

**Direct Object Marking in Eastern Mansi**  
Abstract of the forthcoming Licentiate Thesis  
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My licentiate thesis discusses one part of the effect of expressing semantic transitivity in Eastern Mansi: direct object marking. Mansi (Vogul) is a Uralic language spoken in Western Siberia. Nowadays its Eastern dialects have already vanished. From the typological point of view, Eastern Mansi is a non-configurational language having *case + agreement marking* type morphosyntactic coding: both verb agreement and noun marking exist:

(1)

*jiiw-ty-mø sok juw-tåtø-s-te.*  
wood- PL-ACC all home-bring-PST-SG<3SG  
'He brought all the wood home.'

The four main topics of my study are:

1. In what contexts does verb marking (object agreement) appear?
2. Does it appear alone or is it accompanied by a nominal object constituent?
3. When and how is the nominal object constituent marked?
4. Does possessive marking have a role in the direct object marking system?

My research material is taken from the folklore collection gathered by Artturi Kannisto in the early 1900's and published some decades later (see Kannisto 1951, 1955, 1956, 1958 and 1963), which can be considered as a vast and variable database representing different text genres. The collection includes text patterns from all the main dialects of Mansi. The data used for my study includes more than 2,000 transitivity-related clauses – direct objects, ditransitives and passive clauses – which I collected from Kannisto's texts written in the Middle Konda dialect.

The theoretical basis of my study is the implementation of information structural analyses: I rely mainly on the information structural definitions and terms presented by Lambrecht (1994). I also make use of *Differential Object Marking (DOM)* first created by Bossong (1985) and further developed by Aissen (2003) inter alia. In the most typical cases DOM is applied to languages where some direct objects are accusative marked, whilst others are not. From this point of view, Mansi represents quite an exceptional type of language, where the primary

device for marking the direct object is verbal marking, and the function of case-marking is rather that of complementing.

Mansi has two verb inflection categories: the so-called objective conjugation and the subjective conjugation. The objective conjugation is traditionally defined as the conjugation form for definite objects, whilst the subjective conjugation is for indefinite objects. However, while definiteness is a formal category, to take the topic from the cognitive point of view, I prefer to talk about topicality instead of definiteness. I will argue that the variation in verb marking is based on topicality.

My material shows that the variation in verb inflection is motivated by topicality in a very simple way: the subjective conjugation is for focal constituents, the objective conjugation for topical ones. In the latter ones, zero anaphora expresses high topicality. The role of nominal marking is to specify the object argument or to emphasise it. My material also shows that the variation in DO coding is not primarily affected by an animacy hierarchy as in many DOM languages (see Aissen 2003). Animate and inanimate objects are marked equally.

As mentioned above, a focal direct object is not morphologically marked at all. The focal direct objects are expressed with subjective conjugation and a nominal object constituent in the nominative case:

(2)

<i>nee(g)</i>	<i>öät</i>	<i>uusyöntöäl-i.</i>
woman	NEG	see-PRS.SG3

Highly topical direct objects are only verb marked (zero anaphora):

(3)

*juw-tät-ölään!*  
home-bring-PST.SG<2PL  
'Bring (him) in!'

A topical direct object can also be both verb marked and case marked, if the referent needs to be specified or emphasised:

(4)

<i>öänsyøx<sup>o</sup>-mø</i>	<i>päätt-øš-tø.</i>
bear-ACC	shoot-PST-SG<3SG

'He shot the bear.'

A direct object with a possessive suffix does not get any accusative marking (5), but with certain third person forms we use the so-called possessive accusative (6). The possessive accusative expresses not only the function of direct object but also the person and number of the possessor and the number of the possessee.

(5)

*ääk-øn*                      *komøly*                      *woåxtl-øs-løn!*  
 uncle-SG.2SG.POSS        how                              leave-PST-SG<2SG  
 ‘How could you leave your uncle?’

(6)

*sågrøp-øtääm*                      *kont-øs-tø.*  
 axe-ACC.SG.3SG.POSS        find-PST-SG<3SG  
 ‘He found his axe.’

Despite earlier statements (see Kálmán 1976: 65, Kulonen 2007: 31), my data shows that a possessive suffix does not automatically trigger the objective conjugation. If we look at this phenomenon from the point of view of topicality, it is natural that focal objects with possessive suffixes can appear: if a possessee is mentioned for the first time, it includes a possessive suffix but is not topical: an object with a possessive suffix can naturally appear as a focus as well:

(7)

*oltøn-wity-øng,*                      *suurøny-wity-øng*                      *jälpøng*                      *toågl-äät*  
 silver-water-ADJ                      gold-water-ADJ sacred                      cloth-SG.3SG.POSS  
*nok-posyg-øs*  
 up-wrap-PST-3SG  
 ‘He wrapped his sacred cloth (i.e. one his items of clothing) smoothed with silver and gold on his shoulders.’

A direct object can represent either the Patient or the Recipient/Beneficiary. With a monotransitive active construction the Patient takes always the place of direct object. There are two different active constructions and one passive construction used for expressing ditransitive action. The active constructions are the so called PO/SO construction and the so called DO/IO construction (see Dryer 1986). Also a personal passive clause can contain all the same arguments as a three-participant active clause. Variation in three-participant constructions is based on information structure. There is a certain correlation between pragmatic and syntactic functions: each syntactic role (*subject, object, oblique*) is usually occupied by a certain information structural function (*focus, primary topic, secondary topic*).

The syntactic functions form a hierarchy, and the more topical the constituent is, the higher the position it gets in syntax hierarchy. The subject slot is always occupied by the primary topic, whilst the place of the direct object of an active clause is occupied by the secondary topic. When the Agent is the primary topic, we use an active construction, where the Agent takes the place of subject. The PO/SO construction occurs in situations where the Agent is the primary topic, R-argument represents secondary topic and the Patient is focal:

(8)

*om nää –n tåt –øs –løm nee –l*  
 SG1 SG2 –PossSG2SG bring –PST –SG<1SG woman –INSTR

‘I brought you a wife.’

The occurrence of DO/IO construction is quite marginal: it is restricted to sentences that include a recipient focus:

(9)

*om –nöän pøl eep –øng öänø, eep –øng töäs*  
 1SG-LATPARTIC steam –ADJ bowl steam –ADJ plate

*öät wott –aat*

NEG put –3PL

‘They do not give (in sacrifice) any steaming bowl, nor any steaming plate for me.’

Whenever the Patient or the Recipient is the primary topic, it is promoted to Subject, and the whole clause is turned into the passive voice. Three-participant passive clauses appear particularly in situations where the R-argument is the most topical constituent:

(10)

*nee –tään jår –øl mäj –w –øs*  
 woman –LATSG3SG scraper – INSTR give –PASS –PST

‘He was given a scraper by his wife.’

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