

Fused grammatical functions and discourse roles in Ob-Ugric

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This paper argues that the Ob-Ugric sentence displays a partial fusion of grammatical functions and discourse roles, and this has consequences for the licensing conditions of cases, agreement, and passive. In Ob-Ugric, the subject is also the primary topic, extracted into a topic position preceding VP-adjuncts (1). The conflation of the subject and topic roles is attained by means of a liberal version of passive, involving the demotion of the [-topic] highest argument (whether it is an agent (1b) or a patient (2a,b)), and the promotion of a [+topic] internal argument or adjunct (if there is one). Hence internal argument promotion, i.e., NP movement, is not case-driven; it can also target arguments bearing a semantic, adverbial case (3a,b).

The object is either information focus, in which case it remains in the VP, eliciting no verbal agreement and bearing no morphological case (4a), or it is a VP-external secondary topic, in which case it elicits object–verb agreement (4b) and, in some of the dialects, it bears accusative case (5). In sentences with three arguments (6), the argument with the least prominent thematic role can only be secondary topic if it is promoted to object (6b), in which case the theme argument assumes instrumental or instructive-final case. Promotion to object is argued to be a lexical phenomenon, because the alternative argument structures of ditransitive verbs also encode semantic differences.

In Eastern Khanty, active subjects can also have the oblique case of demoted logical subjects, which marks them as unexpected shifted topics (7). It is shown that oblique subjects are neither quirky subjects of the Icelandic type (because they are not lexically selected), nor ergative subjects (because they also occur in clauses containing an accusative object (7a) and in clauses containing an unaccusative verb (7b)).

It is argued that these facts require the modification of standard case theory and the standard notion of passive. So as to account for Ob-Ugric differential object marking, we have to divorce object licensing, taking place under government by the verb, and accusative marking, taking place under spec-head agreement in a projection of topic function. The distribution of Ob-Ugric locative subjects could best be explained in a Fillmore (1968) style framework, where structural case neutralizes an underlying semantic case. Passivization, i.e., the suppression of the thematically highest argument, and the NP-movement of an internal argument or adjunct into subject position, is not case-driven but discourse-driven in Ob-Ugric.

Examples

- (1)a. **Petra** u:r-na mo:jpər wa:nt-əs (Khanty; Nikolaeva 2001: 18)
Peter forest-LOC bear see-PST.3SG
'Peter saw a bear in the forest.'
- b. Mo:jpər **xoj-na** an wa:n-s-a
bear who-LOC not see-PAST-PASS.3SG
'The bear was not seen by anybody.'
- (2)a. puwləpsi-na e:t-s-a. (Khanty; Nikolaeva 1999: 32)
tumor-LOC enter-PAST-PASS.3SG
'A tumor appeared.' Lit.: '(pro) was entered by a tumor
- b. äk-mäšt kəmnə täwlə-w-s (Mansi, Kulonen 1989: 184)
suddenly man-by appear-PASS-PAST.3SG
'Suddenly a man appeared.'

- (3)a. **Näy** tak mujnēt-nə jɔχt-w-ən. (Mansi, Kulonen 1989: 158)
 you so guest.PL-by come-PASS-2SG
 ‘So guest will come to you.’ Lit.: ‘You will be come to [visited] by guests.’
- b. **Möw** šiw-ən ɔməs-ʌ-a. (Khanty, Kulonen 1989: 185)
 earth mist-by sit-PRES-PASS.3SG
 ‘Mist covers the earth.’ Lit.: ‘The earth is sat on by mist’
- (4)a. *What did you do?* (Khanty; Nikolaeva 2001: 16)
 Ma tam kalaŋ we:l-s-əm /*we:l-s-e:m
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-1SG/kill-PAST-SG<1SG
 ‘I killed this reindeer.’
- b. *What did you do with this reindeer?*
 Ma tam kalaŋ *we:l-s-əm /we:l-s-e:m
 I this reindeer kill-PAST-1SG/kill-PAST-SG<1SG
 ‘I killed this reindeer.’
- (5)a. kom jowt-nyööl wø-s. (E Mansi; Virtanen 2014: (17),(11))
 man bow-arrow take-PAST.3SG
 ‘The man took a bow and an arrow.’
- b. ööw-**mø** öät kont-**il**-ø:m
 door-ACC NEG find-SG<1SG
 ‘I don’t find the door.’
- (6)a. lüw ma-ntem kat qulə-γən məj. (Khanty, Sosa 2017:118)
 (s)he I-DAT two fish-DU give-PST.3SG
 ‘She gave two fish to me.’
- b. lüw ma-nt kat qulə-γən-at məj.
 (s)he I-ACC two fish-DU-INS give-PST.3SG
 ‘She provided me with 2 fish.’
- (7)a. **Lüγ-ən** lüγ-ət wijnat il-wel-tə (Khanty; Honti 1971: 432)
 he-LOC he-ACC deliberately PRT-kill-PAST.SG<3SG
 ‘He killed him deliberately.’
- b. so:rñi-na pos-ij-əl (Khanty; Nikolaeva 1999: 43)
 gold-LOC float-IMPF-PRES.3SG
 ‘The gold is floating down.’

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