

**Heinike Heinsoo, *Mā ja pūd lēvād, meid eb lē. The Subject and the Predicate in Votic*, Tallinn 2010 (*Linguistica Uralica. Supplementary Series / Volume 4*). 152 pp.**

The first grammar of Votic (Ahlqvist 1856) was published more than 150 years ago, and the list of publications on Votic since then is rather impressive. However, it is clear at first glance that there are two major problems with this list. The first is that very little research has been done on Votic syntax. There are almost no publications dealing with syntactic aspects of Votic, except for two doctoral dissertations (Хейнсоо 1987; Сабо 1963), which are not easily accessible to most linguists, and several articles by the same scholars. The two most widely-known Votic grammars (Ahlqvist 1856; Ariste 1948) and the grammar by Tsvetkov (2008) do not contain chapters on syntax at all.

The second issue is that most publications on Votic are written in languages which are commonly understood by linguists working on Finno-Ugric (such as Estonian, Finnish or Russian), but which are not so well known among

wider linguistic circles. The book "Mā ja pūd lēvād, meid eb lē. The subject and the predicate in Votic" by Heinike Heinsoo provides valuable information on Votic syntax, which, since it is written in English, is available to a much wider linguistic audience.

The book is in fact an improved version of the author's PhD thesis (Хейнсоо 1987), which was the first and only attempt at a systematic study of subject-predicate relations in Votic. The aims of this research are stated as follows (page 12):

- 1) to describe the semantic types of the predicate in the Votic language and their relations to the semantics and the form of the subject;
- 2) to show how the content of the predicate controls the form of the subject;
- 3) to show how the form of the subject controls the form of the predicate;
- 4) to show how the semantic type of the predicate controls the form of the entire sentence.

The book starts with an introduction, which contains an overview of the main previous studies of Votic syntax, information on the data to be analyzed, and explanations of the basic terminology (subject, predicate, semantic type, etc.). The main body of the book is divided into two chapters: "Semantic relations between the subject and predicate" and "Formal relations between the subject and predicate".

The first chapter contains abundant language data and can be characterized to a certain extent as a structured and annotated data corpus. The classification of syntactic constructions is based both on semantic and syntactic criteria. The main classes correspond to the semantic types of predicates: state, process and action predicates, and verbs with incomplete meaning as formal predicates (i.e. modal and phasal verbs). A more detailed subdivision uses both semantic and syntactic criteria: semantic roles of predicates, verbal forms, and case marking of arguments. The conclusion to the first chapter lists the different types of subjects (depending on morphological characteristics and semantic type) and gives references to the corresponding sections in the book.

The second chapter is dedicated to the various types of subject from the perspective of its morphological and syntactic form. The core of the chapter is an analysis of the partitive subject. After discussing theoretical issues that bear on this point, the author presents a semantically-structured list of verbs which can combine with a partitive subject, and provides examples of these in use. The functions of the partitive subject are analyzed on the semantic-pragmatic level. The author also investigates the infinitive subject, constructions with the subordinate clause as the subject, and "subjectless" structures (including formal and semantic impersonality). The last section of the chapter gives a detailed overview of the principles of agreement between subject and predicate (including such interesting instances as that of a subject expressed by a cardinal numeral, by a collective noun, by a plurative, etc.).

The analysis presented in the book is not based on any specific syntactic theory and operates with syntactic concepts which will be familiar to every linguist. Hence, this book can be very useful for a wide range of researchers, including specialists on Votic or other Finnic languages, general linguists and typologists. The system of indexes greatly simplifies the task of searching for required data, as it allows the reader to find all the examples in the book which feature a particular verbal lexeme.

Readers should be aware that the problems addressed in this monograph are very far from trivial. Our linguistic tradition has developed primarily on the basis of languages which belong to the accusative type. As a rough generalization, one can say that these languages have a special morphological case for marking the subject (nominative), and a special case for marking a direct object (accusative). As a result of this, the traditional notions of "subject" and "object" were based mainly on the principle of case marking. Data from languages that belong to other types have required further elaboration of these notions, but still they remain fundamental for most languages. However, the classification of languages as belonging to the accusative type, the ergative type, etc. does not really work for Finnic languages. In these languages, the so called "syntactic cases" (namely, the nominative, genitive and partitive) have a wide range of functions besides marking syntactic structure, e.g. they express temporal and aspectual oppositions, denote the referential status of the object or its quantitative characteristics, etc. Finnic languages do not have the accusative case in the classical sense, and so they have been referred to as "accusativeless" languages (Володин 2000). Consequently, it is rather difficult to define the notions of subject and direct object in these languages. Consider, for example, several sentences from contemporary Votic: *tämä ęsap siga* 'He:NOM will buy a pig:GEN', *tämä ęsap sikka* 'He:NOM is buying a pig:PART', *tämä ęsap sigad* 'He:NOM will buy pigs:PL.NOM',

*nämä gsetti sika* 'They:NOM bought a pig:NOM', *sikkoit eB jānūd* 'No pigs:PL.PART are left', *leipä müvvä läfkež* 'Bread:PART is sold in a shop'. It is clear from these examples both that the nominative is not a special case marking the subject, and also that there is no unique case for marking the direct object.

In this book the author tries to reveal the correlation between the syntactic and semantic features of the subject and predicate. The suggested classification of predicates and subjects is very detailed. However, it is clear that the problems concerning the notion of the subject cannot be easily solved. The author introduces the notions of "grammatical subject" and "semantic subject", but the description of these concepts is not very careful, and in some examples it is not clear which criteria are being used to define the subject. Consider the following examples:

(a) *miļ on tarviz gssā uvvet sāppād* 'I need to buy a pair of new boots' (p. 103);

(b) *lāsivāle on dohteria tarviz* 'the sick person needs a doctor' (p. 83);

(c) *interesno on pajattā teijēkā* 'it is interesting to talk to you' (p. 96).

It is not clear why example (a) belongs to "formally subjectless structures" (with the semantic subject in the adessive form — *miļ* 'I:ADESS'); example (b) contains "a partitive subject" (*dohteria* 'doctor:PART') and example (c) has "a subject in the infinitive" (*pajattā* 'talk:INF'). In my opinion, all three examples contain similar predications (*on tarviz* 'is needed' or *on interesno* 'is interesting') with two valences: "what (is needed / is interesting)" and "to whom (it is needed / it is interesting)". If one assumes that the first of these is the subject valence, and *dohteria* 'doctor:PART' in (b) is a subject, it would be logical to qualify the infinitive construction *gssā uvvet sāppād* 'to buy new boots' in (a) as a subject too. The presence of a noun phrase which corresponds to the second valence (*miļ* 'I:ADESS' in (a), *lāsivāle* 'sick person:ALL' in (b) or its absence in (c) does not affect the syntactic structure of the sentence as a whole.

Such variation in the interpretation of syntactic structures inevitably arises

from the fact that there are no evident formal features for the grammatical subject in Votic (i.e. a special case marking as discussed above).

In general, it is not clear why the author needs the term "semantic subject" when at the same time she operates with the notion of a semantic role. These concepts belong to different approaches to syntactic description, and their simultaneous presence in the same research may create the impression (which I suppose to be false) that the author distinguishes three syntactic levels (one for grammatical subject, one for semantic subject and one for agent)

Another problem with the definition of subject in Votic concerns the morphological classes of lexemes. For example, certain lexemes can function in both nominal and attributive functions, cf. *pikkarainō tšülmä* 'little cold' and *tšülmä tšesä* 'cold summer' (Vadja keele sõnaraamat 2010 : 255–256). In the book under discussion, we find some classifications that are very questionable. For example, on page 42 the constructions *nüd jo varai tūp pimmiä* 'now it gets dark early', *täl jo tuli tšülmä* 's/he felt cold already' and *miļ tuli sōjā* 'I warmed up' are classed as containing an adjective. However, in my opinion, the forms *pimmiä*, *tšülmä* and *sōjā* do not show any adjectival features here, and should be classed as nouns.

There are also other instances of questionable morphological classification in the book. For example, it is stated on page 30 that "At other times the state is localized by an adverb: *kainonallā tšihgub* 'sb's armpit is itching', *pisäp tšül'tšē* 'there is a sharp pain in my side', *miļ musētap silmiz* 'I'm very dizzy, my head is spinning'". However, it is not especially clear why the locative forms of nouns are classed as adverbs in these examples.

A number of minor critical remarks should also be mentioned:

1) The research (Caño 1963) mentioned on page 10 as an article is in fact not an article but a PhD thesis.

2) While discussing the issues around the term "predicate", and the construc-

tions with the verb *olema* 'to be' in particular, the author claims that "This kind of problem is irrelevant in Russian syntax because the copula is absent from the surface structure, and the adjective or the noun functions as the surface predicate". It is difficult to agree with this statement, as in Russian the copula is missing only in present-tense constructions, but it is always present in past- and future-tense constructions (compare, for example, *Дом красивый* 'The house is beautiful' — *Дом был красивый* 'The house was beautiful' — *Дом будет красивый* 'The house will be beautiful').

3) I cannot agree with the syntactic interpretation of certain constructions. On page 36 the author analyses constructions with 3Sg verbal forms and the partitive case of nouns, e.g. *miĭ lēb aikā* 'I'll have some time (in future)'. Among other examples are the sentences *tāl gli pall'o voimā* 's/he had a lot of power' and *miĭ gli kahz vohoa* 'I had two goats'. In these examples, the partitive case of *voimā* and *vohoa* is determined by the quantifier *pall'o* and the numeral *kahz*, and not by any other factor. Thus the use of the partitive case in these sentences cannot be classed as a specific characteristic of the predicative construction.

4) The principles of transcription are not always clear. For example, on pages 29–30 we meet such forms as *tšūlmessā* 'be cold, be in shivers', *tšūlmesāb* 'makes (me) shiver', *tšihgutab* '(it) is itching', *tšihguttā* 'be itching'. It is not clear whether the

author distinguishes two different sounds *tš* and *tš'*, whether she uses various sources of data with different spelling conventions, or whether it is simply a misprint. The same question applies to the variation of final *B* and *b* in these forms.

5) It is quite clear that any semantic classification will be more or less subjective. Still, the names of some classes used in the book seem highly disputable. For example, pages 39–40 give an overview of constructions that are supposed to express the meaning 'The state in nature'. Among the examples are such sentences as 'The lock clicked open', 'The carriage wheels are rattling', and 'The teapot is whispering'. I am not sure that the term *nature* is entirely suitable for describing these situations.

To conclude, I would say that, despite some questionable issues, the book by Heinike Heinsoo presents an extensive study of a core aspect of Votic syntax. It provides a solid portion of highly valuable language data, which will be very interesting for many syntacticians. I hope that this book will be used as the basis for many studies on Votic syntactic structures even once there are no Votic speakers left.

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