

The Balto-Slavic dative complement with the verb ‘to be’

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It is suggested in this paper that the dative complement with the verb ‘to be’ in Baltic and Slavic infinitival clauses ultimately goes back to the IE dative of purpose also attested in Old Indic and other IE languages.

Holvoet (2004: 80 and *passim*) demonstrates that in such a Latvian sentence as:

(1) *Lūgsim viņu arī šodien būt mūsu viesim.*
‘Let us ask him ACC to be our guest DAT today as well’

the dative complement of *būt* ‘to be’ is etymologically more ancient than the possible use of an instrumental in syntactically similar clauses in Lithuanian (and Slavic). I propose that etymologically this Latvian construction reflects a subtype of the ‘double dative’ or ‘dative of purpose’. This sentence might then be interpreted as originally meaning ‘Let us ask him in order that (so that) he might become our guest today as well’. Let us consider some other examples which Holvoet offers: (John 1:12) ... ἐδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι is translated into Old Church Slavic as:

(2) ... *dastъ imъ vlastъ čedomъ бъзьемъ DAT byti* (Codex Marianus)
‘...to them gave he power to become the sons of God...’ (King James version translation).

Note that γενέσθαι ‘to become’ is translated by OCS *byti* which thereby retains the Indo-European meaning of the root *bhū- ‘to become, to come into existence, to begin to exist’. I interpret the OCS construction also as a ‘double dative’ or ‘dative of purpose’ and an alternative translation of this might be ‘he gave them power in order that they might become sons of God’. Note also the Old Russian expression:

(3) *Ona že učaše syna svoego byti xristijanu*

which Holvoet (2004: 80), from whom I have the example, translates as: ‘She, however, taught her son ACC to be a Christian DAT’. I could understand this also as ‘She taught her son, so that he might become a Christian’.

The double dative or dative of purpose is well represented in many Indo-European languages and according to Ambrasas (1981: 20–21) is a reflection of the double

dative with verbal abstracts. Haudry (1977: 105) writes: „Le type *índrāya pātave* (‘pour qu’Indra boive’) est constitué d’un substantif ordinaire (la plupart du temps, mais non obligatoirement, un nom personnel) et d’un nom verbal (nom d’action ou infinitif); le lien entre le premier et le second est celui d’un sujet à un prédicat: *índrāya pātave*.“

Concerning the Old Indic type *vṛtrāya hāntave* ‘pour tuer Vṛtra’ Haudry writes (1977: 105–106): „...mêmes constituants, le substantif ordinaire étant quelconque; le lien est celui d’un objet à un verbe transitif... Naturellement, cet exemple peut être interprété hors contexte selon le type précédent ‘pour que Vṛtra tue’: l’expression est donc *ambigue*.“ Similar grammatical ambiguity exists in Lithuanian. Thus:

(4) *Jis nupirkо liūtq karvēms ēsti*

formally could mean either:

(4a) ‘He bought a lion to eat the cows DAT OF GOAL’

or

(4b) ‘He bought a lion for the cows DAT SUBJ to eat.’

Likewise the sentence

(5) *Jis nuvedē Jonq banginiui ēsti*

(5a) ‘He brought Jonah to eat the whale DAT OF GOAL’ or

(5b) ‘He brought Jonah for the whale DAT SUBJ to eat’.

According to Prof. Vytautas Ambrazas in his letter of 1996-03-19 the ambiguity can only be resolved by context.

Now a dative with an infinitive (Lith.) *būti*, (Latv.) *būt*, (Slavic) *byti* denoting ‘to become’ might be understood either as the subject or the complement. The original dative of purpose meaning is illustrated in sentences (1), (2) and (3) above and perhaps also in the further Latvian examples given by Holvoet (2004: 79):

(6) *kas aiskawe manni kristitam tapt*

‘what doth hinder me ACC to be baptized DAT’,

which I could understand as ‘what hinders me so that I might be baptized’ and

(7) *un wiensch pawehleja teem kristiteem tapt eeksch ta Kunga Wahrda*

‘and he commanded them DAT to be baptized in the name of the Lord’

which I could interpret as ‘and he commanded that they should be baptized (in order to baptize them) in the name of the Lord’.

At some point the dative spread from the purpose clauses to become what Holvoet (2004: 77–78) terms 'a syntactic default' case in such sentences as Latv.

(8) *Patīkami ir būt rakstniekam*
'It is pleasant to be a writer'

and

(9) *Valodās viņi centās atrast cits cita vājākās vietas, kas tos piespieda būt uzmanīgiem.*
'In their talk they attempted to discover each other's weak spots, which compelled them ACC to be careful DAT.'

Perhaps it is on the basis of just such sentences as (9) which can almost be interpreted as a purpose clause ('that they might be careful, that they should be careful, in order for them to be careful') which led to the spread of the etymological dative of purpose beyond its original semantic borders.

It should further be remarked that the use of the instrumental in similar constructions in Lithuanian was roundly criticized by Jablonskis. Typically guardians of the language support the retention of earlier norms, so we can assume that Jablonskis is encouraging an older syntactic construction. Piročkinas (1986: 193) gives a number of examples where Jablonskis corrects the instrumental to the dative, e.g.:

(10) *patariu būti atsargiai* INSTR = *atsargiems* DAT
'I advise (someone) to be careful';

(11) *bet studentams reikia būti ir sveikais* INSTR = *sveikiems* DAT
'but students must be healthy too';

(12) *Kareiviu nedera būti žiauriu* INSTR = *žiauriam* DAT
'It does not befit a soldier to be cruel';

(13) *Didę vilį duoda noras geresniu* INSTR *tapti* = *geresniam* DAT *tapti*
'The wish to become better gives great hope'.

The use of the predicative instrumental in Slavic is apparently not an Indo-European inheritance. Danylenko (2003: 44) quotes A. Potebnja who wrote that the predicative instrumental is one of the most characteristic features of the Slavic languages and is a relatively late phenomenon compared with the use of the second nominative. (Danylenko stresses the fact that Potebnja says that both cases were equal 'ravnopravny', not synonymous.) In fact, however, Old Ukrainian texts show the use of the nominative case more frequently. Danylenko quotes from the Hypatian Chronicle:

(14) *ašče bo bylъ perevoznikъ* NOM SG *kyj* NOM SG
'If Kyi had been a ferry-boat operator...';

(15) *u Jaropolka žena grékin(i)* NOM SG *bé i bjaše byla černiceju* INSTR SG
'Jaropolk's wife was a Greek and she had been a nun'
(Danylenko 2003: 40).

I am certainly willing to believe that the instrumental here is an innovation, particularly since this function seems to be limited to Balto-Slavic. Danylenko agrees with Potebnja who saw the use of the nominative in predicate position as being more archaic than the use of the instrumental.

It seems to me that any syntactic function must have its origin in a semantic function. The original semantic function of the dative of purpose was, however, sometimes lost and the dative became the automatic complement with the verb 'to be'. Thus Holvoet's conclusion that the Latvian dative is more original than a Baltic or Slavic instrumental in similar constructions is completely credible.

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