

Differentially Marked Topical Direct Objects in Komi

Gerson Klumpp, Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich

In Komi (Permic branch of Uralic, spoken within and beyond the borders of the Komi republic in Northern Russia), direct objects may be unmarked or marked for accusative, cf. (1).

(1) Komi-Zyryan (Vendenga: Udora dialect; Uotila-Kokkonen 1989: 316)

- a. *Ötpyr tulysyn me mödi osh-Ø vi-ny, köl-öm oshk-ös.*
once in.springtime I intended bear kill-INF tracked.down-PTCL bear-ACC
- b. *Voi gu dor-a-s i skörö me osh-s-ö gu-s'-is vii.*
I.came den to-ILL-3SG and soon I bear-3SG.ACC den-ELA-3SG I.killed

‘a. Once I intended to kill a bear in springtime, a bear (I had) tracked down. b. I came to his den and soon I killed the bear at his den.’

Mandatory object marking is triggered by formally expressed referentiality, i.e. direct object expressions which consist of personal pronouns, token-demonstratives (as opposed to type-demonstratives) and possessive-marked nouns (lexical nouns with a possessive suffix indicating possession or givenness, cf. *osh-s-ö* in (1)) must be marked for accusative. Moreover, object expressions which consist of proper names referring to persons must also be marked for accusative, as well as lexical nouns which refer to humans (for a possible exception see (2) below). Third, object expressions with a specific denotation will more often be accusative marked than unmarked, especially when animate (cf. *oshk-ös* in (1)); the same holds for plural marked object expressions and for adjectival modifiers without head nouns. Given that much, Komi DOM appears to be amenable to an analysis in terms of a prominence-based markedness approach with the two parameters referentiality and humanness. But, as (2) and (3) show, there is a third parameter at work: A referential human object expression like *kaga* ‘child’ in (2) may be unmarked when topical, i.e. when presupposed in its object role. In addition, in some dialects of Komi this type of direct object is marked for dative, cf. (3) (Klumpp 2008 based on text study, cf. also Baker 1985: 202–221).

(2) Prisyktyvkar dialect (Fokos 1916: 13)

Context: Rich Marko wants to buy the newborn son of a poor family. He asks: “How much do you want for him?” They fix a price of hundred rubles.

Marko sto rubl'ej s'etis, kaga-Ø bos'tis, dod'd'-ö puktis
Marko hundred ruble[GEN.PL] gave.3SG child took.3SG sledge-ILL put.3SG

‘Marko gave a hundred rubles, [TOOK] [the child]_P and put it into the sledge’

(3) Komi-Zyryan (Onezh'e: Vym' dialect; Frolova 1948/49: 86)

- a. *Voasny osh dor-ö – osh kulöma.*
they.come bear to-ILL bear has.died
- b. *Osh-ly kul'asny, myj sylön döbra vyjym, ves'-sö*

bear-DAT they.skin what (s)he.GEN goods EXISTall-3SG.ACC
noolasny.
they.carry.away

‘a. They come to the bear’s place: the bear had (obviously) died. b. They [SKIN [the bear]_P]_F and carry away all his goods.’

Komi thus features a topic sensitive object marking pattern which includes dative case to the differential marking options for direct objects. From an areal perspective this pattern can be connected with the object agreement of the (secondary) topical direct object in Ob-Ugric and Nenets (cf. Nikolaeva 1999, 2001, Skribnik 2000).

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