

DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING IN EASTERN MANSI

Susanna Virtanen
University of Helsinki

In this paper, I will deal with the question of variation in object marking in the Eastern dialects of Mansi. My aim is to create a short overview of the variation in object marking, and to find out how this variation is affected by animacy. My main points of interest are:

1. Variation between accusative and nominative objects
2. The use of object conjugation
3. Variation between active and passive (ergative) structures
4. Variation between two different ditransitive structures: dative shift

In the Eastern dialects of Mansi, accusative – the original case of object - still exists (from the Northern dialects it is already disappeared), but there can be found unmarked (nominative) objects, too. Accusative is mainly the case of definite object. However, the opposition between definite and indefinite object is in the first place expressed by verb inflection: the existence of a definite object is marked by an object conjugation suffix. If the patient of the action can be recognized, an object conjugation suffix alone is enough: a single noun object is in these cases used only to emphasize its function.

Consequently, a basic transitive clause could be expected to consist either of a verb with an object conjugation suffix and (possibly) an accusative object, or a verb without object conjugation suffix and a nominative object. However, there can be found cases, where an accusative object appears with a verb not containing an object conjugation suffix.

As mentioned above, structures where the subject, the modal verb and the object are expressed together by a single elaborated verb form containing a personal suffix and an object conjugation suffix are fairly frequent. There are still some exceptions regarding this structure. In a personal passive clause that contains a nominative patient and a lative agent both of these are obligatory constituents. Also in both of the ditransitive structures – the one with a patient object, and the other one with a recipient object - object and oblique (representing either patient or recipient) and even subject are usually expressed by single noun phrases.