

# Further Perspectives on the Baltic Verb The Baltic Verb Project: Summing up Salos, July 30, 2021



Kuriame  
Lietuvos ateitį  
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Vilnius  
University

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# The project

- The research project *The Baltic Verb: Grams, Categories and Domains* is funded by the European Social Fund under grant agreement with the Research Council of Lithuania.
- It started on January 8, 2018 and will end on December 31, 2021.
- Among other things, this project provided the funding for the 2019, 2020 and 2021 Salos summer schools.
- The results of the project research will be published in three collections of articles, published as thematic volumes of the journal *Baltic Linguistics*. Two of them have already appeared in electronic form, one also in print form:
  - *Minor Grams in Baltic*, 2019
  - *Studies in the Voice Domain in Baltic and Its Neighbours*, 2020

# The team



# The team

- The team consisted of research workers from
  - Vilnius University: Axel Holvoet, Birutė Spraunienė, Vaiva Žeimantienė, Asta Laugalienė, Gina Kavaliūnaitė, Vladimir Panov (since 2020)  
As well as
  - Nicole Nau, Poznań
  - Liina Lindström, Tartu
  - Peter Arkadiev, Moscow
  - Anna Daugavet, St Petersburg
  - Kirill Kozhanov, Södertörn
  - Paweł Brudzyński, Warsaw
  - Danguolė Kotryna Kapkan (Vilnius University), not formally a team member, also contributes to the last project volume.

# The goals

- There was no single specific problem for which this project was supposed to provide a solution.
- Rather, the idea was to gain new insights and deepen our understanding of grammatical semantics in Baltic at the light of the now increasingly predominant constructional approach.
- And we also placed a strong emphasis on corpus research, as more and more corpora are becoming available (cf. the Kaunas corpora, internet corpora accessible via Sketch Engine, the TriMCo dialect corpus, and mini-corpora created *ad hoc*; unfortunately there are still no historical corpora for the Baltic languages).
- The choice of verbal categories as main focus of the project reflects a certain continuity with the earlier VARGReB research project (*Valency, Argument Realization and Grammatical Relations in Baltic*, Vilnius University, 2012–2015), in which problems of grammatical voice figured prominently.



# The method

- The project planning left much room for the individual research interests of the team members.
- At the same time, emphasis was on group projects so as to combine expertise on different language groups (Baltic, Slavonic, Fennic), and to combine different research methods.
- Workshops provided opportunity to discuss work methods and research results.
- Project members were also encouraged to read each other's texts and to comment upon them.

# Thematic blocks

The research was divided into three thematic blocks, each dealt with in a separate volume of articles:

- Minor grams and constructional idioms in the verbal domain,
- The voice domain (passive, middle, causative),
- The TAME domain (tense, aspect, mood, evidentiality).

The research projects focuses on the Baltic languages but areal links to neighbouring languages (Slavonic languages, mainly Russian and Polish, Fennic—Estonian and Finnish) also receive ample attention.

# Minor grams

- The constructional approach to grammar has not yet been consistently applied to the Baltic languages. Many interesting grammatical phenomena of the Baltic languages have barely been deemed worthy of a footnote (or a mention in small print) in the grammars because they stand outside the main grammatical correlations of tense, aspect etc.
- In fact, it is clear that many grammatical patterns do not fit into one single domain of grammar as defined by these structuralist correlations. The borderlines between tense and aspect, mood and evidentiality etc. are notoriously fluid.
- Because of the correlational approach reflected in reference works on the Baltic languages many interesting features of these languages, often typologically noteworthy, have remained unnoticed: the Lithuanian avertive (or not-quite-avertive), the Latvian experiential tense, the Lithuanian intensive causatives, the Latvian continuative construction, the Lithuanian cumulative-experiential passive etc.





# Minor grams

- A hitherto completely unnoticed minor gram is the **experiential tense** with the auxiliary *tikt* ‘get’ in Latvian (Daugavet & Holvoet 2019). It is native only to part of the Latvian dialects (Selonian and Latgalian):  

<i>daudzreiz</i>	<i>tiku</i>	<i>dzirdējis</i>
many_times	get.PST.1SG	hear.PST.PART.ACT.M.SG

‘I’ve heard it said (heard it said, had heard it said) many times...’
- It is similar to the compound anterior tenses with ‘be’ and the past active participle, but the auxiliary is *tikt*, and it is used only in the past tense.
- Such forms get brief mentions in the grammars, where they are described as variants of the past tense or the perfect.
- It is a tense form basically referring to event types without exact temporal location in the past and without constant reference time (thus distinct from the experiential perfect, for which  $R = S$ ). The experiential is identified in Dahl (1985, 139–144) as a distinct gram, mainly instantiated in Africa and East Asia. Latvian seems to be the first instance identified in Europe.

# The ambidirectional

- De Groot (2000) introduced the absentive, a construction denoting the temporary absence of a person from a deictic centre for a specific purpose:

German    *Sie*    *sind*    *schwimmen*.  
              they    are    swim:INF    ‘They have gone swimming’

- Many languages have this construction only in the past tense:

Lithuanian    *Buvome*    *paplaukti*.  
                  be.PST.1PL swim.INF

- This suggests the past-tense variety is the original core of this construction, and that the present-tense variety is secondary. Starting out from this assumption Holvoet & Žeimantienė (2019) propose the notion of ambidirectional, a two-way motion-cum-purpose construction, with the ‘absentive’ as a secondary extension in some languages.

# Constructional idioms

- The first thematic block also included constructional idioms, which have received little attention in Baltic studies until now.
- Some of them can be described as marginal grammatical forms, like the Latvian ‘continuative construction’ (Nau 2019):

<i>runā</i>	<i>vienā</i>	<i>runāšanā</i>
talk.PRS.3	one.LOC.SG	talking.LOC.SG
‘(s)he talks in one talking’ = ‘keeps talking all the time’		

- ... or the ‘take and V’ construction, which occurs in many languages all over Europe (Italian *prendono e partono*, Swedish *ta och gå* etc.). We can single out an areal cluster comprising Northern Slavic as well as Baltic. Within this cluster, however, there is a lot of formal variety, and the functions are partly different in the individual languages.

# Constructional idioms

- Another interesting constructional idiom, restricted to Slavonic, Baltic, neighbouring Fennic and Yiddish, is what is described by Holvoet, Daugavet & Lindström as the insubordinated concessive imperative.

## Lithuanian

*Kad ir ė parduotuvę eini, tai nors  
when PTC to shop.ACC.SG go.PRS.2SG then CONC  
dantim gatvėj kabinkis.  
tooth.INS.PL street.LOC.SG hang.IMP.2SG.REFL*

‘Even when you just walk to the shop, you almost have to cling with your teeth to the pavement.’ (i.e. it is so slippery)

## Russian

*do togo ploxo, xot’ kriči*

## Yiddish

*siz shlext xotsh zets zix un vajn*

‘It’s so bad you could as well sit down and cry.’

- The article gives a first systematic cross-linguistic description as well as a diachronic explanation (involving insubordination).



# The voice domain

- Our work in this domain was partly a continuation of the work presented in the volume *Voice and Argument Structure in Baltic* (2015).
- This volume contained
  - Two detailed corpus-based and typologically informed studies of causatives in Baltic—Arkadiev & Pakerys on Lithuanian and Nau on Latvian (and a study of extended—non-causative—uses of causative morphology by Holvoet)
  - A discussion of argument structure in middle-voice (reflexive) constructions in Baltic (Holvoet)
  - Studies on the passive in Lithuanian and Latvian (with an emphasis on ‘impersonal passives’ and impersonals)
  - Etc.

# The voice domain

- In the new voice volume a bulky study is devoted to the passive, viewed as a family of constructions rather than one single construction (Nau, Spraunienė, Žeimantienė 2020).
- Different constructions had already been singled out within the passive, e.g., the resultative passive, the impersonal passive and (in Lithuanian) the evidential passive (cf. Geniušienė 2016).
- Here the approach is even more consistently ‘splitting’, which leads to the discovery of several interesting and hitherto unnoticed constructions with passive morphology.
- E.g., the ‘cumulative construction, characteristic of Lithuanian. It is derived mainly from intransitive verbs and often contains agent phrases, which makes it reminiscent of the passive-based evidential construction.

# The voice domain

[*Kur norėtumėte groti, kad klausytojų būtų daugiau?*

– *Labiausiai aišku užsienyje. Nes čia viskas yra tas pats.*]

*Visą gyvenimą čia gyven-t-a,*  
whole.ACC.SG life.ACC.SG here live-PST.PP-NA

*gro-ta, ei-t-a į koncertus.*  
play-PST.PP-NA attend-PST.PP-NA to concert.ACC.PL

‘[Where would you like to play in order to have more listeners? Most of all of course we would like to play abroad. Because here everything is the same.] Here we have lived, played and gone to concerts all our lives.’ (lit. ‘It has been lived, played...’)

“The construction usually refers to actions in the past of the life of a person or a group of persons which are either recurrent or which took a long time. For this reason we have called this construction *cumulative*: it denotes that some actions, so to speak, ‘accumulated’ in the past because they occurred many times or lasted for a long time.”

# The voice domain

- Another bulky study (Nau, Lindström, Spraunienė & Laugalienė) is devoted to impersonal constructions with personal reference, a characteristic feature of the Baltic and Baltic-Fennic languages:

Latvian

*Barselonā un Limasolā ir bū-t-s, bet*  
Barcelona.LOC and Limassol.LOC be.PRS.3 be-PST.PP-NA but  
*tajā laik nezināj-u, kas ir*  
DEM.LOC.SG time.LOC.SG NEG.know.PST-1SG what.NOM be.PRS.3  
*skriešana.*  
run.ACN.NOM.SG

‘**I have been** [= impersonal passive] to Barcelona and Limassol, but at that time **I didn’t know** [= personal active] what running means.’

- ...“not so much used for agent defocusing as for verb focusing”

# The voice domain

- In the domain of the middle voice the ‘splitting’ approach is well established already —middle-voice constructions such as the reciprocal, the facilitative etc. are treated as constructions in their own right, while many authors reject the notion of middle voice.
- The voice volume contains two studies of middle-voice constructions. The first is a corpus investigation of the Latvian antipassive reflexive (Holvoet & Daugavet):

*Nesanāk*                      *laika*                      *arī pārāk*                      *lasītie-s*                      *un*  
NEG-be.found.PRS.3    time.GEN.SG also too.much    read.INF-RFL                      and  
*komentētie-s.*  
comment.INF-RFL

[*Interneti kļuvuši mazsvarīgi.*]

‘There is also not time enough left to do a lot of reading and commenting. [All this Internet stuff has become irrelevant.]’

- While nearly nonexistent in Lithuanian, antipassive reflexives are abundantly represented in Latvian. The patientless (deobjective) type is productive in colloquial languages where it is derived not only from verbs denoting aggressive interaction (the type *berniukas mušasi* ‘the boy fights’, i.e., is pugnacious), but also from activity verbs.



# The voice domain

- A relative novelty of this study is that it treats the antipassive not as a construction either suppressing the object or optionally realizing in an oblique form, but as two distinct constructions—one suppressing and the other demoting the object. Cf. also Vigus 2018.
- The other type dealt with (by Holvoet & Daugavet) is the ‘facilitative middle’ (often called ‘the middle *tout court*’), i.e., the type *The bread slices easily*. It is studied in both Baltic languages and in North Slavic (represented by Russian and Polish). I will briefly come back to this further on.

# The TAME domain

- Our work in the TAME domain (the last project volume) concentrates on
  - The perfect in Baltic,
  - The passive perfect in Lithuanian,
  - The narrative future in Baltic,
  - The problem of verbal aspect in Baltic,
  - Verbal aspect in the atemporal forms in Lithuanian,
  - Pluractionals in Lithuanian,
  - Mirativity in Lithuanian,
  - Irrealis in Baltic and Fennic.
- This work has been presented during the conference here in Salos, so that I won't discuss it in detail here.

# The broader outlook

- The articles in the project volumes deal with Baltic and the neighbouring Fennic and North Slavonic languages, but our work was, to the best of our intentions, typologically informed.
- At the same time we hope that our work on Baltic will be of use to linguists working on other languages.
- I will point out just a few research questions that might also seem interesting beyond the purely Baltic contexts.

# The broader outlook

- Discussions of passives, impersonal passives and impersonals often give rise to terminological and notional discussions
- Instead of ‘impersonal passive’ Bau, Spraunienė, Lindström and Laugalienė introduce the notion of ‘subject-weak’ passive. The

*Tika*            *gan*            *dziedāts,*            *gan*            *dancots,*  
AUX.PST.3    ADD            sing.PST.PP.SG.M    ADD            dance.PST.PP.SG.M  
*gan*            *Annas*            *godinātas.*  
ADD            Anna.NOM.PL    celebrate.PST.PP.PL.F

‘[This year St Anna’s day was completely “shouldered by the women of Rucava”.] There was singing, dancing, and celebration of Annas.’

- In the last part of this sentence the subject *Annas* is neither topical nor in focus—it is completely backgrounded; all passives in this sentence are in different ways ‘subject-weak’. Could this functional distinction between subject-strong and subject-weak passives have a broader typological relevance?

# The broader outlook

- The middle (called the ‘facilitative middle’ in Holvoet & Daugavet 2020): a construction often described (especially by authors of the formal persuasion) as inherently generic and without a syntactic slot for the agent:

*This bread slices easily.*

In Baltic and Northern Slavonic it may be non-generic (with stage-level readings) and have an agent slot:

Lith. *Durys*        *man*        *lengvai*        *at-si-rakino.*  
door.NOM    me.DAT    easily        un-RFL-lock.PST.3  
'I found it easy to unlock the door.'

Such constructions have been noted (mainly for Russian), but there is an obvious disconnect between the research traditions. Is there cross-linguistic variation among middles? Or does the Lithuanian example (and those of Russian, Polish etc.) represent a different construction? If it is the same construction, then why does the ‘western’ type show restrictions not holding in Lithuanian or Russian?



# The broader outlook

- Marking asymmetries in autobenefactives (Panov, 2020): the restriction of autobenefactive marking to prefixed verbs in Baltic (Lithuanian) has a counterpart in Georgian, where the ‘subjective version’ is sometimes obligatory in the perfective forms (the aorist series):

Lith.     *nu-si-pirkau*                             *obuolių*  
          PFX-RFL-buy.PST.1SG                   apple.GEN.PL  
          ‘I bought some apples (for myself)’

          \**perkuo-si*                             *obuolius*  
          buy.PRS.1SG-RFL   apple.ACC.PL  
          ‘I am buying apples (for myself)’

Georgian   *v-*                             *t’ir-*   *o-*                             *di*  
              1SUBJ                             cry   THEM                             IMPF  
              ‘I was crying.’

*v-*                             *i-*                             *t’ir-*                             *e*  
              1SUBJ   VERS   cry                             AOR  
              ‘I cried’

- Panov’s hypothesis: autobenefactive markers act as ‘bounders’ (hence co-occurrence with perfectivity). This deserves to be further explored.



Thank you!