Agreement and case in the Moksha debitive

Alexandra Shikunova, NRU HSE, Moscow

The concern of my talk is the syntax of the debitive construction in Moksha Mordvin (<Finno-Ugric<Uralic). The data comes from my fieldwork; I am using minimalist syntax as a framework (Chomsky, 1993).

In Moksha root necessity can be expressed with a non-finite construction with a dative argument – a debitive construction (1).

(1) wit'a-n'd'i   kn'iga-t'n'ə   luvə-ma-t
    Witya-DAT book-DEF.NOM.PL read-NZR-NPST.3PL
    'Witya needs to read the books'.

Debitive construction has been described in Zakirova (2018), however, the issues summarized below have not yet received a theoretical explanation.

i. **Case marking of debitive's direct object does not pattern with DO marking in other domains**
   Debitive's DO can be:

   – genitive-accusative – definite DO of a finite clause;

   – nominative – definite subject of a finite clause;

   – unmarked – indefinite both subjects and objects.

ii. **Agreement on the nominalized verb is with the direct object**
    Although Moksha verbs can agree with their objects, morphologically debitive's nominalization patterns with subject verbal agreement.

iii. **Agreement with 1/2 person DO's is prohibited by some speakers**
     This ungrammaticality is hierarchical: if 2nd person agreement is prohibited, so is the 1st, but not vice versa.
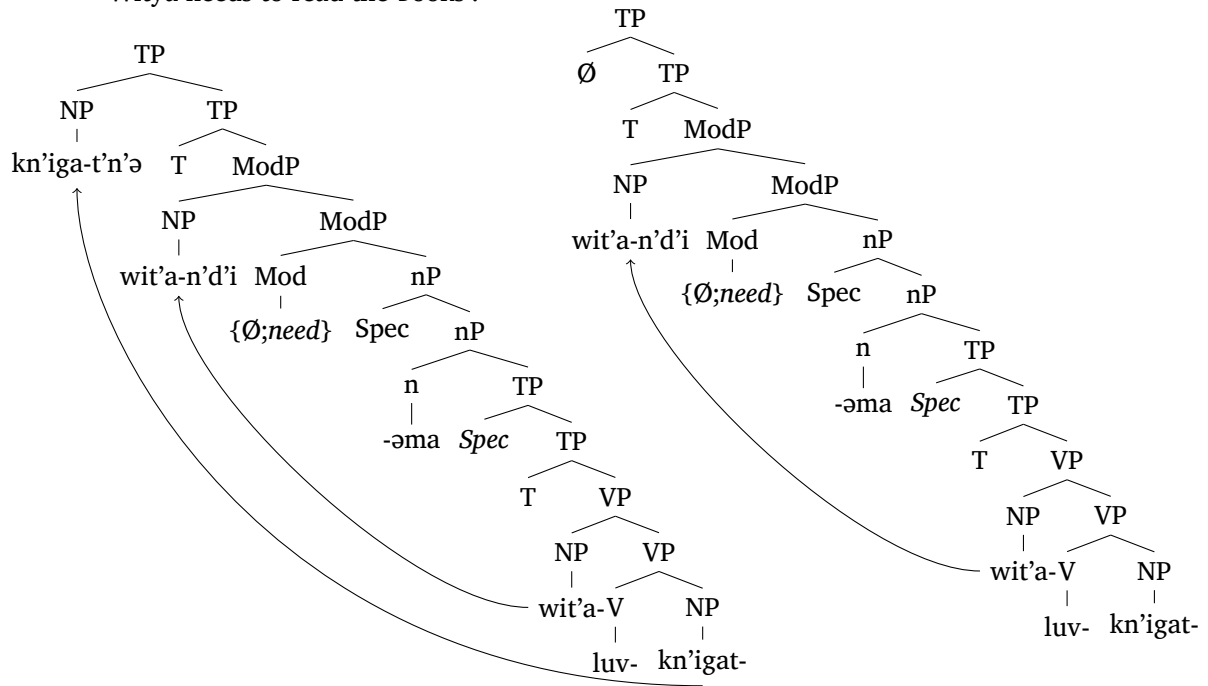
(2) %anna-n'd'i mon sn'imand-əm-an
    Anya-DAT   I   photograph-NZR-NPST.1SG
    'Anya needs to take a photo of me'.

I propose a syntactic analysis of Moksha debitive featuring a null modal verb. Similar approaches to non-finite constructions with a dative argument have been suggested for Russian (Burukina, 2020) and Slovenian (Marušič et al., 2006).

The structure of Moksha debitive is represented by the trees below. There are two options for the DO: it either becomes the subject of the matrix clause (3) or stays in the embedded clause (4).

(3) wit'a-n'd'i kn'iga-t'n'ə
Witya-DAT book-DEF.NOM.PL
luvə-ma-t
read-NZR-NPST.3PL
'Witya needs to read the books'.

(4) wit'a-n'd'i kn'iga-t
Witya-DAT book-NOM.PL
luvə-ma-t
read-NZR-NPST.3PL

TP
— NP: kn'iga-t'n'ə
— TP
 — T
 — ModP
  — NP: wit'a-n'd'i
  — ModP
   — Mod: {Ø;need}
   — nP
    — Spec
    — nP
     — n: -əma
     — TP
      — Spec
      — TP
       — T
       — VP
        — NP: wit'a-V luv-
        — VP
         — NP: kn'igat-

TP
— Ø
— TP
 — T
 — ModP
  — NP: wit'a-n'd'i
  — ModP
   — Mod: {Ø;need}
   — nP
    — Spec
    — nP
     — n: -əma
     — TP
      — Spec
      — TP
       — T
       — VP
        — NP: wit'a-V luv-
        — VP
         — NP: kn'igat-

Case marking is, therefore, determined by the internal argument's structural position: matrix subject is nominative and DO of the embedded clause is genitive-accusative. Unacceptability of 1/2 person agreement can be analysed as a feature conflict between the nominalization's nP shell and the internal argument.

In my talk I will elaborate on the null modal head analysis and explain the case and agreement patterns in more detail.

References

Burukina, I. (2020). Mandative verbs and deontic modals in russian: Between obligatory control and overt embedded subjects. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*, 5(1).

Chomsky, N. (1993). A minimalist program for linguistic theory. *The view from Building 20: Essays in linguistics in honor of Sylvain Bromberger.*

Marušič, F. et al. (2006). On the intensional feel-like construction in slovenian: A case of a phonologically null verb. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory,* 24(4):1093–1159.

Zakirova, A. (2018). Nominalizacii. In Toldova, S. and Kholodilova, M., editors, *Èlementy mokšanskogo jazyka v tipologičeskom osveščenii,* chapter 29, pages 753–778. Buki Vedi.