

PALATALITY AS A PROSODY IN TUNDRA NENETS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some of the phonetic characteristics of palatalisation and non-palatalisation in Tundra Nenets. I argue that palatalisation is best treated as a prosodic property, with implications for place and manner of articulation, manner of release of secondary stricture, and tongue body shapes. The categories *y* and *w* are set up as terms contrastive over CV structures, and exponents are stated for them in the manner of the Firthians [1, 2, 3].

INTRODUCTION

Tundra Nenets is a language of the Nenets (formerly known as Yurak) subbranch of the Samoyed branch of the Uralic family, and is spoken by approx. 25,000 people in an area of tundra in Arctic Russia and Siberia. There are three dialect groups, of which the Eastern one is exemplified here.

The material presented in this paper was collected from Anastasia Lapsui, a Nenets woman who comes from Nyda in Yamal Nenets district, part of the Russian federation. She works as a foreign correspondent in Helsinki.

TRADITIONAL ACCOUNTS OF PALATALISATION IN NENETS

There are essentially two accounts of palatalisation in Nenets. The first one, typified by Décsy [4], treats

palatalisation as a property of consonants: relevant consonants have palatalised and non-palatalised forms. Décsy sets up a system of seven vowels, of which /i e a o u/ occur after palatalised consonants and /i e a ə o u/ after non-palatalised consonants.

In the other account of palatalisation, adopted by Collinder [5], two groups of vowels are set up, one of which invokes palatalisation. Palatalisation under this analysis is an allophonic property of consonants in conjunction with any one from a set of five vowels.

PALATALISATION AS A SYLLABIC PROPERTY

The traditional descriptions of Tundra Nenets contain the following weaknesses:

- they do not give any detail about what the phonetic implications of 'non-palatalised' consonants are;
- they do not describe in any detail the relationship between the presence or absence of palatalisation and the accompanying off-glide as the secondary articulation is released.
- they arbitrarily assign palatality as a property of consonants or vowels.

Table 1 contains some impressionistic records, which were checked for accuracy by analysis of the speech with a sound spectrograph. Particular

attention is drawn to the resonance properties of the syllables, and the ways in which portions of consonantal constriction are connected to vocalic portions. The records were not made with the intention of recording stress, intonation nor duration in any detail.

Syllables can be described as overall more front or more back; and sometimes the frontness or backness is dynamic rather than static, giving rise to vocalic portions of changing qualities on the front-back dimension (exx. 4, 9, 13). Note also that fronter syllables frequently contain consonants written with palatal symbols, such as [c ɲ ʎ j] (exx. 9, 16, 18), which imply

articulations made with the tongue blade rather than the tongue tip. Fronter syllables also typically contain closer vocalic portions than backer ones.

[s] is followed by vowels of rather front quality (eg. 21), but [sʲ] has a very noticeable palatal off-glide (eg. 19), and when final in the utterance frequently sounds ejective as the secondary articulation is released. Other apico-dental sounds also are followed by front vowel qualities (exx. 2, 3).

For many of the backer items, the degree of constriction for the 'secondary' velarising articulation is quite close, sometimes even giving the percept of complete dorso-velar closure.

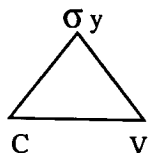
Table 1. Some impressionistic records of Tundra Nenets.

1. mʲɑðəʒ	his hammer	2. mʲɑnəʒ	paw
3. mʲrɛʃe	his foodstuff	4. mʲrɛnəkʲi	seems to be there
mʲɛʃə			
5. mʲuɪəðəʒ	his foodstuffs	6. mʲjɛðəʒŋɑðəʒ	broke something
7. mʲadəʃsɑʲ	present (n.)	8. pʲəðəŋɑkʲi	seems to fight
		pʲəðəŋɑkʲi	
9. ʎɛəðəʒɛʲɪɛ	trembling	10. (g)ʲɪɛkʲ	lazy
11. ʲwʲɔŋŋɑɪɛ	metal button, stud	12. ʎiʲvɛrʲtə	bushy (tail)
13. ʲwʲuɪəðvəʒ	his bones	14. ɲi:ðəʒ	his friend
15. pʲɑlʲi	sword	16. cʉ:	sleeve
17. tʲɑtʲi	elder wife	18. ɲɛbʲɛɛ	mother
19. sʲɑnʲuɪ	piece (in drafts)	20. tʲwʲuʲʲ	fire
21. saŋɛ	magpie	22. jakʲwʲɔ	it itches

There is a mutual dependency between the consonantal and vocalic articulations of Tundra Nenets syllables. The most satisfactory approach to dealing with palatalisation in Nenets is to

treat it as a prosodic feature contrastive over the whole CV 'piece'. ('Piece' is a Firthian term, meaning an indeterminate amount of phonological material, [6].) Fig. 1 shows in graphic terms what is proposed.

Figure 1. Proposed treatment of palatalisation in Tundra Nenets.



The opposing term of *y* (which stands for 'palatalisation') will be labelled $\neg y$ ('non-*y*').

This statement has the advantage that *y* vs. $\neg y$ alternations, which are an important part of Nenets morphophonology [4, 7], can easily be handled.

Table 2. Summary of the exponents of *y* and $\neg y$.

exponents of <i>y</i>	exponents of $\neg y$
overall fronter quality of the syllable	overall backer quality of the syllable
<u>With bilabial constriction</u> Open approximation of tongue body in palatal region, close and front in the mouth; maximal closeness timed to coincide with any complete closure; rather quick release of palatal gesture. Fronter subsequent vocalic portions; relatively closer vocalic portions	<u>With bilabial constriction</u> Open approximation of tongue dorsum at velum, which is rather slowly released, giving backer and generally more open vocalic portions.
<u>With tongue-front constriction</u> Articulations made with tongue blade and predorsum, with the tongue tip down: [j c ɲ ʎ]; followed by a palatal off-glide [s']; momentary articulations made with the tongue tip against the upper teeth, and the tongue body close and front, followed by palatal glide	<u>With tongue-front constriction</u> Apico-dental articulations accompanied by central or back resonance; followed by vocalic portions with generally front quality; momentary articulations made with the tongue tip against the upper teeth and the tongue body close and back.
	<u>With dorsal articulation</u> Either complete dorso-velar closure with a slow release from velarity, [k ŋ]; or more open articulations [ŋ]. Backer subsequent vocalic portions.

Furthermore, the number of *C* and *V* terms which commute in *y* pieces is different from the number which commute in $\neg y$ pieces [7]; thus a structural motivation for this form of statement also exists.

PHONETIC EXPONENTS OF PALATALISATION IN NENETS

Table 2 gives a summary of the phonetic exponents of *y* and $\neg y$ according to place of articulation of the exponents of *C*.

DISTINCTIVE PROPERTIES OF THE PROPOSED ANALYSIS

The proposed analysis keeps phonological and phonetic categories separate, thus avoiding any pseudo-phonetics in the phonology. It also allows the phonology to be accountable to the phonetics, since without an accompanying statement of phonetic exponency, the phonological categories are meaningless.

The proposed statement gives as the exponents of *y* not just 'secondary' tongue body gestures, but also the tongue shapes required to produce the exponents of the *C* terms in a *y* piece, and correspondingly in a $\neg y$ piece. This is done without recourse to statements of allophonic variation.

By treating *y* and $\neg y$ as categories applicable to *CV* structures, and by stating the exponents of *y* and $\neg y$ over the whole consonant-vowel stretch, the question of whether to allot palatalisation to the consonant and spread it to the vowel, or whether to allot palatalisation to the vowel and spread it to the consonant, becomes redundant.

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