

## B.6: Grammatical Subjects and Objects in Uralic

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The concepts of grammatical subjects and objects have interested linguists for centuries, starting with e.g., the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus (2<sup>nd</sup> C AD, Dalrymple et al. 2019: 10 and references therein). However, until this day, there is still no complete cross-linguistic universal typology of the core grammatical relations or even any reliable proof that these, often assumed abstract concepts truly exist in all languages (e.g. Comrie 1989: 104-123). Subjects and objects have been studied extensively in languages that fall under the label of SAE, most notably the Germanic and Slavic languages, yet the Uralic language family lacks a comprehensive picture of their coding and behavioural properties. It is not clear yet, whether these concepts have uniform characteristics and behavioural properties in the Finnic and Ugric languages or whether they are best described language specifically. A recent overview reference volume on Uralic languages (Bakró-Nagy et. al., Eds. 2022) merely assumes the existence of both subjects and objects in the Uralic languages without providing any descriptions of them.

In the SAE languages, the subjects, hierarchically the most prominent of the grammatical relations are considered the arguments that are marked with a certain grammatical case (if the language uses case marking), they have agentive properties and they precede the objects in unmarked transitive sentences (cf. Keenan and Comrie 1977:66), such as shown in (1a), or the sole argument of the intransitive verb as in (1b):

- (1) a. **The cat** was biting **the dog**. ENG  
SUBJ OBJ
- b. **The cat** was sleeping.  
SUBJ

In the Uralic language family, not part of the SAE group, the most comprehensive descriptions of grammatical relations are available for the two largest Finnic languages - Finnish and Estonian, and Hungarian, a Ugric language (e.g. VISK, and Erelt et al. 1993, Kiss 2002 respectively), where the characteristics of arguments that have coding and behavioural properties similar to the ones mentioned above for SAE subjects have been listed as follows:

1. Nominative case marking for the most prototypical arguments (Differential case marking for non-prototypical arguments).
2. Sentences initial position in unmarked clauses (either SVO or SOV).
3. Acting as the default pragmatic topic in the sentence.
4. Trigger person-number verb-agreement.
5. Associated with the Agent/Actor role in the sentence.

For objects, the second prominent argument, the following main characteristic has been offered:

1. Marked by a distinct (differential) object case.
2. Associated with the Patient/Undergoer role in the sentence.

The workshop aims to bring together researchers working within typologically descriptive and various theoretical frameworks who would like to contribute to the discussion on the properties of subjects and objects both within a single language or the whole Uralic language family. Below is a list of possible topics of interest for the workshop:

1. What are the prototypical characteristics of subjects and objects in Uralic? (The marking of the subjects in intransitive and transitive constructions, and the marking of the objects).
2. What categories act as subjects and objects (e.g. noun phrases, verb phrases, clauses, etc)?
3. Are subjects and objects uniform concepts within the Uralic language family (or even cross-linguistically).
4. How do we class elements that show only some characteristics of subjects and objects? Or the elements that show characteristics of both subjects and objects?
5. Similarities and differences of subjects and objects in Uralic and in SAE.
6. The relationship between grammatical relations and topic and focus functions.
7. Agreement and subjects and objects.
8. Word order – unmarked word order, factors affecting word order variations.
9. The factors affecting the assignment of grammatical roles to a noun phrase in a sentence (e.g. animacy, agency etc).
10. Syntactic processes affecting the assignment of grammatical relations (e.g. passivisation).
11. Subjects and objects as pivots, e.g. in control and raising constructions.
12. Pro-forms as subjects and objects, including inclusive and exclusive pronouns.
13. How are non-prototypical subjects and objects marked (e.g. indefiniteness of the subjects)?
14. Is it more correct to describe the syntactic structure of the Uralic languages using the grammatical or pragmatic relations (subject and object vs topic and focus)?

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