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The evolution of the existential negation marker in Nanai

I. Introduction
1) Existential negation
Existential negation in Nanai (< Tungus-Manchu) is commonly expressed by *aba* in the majority of dialects (1) and by *kəukə* in Lower Amur dialects.

(1)   *Kalgama*   **aba**
          yeti   NEG
          'Yeti does not exist.'

2) Standard negation
There is a set of constructions used for expressing standard negation in Nanai. In Middle Amur dialect («Standard Nanai») a synthetic construction for present (2) and an analytic construction for past (3) are the most common:

(2)   *əsi=təni*   *naj=da*   ***ǯobo-a-si***
          now-but   man=PART   work-NEG-NPST
          'But now, people don't work.' (text, 2011, Sinda)

(3)   *bajan* *mapa*   *xaj-wa=da*   ***əčiə***   ***waa-ra***
          rich   old.man   what-OBL=PART   NEG.PST   kill-NEG
          'A rich oldman didn't kill any animals.' (text, 2012, Najxin)

3) The aim of the research
Sometimes the marker of existential negation *aba* is used as a part of a standard negation construction.
     ❖ How does *aba* evolve from an existential negation marker to a standard negation marker?

4) The data used
In this talk, we discuss mostly the data of the Middle Amur dialect that provided the basis for Standard Nanai. The variation across dialects is mentioned when required.
Examples taken from oral texts have a special note in brackets indicating a year and place of recording the text. Other examples are taken from elicitation tasks.

II. The existential negation marker *aba*
1) Semantics

     ➢ existential
(4)   *Mudur*   **aba.**
          dragon   NEG
          'Dragons do not exist.'

     ➢ possessive
     a) *Aba* is preferable if the absence of possession is in focus (and the Possessee is the topic).
(5a)   *Mudur-du*   *xasar* **aba**.
          dragon-ESS   wing   NEG
          'Dragons do not have wings (but they have a tail)'.

b) The use of the caritive *ana* is preferable when the absence of anything is a characteristic of the possessor (the Possessor is the topic):

(5b) *Mudur   xasar **ana***
  dragon   wing   without
  'Dragons don't have wings (and they are green)'.

➢ locative
a) presence in another place (the Subject is the topic): standard negation constructions with *bi-* 'be', ^OK*aba* is also possible

(6a) *Abə, sogdata   dərə-du   bi-ə-si*
  no   fish   table-ESS   be-NEG-NPST
  '(– Is the fish on the table?) – No, the fish isn't on the table. (It is in the bag.)'

(6b) ^OK*Abə, sogdata   dərə-du   aba*
  no   fish   table-ESS   NEG

b) absolute absence (the Place is the topic): *aba*, *standard negation:

(7) *Abə, takto-du   n'oani aba.*
  no   barn-ESS   3SG   NEG
  '(Is you brother in the barn?) – No, he isn't in the barn.'
  including "locative-presentative" contexts (in terms of Hengeveld 1992)

(8) *Əj dalean-du   xaj=da   aba.*
  this bag-ESS   what=PART   NEG
  '(Is there anything in the bag?) – There isn't anything in the bag. (It is empty.)'
  including the sense 'to be absent somewhere':

(9) *Əjniə Maaša klassa-du   aba.*
  today Mary class-ESS   NEG
  '(Who is absent today in the class?) – Today Mary is absent in the class.'
  Cf. Veselinova 2013: 123 on this distinction crosslinguistically.

➢ 'no' (a a short answer), sometimes *abəə*:

(10) *Aba, mi waa-ra-sim-bi-ə   un-ʒi*
  NEG   1SG kill-NEG-NPST-1SG-OBL   say-NPST
  'No, I will not kill! – he says.' (text, 2011, Troickoe)

➢ *Aba* cannot be used to express "ascriptive negation" (= in characteristic constructions):

(11) *Mi ag-bi   gogda bi-ə-si /   *aba.*
  1SG elder.brother-1SG   tall   be-NEG-NPST NEG
  '(– Is your elder brother tall?) – My elder brother isn't tall.'

Table 1. Functions of aba: a typological profile (from Veselinova 2013)

function name	short description	aba	competing markers
neg.ex	Negation of existence	yes	
neg.loc	Negation of location	yes	standard negation *bi*-NEG ('be-NEG')
neg.poss	Negation of possession	yes	the caritive *ana*-construction
no	The negative existential is also used as a short answer 'no'	yes	
pro-sentence	The word used has the same propositional content as the preceding proposition (*V or not?*)	?yes	
disappear	The negative existential is related to 'disappear'	(yes) – the derivate from *aba*	
absent, away, gone	The negative existential is also used with any of these senses	no	
lack	The negative existential also has the sense 'lack'	no	
dead	The negative existential also has the sense 'dead'	no	
destroy	The negative existential also has the sense 'destroy'	no	
nothing	The negative existential also has the sense 'nothing'	no	
none	The negative existential is also a negative indefinite pronoun	no	
without	Use of the negative existential as a pre-/postposition meaning 'without' or as a privative marker	no	
neg.emphatic	The use of the negative existential produces an emphatic statement	no	
not_noun	Use of negative existentials as a negator for nominal constituents	no	
not_be	The negative existential is a general negative copula	no	
co-occurs with 'be'_restricted	The negative existential may be used to negate the copula verb	no	
+ classification	There are different negative existentials depending on the semantic properties of the noun phrase: animate, human, age	no	

➔ *Aba* demonstrates all three core uses of an existential negator (existential proper, possessive, locative) and some more peripheral but crosslinguistcally attested ones; an expected competition with a standard negator in the locative context.

2) Grammatical features

Aba does not fit well in the part of speech classification of Nanai. Three possible interpretations of the *aba*-construction:

         a) *aba* as a noun-like component:

(12)   *mədur-səl*   *aba-či*   ≈   *mədur-səl*   *xasar-či*
        dragon-PL   NEG-3PL   ≈   dragon-PL   wing-3PL
        'dragons do not exist' ≈ 'dragons' wings' (lit. 'dragons' not-existance')
        ≈ A possessive construction, *aba* ≈ the Possessee

         b) *aba* as a verb-like component:

(13)   *mədur-səl*   *aba-či*   ≈   *mədur-səl*   *dəgdə-j-či*
        dragon-PL   NEG-3PL   ≈   dragon-PL   wing-NPST-3PL
        'dragons do not exist' ≈ 'dragons fly'
        ≈ A finite verb construction, *aba* ≈ a finite verb

         c) *aba* as an adjective-like component:

(14)   *mədur*   *aba*   ≈   *mədur*   *daai*
        dragon   NEG   ≈   dragon   big
        'the dragon does not exist' ≈ 'the dragon is big'
        ≈ A predicative construction with an adjective, *aba* ≈ an adjective in the predicative position

This ambiguity is due to the general resemblance of verbal morphology and nominal morphology in Nanai.

The empirical data below: pro's and contra's to nominal vs. verbal nature of *aba*

➢ Optional agreement in person and number

(15)   *Buə*   *əsi*   *xoton-du*   *aba-(pu).*
        2PL   now   city-ESS   NEG-(1PL)
        '(– Are you in the city now?) – We are not in the city now.'

Both nouns (in the possessive construction) and verbs have more regular agreement. Adjectives in the predicative position have optional agreement (cf. Avrorin: 1959: 215).

There is a variation in 3PL between *-či* (used both with nouns and verbs) and *-l* (a purely verbal affix):

(16)   *Nučikən-ǯuən*   *ǯoog-du*   *aba* /   ^{OK}*aba-či* /   ^{OK}*aba-l.*
        little-COLL   house-ESS   NEG   NEG-3PL   NEG-3PL
        'Children are absent (lit. children are not at home).'

➢ Tense (17) and mood (18) forms are derived with *bi-* 'be':

(17)   *Balana*   *siun*   *xosekta-ǯi*   **aba**   **bi-či-či** /   * **aba-xa-či.**
        long.ago   Sun   star-INS   NEG   be-PST-3PL   NEG-PST-3PL
        'Long time ago there was neither the Sun nor stars.'

(18)   *Mi*   *ame-na-i*   *ǯea*   *ǯea-wari*   *əčiə*   *baa-ra*
        1SG   father-ASS.PL-1SG   friend   friend-P.REFL.PL   NEG.PST   find-CVB.NSIM
        oseni, mi   **aba**   **bi-mcə-i** /   ***aba-mca-i.**
        if   1SG   NEG   be-SBJV-1SG   NEG-SBJV-1SG
        'If my parents hadn't met each other, I wouldn't have been born.'

It fits in the "adjective-like" or "noun-like" interpretation: the adjective or the noun in a predicative position requires the copula *bi-* 'be' in all contexts except present indicative.

➢ The verb *bi-* acquires person markers in analytic constructions, while *aba* cannot take them:

(19)   *Təj*   *dalean-du*   *opa*   **aba**   **bi-či-ni** /   ^{OK}**aba bi-čin** /
        that   bag-ESS   flour   NEG   be-PST-3SG   NEG   be-PST
        aba-ni   **bi-čin** /   ***aba-ni***   **bi-či-ni.**
        NEG-3SG   be-PST   NEG-3SG   be-PST-3SG
        'There wasn't flour in that bag.'

Contra to the noun-like status (in the possessive construction the shift of the possessive marker from the Possessee to the verb 'be' is not expected).

➢ It is impossible to derive converbs from *aba*, constructions with *bi-* are used:

(20) *N'oani*   *Najxen-du*   ^{OK}***aba bii-mi* /   **aba-mi*   *əj***
      3SG   Najhin-ESS   NEG   be-CVB.SIM   NEG-CVB.SIM this
      neŋmam-ba   *niru-xə-ni.*
      fairy.tale-OBL write-PST-3SG
      'He wrote this fairy tale while he was away from Najhin.'

An argument for the adjective-like status.

➢ *Aba* can be used as a head of a dependent clause. The head of a dependent clause is expressed in Nanai by a nominalization with a case marker (which depends on the type of the clause) and a person marker (which agrees with the subject of the dependent clause):

(21) *Ase-i*   *ӡoog-du*   *bi-i-du-ə-ni*
      wife-1SG   house-ESS   be-NPST-ESS-OBL-3SG
      mi   *sea-go-ri*   *mənə*   *puju-či-ə-čim-bi.*
      1SG   eat-CVB.PURP-P.REFL.PL   oneself   cook-IPFV-NEG-PST-1SG
      'When my wife was at home, I did not cook by myself.'

Aba also takes a case marker and a person marker in this position (like a noun or a nominalization → the argument for the noun-like status).

The alternative strategy is *aba* + the nominalization of *bi-* 'be' (the argument for the adjective-like status).

(22) *Ase-i*   *ӡoog-du*   ***aba-do-a-ni* /   *aba*   *bi-i-du-ə-ni*   *mi***
      wife-1SG   house-ESS   NEG-ESS-OBL-3SG   NEG   be-NPST-ESS-OBL-3SG 1SG
      sea-go-ri   *mənə*   *puju-či-xəm-bi.*
      eat-CVB.PURP-P.REFL.PL   oneself   cook-IPFV-PST-1SG
      'When my wife wasn't at home, I cooked by myself.'

➢ *Aba* cannot take verbal derivational suffixes:

(23) ** aba-lo-xa-ni*
      NEG-INCH1-PST-3SG
      'he began to be absent / disappeared'

The only acceptable derivational marker is the verbalizer *-na*

(24) *aba-na-xa-ni*
      NEG-VBLZ-PST-3SG
      '(smth.) disappeared'

The verbalizer *-na* is used with both adjectives (*sagӡi-na-* 'to become old') and nouns (*ӡolo-na-* 'to become a stone'), cf. (Avrorin 1961: 18).

Table 2. The grammatical features of *aba* and its morphological status

	verb-like status	noun-like status	adjective-like status
+/- agreement markers	?		**pro**
3PL-marker	**pro**	?	
TAM-forms	contra	pro	
+/- agreement markers in the construction *aba* + *bi-*	contra	contra	**pro**
+/- converbs	contra	contra	**pro**
the use in dependent clauses	contra	**pro**	**pro**
deverbal affixes	contra	pro	
denominal affixes	contra	pro	

➔ The mixed status of *aba* (and the syntactic construction of existential negation): it is most similar to a defective adjective (with only a predicative use), however reveals also some verb features and noun ones.

III. Standard negation

The existential negator *aba* has also some extended uses in different types of standard negation. There is a great variation across dialects:
- Standard negation constructions with *aba* in Bikin Nanai – behave in quite a predictable way;
- The past tense negation construction with *aba* in Amur dialects – is of interest in crosslinguistic perspective.

1) The use of aba in standard negation constructions in Bikin Nanai (according to the short grammar description Sem 1976)
  ➢ *Aba* is used as a pleonastic element with all types of negation forms, except prohibitives (cf. the negation marker *-si* in (25)).
  ➢ In this use *aba* behaves as a particle: no inflection, no morphological / syntactic changes in the initial negation construction.
  ➢ With synthetic negation forms – optional, with analytic negation forms (with auxiliaries *bi-* 'be' and *oda-* 'do; become') – obligatory.
  ➢ It can take a reduced form *ab*.

(25) *Xuə=də   ab   čik-si*
      plank.bed=PART NEG   fit-NPST.NEG
    '(He) does not fit in the plank-bed!' ([Sem 1976], text 2)
  ➢ In a more general grammaticalization perspective:
    - The *aba*-construction can be considered in terms of Jespersen's double negation cycle (cf. Jespersen 1917; Auwera 2009; Larrivée, Ingham 2011 among oth.).
    - The *aba*-construction can be considered in terms of Croft's existential negation cycle (Croft 1991):

Table 3. Croft's cycle of negation: ...A>B>C>A...

	existential negation	standard negation
type A	verbal negator	verbal negator
type B	existential negator	verbal negator
type C	existential negator	existential negator

The intermediate stage B>C, "reinforcement": the existential *aba* "reinforces" the initial form of standard negation, cf. the discussion in (Hölzl 2015).

2a) A standard negation construction with aba in Amur Nanai
Aba can be used in a standard negation construction in Amur Nanai:
simultaneous converb + (the emphatic particle =*da*/*də*) + *aba*-(person-number marker)
V-CVB.SIM(=*da*/*də*) *aba*-(*ni*)

(26) *Mi   čisəniə   ʒobo-m(=da)   aba-(i).*
      1SG   yesterday   work-CVB.SIM.SG=PART   NEG-1SG
    'I didn't work yesterday.'

This construction is used as a default marker of negation with reference to past in Upper Amur dialect. Speakers of Middle Amur dialect use it occasionally but consider it acceptable. Speakers of Lower Amur dialect don't accept this construction at all (in this dialect *aba* is not used as an existential negator either).

> A shorten form of the converb is used more often: *ǯobom=da aba* (sometimes *ǯobom'=da aba*) instead of *ǯobomi(=da) aba*.

> *Aba* can take person-number markers which are optional:

(27) *n'oani ǯobo-m=da   aba-(ni)*
     3SG   work-CVB.SIM.SG=PART   NEG-3SG
     '(S)he didn't work.'

(28) *buə   ǯobo-m=da   aba-(pu)*
     1PL   work-CVB.SIM.SG=PART   NEG-1PL
     'We didn't work.'

> If the subject is plural, the plural form of the converb can be used, but the singular form is still more preferable (?the evidence of grammaticalization?):

(29) *buə   ǯobo-mar(i)(=da)   aba-(pu)*
     1PL   work-CVB.SIM.PL=PART   NEG-1PL
     'We didn't work.'

> The particle can be omitted:

(30) [OK]*N'oani   ǯobo-mi   aba-(ni).*
     3SG   work-CVB.SIM.SG   NEG-3SG
     'He didn't work.'

The use of the construction V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba* can be interpreted at the first glance in terms of (Croft 1991) as a stage of evolution of an existential negator to a standard one.

It could illustrate the intermediate type B>C (see Table 3 above) called "gradual substitution in only part of verbal system". It means that the existential marker *aba* replaced the verbal marker only in this part of system — in the past tense in declarative sentences (and the possible way of its further evolution is the extension to the whole verbal system).

However this case differs considerably from the case observed e.g. in Bikin Nanai (see above).

Another perspective is also possible:

- V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba* emerges not to fulfill a lacune in a system of standard negation. It is initially just a negative counterpart of an analytic construction V-CVB.SIM *bi-* (lit. 'to be while doing'), in which the existential negator (*aba*) appears "legitimately".

2b) An analytic construction with bi- in Amur Nanai

The analytic construction V-CVB.SIM *bi-* expresses the progressive and some related meanings (cf. Avrorin 1981: 91):

(31) *Mori-ni   əm   boa-du   oni   kera-do-a-ni*
     horse-3SG   one   place-ESS   river   bank-ESS-OBL-3SG
     ili-si-mia   bi-i-ni
     stand-IPFV-CVB.SIM.SG   be-NPST-3SG
     '(Then he saw): the horse is standing at one place on the river bank.'

(32) *Mi   ǯok-či   ǯi-ǯu-xən-du-j-ə   mi   piktə-i*
     1SG   house-DIR   come-REP-PST-DAT-1SG-OBL   1SG   daughter-1SG
     bičxə-wə   bičxə-lə-mi   bi-či-ni.
     letter-OBL   letter-VBLZ-CVB.SIM.SG   be-PST-3SG
     'When I came home my daughter was writing a letter (at that moment).'

Aba is a negative counterpart of the existential *bi-* 'be'.

Therefore V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) **aba**- is a negative counterpart of V-CVB.SIM **bi-**[1]

NB the form V-CVB.SIM *biəsi-* (*be*-NEG) is forbidden.

➢ An additional evidence**:**

The analytic construction V-CVB.SIM *bi-* is spread mostly in Upper Amur dialects + Hezhe (Chinese Nanai), cf. (Zhang et al. 1989: 60–65). Speakers of Middle Amur dialect use this construction occasionally. The same picture is observed for the construction V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba-* (see 2a) above)[2].

➢ Similar cases which go beyond the schema proposed in (Croft 1991) are discussed in (Veselinova 2014) for Slavonic and Polynesian:

Bulgarian and Macedonian: the existential construction with *njama/nema* 'there is no…' (the frozen form of NEG+ the verb 'have') expresses standard negation in the future tense.

Old Church Slavonic: the similar affirmative construction *iměti* 'have' + INF with the meaning of the future tense is attested.

The future negator in Bulgarian and Macedonian is rather a counterpart of this affirmative *have*-construction, so it does not fit well in Croft's cycle.

CONTRA this interpretation (?):

➢ The apparent inconsistency in TAM-interpretation between V-CVB.SIM *bi-* and V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba*-.

V-CVB.SIM *bi-*

The affirmative analytic construction V-CVB.SIM *bi-* can refer both to present (the present form of *bi-*, cf. (31)) and to past (the past form of *bi-*, cf. (32)).

The aspectual interpretation is progressive.

V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba-*

The negative construction V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) *aba-* is used only with reference to past. Mophologically however it is the counterpart of the present (!) form of V-CVB.SIM *bi-* (*aba bičini* is expected for past, (33)).

(33) **N'oani   bičxə-wə   bicxə-lə-mi=də   aba   bi-či-ni.*
       3SG   letter-OBL   letter-VBLZ-CVB.SIM.SG=PART   NEG   be-PST-3SG
       'He didn't write a letter.'

No progressive semantics. No clear aspectual meaning at all.

- Upper Amur dialect: the main past tense negator, it covers all aspectual contexts;

- Middle Amur dialect:

One of three competing past tense negators, the most marginal one. The choice of it is determined rather pragmatically (emphatic contexts, cf. Avrorin 1961: 108). Different aspectual interpretations are available, the perfect context seems to be especially preferable (NB! it needs further investigation):

(34) *Gəə,   əsi   buə   xaj-wa=daa   waa-mari=da   aba-pu*
       mm   now   1PL   what-OBL=PART   kill-CVB.SIM.PL=PART   NEG-1PL
       'So now we have killed nothing'. (text from (Avrorin 1986))

(35) *Ixərə žəgdə-j   mi:təni   xaj-wa=da   ičə-m=da   aba-i*
       light burn-NPST   1SG=but   what-OBL=PART   see-CVB.SIM.SG=PART   NEG-1SG
       'The light is on, but I have not noticed anything'.

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[1] However, the existential *bi-* is prohibited in present unlike *bi-*in the affirmative analytic construction:

(i)   mədur   aba   *bi-i
           dragon   NEG   be-NPST
           'Dragons don't exist.'

[2] We don't know anything about the use of V-CVB.SIM(=*da*) **aba**- construction in Hezhe.

➢ Therefore: semantic shifts in comparison to the affirmative counterpart

Present > Past

Progressive > No aspectual distinctions

The perfect context is preferable

    ➢ The possible explanations:

The stative nature of negation, aspectual meanings are less distinctive under negation (Schmid 1980; Auwera, Miestamo 2011).

Not so much the semantics itself, but the "inner form" of the construction plays a role:

- affirmative: lit. *the hunter is present while killing them* – 'a hunter is killing them';
- negative: lit. *the hunter is absent while killing them* – 'a hunter has not killed / did not kill them'.

the absence of the process in the present > no fact in the past;

the perfect context – semantically intermediate between Present and Past.

III. Conclusion

    ➢ *Aba* in Nanai has a range of uses that agrees in outline with typological expectations on existential negators.

    ➢ *Aba* cannot be unambigously attributed to any part of speech class (it reveals some features of an adjective, a noun and a verb), so the structure of the existential construction with *aba* is also not self-evident.

    ➢ The existential *aba* takes part in the formation of standard negation constructions. There are two different types of standard negation constructions with *aba* in Nanai: a Bikin type and an Amur one.

    ➢ The constructions of these two types differ in their grammatical nature.

    ➢ They also differ in the way of evolution. The Bikin construction could evolve according to Croft's cycle. The Amur construction can be considered as an example of an extension of Croft's cycle.

    ➢ The Amur construction can emerge as a counterpart of the affirmative progressive construction with *bi-* 'to be', not due to the requirements of negation system itself.

    ➢ One more interesting point is why the past negative construction with *aba* is formally parallel to the present progressive (!) affirmative construction with *bi-*.

    ➢ Further discussion: possible preconditions for different scenarios in Bikin Nanai and in Amur Nanai

    Why does *aba* penetrate into the system of standard negation in Bikin Nanai more intensively, than in Amur Nanai?

    In Bikin Nanai *aba* in its existential use is a more "frozen", particle-like item, than in Amur dialects: *aba* e.g. does not take possessive markers (Sem 1976: 51); this fact can facilitate its integration into the system of standard negation.

    In Bikin Nanai the dedicated particle *əm*, which is actively used in analytic constructions of standard negation in Amur Nanai, is absent. *Aba* in Bikin Nanai fulfills this gap in system.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 — 1, 2, 3 person; ASS — associative plurality; COLL — collective; CVB — converb; DAT — dative; DIR — directive; ESS — essive; INCH1 — inchoative; INF — infinitive; INS — instrumental; IPFV — imperfective; NEG — negative; NPST — nonpast; NSIM — non-simultaneous; OBL — oblique; P — possessive; PART — particle; PL — plural; PST — past; PURP — purposive; REFL — reflexive; REP — repetitive; SBJV — subjunctive; SG — singular; SIM — simultaneous; V — verb; VBLZ — verbalizer.

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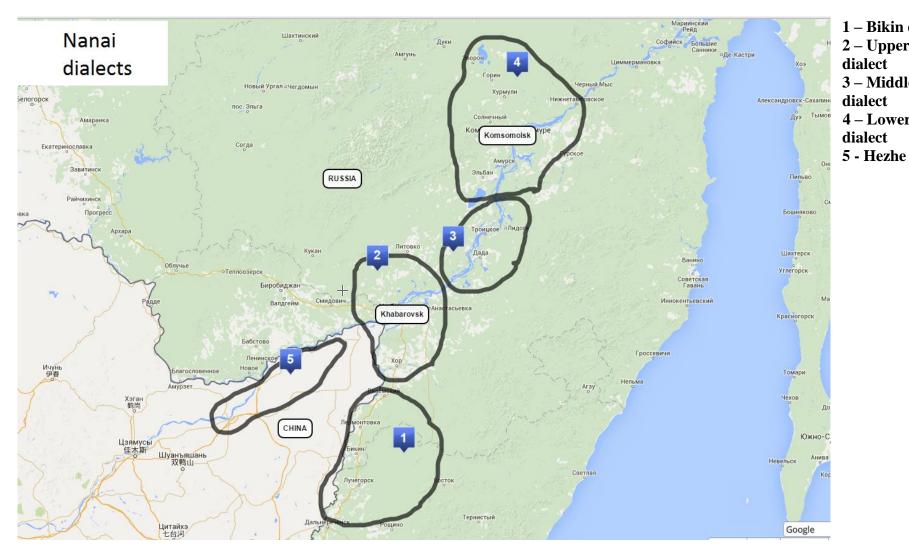
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Nanai dialects

1 – Bikin dialect
2 – Upper Amur dialect
3 – Middle Amur dialect
4 – Lower Amur dialect
5 - Hezhe