

A case of rare fluid intransitivity in Europe: Russian

The subject alignment type probably best known as stative/active subsumes two different patterns: split-S, where intransitive verbs lexically require A or O coding on their subjects, and fluid-S, where most or all verbs can take either kind of coding depending on semantic factors such as volitionality, control, etc. The split-S type is well established but relatively uncommon worldwide (Nichols 1992: 14% of sample languages), while the fluid-S type is very rare (Dixon 1994:78ff. lists only Batsbi, Acehnese, spoken Tibetan, and Baniwa).

In addition to Dixon's A, S, and O, for three-argument clauses it is necessary to distinguish P (patient-like object of ditransitive) and E (goal-like object of ditransitive; mnemonically "Experiencer"). Object alignment types are P=O and E=O (Dryer 1986's direct/indirect and primary/secondary object respectively).

The S_O coding as described for many languages of the Americas and the Pacific is usually thought of as patient marking, but in fact these languages almost all have primary/secondary object alignment, i.e. E=O, so their S_O coding is more precisely S_E and their split should technically be recognized as S_A/S_E. Eurasian languages rarely have prototypical stative-active systems, but I argue that this is simply because they have direct/indirect object alignment. The dative-subject construction that is widespread in southern Eurasia (Masica 1976, 1991) and central Europe (Bossong 1998) is the precise analog to split S_A/S_E alignment in languages with typical Eurasian role marking and object alignment. Both involve E coding of some subjects, regardless of whether the object alignment is E=O or P=O.

Fluid S_A/S_E marking has not been reported for any language of mainland Eurasia (Batsbi is S_A/S_P), but in fact there is a very good example in Russian, for which nearly every verb interpretable as having a volitional or responsible subject or perceiving experiencer can have either its usual nominative subject (and accusative object if transitive) or a dative subject (and nominative object or no object) with reflexive verb. In addition, there are some two dozen lexicalized pairs. (The terms *subject* and *object* are used here only for convenience, though they do not fit well: Perlmutter and Moore 2002.) Examples: *ja xochu X* (I.DAT want-1sg X-ACC) 'I want X', *mne xochetsja X* (I.DAT want-3sgREFL X.NOM) 'I'd like X'; *ja ne rabotaju* (I.NOM not work-1sg) 'I don't work, am not working', *mne ne rabotaetsja* (I-DAT not work-3sg-REFL) 'I can't get down to work, don't feel like working'.

The coding of subjects in Russian has systematic correlations with tense/aspect, Aktionsart, subject and object animacy, and volitionality/control, in which the dative subject patterns the same as statives in prototypical stative/active systems. This paper describes the Aktionsart properties in current terms (using the framework of Stoll 2001). It uses corpus data to compare frequencies of S_A and S_E coding in various tense/aspect/Aktionsart configurations and with various lexicosemantic classes of verbs. It hypothesizes that the discourse property of experiencer viewpoint which is systematic for Russian dative subjects (Nichols 1986) is a more widespread property of S_E coding and challenges linguists to falsify this claim for prototypical stative/active languages. It factors out aspect and Aktionsart and also challenges linguists to separate these two in descriptions of stative/active languages. Though the necessary morphology is available to all Slavic and Baltic languages, the lexicon-wide fluid coding appears unique to Russian; S_E coding is a minority lexical type elsewhere in Balto-Slavic, too minor to justify classifying the languages as split-S.

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