

Labile verbs in Finno-Ugric languages

All Finno-Ugric languages express transitivity vs. intransitivity with derivational morphology, some of them also with different conjugation forms. Other solutions seem to be marginal. In Erzya, an absolutive non-ergative language, transitivity is morphologically marked both in verbal conjugation and in the inflection of the object, which are conditioned by many different morphosyntactic rules. Also the case of the object alternates as in Saamic and Finnic languages (Grünthal 2016: 292). The use of a separate object conjugation is actually quite Eastern feature in Erzya (and Moksha), which connects the Mordvin languages with the Ugrian and Samoyed languages (Salo 2014: 303-304). Derivational morphology in Erzya is exceptionally rich, since there can be several valence changing suffixes added to the verbal stem. The rules concerning the choice of conjugation are complicated and transitive situations can also be expressed with subject conjugation forms. However, there are some underived verbal stems, which can show valency alternation, e.g. *kekšems* ‘hide (tr. & itr.) in ex. (1) and (2). More similar cases can be found in old folklore texts, e.g. *strojams* ‘build (tr. & itr.) in ex. (3) and (4).

- 1) *řiviž-ś* *ko-v-ko-v* *di* *nora-s* ***kekš-ś***.
fox-DEF.NOM where-LAT where-LAT and den-ILLAT hide-PAST3SG
‘Der Fuchs hierhin, dorthin und versteckte sich in einer Höhle.’ (PM II: 143)
- 2) *Ko-so* ***kekš-i-k***, *od’irva-kaj*, *veška*
where-INE hide-PAST-2SG<3SG daughter.in.law-VOC small
poli-ńe-t’?
husband-DEMIN-PX2SG
‘Wo hast du, junge Frau, deinen kleinen Gatten versteckt?’ (PM I: 6)
- 3) *son* *ku-va* ***stoj-i***, *londad-i*,
it where-PROLAT build-PRES3SG collapse-PRES3SG
‘Während es sich aufbaut, stürzte es immer ein,’ (PM I: 44)
- 4) *Ikel’e-ń* *lomań* ***stoj-i-že***.
before-ADJ human build-PAST-3SG<3SG
‘Ein Mensch aus früheren Zeiten erbaute es.’ (PM I: 70)

In Komi, the situation is not the same. There are several transitive and intransitive verbal stems, which are perfectly similar in all forms of the verbal paradigm, as *punj* ‘cook; boil’ in ex. (5) and (6), and *kjvnj* ‘hear; be heard’ in ex. (7) and (8).

- 5) *Va-ǰs* ***pu-ǰ***.
water-PX3SG boil-PRES3SG
‘The water is boiling.’ (KRS 579)
- 6) *Mam* ***pu-ǰ*** *rok*
mother cook-PRES3SG porridge
‘The mother is cooking the porridge.’ (According to KRS 579)
- 7) *Ajlov ńinǰm* ***e-z*** ***kǰv***.

- man nothing neg-PRES3SG hear.CONNEG
 ‘The man can’t hear anything.’ (Acc. to KRS 348)
- 8) *Ver-jn* *ljjm* *šj* *kj-i-s.*
 forest-INE shooting sound be.heard-PAST-3SG
 ‘In the forest, there was heard a sound of shooting.’ (Acc. to KRS 348)

Occasionally, there are labile verbs also in Finnish. A good example is the verb *alkaa* ‘begin (tr. & itr.)’ as seen in ex. (9) and (10).

- 9) *Koulu* *alkaa* *huomenna.*
 school begin.PRES3SG tomorrow
 ‘The school begins tomorrow.’
- 10) *Ala-n* *heti* *teh-dä* *läksy-j-ä.*
 start-PRES1SG immediately do-INF homework-PL-PART
 ‘I start immediately to do homework.’

References

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