

Syntax of DO-encoding patterns in Moksha¹

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1. Introduction. The talk concerns three basic patterns of encoding the second argument of a transitive verb in Moksha (< Mordvin < Finno-Ugric).

The main features of differential object marking (DOM) system in Moksha are as follows. Firstly, the DO markers can be hosted both by nouns and verbs, i. e. in terms of Haspelmath (2013), Moksha has both differential object indexing and differential object flagging. The NP/DP in the DO position can trigger or not trigger object agreement on the verb. The main research question of this study is whether Moksha O-arguments manifest the same behavioural syntactic properties irrespectively of their marking?

According to some theoretical accounts of DOM in Finno-Ugric languages (see Nikolaeva 1999, Nikolaeva, Dalrymple 2011), the difference in DO encoding can stem from the difference in its structural position. It follows that different NPs/DPs should differ in their syntactic behavior. In our work we establish a set of syntactic properties that are associated with “canonic” DOs (overtly marked, cross-referenced DOs with transitive verbs in clauses with telic reading) in Moksha and compare them to other DO-encoding patterns. We check two types of features: (1) control properties (depictives, infinitival constructions etc.); (2) the changes in the argument encoding under some syntactic operations (in passives, causatives, nominalizations etc.).

2. Moksha DO-encoding patterns. There are two types of verb conjugation in Moksha: “subject conjugation” and “subject-object conjugation”. The former is the only option for intransitive verbs; the latter can be used with transitives. For transitive verbs, the DO triggers not only number agreement (as in other Uralic languages with differential object indexing), but person agreement as well. There are three declension types in Moksha: **basic**, **possessive** and the so-called **definite** one. The following combinations of DO marking are possible:

- (1) a. *son səv-s’ kši / *kši-t’*
he eat-PST.3[SG] bread / *bread-DEF.SG.GEN
‘He ate (some) bread’ (Sub conj + Indef decl)
- b. *son sev-əz’ə kši-t’ / kši-nc / *kši*
he eat-pst.3.sg.o.3.sg.s bread-def.sg.gen / bread-poss.3.sg / * bread
‘He ate (this) bread’ (Sub-Obj conj + Def decl)
- c. *son sev-s’ kši-t’ esə*
he eat-pst.3[sg] bread-def.sg.gen in
‘He was eating (this) bread’ (Sub-Obj conj + PP)

The so-called definite genitive marker on the DO obligatorily triggers subject-object agreement on the transitive verb (1b). Object agreement forms indicate the number and the person of the direct object (they are glossed with O). The NP in the DO position has no overt marker and the verb has a subject conjugation marker in (1a). In (1c) the definite O-argument (marked with the definite genitive affix) is the complement of a postpositional phrase with the postposition *esə* (“anti-passive” pattern).

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Bearing in mind the two patterns (1a) and (1c), contrasting with the “canonical” definite DO pattern (1b), our main question has two guises. The first one is whether the unmarked DO has the full-fledged properties of an autonomous argument and no properties of incorporation or pseudoincorporation (see Nikolaeva 1999, comparing Khanty and Nenets DOM; or Lyutikova, Pereltsveig 2015, comparing two types of DO marking in two different dialects of Tatar). The second guise is whether the “demoted” argument in PP (we’ll further refer to it as *esəP* objects) retains some DO properties.

3. Pseudo-incorporation. The unmarked DO does not exhibit the properties of a (pseudo-)incorporated argument. It can occupy any position in the sentence and can be separated from the verb by any material (perhaps except for the subject DP/NP). It is not neutral for number:

(2) *son sev-s' kał-t / #kał*
 he eat-pst.3.sg fish-pl / fish(sg)

To mean: ‘He ate (several) fishes’

4. The control features. Both unmarked DO and *esəP* objects can control some types of converbs. E.g. they control the attendant circumstance converb in *əz'* (apart from DOs, it can be controlled by subjects and indirect objects):

(3) a. *maša kand-əz'ə gor'ε-z' pajgə-n'ε-t'*
 Mary carry-PST.3SG.O.3SG.S jingle-CONV.ATD bell-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN

b. *maša kanc' gor'ε-z' pajgə-n'ε*
 Mary carry.PST.3[SG] jingle-CONV.ATD bell-DIM

c. *maša kanc' gor'ε-z' pajgə-n'ε-t' esə*
 Mary carry.PST.3[SG] jingle-CONV.ATD bell-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN in

‘Marry carried a/the jingling bell’.

However, only unmarked DO, but not *esəP*, can control depictives:

(4) a. *d'ed'ε-z'ə pic'-i jam salu-stə*
 mother-1SG.POSS.SG cook.FREQ-NPST.3[SG] porridge salty-EL
 ‘My mother cooks porridge salty’.

b. *#d'ed'ε-z'ə pic'-i jam-t' esə salu-stə*
 mother-1SG.POSS.SG cook.FREQ-NPST.3[SG] porridge-def.gen in salty -EL
 ‘My mother cooks porridge salty’.

Thus, while unmarked DOs has the full-fledged set of control features, *esəP* objects do not.

In the talk, we will show the same point on the basis of several valency-changing operations. The conclusion goes as follows: Moksha treats unmarked DOs as full-fledged DOs, while the behavioural properties of *esəPs* are reduced.

References

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