

The Case of Experiencers: Receiving, Holding, Doing*

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1. Introduction: the experiencer theta-role problem

This paper addresses the puzzle which I refer to as ‘the Experiencer theta-role problem’. The problem is as follows: dative subjects such as the ones shown in (1) are crosslinguistically experiencers (Sigurdsson 1989, 1992, Harley 1995, *inter alia*), but not all experiencers are dative subjects (2).

Dative [adverbial] experiencer¹

- (1) Dime bylo skuchno / grusno / smeshno
Dima-dat was-3rd-neut bored-adv / sad-adv / funny-adv
‘Dima felt/was bored / sad / like laughing’

Nominative [verbal] experiencer

- (2) Dima skuchal / grustil / smejalsja
Dima-nom bored-verb / sadded-verb / laughed
‘Dima felt/was bored / sad / like laughing’

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1. There are other dative subject experiencer constructions in addition to adverbial experiencers. I concentrate on the adverbial ones because they can be nicely contrasted with the verbal experiencers that involve nominative case. The account can be extended to dative subject experiencers that involve verbal and adjectival predicates.

Importantly, that dative subjects are subjects is evidenced by a number of tests given in the appendix.

The above cases present a problem because if the experiencer theta-role in (1) and (2) is assigned in an identical configuration, then the case and agreement differences between the two constructions are unexplained. On the other hand, if the configurations involved are distinct, then we have a problem for UTAH (Baker 1988, 1997): the same theta-role is assigned in distinct configurations.

2. The Proposal

To deal with the experiencer theta-role problem I propose that the theta-roles in the dative and nominative experiencer constructions are not in fact, identical. Experiencers is too coarse a term which conceals several distinct theta-roles. Namely, a recipient theta-role which appears in the dative [adverbial] constructions (1) and a holder/doer theta-role which appears in the verbal constructions (2). In accordance with UTAH these two kinds of theta-roles are assigned in distinct configurations which is in turn what is responsible for the case and agreement differences between constructions (1) and (2). Thus, the case and agreement differences between the adverbial and the verbal experiencers are derivable from the configurations in which the subject NPs in (1) and (2) originate and are assigned their theta-roles.

3. Not all experiencers are created equal

The evidence that ‘experiencer’ is too coarse-grained a term and that the theta-roles in (1) and (2) are distinct comes from three sources. First, the verbal experiencer has an agentive (do-er) reading in addition to the non-agentive (holder) reading:

- (3) a. Ja grustil special'no chtob vyzvat' k sebe zhalost'
I sad-verb purposefully to call to self pity
'I was being sad to invoke pity in others'
- b. Ja veselilsja special'no chtob razveselit' detej
I happied-verb purposefully to make-happy children
'I was being purposefully happy to make the children happy'

In contrast, the adverbial experiencer is unambiguously non-agentive:

- (4) a. # Mne bylo strashno special'no chtoby napugat' detej
Me was scared purposefully to scare the children
'I felt scared purposefully to scare the children'
- b. # Mne bylo special'no grusno chtob vyzvat' sochustvie k sebe

Me-dat was purposefully sad-adv to call-out pity to self
 ‘I felt sad on purpose to make other people feel sorry for me’

Second, the verbal experiencer entails the corresponding adverbial construction as seen from the negation facts². Affirming the verbal while negating the adverbial results in contradiction:

- (5) a. #Ja iskrene grushchu, no mne ne grusno
 I sincerely sad-verb, but me-dat not sad-adv
 ‘I am sincerely sad but I am not feeling sad’
- b. #Dima skuchal, no emu ne bylo skuchno
 Dima bored-verb, but him-dat not was bored-adv
 ‘Dima was being bored, but he did not feel bored’

The adverbial experiencer, on the other hand, never entails its verbal counterpart. Affirming the adverbial while negating the verbal does *not* result in contradiction:

- (6) a. Dime bylo iskrene grusno, no on ne grustil
 Dima-dat was sincerely sad-adv, but he not sadded-verb
 ‘Dima was sincerely sad, but he was not being sad’
- b. Dime bylo skuchno, no on ne skuchal
 Dima-dat was bored-adv, but he not bored-verb
 ‘Dima was bored, but he was not being/acting bored’

The natural interpretation of the sentence like (6a) is that Dima feels sad but he distracts himself by thinking happy thoughts or by doing something; Third, due to the presence of the agentive reading, the verbal experiencer can appear in the following question-answer pairs:

- (7) a. Chto Dima delajet? b. On skuchaet /grustit / boitsja
 What Dima does? He bores / sads / fears
 ‘What is Dima doing?’ ‘He is being bored/sad /scared’

However, the adverbial-experiencer is significantly worse in these constructions:

- (8) a. Chto Dima delated? b. #/? Emu strashno/skuchno/grustno
 What Dima does? Him-dat scared/bored/ sad

2. I am greatly indebted to S. Malamud for pointing out this contrast to me (p.c.).

'What is Dima doing?'

'He is scared / bored / sad'

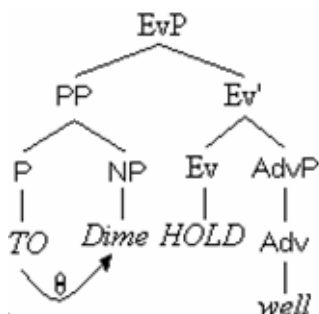
(8b) cannot be used as an answer to (8a) because it cannot involve any action. In sum, the above data indicates that the adverbial and the verbal experiencers -- are not identical -- they have different theta-role options.

4. The syntaxes of the adverbial and the verbal experiencers

4.1. Adverbial experiencers

I propose that the NP in the adverbial experiencer construction is embedded under a null preposition P that gives it a 'recipient' theta-role. (This claim is similar to the proposals in (Baker 1997, Landau 2003)). The resulting PP is merged into the spec of EvP, where the Event head introduces an event argument a la Harley 1995, Travis 2000.

- (9) Dime bylo xorosho
 Dima-dat was well-adv
 'Dima felt well'



The support for the configuration in (9) comes from three sources. First, the P accounts for the impossibility of the agentive reading. Recipients cannot be agentive as seen from (10):

- (10) John gave a book to Bill on purpose

In the construction above, the modifier 'on purpose' cannot modify Bill's receiving the book. Second, the PP in Spec EvP is an adjunct, not an argument of Ev. It can be dropped:

- (11) (Mne) xolodno / skuchno / ploxo / xorosho
 (Me) cold-adv / bored-adv / bad-adv / good-adv
 'I feel cold / bored / bad / good'

When the specifier is dropped, we get an ‘impersonal’ interpretation, e.g. ”it is cold/ boring”, etc. The PP can also be replaced by a location pronoun such as “here”:

- (12) Zdes’ xolodno / skuchno / ploxo / xorosho
 Here cold-adv/ bored-adv / bad-adv / good-adv
 ‘It’s cold/ bored/ bad / good here’

Since Russian is not a pro-drop language (Franks 1995), arguments cannot be generally dropped. Crucially, if they are dropped, they cannot yield an ‘impersonal’ reading.

- (13) */? Smejalsja / grustil / skuchal
 Laughed / sadded-verb / bored-verb
 ‘(He) laughed / was sad / was bored’ NOT: it was sad/ boring...

(13) cannot mean something like “it was sad” or “it was cold”. It is also not possible to replace the NP in (13) with ‘here’ as in (14):

- (14) */? Zdec’ smejalsja / grustil / skuchal
 Here laughed / sadded-verb / bored-verb
 ‘Here (he) laughed/was sad/ was bored’ NOT: it was sad/ boring...

Third, there is a related construction in Russian that actually involves an overt preposition, though with a slightly different meaning:

- (15) (U menja) xolodno / skuchno / veselo
 (At me-loc) cold-adv / bored-adv / happy-adv
 ‘It is cold / boring / fun (at my place)’

The construction in (15) means something like it is cold/ boring/ fun at my place. The NP in the above construction is not an experiencer but rather a possessor of a state in some possibly abstract sense (see Pytkkanen 2002: Ch2, Landau 2003 for extensive discussion). The PP in (15) can also be dropped (16):

- (16) Xolodno / teplo / veselo
 Cold-adv / warm-adv / happy-adv
 ‘It is cold / warm / fun’

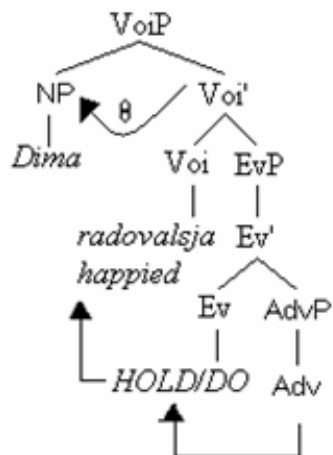
This results in the impersonal reading much like what we saw in (11), (12).

4.2. Verbal experiencers

The verbal experiencer on the other hand originates in a distinct configuration. Namely, I argue that (17) is derived by conflating the Adv0 with Ev with Voice³ (Kratzer 1996). The theta-role introduced by Voice is crucially dependant on the event head involved.

- (17) Dima bojsajsja / radovalsja / grustil
 Dima feared-verb/ happied-verb / sadded-verb
 ‘Dima was happy / afraid / sad’

(18)



Since the event head has a range of meanings – it is vague between the – hold / do interpretation, the argument [Dima] introduced by Voice can have both the agentive [do-er] and non-agentive [holder] interpretation. Some

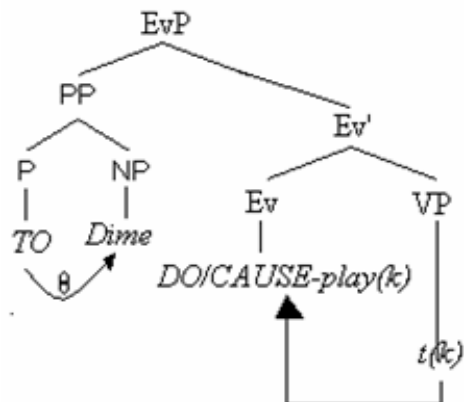
3. (Here I am adopting the idea in Baker 2003 who views verbs as derived from adjectives via conflation. I am extending Bsker’s hypothesis to adverbs: and adverbial head that itself has no theta-role to assign can be conflated with a head that introduces an event argument and then further with a theta-role introducing head such as Voice. The result of this conflation is spelled-out as a verb. Conflation is defined as incorporation prior to lexical insertion (also Hale and Keyser 1993, 1997).

verbs may prefer the agentive interpretation of this head while others may disallow it due to the lexical meaning of the verb. For example, a verb such as ‘radovalsja’ = ‘happied’ allows and even prefers an agentive reading. That is, on the range of possible meanings of the do/hold event head, the lexical meaning of ‘happied’ is located closer to the agentive end of the spectrum. In contrast, a verb like ‘grustil’ = ‘saddened’ disprefers the agentive reading due to its lexical-semantics. That is, the interpretation of do/hold event head is closer to hold [stative] in this case. In sum, the event head determines the theta-role assigned to the NP by Voice. Because the event head has a range of possible meanings, the theta-role assigned to the NP can be a doer or a holder.

Crucially, the dative experiencer does not have the agentive (do-er) reading even if the event head is the agentive [DO/ CAUS] as in (19). This is so because the theta-role in the adverbial experiencer is assigned to the NP by the null preposition [TO] and is completely independent of the nature of the event head involved. In other words, [TO] relates the event to the individual such that the individual is a recipient of the eventuality and not an agent even if the eventuality is non-stative as in (19). The agentive reading in (19) is ruled out despite the fact that the construction involves an agentive/eventive verb ‘play’.

- (19) Mne xorosho igraet-sja (*chtoby vyigrat') / (* special'no)
 Me-dat well plays-sja (*to win) / (* purposefully)
 ‘Playing goes well for me / feels well to me (*in order to win) /
 (*on purpose)’

As in the adverbial experiencer construction, the NP receives a recipient theta-role from the null P [TO]. The individual is a recipient of a playing event, not an agent.



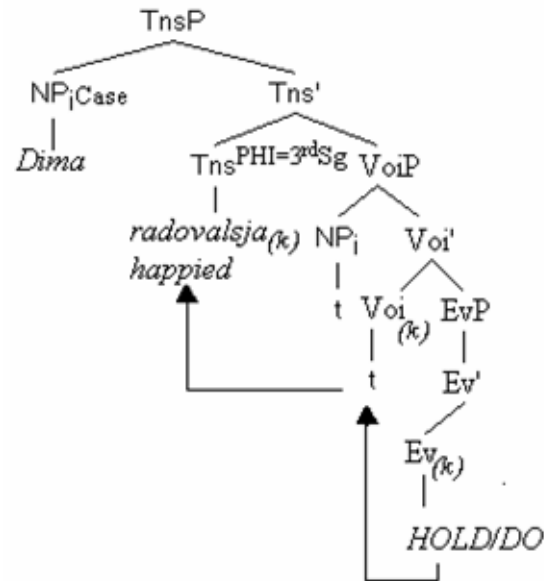
A parallel construction with the nominative subject (20) does have the agentive reading much like the verbal experiencer in (17):

- (20) On xorošo igraet special'no chtoby vyigrat'
 He-nom well plays purposefully to win
 'He is playing well on purpose in order to win'

5. From argument structure to case and agreement

Let us now see how the case and agreement differences between the verbal and the adverbial experiencers can be derived given their distinct initial configurations. Consider first the verbal experiencer.

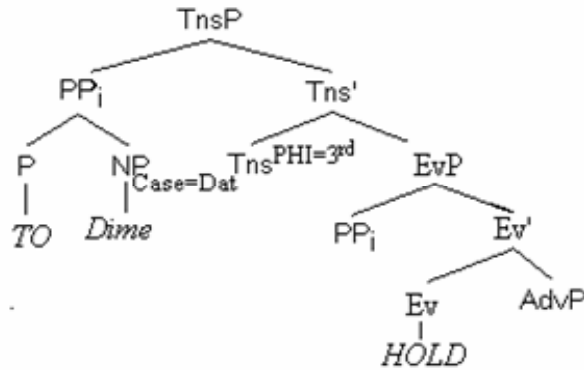
- (21) Dima radovalsja/ grustil
 Dima happied-sja / sadded-verb
 'Dima was happy / sad'



The case on the NP is deleted by the probe (T) resulting in nominative and subject-verb agreement. The NP moves to spec TP due to the EPP, hence it has the subject properties.

Turning to the adverbial experiencers, let us see why nominative case on the NP and subject-verb agreement are precluded. The T attracts the PP into its spec [EPP]. Here I assume that at the time of attraction the T has no way of knowing that the phrase it attracts is not an NP but a PP and as such lacks the relevant case-feature. This is a version of the 'no look ahead' property of grammar (Chomsky 2000). In addition, I am assuming a rather strict version of locality whereby the T attracts the closest possible XP which in this case happens to be a PP. However, the PP lacks a full set of phi-features leading the T to get 3rd person default agreement. (I am assuming that 3rd person is the absence of person following Sigurdsson 1996, 2002 and subsequent work). The case on the NP cannot be deleted by the T – the T can only delete case features carried by the head of the phrase it attracts. The case on the NP is licensed by P which is spelled out as dative. (Following recent work in Pesetsky and Torrego 2001, 2003, I am assuming that T does not have its own case-feature that needs to be checked. All heads only have interpretable features where nominative case is the interpretable T features which appears on the DP / NP. Hence, T lacks its own uninterpretable case feature.). The derivation of the adverbial experiencer is given in (22).

(22)



6. The non-universality of dative experiencers: What makes dative subject experiencers (not) exist in a language?

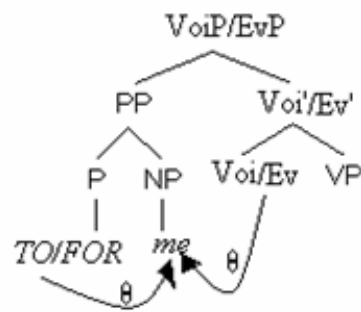
This section briefly addresses the question why dative experiencers, while common, are not universal. I propose that the non-universality of dative experiencers is due to the nature of Ev0. Generalizing a proposal in Pylkkanen 2002 who claims that a causative head Caus introduces only a causing event and not a theta-role, I argue that any event head Ev0 does not assign a theta-role but only introduces an eventuality. Further building on Pylkkanen's work, I assume that Ev0 can come either together or separately from an argument introducing head such as Voice depending on a language. Some languages have Ev and Voice realized as a single head while others have two different heads one introducing the event argument and one introducing a theta-role. This is the 'generalized' Voice-bundling parameter (Pylkkanen 2002). Now, if Ev0 and Voice are realized as separate heads, then it is possible to merge a PP into the spec of EvP [cf 9 p.3]: [EvP[PP [Ev [AdvP]]]. In other words, in a non-voice-bundling language, it is possible to have a configuration that leads to dative subject experiencers. This is so because since the event head does not introduce a theta-role, the NP can be theta-marked by the P – there is no theta-role conflict. In addition to Russian, the prediction is borne out in Japanese – another non-voice-bundling language (Pylkkanen 2002) which also has dative experiencers (Harley 1995: p. 202):

- (23) Yamada-sensei-ni sono gakusei-ga o-wakari-ni-nar-ana-katta
 Yamada-Prof-Dat that student-nom understand-Hon-Neg-Past
 'Professor Yamada did not understand this student'

However, if Voice is realized as a single head with Ev in a language, the PP cannot be merged into the spec of EvP due to the Theta-Criterion violation. Pyllkkanen (2002) argues that English is a voice-bundling language (Pyllkkanen 2002). Hence, dative subjects are impossible in English:

(24) *Me well / TO me there is wellness

(25)



In (25), both the P and Voice want to theta-mark the NP which leads to ill-formedness. Thus, languages such as English that lack a separate Ev head (Pyllkkanen 2002), will only have nominative experiencers.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, I have started by presenting the Experiencer Theta-Role problem and have argued that the problem disappears if we treat experiencers as a conflation of two distinct theta-roles: recipients and holder/doer. I have argued that adverbial [dative] experiencers involve a recipient theta-role which the verbal [nominative] experiencers involve a holder or a doer theta-role depending on the event head. The theta roles in these two constructions are assigned in distinct structural configurations in accordance with UTAH (Baker 1988, 1997). Their different syntaxes are responsible for their different case and agreement properties. Finally, I have argued that the non-universality of the dative experiencer is attributed to the fact that Ev0 is bundled with a theta-marking Voice in some languages (Pyllkkanen 2002), but not in all.

Appendix: Why dative subjects are subjects

The evidence for the subject-status of the dative-NP comes from (a) subject-oriented -anaphor binding; (b) control of PRO; (c) facts about conjunction reduction. These tests are a subset of subjecthood tests presented in Perlmutter and Moor (2000), (also Zaenen, Maling and Thrainsson (1985), Sigurdsson (1989: Ch.5, 6), Harley 1995 for Icelandic). I treat the 'subject' position as 'spec TP'. Crucially, the arguments presented below should not be taken to indicate that the dative subjects and the nominative subjects originate in the same configuration. On the contrary, as I have argued above, they do not. However, both the dative and the nominative NPs undergo movement into spec TP.

I. Binding subject-oriented anaphors

While the facts surrounding subject-oriented anaphors in Russian are murky, it is clear that they do not tolerate being bound by internal arguments at all. Consider the following contrast.

NOM SUBJECTS:

- (26) a. Dima(i) boitsja zhit' odin v svoej(i) kvartire
 Dima scared-sja live-INF alone in self's apartment
 Dima is afraid to live alone is his own apartment
- b. Dima(i) smejetsja nad svoimi(i) oshibkami
 Dima laughs-sja at self's mistakes
 'Dima is laughing at his own mistakes'

INTERNAL ARGUMENTS:

- (27) a. Dima(i) videl Mishu(j) v svoej(i/*j) kvartire
 Dima saw Misha in self's apartment
 'Dima saw Misha in his own (Dima's) apartment'
- b. Dima(i) vernul Mishe svoju(i/*j) fotografiju
 Dima returned Misha self's picture
 'Dima returned to Misha his (Dima's) picture'
- c. Mishe(j), Dima(i) vernul knigu v svoej(i/*j) kvartire
 Misha-dat, Dima returned book in self's apartment
 'To Misha, Dima returned the book in his (Dima's) apartment'

While the anaphor can be construed with the subject (in this case the agent) it cannot be construed with the theme even when the c-command is respected due to topicalization as in (27c). Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the issues of anaphora, it is clear that the anaphor cannot be bound by an internal argument even if the argument is

topicalized. In contrast to the dative-marked indirect objects, the dative-experiencers in the adverbial construction pattern with the nominative agents in (28).

DAT SUBJECTS:

- (28) Mne(i) / Dime strashno / skuchno v svoej(i) kvartire
 Me-dat / Dima-dat scared / bored in self's apartment
 'I/ Dima is scared/ bored in my /his own apartment'

The same facts hold for Icelandic (Sigurdsson 1989, Zaenen, Maling , and Thrainsson 1985, Harley 1995) and Hindi (Mohan 1994).

The fact that the dative-NP patterns with the nominative one indicates that the two wind up in the same position – spec TP.

II. Control of PRO

Like the nominative subjects, dative subjects can control PRO in infinitival constructions:

NOM SUBJECTS:

- (29) a. Dima(i) xochet / nadejetsja [PRO(i) kupit' mashinu]
 Dima wants / hopes-sja [PRO buy-INF car]
 'Dima wants/ hopes to buy a car'
- b. Dima boitsja [PRO zhit' odin]
 Dima fears-sja [PRO live-INF alone]
 'Dima is afraid to live alone'

DAT SUBJECTS:

- (30) a. Dime(i) strashno [PRO zhit' odnomu]
 Dima-dat scared [PRO live-INF alone-dat]
 'Dima is afraid to live alone'
- b. Dime(i) skuchno [PRO(i) sidet' v klasse]
 Dima-dat bored [PRO sit-INF in class]
 'Dima is bored to sit in class'

The above facts further indicate that the dative and nominative NP appear in the same position. Otherwise, their identical behavior with respect to control of PRO is unexpected.

Finally, the nominative NP can be dropped under reduction of conjunction:

- (31) My byli golodnyje i xoteli kupit' edu
 We were-3rd-Pl. hungry and wanted-3rd.Pl. buy-INFfood
 'We were hungry and wanted to buy food'

While the dative-NP does not induce agreement, it can also be dropped under identity:

- (32) Mne bylo strashno i xotelos' kushat'
 Me-dat was-3rd-Neut. scared and wanted-3rd-Neut.-sja eat-INF
 'I was scared and I wanted to eat'

Furthermore, the dative-NP can be dropped under identity with the nominative NP. In the construction below, the same people who are hungry are the people that were bored:

- (33) My byli golodnyje i (nam) bylo skuchno
 We were-3rd-Pl. hungry and (us-dat) was-3rd-Sg-Neut. bored
 'We were hungry and bored'

In contrast, the internal argument cannot be so dropped:

- (34) Oni byli grustye i (im) bylo skazano ujt
 They were-3rdPl sad and (them-dat) was-3rdSgNeut said leave-INF
 'They were hungry and were told to leave' [NOT '... and (they)
 told (someone) to leave']

In (33), it is not possible to construe the dropped internal argument as referring to the people who told someone to leave. The people who were hungry are the people who *were told* to leave by someone. However, the dative-NPs in the adverbial experiencer constructions behave like the nominative subject NPs with respect to conjunction reduction (32). Thus, the above tests indicate that the dative-marked argument is a subject much like the corresponding nominative NP.

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