

FROM TRANSITIVITY TO ASPECT: CAUSATIVE-INCHOATIVE ALTERNATION AND ITS EXTENSIONS IN LITHUANIAN

Lithuanian (as well as Latvian) is outstanding among the European languages in that it possesses both a productive morphological causative (the mostly used suffixes are *-in-ti* and *-dy-ti*) and an even more productive morphological anticausative based on the reflexive marker *-si* (cf. Geniušienė 1987; Toops 1994). However, in this paper I will focus on a less productive and more morphologically idiosyncratic valency-affecting operation in Lithuanian, which is interesting primarily because of the unexpected semantic shifts it has undergone.

In Lithuanian, there exist several dozens of pairs of ‘primary’ (i.e. basing their inflection directly on the root) verbs whose members are related in the following way: the intransitive verb (usually denoting a non-agentive process or change of state) forms its present stem by *n*-infixation or *st*-suffixation and shows the ‘zero’ grade of vocalic ablaut; the transitive verb denotes the agentive causation of the event expressed by the corresponding intransitive verb, belongs to another inflectional class and shows the ‘full’ grade of ablaut. Some examples:

dribti ‘fall’ (Pres. *dri-m-ba*) ~ *drėbti* ‘drop’ (Pres. *drebia*)

linkti ‘bow’ (Pres. *link-st-a*) ~ *lenkti* ‘bend’ (Pres. *lenkia*)

jukti ‘become mixed’ (Pres. *ju-n-ka*) ~ *jaukti* ‘mix’ (Pres. *jaukia*)

This type of causative~inchoative pairs belongs to the oldest layer of transitivity-related formations in Baltic (Stang 1942), going back to the Indo-European causative, and does not present anything special from a typological or theoretical points of view (cf. Haspelmath 1993, Comrie 2006).

However, there is a considerable (though somewhat neglected by linguists) set of verb pairs in Lithuanian which exhibit the same or very similar relationships of form but do not differ in transitivity. The majority of such pairs consist of a (not necessarily ‘primary’) verb denoting an atelic process and a prefixed primary verb with an infixed or *st*-present stem denoting the entry into this process (ablaut alternations are not necessary here either):

verkti ‘weep’ (Pres. *verkia*) ~ *pra-virkti* ‘burst into tears’ (Pres. *pra-virk-st-a*)

kaboti ‘be in a hanging position’ (Pres. *kabo*) ~ *pa-kabti* ‘put into a hanging position’ (Pres. *pa-ka-m-ba*)

The number of such pairs is comparable to the number of ‘normal’ causative-inchoative pairs, and the nature of verbs participating therein suggests that this is a result of a more or less recent extension of the original type relationship (cf. such pair as *turtėti* ‘enrich oneself’ ~ *nu-tursti* ‘become rich’, where both members are based on the adjective *turtas* ‘rich’ itself derived from *turėti* ‘hold, have’). In my presentation I will discuss this type of verb pairs in more detail and will outline the possible path of extension from the alternation in transitivity to the purely aspectual derivation. I argue that a whole group of factors played a role here, most importantly, the semantic prototype of the inflection class and the aspectual impact of prefixation.

References

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