

On the notion of subject in Baltic

Ilja A. Seržant
Universitetet i Bergen &
Lietuvių kalbos institutas
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UNIVERSITETET I BERGEN



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Introductory remarks

- There are a number of predicates in any language, where the prototypical Agent and Patient are not clearly identifiable, the agent and patient properties being spread across both core arguments.
- This may vary across languages: in languages, where the lexical case assignment is widely used this low transitivity can be marked on the construction level with the assignment of a lexical case to the subject.
- This, in turn, has morphosyntactic consequences, since non-nominative subjects (usually) do not possess the typical morphosyntactic properties as e. g. verb agreement.



Introductory remarks

- Oblique subjects do not show the same behaviour as canonical, i. e. nominative-marked subjects.
- Thus, e.g. Sasse (1983) has introduced the notion Semi-Subject, i. e. subjects, which exhibit a number of subjecthood properties (Keenan 1976) though not all properties that are typical for subjects in the given language.
- Keenan (1976: 307) states that the subjecthood of an NP (in a sentence) is a matter of degree.



Introductory remarks

- Also nominative subjects are not equal in respect to the subject properties they have.
- Nominative subjects of unaccusative predicates, for instance, behave like canonical direct objects in Lithuanian with respect to genitive of negation rule and the partitive genitive rule.



- Thus subjects do differ across constructions in their properties even within one and the same language.
- We may state that there is certain graduality in subjecthood, even across canonical subjects.
- How to describe the subject diversity in a language?



I. General understanding of subject



The present paper concentrates on:

- An attempt to systematically capture subject (and object) properties for Baltic;
- A notion of the subject (and in part the notion of the object) specific for the Baltic languages, which would allow the most straightforward account of the data.



- Subject properties (Keenan 1976):
 - coding properties;
 - behavioural and control properties
 - semantic properties (?).

One should distinguish between behavioural and morphosyntactic properties in Baltic.

Morphosyntactic properties: valency changing derivations, as causativization, passivization but also dativus absolutus;

Additional properties could be:

- "paradigmatic coherency principle"
- Canonizing



The consequences are:

- subject is configurational, i.e. defined by the properties it has / shows;
- and that subject has to be defined for every concrete language independently and it may vary cross-linguistically in its substance.
- even in a one and the same language subjects within different constructions do not show a uniform behavior (Barddal 2006 for Germanic) or even (more radically) are different in substance (cf. Keenan 1976: 307;).
- one can speak about gradualness of subjecthood (depends on the number of properties) (Keenan 1976).
- in a clause there might be two arguments sharing the subjecthood properties



An approach

This way of thinking leads to an approach similar to Dowty's (1991) approach on semantic Proto-roles.

I assume that there are also Syntactic Proto-roles:

In a clause where all core arguments are overtly expressed there must be a Proto-subject, and if there is more than one argument, a Proto-object.

There is no contradiction in this account if the Proto-subject has also some objecthood properties and vice versa.

Only the prevalence is decisive:



An approach

The argument, which contains more subject properties and less object properties is the Proto-subject;

The argument, which contains more object properties and less subject properties is the Proto-object;



An alternative approach

- A. Holvoet (2009) introduced the notion of secondary (*antraeilis*) or downgraded (*pažemintasis*) subject to account for the cases as:

(1) Kiemas privažiavo svečių
yard:nom. come:past.3. guest:gen.pl.

”Too many guests came to the village”

and

(2) Privažiavo svečių
come:past.3. guest:gen.pl.

”Guests came to the village”



However this account makes the analysis that the downgraded subject is dependent on the presence of a primary subject in the sentence. Thus, it is not applicable to one-place predicates (3) with non-canonical subjects or two-place predicates with an object (4).

(3) man bloga
I:dat. bad:predicative
"I feel bad"

(4) man skauda galva
I:dat. ache:3. head:acc.sg.
"I have a headache"

Furthermore, it does not really include graduality of subject



II. Discussion of the subject tests for Baltic



Subject tests

I assume that the subject tests are instantiations of corresponding subject properties.

Therefore, if none of the possible subject tests in a given language is applicable, it means that the language does not have the category of subject. Or the concept of subject is not grammaticalized in this language, since there is no motivation for assuming a zero category in a language (i. e. category without any function).



- In the subject tests one has to distinguish between two cases (sometimes mixed up):
 - (i) the test is not applicable, e. g. relativization or control of converbs (thus in some language only S can be relativized or control the converbs, while in others there is no such restriction).

In this case the test is not subject-oriented and it is simply irrelevant for the configuration of the subject in a given language.

- > consequences for the subject definition for the language as a whole (language level);
"less subjecthood" in the language



(ii) the test is otherwise applicable to S but with a certain construction it produces ungrammatical results. In this case the test result for the given construction is negative and the supposed subject in the given construction has to be considered as lacking the given property.

-> consequences for the subject of the given construction (construction level);

"less subjecthood" in the construction = Semi-Subject / Quasi-Subject



Subjecthood properties

I. Coding properties:

- nominative case
- agreement (not semantic agreement);



Subjecthood properties

- the nominative case appears in Baltic not only in the subject position (although much rarer) but also in the object position and as adverbial (cf. Roduner 2005).
- Is the nominative case a subjecthood property?



Subjecthood properties

- Verb agreement

Nominative subjects trigger verb agreement but non-canonical subject do not.

Is the agreement property a property then of the nominative case (and not of the subject)?

Apparently not, since non-subject nominatives as nominative adverbials and nominative objects do not trigger verb agreement;

On the other side there are nominative constituents which trigger verb agreement but are not "full subjects", cf. Lithuanian:



(1) Kiemas buvo privažiavęs svečių
yard:nom.sg.m. be:AUX.past arrive:part.past. guest:gen.pl.
act.nom.sg.m.

"Many guests had arrived to the village"

As A. Holvoet (2009) pointed out both arguments *svečių* and *kiemas* seem to share subjecthood properties here. This is evident by the fact that *kiemas* does not seem to be a core argument, see (2) which is a complete sentence:

(2) Privažiavo svečių
arrive:past.3. guest:gen.pl.
"There arrived (too) many guests"



Subjecthood properties

- So, is verb agreement subjecthood property in Baltic?
- I assume that verb agreement can be regarded as a subjecthood property in Baltic in the sense of Syntactic Proto-Roles.
- The constituent which triggers verb agreement has usually other subjecthood properties as well.



Agreement

- The alternating predicates in Baltic in the sense of Barðdal (2001), cf. the Latvian verb *patikt* “to like”:

(1) Man patīk šis mežs
I:dat. like:3. this:nom.sg. forest:nom.sg.
”I like this forest”

(2) Tu patīci man
You:nom. like:2. I:dat.
”I like you”

In (1) and (2) the syntactic status of the dative constituent is correspondingly subject and object.



Agreement

- Thus, the (nominative) arguments which trigger verb agreement but are not subjects are related to subjects in that they alternate between subject and object depending on the semantics (animacy).
- Thus, agreement is a subjecthood property in Baltic because it is related to subjects.



Nominative

- If agreement is a subjecthood property, one could also regard the nominative case as a subjecthood property because we find agreement in Baltic only if the triggering constituent has the nominative case marking.



Behavioural properties

1. Control of reflexive pronoun
2. Control of converbs
3. Co-referential PRO deletion
4. Raising to subject & raising to object;
5. SVO as unmarked word order



1. Control of reflexive pronoun:

RP does not necessarily refer to the antecedent subject (*namas*) of the clause in Baltic, cf. Lithuanian:

savo namas visada geriausias
refl.:gen. house:nom.sg. always best:nom.sg.

"One's own house is always the best one"

This statement is construed impersonally.

??? Is not really contradictive since it can be replaced with *savas*.



Behavioural properties

2. Control of converbs

Lithuanian: *-ant/-us* converb always refer to the participant which is not co-referential with the S;

-damas/-dama: is marked for the nominative case and gender, it always refers to (and agree with) the nominative participant.

Latvian: *-ot/(-us)* can combine with any participant (also clause external).

-dams/dama: is marked for the nominative case and gender, it always refer to (and agree with) the nominative participant.

But how behave the past participle *-us*? *Probably with and without coreference to S.???*



Behavioural properties

3. Co-referential subject deletion

Personal pronoun is usually dropped in Baltic anyway. The test is positive even with non-core arguments, cf. Lith.:

Man	vaikas	stipriai	trenkė	į galvą,
I:DAT	kid:NOM	hard	knocked:	at head:ACC
			3SG PAST	

todėl	tiktai	rytoj	galiu	ateiti	pas Jus
therefore	only	tomorrow	can:1SG	come:INF	to you

“A kid knocked me hard on the head and therefore I can come to you only tomorrow”

Behavioural properties



4. Raising to subject & raising to object

Raising to subject verbs as *pradėti, imti* "to begin" seem to give positive results, cf. (1) with the nominative subject predicate and (2) with the dative subject predicate:

(1) Aš pradėjau rašyti laišką
I:NOM began:1SG write:INF letter:ACC
"I started to write a letter"

(2) Man pradėjo skaudėti galvą
me:DAT began:3SG ache:INF head:ACC
"I began to have a headache"

Raising to object: Infinitival small clauses do not exist in Lithuanian (Gronemeyer & Usonienė 2001: 127)



Behavioural properties

5. SVO unmarked word order

Sometimes claimed to be rather topicality test.



Morphosyntactic properties

1. Causativization
2. Passivization
3. Dativus absolutus



1. Causativization:

- (i) A V (S_{dat}->) O_{acc} semantically and morphologically positive;
- (ii) A V (S_{dat}->) O_{dat} only semantically positive (?) or free dative?

(i) Ji *skaudina mane* kiekviena diena.
she:nom. ache:caus.3. I:acc. every day
"She hurts me every day"

(ii) Man *vaikai skaudina širdį*
me:DAT children:NOM.PL ache:3SG.caus. heart:acc.sg.
"Children hurt my heart" (LKŽ)

A causative does not exist for several experiencer predicates with the non-canonical subject (let alone morphological causatives, since double causative is not possible): *gelti, smelkti, reikėti, knieti, tekti, rinkti, kristi*



2. Passivization

(1) Oro temperatūrai kritant iki -20,

When the temperature outside falls until -20,

žmonių yra skaudami kaulai

people:GEN.PL AUX:3SG ache:PASS bones:nom.pl

PART.NOM.PL

“When the temperature outside falls until -20, the people’s bones ache [lit.: “by people bones are being ached]”

The same is true for the following example:

(2) Vakar kolegų buvo labai reikėta tavo pagalba

yesterday colleague: be;aux. very have:part. you:gen. help:nom.

gen.pl past.3 pass.nom.f. fem.

“Colleagues needed your help yesterday” [lit. “Your help was needed by the colleagues yesterday”]



Passivization

- Latvian debitive:

S O

Man jāizlasa grāmata

I:dat. read:deb. book:nom.sg.

"I have to read the book"

S (< O)

Grāmatai jābūt izlasītai.

book:dat. be:deb. read:part.pass.dat.

"The book has to be read"



2. Passivization

- Thus in cases where a passive construction is possible the test seems to show positive results.
- However the informants say that these constructions seem unnatural to them (though grammatical).
- All accusative marked experiencer predicates show promotion of the accusative argument into the subject position (become nominatives) and no demotion (to the complement phrase marked with the genitive case).



3. Dativus absolutus

patikti "to like", Exp._{dat} – Stim._{nom}:

Stim_{nom} does not acquire dative case-marking as a subject would have to:

Tévui patikus ta jos istorija,
Father:DAT like:prior-CONV this:NOM.SG.f. her story:NOM.SG.f
tai ji pradėjo pasakoti kitą
then she:NOM started:3.PERS.PAST tell:INF another:ACC.SG.f.
"Since the father liked her first story, she started to tell the other one"

NB: The test is positive only for the dative Experiencer predicates.

??? Maybe wrong interpretation because patikus can be patikusi???



“Paradigmatic coherency principle”

- If in a given place of the verbal paradigm there are no valency changing operations (derivations, constructions, lability), one does not have reason to assume deviating distribution of the syntactic roles than otherwise in the paradigm,
 - partitive genitive subjects;
 - genitive of negation subjects;
 - debitive subject;

“Paradigmatic coherency principle”



- cf. Latvian deictive:

S

O

Es

situ

Jāni

I:nom. hit:1.sg.pres. Jānis:acc.sg.

“I hit Jānis”

S

O

Man

jāsit

Jānis

I:nom. hit:1.sg.pres. Jānis:acc.sg.

“I have to hit Jānis”



Canonizing

- The fact that certain constituents tend to acquire prototypical subjecthood must be also considered as a kind of subject test, cf. Lith.:

Lith. *trūkti* (“to lack”) “to be insufficient with”

(3) S_{NOM.}-O_{GEN.}:

Ar ne-trūk-si-m bulv-i-ų sėkl-ai?
not-lack-FUT-1PL potatoes-Gen.Pl. sowing-Dat.Sg.

“Won’t we lack potatoes for sowing?”

(4) S_{DAT.}-O_{GEN.}:

J-am *trūk-o* *pinig-ų*
he:DAT lack-3.Pers.PAST money-Gen.Pl.

“He was short if money”



Summary

1. Some of behavioural properties are not applicable for Baltic. Are these not "subject-related" / "subject-conditioned"?
2. The coding properties can be regarded as subject properties but they are not sufficient on their own. There must be other subject properties which would make the analysis of a certain constituent as Proto-subject or Proto-object probable.
3. The morphosyntactic and behavioural tests do show positive results for dative subject predicates. but the relative low frequency of the passives, causatives or dativus absolutus and their incompatibility for the most predicates make these tests inapplicabe in many cases.
4. Can the "paradigmatic coherence principle" be regarded as a subject test/ argument for the subjecthood?



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