REFERENT TRACKING IN EVENKI

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I first met Andrej over 15 years ago, when he invited me to Moscow to give a talk in 2007. It was a formative moment for me professionally, as it reconnected me with the Moscow linguistic community and was the start of what has since become a deep friendship. Our research interests overlap almost completely, and so I was hard put to decide which topic to write about in his honor. But among his many significant contributions to linguistics, his (2011) monograph on *Reference in discourse* stands out as having broad, cross-linguistic impact on our understanding of the marking of reference and information structure. It is a book that I turn to frequently in my own research on understanding reference.

The present contribution builds on that foundational work with a small study of referent tracking and information structure in Evenki, a Tungusic language spoken by small communities who are now scattered over a wide territory of Siberia and northeastern Russia. Information structure has been more thoroughly studied in some other languages (see, for example, Gorelova 2002, 2006 for Manchu; Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001 for Udihe), but less is known about the northeastern Tungusic languages, such as Evenki and Even. The data here come from my fieldwork and folklore texts that were collected in the area of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), where Evenki is most robustly spoken these days. Evenki has a number of linguistic means for introducing and tracking referents. Despite relatively comprehensive descriptions of Evenki (e.g. Bulatova 1987; Bulatova & Grenoble 1999; Konstantinova 1964; Nedjalkov 1997), referent tracking and information structure have been largely ignored.

In Evenki, a referent tends to be first introduced (or activated, following Chafe 1994) with a full lexical noun: a noun, including a proper name, a nominalized verbal form or participle, or a modifier plus noun. It can then be referred to by use of a noun, a pronoun or a zero anaphor. A number of different pronominal categories are available for referent tracking in Evenki: personal pronouns, deictic pronouns and zero anaphora (with explicit person marking of subject on the verb). Unlike some Tungusic languages such as Oroch and Udihe, the use of personal pronouns is not restricted to human and anthromorphized referents. The personal pronouns are given in Table 1:

Table 1. Personal pronouns in Evenki

	singular	plural
1	*bi*	*bu* (excl.); *mit* (incl.)
2	*si*	*su*
3	*nuŋan*	*nuŋartyn*
oblique		
1	*min-*	*mun(e)-; mit-*
2	*sin-*	*sun(e)-*
3	*nuŋan- -n*	*nuŋar- -tyn*

The personal pronouns take case inflection, with the oblique stems, as in *min-du* '1SG-DAT'; Evk *nuŋar-du-tyn* '3PL-DAT-3PL'. There is no grammatical gender. In addition to personal pronouns, subject person is marked on the verb, which thus indexes (and tracks) the subject in discourse.

In addition to the personal pronouns, Evenki has a two-way deictic distinction of proximal/distal in the demonstrative pronouns, as in Table 2:

Table 2. Demonstrative pronouns in Evenki

proximal	distal
er	*tar*

Number and case are marked on the demonstrative pronouns, as in *eri-l* 'this-PL' and *tari-l* 'that-PL' in the nominative. Case suffixes follow the plural *-l*: *eri-l-du* 'this-Pl-Dat' or *tari-l-git* 'that-Pl-Ela'.

As Kibrik (2011: 124–127) discusses, there is a close relationship between 3rd person pronouns and demonstratives cross-linguistically, as evidenced by the fact that the person pronouns often develop from demonstratives (Majtinskaja 1969 in Evenki), the demonstrative pronouns can be used for referent tracking instead of the 3rd personal pronouns.

In tracking referents, the third person is more likely to involve potential ambiguities than the first or second persons. In third-person narration the distribution of anaphoric devices is not straightforward. Continuing topic can be signaled by anaphoric zero, but often is not. Full lexical NPs sometimes occur in adjacent clauses, often with a disambiguating function, i.e. in those situations where there are two possible referents. Elsewhere, the second NP is used for emphasis of some kind (and perhaps for metrical reasons in oral folklore). An excerpt from a folktale, *Ilan nəkunel* 'The three daughters', illustrates the introduction of a new

referent, the young man, and shows how this referent is subsequently referenced in the text[1]:

(1) Ilan nəkunel (Bulatova 1999: 7)

    1. *ta-duː   bəjə   təgət-tʃə-rə-n*
       there-Dat   man.Nom sit-A.Dur-Ra-3Sg
       'There sits a man.'

    2. *soːma ədər bəjə*
       very   young man.Nom
       'A very young man.'

    3. *oːn gun-dʒəŋəː-n nuŋan   sin-tikiː*
       what say-Fut-3Sg   3Sg.Nom 2Sg-All
       tara ajamat doːltʃu-na
       that   well   listen-Cvp.Sim
       'Listen carefully to what he will say to you.'

    The referent is introduced in line 1, a man, with further descriptive information in line 2. This referent is indexed in line 3 with the personal pronoun *nuŋan* 'he'; there is a change of subject in line 4 as noted by the nominative 2nd singular pronoun. In this line, the pronoun *nuŋan* is used as a possessive pronoun: a characteristic feature of Evenki spoken in this region is the use of personal pronouns instead of (inherited) possessive pronouns.

    As (1) indicates, Evenki uses the designated third person personal pronouns (*nuŋan, nuŋartyn*) to track referents. In addition, the distal deictic demonstratives (*tar*) and, less frequently, the proximal demonstrative (*ər*) can be used. Nedjalkov (1997: 213) mentions that this is infrequent, but in some of my recordings, the distal demonstrative occurs with near equal frequency as the personal pronouns in tracking third person referents, not only inanimates, but animates as well. Consider the form *taril* in line 6, example (2):

(2) Speaker (born 1930) addressing N.Ja. Bulatova; recorded in Iengra, 1998

    1. *Pjatnadcataj-duk mun-dulə dəg-ri-xun Anna Myreeva,*
       15th-Abl   1Pl-Loc   fly-Pst-2Pl Anna Myreeva
       Galja Kəptukə taduk   Nadja,
       Galya Keptuke and   Nadya

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    [1] Glossing follows the Leipzig Rules, available at https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf. Additional glosses used here are: A.BREV = habitual aspect of brevity, short duration A.HABT = habitual aspect; AUG = augmentative; PTCP.PRED = predicative participle. (Note that what is a habitual participle *-βkiː* is frequently used in these dialects in a predicative function; Bulatova 1987: 61–62.)

2. *tar   si: bi-tʃə-s*
    that   2Sg   be-Pst-2Sg
    'You flew to us from the 15ᵗʰ brigade, Anna Myreeva, Galya Keptuke, and
    Nadya, that was you.'

3. *Ta-du: su: iɲə-dʒə-ri-xun   ətʃə*
    that-Dat 2Pl laugh-Ipfv-Pst-2Pl after.all
    'You were laughing there after all.'

4. *Ta-du: istado-du: bu: kətə-kun bixi-βun*
    that-Dat herd-Dat   1Pl.Excl many-Aug be-1Pl.Excl
    'There were a lot of us there in the herd.'

5. *βirahi-l su: bi-tʃə-tin.*
    doctor-Pl be-Pst-3Pl
    'There were doctors.'

6. **Tari-l** *ta-du: xaβal-dʒa-ra-Ø=gu?*
    that-Pl   that-Dat work-Ipfv-N.Fut-3Pl=Q
    'They work there, right?'

There is an interesting interplay of person marking throughout, as the
speaker remembers an incident from the past when three visitors came; one in-
cludes the current addressee. The distal deictic demonstrative here is used to refer
to the three referents named in line 1: Anna Myreeva, Galya Keptuke and Nadya
(Bulatova).

Another example is found in line 5 of the following excerpt from a longer nar-
rative recorded in the village Iengra (Republic of Sakha), in 1998. The speaker tells
how she tracked her son down in the woods when he was allegedly fishing and she
suspected him of partying instead. She refers to him in line 5 with the distal de-
monstrative *tariŋiβ*:

(3) Anna goes to the taiga in search of Kolya; recorded in Iengra, 1998
    1. *Bi: tar Kolja-βa guni-ŋnə-m:*
        1Sg that Kolja-Acc say-A.Habt-1Sg
        'I say to that Kolya.'

    2. *dʒarga-ŋna-m-bo bi: lutʃadi:t*
        curse-a.habt-1sg-part 1Sg Russian-Inst
        'I curse him of course, in Russian.'

    3. *Kolja-βa guni-ŋnə-m:*
        Kolja-Acc say-A.Habt-1Sg
        'I say to Kolya.'

4. *Eda araxinaxi-l-ba ə-du: umuβ-dʒa-nni*
why various-Pl-Acc this-Dat drink-Ipfv-2Sg
'Why are you here drinking all these (alcoholic) things?'

5. **Tari-ŋi-β**
that-Poss-1Sg
'That one of mine.'

6. *ətʃə:β-mə:t guni-βki:* ser'eznyj *takoj vid sdelal*
no-Part say-Ptcp.Pred serious such face made
'No, he says, and made such a serious face.'

7. *ollo-mi:-dʒa-na bi: ə-du: bi-dʒə-m guni-βki: Kolja*
fish-Vblz-Ipfv-Cvb.Sim 1Sg this-Dat be-Ipfv-1Sg say-Ptcp.Pred Kolya
'I am here fishing, says Kolya.'

In line 5 the distal demonstrative *tar* is used to index the speaker's son, Kolya. The question is why this form, instead of the 3rd person pronoun *nuŋan*? And similarly, why the demonstrative in example (2). Kibrik (2011: 127) discusses this question, raising doubts about one widespread hypothesis that the demonstratives convey less activated and thus less accessible information (see, for example, Gundel et. al 1993, for this argument). Certainly it is hard to reconcile this hypothesis with the use of the demonstrative in line 5: the co-text shows frequent use of the referent's name (Kolya). In fact, this excerpt is entirely about the speaker having a conversation with him and he is arguably the discourse topic of the entire text. Similarly in (2), the story is about the speaker's recollections of a visit by the three people indexed with *taril* in line 5. It is difficult to construe these referents as less accessible, given or salient in terms of the overall information structure of the text.

Rather, in Kibrik's discussion he advances arguments that the opposite is in play, that the demonstratives are used when the referent has higher accessibility or givenness (Maes 1996), which is a plausible explanation for line 5 in (3), although this does not explain why the demonstrative is **not** used in example (1). In addition, the use of the possessive morphology on the demonstrative adds a pragmatic nuance, something like English 'that guy of mine'; the use of the possessive suffix -*ŋi*- and the personal possessive marker -*β* also index the relationship between the speaker and the referent. While the use of the distal demonstrative might arguably be metaphorically distancing, it is important to add that the demonstrative *tar* is quite frequently used for anaphoric reference like this, more frequently than the proximal demonstrative *ər*, so the idea that its use is somehow emotionally or metaphorically distancing is somewhat fanciful and not supported by the majority of instances; example (2) is typical in this regard. Nikolaeva and Tolskaya (2001: 760) point to the relevancy of animacy for the use of anaphoric demonstratives in

Udihe, noting that it is the distal demonstrative (*u*)*ti* that is used for reference to people and that the personal pronouns and distal demonstrative "are sometimes interchangeable," and "equally permissible when referring to animals."

More research is needed to understand the full distribution and use of personal and demonstrative pronouns in the Tungusic languages; the present study cannot pretend to provide a full analysis. Kibrik's work on reference has laid the necessary foundation to conduct a full-fledged examination in Evenki and related Tungusic languages, which would be particularly useful in helping us understand not only how these different tracking devices are utilized, but how they pattern across closely related languages. It would be particularly interesting to incorporate the insights of his work on multimodal communicative strategies and how they relate to discourse and reference.

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