

Kazakh Differential Object Marking – the Dynamic Syntax Approach

This paper attempts to explain the phenomenon of Differential Object Marking (DOM) in the Kazakh language from the point of view of Dynamic Syntax (DS). DOM in Kazakh is shown in the examples in (1). It works in the following way: all objects that appear outside of the immediately preverbal (IPV) position are marked with the Accusative case-marker (1a), while those in the IPV position may be marked (1b) or unmarked (1c) depending on the specificity (in von Heusinger's (2002) meaning) of the referent; the unmarked noun form coincides with the Nominative case form of the subjects. It is this possibility for an unmarked noun to be either a subject or a direct object (in the IPV position) that presents a challenge for modelling Kazakh DOM in DS. Below is a short account of how I propose to approach this question, fully worked-out formalisations to be developed.

(1) a) in response to the question 'Who wrote the book?'

Kitap-ti/onı Bolat žaz-dı.
book-ACC/3SG.ACC Bolat write-3.PAST
'Bolat wrote the book/it.'

b) Bolat onı kör-di biraq eleme-di.
Bolat 3.SG.ACC see-3.PAST but ignore-3.PAST
'Bolat saw him/her, but ignored him/her.'

c) Bolat kitap žaz-ıp, onı orısša-ğa audar-dı.
Bolat book write-CONV 3.SG.ACC Russian-DAT translate-3SG.PAST
'Bolat wrote a book and translated it into Russian./ Having written a book, Bolat translated it...'

In DS, case is generally viewed as fulfilling two roles: defining filters on output by imposing requirements on a node which restrict subsequent development of the tree; and inducing a structure-building action within the incremental structure-building process (Cann et al 2005). Thus, an Accusative case-marker on a noun in Kazakh will simultaneously rule out all further tree developments apart from those in which the node with the Accusatively-marked noun has its relation fixed as object, and induce the building of a structure in which the predicate will need to be at least transitive. The problem, however, is that the lack of an overt case-marker does not necessarily fix the relation of the unmarked noun phrase as that of a subject.

I solve this problem by proposing that: a) each noun in Kazakh carries within itself a requirement to identify its position within a tree as early as possible; and b) this requirement can be satisfied by either a case-marker or prosody. I further posit that the clause initial, non-focused subject phrases separately from the rest of the clause and is demarcated by an intonation phrase (IP) boundary. This allows the parser to identify the unmarked clause-initial noun as the subject, and prevents the unmarked direct objects from appearing in the clause-initial position unless followed immediately by the verb. In the latter case, the prosody of the verb phrase – into which an unmarked direct object is incorporated – would satisfy that unmarked noun's requirement to identify its position within a clause.

The Accusative case marking on a direct object outside of the IPV position would immediately fix it as the object. The same marking on a direct object in the IPV position would signal to the parser that the referent of this noun phrase is specific (minimally, to the speaker) and must be either present in the Common Ground (CG), or needs to be added to it with further information to follow – a similar effect is achieved in English by adding 'this' to an indefinite noun phrase as in 'I met this guy yesterday'. The Accusative case marking can also be added to nominalized verb phrases which can become direct objects; here the Accusative case marking signals the nominalised status and the objecthood of these phrases.

References:

- Cann, Ronnie, and Kempson, Ruth, and Marten, Lutz. 2005. *The Dynamics of Language: an Introduction*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- von Heusinger, Klaus 2002. Specificity and definiteness in sentence and discourse structure. In: *Journal of Semantics* 19, 245-274.