

Root infinitives with dative subjects

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This paper focuses on the declarative infinitival clauses with a dative subject in Russian, as in (1). It is generally assumed that the dative case in these constructions is a default value of the infinitival inflection (Babby 1998; see also Landau 2008). This view needs further refinement in the context of multiple inflectional pieces sandwiched in between CP and VoiceP/vP, including the grammatical (view-point) aspect. Which head would be involved in the dative case assignment and licensing? This question is also related to the source of modality in these sentences. How does the dative relate to the modal meaning in (1)? As an alternative, we could dismiss the inflectional view of this dative and assume a covert lexical modal that embeds these infinitives. This option is problematic for two reasons. First, Fortuin (2007) has shown that modality in these structures is attributable to aspect. In fact, if we compare the infinitives in (1) with those selected by an overt modal, they do not have the same aspectual restrictions: (1a) must be imperfective and (1b) must have a negation; cf. (2). Stipulating a special covert modal for necessity in (1a) and (im)possibility in (1b) would not capture this aspect/modal connection. Second, infinitives do not necessarily involve syntactic embedding and can contain case-marked subjects in the root contexts as well (Haug et al. 2019). Postulating syntactic embedding does not shed any light on such infinitives.

- (1) a. Mne zavtra rano vsta-va-t'.
me.DAT tomorrow early get.up-IPFV-INF
'I have to get up early tomorrow.'
- b. Mne zavtra rano ne vsta-t'.
me.DAT tomorrow early NEG get.up[PFV]-INF
'It is impossible for me to get up early tomorrow.'
- (2) Mne nužno zavtra rano vsta-t'.
me.DAT need tomorrow early get.up[PFV]-INF
'I need to get up early tomorrow.'

In an attempt to link aspect and modality, I propose that the dative case-assigning head, M_G (standing for “modal goal”), is merged right above VoiceP (and below AspP), as in (3). Crucially, M_G is not a modal that lexically encodes necessity or possibility, but a spatio-temporal head that introduces a preparatory time interval, $\tau(\text{prep})$, stretching between the utterance time and the event time (from $\text{TIME}(u)$ to $\tau(e)$); as shown by an arrow in (4) (i.e. the event is viewed as a goal). Thus, the imperfective places the reference time $g(i)$ relative to $\tau(\text{prep})$, not $\tau(e)$: $g(i) \subseteq \tau(\text{prep})$.

(3) $[_{\text{AspP}} \text{Asp} [_{\text{M}_G\text{P}} \text{Subj } M_G [_{\text{VoiceP}} \langle \text{Subj} \rangle \dots]]]$

(4)

This proposal leads to a generalization that M_G has to be under the scope of an operator that distributes over possible situations at $\tau(\text{prep})$; the imperfective would be an instance of universal quantification in this domain (Arregui et al. 2014). Under this view, the verb-final infinitive marker is not a case assigner; it merely signals the lack of a tense anchor in the structure containing M_G .

References

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