Lexico - Semantic Interpretation of Transitive And Intransitive Constructions in The Grammar of The German Language

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the description of studies of transitivity-intransitivity categories as a grammatical category of the German language. The author pays special attention to the question of the function and place of the accusative in a German sentence. It should be noted that the interpretation of the accusative is directly related to the interpretation of the nominative. Many scientists, emphasizing the crucial role of the accusative not only in the content, but also in the structure of the sentence. However, they deny him the right to be called a case, since this case is controlled. From the standpoint of generative grammar, an accusative cannot be included in the number of nuclear components, since a verbal phrase is split into a verb and an object only at a later stage.

1 Introduction

One of the existing subdivisions of language categories is the subdivision according to the correlation or non-correlation of the meanings of linguistic forms with extralinguistic and logical content. In this sense, the place of the category of transitivity-intransitivity is definitely unclear. The meaning of transitive verbs is defined as “an action passing on a foreign object”. But what does it mean? In wide everyday use, “action” is both verbs of action proper and verbs with the designation of activity, that is, not only, for example, (einen Brief) schreiben, (ein, in einem Buch) blättern, but also arbeiten, klopfen, tanzen, springen, pfeifen.

Fuzziness in the definition of the grammatical semantics of both classes of verbs leads to the following consequences:

1. The category of transitivity-intransitivity is considered either purely syntactic, with subtext - formal, not having a generalized grammatical meaning, or - lexical, lexicosemantic, lexical-syntactic, functional semantic, the meaning of transitivity is in the semantic inferiority of the verb without direct complement.

2. The concept of transitivity extends to other indirect and even prepositional cases. This, in essence, also leads to the elimination of transitivity-intransitivity as a grammatical category.

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However, the grammaticality of the category is supported by its connection with another grammatical category - voice. This factor makes researchers pay attention to the special place of cases, since only the accusative can be transformed into the subject of a passive construction.

So, O. Jespersen also mentions in his works about its logical relationship with the nominative [3].

H. Brinkman calls it the “anticase” of the nominative [14].

R. Jakobson sums up the nominative and accusative as one correlative pair under the general concept of “Vollkasus”, as opposed to others – “Randkasus” [13].

There were attempts to single out this case among other indirect cases as a case of “full coverage” by the action (A.A. Shakhmatov, V.G. Admoni, V.P. Sukhotin), as a case that plays a special role in the theory of strong control [7,2, 6].

The question of the function and place of the direct object is not only not removed from the agenda, but has recently received a very pointed statement: can it be considered a “nuclear” component of the proposal? And although this question is almost always answered in the negative, the very fact of posing it is indicative.

With the position of transformational syntax and supporters of the “one-top” sentence structure, the accusative cannot be singled out from among the secondary members, since any other component, along with the subject, can take on this role.

Perhaps the most extreme position on this issue is taken by V.S. Yurchenko. It reduces any object and circumstance, as obligatory elements of a sentence, to one logical attribute, which, together with the predicate, serves as an expression of a logical predicate. He considers such a linguistic structure to be the embodiment of the “universal structure of the world” [8].

The well-known linguist E. Shendels in his scientific works proposes to consider the direct object as an equivalent obligatory element of the transitional structure, along with the subject and predicate. The author substantiates his choice with a selection showing the functional equivalence of the subject and the direct object. Both can have the following meanings:

a) classifying: Berlin ist eine Stadt - Wir nennen Berlin eine Stadt;
   Er nannte seinen Freund einen Schurken - Sein Freund ist demnach ein Schurke.

b) definition of quality, properties: Die Maus ist tot - Du schlugst die Maus tot;
   Mein Vater hieß mein Verhalten gut - Mein Verhalten ist demnach gut.

c) behavior: Das Mädchen singt - Ich höre das Mädchen singen;
   Ich sehe ihn schwimmen - Er schwimmt.

d) state: Der Baum ist gefällt - Er hat den Baum gefällt.


In all five of the above cases, the feature related to the direct object, in contrast to the subject of an intransitive or nominal predicative construction, acts as a “caused feature”.

2 Research Methodology

The interpretation of the accusative is directly related to the interpretation of the nominative. And here, accordingly, we encounter contradictions. If R. Yakobson notes that the main meaning of the nominative is manifested in the position of the subject of the transitional structure, which indicates its unequal value in other positions, then E. Cheshko, arguing with him, argues the opposite: “From the semantic point of view, differences in the meaning of the “acting subject” with transitive or intransitive verbs no. The difference in the use of the nominative case with transitive or intransitive verbs is a difference in position in the context” [13].

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V.G. Admoni, on the contrary, distinguishes between the grammatical subject - the subject and the producer of the attribute in the sentence: “The workers built this building last year” and the grammatical subject - the subject and the carrier of the attribute in the sentence. “This building was built last year” [2].

Thus, it becomes clear that if, on the one hand, the form (Akk, Akk-Passiv) serves as the basis for highlighting the grammatical category, then, on the other hand, the form prevents a satisfactory solution of the problem, since:

a) the obligatory connection of a verb with a direct object is formally, morphologically as unexpressed as its connection with any other object;

b) the accusative is included in the system of indirect and prepositional cases, which, on the whole, oppose the “absolute” case-nominative;

c) the subject of both transitive and intransitive constructions is equally expressed by the same nominative case, and is equally consistent with the predicate.

The unresolved nature of the entire complex of issues forces us to turn to them again and again and look for ways to resolve the tangible contradiction between form and content.

So, academician I.I. Meshchaninov, referring to E. Sapir, considers the direct object in the sentence The farmer kills duckling as the second subject of the statement: if it is said about the farmer that he kills (duckling), then about the same duckling - that he dies, dies due to the actions of the subject - subject. I.I. Meshchaninov hesitates in defining the role of the direct complement, which can be seen in each of his works.

On the one hand, following tradition and form, he emphasizes that independent, i.e. the main members of the sentence involved in the expression of predicative relations are the subject and the predicate.

On the other hand, making comparisons in languages of the ergative system, he cannot but come to the conclusion that the direct object in its main function - the object on which the action of the subject passes, acts not only as the leading, but also as an indispensable member of the corresponding predicative group in languages both ergative and nominative systems. This logically leads to the conclusion about the two-way connection of the transitive verb: both with the subject and with the direct object, and the idea of the equivalence of both connections [5].

But how does such a two-way connection manifest itself - with the subject and with the direct object, in contrast to other obligatory valence bonds? If this is a property of all transitive verbs, then it is grammatical: then the generalized grammatical meaning of the transitive structure consists of two elements. What are they? The need to get an answer to this question is especially clearly felt when considering two problems: dual functioning (transitive-intransitive and transitive-reflexive use) and the problem of pledges.

3 Results and Discussions

Let us turn to the logical aspect of the problem. To answer the question of whether the category under consideration is logical-grammatical, it is necessary to find out whether they have a formal correlate in reality.

In this regard, let us first consider an intransitive construction. It symbolizes the simplest and most common model of judgment, including a logical subject and a predicate.

In ontological terms, it corresponds to the model: “the carrier of the sign + its sign” or “the object and its sign”.

The other side of the “object and its sign” model is the meaning of the dynamics, the temporal relativity of this connection. The content of such a connection can only be a process. By process, we understand, therefore, the dynamic relationship between the carrier of the feature and the feature itself, which is characterized by interdependence between them and proceeds over time. At the same time, the content of the concept of “process” is in close dialectical connection with the concept of “state.
Thus, the model of the objective world and the model of its cognition directly corresponds to the language model. In the intransitive model, the objective and syntactic functions coincide: the carrier of the feature is the subject.

The representation of any individual attribute as immanent, regardless of other objects, is in reality always an abstraction, since all phenomena of objective reality are in diverse interconnections with each other.

The cognizing subject, however, in each specific case can abstract from this law and present the nature of this or that feature either in direct connection, depending on some one, specific fact - “a kind of label for an infinite number of events” - or even altogether independent, immanent.

As you know, the transition of an object from S1 to state S2 is called a process. It follows that the transition of an object from one state to another can occur either spontaneously (regardless of the existence of other objects), or due to the influence of another object ... In the first case, we say that the object is “isolated” (free), in the second - that the object is “bound” (not free). In connection with what has been said, we emphasize that in the second case we are talking about the same two-way and dynamic connection between the carrier of a sign and its sign, i.e., here, too, the content “process-state” is present.

It is quite obvious that such a model of the objective world is just as universal as the first one, and also has a direct manifestation in the linguistic structure, namely in the structure of the transitive verb: Svt. – Vt. – Ovt.

4 Conclusions

Thus, the logical aspect of the analysis of the problem confirms the fundamental difference between both structures, which is the basis for highlighting the logical-grammatical category of transitivity-intransitivity.

From all that has been said, it follows that if an intransitive construction is semantically one-part, having an immanent process or an immanent state as its content, then a transitional construction is two-part. The connection of the verb with the direct object (object connection) has the content “process-state”, the connection of the verb with the subject has the content “causation”. The only purely grammatical argument for recognizing the exclusivity of the subject-predicate connection is the possibility of excluding all other components, except for the direct object.

Here one should ask the question whether the semantic autonomy of the statement is violated with the elimination of the direct object, the structural basis of which should be considered the relation (S-V)?: Der Arbeiter fällt / einen Baum. Sie Scheuert / die Diele/. Er besucht / seine Tante/. The potential possibility of forming a personal passive is the main identification mark of constructions with transitive verbs (in this case, there may be limitations of a lexical, constructive, stylistic nature). Therefore, it is hardly appropriate to explain the obligatory nature of the direct object in such cases by introducing the concept of “extended predicate”.

Can it be considered adequate in meaning and in the nature of syntactic relations of a sentence with a direct object - and without it, or with its transformation into a prepositional object? For example: Er liest ein Buch - Er liest - Er liest in einem Buch.

The content of the first sentence is made up of the idea of the subject that influences the book with its perception, and the idea of the “affected” object (book) by this influence.

The content of the second sentence is the idea of occupation as an immanent activity of the subject. This meaning is emphasized by the formation of an “unsubjective” passive: Es wird gelesen. The last sentence, according to the meaning contained in it, is located between the first and second. The passive (if it is possible here) is formed according to the model of the second sentence: Es wird in einem Buch gelesen. This means that one cannot equate a direct object with a prepositional one, even in such cases of semantic closeness.
The grammatical semantics of such sentences is different. The prepositional object clarifies the meaning of the activity, but retains the meaning of the verb activity, not the impact.

From the foregoing, it follows that, with the usual understanding of the category “transitivity-intransitivity”, both of its members are presented as members of a binary privative opposition - on a formal basis: - direct object, and as members of an equivalent (equivalent) opposition on a semantic basis: “action” for transitive verbs, “process”, “state”, “movement”, etc. in intransitive, then here both members also find one common link: the content element “process/state”.

Consequently, in an intransitive construction it is an immanent process, in a transitional one it is not immanent, causal. In the constructions considered above, three connections are reflected: a) a two-way connection of the predicate with the subject and with the object;

b) the connection of the subject with the object, which has the character of causation;

c) the close connection of the predicate with the object, as the connection of a sign with its carrier, as a result of which a two-way connection is traditionally seen between the subjects, on the one hand, and the block of the predicate and direct object, on the other.

Thus, the two-way nature of the connection of the transitive verb is confirmed: both with the subject and with the direct object. The object connection is equally included in the constitutive predicative relation, as well as the subject connection, and the direct object, as the carrier of one of the two semantic components of transitivity, is constructively necessary, the construction.

Such an interpretation of the category facilitates the understanding of a number of issues related to transitivity-intransitivity. Thus, it is obvious that any transformation of structures based on the transfer of the direct object to the position of the subject becomes possible due to the fact that the direct object has the objective function of a feature carrier. The transformation of a direct object into a subject can be explained as a means of combining objective and syntactic functions. Both in the original and in the derivative structure, this objective function of it is somehow relegated to the background, obscured by the syntactic position of the complement, and in the derivative it is emphasized by the function of the subject.

The category “transitivity-intransitivity” in this case turns out to be a category that partially incorporates both the problem of voices and the problem of the dual functioning of verbs; on the basis of the correlation of the syntactic function of the subject and the objective function of the carrier of the sign, these constructions are distributed in such a way that only the transitional construction remains at one pole (the subject has the function of the producer of the trait), and at the other - all the rest: reflexive, steel, passive, intransitive constructions (subject - trait carrier), for example:

1. Er reibt das Seil. 1. Das Seil reibt.
2. Das Seil wird gerissen.
3. Das Seil ist gerissen.

Or:
1. Du besserst dadurch kaum deine Lage.1. Deine Lage wird dadurch kaum gebessert.
2. Deine Lage ist dadurch (damit) kaum gebessert.
3. Deine Lage bessert sich dadurch kaum.

From these positions, the presence or absence of a direct object in the structure of a sentence is not just a lexical factor, but the central feature of the difference between the two fundamentally, in the logical-grammatical (and hence semantic-syntactic) relation of different structures.

For verbal constructions, regarding their logical-grammatical content, there is a solid alternative: either this is a two-term “nuclear” structure, and then its content can only be a process or a state, or it is a three-member “nuclear structure”, and then it is semantically two-part and contains in self (explicit constructions) and process/state, and causation.

The presence of an accusative in a structure does not in itself indicate transitivity; if the accusative is not a carrier of a sign, then, therefore, there are no both components - the
semantic elements of transitivity: neither causation nor the sign caused to the object. This is
the accusative measure, time, space, price, direction:

Er mißt zwei Meter;
Wir haben dich zwei Stunden gesucht: Das Ding kostet eine Unmenge Gold;
Mutter steigt die Treppe hinauf;
Der Raum fasst vierhundert Zuschauer.

Formally transitive, but semantically one-part verbs related to “Haben – Perspektive”;
haben, bekommen, kriegen, erhalten, besitzen, behalten, bewahren; wissen, kennen, erfahren.

Such are the constructions with the “accusative content” (“internal object”):

Die Sache geht Ihren Gang, Sie lächelt ein gutmütiges Lächeln;
- constructions with modal verbs:
Wir wollen Frieden;
- constructions that are phraseological combinations: Klavier spielen, Sorge tragen, Abschied nehmen, Atem schöpfen;
- impersonal constructions denoting the state of a real subject acting in the syntactic
position of a direct object: Es schaudert, wundert, ekelt mich.

In all these cases, it seems possible to speak of an “extended predicate”. In other cases,
the representation of the predicate and the direct object as a direct sign of the subject is a
consequence of the grammatical inexpressibility of the second, object connection of the
transitive verb. If transitional constructions are traditionally considered in this way, which
deprives them of fundamental differences from intransitive constructions, then this is a
phenomenon of surface structure; deep structure, the essence of transitional constructions
- in their two-way connection, in the presence of two elements of grammatical semantics.

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