SUBJECTS AND DIRECT OBJECTS IN URALIC LANGUAGES: A FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATION OF CASE-MARKING SYSTEMS

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Linguists working on the indo-european languages are accustomed to a relatively simple relationship between syntactic categories such as subject and direct object, and morphological categories such as nominative and accusative case : typically, subjects stand in the nominative, direct objects in the accusative. Linguists working on the Uralic languages are usually faced with a more complex picture : there is rarely a single case coding all and only direct objects (i.e. corresponding to the Indo-European accusative), and in some languages the same is true also of the subject. The present paper will examine some instances of this lack of correspondence between syntactic and morphological categories in Uralic languages, and attempt to provide an explanation for at least some of the discrepancies, i.e. to give a theoretical account of why we should expect to find just such discrepancies in languages rather than any arbitrary set of non-correspondences between syntax and morphology. In the present paper, the material is taken from Uralic languages, although the principles used are applicable to other languages with similar non-correspondence between syntactic and morphological categories.

As a starting-point, we may take as the function of case-assignment to subjects and direct objects the differentiation of subjects from direct objects, i.e. the morphology allows recovery of the syntactic categories. There are other ways of explicitly coding the syntactic categories of subject and direct object, such as word order and verb agreement. In Uralic languages, word order is typically relatively free, although in the few languages that have no case difference between subject and direct object nouns at all (e.g. Ostyak, northern dialects of Vogul) word order plays a more important role (subjects usually precede direct objects) ; and similarly in individual instances in other languages where there is no morphological distinction between subject and direct object, e.g. Finnish *pojat näkivät tytöt* 'the boys saw the girls', rather than 'the girls saw the boys' : with plural nouns in Finnish, there is no distinction between nominative and accusative. In most Uralic languages, verbs agree with their subjects ; in some languages (Mordvin, the Ugric languages, the Samoyedic languages) verbs also agree with (some) direct objects. In the present paper we shall be concerned primarily with case-marking as a means of coding the difference between subjects and

direct objects, and also to a certain extent with verb agreement.

Languages in which the subject always stands in the nominative, the direct object always in the accusative, have a particularly simple realization of the function of case-marking here : since the subject is always in the nominative and the direct object always in the accusative, the two syntactic categories are always immediately identifiable from the morphology. As already noted, this situation is rare in the Uralic languages, being found for instance in Hungarian (accusative in *-t*) and Cheremis (accusative in *-m*). The general hypothesis that will be exemplified in detail below is that typically in Uralic languages, differential case-assignment to subjects and direct objects is limited to those constructions where it is particularly necessary to keep these two syntactic categories apart, rather than across the board in all constructions.

1. Direct object and accusative case

Perhaps most attention has been devoted, in earlier discussions of this general problem, to the lack of any uniform morphological encoding of the direct object. The data are reasonably readily accessible.[1] What is lacking in more traditional discussions is any attempt to explain why this discrepancy between syntax and morphology should exist.

1.1. Nominative of the direct object

One language with a discrepancy of this kind is Finnish ; essentially the same situation is found in the other Balto-Finnic languages, including Estonian, so that here Finnish may serve as an illustration of the phenomenon which is also found in the other languages of this group. For the moment, we shall be concerned solely with total direct objects, i.e. those not in the partitive case, although we shall return to the latter in section 2.2. The discrepancy is found with singular nonpronominal noun phrases, which have two case forms that are of interest to us : one with no ending (e.g. *kala* 'fish'), traditionally called the nominative, and the other with the ending *-n* (e.g. *kalan*), traditionally called the accusative. [Plural nonpronominal noun phrases in Finnish have no difference between nominative and accusative. Personal pronouns have a nominative with no ending (e.g. *minä* 'I') and an accusative with the ending *-t* (e.g. *minut* 'me') ; with the pronouns, the accusative is used for all total direct objects, i.e. the discrepancy noted with singular nonpronominal noun phrases between syntax and morphology does not occur with pronouns.] However, this accusative in *-n* is found only with some direct objects, while other direct objects stand in the nominative, e.g. *Pekka söi kalan* (accusative) 'Pekka ate the fish', but *syö kala* (nominative)*!* 'eat the fish !', *syötiin kala* (nominative) 'the fish was eaten', *minun täytyy syödä kala* (nominative) 'it is necessary for me to eat the fish'. Examination of the full range of data shows that the general rule for Finnish is the following : the direct object stands in the accusative in *-n* if it is the direct object of a verb or verbal chain (i.e. main verb followed by one or more infinitives) with a subject, and stands in the nominative if it is direct object of a verb or verbal chain without a subject.[2] Thus in *Pekka söi kalan*, the verb *söi* has a subject (*Pekka*), therefore the direct object is in the accusative (*kalan*). In *syö kala!*, on the other hand, the verb has no subject, therefore the direct object *kala* is in the nominative.

In Finnish, then, we have an example of a language where a special case-ending, namely *-n*, is added to the direct object, but if and only if the sentence also has a subject. This is a clear instance of a language where case-assignment to subjects and direct objects serves the function of differentiating them from one another : the need to differentiate subject from direct object is particularly acute when a sentence contains both a subject and a direct object, and Finnish restricts the use of the accusative in *-n* to just such instances. In other words : subject and direct object are distinguished only where both are present, and the differentiation is effected by adding a special marker to the direct object ; otherwise, all subjects and direct objects take no marker (the so-called nominative).

1.2. Definite direct objects

Many Uralic languages have two cases for encoding subject and direct object, typically a case with no ending and one with the reflex of Proto-Uralic **-m* (though other endings are also found, e.g. Zyryan *-ęs*), but with the following distribution : the

[1] See, for instance, Bo Wickman, The Form of the Object in the Uralic Languages, Uppsala, 1955, and, for the Samoyedic languages, N. M. Tereščenko, Синтаксис самодийских языков, Leningrad, 1973, pp. 171—199.

[2] For more detailed analyses along the same lines as proposed here, see Jean-Luc Moreau, La corrélation du sujet et de l'objet en finnois, Études Finno-Ougriennes 8, 1971 (1972) ; Bernard Comrie, The Antiergative : Finland's Answer to Basque, Papers from the Eleventh Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, 1975; Alan Timberlake, The Nominative Object in Finnish, Lingua 35, 1975. The nominative of the direct object of an imperative is also found in the Samoyedic languages (Tereščenko, op. cit., pp. 177—178), and may be traceable back to Proto-Uralic, although the data presented by Tereščenko are not absolutely consistent on this.

unmarked case (traditionally nominative) is used for all subjects and also for indefinite direct objects; the other case (traditionally accusative) is used only for definite direct objects. Languages of this kind are Mordvin, the Permic languages, Southern Lappish, some dialects of Vogul, and possibly Proto-Uralic, or at least some dialects of Proto-Uralic. An example from Zyryan would be the difference between *Peder pir keć* (nominative) *kije* 'Theodore hunts hares all the time' and *sije so kećes* (accusative) *lijema* 'see, he has shot the hare'.[3] In some Uralic languages, verb agreement plays a role here rather than — or in addition to — case-marking: verbs agree with definite direct objects in Mordvin (though only in the perfective aspect), the Ugric languages, and the Samoyedic languages. Thus in Hungarian we have the difference between *megkapta* (definite conjugation) *a levelet* 'he received the letter' and *megkapott* (indefinite conjugation) *egy levelet* 'he received a letter'. Here the phenomenon that needs explaining is why, in Uralic and many other languages, we find a special marker restricted to definite direct objects, while only rarely, if ever, do we find a special marker for indefinite direct objects, all other direct objects and all subjects having the same inflectional form (typically, no ending at all).

In some recent work on the nature of subjects and their relations to other grammatical categories, Givón notes,[4] with references to detailed statistical exemplification, that in language there is a general tendency for subjects to be definite, to be topic, and to be animate (or even more specifically, human).[5] This is a tendency, by no means an absolute rule, but the application of this principle to English can be seen by comparing pairs of sentences like *John has bought a bus/a bus has been bought by John, a bus has run John over/John has been run over by a bus*; in both pairs the sentence with *John* as subject (definite and animate) is more natural than the sentence with *a bus* (indefinite and inanimate) as subject.

Some brief definitions of 'definite' and 'topic' will prove useful in the ensuing discussion. A definite noun phrase is one where the speaker presupposes that both speaker and hearer can unambiguously identify the referent of the noun phrase. This corresponds to the class of definite noun phrases in those languages, like English and Hungarian, that have a definite article for noun phrases that are not otherwise known to be definite (such as

[3] V. I. Lytkin—D. A. Timušev, Краткий очерк грамматики коми языка, in Коми-русский словарь, Moscow, 1961, p. 864. For further data from various Uralic languages, see Wickman, op. cit., passim.
[4] Talmy Givón, Topic, Pronoun, and Grammatical Agreement, in Subject and Topic, ed. C. Li, New York, 1976.
[5] Animacy seems to play a minimal role in case-marking in the Uralic languages.

proper names). The category of definiteness can, however, also exist in languages which lack such an article, such as Ostyak, where the definiteness of a direct object noun phrase is shown by the use of the definite conjugation, e.g. *ma taŋkə wetsem* (definite conjugation) 'I have killed the squirrel', and *ma taŋkə wetsəm* (indefinite conjugation) 'I have killed squirrels'.[6] The definite conjugation in Hungarian *melyiket akarod?* 'which one do you want?' (cp. *mit akarsz?* 'what do you want?' with the indefinite conjugation) is not controlled by definiteness in the strict sense, but by the related notion of 'restricted superset': in *melyiket akarod?* the speaker presupposes that both speaker and hearer can identify the restricted set from which the choice is to be made, whereas with *mit akarsz?* the choice is completely free.

The topic, or theme, is the old information in a sentence, whereas the comment, or rheme introduces the new information. Thus in answer to the question *what did Harry do?*, the sentence *he bought a book* (or *he bought the book*) contains the topic *he*, and the comment *bought a/the book*.[7]

Given this general tendency in languages, instances where confusion will be particularly likely will be where one has either indefinite and/or rhematic and/or inanimate subjects, or where one has definite and/or thematic and/or animate direct objects. The type of instance in which we are particularly interested here is that of the definite direct object. If there were to be no special marker for at least definite direct objects, then if such a noun phrase were to be identified as a direct object, the natural tendency would be to interpret it further as indefinite; if it were identified as definite, then the tendency would be to interpret it as subject. From a functional viewpoint, a special marker for definite direct objects only is a very efficient device: by coding both direct object status and definiteness in the one marker, the relatively unusual combination of definiteness and direct object status can be immediately identified. A special marker for indefinite direct objects would be less efficient from this viewpoint: if an unmarked noun phrase were identified as direct object, then it would equally and unambiguously be identified as definite; but if some unmarked noun phrase were identified only as definite, it would not follow automatically that it was direct object, since in such a system both definite subjects and definite direct objects would have no inflection, and preference

[6] Cp. Wolfgang Steinitz, Ostjakische Grammatik und Chrestomathie, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1950, p. 74.
[7] For a recent discussion of topic-comment structure (functional sentence perspective), building on the pioneering work of the Prague School in this area, see Susumu Kuno, Functional Sentence Perspective, Linguistic Inquiry 3, 1972.

would be given to the more natural combination, namely definite subject.

All Uralic languages distinguish nominative from accusative in the personal pronouns, even those languages where there is no distinction with other noun phrases.[8] Personal pronouns are inherently, i.e. necessarily, definite. In Finnish, animacy is also relevant: the necessarily human personal pronouns of the first and second persons and of the third person *hän* 'he, she', *he* 'they (human)', all have special accusatives in *-t*, whereas the third person nonhuman pronouns *se* 'it', *ne* 'they (nonhuman)' behave like other nonpronominal nouns.[9] Since the definiteness of personal pronouns is inherent, a marker of definiteness as a marker of definiteness, is also redundant, and this may account for the use of the indefinite conjugation with first and second person direct objects in Hungarian, Vogul, and some dialects of Ostyak, e.g. Hungarian *látott* (indefinite conjugation) *engem* 'he saw me'.[10]

N. Tereščenko claims that in some of the Samoyedic languages,[11] in particular Yurak (from which the examples below are taken), definiteness is distinguished in direct objects, but that it is the definite direct object that has the same form as the nominative, whereas the indefinite direct object has the accusative ending *-m*'. However, a more detailed examination of the examples given by Tereščenko suggests that the author is here using 'definite' in a different sense from the one outlined above. For instance, the author contrasts the two sentences *ťuku tį ŋamzodadăna*'' *tėmdawa*'' and *ťuku tįm*' *ŋamzodadăna*'' *tėmdawa*''; both have the general meaning 'we bought this reindeer for food', but in the first we have the nominative direct object *ťuku tį* 'this reindeer', in the second the accusative *ťuku tįm*'. In Tereščenko's terminology the direct object is definite in the first sentence, indefinite in the second. But taking definiteness in the sense outlined above, the direct object would be definite in both sentences, given the demonstrative pronoun *ťuku* 'this'. Tereščenko's further explication makes the difference clear: the author notes that in the first sentence the emphasis falls on *ťuku tį*, whereas in the second it does not fall on *ťuku tįm*, but rather on the verb *tėmdawa*''. In the terminology we are using, this is a difference in the topic/comment structure of the sentence: in the first sentence the direct object is part of the new information, part of the rheme, and could be translated into English as 'it was this reindeer that we bought for food', or 'we bought *this reindeer* for food', with sentence stress on *this reindeer*.[12] In the second sentence the direct object is part of the topic, the old information, and is therefore unstressed. Thus, keeping consistently to the use of definiteness and topic outlined above, it seems that in Yurak the accusative ending is used for direct objects if and only if they are topic (part of the topic) of the sentence. Since topics are usually subject of their sentence, the explanation for having a special marker for a thematic direct object is the same as that given above for having a special marker for a definite direct object. Tereščenko suggests moreover that verb-object agreement is also susceptible to topic-comment structure;[13] verbs tend to agree with thematic direct objects.

One of the Samoyedic languages, Tavgi, has for some nouns a three-way distinction between subject (no inflection), indefinite direct object (no inflection, but with stem change), and definite direct object (in *-m*);[14] this represents the intersection of a purely syntactic case-assignment system (distinguish all subjects from all direct objects) and a functional case-assignment system (have a special marker for definite direct objects).

As a final note on the definite direct object, we may consider the development of the definite direct object marker in the plural in Southern Lappish.[15] Here the nominative is used for indefinite direct objects, e.g. *jùktie treœwgah* (nominative) *dajtəjh* 'when they make skis', and the accusative (apparently optionally, alongside the nominative) for definite direct objects, e.g. *jùktie treœwgəjdə* (accusative) *dojtəmə* 'when one has made the skis'. The semantic distinction made seems to differ little from that of the other languages mentioned in this section, but the interesting point is that this accusative plural derives etymologically from the partitive plural. At first sight, this seems an astonishing development, given the wide semantic difference between a partial direct object and a definite direct object. If, however, we bear in mind that it is natural for a language to have a special form for definite direct objects, then the development is rather less surprising: presumably at some stage Southern Lappish had a distinction between two cases for direct objects, nominative and partitive, differentiated semantically much as in Finnish.

[8] See, for instance, Edith Vértes, Die ostjakischen Pronomina (= Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 74), 1967, pp. 235–240, for Ostyak; and E. I. Rombandeeva, Мансийский (вогульский) язык, Moscow, 1973, p. 100, for Vogul.

[9] Cp. section 1.1.

[10] Compare the absence of the definite article from proper names, which are inherently definite, in most European languages that have a definite article.

[11] Tereščenko, op. cit., pp. 178–181.

[12] Kuno, op. cit., p. 269, calls this 'exhaustive listing', a subdivision of comment, i.e. the stressed noun phrase in an exhaustive list: the sense is 'we bought this reindeer (and not anything else) for food'.

[13] Tereščenko, op. cit., pp. 187–198.

[14] Ibid., p. 173.

[15] For the data and detailed references, see Wickman, op. cit., pp. 30–38.

Later, this earlier system broke down, though still leaving two possible cases for the expression of the direct object. The use of the two cases was then again differentiated, and a natural way for such a differentiation is for one to be used for indefinite direct objects, the other for definite direct objects ; moreover, if one is the same as the nominative of the subject, it will be the one that is used for definite direct objects. This gives precisely the situation we observe in Southern Lappish today.

2. Subject and nominative case

While the absence of a general marker for direct objects in many Uralic languages has been well documented in previous works, relatively little has been written on the expression of the subject in these languages. It is in fact true that the majority of Uralic languages do have one case (the nominative) which serves to code all subjects, but there are some languages where the situation is rather less straightforward.

2.1. Ergative construction

The construction that has most interested linguists among the constructions where there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the syntactic categories subject and direct object and the morphological cases nominative and accusative is the ergative construction, where the subject of a transitive verb stands in the ergative case, and both the subject of an intransitive verb and the direct object stand in the absolute case. A classical example is Basque, where the ergative ending is *-(e)k*: *gizona* (absolute) *ethorri da* 'the man came', *Martin-ek* (ergative) *haurra* (absolute) *ikusi du* 'Martin saw the child'. Examples as clear as this of the ergative construction are apparently not to be found in the Uralic languages, but one of the possible sentence constructions with a transitive verb in the Vakh dialect of Ostyak does seem to be ergative.[16]

The subject of an intransitive verb takes no ending in Vakh Ostyak, e.g. *nə°yət os morəqtəsət* 'the boughs crackled again', where the subject *nə°yət* has no case ending, and the verb agrees with this third person plural subject. One possible construction with a transitive verb is for the subject to stand in the locative in *-nə/-nä*, the direct object having no case-marker, e.g. *ikinä ṛit werlätä* 'the old man is making the boat', where *iki-nä* is locative, and the verb *werlätä* encodes both the third person singular subject and the third person singular direct object. This is not a passive construction, i.e. is not to be glossed as 'by the old man the boat is being made', although the locative ending also expresses the passive agent, since it contrasts with the passive sentence *ikinä ṛit werli* 'the boat is being made by the old man' ; cp. also *ṛit werli* 'the boat is being made'. So far, Vakh Ostyak seems to be a typical ergative language. And the same sort of functional explanation as was used in section 1.1 in connexion with the nominative direct object in Finnish will account for the ergative system : subject and direct object are differentiated only where both are present in the same sentence, but here it is the subject which is assigned a special marker (Vakh Ostyak *-nə/nä*, Basque *-(e)k*), all other subjects and direct objects having no ending).

However, in Vakh, in addition to this transitive construction, there is a second possibility, with both subject and direct object having no ending, while the verb agrees with the subject only ; word order is often the only way of distinguishing subject and direct object here, and the direct object in fact usually precedes the verb immediately, with the subject preceding the direct object (not necessarily immediately, in longer sentences), e.g. *iki ṛit werwäl* 'the old man is making a boat'. However, the two transitive constructions are not synonymous. The former (ergative) construction is used when the direct object is definite, the latter when the direct object is indefinite, as indicated in the glosses given to the sentences here.

The ergative construction *per se* does have a functional explanation within the terms of the present paper, as indicated above. The situation actually found in Vakh Ostyak, with the ergative construction being used only when the direct object is definite, is rather more complex, but again has its justification within the functional explanation. It was noted in section 1.2 that languages have a tendency to mark definite direct objects. Vakh Ostyak also marks definite direct objects, though in a rather round-about way : instead of a special marker being attached to the direct object, a special marker is attached to the subject (and also to the verb, in the definite conjugation) as can easily be seen if we place *ikinä ṛit werlätä* and *iki ṛit werwäl* side by side. The only thing that is unusual about this situation is that the definiteness of the direct object is not marked on the direct object itself.

2.2. The partitive in Finnish

In Finnish, the partitive can be used for partial direct objects, e.g. *hän otti ruokaa* (partitive) 'he took some food', and for partial subjects, e.g. *põydällä on vettä* (partitive) 'on the table

[16] A. N. Balandin, «Обско-угорские конструкции глагольного предложения со скрытым суб'ектом», in: Эргативная конструкция предложения, Leningrad, 1967 ; for further examples from Vakh Ostyak, see N. I. Tereškin, Очерки диалектов хантыйского языка, Часть первая. Ваховский диалект, Moscow—Leningrad, 1961, pp. 43—44, 50, 85, 87,

there is some water'. However, it may not be used for the subject of a transitive verb, i.e. not **naisia* (partitive) *ostaa kalaa* 'some women are buying fish', but only *naiset ostavat kalaa*. Thus the distribution of the partitive seems to parallel that of the absolute case in the ergative construction.[17] However, one should also note certain differences between the Finnish partitive and the absolute case in the ergative construction. Firstly, the partitive in Finnish is much more of a semantic case than the purely syntactic ergative case: thus there is a semantic contrast between the sentences quoted above and *hän otti ruoan* (accusative) 'he took the food', *vesi* (nominative) *on pöydällä* 'the water is on the table'; and the partitive occurs with similar meaning in noun phrases which are neither subject nor direct object, e.g. after numerals, with the same basic meaning, though with different syntactic status. Secondly, the constraints on the use of the partitive as subject are much narrower than those on its use as a direct object.[18] To take one clear example: if one has a definite singular countable noun phrase, such as *tämä kirja* (partitive *tätä kirjaa*) 'this book' with a non-negated verb, then it is possible for the partitive to appear as direct object, e.g. *Maija lukee tätä kirjaa* 'Maija is reading this book', but impossible to have such a noun phrase as subject of a non-negated verb (at least in the standard language), i.e. not **pöydällä on tätä kirjaa*, but only *tämä kirja on pöydällä* 'this book is on the table'. Thus the rules assigning the partitive case to subjects seem to be rather different from those assigning the partitive case to direct objects.

Despite these qualifications, however, the distribution of the partitive in Finnish is not irrelevant to the present argument: it still remains true that it is impossible to have both subject and direct object in the partitive case in a sentence, and this does serve to keep subject and direct object apart morphologically.

2.3. Indefinite subjects

Since the ergative construction mirrors the nominative direct object construction found in Finnish, one might expect equally to find the mirror-image of the definite direct object construction, namely the indefinite subject construction, where there would be a special marker for subjects which are indefinite, rhematic, or inanimate. One such language is attested outside the Uralic family, namely Bengali.[19] Whether this construction exists in the Uralic languages depends on the analysis of the so-called passive in Vogul (northern dialects).[20] In Vogul, there are two constructions with transitive verbs, one the so-called active, e.g. *ōjka χāpət wārəs* 'the man made boats', with no ending on either subject (*ōjka*) or direct object (*χāpət*); the other the so-called passive, e.g. *χāpət ōjkan wārwēsət*, where the agent has the lative ending *-n*. ROMBANDEEVA says that the second version accentuates the definiteness of the agent (i.e. 'the man'), though from the discussion it is clear that the term 'definiteness' is used as in TEREŠČENKO's work cited above, i.e. in our terminology the essential fact about the so-called passive version is that the agent is part of the comment (exhaustive listing); this version could be used in answer to the question 'who made boats?' But the problem still remains as to whether the so-called passive should be analyzed as a passive, i.e. literally 'boats were made by the man', in which case the construction is simply irrelevant to our present discussion, since the syntactic subject of the sentence is then *χāpət*. ROMBANDEEVA argues rather for the opposite analysis, whereby the so-called passive is in fact an active construction, with *χāpət* as direct object and *ōjkan* as subject, i.e. the inflection *-n* would mark a rhematic subject. Part of the difficulty is that hitherto, there have been few criteria for deciding definitively what the syntactic category of a noun phrase is, other than intuition, which leads to difficulties where different people's intuitions conflict, as here.[21] The present author is inclined to regard the construction as in fact passive, in which case Uralic would not present any examples of a special marker for rhematic subjects, although one could easily imagine a future interpretation of such a passive construction as an active construction.

Some of ROMBANDEEVA's arguments against the passive analysis seem to be based on a rather narrow concept of the passive. Thus the fact that this construction can be formed from intransitive verbs is not an argument against the passive; German, for instance, has passives of the type *es wird den Schülern vom Lehrer geholfen* 'the pupils are helped by the teacher', literally 'it is helped to the pupils by the teacher', with the intransitive verb (in German) *helfen* 'to help'. The observation that the Vogul

[17] Cp. ROBERT HETZRON, Review of Études Finno-Ougriennes 8, Journal of Linguistics 10, 1974, pp. 134—135.

[18] For a detailed discussion of the partitive as subject and direct object in Finnish, see NORMAN DENISON, The Partitive in Finnish (= Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Ser. B, Tom. 108), 1957.

[19] PUNYA SLOKA RAY, MUHAMMAD ABDUL HAI and LILA RAY, Bengali Language Handbook, Washington D. C., 1966, p. 35.

[20] Rombandeeva, op. cit. pp. 47, 113; id., О так называемых пассивных конструкциях в манскийском языке, in: Эргативная конструкция предложения, Leningrad, 1967.

[21] Recently, a promising approach has been developed by EDWARD L. KEENAN, Toward a universal definition of "subject of", in: Subject and Topic, ed. C. Li, New York, 1976, using a set of criteria for subject status; these criteria have not yet been applied to Vogul, but this might be one way of reaching a more definitive solution.

sentence *χon olum porat mańsi maχum χon pojarĭtn, wataχumitn os śolĭŋ maχumĭtn saka paśralawesĭt* 'under tsarism the Vogul people were cruelly subjugated by the tsarist functionaries, merchants, and rich men' would translate into Russian as при царизме мансийский народ угнетали царские чиновники, купцы и богатеи (i.e. active, though with the word order direct object—verb—subject) rather than ... мансийский народ угнетался царскими чиновниками, купцами и богатеями (passive) is true,[22] but in Russian topic-comment structure is carried largely by word order (topic first, comment last), and hardly at all by the active/passive distinction; which is why in the Russian gloss the reference to the tsarist agents comes at the end of the sentence. In English topic-comment structure is carried largely by the active/passive distinction (which in fact brings about the same change of word order as is effected by mere word order change in Russian). The most natural English translation of the above Russian active sentence would be the English passive sentence given as a gloss to the Vogul above. Vogul is in this respect typologically closer to English than to Russian.

The morphology also tends to support the passive analysis. In sentences like *χāpət ōjkan wārwēsət* the verb agrees with *χāpət*, and not with *ōjkan*; nowhere else in the Uralic languages do we find agreement with the direct object but not with the subject, and if agreement is with the subject here too, then *χāpət* is subject. The personal pronouns do distinguish nominative from accusative, e.g. *am* 'I', *ānum* 'me'; for 'I am known', 'someone (unspecified) knows me', we have *am wāwem*, with nominative *am* and the first person singular of the verb; similarly *naŋ* (nominative) *wāwen* 'you are known', *taw* (nominative) *wāwe* 'he is known'.

3. Conclusion

Differential case-assignment to subjects and direct objects serves the function of distinguishing subjects from direct objects. Some languages have a one-to-one correspondence between subject and nominative, and between direct object and accusative. Other languages have differential case-assignment only where confusion between subject and direct object is particularly likely: this includes sentences containing both a subject and a direct object, and sentences where the usual co-occurrence of subject status with definiteness, thematicity, and animacy is violated. In such languages we may find (a) a special case for the direct object only in the presence of a subject, (b) a special case for definite (thematic, animate) direct objects, (c) a special case for the subject only in the presence of a direct object; (d) a special case for indefinite (rhematic, inanimate) subjects. The first three of these types, and perhaps all four, are to be found in the material provided by the Uralic languages. The fact that the Uralic languages do not have one-to-one correspondence between syntactic and morphological categories, and in particular that they rarely have a specifically direct object case, does not mean that syntactic-morphological relations are in any way unsystematic in these languages: the particular case-assignment types that are found are precisely those that are favoured by the function of differential case-assignment to subjects and direct objects.

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[22] ROMBANDEEVA, О так называемых пассивных конструкциях ..., pp. 307—308.