ON ARGUMENT STRUCTURE IN TATAR AND FINNISH CONVERB CLAUSES

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The present paper deals with the argument structure of Tatar and Finnish converb clauses from a typological perspective. These two languages have been chosen due to the many structural and typological similarities that appear to exist between them. The purpose of the research is twofold: firstly to find out how the argument structure – in our case the subject and object – in Tatar and Finnish converb clauses compares with that of the basic finite clause/sentence; and secondly to compare and contrast the arguments in Tatar and Finnish converb clauses.

Tatar and Finnish belong to different language families – Tatar to the Altaic, and Finnish to the Uralic language family. However, typologically there are many similarities between them. Morphologically they are both agglutinative, and strongly suffixing languages, and in genitive constructions both can mark the head as well as the dependent. Syntactically both are pro-drop languages, and both use non-finite verb forms, such as converbs and participles, extensively.

This paper focuses on the converb, that is, a non-finite verb form that functions as a free adverbial modifying the finite verb or the entire main clause. An example from Finnish is given in (1), and a Tatar example in (2).

(1) Kaatu-essa-an Maija satutt-i jalka-nsa.
    fall.over-CONV(2INF.INE)-POSS.3s Maija hurt-PST.3s leg-ACC+POSS
    ‘When falling over, Maija hurt her leg.’

(2) Janggyr bet-kach, bala uram-ga chyq-ty.
    rain finish-CONV child street-DAT go.out-PST.3s
    ‘After it had stopped raining, the child went out.’

In (1) the converb, *kaatuessaan*, modifies the finite verb *satutti*. In (2) the converb *betkach* (with its argument) modifies the main clause. In Tatar and Finnish, converbs are typically used in syntactically subordinate clauses.

Converb clauses in both Tatar and Finnish can frequently take subjects and objects. Special attention is given to describing the possibilities and limitations for converb clause arguments. For example, in Finnish, different rules apply to different types of converbs, whereas in Tatar there are fewer restrictions.

In both Tatar and Finnish, the object in converb clauses retains the form it would have had in the equivalent basic finite clause. An object which is in a main clause occurring with a converb clause sometimes undergoes changes, depending on whether it is co-referent with the subject or the object of the converb clause. The purpose of these changes is to make the reference explicitly clear.

While the changes affecting the object are relatively constrained, the subject in both languages experiences greater changes when it occurs in a converb clause. In many cases the way the subject is marked in converb clauses is different from the way it is marked in finite clauses. These differences depend on many factors, one of the most important being whether the subjects of the converb clause and main clause are co-referential. The general principle is towards economy: if the subjects are co-referential, the subject is made explicit with a noun phrase only in one of the clauses. This is particularly prevalent in Tatar.

The subject of the converb clause can be non-co-referential with the subject of the main clause in both Tatar and Finnish. However, Tatar is far freer: almost all the converbs are able to take non-co-referential subjects. Finnish is more restricted: some converbs do not allow for non-co-referential subjects at all, while certain others allow them only very rarely.

The subject of converbs takes various forms: an independent noun phrase, a possessive suffix, agreement marking on the main verb, or zero. The principles determining what form a subject will take are different in Tatar and Finnish. In discourse Tatar, unlike Finnish, also allows the subject to be fully implicit in both the converb clause and the main clause, if the subject is evident from the preceding context.

The argument structure in Tatar and Finnish converb constructions has key similarities, largely in the broad spectrum, but numerous differences, mainly in the details.