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Dative sentence patterns in Slavic and Circum-Baltic languages

The paper is addressed sentence patterns with dative marking on the semantic subject in Slavic and Circum-Baltic languages. These sentence patterns normally lack overt syntactic subjects in the nominative case. If a nominative NP is present in a dative sentence pattern of the Slavic/Circum-Baltic type, it often displays features specific of syntactic objects rather than those of syntactic subjects. This parameter known as ‘Nominative Object Parameter’ is an areal feature of Circum-Baltic languages: it is attested in Latvian, Modern Icelandic and elsewhere. The language sampling includes Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Old Church Slavonic and other Slavic and Baltic languages. For the typological and areal comparison it is necessary to examine close parallels in Old Swedish, Old Icelandic [Zimmerling 1992] and Modern Icelandic [Sigurðsson 2002].

I am focusing on three types of dative sentence patterns and classify them depending on the morphology of the predicative component. In type a) the predicative nucleus (the head of the predicative group) is represented by an infinitive. In type b) the predicative nucleus is represented by a non-agreeing nominal predicate called slovo kategorii sostojanija (lit. ‘Category-of-State form’) in the Russian tradition [Schjerba 1974], [Vinogradov 1947]. In type c) the predicative nucleus is represented by a secondary verbal form.

Type a) Rus. грузовикам здесь нет проезда.
Truck-Dat.Pl here  no go.through-Inf
“The trucks can not go through here”.

Rus. нам еще тренироваться и тренироваться.
We-Dat.Pl. still practice-Inf and practice-Inf  
“We have to practice even more”.

Type b) Rus. Мне было грустно.
I-Dat.Sg. Aux.Past-3Sg.N sad-Pred
“I felt sad”.

Type c). Lat. Man (ir) jālasa grāmata.
I-Dat.Sg. (Aux 3p.Pres) JĀ.Mod.+read-3p.Pres. book-NomSg
“I must read a book”, lit. «to-me has-to-read book».

Patterns of the type a) are identified as Dative-Infinitive Structures (DIS). Patterns of the type b) are identified as Dative-Predicative Structures (DPS). DIS sentences ([N$_{\text{dat}}$ — V$_{\text{inf}}$]) are traced back to the Common Slavic period, though their frequency in different parts of the Slavic world varies [Mrazek 1963]. DPS sentences ([N$_{\text{dat}}$ — V$_{\text{link}}$ — Pred]) were earlier described as unique for Modern Russian [Issachenko 1955], but I prove they are also attested in Ukrainian, Czech [Zatovkaňuk 1965], Bulgarian, Serbo-Croat, Old Icelandic, Old Swedish, Modern Icelandic, possibly in Lithuanian. Most of these languages have or have earlier had productive word-building mechanisms deriving nominal predicatives from a subclass of adjectives. In Germanic, it is strong adjectives, in Slavic and Baltic it is short adjectives: the ending of Nom-Acc. Sg. N. is the most common marker of predicatives in Germanic, Baltic and Slavic areas [Zimmerling 1998].

Patterns of type c) are attested only in Latvian: this language grammaticalized a modal construction, the so called debitive. The Latvian debitive is neither mood, nor voice, but a derived finite verbal form with the prefix jā- [Hoelvoet 2001]. The debitive construction serves
to express dynamic and deontic modality and partly compensates the lack of nominative predicatives in Latvian.

A part of nominal predicatives capable of heading DPS sentences take infinitival complements ([N\text{\text{ dat}} − V\text{\text{ link}} − Pred] − V\text{\text{ inf}}), which may eventually lead to reanalysis and merger of DPS with DIS. In Old Church Slavonic, the distinction of DIS and DPS is obscured: the corpus of the oldest Old Church Slavonic texts has ca. 50 nominal predicatives, most of which take infinitival complements [Khodova 1980]. In modern Russian, DIS and DPS always retain different syntactic and semantic properties [Zimmerling 2009]. Other languages take an intermediate position between these two extremes.

The origin and semantics of nominal predicatives in the European languages is an open issue. I argue that non-agreeing nominal forms heading DPS are Stage-Level predicates: they can only refer to actual, not generic situations. The vast majority of predicatives used in DPS correlate with adjectival stems. This statement if true for forms like Rus. *стыдно, *совестно, *тошно as well: although agreeing forms *стыдный, *совестный, *тошный do not exist, *стыдн-, совестн- or тошн- remain well-formed adjectival stems. The non-trivial feature of stems from the class *стыдн- is that they are used only for producing Stage-level predicates and cannot be used for denoting properties of objects or persons. I label stems from this class ‘stems with a situative polarity’. Modern Russian also has a class of adjectival stems that are used only for producing designations of objects or persons. The adjectives from this class are either not capable of any predicative usage in structures without agreement (*мне гневно, *это гневно), or cannot be used in DPS (*мне алогично, это алогично). I label stems from this class ‘stems with an argument polarity’. Finally, Modern Russian has a class of stems that both produce designations of objects/persons and Stage-level predicates: мне скучно, скучный фильм. I label stems from this class ‘ambivalent stems’. The presence/absence of agreeing correlates does not have any impact on the semantics of a predicative in any language.

Although Schjerba, Vinogradov and their followers primarily focused on stems with a situative polarity, it is evident that the productive usage of DPS depends in Russian on the ambivalent stems from the скучно class. Our data suggest that there are at least 250 ambivalent stems in Russian, while stems with a situative polarity are few. Other languages with DPS deviate from the ternary opposition of adjectival stems attested in Russian. Ukrainian largely patterns with Russian, but the overall number of stems is lower. Old Icelandic and likely, Old Swedish seem to lack stems with argument polarity. This typologically rare option means that Stage-level predicates are derived from all adjectival stems, which can make the class of predicatives open. A deviation in a different direction shows Modern Czech: this language completely lacks ambivalent stems, the class of predicatives is closed and cannot be expanded by any new forms. The volume of the class of predicatives depends on a number of factors as e.g. constraint on the animacy of the dative subject, the proportion of ambivalent stems vs stems with a situative polarity and accessibility of syntactic transformations linking BE-predicates and HAVE-predicates together.

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