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**Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, R.M.W. Dixon, and Masayuki Onishi.** *Non-Canonical Marking of Subjects and Objects*. In the series *Typological Studies in Language* 46. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 2001. Pp. x + 362. US\$125.00/EUR 125.00 (hardcover), US\$54.00/ EUR 55 (softcover).

Reviewed by Leonid Kulikov, *University of Nijmegen*

The book under review deals with issues which concern core syntactic arguments, subject and object, and yet belong to the periphery of syntactic research. In most languages of the world, we find constructions where the core arguments display some non-standard properties, in particular, non-canonical case marking. Thus, subject can surface in cases other than nominative (in nominative-accusative languages) or ergative and absolutive (in ergative languages); likewise, (direct) object can be marked with cases other than accusative or absolutive. The typology of such a non-canonical marking has not yet become the subject of a special study. This volume aims at filling this lacuna in the research of argument realisation.

The book consists of a short editorial preface (pp. ix–xi), a general introduction written by M. Onishi, a survey article on non-canonical marking of objects and subjects in European languages, and seven studies on individual languages. The editors have tried to remain outside formal theories “which come and go with such frequency that anything cast in terms of them soon becomes antiquated” (p. x)—an approach which seems most appropriate and laudable for a coherent typological study of a particular linguistic problem. Each of the contributors received the preliminary draft of the introduction, which determined the guidelines for description of the non-canonical marking in individual languages. On the basis of the individual contributions, the introduction was revised. This simple and effective method of processing the typological data resembles very much the interaction between the co-ordinator of the group and the individual authors in the tradition of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg typological school described in detail by Nedjalkov and Litvinov (1995:235ff et passim).

Since Onishi’s introductory chapter “Non-canonically marked subjects and objects: Parameters and properties” (pp. 1–51) accumulates and conveniently summarises the results of the individual contributions. I will mainly focus on this chapter in my review. It starts with a general discussion of the basic patterns for cross-identification of the core syntactic categories, A (= the subject argument of a transitive clause), O (= transitive object), and S (= intransitive subject). Alongside the two basic syntactic patterns, transitive and intransitive, the author briefly discusses extended transitive (ditransitive) and extended intransitive clauses, of which each requires one additional obligatory argument E. Thus, roughly speaking, the scope of the present study encompasses all instances of the

non-nominative and non-ergative/non-absolutive marking of A and S, as well as the non-accusative and non-absolutive marking of O.

After this introductory discussion of the basic syntactic patterns, the author addresses two main theoretical questions, which thus divides the introduction into two main parts: (1) the properties of the canonically marked subjects and objects and their application to the cases of non-canonical marking; and (2) the semantic basis for (= parameters of) the non-canonical marking, viz. semantic classes of verbs involved in such constructions.

The relevant properties of subjects and objects are further divided, according to the well-known scheme, into coding and syntactic properties. The former include case-marking, verbal agreement, and word order. The non-canonical marking of the core arguments suggests oblique case marking for A/O/S (e.g., Dative for A/S, Partitive or Genitive for O). The syntactic properties and criteria, which can also be used for determining the status of an argument under question (A/O/S or not), include:

1. imperative constructions, which prototypically require canonically marked 2nd person A/S;
2. constraints on coreferential arguments in complementation: A/S of the complement clause are typically coreferential with A/S or O of the main clause;
3. valency-changing derivation, targets of which are usually core arguments, i.e., A/O/S;
4. antecedent control over reflexive pronouns, usually performed by A/S;
5. relativisation, for which very often only the top of the well-known hierarchy of grammatical relations (Subject > Object > Indirect Object ...) is accessible;
6. conditions for (non-)sharing A/S or O/S in switch-reference systems;
7. coreferential deletion of the core argument shared by two clauses.

These criteria produce altogether a powerful tool for investigating the variety of grammatical relations, yet not all of them are of equal value for identifying core arguments and some others involve several additional parameters, which complicates using them as direct tests for grammatical relations. For instance, as Onishi rightly notes (p. 22), the criterion of control over reflexivisation is quite sensitive to the topicality of the antecedent and, therefore, often does not separate canonically and non-canonically marked subjects, whilst some other, (more) syntactic criteria, such as passivisation, are more dependent on coding properties (in particular on the case-marking) of the arguments. Finally, such processes as causative derivation (p. 13ff) produce too many variegated effects on the clause structure, often crucially depend on the semantic class of the verb, and are essentially language-specific (as we know since Comrie's 1976 seminal article on the syntactic typology of causative constructions). This means that we are confronted with a general theoretical issue (which unfortunately has not received due attention): what do the criteria under discussion test? Is it, for instance, in the case of reflexivisation, subjecthood, topicality, or something else? Do they depend perhaps on some very general feature(s) of the language under study, such as prevalence of semantic or syntactic parameters in determining grammatical relations (cf. the opposition of role and reference domination, in Foley and Van Valin's (1984:123) terminology; cf. also similar doubts expressed by M. Haspelmath in his survey of European languages (p. 72))?

In any case, we are hardly able to arrange all these quite heterogeneous criteria/tests within one single hierarchy (promised by the author on p. 9). Rather we are forced to limit ourselves to separate statements on their relative relevance, as in quite vague and

sometimes even (partly) tautological generalisations formulated by Onishi on pp. 21–23 (and repeated in a more condensed form on p. 44), like: “strictly syntactic derivations such as passives and causatives . . . seem more likely to be restricted to canonically marked A/S than other criteria such as . . . reflexivisation, control over coreferential deletion, and pivot constraints” (p. 22) or “control over pivot constraints and coreferential deletion seem to apply most broadly, even to those non-canonically marked arguments which can only marginally be regarded as A/S” (p. 23).

The author’s discussion of the syntactic criteria and tests raises yet another general issue: the problem of circular definition. Thus, if we know that control over pivot constraints and coreferential deletion often apply “even to those non-canonically marked arguments which can only marginally be regarded as A/S” (p. 23), the two questions remain: (1) why should we believe that the arguments identified by this test are (non-canonically marked) A/S; and (2) how do we know that this criterion tests A/S and not something else? These questions remain essentially unanswered.

The second part of the introduction deals with the semantico-syntactic classes of verbs/predicates (for this terminological opposition, see below) which require non-canonically marked A/O/S. The author follows Dixon’s (1991) distinction between Primary-A (cf. ‘run’, ‘hit’), Primary-B (‘think’, ‘see’), and Secondary (‘try’, ‘begin’) verbs, determined as those which never, sometimes, or obligatorily take complement clauses, respectively (why not call the second class ‘Primary-Secondary’?). The cross-linguistic evidence brings the author to the following very useful classification of predicates (for a summary, see p. 25):

- I: Primary-A verbs with affected S/A, further subdivided into (Ia) verbs referring to physiological states or events (‘be/become hungry’, ‘sweat’) and (Ib) verbs referring to inner feelings or psychological experiences (‘be/become sad’, ‘be/become surprised’);
- II: Primary-A/B verbs with less agentive A/S and/or less affected O, which include, in particular, verbs of perception (‘see’, ‘hear’), cognition (‘know’, ‘think’), liking (‘like’, ‘miss’), interacting (‘help’, ‘win’), etc.;
- III: Secondary verbs with modal meanings (‘want’, ‘can’, ‘seem’);
- IV: Verbs of ‘happenings’, expressing uncontrolled non-volitional events;
- V: Verbs of possession, existence, and lacking (‘like’, ‘miss’).

The author further discusses the languages where constructions with non-canonically marked subjects and/or objects have counterparts with canonical marking (often with systematic voice alternations), called here “fluid systems”,<sup>1</sup> cf. Russian *Ja rabotaju* ‘I (nom.) work’ ~ *Mne rabotaet-sja* ‘I (dat.) can do the work’ (with the reflexive/middle verbal form in *-sja*<sup>2</sup>). The three main semantic oppositions with which such syntactic alternations

<sup>1</sup>The terms “fluid” and “fluidity” (in discussion of Bengali evidence, p. 125), probably going back to Dixon (e.g., 1994:6, where it is used to refer to labile verbs, such as *open*, which show valence alternation with no formal change in the verb), do not seem quite felicitous.

<sup>2</sup>The Russian example (4b), quoted on p. 7 and then mentioned on p. 35, is not quite correct, since the reflexive form in *-sja* can only be employed with an adverbial complement (for instance, *Mne legko rabotaetsja* ‘My work is going well/easily’) or should be put under negation (*Mne ne rabotaetsja* ‘I do not feel like working’).

correlate are: control/involitionality (as in the above-mentioned Russian pair *ja rabotaju* ~ *mne rabotaet-sja*), active/stative, and modality.

The classification of verbs is followed by a convenient survey of languages. It shows which predicates most commonly require non-canonical marking (class Ia), and in which languages most of the predicate classes require non-canonical marking: these are Indo-European languages, Icelandic, Russian (in Onishi's formulation, p. 42, "[s]ome European and [sic!] Slavic languages" [reviewer's emphasis]), and Bengali. The author also formulates some implicative universals in terms of the suggested classification, for example: "[i]f a language has Class IIIa/Ib predicates requiring non-canonically marked A/S, then it also has Class Ia predicates requiring non-canonically marked A/S" (p. 43, unnecessarily repeated on p. 45).

To conclude the discussion of the introductory chapter, I have to mention an important terminological issue, which has been disregarded by the author. It seems that Onishi uses the terms 'verb' and 'predicate' (which refer to the main topic of the last section) as synonymous. Thus (reviewer's emphasis throughout), "*predicates* which take non-canonically marked A/S can be categorised into five major semantico-syntactic classes" (p. 24), the first of which includes "[o]ne- or two-place ... *verbs*" (p. 25); "[t]he *predicates* of this class [= class I] express ... physiological states/events" (p. 25); and so on. It seems that this terminological inaccuracy is not accidental but has its roots in the nature of the verbs/predicates under discussion. It is common knowledge that the term "verb" usually denotes a particular grammatical class (part of speech), while "predicate" typically refers to the class of meanings expressed foremost by verbs, but also by other parts of speech, in particular by adjectives. Using the two terms indiscriminately, the author, as a matter of fact, (quite non-explicitly) extends the scope of the study to the non-verbal predicates. There are indeed good reasons to do so, since the non-canonical marking of subjects and objects often correlates with the non-canonical (i.e., non-verbal) form of the predicate: many of the predicate meanings listed by Onishi are often rendered by adjectives, nouns and some other non-verbal forms, cf. Eng. *I am cold*, Rus. *Mne xolodno* 'I (dat.) am cold' (lit. 'To-me coldly': *xolodno* is an adverbial form, for which the traditional Russian grammar uses a special term, *kategorija sostojanija* 'category of state'). This important theoretical issue is only mentioned in passing by Onishi (for instance, in note 26 on p. 47, where he mentions pairs "of transitive verbs and stative predicates such as adjectives" as one of the possibilities to indicate contrasts in control, modality, etc.). No doubt, a typology of non-canonical marking of arguments should be supplemented with a cross-linguistic study of the non-canonical expression of predicates. This lacuna is partly filled in by M. Haspelmath (pp. 64–67) for European languages and by A.D. Andrews (p. 94) for Icelandic.

The survey chapter on non-canonical marking of objects and subjects in European languages by M. Haspelmath (pp. 53–83) summarises generalisations on the languages belonging to the European linguistic area, called Standard Average European (SAE) type, with West Germanic and Gallo-Romance as core members. The SAE languages share a number of features: accusative-nominative syntactic pattern, person-number agreement on the verb, direct/indirect object (not primary/secondary object) contrast, and a wide variety of semantic roles allowed for subject (agent, experiencer, possessor). An important subdivision within SAE languages is that between case-marking and configurational languages (the latter term refers in fact to the languages with fixed word order, used as the main device for distinguishing arguments).

Haspelmath formulates the main conditions for non-canonical marking of arguments:

1. reference-related (which include “the high degree of individuation of the object or its high position on the animacy/definiteness hierarchies” and partial affectedness of the object, pp. 56–57);
2. clause-related (negation, as in Slavic; imperfectivity, as in Finnish); and
3. predicate-related, i.e., the meaning of the predicate (thus, two-place interaction verbs often use dative and oblique marking).

The rest of Haspelmath’s article concentrates on the most interesting class of predicates constructed with non-canonically marked arguments, viz. experiential predicates. Haspelmath draws an important distinction between three types of experiencer constructions: with the agent-like experiencer (i.e., with the experiencer and stimulus treated as if they were A and O, cf. *John hates his teacher*), dative-experiencer (with the experiencer in the dative and stimulus assimilated to S, cf. German *Mir gefällt dieses Buch*), and patient-like experiencer (experiencer ~ O, stimulus ~ A, cf. *This problem worries me*). The SAE languages show “predilection for agent-like experiencer constructions” (p. 61). As for the two other patterns, they are also attested in SAE with certain verbs, although, as Haspelmath rightly points out (p. 61), they cannot be distinguished for languages which lack any accusative-dative distinction. Yet, one page later he fails to observe that his own analysis of the Dutch example *he[t] bevalt mij* ‘I like it’ as a dative-experiencer construction (perhaps imposed by the German parallel *Es gefällt mir?*) cannot be proved, since accusative and dative forms of personal pronouns are not distinguished in Dutch. Rather, since the Germanic verbal prefix *be-* typically functions as a transitiviser (applicative marker), there is even indirect evidence for the patient-like analysis.

Haspelmath further concentrates on the syntactic (behavioural) properties of the dative experiencers, in order to determine whether it is most appropriate to treat such constructions as (1) transitive (A-O) with non-canonical marking of arguments or (2) as extended intransitive (S-E). Evidence is controversial but pleads rather for the latter description. Yet the author opts for a compromise, diachronically oriented, solution (which seems quite appropriate in this context): “[t]here is a diachronic tendency for intransitive S-E clauses to change into transitive A-O clauses” through acquiring subject properties by the oblique experiencer (p. 75), so that such constructions rather represent “intermediate stages between intransitive and transitive” (p. 68). After a discussion of the evidence from Old, Middle, and Modern English, as well as from Maltese, Haspelmath formulates a convincing diachronic explanation of the general mechanism for the change from oblique experiencer to non-canonically marked subject: “The experiencer is increasingly placed in topic position because it refers to a definite human participant, and since most human topics are subjects, it is gradually assimilated to subjects with respect to its morphosyntactic behavior” (pp. 78–79). On the basis of comparison between Imbabura Quechua and Huanca Quechua — where, in the latter, which is supposedly more archaic, non-canonically marked subjects are treated as objects syntactically — G. Hermon comes to similar conclusions on the evolution from O to (non-canonically marked) S/A (pp. 171–173). These diachronic discussions nicely supplement the synchronic generalisations by Onishi.

The studies on individual languages deal with evidence from two Indo-European languages, Icelandic (A.D. Andrews, pp. 85–111) and Bengali (M. Onishi, pp. 113–147); a Uralic language, Finnish (K. Sands and L. Campbell, pp. 251–305); two South American languages, Imbabura Quechua (G. Hermon, pp. 149–176) and Tariana (A.Y. Aikhenvald,

pp. 177–199); a Papuan language, Amele (J. Roberts, pp. 201–250); and Japanese (M. Shibatani, pp. 307–354). Below I will briefly pinpoint some interesting observations made in these chapters.

Andrews draws attention to the unusually large number of grammatical criteria which groups non-canonical (dative, accusative and genitive) subjects with the canonical ones in Icelandic — at least thirteen, only three of which he discusses: word order, obligatory subject omission, and reflexivisation. After discussing general and syntactic properties of the non-canonically marked S/A (in the genitive or objective), as opposed to the canonically marked ones (in the nominative or locative; the latter is used predominantly in indefinite and generic contexts), Onishi arranges these four types of marking in accordance with the number of S/A properties: Nominative > Locative >>> Genitive >> Objective (I use more >s to render the larger distance on Onishi's scheme). G. Hermon notes among the most interesting features of the non-canonical marking in Imbabura Quechua that the accusative S/A of the desiderative verbs with the suffix *-naya* shows more subject properties than the non-canonically marked S/A with other (non-derived) classes of predicates. Aikhenvald distinguishes between three types of S in Tariana:

1.  $S_a$  (= subject of active intransitive verbs, marked in the verb in the same way as A),
2.  $S_o$  (= subject of stative intransitive verbs, treated as O), and
3.  $S_{io}$  (= subject of physical and mental states such as 'be hungry').

She shows that  $S_{io}$  is "a distinct grammatical function" (p. 178), not sharing most of the syntactic properties with A,  $S_a$ , and  $S_o$ , although her formulation in the concluding section — " $S_{io}$  ... can ... be treated as a distinct subtype of S as part of the grammatical relation 'subject'" (p. 197) — leaves some unclarity concerning her interpretation of this grammatical relation. Roberts concentrates on impersonal constructions (which express desire, wish, and physiological or psychological experience) in Amele and shows that the subject properties in such constructions are divided between the experiencer nominal (cross-referenced on the verb as direct object), and the zero nominal (cross-referenced on the verb as "anonymous" 3rd person singular noun by subject agreement); the former bears the majority of the subject features, however.

Sands and Campbell discuss in detail non-canonical subjects and objects in Finnish and the conditions under which they occur (e.g., partitive subjects appear in existential sentences). One of their major conclusions is that many (or even most) of the instances of non-canonical marking on closer examination turn out to be canonical. The authors suppose that the same approach may be appropriate for several other languages, calling for a more restricted use of the notion of "non-canonicity". It seems, however, that many of these generalisations, albeit perfectly valid for Finnish, are language-specific and can only be extended to other languages with caution. Thus, for Finnish, there are indeed good reasons not to consider the nominative marking of direct objects, employed when there is no overt nominative subject (for instance, with imperatives and infinitives, cf. *Anna Marja-n ostaa auto* 'Let Marja (gen.) buy a car (nom.)'; see pp. 279ff), as an instance of non-canonical object marking. However, this seems to be a peculiar feature of the Finnish syntax (which, incidentally, may be the source of a similar phenomenon in the adjacent Northern Russian dialects). Normally, we do not find such "loose" object marking in languages with more rigid case marking of core arguments, where the non-nominative case of the object can therefore be used as a stronger criterion of non-canonicity. Here, one

might express regret that we do not find Altaic languages (with “loose” object marking) in the language sample of the volume.

Shibatani explains several peculiar features of the Japanese syntax in terms of ‘double subject constructions’ (of the type *Hata-san ga* (nom.) *okusan ga* (nom.) *utukusii* ‘It is Mr. Hata whose wife is beautiful’, *Hata-san ni* (dat.) *okusan ga* (nom.) *iru* ‘Mr. Hata has a wife’), where the large subject (nominative *Hata-san ga*, dative *Hata-san ni*) specifies “a domain in which the described state of affairs obtains” (p. 349), controls subject properties and dominates over the small subject.

The book is concluded with language, author, and subject indices.

Each article of the volume is valuable for its presentation of new data from individual languages as well as for its contribution to the study of subject and object properties from a cross-linguistic perspective. The clear presentation helps a lot in understanding the most complicated syntactic problems. This book is highly recommended for general linguists and typologists.

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