Direct Object marking in Mari: unmarked DOs or pseudoincorporation

1. The paper presents a case-study of Differential Direct Object (DO) marking in Eastern Mari (Uralic, Finno-Ugric). I consider the syntactic and semantic features of this phenomenon giving arguments for the analysis of this phenomenon in terms of pseudoincorporation. This solution leads to the non-obligatoriness of the number-neutrality condition.

2. In Mari, the phenomenon of DO encoding is attested: the accusative marker is obligatory on definite NPs, while indefinites can remain unmarked. In reference grammars and special articles, definiteness is used to explain the choice of DO marking (cf. Galkin 1964, Tuzharov 1984, cf. also Wickman 1955) However, (Toldova, Serdobolskaya 2002) shows that definiteness is not the main factor regulating the choice of the DO marker. The information structure of the sentence is more important in Mari: if the whole VP belongs to the same information structure unit (topic or focus), it can be unmarked. In the opposite case, the DO is marked with the accusative, and its omission leads to ungrammaticality. This study is focused on the syntactic features of the unmarked DO in Mari. The data of the research comes from fieldwork.

3. Omission of the DO marker in Mari is restricted by the following rules.
   1. It is only possible in various types of non-finite clauses, cf. (1a) and (b).
   2. The unmarked DO has to be verb-adjacent, cf. (2a) and (2b).
   3. The unmarked DO can not take modifiers that serve as presupposition-inducing adjectives or pronouns (cf. Geurts 1998), i.e. restrictive adjectives, demonstrative pronouns etc.
   4. Presupposition inducing nouns (personal pronouns, proper nouns with definite reference, nouns with possessive markers etc.) only rarely head unmarked DOs.
   5. It is impossible if the DO is headed or modified by indefinite expressions, e.g. indefinite pronouns.

The rules 2, 3 and 5 seem to be easily explained if we assume that Mari Direct Object marking presents an example of incorporation. However, the following facts contradict this hypothesis.

A. Unmarked DO can be modified by various types of adjectives/pronouns (excluding the ones listed above). Cf. for the same possibility of incorporated DOs in West-Greenlandic (van Geenhoven 1998) and pseudoincorporation in Turkish (Muravyova 1994; 2008).

B. Unmarked DOs can be conjoined.

C. Unmarked DOs can host numerals, quantifiers (3) and plural markers (unlike pseudo-incorporated DOs in Turkish).

D. Unmarked DOs can (cf. rule 4.) be headed by proper nouns and nouns with possessive markers (4).

Hence, the considered constructions yield to the features of pseudoincorporation, excluding the number neutrality condition. This notwithstanding, I propose to analyze the Mari unmarked DOs in terms of pseudoincorporation, which solution is grounded on their semantic properties.

As stated above, the unmarked DO is only possible, if the whole VP belongs to one and the same information structure unit – topic, focus, contrastive focus, contrastive topic etc. However, this is not the sufficient condition of the omission of the accusative. Most often, unmarked DOs are observed if the VP describes an “institutionalized activity” unit (wash the hands, sweep the floor etc.). In those cases, even the nouns marked with the possessive can appear without the accusative. Hence, both from the point of view of information structure and lexical semantics, the verb and the unmarked DO have to form one and the same unit.
Basing on these arguments, I propose to analyze the unmarked DO in Mari in terms of pseudoincorporation. This solution is possible if the theoretical decision is accepted to accept pseudoincorporation of the plural NPs, quantifier groups and conjoined NPs.

**Examples**

(1) a. Čodara-šte kaj-že da **pong-øm / *pongø** pog-ažo.
   forest-INESS go-OPT and mushroom-ACC mushroom collect-OPT

   *Let him go to the forest and collect mushrooms.*

   b. Maj čodara-š **pongø** pog-aš kaj-em.
   I forest-LAT mushroom collect-INF go-PRS.1SG

   *I’m going to the forest to collect mushrooms.*

(2) a. Rvez-øn motor-øn **poč’elamut** lud-m-až-lan
   boy-GEN beautiful-ADV poem read-NZR-3SG-DAT

   learn-CAUS-PTCP.ACT rejoice-PRT

   b. Rvez-øn **poč’elamut-øm / *poč’elamut** motor-øn lud-m-až-lan ...
   boy-GEN poem-ACC / poem beautiful-ADV read-NZR-3SG-DAT

   *The teacher is glad that the boy recites poems well.*

(3) **Šuko olma-m / olma** kudalt-aš logal-eš.
   many apple-ACC apple throw-INF have.to-PRS.3SG

   *We had to throw away many apples.*

(4) Pet’a-n **kid-še** muš-m-až-øm møj už-øm.
   Peter-GEN hand-POSS.3SG wash-NZR-POSS3SG-ACC I see-PRT2.1SG

   *I saw Peter wash his hands.*

**References**


