

Peter Arkadiev

May 23, 2003 Homework # 5

### Accusative vs. Genitive under Negation

0. *Preliminary remarks.* Aproaching this topic, one has to constantly keep in mind that ACC vs. GEN DO-marking under Negation is different from NOM vs. GEN Sb-marking under negation in several respects:

- ◆ the transformation in most cases is not obligatory;
- ◆ there seems to exist considerable idiolectal variation concerning ACC vs. GEN, some native speakers preferring it in more contexts than other; therefore I will judge only my personal intuition;
- ◆ we cannot exclude the possibility that there be some subtle differences depending on individual properties of particular verbs or nouns, which properties may turn out to be of some non-semantic origin.

1. *ACC vs. GEN and animacy.* Since in Russian ACC and GEN are syncretised with animate nouns throughout the plural subparadigm and with masculine animate nouns of the 1<sup>st</sup> declension (type *мальчик* vs. *стол*), only inanimate nouns may serve as diagnostic for ACC vs. GEN distinction. From my point of view, it is important that even those animate nouns which do not show ACC = GEN syncretism (*мама*, *дочь*) should be kept under suspicion, because we have a right to expect that if there exists any semantic difference between ACC and GEN DO-marking, it is neutralized with *all* animate nouns regardless of their inflectional class. (Certainly, it may as well be plausible that such a hypothesis is not valid, nevertheless I would like to exclude animate nouns from my discussion).

2. *ACC vs. GEN and partitivity.* Negation is by no means the only context where the DO-marking may vary between ACC and GEN. Such a variation exists with mass nouns and depends on holistic/definite (ACC) or partitive/indefinite (GEN) interpretation of the NP, cf.

(1a) *Он выпил воду*<sub>ACC</sub> 'he drank the water' = 'there was some water, and he drank all of it'

(1b) *Он выпил воды*<sub>GEN</sub> 'he drank some water' = 'there was some water, he drank some of it, but not all, no matter how much'

The same with plural NPs:

(2a) *Съешь яблоки*<sub>ACC</sub> 'eat the apples' = 'there are some apples, eat all of them'

(2b) *Поешь яблок*<sub>GEN</sub> 'eat some apples' = 'there are some apples, eat some of them, as much as you want'

Note different verbs in (2a) and (2b) — 'delimitative' *поесть* implies non-holistic interpretation of the NP, while telic *съесть* implies that the whole DO is affected (just as Hopper & Thompon 1980 point out, degree of affectedness and definiteness of the DO correlates with aspectual properties of the verb).

We might hypothesize that the partitive/holistic distinction should be neutralized with the negated VPs, since both types of interpretation seem to have the same negative counterpart, i. e. 'the action did not affect DO at all'. However, it turns out that there does exist some semantic difference between the negative sentences: with ACC there is a presupposition concerning Speaker's expectations about the completeness of the event, while with GEN there is no such presupposition:

(3a) *Он не выпил воду*<sub>ACC</sub> 'he did not drink the water' = 'he was expected to drink all the water, but he did not (some water was left)' = 'he tried to drink all of the water, but did not succeed'

(3b) *Он не выпил воды*<sub>GEN</sub> 'he did not drink any water'

Cf. with *допить* 'finish drinking', which implies the holistic interpretation of the DO:

(4a) *Он допил воду*<sub>ACC</sub>/\**воды* 'he finished drinking the water' → 'there is no more water left'

(4b) *Он не допил воду*<sub>ACC</sub>/\**воды*<sub>GEN</sub> 'he did not finish drinking water' → 'there is some water left'

We might argue that negation has different scope with ACC and with GEN due to the presupposition generated by the telic/holistic interpretation of the whole VP:

(5a) *он выпил воду* = 'he drank water (presupp.); he achieved the result: there is no water left (assert.)'

(5b) *он выпил воды* = 'he drank water'

(5c) *он не выпил воду* = NEG[‘he drank water (presupp.); he achieved the result: there is no water left (assert.)’] = ‘he drank water (presupp.); he did not achieve the result: there is water left (assert.)’

(5d) *он не выпил воды* = NEG[‘he drank water’] = ‘he did not drink water’  
Perhaps there are some more difficult cases, but I won’t try to deal with them here.

3. ACC vs. GEN, determiners and definiteness. When the DO is an NP with an indefinite pronoun such as *никакой*, ACC → GEN transformation seems to be obligatory, cf.

(6) *Я не видел никакого автомобиля*<sub>GEN</sub> / \**никакой автомобиль*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I did not see any car’

Thus it is not surprising that the negative indefinite pronoun *ничто* does not have ACC at all, being GEN when used in DO function:

(7) *Я ничего* / \**ничто не видел* ‘I did not see anything’

Bearing that in mind, as well as the correlation between definiteness/indefiniteness and ACC/GEN DO-marking in affirmative sentences, we may hypothesize that in negative sentences too, ACC marks definite/individuated DO’s while GEN marks indefinite/non-individuated DO’s. That hypothesis seems to be valid, at least to certain extent, cf.:

(8a) *Он ещё не прочёл книгу*<sub>ACC</sub> / <sup>?</sup>*книгу*<sub>GEN</sub>, которую я ему дал ‘He has not yet read the book I gave him’ (definite individuated DO)

(8b) *Он ещё не прочёл книги*<sub>ACC</sub> / <sup>?</sup>*книги*<sub>GEN</sub>, которые взял из библиотеки ‘He has not yet read the books that he had taken from the library’ (definite collective DO)

(8c) *Он не читает книги*<sub>ACC</sub> / *книги*<sub>GEN</sub>, которые берёт из библиотеки ‘He does not read the books that he takes from the library’ (less definite collective DO, generic situation)

(8d) *Он никогда не читает* <sup>?</sup>*книги*<sub>ACC</sub> / *книги*<sub>GEN</sub> ‘He never reads books’ (non-referential DO, generic situation)

However, surprisingly enough, GEN marking of the DO is permitted with the definite determiner *этой*:

(9a) *Я не читал этой книги*<sub>GEN</sub> / *эту книгу*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I did not read this book’

(9b) *Я ещё не видел этого фильма*<sub>GEN</sub> / *этот фильм*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I have not yet seen this film’

Similarly, in generic contexts with the definite (?) determiner *такой*:

(10a) *Я не читаю таких книг*<sub>GEN</sub> / *такие книги*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I never read such books’

(10b) *Я не люблю таких фильмов*<sub>GEN</sub> / *такие фильмы*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I do not like such films’

And even with definite DO:

(11) *Я ещё не видел такой книги*<sub>GEN</sub> / *такую книгу*<sub>ACC</sub> ‘I have not yet seen such a book’

However, when the VP is in the scope of certain propositional operators, ACC seems to be preferred, cf.

(12a) *Я бы предпочёл не смотреть этот фильм*<sub>ACC</sub> / <sup>?</sup>*этого фильма*<sub>GEN</sub> ‘I would prefer not to watch that film’

(12b) *Я советую тебе не смотреть этот фильм*<sub>ACC</sub> / <sup>?</sup>*этого фильма*<sub>GEN</sub> ‘I recommend you not to watch that film’

(12c) *Нельзя не посмотреть этот фильм*<sub>ACC</sub> / <sup>?</sup>*этого фильма*<sub>GEN</sub> ‘One can not miss that film’

In all these examples the presupposition of existence concerning the DO holds, so that only the action is in the scope of negation. However, the same is true for the examples (9) — (11), where GEN is absolutely OK (and even with (12a-c) I have only a slight preference of ACC). Therefore, we cannot say that definite DO’s require ACC marking; perhaps a weaker generalization holds: at least in some contexts GEN is possible with all DO’s, and if the DO is indefinite, GEN is favoured.

4. Tentative conclusions. Up to now I have been trying to show that there are at least partial correlations between ACC vs. GEN DO marking under negation and what may be called the ‘degree of transitivity’ of the clause in Hopper & Thompson’s sense. Thus, GEN is preferable when the DO is completely unaffected by the action, if it is indefinite or non-individuated, while ACC is favoured by partially (although due to negation not completely) affected, definite and individuated DO’s. However, it really seems to me that such correlations do not go too far, and that one must search for other factors determining the choice of the case; it is very possible that those factors lie in the field of discourse pragmatics.