)

	Subject paradigm	Subject-object paradigm for singular objects	Subject-object paradigm for non-singular objects (dual and plural)
1SG	FE *-zʔ*, *-zoʔ* TE *-zoʔ*	FE *-a* (*-e*), *-u*, *-b* TE *-a*, *-ɔ*, *-bo*	FE *-n* TE *-no*
2SG	FE *-d* TE *-do*	FE *-r* TE *-ro*	FE *-z* TE *-zo*
3SG	FE *-∅* TE *-∅*	FE *-za* TE *-za*	FE *-za* TE *-za*
1DU	FE *-jʔ*, *-biʔ* TE *-jʔ*, *-biʔ*	FE *-jʔ*, *-biʔ* TE *-jʔ*, *-biʔ*	FE *-nʲiʔ* TE *-nʲiʔ*
2DU	FE *-riʔ* TE *-riʔ*	FE *-riʔ* TE *-riʔ*	FE *-ziʔ* TE *-ziʔ*
3DU	FE *-xiʔ* TE *-xaʔ*, *-xɔʔ*, *-xiʔ*	FE *-ziʔ* TE *-ziʔ*	FE *-ziʔ* TE *-ziʔ*
1PL	FE *-aʔ* (*-ɔʔ*, *-eʔ*), *-baʔ* TE *-aʔ*, *-baʔ*	FE *-aʔ* (*-ɔʔ*, *-eʔ*), *-baʔ* TE *-aʔ*, *-baʔ*	FE *-naʔ* TE *-naʔ*
2PL	FE *-raʔ* TE *-raʔ*	FE *-raʔ* TE *-raʔ*	FE *-zaʔ* TE *-zaʔ*
3PL	FE *-ʔ* TE *-ʔ*	FE *-zuʔ* TE *-zuʔ*	FE *-zuʔ* TE *-zuʔ*

Agreement suffixes of the three Enets agreement paradigms available for transitive verbs are given in Table 2 and shown in the example forms in (1). Any form from the non-singular object paradigm obligatorily includes a suffix specifying the dual or plural number of the object; the suffix goes immediately before the subject-object agreement suffix, as in (1b)–(1c).

(1) a. *pɔnʲiŋa-**r***
FE use(ipfv)-**2SG.SOsg**
'you (sg) use it'[6]

b. *pɔnʲiŋ-**e-z***
use(ipfv)-**SOpl-2SG.SOnsg**
'you (sg) use them (pl)'

c. *pɔnʲiŋa-**xuu-z***
use(ipfv)-**SOdu-2SG.SOnsg**
'you (sg) use them (du)'

d. *pɔnʲiŋa-**d***
use(ipfv)-**2SG.S**
'you (sg) use'

e. *dʲaza-**d***
go(ipfv)-**2SG.S**
'you (sg) go'

Unlike in certain other Uralic languages, the choice of a case of the direct object in Enets is irrelevant for a discussion of object agreement on the verb. In their non-possessive forms, most Enets nouns lost the distinction between core cases due to historical sound changes. In possessive forms, other sound changes led to a merge of the three Uralic core cases into two: nominative and oblique. Nominative is used for subjects and oblique is used for possessors. The case of a direct object is for the most part defined by the constellation of its number and of the person of its possessor: nominative is used with singular objects if they have a 1st-person possessor, and oblique – if they have a 2nd- or 3rd-person possessor; non-singular objects take nominative if they have a 2nd- or 3rd-person possessor, while core cases are not formally distinguished with a 1st-person possessor.[7]

If a transitive clause contains no overt object NP, object agreement has an anaphoric function and is very common, as in (2), though it may occasionally be absent.

(2) *nɛ* *ɛʧe-jʔ* *anʲi* *tɔri* *pɔɔne-naʔ*
FE woman child-NOM.SG.1SG and so behind-OBL.SG.1PL
nɛbo-ro-bi-zʔ, *ɛɛ-za* *anʲi*
run(ipfv)-INCH-PRF-3SG.M mother-NOM.SG.3SG and
*i-bi-**za*** *mɔdis*
NEG-PRF-**3SG.SOsg** see(pfv).CONN
'My daughter also started to run behind us, (but) her mother did not notice it/her.'

6. In round brackets, we provide expressions that have no direct correspondence in the Enets sentence, but are necessary to clarify the meaning. Square brackets are used for translations of preceding or following Enets sentences for which we omit the Enets sentences themselves. Curly brackets serve to provide metalinguistic comments on the context of the exemplified extract.

7. In addition, nominative is always used for direct objects of a verb in the 2nd

At the same time, when there is an overt noun phrase expressing the direct object, the object agreement on the verb can be either present, as in (3a), or absent, as in (3b).

(3) a. *kere-ta* *baza-da* ***tɛnie-za***
FE self-OBL.SG.3SG language-OBL.SG.3SG know(ipfv)-**3SG.SOsg**
'She knows her language.'

b. *rɔsa* *baza* ***tɛnie***
Russian language know(ipfv).**3SG.S**
'He knows Russian.'

1.4. The methodological pathways of the study

The widespread anaphoric use of object agreement presented in (2) for Enets is attested in all other Uralic languages with agreement and represents a trivial case of definite and topical direct objects. However, further research is needed to understand whether it is definiteness, topicality, or any other syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic feature that actually defines the choice of object agreement in (3a), but not in (3b). Therefore, in this study, we focus on those Enets finite clauses from the corpora which contain an overt direct object NP: we take them as a diagnostic context for the functional load of object agreement. We are then interested in the distribution between the absence and presence of object agreement in such clauses.

In our earlier work (Khanina & Shluinsky 2015), based on the same Enets corpora, we showed that the following parameters were statistically irrelevant to the choice of the presence vs. absence of object agreement in clauses with an overt direct object NP:

- lexical verbal aspect (perfective or imperfective),
- the presence of any TAM markers,
- animacy, definiteness, and specificity of the subject,
- animacy and specificity of the object,
- length of the object NP (in number of words),
- contrast between a full object NP and a pronominal object NP.

person singular imperative. There is also a small number of examples where the case of the direct object cannot be explained by the number-person parameters, but they are too few to allow for any generalizations.

At the same time, some other parameters showed a statistically significant correlation with the presence of object agreement: definiteness of a direct object and the presence of possessive marking on it, as well as a non-standard linear order (namely, different from a direct object immediately preceding the verb). However, the aforementioned correlations were far from absolute, and so it remained evident that a real limiting factor – connected to the parameters, but broader than them – was yet to be found.

Given the functions of object agreement in other Uralic languages (in particular, in Tundra Nenets, Khanty, and Mansi; see 1.1), we now take a closer look at Enets information structure. In this paper, we examine the hypothesis whether Enets object agreement is triggered by direct objects that are sentence topics.

For this, we use the classical framework of Lambrecht (1994) as a conceptual point of departure. It defines a sentence(-level) topic as "the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about" (p. 118), and a sentence(-level) focus as "the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ from each other" (p. 207). Furthermore, Lambrecht's (1994) framework also takes into consideration the notion of discourse topic as distinct from sentence topic, defining the former as "pragmatically salient beyond the limit of a single sentence" (p. 117).

In the rest of this paper, we undertake a corpus-based study of the formal correlates of the information structure (i.e. of the concepts 'sentence-level topic', 'sentence-level focus', and 'discourse-level topic'), to grasp the way Enets object agreement works. First, we survey Enets interrogative sentences in Section 2 and check how the presence or absence of object agreement correlates with what is questioned in the sentence. Following Lambrecht (1994) and many other studies of information structure (e.g., Krifka 2008), we use question-answer pairs as a practical tool for detecting sentence focus: a questioned constituent and its structural equivalent in the answer are taken as the focus. Then, in Section 3, we examine non-interrogative sentences. In 3.1, we search for transitive clauses with an overt NP which contain a formal means sensitive to the information status of the direct object; we then explore possible correlations of the presence vs. absence of object agreement with topical vs. focal status of the direct objects as defined by the formal means. In 3.2, we ask how linear placement of a direct object correlates with the presence or absence of object agreement. In Section 4, we investigate the relationship between sentence topics and discourse topics in Enets: we examine object agreement on the verb in contexts where the two coincide in a direct object as well as those where only one of them is expressed by a direct object. Section 5 summarizes our results and compares the Enets case with the rest of Uralic.

2. Evidence for sentence focus and sentence topic from interrogative sentences

From a random sample of ca. 1000 Enets interrogative sentences, we have compiled a subcorpus of 89 Enets interrogative sentences which are transitive and have an overt object NP (66 FE, 23 TE). The subcorpus includes not only extracts from real dialogues, but also retellings of dialogues, as in (4), and questions to oneself, as in (5).

(4) – *ɔbu* *oo-bi-**d**,* *ɔbu* *oo-bi-**d**?*
FE what eat(ipfv)-PRF-**2SG.S** what eat(ipfv)-PRF-**2SG.S**
mod^{j}i *man-ʔ* *n^{j}e-zuʔ,* – *gribi*
I say(pfv)-CONN NEG-1SG.S.CONT mushrooms.R
*oo-bi-z**ʔ**,* *gribi*
eat(ipfv)-PRF-**1SG.S** mushrooms.R
'– What did you eat, what did you eat? I say, – I ate mushrooms, mushrooms.'

(5) *miiro* *kinu-ta-z**o**ʔ?* *ese-n^{j}iʔ*
TE what sing(ipfv)-FUT-**1SG.S** father-OBL.SG.1SG
mu *mu-da-z**o**ʔ?*
PLC make(pfv)-FUT-**1SG.S**
'What will I sing, will I sing that (= the songs) of my father?'

Only some of these 89 interrogative sentences, such as (4), are accompanied by an answer relevant for our study: a transitive clause with an overt direct object. First, most answers consist only of response particles similar to 'yes' or 'no'. Second, some answers are not structurally identical to their questions, e.g., *Where did she go? – She was taken away by those people*. All those answers which are structurally identical to the questions show verbal agreement identical to their questions: the object agreement is either present or absent simultaneously in a question and its answer. Table 3 shows a distribution of subject and subject-object agreement in transitive interrogative sentences (questions and answers are counted as a single token here).

Table 3: Transitive interrogative sentences with an overt object NP in the Enets corpora

Type of question	Subject agreement	Subject-object agreement	Overall number of questions
Questions to objects	42 (100%)	0 (0%)	42 (100%)[a]
Questions to subjects	0 (0%)	8 (100%)	8 (100%)
Questions to other arguments or adjuncts	5 (25%)	15 (75%)	20 (100%)
Yes/no questions[b]	3 (16%)	16 (84%)	19 (100%)
	8 (18%)	39 (82%)	47 (100%)
Total	**50 (44%)**	**39 (56%)**	**89 (100%)**

[a] Including one question simultaneously to the subject and the object.
[b] The few cases of questions to verbs were included in the same category.

So, our first finding is that not a single question to the object from the total of 42 attested in the Enets corpora features a verb with object agreement. This suggests that focal direct objects are never marked on the verb in Enets.

From the 47 remaining questions to anything other than the object, 39 show a verb with object agreement, while 8 do not (82% vs. 18%). It makes sense to further classify these other questions.

Eight of them are questions to the subject, and they all do agree with an object, as examples (6)–(7) illustrate. It is quite logical to assume that if a subject in a clause is focused, the object in the same clause will be topical. If so, these data, limited in number, but strikingly uniform, suggest that topical direct objects are marked on the verb in Enets.

(6) *kudʲi-miʔ* *mu-da-**za*** *ɛke,* *ɛke* *dʲaʔ*
FE which-NOM.SG.1DU take(pfv)-FUT-**3SG.SOsg** this this land
'Who of us two will take this land?'

(7) *nexuʔ* *kare* *ʃiɔ* *ɔ-da-**za**ʔ*
TE three fish who eat(pfv)-FUT-**3SG.SOsg**
'Who will eat these three fish?'

Interestingly, there is one example, given in (8), which happens to be a question simultaneously to the object and to the subject (and where, therefore, both the subject and the object are focused): it shows an absence of object agreement. This is indeed in line with the evidence above from questions to subjects (focal objects do not trigger agreement) and to objects (topical objects trigger agreement): the object in (8) is focal and so no agreement is observed.

(8) *buʔ* *i-bu-ta* *ko-ʔ,*
FE s/he NEG-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.3SG find(pfv)-CONN
ʃee *ɔbu* *ɔ-daʔ*
who what eat(pfv)-FUT.**3SG.S**
'If he does not find (it), who will eat what?'

20 questions query arguments other than the subject or the direct object, as well as adjuncts. Checking agreement in these questions, we see that 15 of them do mark the object on the verb, as in (9)–(10), while five do not, as in (11).

(9) *ɔ,* *pogu-nʲiʔ* *anʲi* *ɔbuʃ* *mɔdisu-ŋ-**e**-**z*** *uuʔ*
FE oh net-PL.1SG and why see(pfv)-MULT-**SOpl-2SG.SOnsg** you(sg)
'Oh, why do you check my fishing nets?'

(10) *nʲii-za* *mii-gone* *ɔɔta-d-**e**-**za**ʔ*
TE child-NOM.PL.3SG what-LOC.SG feed(pfv)-FUT-**SOpl-3SG.SOnsg**
'With what will he feed his children?'

(11) – *taxara-go-ze* *mii-gone* *nexaʔ*
TE dilute(pfv)-DUR-PTCP.SIM what-LOC.SG take(pfv)-**3SG.S**
– *bese-ɔne*
money-PROL.SG
'– With what did he buy alcohol? – With money.'

Finally, 19 remaining questions are yes/no-questions. 16 of these show object agreement, as in (12)–(13), and only three do not, as in (14).

(12) *anʲi* *mu* *ŋa-j,* *kɔdeʔo* *ŋa-j*
FE and PLC exist(ipfv)-3SG.S.IMP owl exist(ipfv)-3SG.S.IMP
ʧike, *kɔdeʔo* *nʲe-**ruʔ*** *tɛni-ʔ?*
this owl NEG-**2SG.SOsg.CONT** know(ipfv)-CONN
'This, for example, the owl, you know the owl, after all?'

(13) – *ne-do* *kaza-ba-**ro**?*
TE woman-OBL.SG.2SG kill(pfv)-Q-**2SG.SOsg**
– *dʲigua,* *ne-jʔ* *dʲuʔa-**bo***
there_is_no(ipfv).3SG.S woman-NOM.SG.1SG lose(pfv)-**1SG.SOsg**
'– [What has happened?][8] Have you killed your wife? – No, I have lost my wife.'

(14) *uuʔ* *te* *nado-ʔ* *mɔru-ta-sa-**d**?*
FE you reindeer antler-PL break(pfv)-CAUS-Q-**2SG.S**
'[The reindeer antlers are broken.] Did you break the reindeer antlers?'

Thus, while the distribution of the presence vs. absence of object agreement in the overall sample of all interrogative sentences is unremarkably even (44% and 56%), the situation is drastically different if the questions are classified into syntactic types. Questions to direct objects stand in stark contrast with the rest: the former disfavor object agreement, while the other types of questions strongly prefer it. This preference is absolute in questions to subjects and next strongest in yes/no questions. So, if the object is focused, object agreement is never attested, and quite probably is impossible. If something else is focused, suggesting that the object is very likely topical, object agreement is most often present.

In addition, placement of the question word in interrogative sentences (both transitive clauses with overt object NPs and any other wh-questions) allows for a generalization about the typical clausal position of a focal constituent. Enets is an SOV language, and question words may remain in situ, but more often they occur immediately before the verb, as in (7) and (9)–(11). This implies that preverbal position can be seen as focal in Enets. This is in line both with findings reported for other Uralic languages (e.g., É. Kiss 1981 for Hungarian, Virtanen 2021 for Mansi) and with a typological trend for SOV languages in general (e.g., Czypionka 2007). We will return to this observation in 3.2 when discussing linear placement of direct objects in clauses with and without object agreement.

8. We use square brackets for Enets sentences which are provided only as translations in the interests of space.

3. Evidence for sentence focus and sentence topic from non-interrogative sentences

In this section, we search for overt manifestations of topical or focal status of a direct object which can be found in non-interrogative sentences and check how the object's information status specified by these manifestations correlates with the use of object agreement. In 3.1, we study transitive clauses with direct objects featuring indefinite pronouns or so-called emphatic suffixes that interplay with the information status of the lexeme to which it is attached. In 3.2, we turn to the word order of the direct object in relation to the verb.

3.1. The overt manifestation of the direct object's information status

An indefinite direct object cannot be a sentence topic by the very definition of the topic (see 1.4). In Enets, direct objects expressed by indefinite pronouns never trigger object agreement, cf. (15). The same is true for direct object NPs with some other explicit markers of indefiniteness, e.g., an indefinite pronoun as an attribute, as in (16), or a (pre)destinative suffix, as in (17).[9]

(15) *kuunaadʲu,* *neɔ-do* ***miigoa*** *sazu-da-**do***
TE how child-DAT.SG **something** sew(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.S**
'Well, you will sew something for your child.'

(16) *jeʃɔ* ***ɔbuxoɔ*** *bare* *kinuʔɔ-**xiʧ***
FE also.R **something** song sing(ipfv)-**3DU.S.PST**
ɔlʲesʲka-nʲiʔ *nɔʔ*
Oles'ka-OBL.SG.1SG with
'They also sang a song with my Oles'ka.'

(17) *ugalʲe-**zo**-do* *teza-da-**do***
TE coal.R-**DEST.SG**-OBL.SG.2SG bring(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.S**
'You will bring coal for yourself.'

Also, Enets has two emphatic suffixes: the insistive with the meaning 'even' (18)–(19) and the restrictive with the meaning 'only' (20)–(22), which are possible only if the item they are attached to is a sentence focus. No direct object marked with the insistive or restrictive is attested with object agreement on the verb.

9. Khanina & Shuinsky (2014; 2020) show that Enets direct objects with a (pre)destinative suffix are always indefinite.

(18) *kare* *lizi-**xuru*** *bunʲi-**d*** *tadu-t*
FE fish bone-**INS** NEG.EMPH-**2SG.S** trample(pfv)-FUT.CONN
'You would not step even over a fish's bone.'

(19) *ʧi* *kaza-nʲiʔ* *nʲi-**goreɔ**,* *nʲi-**goreɔ***
TE so grandmother-OBL.SG.1SG name-**INS** name-**INS**
*dʲaxara-**zoʔ***
not_know(ipfv)-**1SG.S**
'So, I don't know even the name of my grandmother.'

(20) *aga* *te-**ru**-ʔ* *kada-**ʧ***
FE big reindeer-**RSTR**-PL take_away(pfv)-**3PL.S.PST**
'They took only big reindeer.'

(21) *piva-dʲa-**reɔ*** *ɔma-**zodʲi***
TE beer.R-PEJ-**RSTR** eat(pfv)-**1SG.S.PST**
'I drank only beer.'

(22) *neɔ* *name-**reɔ*** *oo-da*
TE child breast-**RSTR** eat(ipfv)-FUT.**3SG.S**
'The child will eat only the breast (= will be only breastfed).'

The only exception is given in (23).

(23) *prɔdukta-**ru**-naʔ* *ʧi* *pɔnʲim-obi-**naʔ*** *ʧike*
FE foodstuff.R-**RSTR**-PL.1PL so use(ipfv)-HAB.**SOpl-1PL.SOnsg** this
'We buy only this foodstuff.'

Thus, all of these cases feature direct objects which are not topical, and object agreement on the verb is absent. Therefore, we can deduce that focal and other non-topical objects cannot trigger subject-object agreement. This reproduces the same observation that was made regarding interrogative sentences in Section 2.

3.2. Focal vs. non-focal direct objects and word order

Finally, the findings from clausal word order further strengthen this observation. As was revealed by the placement of question words in interrogative sentences (see Section 2), preverbal position is focal in Enets. On the one hand, it is not that straightforward to check whether direct objects which immediately precede their verbs and are, thus, focal are not attested with object

agreement. Indeed, Enets is also a pro-drop language and most transitive clauses with overt direct objects have no other lexemes beyond a verb and its object, and so an object most often immediately precedes the verb anyway, regardless of its information status (cf. most of the examples in this paper). Therefore, the linear order is not per se diagnostic for our purposes. On the other hand, a word order contrast between transitive clauses with or without object agreement is still visible. As Table 4 shows, only 75% of clauses with object agreement have a direct object immediately before the verb, while 95% of clauses without object agreement display the same word order. Thus, among the transitive sentences with overt direct objects, a higher ratio of absence of object agreement correlates with the focal linear order of the object.[10]

Table 4: Correlation between the presence or absence of object agreement and linear placement of direct objects with respect to their verbs

	The direct object immediately precedes the verb	**The direct object does not immediately precede the verb**	**Total**
The verb has object agreement	**847 (75%)**	275 (25%)	1 122 (100%)
The verb has no object agreement	**1 345 (95%)**	68 (5%)	1 413 (100%)

Summing up, in Sections 2–3, we surveyed sentences with formal criteria to specify a direct object as focal or non-topical, both interrogative and not. Based on these data, we can conclude that object agreement in Enets is triggered neither by direct objects which are sentence-level focus nor by indefinite direct objects. This partly confirms our initial hypothesis that object agreement is a way to indicate a sentence topic: at least we could show that non-topical objects are not used with it.

Note that this result is more extensive than that received by Däbritz (2021: 286) in his corpus-based study of information structure in Khanty, Forest Enets, and Nganasan. Däbritz (2021) used the practically-oriented framework of Götze et al. (2007) to annotate direct objects in the corpora as 'given', 'accessible', and 'new' and checked for attestations of every type of

10. Note also that in the exceptional example (23), the direct object with a morphological marker of focus is not immediately before the verb, which might reflect some conflicting motivations of the speaker.

direct object with object agreement.[11] He infers that in Forest Enets objects with the information status 'new' never occur with object agreement on the verb, while 'given' or 'accessible' objects are attested both with and without object agreement. Indeed, topical arguments are not expected to be 'new', but focal arguments can equally well be 'new', 'given', or 'accessible'. Therefore, Däbritz (2021) rightly pointed out that Enets 'new', and, thus, focal objects are never cross-referenced on the verb; however, we can now extend the objects that never do so to 'given' and 'accessible' focal objects too.

4. Sentence topic and discourse topic

At the sentence level, we can directly check only that object agreement never encodes focal objects, as we did in Sections 2–3, but not whether sentence-level topics cooccur with agreement. Indeed, we could not find any formal means of detecting sentence-level topics in Enets that we could check for in the corpora. Note that their very absence is in line with our hypothesis that object agreement on the verb is such a means: it would be redundant to have more expressions for it.

However, sentence topics often coincide with discourse topics (cf., e.g., Givón 1983), and a simple text analysis usually makes it possible to determine a discourse topic. In this section, we showcase that most Enets direct objects cross-referenced on the verb are indeed discourse topics (4.1) and minutely study cases when they are not (4.2). We also study discourse-level topical objects which do not trigger agreement on verb in 4.3.

4.1. Object agreement on the verb triggered by a discourse topic

Examples (24)–(26) illustrate the most common pattern: discourse topics as direct objects of verbs with object agreement. They also show that direct objects which are expressed both by a separate NP **and** verbal agreement tend to be secondary topics, as first suggested by Nikolaeva (2001) for Khanty.[12] Indeed, primary, well-established topics are usually subjects, and if they need to be direct objects, they are usually encoded by verbal agreement only, as is

11. Götze et al. (2007) define 'given' as "referred to explicitly in the preceding discourse", 'accessible' as "known from some kind of relational information, the situational context, or the assumed world knowledge of the hearer", and 'new' as "new to the hearer and to the discourse".

12. Nikolaeva (2001) dealt mainly with sentence-level topics, which she classified as primary and secondary. Here, however, we use the same terms at the discourse level.

the case with the dog in (24), which is the beginning of a story about a small dog. (25) is an extract from a longer autobiographical story about a reindeer herder's life (the extract comes from the mid point of the story); this is not a story about a wolf. (26) is the beginning of a story which had an active listener who interacted with the storyteller when necessary.

(24) [Long ago I had a small dog, Pushok. In spring, during my shift, the first calf appeared. It had appeared just in the night. In the morning, I set to check on my reindeer. And him (= the dog), I never tied him up. He did not jump onto the reindeer.]

FE
*ŋike nezi tɔz mədiʔɛ-**za**, mədiʔɛ-**za** anʲi nezi*
this calf so see(pfv)-**3SG.SOsg** see(pfv)-**3SG.SOsg** and calf
pɔɔn periʔ nɛbo-ʃ kanʲi.
behind always run(ipfv)-CVB leave(pfv).3SG.S
'And so he saw this calf, he saw it and went after the calf endlessly running.'

*leuta-**u**, leuta-**u***
call(ipfv)-**1SG.SOsg** call(ipfv)-**1SG.SOsg**
'I call for him (= the dog), I call for him.'

[He does not want to stop. He does not stop.]
*nezi periʔ nɔlʲkuʔɔ-**za***
calf always pursue(ipfv)-**3SG.SOsg**
'He still pursues the calf.'

(25) [Since I became an adult, I have always been a reindeer herder. <...> Once, when I was watching reindeer, a wolf frightened me.]

TE
*saame seixoŋa-**bo***
wolf look(pfv)-**1SG.SOsg**
'I saw the wolf.'

(26) [– There lived an old woman Tulba.]

TE
*– tulba menʲeʔɔ tenʲi-**bo***
Tulba old_woman know(ipfv)-**1SG.SOsg**
'– I know the old woman Tulba.'

It is also common for objects that are expressed both by a separate NP and verbal agreement to have other typical properties of secondary topics. For example, they can have tight semantic relations with the discourse topics themselves, e.g., when the topic is the whole and the object is its part, as in (27)–(30); when the topic is the person and the object is its name, as in (31);

or when the topic is a situation/activity and the object is its essential part, as in (32) (see Nikolaeva (2001: 35–39) for similar evidence from Khanty). Note that quite often the primary topics – in relation to which the secondary topics that interested us are defined – are indeed encoded as subjects (e.g., the preceding sentences in (27) and (31)).

(27) {Speaking of a fish which is now being fried:} [**It** is thick. Now **it** will burn up on the fire.]

	kobaj-da	*pɔna*	*kaʔa-ra-da-**r***
FE	rind-OBL.SG.3SG	then	come_down(pfv)-CAUS-FUT-**2SG.SOsg**
	i	*ɔza-da*	*ɔ-da-**r***
	and.R	meat-OBL.SG.3SG	eat(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.SOsg**

'Then you will take off its skin and you will eat its meat..'

(28) [At that time, my late father lived with us, in the back part of **the tent**, in the uninhabited part of the **tent** {i.e., behind the stove}. <...> I went out outdoors.]

	tɔxo-nʲiʔ	*pade-ʔ*	*ʧuktʃi*	*nɛt-**e-n***
FE	lap-OBL.SG.1SG	flap-PL	all	open(pfv)-**SOpl-1SG.SOnsg**

'I opened all the flaps of the tent.'

(29) {The story is about how reindeer skins are used in the traditional economy.}

	tea	*kaza-ma-xazo*	*koba-da,*
TE	reindeer	kill(pfv)-NMLZ-ABL.SG	skin-OBL.SG.3SG
	peda-da	*kasota-da-**ro***	
	kamus-OBL.SG.3SG	dry_up(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.SOsg**	

'Having killed a reindeer, you will dry its skin and kamuses (= skins from legs).'

(30) {From an autobiographical story of an old woman describing her current life.}

	nɔzum-obi-zoʔ,	*kobi-zo*	*mezo-ɔbi-**zoʔ**,*
TE	process(ipfv)-HAB-1SG.S	skin-NOM.PL.2SG	do(ipfv)-HAB-**1SG.S**

'I process, I scrape the skins.'

peda	*nɔ-ta-**ro**,*	*miigoa*
kamus	scrape(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.SOsg**	something

*sazu-da-**ro***
sew(pfv)-FUT-**2SG.SOsg**

'You will scrape a kamus, you will sew something (from it).'

(31) [**Her husband** was Nenets.]

	nʲi-da	*anʲeʔ*	*dʲurota-**bo**,*
TE	name-OBL.SG.3SG	and	forget(pfv)-**1SG.SOsg**
	*dʲaxara-**bo***		
	not_know(ipfv)-**1SG.SOsg**		

'And I forgot his name, I don't know it.'

(32) [On the opposite bank of the Yenisei there is Lake Kodla, there is Kodla Hill. <...> A Russian man **fished** there. <...> Well, there was a fish factory there in Dudinka, a fish factory. <...> And once a man came with him, his friend.]

	kare,	*nara-noju*ʔ	*kare*	*nɔʔɔ-g-**e-zi**ʔ*
FE	fish	spring-ADV	fish	grasp(pfv)-DISC-**SOpl-3DU.SOnsg**

'Fish, in spring they get fish.'

Another instance are topics defined by communication, i.e., those entities whose referents are directly visible in the speech situation, though not mentioned in previous discourse, as in (33).

(33) {The speaker is holding a pike that he is cutting.}

	tak,	*dʲɔdazo*	*beree-**u**,*	*bɛzi-da*
FE	so.R	pike	disembowel(pfv)-**1SG.SOsg**	intestine-OBL.SG.3SG
	*bɛɛ-d-**e-n***			
	throw(pfv)-FUT-**SOpl-1SG.SOnsg**			

'So, I have gutted the pike, I will throw away its intestines.'

The numbers from the Enets corpora indeed exhibit a very high share of discourse topics among overt object NPs that are cross-referenced on the verb, cf. Table 5.

Table 5: Discourse status of Enets overt direct objects triggering agreement on the verb

The object is a discourse topic		The object is not a discourse topic	Unclear cases	Total
The object is an immediate discourse topic	The object has a tight semantic relationship with a discourse topic			
914 80.18%	159 13.94%			
1 073 94.12%		59 5.18%	8 0.7%	1 140 100%

Note that Table 5 does not include sentences where topical objects are only cross-referenced on the verb, but are not expressed simultaneously by an overt NP. There are thousands of such cases, and if added to the tables, the share of discourse topics triggering agreement as objects on the verb would be even higher – nearly 99% of all instances of the uses of the subject-object paradigm.

4.2. Object agreement on the verb triggered by an NP which is not a discourse topic: a bridging reference relation

Even though they are not very numerous, around 5% of all finite transitive clauses with an overt object NP (and around 1% of all finite transitive clauses) are cases where the object triggering agreement on the verb cannot be analyzed directly as a discourse topic, cf. Table 5 and (34)–(37). However, it is possible to consider all these direct objects as having a bridging reference relation to the previous discourse, i.e., as referring to essential parts of a previously pictured setting or frame (see, e.g., Asher & Lascarides 1998: 83). In the examples below, 'bedding' is an essential part of 'household chores' (34), 'bread' – of 'an extended trip to the tundra' (35), 'polar foxes' – of 'hunting' (36), and 'small clothes' – of both 'nursing a child' and 'doll play' (37).

(34) [As for big shoes, of course, she cannot sew them. She can do mittens, soles for the shoes. And her home is really fine. She would always cook the food, her husband is also always... Her meat is ready.]

	baʔa-d	*nʲee*	*periʔ*	*kɔlta-goɔ-**za***
FE	bedding-OBL.SG.2SG	surface	always	wash(pfv)-DUR-**3SG.SOsg**

'She would always wash the bedding.'

(35) [We went together for cloudberries. I set my net, I had a tent. I put up a tent. I set my net. We caught fish. We caught it, well, the fish. (We set up) a bonfire, well... We sat down to drink tea. And the dog was near us.]

	axa,	*ʧike-r*	*dʲadokoɔn,*
FE	yeah.R	this-NOM.SG.2SG	carefully

mɔdee-bu-nʲiʔ	*dʲadokoɔn*	*tɛxɛ*	*bemo-da*	
see(ipfv)-CVB.COND-OBL.SG.1SG	carefully	there	chief-OBL.SG.3SG	
ke-xoz	*kirba*	*kada-**za***		
side-ABL.SG	bread	take_away(pfv)-**3SG.SOsg**		

'Well, it carefully, I see, carefully, took the bread from near her boss.'

(36) [My son kills geese. He also has a gun. My son has luck at hunting. He kills many wild reindeer.]

	i	*sezoko*	*anʲeʔ*	*kaza-ɔbi-**za**,*	*kare*	*anʲeʔ*
TE	and	polar_fox[13]	and	kill(pfv)-HAB-**3SG.SOsg**	fish	and

'He kills polar foxes and fish.'

(37) [Noine came, Noine. She brought us a child, a boy. It was Zhen'ka, little Zhen'ka. He was white, a small child... So we played with my aunt's child as if with a doll.]

	page-ku-ʔ	*sero-to-ɔbi-**nʲiʔ***
TE	clothes-DIM-PL	tie_up(pfv)-CAUS-HAB.**SOpl-1DU.SOnsg**

'We put little clothes on him.'

Let us now study example (38) which not only gives a further example of a bridging relation, but also sheds light on the ways sentence topics are contrived in Enets and more generally.

(38 = 10) {In the whole text, the speaker passionately scolds younger indigenous people around him.} [Some of our people look only at vodka.]

	nʲii-za	*mii-gone*	*ɔɔta-d-**e-za**ʔ*
TE	child-NOM.PL.3SG	what-LOC.SG	feed(pfv)-FUT-**SOpl-3SG.SOnsg**

'With what will he feed his children?'

In (38), the children are mentioned for the first time in the text, so they cannot be a direct discourse topic. What is the information status of this NP then? On the one hand, 'children' are an intrinsic part of the everyday life of the generation against which the speaker directs his polemics, and so a bridging relation to the discourse topic can be suggested. On the other hand, being an interrogative sentence with a different focused question word, (38) clearly frames 'children' as a part of a presupposition of the sentence: 'one usually has children and must take care of them instead of wasting money for alcohol', the speaker could mean to say. One could advocate that by framing children as a presupposition and thus as a sentence topic, the speaker increases the persuasive and emotional load of the sentence. In other words, here the linguistic means do not merely reflect the reality, but create it.

The subjective agentivity of the speaker in relation to the information structure at the sentence level has also been noted in previous studies of sentence topics, cf. Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011: 194, emphasis is theirs) repeating the idea earlier expressed by Lambrecht (1994: 119):

13. In Enets, the singular form of nouns is usually used in generic contexts.

> The topicality of a referent depends on how the speaker construes the situation with the given communicative context; features of topic-worthiness determine only the **likelihood** for the object to be construed as topical.

To sum up, sentence topics often coincide with discourse topics, but less than a complete equivalence here is expected from the very notion of sentence topic. For Enets, we can conclude, therefore, that in those infrequent cases where discourse and sentence topics diverge, object agreement does indeed encode sentence topics.

4.3. Discourse-level topical objects which do not trigger agreement on the verb

In very rare cases, object agreement can be missing when the object is a discourse topic (though usually only a secondary one). As can be judged from their semantics, all such examples seem to be cases where direct objects are in fact sentence foci, either contrastive, as in (39), or ordinary, as in (40). Since focal NPs never trigger agreement, it is indeed absent from such clauses.

(39) [Then at some time the witch gave birth to a child. <...> And the other one gave birth to a white-haired boy. <...> They moved from that place, and the witch said. She said about that girl: let her leave him (= the girl's son), let him stay on the bank of the river. And as for my child, let her have my child instead of hers. I will take her child. Well, the girl left him (= her own son).]

	pɔrne-da	*nʲe*	*muɔ*
FE	witch-OBL.SG.3SG	child	take(pfv).**3SG.S**

'She took the child of the witch.'

(40) {The woman has been mentioned several times in the previous discourse as meeting the first brother, but the second brother – the subject of this sentence – has never seen her, though has suspected her existence.}

	kasa-za	*sɔjeeʔ*	*ʧike*	*nɛ*	*mɔdiʔɛ*
FE	man-NOM.SG.3SG	only	this	woman	see(pfv).**3SG.S**

'His brother only now saw this woman.'

5. Conclusion

In this study, we have chosen transitive clauses with an overt object NP in the 3rd person as diagnostic for the functional contrast between the presence and absence of object marking on Enets verbs. From what was known about other Uralic languages, Enets object agreement could be expected to occur when the direct object was either definite or a sentence-level topic. In an earlier study (Khanina & Shluinsky 2015), we showed that the correlation with definiteness was only partial, and so we have taken the topic hypothesis as our starting point in this paper.

Our corpus study has demonstrated that Enets object agreement is indeed triggered by sentence-level topics. Let us reiterate here all the logical steps that we have gone through.

- When there are formal indicators that a direct object is ether focal or non-topical at the sentence level, object agreement is never used.
- From all sentences with object agreement and an overt object NP in the 3rd person, 94% have an object which is a discourse topic (usually a secondary topic). If we set no restrictions on overt expression of the object, this figure will rise to 99% of all cases.
- The remaining 6% of cases stand for occasional mismatches between discourse and sentence topics. Most of these represent objects which are in a bridging reference relation to the discourse topic, and thus can ultimately also be considered a discourse topic.
- The remaining very few mismatches represent instances of the speaker's choice to contrive the sentence in a way that would make some argument topical at the clause level regardless its non-topical status in the previous discourse. Such instances argue strongly that Enets object agreement is triggered by sentence topics, not discourse topics.
- Few cases when discourse topics do not trigger agreement on the verb are considered as speaker's choice to contrive the sentence in a way that would make the object focal regardless its status in the previous discourse.

If we now compare Enets object agreement to its other instances in the rest of Uralic (cf. Table 1), it looks identical to Tundra Nenets as described by Nikolaeva (2014) and Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011). On the one hand, this is not surprising given that Nenets and Enets are closely related. On the other hand, Tundra Nenets object agreement was described using only elicited data, and so its future description based on corpus data might bring some additional insights and possible differences from Enets.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	1st, 2nd, 3rd person
ABL	ablative
ADV	adverbializer
CAUS	causative
CONN	connegative
CONT	'contrastive' series
CVB	converb
CVB.COND	conditional converb
DAT	dative
DEST	destinative
DIM	diminutive
DISC	discontinuative
DU	dual
DUR	durative
FUT	future
HAB	habitual
INCH	inchoative
IMP	imperative
INS	insistive
ipfv	imperfective
LOC	locative
M	middle (reflexive) agreement
MULT	multiplicative
NEG	negative verb
NEG.EMPH	emphatic negative verb
NMLZ	nominalization
NOM	nominative
OBL	oblique
PEJ	pejorative
pfv	perfective
PL	plural
PLC	placeholder
PRF	perfect
PROL	prolative
PST	past series
PTCP.SIM	simultaneous participle
Q	interrogative
R	Russian borrowing
RSTR	restrictive
S	subject agreement
SG	singular
SOnsg	subject-object agreement for a non-singular object
SOdu	dual object marker
SOpl	plural object marker
SOsg	subject-object agreement for a singular object

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