

Case in applicative constructions in Kazym Khanty

Aleksandra Belkind, Leipzig University

Data: Crosslinguistically, languages vary in that either indirect or direct object can be more prominent in applicative clauses. In languages with indirective alignment, the theme (DO) bears object case (ACC or ABS) and/or triggers object agreement. In languages with secundative alignment, the IO bears object case (ACC or ABS) and/or triggers object agreement. Some languages make use of both alignments. The indirective-secundative alternation is attested in several Uralic languages - e.g. Khanty, Mansi and Nenets. ACC-marking and object-agreement conspire and can target either DO or IO. The second object is marked with DAT or LOC/INSTR and never agrees with the verb. In this talk, I present novel fieldwork data from Kazym Khanty (1)-(2), and propose a minimalist analysis of this alternation, based on case assignment. The data were elicited with 10 native speakers of Kazym Khanty during 2022-2024.

(1) Indirective alignment

a. Sub-[NOM] IO-Dat DO-[Acc] V

b. Kašəŋ χujat λəχs-əλ-a lipət mə-s
Every person-[NOM] friend-POSS.3SG-DAT flower-[ACC] give-PST-[3SG]
'Everyone gave a flower/flowers to his friend.'

(2) Secundative alignment

a. Sub-[NOM] IO-[Acc] DO-Loc V

b. Kašəŋ χujat λəχs-əλ lipət-ən mə-s-λe
Every person-[NOM] friend-POSS.3SG-[ACC] flower-LOC give-PST-3SG>SG
'Everyone gave a flower/flowers to his friend.'

Information structure: Previous research on the Ob-Ugric argued that alignment alternation depends on topicality of the IO (Dalrymple & Nikolaeva 2011; Sipőcz 2015; Sosa 2017). Kazym Khanty fits into the general Uralic picture. Secundative alignment is preferred if the recipient is a secondary topic. Additionally, secundative alignment is preferred even in clauses with focal recipients if the theme is a mass noun (3).

(3) Where does Masha sew the blue glass beads?

^{ok} λəw ɛtərxəri sak-ən akań jont-λ-əλλe
(s)he blue glass.beads-LOC doll-[ACC] sew-NPST-3SG>SG
'She is sewing the blue glass beads onto a doll.'

However, these are rather tendencies, but not requirements, since indirective alignment is never truly ungrammatical, as (4) demonstrates. Hence, neither topic nor mass semantics of the theme can be used as a formal feature for a syntactic analysis of the alignment alternation.

(4) 'Why our dog is barking?'

^{ok} Pet'a-jen amp-əλ-a λetut änt mə-s
Petja-POSS.2SG dog-POSS.3SG-DAT food-[ACC] NEG give-PST-[SG]
'Petya hasn't given the dog (lit. his dog) any food.'

Syntactic restrictions: Apart from information structure, availability of secundative alignment depends on two purely syntactic factors. (i) Themes in secundative alignment are smaller than DP and cannot have DP-layer modifiers, e.g. demonstratives (5) or possessive markers (6). Additionally, (6) shows that this restriction cannot be re-analyzed as definiteness restriction. A proper possessive marker allows non-unique and non-specific interpretation (Mikhailov 2023), but is still ungrammatical on a secundative theme.

(5) *Nurum **täm** kińška-(jət)-n tɛλ pun-s-ɛm
shelf.[ACC] this book-(PL)-LOC entirely put-PST-1SG>SG
Intend.: 'I've filled the shelf with this book(s)'

(6) *Vasja-jen aŋk-eλ muλsər an-əλ-ən mə-s-λe
Vasya-POSS.2SG.[NOM] mother-POSS.3SG.[ACC] some cup-POSS.3SG-LOC give-PST-3SG>SG
'Vasya gave his mother one of his cups.'

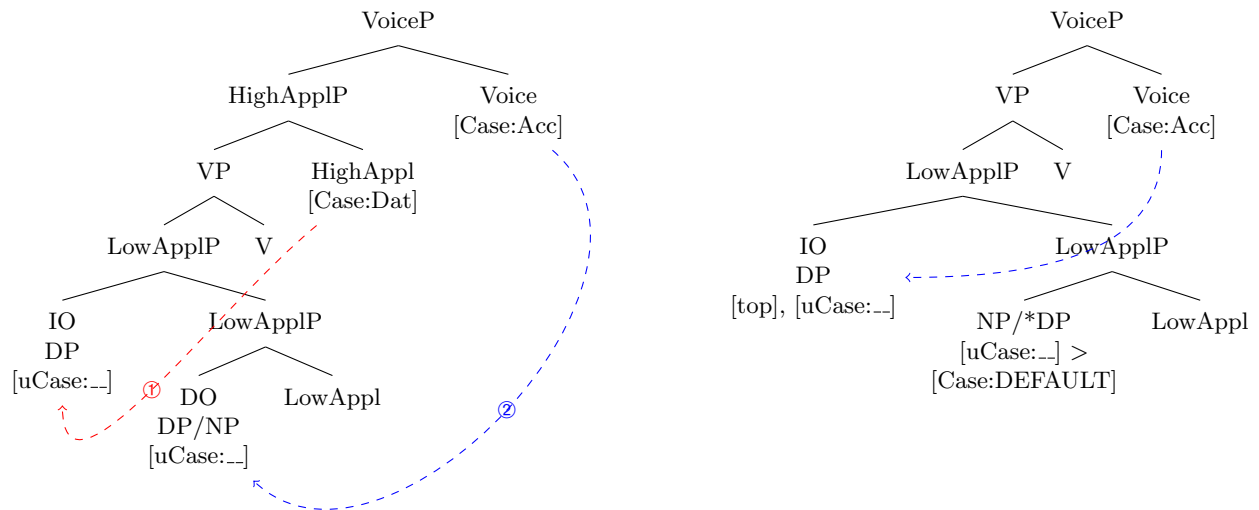
(ii) Secondly, indirective-secundative alternation is available for low applicatives (1)-(2), but not for high applicatives, which only allow indirective alignment (7).

- (7) a. Ar χujat λuwela rɔpata wɛr-λ-ət
 many someone-[NOM] (s)he.DAT work do-NPST-3PL
 ‘Many people work for her.’
 b. *Ar χujat λuwti rɔpata-jən wɛr-λ-eλ
 many someone-[NOM] (s)he.ACC work-LOC do-NPST-3PL
 Intend.: ‘Many people work for her.’

Analysis: I propose an analysis where alignment alternation depends on optional merger of High Applicative projection (Pylkkänen 2008). HighApplP can optionally introduce a new argument, and is also responsible for DAT-assignment, i.e. for presence of the indirective alignment. (Compare somewhat similar idea in Georgala 2011 and Nie 2020, that a higher applicative projection is responsible for licensing/case-assignment to an applied argument, base-generated below it.) When HighAppl is merged, IO is always the closest caseless DP and is assigned DAT under Agree with HighAppl, which allows Voice to assign ACC to the theme (7a). Secundative alignment corresponds to a structure without HighApplP where Voice assigns case to the IO, and the theme is never licensed for Case (7b).

(8) a. indirective alignment

b. secundative alignment



The absence of case-licensing in secundative alignment allows one to explain the DP-restriction on themes. NP-arguments can survive the derivation unlicensed, while DP-arguments require obligatory licensing (see e.g. Kalin 2018). I assume that an NP-theme stays unlicensed and gets a repair LOC case. An alternative analysis where the theme is demoted to a PP is improbable, since it would require a stipulation of a phonologically zero P with unique selectional restrictions. Moreover, a LOC-marked theme is obligatorily present in the clause, which contrasts to other cases of argument demotion (e.g. passive agents or antipassive objects), where demoted arguments can be freely omitted.

References:

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