

A Case of Rare Fluid Intransitivity in Europe: Russian

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1. Introduction

The subject alignment type best known as stative/active subsumes two different patterns: split-S, where intransitive verbs lexically require A or O coding on their subjects; and fluid-S, where most or all verbs can take either kind of coding depending on semantic factors such as volitionality, control, etc.¹ Examples of classic split-S and fluid-S systems are in (1)-(3) and (4)-(5) respectively.²

(1) Lakota (Siouan; Mithun 1991:514-5, hyphens added). Σ = first element of bipartite stem.

a-wá-'u	a-má-'u
Σ 1SG.[A]-bring	Σ 1SG.[O]-bring
'I brought it'	'he brought me'

(2) wa-psíča	ma-xwá
1SG.[Sa]-jump	1SG.[So]-sleepy
'I jumped'	'I'm sleepy'

(3) wa-lową	ma-hı̄xpaye
1SG.[Sa]-sing	1SG.[So]-fall
'I'm singing'	'I fell'

(4) Batsbi/Tsova-Tush (East Caucasian; Georgia)

so	vozhen-sõ
I.ABS[So]	fell-1sg.ABS
'I fell (accidentally)'	

¹ S, A, and O as in Dixon 1979. Sa = S coded like A; So = S coded like O.

² Clause roles (A, S, O; Sa, So, etc.) are identified in interlinears in square brackets.

- (5) as vuizhn-as
 I.ERG[Sa] fell-1s.ERG
 'I fell (on purpose)'

The split-S type is infrequent, making up only 14% of the sample languages in Nichols 1992. The fluid-S type is very rare: Dixon 1994:78ff. lists only Batsbi, Acehnese, spoken Tibetan, and Baniwa as belonging to this type. A few more languages have a split implemented with fluidity for one of the two classes of verbs (Koasati and other Muskogean languages have fixed So vs. fluid Sa/So: Kimball 1991:249, 251; Axininca Campa has fixed Sa vs. fluid So/Sa: Payne 1981:14). The majority of split-S and fluid-S languages are from the Americas, followed by the Pacific; they are quite rare in Eurasia and more so in Africa.

This paper argues that Russian is a fluid-S language of the same type as most of the American and Pacific ones. Though the morphology that implements the fluid-S type is available to all Slavic and Baltic languages, fluidity appears to be found only in one Slavic branch. Since the correlations of the Russian phenomenon with tense/aspect, Aktionsart, subject and object animacy, volitionality/control, and viewpoint are relatively well understood, they can be used to raise hypotheses for testing on other stative-active languages.

Only if object alignment is brought into the picture can Russian be described as a fluid-S language. This requires, in addition to Dixon's (1979) S, A, and O, abbreviations for the two object arguments of ditransitives. I will use P for the more patient-like or theme-like object and G for the more goal-like object. Thus the argument configurations for the basic valence types are:

Intransitive	S
Monotransitive	A O
Ditransitive	A P G

The morphological coding of S in ergative languages, and the "stative" pattern in split-S and fluid-S languages, can be described loosely as So or more precisely as either Sp or Sg, depending on whether the language has the direct/indirect object type or the primary/secondary object alignment type (in the terms of Dryer 1986). In direct/indirect object languages, P=O; in primary/secondary object languages, G=O. (6)-(7) illustrate P=O alignment in Russian (a direct object language), and (8)-(9) illustrate G=O alignment in Tzotzil (a primary object language).

- (6) ja chitaju knigu
 I.NOM[A] read-1SG book-ACC[O]
 'I'm reading a book'

- (7) ja dala detjam knigu
 I.NOM[A] gave children-DAT[G] book-ACC[P]
 'I gave the children a book'

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- (8) Tzotzil (Mayan, Guatemala; Dryer 1986:818 citing Aissen 1983:277, 280)
mi č - a - mah - on
Q ASP-2SG.ERG[A]-hit-1SG.ABS[O]
'Are you going to hit me?'
- (9) mi mu š - a - čon - b - on I-a-čitome
Q NEG ASP-2SG.ERG[A]-sell-BEN[G]-1SG.ABS[P] the-your-pig
'Won't you sell me your pigs?'

In (4) above, So is more precisely Sp, as Batsbi is a direct object language. But in (3), the right-hand examples illustrating So alignment are more precisely Sg, as Lakhota is a primary object language. Lakhota is typical: most split-S and fluid-S languages have G=O alignment (Nichols 200:), and this means that Sa/So in its typical form is more precisely Sa/Sg. It should also be emphasized that in many split-S languages a few two-argument verbs are usually included among the "statives". Usually these are verbs of emotion and/or perception (such as 'like', 'fear', 'see'). The subject of a two-argument verb is A, so for most languages the "stative" verb class should be described as consisting of Sg and Ag verbs. Thus the split-S type can be described more precisely and more accurately as having the alignment Sa/Sg and sometimes also Aa/Ag.

So described, the split-S type is not at all rare in Eurasia. The dative-subject construction that is widespread in southern Eurasia (Masica 1976, 1991) and central Europe (Bossong 1998) is precisely Sa/Sg and Aa/Ag (Nichols 200:). (10)-(13) illustrate So, A, Sg, and Ag from Ingush (Nakh-Daghestanian: Caucasus).

- (10) so wa-vyzhaav
1S.ABS[So] down-fell
'I fell down'
- (11) aaz kinashjka diishar
1S.ERG[A] book[O] read
'I read a book'
- (12) suona shiila jy
1S.DAT[Sg] cold be.PRES
'I'm cold'
- (13) suona hwazaljg bwarjg-deira
1S.DAT[Ag] bird[O] eye-saw
'I saw a bird'

2. Russian dative reflexives and dative intransitives

Russian has a number of verbs that take dative subjects and are reflexive in form. Most are impersonal, i.e. the verb does not agree with anything (because there is no nominative subject for it to agree with) and appears in the default third person singular or neuter form. A few have a nominative object with which the verb agrees ((14b) below). Most have non-reflexive counterparts that take nominative subjects. (In (14) the reflexive and non-reflexive verbs are not cognate.)

(14) a. Ja ljublju klassičeskiju muzyku.
 I.NOM[A] like-1SG classical-ACC music-ACC[O]
 I like classical music.

b. Mne nravitsja èta muzyka.
 me.DAT[Ag] like-REFL this-NOM music-NOM[Oa]
 I like this music.

(15) a. Ja xochu kupit' mashinu.
 I.NOM[A] want buy-INF car-ACC
 'I want to buy a car'

b. Mne xochetsja poprobovat' šokolad.
 me-DAT[Ag] want-REFL try-INF chocolate-ACC
 'I'd like to try (the/some) chocolate'

(16) a. Ja dumaju, čto ...
 I.NOM[A] think-1SG that ...
 'I think that ...'

b. Mne dumaetsja, čto ...
 me-[Ag] think-3SG-REFL that ...
 'I'm inclined to think that...'

(17) a. Ja slyšu ego golos
 I.[A] hear-1SG his voice.ACC[O]
 'I hear his voice'

b. Mne slyšitsja ego golos
 me.DAT[Ag] hear-3SG-REFL his voice.NOM[Oa]
 'I can hear his voice'

Several of these have cognates in the other Slavic languages and reconstruct to Proto-Slavic (this is true of the verbs of (14b) and (15b)). What makes Russian distinctive is the existence of large numbers of pairs like the following:

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- (18) a. On xorosho rabotaet
 he.NOM[S] well work-3SG
 He works well. He's working well.
- b. Emu (zdes') xorosho rabotaetsja
 him.DAT[Sg] (here) well work-3SG-REFL
 He can work well here. He is able to get down to work here.
- (19) a. On chitaet
 he.[S] reads
 He reads. He's reading.
- b. Emu (xorosho) chitaetsja
 him.DAT[Sg] (well) read-REFL
 He's able to get down to reading.

Dative-reflexive constructions in general, i.e. all those like the (b) examples in (14)-(19), share a number of properties that distinguish them from nominative-subject constructions. One is that verbs with nominative subjects, if imperfective, can easily be interpreted as durative and translated with English progressives (as in the translations above), while the dative-reflexive ones cannot; they can be generic, intermittent, potential, etc. but not durative. A second is that some verbs with nominative subjects can describe activities, while those with datives describe propensities, potential to concentrate, inclinations, perceptions, and the like. Third, for verbs of cognition, perception, etc., those with nominative subjects describe opinions, attitudes, stances, and more or less durable or unhindered perceptions, while those with datives describe reactions, intermittent or contingent perceptions, and the like. Fourth, the perspective in the (b) examples is that of the noun or pronoun in the dative: the speaker reports that person's viewpoint and experience (Nichols 1986; this is discussed in section 4 below).

Examples like (18)-(19) are the main concern of this paper. They share all these properties and have additional distinctive ones. First, as shown in these examples, they tend to occur with negation, adverbials of place or time, and other qualifiers that explicitly indicate contingency of the situation or event. Second, while (14)-(17) have objects or clausal complements, examples like (18)-(19) do not and cannot (Franks 1995:365-6). Some of these are intransitive in their non-reflexive form, like *rabotat'* 'work' of (18). Others are transitive, like *chitat'* 'read' of (19), but cannot take an object in this construction:

- (20) * Emu segodnja ne chitaetsja gazet/gazety/gazetu/gazeta
 him-DAT[Ag] today NEG read-REFL newspaper-GEN.PL/NOM=
 ACC.PL=GEN.SG/ACC.SG/NOM.SG[O]
 'He just doesn't feel like reading the paper(s) today', 'He just can't get
 down to reading the paper today'

(The object 'newspaper(s)' in (20) is put in all case forms that might be used for a direct object or subject of passive, to show that the problem is not the case of the object but its very presence.) Because no object is possible with this kind of dative-reflexive construction, I interlinearize the subject as S in (19) and will call this the *dative-S construction*. The broader category comprising all examples like (14)-(19) is the *dative-subject construction*, and (14)-(17) more specifically illustrate the *dative-A construction*.³

Third, the dative-S construction has a distinctive semantics: it implies that there is something the subject is supposed to do or considers it appropriate to do but is disinclined to do or cannot get himself/herself to do, hence the glosses 'just doesn't feel like', 'can't get down to', etc. This is different from ordinary volitionality/non-volitionality and might be described as thwarted or ambivalent volitionality (Timberlake 2004:436-7 calls these reflexives *modal* for that reason; Franks 1995:364 and several earlier sources call them *dispositional*; for semantics and much bibliography see Gerritsen 1991:173-200).

Fourth, the dative-S constructions are paired with nominative-S constructions whose verbs do not form perfectives. *Rabotat'* 'work' of (18) is a durative verb which, like other verbs of this Aktionsart, has no perfective. There are related prefixally derived verbs which do have perfectives, such as *porabotat'* 'work briefly, work a bit, work for awhile' and *zarabotat'* 'start up (of engine, etc.)', but these are different verbs rather than perfectives of *rabotat'*. In contrast, the dative-S verbs, which as noted above are not durative, do have perfectives. Most often they form inceptives with *za-*, and occasionally a telic perfective with *po-*:

- (21) Emu zarabotalos'
 him-DAT *za*-work-REFL
 '(After not being able to get down to work) he got his concentration back',
 'he got inclined to work', 'he began working with (renewed) energy'
- (22) Xorosho **porabotalos'**! Tri dnja posvjatil dorabotke plana schetov ...
 well **po-WORK-REFL**
 '(Oh boy) did I ever get a lot done! I was able to devote three whole days
 to working out the account plan (text continues: Nobody bothered me,
 everybody but the accounting department was on vacation. It was great!)'
 (forum.klerk.ru/showjournal.php?journalid=411)

These appear to be true perfectives of the unprefixated dative-reflexive verbs, and they differ from the prefixed derivatives of nominative-subject verbs. The *za*-prefixed inceptives are not as strongly inceptive as the *za*-prefixed inchoatives of

³ This terminology assumes that all these datives are syntactically subjects. To be sure, they behave differently from nominative subjects (see Moore & Perlmutter 2000), but I assume that this is because of their non-nominative case and not because of their syntax.

nominative-subject verbs (such as *zaplakat'* 'burst into tears, start to cry'; for the properties of these see Stoll 2001:49-51) but are ordinary perfectives of verbs whose imperfective Aktionsart is (as described above) inceptive or intermittent:

- (23) Xot' i pjatnica, a vse ravno **zarabotalos'** s utra s èntuziazmom ...
though Friday, nonetheless **za-work-REFL** in morning with enthusiasm
'Though it was Friday, still we began work enthusiastically'
(http://www.e-executive.ru/oneday/article_1736/forum_42300/msg_38231/:/)

And the verb of (22) is not an attenuative durative like *porabotat'* 'work a bit, work awhile' but appears to be a telic 'work (and accomplish something)'.
Fifth, the dative-S construction is highly productive and can be formed from nearly every non-reflexive verb with an agentive subject. Moore & Perlmutter 2000:384-5 describe them as being formed only from unergative verbs and not from unaccusatives:

(24) * Vase ne rastetsja
Vasja-DAT NEG grow-REFL
'Vasja doesn't feel like growing, just can't seem to grow'

Contrast this stance verb (unergative):

- (25) **Ej javno ne stojalos'** na meste. Ona otbegala v storonu ...
her-DAT clearly NEG **stood-REFL** in place She-NOM ran away
It [game animal] obviously couldn't stand still and ran away.
(ps.1september.ru/articlef.php?ID=200408007)

However, not all unergatives can take dative subjects. Aktionsart seems to play an important role: the determinate verb *idti* 'go (in one direction, to one goal)' cannot take a dative subject while its indeterminate *xodit'* 'go (around, in more than one direction, to more than one place)' can:

- (26) a. *mne ne idetsja
me-DAT NEG go-REFL
'(I don't feel like going)'
b. (segodnja) mne ne xoditsja
today me-DAT NEG go.INDET-REFL
'I just don't feel like walking around (today)'

Finally, the dative-S construction can be formed only from a verb that is lexically intransitive or, if transitive, able to occur without an object. Whereas English can use virtually any transitive or oblique-object verb with a null generic or unspecified object (*I'm eating. I'm just looking. I can't come to the phone now,*

I'm painting. Don't bother me while I'm sewing. It's midnight and I'm still ironing. We're buying today but expect to be selling tomorrow), in Russian this possibility is much more limited and is lexically restricted. For instance, the two partial synonyms *est'* and *kushat'* 'eat' differ in that only *kushat'* can easily be used without an object; and of these two only *kushat'* takes the dative-subject form in productive contexts with any frequency.⁴ Since objectless use is lexically restricted, verbs like that in (19b) can be regarded as derived lexically from intransitive verbs rather than syntactically from objectless clauses.

Thus, in summary, the dative-S construction can be used with any verb that is intransitive, not already reflexive, agentive or at least with a responsible subject, and non-durative. Its most salient semantic properties are its modal sense (inclination or ability – or, more commonly, disinclination or inability – to do something that it would be natural or expected or appropriate to do), which is unique to the dative-S construction, and intermittent, contingent, or transient Aktionsart (common to most dative-subject constructions), which enables them to perfectivize when their non-reflexive source verbs cannot. If dative-subject constructions like those in (14)-(17) had greater text or lexical frequency than they do, Russian could be called a split-subject language, but in fact they are just a minor type of subject coding in Russian. The dative-S construction, however, is lexically unlimited in that it is available to any intransitive with the right Aktionsart and semantics, and this allows Russian to be considered a fluid-S language of the typical sort, i.e. with Sa~Sg subject coding. (Implicit in this discussion is the assumption that the impersonal and reflexive morphology on the verb in Russian dative-subject constructions is the consequence, not the cause, of the non-nominative subject case. Russian, like other Indo-European languages with case, rigidly limits verbal agreement to nominative subjects, and the impersonal form and perhaps the reflexivization are responses to non-nominative subjects.)

It should be noted that dative-subject constructions are very different from passives in Russian. In a passive, the patient is an S and the agent a non-argument; the agent is in the instrumental case, not the dative; the verb agrees with the S (which is nominative); and the verb is reflexive only in imperfectives, while perfective passives use the past passive participle plus 'be'. In the dative-subject construction, there is a case change but no diathesis: the dative-marked noun or pronoun is still A or S. The verb is reflexive in either aspect.

3. Other Slavic languages

All Slavic languages have dative-subject constructions, and both the construction

⁴ Estimates based on Google searches for *mne kushaetsja* and *mne estsja* (me-DAT eat-REFL) 'I feel like eating' and *emu kushaetsja*, *emu estsja* (him-DAT eat-REFL) 'he feels like eating'. *Estsja* actually has higher raw frequency but most examples are folkloristic or in formulaic expressions (e.g. *ne spitsja*, *ne estsja* 'can't sleep or eat'), but *kushaetsja* is used in all kinds of contexts. Both verbs are infrequent in this construction (frequencies in the Russian National Corpus are 0 or 1), probably because there are more idiomatic ways of saying 'have an appetite' and the like in Russian.

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and some of the verbs that take it reconstruct to Proto-Slavic. The fluid dative-S construction as described above appears to be limited to East Slavic (Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian; see Shevelov 1963:128 for dative-S constructions in Ukrainian). The other Slavic languages have a dative-subject construction that is as productive and widely used as the Russian dative-S construction, and has similar semantics (glossed 'feel like', 'inclined', etc.), but differs in that it is not limited to intransitives and an object can be present. In Polish and Slovenian the object is accusative and the verb is impersonal; in the other languages the patient is nominative and the verb agrees with it:

- (27) Polish Jankowi czytało się tę książkę z przyjemnością
J.-DAT read REFL **that-ACC** **book-ACC** with pleasure
'Janek read this book with pleasure' (Rivero 2002:472)
- (28) Slovenian Janezu se je jedlo jagode
J-DAT REFL AUX. eat-NEUT **strawberries-ACC**
'Janez felt like eating strawberries' (Rivero 2002:472)
- (29) Czech Ta kniha se Janovi četla dobře
that-NOM **book-NOM** REFL J-DAT read-**FEM** well
'Jan read that book with ease' (Rivero 2002:473)
- (30) Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Pije mi se kava
drink me-DAT REFL **coffee-NOM**
'I'd like to have some coffee'
- (31) Bulgarian⁵ Na Ivan mu se četjaja knigi
DAT Ivan 3S.DAT REFL read-PL books
'Ivan felt like reading books' (Rivero 2002:473)

In Polish this construction is much like the impersonal passive except for using the dative case rather than the instrumental. In the languages with nominatives, it is much like an ordinary passive again except for the dative. In the most detailed discussion to date, Marušić and Žaucer (4228) show that the Slovenian construction is not monoclausal like the Russian one but is biclausal with a null modal predicate. In (32), the adverb *včeraj* 'yesterday' applies to the null modal while *jutri* 'tomorrow' applies to 'go'.

- (32) Slovenian Včeraj se mi ni šlo jutri domov
yesterday REFL me.DAT NEG go-PAST-NEUT tomorrow home
'Yesterday I didn't feel like going home tomorrow'

⁵ The proclitic *mu* agrees with *Na Ivan*.

This is impossible in Russian. (In addition, the verb is that of Russian (26a), which is made ungrammatical precisely by this verb in Russian.) These differences suggest that Slovenian has fewer, probably many fewer, dative-subject verbs than Russian, as most dative subjects prove to be governed by this dative-taking null modal predicate. Slovenian is not fluid-S at all, and this probably applies to at least some of the other Slavic languages as well.

4. Two cross-linguistic hypotheses

As noted above, the case of Russian subjects affects the discourse-pragmatic perspective: the nominative-subject construction has external viewpoint (the reader or hearer sees, as it were, the referent of the nominative noun or pronoun), while the dative-subject construction has internal viewpoint (the reader or hearer shares the perspective of the referent of the dative). This was established by close analysis of a few texts, and chiefly for dative-A verbs (Nichols 1986). Is it true of dative-S constructions as well? (33) on the next page gives evidence from the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru) suggesting that it is. Frequencies are shown for first and third person singular subjects, both nominative and dative, for a few verbs that easily take a dative S. The proportion of first person S is much higher for dative than for nominative. I hypothesize, then, that what may be called *dative viewpoint* is a regular cross-linguistic concomitant of Sg and Ag constructions. A ready counterexample is Icelandic, where dative-subject constructions have speaker viewpoint (Barðdal 2004:124-131). Wider testing is needed, among non-European languages with dative subjects and among stative-active languages.

A second hypothesis concerns the typical tense/aspect/Aktionsart properties of different alignment types. As seems to have been first pointed out by Regamey (1954), ergativity is prototypically centered on a change undergone by a patient and is therefore associated with past and perfective categories, while accusativity is centered on the action of an agent and is associated with present and imperfective categories. The Russian facts reviewed here suggest that dative subject coding has a prototypical configuration different from either of these two: it is associated with experiencers and with the onset of perception or cognition. The three prototypical configurations are shown in (34).

(33) Frequencies of selected verbs with singular pronoun subject: nominative *ja* 'I', *on/ona* 'he/she' vs. dative *mne* 'I-DAT', *emu/je* 'he/she-DAT'. Figures for nominatives are estimates. ($p < 0.000\dots$, $X^2 = 58.046$)

<u>Person</u>		<u>Nominative</u>		<u>Dative</u>	
1 st	<i>work</i>	ja rabotaju	1000	mne rabotaetsja	17
3 rd		on/ona rabotaet	1500	emu/je rabotaetsja	5
1 st	<i>read</i>	ja chitaju	900	mne chitaetsja	0
3 rd		on/ona chitaet	670	emu/je chitaetsja	1

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1 st	<i>write</i>	ja pishu	900	mne pishetsja	9
3 rd		on/ona pishet	2200	emu/ej pishetsja	8
1 st	<i>sleep</i>	ja splju	600	mne spitsja	39
3 rd		on/ona spit	1100	emu/ej spitsja	19
TOTAL 1 st			2400		65
3 rd			5500		33

(34)	<u>S=O, Ergative</u>	<u>S=A, Accusative</u>	<u>S=G, "Dative"</u>
<u>Aspect:</u>	Punctual, perfective	Durative, progressive	Intermittent, inceptive
<u>Tense:</u>	Past	Present	Generic
<u>Predicate:</u>	Change of state	Activity, attitude	Reaction
<u>Role:</u>	Patients	Agents	Experiencers

Russian and its sisters, a loner fluid Sa/Sg language family in Eurasia, can probably be presumed to have followed universals or prototypes in innovating this rare alignment type, so they can help us spot those universals. The copious lexical and textual resources for these languages, and their neat grammaticalization of aspect, make it possible to use their dative-subject constructions as a basis for cross-linguistic hypotheses, and I invite other linguists to falsify the claim that Sg and Ag coding are preferentially associated with dative perspective, inceptive aspect, generic tense, experiencers, and transient reactions.

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