

A language without ‘get’?

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The verb ‘get’ belongs to the most frequent “basic” verbs. Additionally this verb is a common source of grammaticalization in many languages. Thus, it may seem surprising that in the Mansi language there is no verb meaning ‘get’. The notion and situation of getting, together with the notion of giving, naturally can be expressed in Mansi, too, and in the expressions for the concept of getting the verb ‘give’ is used. The verb ‘give’ is probably the most frequent ditransitive verb in the languages of the world (Haspelmath 2013). Thus, this phenomenon is connected to the use of ditransitive constructions. In this paper I intend to describe and analyze such constructions in Mansi.

In the first part of my paper I provide a short description of the Mansi language (1.1) then I define the term ditransitivity and discuss the main typological aspects of ditransitivity (1.2). Next, I describe the ditransitive constructions of the Mansi language (2.1 and 2.2) and the main rules of their usage (2.3). Finally, I discuss the constructions expressing the event of ‘getting’ (3).

1.1. The Mansi language

The Mansi (or Vogul) language is an endangered Uralic language. Nowadays Mansi is spoken by fewer than 1,000 people, however, more than 12,000 people declare themselves to be of Mansi nationality (cf. Table 1).

In our time the only Mansi dialect that is still spoken is Northern Mansi, and this dialect also serves as the basis of the Mansi literary language. As a consequence of this situation, the term Mansi is usually used as referring to the Northern Mansi dialect. In this paper I use data from the Northern dialect so I also use the term Mansi referring to this variety. (Northern) Mansi people live in a few villages by the Lower Ob and its western tributaries, the Sosva and Sygva rivers in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District of the Tyumen Region of Russia, as well as by the Lozva River in the Ivdel Area of the Sverdlovsk Region. This dialect is currently

threatened by the process of language shift to Russian, almost all of its speakers are bilingual.

MANSI	LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
12,269	938 (7.6%)

Table 1. Ethnically Mansi population and language proficiency according to data from the 2010 Russian census.

(http://www.perepis-2010.ru/results_of_the_census/results-inform.php)

1.2. Ditransitive constructions and ditransitive verbs

Ditransitive constructions are defined as argument structure required by the ditransitive verb, containing the verb itself, the agent (A), the recipient (R) and the theme (T) (Malchukov et al. 2010: 1). Compare:

English			Hungarian		
<i>Mary gave</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>a book.</i>	<i>Mari</i>	<i>könyvet adott</i>	<i>Jánosnak.</i> ‘id.’
<i>Mary told</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>a story.</i>	<i>Mari</i>	<i>mesét mondott</i>	<i>Jánosnak.</i> ‘id.’
A	R	T	A	T	R

Ditransitive verbs are three-argument verbs which typically denote physical transfer (give, send, bring, etc.). If other verbs with similar semantic features are also used in similar constructions, they are included in the group of ditransitive verbs as well. For instance, such verbs are verbs of communication, as seen in the examples above. In Mansi the number of verbs occurring in ditransitive constructions is high. In addition to the transfer and mental transfer verbs the benefactive and instrumental verbs are also characterized by the same argument structure (Sipőcz 2015).

1.2.1. The main typological groups of the ditransitive constructions

The typological categorization of ditransitive constructions is based on the comparison of ditransitives with the categorization of monotransitive constructions. We differentiate between construction types taking into account whether the T or the R argument of the ditransitive verb occurs in the same position as the patient (P) of the monotransitive construction. On the basis of this, we can differentiate between three main construction types: (1) indirect object construction (IOC) / indirective alignment, in which marking of the P and T is the same, (2) secondary object construction (SOC) / secundative alignment, in which marking of the P and R is the

akw' ēt ūnl-ən-ən māγəs.
 one night sit-AN-SG for
 'I'll give you 300 rubles for another night's watching.'

(VNGy IV: 336)

(5) *akw' sup-ä kat'i-tä-n mi-s-tä*
 one piece-3SG cat-3SG-LAT give-PST-SG.3SG
 'S/He gave one piece to his/her cat.'

(VNGy IV: 343)

(ii) In the secondary object construction, the R of the ditransitive construction is the syntactic object and the T is marked with the instrumental suffix. In this construction the verb is almost always in the objective conjugation.

(6) *Mañ piγ-əm nē-γəl viγ-ləm.*
 little son-1SG woman-INSTR take-SG.1SG
 'I will find a wife for my youngest son.'

(VNGY IV: 324)

2.2. Passivization of the ditransitive constructions

From the typological perspective it can be observed that the alignment of passivization often follows the general alignment of encoding. If a language uses a secondary construction, then most probably it will use a secundative alignment in passivization as well. In Mansi both the indirective and the secundative alignment can passivize. The passivization of the indirective construction leads to T-passivization (7), and passivization of the secundative construction always results in R-passivization (8), thus in other words the P-like arguments can be passivized:

T-passivization from an indirective construction:

(7) *jārm-ən ta-ke maj-wä-s-əm*
 poverty-LAT that-PTCL give-PASS-PST-1SG
 'It is poverty that I was given to.'
 ['It is poverty that I was made to experience.']

(VNGy IV: 330)

R-passivization from a secundative construction:

- (8) (tan) tōnt tax ōs akw Buran-əl mi-w-et.
 (they) then PTCL PTCL one Buran-ISTR give-PASS-3PL
 ‘Then they got [=were given] one more new Buran.’

(Dinislamova 2007: 11)

The R-passivization is crosslinguistically more common, and also in Mansi it is more frequent (Bíró and Sipőcz 2016).

2.3. Ditransitive alternation in the Mansi language

Several languages have more than one ditransitive constructions. This phenomenon is called alternation and is well-known from English (where it is often called dative shift), e.g.: *Mary gave a pen to John.* / *Mary gave John a pen.* In English the indirective and the neutral alignments alternate.

In the Mansi language we can see the alternation of the indirective and secundative types. This type of alternation is cross-linguistically more common than the alternation found in English (Malchukov et. al. 2010: 18). Regarding alternation the main task is to describe the rules of the choice between the different constructions. Typological studies mention several factors like the markedness of the arguments, the prominence differences between the T and R arguments, and the topicality of the arguments. There may be even semantic difference between the alternating constructions, etc. It is also common that several factors work together in a language (Malchukov et al. 2010: 20–21).

Mansi seems to belong to the type of languages in which the alternation is related to topicality. The alternation of the ditransitive constructions together with their passivization is part of a system in which the use of different conjugations (subjective or objective) and constructions is in connection with the information structure of the sentence (Skribnik 2001). According to this, the function of promoting the arguments to subject position by the means of passivization or to direct object position by the means of the alternation of the active constructions is to express the relative topicality of different noun phrases within a clause. As a result, T and R occur alternately in the subject or object position. The subject of the sentence is also the (primary) topic, whereas the object functions either as a secondary topic or as a focus. (By topic I mean a previously mentioned contextually or situationally given information, cf. Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2014: 48–57.) The topicality of the object is marked by the objective conjugation of the verb.

In example (9) all arguments are new information except the A, consequently the predicate agrees only with the subject expressing the A (thus, the verb is in the subjective conjugation). Example (10) represents the case in which the A and the T are given participants, and the R is new information. Thus, the verb must agree with the A and the T. Consequently, the IOC is used where the T is the syntactical object, the verb agrees with it in the objective conjugation. And in example (11), besides the A the R is also a given participant, and the T is the new information. Consequently, the SOC is used, in which the R is the syntactic object which the predicate in the objective conjugation agrees with.

- (9) *Pjotr Gavrivolič ānəmn jurt-ane jot tīt kassēta-γ tēt-əs.*
 P.G. I.LAT friend-PL.3SG with two cassette-DU send-PST.3SG
A = TOP [IOC + Subj. agreement]

‘Pjotr Gavrivolich sent me two cassettes with his friends.’

(Dinislamova 2007: 5)

- (10) *(tan) al-ne χul-anəl gosudarstwə-n miγ-anəl*
 (they) kill-PTCP fish-3PL state-LAT give-SG.3PL
A + T = TOP [IOC + Obj. agreement]

‘They give the fish they catch to the state.’

(Kálmán 1976: 136)

- (11) *Nēnan am šopr-šonaχ-əl wāri-jaγəm.*
 you(DU).ACC I silver-cup-INSTR do-DU.1SG
R + A = TOP [SOC]

‘I’ll make the two of you a silver cup.’

(Kálmán 1976: 70)

The following Mansi examples collected from a native speaker confirm the correlation between the information structure and the use of the different constructions (Sipőcz 2015). If T or R occurred as contrastive topics, the native speaker used the indirective construction in the case of T (12), and secundative construction in the case of R (13). Cf.:

(12) **T as contrastive topic:**

Wi-s-lum *ńań os śakwit,*
 buy-PST-SG.1SG bread and milk

śakwit *oma-m-n* *mi-s-lum.*
 Milk mother-1SG-LAT give-PST-SG.1SG
 ‘I bought bread and milk, I gave the milk to my mother.’

(data from informant)

(13) **R as contrastive topic:**

Uwśi-m tor-əl *mi-s-lum,*
 sister-1SG kerchief-INSTR give-PST-SG.1SG

kaŋk-um *sup-əl* *mi-s-lum.*
 brother-1SG shirt- INSTR give-PST-SG.1SG
 ‘I bought a kerchief for my (elder) sister and a shirt for my (elder) brother.’

(data from informant)

The following examples show the use of passivization in expressing the different information structural roles. The sentences (14) and (15) were recorded from a Mansi native speaker and they were uttered one after the other. The first sentence, (14), contains T-passivization, the word ‘dress’ is the topic – the dress was given to the informant as a present. In the next sentence, (15), the informant talks about herself as the recipient, someone who was given a present, so she uses R-passivization (Sipőcz 2015):

(14) *Ti mańši sup podruška-m-n mujlupt-awe-s.*
 this Mansi dress girlfriend-1SG-LAT present-PASS-PST.3SG
T = TOP [T-passivization]

‘This Mansi dress was given (to me) by a friend as a present.’

(data from informant)

(15) *Tor-el os mujlupt-awe-s-əm.*
 kerchief-INSTR also present-PASS-PST-1SG
(R) = TOP [R-passivization]

‘I was given a kerchief as well.’

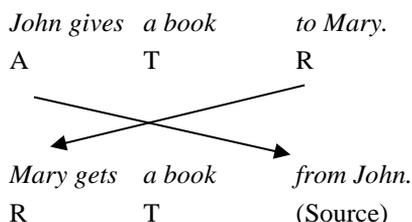
(data from informant)

3.1. Giving is getting

As has been already mentioned, the absence of the verb ‘get’ is an interesting feature of the Mansi lexicon. By this I mean the absence of the “basic” verb meaning ‘get’. Similarly to other languages Mansi also has several verbs for the concept of getting with different specialised meanings, like ‘obtain’, ‘receive’ etc. For instance, NM *patti* ‘take, obtain, get’, *wiy* ‘id.’ (Munkácsi and Kálmán 424, 725). “Modern” Russian-Mansi dictionaries contain the verb *wiy* ‘take’ as the Mansi equivalent of the Russian verb *получать* ‘get’. For instance, *wiŋkwe / wojiŋlaluŋkwe* ‘получить / получать’ (Rombandeeva, Rombandeeva and Kuzakova).³ Dictionaries based on earlier collections do not mention this meaning of the verb *wiy*.

Crosslinguistically the verb ‘get’ belongs to the most frequent verbs⁴ and, as a result, this verb – similarly to the verb ‘give’ – is a common basis for grammaticalization processes (Heine and Kuteva 143–149, 149–156).

The verbs ‘get’ and ‘give’ are considered a semantic pair (Primus 407). The events expressed by these verbs are represented by the same participants: the giver, the recipient and the given object. (As thematic roles, these are the Agent, the Recipient and the Theme.) In the case of the verb ‘give’ the giver is the subject of the verb, while in the case of the verb ‘get’ the recipient is the subject. Cf.:



In Mansi the ditransitive alternation is a device for differentiation between the events of giving and getting by the single verb ‘give’ putting the participants of the event into different grammatical roles.

³ Probably, under the influence of Russian, modern Russian-Mansi dictionaries often list Mansi lexemes the use of which is not typical or even questionable. (It can be seen also in the fact that these dictionaries often create the perfective/imperfective pairs for verbs, as we can see it in the example mentioned above. The perfective/imperfective opposition is characteristic of Russian verbs but not of Mansi.)

⁴ According to the Hungarian National Corpus the verb *kap* ‘get’ is among the 10 most frequently used Hungarian verbs. <http://www.helyesiras.mta.hu/helyesiras/blog/show/tiz-leggyakoribb-tartalmas-szo-a-magyarban>. (2016.08.03).

In the case of the active ditransitive constructions containing the verb *miy* ‘give’, the event expressed by the verb is giving. The subject of the clause is the giver, who is at the same time the Agent of the event and usually the topic of the discourse. The event in which the giver is the Agent can be only the giving irrespectively of the fact whether the Theme or the Receptient is in the object position. Cf. 16–17:

- (16) *Kāsəŋ xōtpa manasāwit wērm-əs, tasāwit oln ta mi-s.*
 every person as.much able-PST.3SG same.much money PTCL give- PST.3SG
 ‘Everybody gave as much money as s/he could.’

(LS 2016/13: 13)

- (17) *akw’ ēt ūnl-än-ən māγəs χūrəm-sat*
 one night sit-AN-2SG for three-hundred

sajt-əl mīγ-ləm
 ruble-INSTR give-SG.1SG

‘For watching for one night I give you 300 rubles.’

(VNGy IV: 334)

However, the passive constructions containing the verb ‘give’ allow the interpretation of both giving and getting. As has already been mentioned, there are two types of passive ditransitive constructions in Mansi, the T and R passivizations (2.2). In the case of T passivization the subject of the construction is the Theme argument and, regarding the connection of information structure and clause structure, the Theme is the topic of the discourse.⁵ The event in which the Theme appears as the topical element can be either the giving or the getting. For instance, in Finnish both verbs can be used in the passive construction:⁶

⁵ It is worth mentioning that T-passivization in more recent texts seems to have an emphasizing function, in addition to its topical use. Rather often this kind of passivization is used in order to place an extra emphasis on the Theme (Bíró and Sipőcz 2016). See for example:

<i>Sverdlovski</i>	<i>oblast’-it</i>	<i>mansi</i>	<i>mir-n</i>	<i>nemater</i>	<i>ńotmil</i>
Sverdlovsk	region-PL	Mansi	people-LAT	nothing	help
<i>at</i>	<i>majla-we.</i>				
NEG	give-PASS.3SG				

‘Since the Mansi people of the Sverdlovsk region are given no help at all.’

(Dinislamova 2007: 8)

⁶ In Finnish only the T argument can be passivized.

(18) Finnish

<i>Kirja anne-ttiin.</i>	/	<i>Kirja saa-tiin.</i>
book give-PASS.PST/		book get-PASS.PST
‘The book was given.’	/	‘The book was received.’

As far as the overt arguments of the structure are concerned, it would seem that if the A is present, the even should be interpreted as giving, whereas if the R is present, then as getting. A characteristic feature of Mansi passives is that the A is often present. The presence of the agent is, however, not typical of T-passive sentences, whereas the presence of the R is very typical (19). From this we could conclude that in T-passive sentences the main factor is getting. However, in my opinion it is unnecessary to separate the two meanings: the interpretation of the situation as getting or giving is dependent on the context and perspective.

- (19) *vāt tal kēr=tińśäj naurəm-ən maj-wə-s*
 thirty fathom iron=tether child-LAT giv-PASS-3SG
 ‘The thirty fathoms long iron tether was given to the child.’
 /‘The thirty fathoms long iron tether was received by the child.’

(VNGy II: 111)

In case of R-passivisation the subject of the construction (and, thus, the topic of the utterance) is the recipient. (Example 22 demonstrates well the topic nature of the R.) The event whose topic is R is getting and not giving. In other words, from the perspective of the R, the primary aspect of the event is getting. From this it follows that the verb ‘give’ in the secundative passive construction is used to express the notion ‘get’.⁷ For instance:

- (20) *kank-ä-n jäy-ä sēl-əm*
 elder.brother-3SG-LAT father-3SG gather-PTCP.PST
puuŋ-nəl i akw’ ōln=pāl-əl at maj-wə-s.
 wealth-ABL and one money=half-INSTR NEG give-PASS-PST[3SG]
 ‘He did not get even a half penny from his elder brother from the wealth gathered by his father.’

(VNGy IV: 326)

⁷ Unlike in many other languages, traditionally in Mansi it is not characteristic that passive constructions are used when the agent of the verb is unknown or general. On the contrary, the Agent is often present in the clause (example 22). The use of the passive voice is motivated by the information structure. It is worth mentioning, however, that in more recent texts the use of the passive construction is not rare in the case of general agents.

- (21) *Kit-it mesta-l Nižnewartowskij ūs-t ōl-ne*
 two-DX place-INSTR Nizhnevartovsk town-LOC live-PTCP.PRS
xantə-t maj-we-s-ət.
 Khanty-PL give-PASS-PST-3PL
 ‘Khanty people from Nizhnevartovsk got the second place.’
 (LS 2016/13: 9)
- (22) *Ruś-ət jornkol-t ōs ōl-s-ət, Raisa Iwanowna-n*
 Russian-PL tent-LOC also to be-PST-3PL R.I.-LAT
tān pussən ḥāḥ-əl ōs maj-wē-s-ət.
 they all bread-INSTR also give-PASS-PST-3PL
 ‘There were Russians in the tent, too. All of them got bread from Raisa Ivanovna.’
 (LS 2016/10: 9)

3.2. Taking as getting?

As has already been mentioned, modern Russian–Mansi dictionaries contain the verb *wiy* with the meaning ‘get’. The basic and most frequent meaning of this verb is ‘take, bring’ and earlier dictionaries do not mention this use of the verb, i.e. the meaning ‘get’. It is noticeable, however, that in more recent texts we can see this kind of use of the verb *wiy*. Example (23) is from the same newspaper article as example (21), the sentences express the same situation, but the verbs are different.

- (23) *Os xūrmit mesta ḥefʹejuganskij rajon-t*
 and third place Nefteyugansk district-LOC
ōl-ne xōtpa-t wi-s-ət.
 live-PTCP.PRS person-PL take-PST-3PL
 ‘And people from Nefteyugansk took/got the 3rd place.’
 (LS 2016/13: 9)

I consider it important, however, that the verbs ‘get’ and ‘take’ differ regarding the thematic roles of their arguments. While the subject of the former verb is not an Agent but a Recipient, the subject of the latter verb is a typical Agent. This kind of alternation for expressing the situation of getting is common in other languages, too. Cf.: English *They got the first place.* (Subject = Recipient) / *They took the second place.* (Subject = Agent)

4. Summary

The absence of the verb meaning ‘get’ is an interesting lexicological feature of the Mansi language. The linguistic analysis of the event of getting makes it clear that the notion of getting is expressed by the verb ‘give’ used in the passive construction. The passivization of the verb ‘give’ belongs to the phenomenon of ditransitive alternation and passivization. In this paper I have argued that R-passivization of the verb ‘give’ is the main device to express the notion of getting.

Abbreviations

A	agent of a (di)transitive clause
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
AN	action nominal
DAT	dative
DOC	double object construction
DU	dual
INSTR	instrumental
IOC	indirect object construction
LAT	lative
LOC	locative
NEG	negative particle
NM	Northern Mansi
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
R	recipient
SG	singular
SOC	secondary object construction
T	theme
V	verb

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