Tėvas dirbta?! — A misinterpretation

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Since the participle *-ta is always etymologically intransitive the author would never propose a sequence *tėvas dirbta with the putative meaning 'father worked'. The author explains *tėvo būta as analogical to *tėvo dirbta.

Once a misinterpretation takes root in the world of linguistics its extirpation becomes practically impossible, but in this brief note I should like to reiterate a statement that I have already made in my review of V. Ambrazas' excellent and thought-provoking book, Šravinėt 'nųjį sintaksis prūsų Baltij- skioj jėzykų (Schmalstieg 1991:77-79). I am taking this opportunity because the misunderstanding was repeated in A. Holvoet's review of the same book which appeared in the first issue of Linguistica Baltica.


Ambrazas' first objection, viz., that I consider the genitive case the same as the original Indo-European ergative case is at least a correct interpretation.
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the introduction of the genitive case as a kind of subject here was formed by analogy with the agent marking encountered in the passive (originally ergative).

Typically in ergative languages the ergative is the agent only if the verb has two arguments. In verbs which have a single argument the subject is in the same case as the patient of two-argument verbs. Thus in the Georgian system one encounters:

\[ txa(-i) \text{ mo-} \text{ vid-} \text{ a} \]
(nom.) (preverb-root-3rd sg. marker)
g oat came

\[ txa-m \text{ ēse-} \text{ ēam-} \text{ a} \]
(erg.) (preverb-root-3rd sg. marker) (nom.)
g oat ate

\[ \text{venax-} \text{i} \]

The case of the subject of the single-argument verb patterns with the case of the patient (traditionally object) of the two-argument verb (Boeder 1979:437). Now in western Georgian dialects the ergative sometimes replaces the nominative with intransitive verbs. Thus one might find:

\[ k'ac-ma \text{ mo-wid-a} \]
(root-erg.) (preverb-root-3rd sg.)
man came ‘The man came’

Thus in western Georgian dialects the ergative case expressing the notion of agency could be transferred from constructions with ergative syntax to the subject of intransitive sentences thereby replacing the absolutive or nominative case. I assume then that a similar phenomenon is to be observed in Proto-Baltic as expressed in the Lithuanian examples below.

\[ tēvo \text{ eita} \]
(gen.) (neut. past passive participle)
father came

\[ jō \text{ būta} \]
(gen.) (neut. past passive participle)
he was
The genitive here had its origin as the agent in ergative constructions. My earlier view expressed in (1976) is completely wrong. Thus I now agree with my critic Guido Michelini, who wrote (1989:54) that such constructions as Lith. *jo bûta 'he was* are probably due to analogy with the passive of active verbs. But instead of passive I would use the term ergative.

Indeed the parallelism between Lith. *jo visur bûta* and Russian dialect *u nego vesde byto* 'he has been everywhere' is truly striking, as Holvoet (1992:245) says. Perhaps this is a Baltic substratum phenomenon, or perhaps the retention of an early Slavic syntactic pattern similar to that of Baltic. The Indo-European agentic genitive has in general been strengthened by *ots* 'by, from' in Slavic, common in South Slavic, but perhaps not well attested in East Slavic, although even here we encounter such sentences as (Igor Tale, line 55, as reconstructed by Jakobson 1966:170):

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Poskêpani sablùmi kalenyymi šelomi Ovârski ble ots tebe,
(past psv. part.) (instr. pl.) (nominative plural) (genitive)
Cleft with sabers tempered helmets Avar by you
Jaa ture Vsevolod!
Fierce Bull Vsevolod! 'Cleft with tempered sabers are [their] Avar helmets — by you, Fierce Bull Vsevolod!
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In addition Mrázek (1964:159) quotes the following sentence from Pushkin’s *Kapitanskaja dočka: obłeçennyj vlast’ju* (instr. ot samoznanca 'clothed with authority by the impostor'. Perhaps in East Slavic the preposition *u* has replaced the older *ots* in some agentic functions. Whatever the origin of the north Russian construction *u nego vesde byto* may be, I still suppose that Lithuanian constructions of the type *lévo ėta* and *jo bûta* are modeled on constructions of the type *lévo sêla rugiai*.

Wackernagel and Debrunner (1954:582) write that Pataiñjali quotes the three sentences:

1. *iháhíh* = *iha + ahih* *srptâh*
   (adv.) (nom. sg. masc.) (nom. sg. masc.)
   here serpent crawled 'The serpent crawled here'

2. *idam aheh* *srptam*

3. *ihâhinâ = iha + ahinâ* *srptam*
   (adv.) (instr. sg.) (nom.-acc. sg. neut.)
   here serpent crawled

I assume that sentence 1. above with a nominative subject and an intransitive participle represents the earlier situation. Sentences 2. and 3. are later analogical models based on the same considerations as the Lithuanian constructions with a genitive plus intransitive participle.

Let us recall also Darius’ statement:

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*vâtiy dåravyaun xâdâyia ima tya manâ kartam pasâva*
(3 pres.) (nom. sg. masc.) (nom. sg.) (nom. sg.) (gen. sg.) (nom. sg. neut.)

says Darius king this that — by me done after

yaðâ xâdâyia abavam
(conj.) (nom. sg.) (1 sg. imperfect)

[that] king I became
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(Kent 1953:117, 26-28) ‘Says king Darius: This is what was done by me (= this is what I have done), after I became king’. (cf. Lith. *manâ* [gen. sg.] su-kurta [*-kro*] 'by me created' = Old Persian *manâ kartam* [*-kro-]*)

Horn (1898:148) writes that the two Palhevi preterit constructions *am kart* 'from (ward) gethan, by me (was) done' and *man kart* 'mein Gethane, my deeds‘ merged and gave the modern Persian preterit sg. 1 *man kardam* 'I did', 2 *to kardâ* 3 *u kard*, pl. 1 *ma kardim*, 2 *ðoma kardîd*, 3 *anha kardand*. With the exception of the 3 singular form the preterit paradigm consists of the etymological past participle kard- (*kort < *kar-t-) plus the present conjugation of the verb ‘to be’: *am* 1 (3 sg. ast), *im* id. and. The interesting part from the typological point of view is the appearance of the old genitive as the fixed form of certain of the personal pronouns. Thus modern Farsi *man* 'I can be compared with Old Persian (gen.) *manâ* 'mine, of me', *te* 'you' (sg.) with the Avestan (gen.) *taav* 'your, of you', *u* 'he, she' with the Old Persian (gen. sg.) *avâhya* ma 'we' with Old Persian (gen. pl.) *amâzam* 'our', Avestan *ahmâkmâ*, Old Indic *asmâkam*, *ðoma* with Gatha Avestan (gen. pl.)
zsmakom 'your' (Horn 1898:118-119). These etymological genitives man, to, u, ma and somoa have become the fixed forms, now used with present as well as preterit verbs, e.g., in such sentences as man doktor am 'I am a doctor', to doktor i 'you are a doctor', u doktor ast 'he is a doctor', ma doktor im 'we are doctors', somoa doktor id 'you are doctors'. Thus the substitution of an old agentive genitive into a position where it did not previously belong is not a surprising event.

References


Holvoet, A. (1992), Review of Vytautas Ambrasas' Sravintel'nyj sintaksis pričastij bal- tijskiz jazykov, in Linguistica Baltica 1, 244-246.


