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**NOMINATIVE OBJECT IN
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RUSSIAN DIALECTS**

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NOMINATIVE OBJECT IN MODERN NORTH RUSSIAN DIALECTS

The main way to mark the direct object in Russian dialects is the accusative case, but in some constructions the NP in direct object position is marked by the nominative case. This paper considers this similar to the Differential Object Marking (DOM) phenomenon, where an NP in the direct object position in certain conditions can be in the nominative case, but in normal conditions it is in the accusative. The study describes this phenomenon in North Russian dialects. Different syntactic constructions with nominative objects considered from the point of the DOM features: animacy, definiteness, word order, information structure, and the modality of predicates.

Key words: Differential Argument Marking, Differential Object Marking, nominative object, North Russian dialects

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Introduction

The Baltic, Germanic, Finno-Ugric and Slavic languages that spread around Baltic Sea have some common phonetic, morphological and syntactical features. One of those features is the *nominative object structure*. These structures are present in Lithuanian, Latvian and Finnish and in North Russian dialects:

North Russian:

- (1) Kapust-a nado poč'ist'it'
Cabbage-NOM.SG need (mod) clean-INF
'It is necessary to clean the cabbage'
- (2) Van'a korovu kup'il.
Vanya-NOM.SG cow-ACC.SG buy-PRS-3SG
'Vanya has bought a cow'

In (1) we see an example of the nominative object structure. The main way to mark the direct object in Russian dialects is the accusative case (example (2)), but in some constructions the NP in the direct object position is marked by the nominative case. These will be considered as examples of Differential Object Marking (DOM) (Aissen 2003, Bossong 1985), where NPs in the direct object position in certain conditions can be marked by the nominative case, but in normal conditions they are marked by the accusative case. Linguists talk about nominative objects, when in the case system of a language there is a morphological nominative case.

Nominative objects in circum-Baltic languages occur in a different syntactic environment: in debitive constructions in Latvian (Seržant, Taperte 2016); with gerundive and infinitive forms with an auxiliary, modal predicative, defective verb (third person only) or the evidential construction with a non-canonically realized subject in Lithuanian (Serjant 2016:156); with passive, infinitive and imperative in Finnish (Timberlake 1975); with infinitive, finite verbs and modal predicates in North Russian.

Lithuanian:

- (3) Reikia šienas grėbti
need.PRS.3 hay.NOM.SG.M rake.INF
'It is necessary to rake the hay.' (Ambrazas 2001: 391)

Latvian:

- (4) Kāpēc šī filma ir jā-redz?!
why DEM.NOM.SG.F film-NOM.SG.F AUX.PRS.3 DEB-see

‘Why does one have to see this film?!’ (Seržant 2016: 163)

Finnish:

- (5) *hänen täytyy kirjoittaa kirje*
GEN 3SG. INF.I NOM.

‘He must write a letter’ (Timberlake 1975: 205)

This study analyses the nominative object structure in North Russian dialects and describes the phenomenon from an areal and typological point of view. We consider common DOM features (such as animacy, definiteness, word order, information structure and modality) for various syntactic constructions with the nominative objects in North Russian dialects.

Types of syntactic environment and the data

There are nine types of syntactic environments in constructions with nominative objects:

nominative objects with an independent infinitive (I):

- (6) *Dak Tol’ko pašn’-a paha-t’, kartošk-a p’er’eb’ir-a-t’*
Part Only arable land-nom.sg plow-inf, potato-nom.sg sort out-inf.

‘Only to plow arable land and sort out the potatoes’

nominative objects with an infinitive which depends on another infinitive (II):

- (7) *Poi-ty tr’apk-a namoči-t’*
Go-INFrag-NOM.SG wet-INF

‘to go to wet a rag’ (Markova 1989: 25)

nominative objects with an infinitive which depends on a verb (III):

- (8) *Prid’ot-s’a izb-a my-t’*
Go-REFL house-NOM.SG wash-INF

‘(I) have to wash the house’ (Markova 1989: 26)

nominative objects with a finite verb without modal meaning (IV):

- (9) *Pr’a-l-a ran’še kanopl’-a*
spin-PST-FEM before flax-NOM.SG

‘I used to spin flax’

nominative object with an infinitive which depends on the modal predicative ‘nado’ (V):

(10) Nado by-l-o ban’-a rubi-t’

Need be-PST -? Bathhouse-NOM.SG hack-INF

‘It was necessary to build a bathhouse’ (RNC, Arhangelsk region)

(6) with another word order (VI):

(11) Kapust-a nado počist’it’

Cabbage-NOM.SG need (mod) clean-INF

‘It is necessary to clean a cabbage’ (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

nominative objects with a modal predicative only (VII):

(12) Nado ли vod-a t’ot’a Kat’

Need PARTQ water-NOM.SG aunt-NOM.SG Kate-Vocative

‘Aunt Kate, do you need water?’ (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

nominative objects with an infinitive which depends on a finite verb (VIII)

(13) Hod-il korov-a doi-t’

Go-PST cow-NOM.SG to milk a cow-INF

‘He went milk a cow house’ (Markova 1989: 27)

nominative objects in preposition groups (IX):

(14) On id’o-t na mogil-a

He go-PRS.3SG on grave-NOM.SG

‘He is going to the grave’ (Timberlake 1974: 107)

The study is done using fieldwork data from Synyaky village (Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region), Ustja River Basin Corpus, Russian National Corpus, and data of previous researchers (Markova 1989, Timberlake 1974, Stepanov 1984).

The nominative object is a North Russian feature, but we have some examples of the constructions in South and Central Russian dialects.

Table 1

Types of syntactic environment

Source	I	II	III	IV	V,VI	VII	VIII	IX
Siniki vyllage (Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)	3	1	1+0	10	4	9	1	1
Ustja River Basin Corpus	4	4	0	1	7	3	0	0
Russian National Corpus	8	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Markova 1989	81	5	9+1	64	193	0	13	23
Timberlake 1974	4	3	0+	2	3	0	0	1
Stepanov 1985	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
TOTAL	10 0	13	11	77	211	15	14	25

In Table 1 we present the data, which we have used in our research. In every cell we can see the number of examples with nominative object construction with different types of syntactic environment from the different sources.

Animacy and definiteness

Animacy and definiteness are the features, which are usually considered in DOM research. In modern typology, these parameters have hierarchy:

1/2 pron > 3 pron > proper > human > animate > other (Silverstein 1976).

Table 2

Animacy in nominative object constructions

Source	inanimate nouns	animals	human	names
Ustja River Basin Corpus	18	3	1	0
Russian National Corpus	10	1	0	0
Timberlake 1974	10	2	0	1

Markova 1989	143	13	7	1
Siniki vyllage	23	5	3	0
TOTAL	204 (84%)	24 (10%)	11 (5%)	2(1%)

In table 2 examples with nominative object from different sources is distributed on the animacy scale. According the data, nominative objects have a tendency to be inanimate and indefinite, but there are many counterexamples:

- (15) Lenk-a č'etyr'-e god-a n'e mog-l'-y prop'isa-t'
 Lenka-nom.sg four-nom year-gen.sg neg can-pst.-pl. register-inf
 '(They) can't register Lenka for four years' (Karelia Republic [Markova 1989: 27])

Table 3

Animacy in constructions with accusative objects

Source	inanimate nouns	animals	human	names
Russian National Corpus	110 (55%)	40 (20%)	44 (21%)	9 (4%)

In table 3 examples with accusative object from the dialectal part of Russian National Corpus is distributed on the animacy scale. We can see another distribution, than in table 2: the higher proportion of different types of animate objects. The different proportions of animate objects in comparable samples indicate the different tendencies in patterns of accusative and nominative objects.

Word order

Word order and information structure are also factors affecting DOM, (for example, in the Uralic and the Baltic languages (Seržant 2016; Serdobol'skaya, Toldova 2012). In structures (I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII,) the position of the object relative to the predicate is as follows:

Table 4

Word order in Nominative object constructions (without constructions with predicatives and with prepositions)

Source	OV	VO
Siniki vyllage	11 (6)	5 (4)
Ustja River Basin Corpus	14 (1)	4 (0)
Russian National Corpus/Timberlake 1974	20(2)	5 (0)
Markova 1989	100 (37)	31 (16)
TOTAL	145 (46) - 76%	45 (20) - 24%

Among sources for these constructions the nominative object is before the predicate in 76% of cases. Table 4 combines the various infinitive constructions and constructions with finite forms.

We consider the predominance of OV over VO word order from two points of view. It is a relic of the last possible subjectivity of this argument. A similar argument is made to describe a similar situation with the word order in Latvian (Seržant, Taperte 2016). On the other hand, the reason for this word order may be hiding in the information structure of such constructions.

For comparison, Table 5 shows comparable sample of accusative objects in special dialect subcorpus of the RNC

Table 5

Word order in accusative object constructions

	OV	VO
With infinitive	230 (58%)	167 (42%)
With finite verbs	71 (65%)	38 (35%)

Table 6 combines the data of examples of nominative objects with modal predicative. In this data modal predicative prefer object preposition.

Table 6

Word order in nominative object constructions with predicatives

Source	object-predicative	predicative -object
Siniki vyllage	3	6
Ustja River Basin Corpus	2	1
Russian National Corpus	0	2
Markova 1989	0	0
TOTAL	5 (36%)	9 (64%)

In constructions involving a predicate, an infinitive and a nominative object, these elements can be placed in different ways.

Table 7

Word order in nominative object constructions with infinitive and modal predicatives

Source	predicative- infinitive- object	predicative- object- infinitive	object- predicative- infinitive	object- infinitive- predicative	infinitive- predicative- object
Siniki vyllage	0	0	4	0	0
Ustja River Basin Corpus	4	2	1	0	0
Russian National Corpus	0	1	1	0	0
Markova 1989	3	16	5	1	1
Timberlake 1974	1	2	0	0	0
TOTAL	5 (11%)	21 (55%)	11 (28%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)

Modal predicatives prefer a position before the objects and infinitives. This fact can be an argument in the discussion about common or independent development of constructions *nado*+object / *nado*+verb+object (verb+object):

- (16) Muzyk-ám nádo tak-ája défk-a, dak štób défk-a
 Man-DAT.PL need such girl-NOM.SG PART that girl-NOM.SG
 ‘Men need a GIRL!’ (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

- (17) Nado noč'-juet-a ryb-a lovi-t'
 Need night-INST.SG fish-NOM.SG catch-INF
 'It is necessary to catch fish at night' (Markova 1989: 25)

Information structure

If we consider these NPs from the point of information structure, we see that all the examples with nominative objects have a special type of information structure. Most of these NPs can be in focus, topic or contrast.

Nominative object in focus:

- (18) Vilk-a nado? N'et
 Fork-NOM.SG need? No
 'Do you need a fork? No' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

Nominative object with focus particles:

- (19) Gus'-em ved' nado vod-a
 Goose-DAT.PL PART need water-NOM.SG
 'Geese need water' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

- (20) Dak jemu ved' nado sobak-a
 PART him PART need dog-NOM.SG
 'He needs a dog' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

Nominative object in contrastive focus:

- (21) Ondatr-u, v'ydr-u, bobr-a, no
muscrat-acc.sg otter-acc.sg beaver-acc.sg, but
 nork-a n'e pr'ihod'ilos' mn'e strel'a-t'
mink-nom.sg neg come-refl me shoot-inf
 '(I) shot a muscrat, an otter and a beaver, but I didn't shoot a mink' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

Table 8

Information structure

Source	Topic	Focus (47 – focus, 2 – focus in question, 2 – contrastive focus)
Siniki vyllage	4	27
Ustja River Basin Corpus	2	19
Russian National Corpus	1	7
TOTAL	7 (11%)	53 (89%)

Table 8 contains examples with long contexts, which allow us to determine the information structure type. In this data the nominative object is associated with focus (89% of sample).

Modality

Much of the data are clauses, which have special modality. For example in Onega dialects, 52% of clauses contain special predicative *nado* ('need'). In other North Russian dialects the situation is the same. Less often we can see another predicatives (*možno*, *nužno...*).

- (22) *Kartošk-a nado byl-o i pol'iva-t' uže*
 Potato-NOM SG need be-PST.3 water-INF already

'It is already necessary to water potatoes' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

There are clauses with another type of modality. For example, with predicative *možno* ('may')

- (23) *A vniz-u možno tr'apočk-a*
 And down-LOC may cloth-NOM.SG

'and at the bottom you may (put) a rag' (Siniki village, Ustianskiy district, Arhangelsk region)

- (24) *Možno vyrasti-t' borodk-a*
 May grow-INF beard-NOM.SG

'May grow a beard' (Markova 1989: 26)

Conclusion

This paper considers some types of constructions with nominative objects in North Russian dialects from the point of view of the DOM phenomenon. The typological behavior of those constructions in North Russian dialects is typical. The features of definiteness and animacy are similar to the patterns in other languages with DOM: nominative objects tend to be inanimate and indefinite. The presence of these structures special status from the point of view of information structure (being in focus) is comparable to the situation in the geographically close Baltic and Finno-Ugric languages. The information structure is important for the formation of these constructions; nominative objects could be in different types of focus. The word order in these constructions can be explained by the reflex of their syntactic status in diachrony or by the properties of information structure.

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