

# Oblique subjects in English and Croatian

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SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU

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ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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OBLIQUE SUBJECTS IN ENGLISH AND CROATIAN

Diplomski rad

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**Abstract**

Oblique subjects involve a number of issues in their research, as they represent an uncharacteristic intersection of syntactic and semantic features. This is most evident when they are encoded by the dative case, exhibiting the syntactic features of indirect objects and the semantic and pragmatic features of subjects. However, they are often dismissed by both traditional grammar and modern linguistic research due to their failure to fulfil the syntactic criteria deemed necessary for subjecthood, where traditional grammar focuses on case marking and predicate agreement, while modern linguistic theory focuses on behavioural properties typical of subjects. However, the methodologies of both approaches are somewhat inadequate, as they can result in language-specific definitions of subjects in some cases, while in others they cannot sufficiently explain the combination of subject and indirect object features of dative subjects. Part of the problem lies in their approaches being based on the prototype theory of categorisation, which views subjects as a set of different features, but does not state which are required for subjecthood. However, a different approach based on the classical theory, which defines categories in terms of sufficient and necessary features, has provided a subject definition that circumvents those issues. It defines subjects in terms of only one syntactic feature, the position of arguments in a predicate's subcategorization frame. This approach has acknowledged dative subjects as members of the subject category in multiple languages, even in those where dative subjects have been rejected as a concept by both traditional grammar and modern linguistic research. This thesis will explore the issues posed by dative subjects primarily in English and Croatian, as these two languages possess experiencer subjects, but not dative subjects, although for different reasons. Additionally, the methodological issues present in traditional grammar and linguistic theories will also be presented through the research done on experiencer and dative subjects in these two languages. Finally, the merits of an alternative definition based on classical theory will be examined, as they include historical comparative research and a greater inclusion of native speakers' opinions. Its viability as a new universal subject definition will be tested, focusing specifically on its application to oblique subjects.

**Key words:** oblique, subject, dative, English, Croatian

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## 1. Introduction

According to Trask (1996: 266), the subject is “the most prominent of the grammatical relations which a noun phrase may bear in a clause”, and that “[i]n most, but not all, languages subjects are prominent and readily identified”, which highlights the importance of their research. However, Uhrig (2018: 5) also says the following on the history of research on subjects:

Subjects in English are peculiar. For most English sentences most linguists will agree on what the subject is, but few would agree on a definition. Having been in use for over 2,000 years in the study of language, logic and philosophy, the term is often taken for granted, but if it is not, it is highly controversial.

This lack of an accepted definition is indicative of its problematic nature that is the result of the combination of its particular syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics, many of which are not equally distributed in various languages. Additionally, the number of problems multiplies as research moves away from typical examples of subjects across languages, and towards more marginal examples. This is also true for the research of the subcategory called oblique or dative subjects, due to the fact that they are an amalgam of a semantic role and a syntactic function. However, researching less typical examples of subjects may be the key to determining a universal definition that has been one of the objectives of the research on subjects. This sentiment is echoed by Chomsky (1965: 218) when he states that

... the discovery of peculiarities and exceptions (which are rarely lacking, in a system of the complexity of a natural language) is generally so unrewarding and, in itself, has so little importance for the study of the grammatical structure of the language in question, unless, of course, it leads to the discovery of deeper generalizations.

This thesis is therefore a presentation of the current status of the research done on oblique subjects in order to determine whether it has the capacity to lead to deeper generalizations about the category of subjects as a whole. This will principally be accomplished by reviewing current linguistic research on oblique subjects in multiple languages, but particularly in English and Croatian, as two languages which are on the opposing ends regarding the issues that oblique subjects can exhibit, despite the category having a similar theoretical status in both. There are

two general linguistic approaches that analyse this topic, the first being traditional grammar<sup>1</sup>, an approach that is found in grammar books and was the dominant linguistic view until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The second approach is found in various modern linguistic theories that began to develop at that point, and can offer different analyses of the concept based on their specific theoretical frameworks. The predominant conclusion of both approaches is that both English and Croatian possess experiencer subjects, but differ in the subcategory of oblique or dative subjects, where the subject is marked by a non-nominative or oblique case. Neither language possesses oblique subjects, although for different reasons, as English lacks a morphological case marking system, and Croatian oblique subjects do not possess the necessary syntactic characteristics of typical nominative subjects. However, the research done on Croatian oblique subjects has not yet provided a conclusive explanation for their anomalous qualities, as they exhibit the syntactic features of indirect objects, but the semantic and pragmatic features of subjects. On the other hand, a new potential subject definition has been proposed as a result of researching oblique subjects in Germanic languages, and has been able to include into the subject category the oblique subjects found in languages which are generally considered not to have them, such as German. This thesis will therefore also explore the applicability of this new definition for both English and Croatian subjects, as well as determine its value as a potential alternative to the current definitions of subjects in general. Additionally, the new definition also highlighted the need for a historical comparative analysis of the oblique subject construction in Croatian, in order to determine at what point in the process of language change these constructions either lost the syntactic features, or gained the semantic and pragmatic features of subjects. Finally, the definition also stressed the importance of the inclusion of the opinions of native speakers when discussing the acceptability of linguistic constructions, as they influence the way language is used through their linguistic behaviour, which ultimately also leads to changes in linguistic interpretations. Therefore, this thesis includes a survey of Croatian university students' opinions regarding the acceptability of Croatian dative constructions as subjects.

The second chapter discusses the issues of subjects in general, their ambiguous nature as syntactic functions, their semantic and pragmatic features, as well as two approaches to their categorisation that can be found in linguistic research, which are classical theory and prototype

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<sup>1</sup> According to Trask (1996: 281), “[a] label applied loosely to the entire body of grammatical description in Europe and America during the whole period before the rise of modern linguistics in the twentieth century, but particularly to the descriptions presented in school textbooks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”. This meaning of traditional grammar will be used in the rest of the thesis.

theory. The third chapter presents the issues of semantic roles, in particular that of experiencer, which is connected to oblique subjects, how it relates to the prototypical semantic role of subjects, which is the agent, and the issues that arise when combining semantic functions with syntactic roles. The fourth chapter focuses specifically on the syntactic feature of case, as the domain where the issues of oblique subjects are realised, providing an overview of different types of cases and case assignments, as well as a comparison of the Croatian and English case systems. The fifth chapter discusses oblique or dative subjects in particular, encompassing the issues elaborated on in the previous chapters, and presenting an overview of the research done on oblique subjects in Croatian and other languages, as well as a comparison of English and Croatian experiencer and oblique subjects. The sixth chapter elaborates on the issues present in the research done on oblique subject constructions which are predominantly based on the prototype theory, and compares it to the new proposed definition of subjects, its approach based on classical theory, and its use of historical comparative research and native speakers' opinions regarding the acceptability of linguistic constructions. The seventh chapter analyses a survey completed by Croatian university students on the acceptability of dative subjects in Croatian.

## **2. Theoretical issues regarding subjects**

### **2.1. Semantic, pragmatic and syntactic definitions of subjects – everyday use, traditional grammar and modern linguistic theories**

The first problem that is encountered in the discussion surrounding subjects is their dual semantic and syntactic nature, which has been characteristic of the subject since its inception. Uhrig (2018: 6) states that Aristotle, who defined the subject as “that of which everything else is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else”, was the first to introduce a “twofold division of subject and predicate that is still used by many grammarians today” and that he “relates categories in the language to categories in the world”. This makes it clear that since their origin subjects possess both linguistic and extralinguistic meaning. The meaning and application of the term has since been extended, which can be seen in its dictionary entries – for example, *Lexico Dictionary* lists a total of 10 entries for the term ‘subject’ in English, while *Hrvatski jezični portal (HJP)* lists 6 entries for the equivalent ‘subjekt’ in Croatian. Their first entries focus on the semantic characteristics of the term: for *HJP*, the first definition of subject is “osoba koja je nosilac radnje, stanja ili događanja”, while for *Lexico* it is “a person or thing that is being discussed, described, or dealt with”. On the other hand, their definitions as

grammatical functions are listed second to last in both dictionaries. However, *HJP* also incorporates pragmatics and semantics in that entry, describing the subject in grammar as “imenski dio rečenice (ob. u nominativu) o kojem govori predikat; najčešće označuje vršitelja radnje, nositelja kakva svojstva ili stanja izražena predikatom (npr. »učenik« čita)”. On the other hand, the *Lexico* entry is purely grammatical, although relatively vague: “a noun or noun phrase functioning as one of the main components of a clause, being the element about which the rest of the clause is predicated”. The order in which the meanings appear in the two dictionaries might be indicative of how the subject is perceived outside of linguistic analysis, as Jackson (2002: 92) cites the *Collins English Dictionary* when stating that “[a]s a general rule, where a headword has more than one sense, the first sense given is the one most common in current usage”. Although neither *Lexico Dictionary* nor *HJP* state how they order their entries, they seem to be guided by a similar principle. Additionally, this kind of definition of the subject as an amalgam of characteristics is also typically present in so-called traditional grammars. Trask (1996: 281) claims that they are often referred to with

clear pejorative connotations, reflecting the sometimes inadequate nature of traditional descriptions and the overtly prescriptivist orientation of the school texts, but it should not be forgotten that traditional grammar represents the fruits of more than two thousand years of serious grammatical investigation, or that many of the categories and analyses of traditional grammar have been incorporated with only minor modifications into our current theories of grammar.

This shows that although it is considered to be an inadequate perspective regarding various aspects and elements of language, traditional grammar often forms the linguistic basis, not only for various modern linguistic theories, but also grammar books that are used in an educational capacity. Trask gives the example (1996: 281) of *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Quirk et al. (1985: 79), which offers a pragmatic definition of the subject, viewing it more as a logical category than a structural fact of grammar:

Thus the subject is often described as the constituent defining the topic of the sentence - that which the sentence is 'about' and which it presupposes as its point of departure; whereas the predicate is that which is asserted about the subject.

An example of Croatian traditional grammar would be the grammar book by Silić and Pranjković (2005). Although they do focus on the grammatical characteristics of subjects later in text, their initial description is semantic and pragmatic, as it is based on the meaning of the



original Latin term *subjectum*, or “that which lies beneath something”, and which they describe as an initiator of an action or a sign for what is being said in a sentence (cf. 2005: 293). It is therefore clear that both in everyday usage and in traditional grammar, semantic and pragmatic definitions take precedence over the grammatical in both English and Croatian. However, the pejorative connotations in modern linguistic theories that Trask mentions stem from the fact that this kind of subject definition that combines syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics can be problematic. Kučanda (cf. 1998:3-4) states that a typical combination of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties is cross-linguistically accepted, citing in particular Keenan, who was the first to compile a list of subject features, which included not only syntactic, but also semantic and pragmatic properties. Keenan claimed that subjects “normally express the agent of the action” (1976: 321), and “the topic (...), i.e. they identify what the speaker is talking about” (1976: 318). Kučanda (cf. 1998:3-4) also mentions Comrie, who claimed these two characteristics were the most common for subjects, as he stated that “the clearest instances of subjects, cross-linguistically, are agents which are also topics” (1989: 107). However, “[i]t was only in the cases of discrepancy between pragmatic, semantic and morphosyntactic notions, as for example in passive constructions, that the notions like grammatical and logical subject were resorted to” (Kučanda 1998:3), showing that problems arise in the less frequent, more marginal combinations of the three types of characteristics. This resulted in Kučanda stating that “the syntactic notion of subject must be clearly kept apart from the pragmatic and semantic notions of subject” (1998: 5). However, this opposition to including semantic and pragmatic characteristics in the definition of subjects does not pertain only to the opposition between traditional grammar and modern linguistic theories, but also between different theoretical approaches. Kučanda and Belaj (cf. 2007: 2) portray this primarily as the difference between formalist or Chomskyan and functionalist approaches to language, as the former treat syntax as independent from semantics and pragmatics, while the latter focus on semantics and pragmatics. This difference in focus will be reflected not only in the theoretical treatment of subjects in general, but also of oblique subjects in particular. Another important difference between traditional grammar and various theoretical approaches is in the nature of the definition they use, or rather the nature of categorisation, which is generally divided into two approaches: classical theory and prototype theory.

## 2.2. Categorisation of subjects - classical theory vs. prototype theory

Taylor (1995: 22) describes the classical or Aristotelian theory of categorisation in two ways, “in that it goes back ultimately to Greek antiquity”, and “that it has dominated psychology, philosophy, and linguistics (especially autonomous linguistics, both structuralist and generative) throughout much of the twentieth century”. This connects it to traditional grammar, which is “based on Aristotelian logic”, and deals with “classification of data into formal categories, e.g. sentence type, part of speech” (Bussmann 2006: 1032). Taylor (cf. 1995: 23-4) also describes Aristotelian categories as having clear boundaries that are defined by binary features which are sufficient and necessary, and that within the category all members have equal status. Setting aside the semantic and pragmatic aspects of subjects, the syntactic definition in Silić and Pranjković (cf. 2005: 293-4) follows the classical approach, as they list a number of necessary features for Croatian subjects, namely that it is dependent on the predicate, as they agree in person, number and gender, and that it is most commonly a noun phrase in the nominative case. Quirk et al. (cf. 1985: 724-5) offer a similar set of characteristics, stating that subjects have four types of distinctions: the form of a noun phrase or a nominal clause, occurring before the verb in declarative clauses and after the operator in *yes-no* interrogative clauses, and a number of syntactic and semantic properties, one of which is that it determines the number and person of the verb. However, such definitions can be problematic, as the given criteria of such a definition can be language-specific and not universally applicable. For example, Kučanda (cf. 1999: 76) states that the feature of Croatian subjects being defined as dependent on the predicate is too croatocentric, and that if different features are used to define the subject in different languages, the subject cannot be considered a universal category of language. Crosslinguistic applicability is a particular issue for formalist approaches that belong to the Chomskyan tradition of generative grammar, as Bussmann (2006: 2049) writes:

In N.Chomsky’s Revised Extended Standard Theory (=REST) of transformational grammar, universal grammar corresponds to the genetically determined biological foundations of language acquisition. The goal of linguistic description is to postulate general traits and tendencies in all languages on the basis of studies on grammars of individual languages.

By this account, language-specific definitions are too exclusive and could not accurately describe categories such as subjects, as there are too many differences in their given characteristics between languages. Consequently, modern linguistic theories use a different

approach which takes crosslinguistic applicability into account. Keenan (1976) is usually considered to be the first to define subject with a set of 30-ish morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic features (cf. Buljan and Kučanda 2004: 89). He also claimed that a particular member of this category may have a greater or smaller number of these features and thus be considered to be a more or less typical subject. This type of approach would come to be known as prototype theory, typically associated with functional approaches in linguistics. Givón (cf. 2001: 32) states that the two principal aspects of the theory are multiple criterial features, some of which are more common than others, as opposed to only one either/or criterion of a logical category, and that membership in the category is graded, meaning that there is a hierarchy of members, in which the one displaying the most features is considered the prototype. However, this approach is not limited to functional theories, as it can be used to list only syntactic features, excluding semantic and pragmatic ones. Regarding subjects in particular, syntactic features are typically divided into two categories, coding properties and behavioural properties, which Sridhar (1979: 104) defines respectively as “overt formal properties, such as characteristic position, case marking, control of verb agreement, etc.”, and “characteristic behaviour of the NP in question with respect to certain transformations that make crucial reference to the notion ‘subject of’ in the language”. By this division, the characteristics listed by Silić and Pranjković (cf. 2005: 293-4) would be coding properties, however, their use as distinguishing features of subjects is problematic. For example, Zaenen et al. (1985: 447) write that “nominative casemarking is not a necessary prerequisite (nor a sufficient one) for subjecthood in Icelandic”, which is in contrast with the Croatian definition of subject given by Silić and Pranjković (2005). Additionally, Barðdal and Eythórsson (2018: 257) criticise their application within a single language as well, particularly in the case of prototypical nominative subjects, “as their inclusion by definition leaves out any and all arguments except for nominatives themselves”, which “results in an intrinsic catch-22 paradox, in which an argument must be in the nominative case in order to ‘pass’ the subject tests”. In an effort to circumvent this fault, many modern linguistic analyses instead focus on behavioural properties in order to determine what defines a subject syntactically. For example, this approach can be seen in the research on potential dative subjects in Slavic languages by Greenberg and Franks (1991). Their analysis of sentences with dative NPs using the framework of Government and Binding (GB) theory led them to conclude that “within Russian grammar, the existence of the non-agreeing Second Dative construction is directly related to the possibility of dative subjects” (1991: 73). However, focusing on behavioural subject tests raises issues as well, as Barðdal and Eythórsson (cf. 2018: 260) criticise the application of the prototype theory in general, stating that it presents subjects as a

gradient concept, and that no principled methodology has been used to establish which criteria are necessary and sufficient for defining subjects. To validate their criticism, they give the example of the difference in the behavioural tests used in research on Icelandic and German to determine subject status in each language. When they looked at the tests used in a number of different analyses on Icelandic or German subjects, they found that out of a total of 13 tests, nine are typically applied in Icelandic, and seven in German, with only three tests that are common for both languages (cf. 2018: 261). Barðdal (cf. 2002: 70) has criticised this kind of interpretation, calling it cross-linguistic methodological opportunism when scholars use different criteria for different languages, and language-internal methodological opportunism when they choose which properties are criterial for determining subjecthood for a single language, both according to their own theoretical preferences. Additionally, such an inconsistent approach can make categorisation more difficult, as the problem lies not with having degrees of prototypicality in members, but with where the cut-off point for membership is. Barðdal and Eythórsson (2018: 263) therefore write that “[w]ithout an independent subject definition, an oblique subject-like argument becomes less of a subject if it has only some behavioural properties; i.e, it would then be some sort of a ‘partial subject’”, and that “any gradient analysis of subject is both fuzzy and imprecise”. Kučanda (2003: 204) seems to agree with Barðdal on the issue of opportunism, but he claims that it exists only in traditional Croatian grammars, while he defends modern theoretical approaches on the grounds that they use prototypical subject features “which are characteristic of a subject either language-internally or cross-linguistically”, and are not treated as “a set of Aristotelian necessary and sufficient conditions”. However, it seems that Barðdal and Eythórsson do not consider Aristotelian categories to be an inappropriate alternative. In fact, instead of using the prototype theory approach based on a selection of behavioural tests, they propose a new definition, which constitutes a sort of return to classical theory, and is based on the argument structure of a predicate. Trask (1996: 20) highlights both the syntactic and the semantic aspect of the concept, defining an argument as “a noun phrase bearing a specific grammatical or semantic relation to a verb and whose overt or implied presence is required for well-formedness in structures containing that verb”, while “[t]he specification of the number and types of arguments which a verb requires for well-formedness” is its argument structure. He goes on to state that arguments are assigned grammatical functions (e.g. of subject or direct object, etc.) and semantic roles (such as Agent or Patient, etc.) (cf. 1996: 20). Formal approaches usually distinguish between internal and external arguments, as the former occur inside the verb phrase and are subcategorized for by the verb (direct objects, indirect objects), while the latter occur outside

the VP, meaning that subjects are therefore considered to be external arguments (cf. Trask 1996: 20). This interpretation echoes the one given by both Quirk et al. (1985: 724-5) and Silić and Pranjković (2005: 293-4) about subjects being dependent on the predicate. Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 196) go on to specify that argument structure can also be called valency, which is most typically associated with verbal predicates, and that based on the number of required arguments, a verb can be aivalent, monovalent, bivalent and trivalent. Like Trask, they also state that valency has a double nature, both syntactic and semantic, which they show on different examples of aivalent verbs, i.e. verbs which require no arguments, in particular weather verbs:

(1) Nevica. (Italian)

snow:PRS.3SG

‘It is snowing.’

Luraghi and Parodi use this example to demonstrate the difference between syntactic and semantic valency, as the sentence in Italian contains only the verb and no subject, while English verbs require at least a syntactic subject, such as the ‘it’ in “It is snowing”, which is semantically aivalent. Going back to Barðdal and Eythórsson (cf. 2018: 263), their definition treats the first argument of the argument structure as the syntactic subject, and they take no other criteria into account. However, it is still based on behavioural tests, because “when generalizing across the subject tests, we have found that it is always the first argument of the argument structure that is targeted by the subject tests” (2018: 263-4). Their reason for using a definition instead of a selection of tests and properties is that “[o]nly an approach involving an independent subject definition will prompt an active search for deeper reasons for possible deviations in the behaviour of subject-like arguments from the nominative canon” (2018: 264). The first argument in their theory is viewed as a part of a subcategorization frame, which is defined as “[a] constraint on the syntactic occurrence of a lexical category (such as a verb), requiring that it be accompanied by a complement belonging to a particular syntactic category (or to one of a restricted set of syntactic categories)” (Fromkin et al. 2000: 687). However, this is not a linear representation, but rather an abstract representation of the syntactic constraints of a particular element that is used in some syntactic approaches. Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 177-8) claim that this is part of the tradition of Transformational Generative Grammar, and give the example of the verb *watch*, stating that it subcategorizes for a complement which is either a nominal or a determiner phrase, which is then formalized in its subcategorization frame as:

(2) *watch*: V, [ \_\_\_ DP/NP]

This also signifies that the verb is placed in front of the complement. Barðdal and Eythórsson (cf. 2005: 827-9) give their own examples of verbs and their subcategorization frames in English, Icelandic and German, such as the verb *repeat*, and present its subcategorization frame as:

(3) *repeat* [ARG1, ARG2]

They claim that the first or the leftmost argument is the one targeted by three particular subjecthood tests which are commonly applied to Germanic languages, namely control infinitives, conjunction reduction and reflexivisation, and is thus considered to be the syntactic subject. On the other hand, the second or the rightmost argument of the verb behaves as the syntactic object. This also shows that their definition includes the subject into the subcategorization frame, unlike formal approaches which consider it to be an external argument. However, despite the fact that Barðdal and Eythórsson focus on the syntactic aspect of arguments, the semantic aspect presented in the form of semantic roles also needs to be taken into account, particularly on the topic of oblique subjects, as they typically encode the semantic role of experiencer.

### 3. Theoretical issues regarding experiencers

#### 3.1. Semantic roles in general, agents and experiencers

Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 167-8) define semantic roles in the following way:

Semantic roles (also called thematic roles, semantic relations, semantic functions, case roles or deep cases, depending on the theoretical framework) of constituents are determined by the semantic relation they bear to the predicate, which in turn is a generalization based on the role of participants in given events.

The concept originates from Fillmore's (1968) work on the so-called Deep Cases, i.e. his Case Grammar, which was a reaction to the generative grammar tradition that viewed syntax as autonomous from semantics<sup>2</sup>. Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 9) explain that “[d]eep cases, which

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<sup>2</sup> The deep cases of case grammar are not equated with the morphological category of case, but are a representation of an abstract category.

broadly correspond to semantic roles in current terminology, were conceived as making up part of the deep structure of sentences and were held responsible for determining the syntactic function of constituents. More specifically, Fillmore claimed that the choice of surface subject is based on a hierarchy of deep cases”. Since its inception, various frameworks added a number of roles to the concept, which are “based on the fact that they are grammaticalized (i.e. expressed with specific grammatical means) in a number of languages” (Luraghi and Parodi 2008: 168). Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 168-70) list a total of 26 roles that are used in various theories), while Bussmann (2006: 157) states that “[t]he number and types of [deep] cases are a matter of continuous debate in the literature”. Despite the fact that semantic roles were believed to determine syntactic functions, Kučanda (2005: 1-2) writes that “Fillmore (1968) was the first to point out that there is no necessary correlation between semantic roles (deep cases in his terminology) and ‘surface’ grammatical relations”. However, this principle later became popularised, and was taken up particularly by functionalists, who created hierarchies that were based on the patterns of correlation between certain semantic roles and syntactic functions. Kučanda and Belaj (cf. 2007: 2) cite a number of different linguists and their hierarchies, such as Dik’s *Semantic Function Hierarchy*, Givón’s *Topic Accession Hierarchy*, and Van Valin’s *Actor – Undergoer Hierarchy*. For example, the *Topic Accession Hierarchy* determines the sequence in which thematic roles are likely to be the topic in a clause, and Kučanda and Belaj (2007: 2) represented it in the following way:

- (4) Agent > Dative / Benefactive > Patient > Locative > Instrument/  
 Associative > Manner adverbs

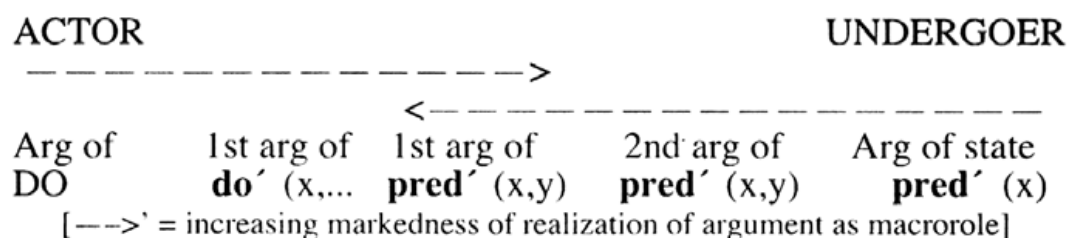
This shows that if the agent is not present in a clause, the next thematic role that will be assigned topic is the dative/benefactive. Additionally, Kučanda (2005: 2) states that some of these hierarchies “suggested that subject and object assignment become more difficult as we move down the hierarchy until the cut off point is reached, after which the mapping between a grammatical relation and a semantic function becomes impossible”. Despite the fact that numerous theoretical frameworks use these hierarchies to display the general patterns in the mapping of semantic roles and syntactic functions, the cut-off points that Kučanda mentions can posit significant theoretical problems. For example, Kučanda (2005: 2) mentions Dik’s *Semantic Function Hierarchy (SFH)* developed in the framework of Functional Grammar (FG), which represents the sequence of roles from most to least likely to be assigned the function of subject:

- (5) Ag > Go > Rec > Ben > Inst > Loc > Temp

According to this hierarchy, the highest available role from the hierarchy will be assigned the syntactic function of subject, while the cut off point for English subject assignment is the semantic role of beneficiary, as “subject assignment to Locative or Instrument results in an ungrammatical sentence (\*This room was signed the contract in; \*This knife was cut the salami with by John)” (Kučanda and Buljan 2005: 2). However, this hierarchy does not always provide a clear-cut solution, as Buljan and Kučanda (2004: 95) give examples of both instrumentals and locatives in the function of subjects:

- (6) The stick hit the horse.  
 (7) This hotel forbids dogs.

However, this is the result of a relation of metonymy between the two roles and the agents that they represent, which are not equally acceptable in different languages (cf. Kučanda and Buljan 2005: 14). Belaj and Kučanda (cf. 2007: 3) give an example of another type of scale, the *Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy* developed by Van Valin and LaPolla in the framework of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). Trask (cf. 1996: 244) notes that a specific characteristic of RRG is that it has two superordinate participant roles, the actor, which is the highest available role, and the undergoer, which is given to the second argument if present. Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 167) call them semantic macro-roles, and state that they group together multiple semantic roles which can be mapped either onto the syntactic function of subject or object. Thus, the actor is usually the subject of transitive verbs, and includes the roles agent, experiencer, possessor, etc., while the undergoer is usually the direct object, and includes the roles patient, theme, recipient, etc. (cf. Luraghi and Parodi 2008: 167). Van Valin (fig. 1.) gives the following representation of the hierarchy:



**Fig. 1.** The Actor–Undergoer Hierarchy from Van Valin (2007: 38)



Van Valin's (2007: 35) division between the two macro-roles is based on the division between state and activity predicates, as "[s]tate predicates are represented simply as **predicate**', while all activity predicates contain **do**". He also states that „[t]he basic idea of the AUH is that in a LS [logical structure] the leftmost argument in terms of the hierarchy will be the actor and the rightmost will be the undergoer “(2007: 38). This indicates that there is an overlap in the assignment of macro-roles in the case of the first argument of state predicates, which are the least likely roles available to be assigned either the subject or the object function, as other types of arguments and roles take precedence. This presents another problematic aspect that arises in the combination of semantic roles and syntactic functions. A third system of mapping semantic roles and syntactic functions is posited by Zaenen et al. (1985) in the framework of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) and Relational Grammar (RG), and is centred on the concept of association principles, which are based on the syntactic research done within a language, as well as on cross-linguistic comparison. They are divided into sets of universal and language-specific principles, and are used to determine which role will be mapped onto which function, and if the two interact, language-specific principles take precedence (1985: 466). Zaenen et al. (1985: 466) also give an example of the agent role being associated with the subject function as a universal principle. Thus, they circumvent the problematic overlapping areas by determining that language-specific rules take precedence, similarly to how left- or right-most roles in the *Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy* take precedence in the assignment of syntactic functions. Zaenen et al. also point out that the characteristic of prototypical subjects in many languages is the combination of the semantic role of agent and pragmatic function of topic, as did Keenan (1976:321) and Comrie (1989: 107). Bussmann (2006: 29) defines the agent role as the “the volitional initiator or causer of an action, which is usually expressed in nominative languages like English as the subject of the sentence: *He ate the apple*”. However, as is evident in the name, oblique or dative subjects are connected to the semantic role of experiencer, which Bussmann (2006: 157) places in Fillmore's Case Grammar under

- (iv) dative (also: **recipient**, **benefactive**, experiencer), the role of the animate participant who is less directly affected by the action or state described by the verb (in contrast to the **patient**): *Philip opened the door for Caroline*).

Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 168) define the role of experiencer more narrowly as a “living being who experiences a process signified by a verb of sensation, perception, or mental activity, as in *Paul likes pears*”. Bussmann (2006: 157) also expresses how the two roles are essentially

opposites, as “[m]ore recent approaches to case grammar have proposed a classification of semantic roles on the basis of the **aspect** of the verb (...). Thus the agent of an action (→ **process US action**) is set in contrast to the experiencer of a state (*Philip* in *Philip is afraid*) (→ **stative vs active**)”. This also places experiencers on the undergoer end of Van Valin’s hierarchy, as they are the arguments of state verbs such as “be sick, be tall, be dead, love, know, believe, have” (2007: 34) which are located on the right side of the hierarchy, while the actor and activity verbs are on the left side. Additionally, when discussing this contrast between agents and experiencers, various theories state that it lies in the two roles’ connection to the semantic aspect of volitionality and/or control. For example, Daković (2015: 162) discusses how it is principally verbs of psychological states that are connected to experiencers, as they structure a causative situation with two participants, the causer which is in the form of an internal or external stimulus, and causes the reaction in the experiencer independently of their will. This contrast between agents as volitional performers of actions and experiencers as non-volitional participants that experience certain states seems to form the central issue of oblique subjects. As was previously stated by Kučanda (1998: 3), any change in the prototypical combination of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects leads to the development of marginal linguistic categories, such as oblique subjects. It can be assumed that the difference between how agents and experiencers express the semantic aspect of volitionality would also lead to morphosyntactic differences. On this topic, Kučanda and Buljan (2005: 7) state that “[i]f a speaker of Croatian or German wanted to indicate that the action was not intentional he would use the dative and the verbs *ispasti* or *fallen* (*Ispali su mi ključevi u vodu, Mir sind die Schlüssel ins Wasser gefallen*) “. This is significant, as the dative case they discuss is not the same as dative deep case in Bussmann’s categorisation of Fillmore’s Case Grammar, but rather a morphosyntactic feature. It indicates that the category of case seems to be connected to both syntactic functions and semantic roles, and also represents the domain where volitionality is expressed in Croatian. The dative case is also in opposition with another morphosyntactic feature that Silić and Pranjković (2005: 293-4) specify for prototypical Croatian subjects, which is the nominative case. Additionally, Kučanda and Buljan (2005: 7) also state that “[i]n Modern English there is no dative case, and non-volitional participants are marked the same way as volitional participants”, which indicates that English might not possess the same problematic aspects of oblique subjects as Croatian. Thus, it is necessary to take a closer look at the morphosyntactic category of case to determine how it influences the mapping of syntactic functions and semantic roles in general, as well as English and Croatian in particular.

## 4. Theoretical issues regarding case

### 4.1. Definition of cases and case assignment

Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 69) define morphological case as “[a]n inflectional category of nouns that helps identify a NP’s grammatical relation and/or semantic role”. Case can be expressed differently in different types of languages, as Bussmann (2006: 156) states:

In inflectional languages, case is marked by grammatical morphemes which often have a variety of functions, such as marking **gender** and **number**. Adpositions, as in *give to Caroline* are occasionally referred to as case. In non-inflectional languages, where syntactic functions are primarily encoded by word order or sentence structure (e.g. English and French), attempts have been made to associate cases with specific syntactic positions.

Trask (1996: 35) highlights this difference between languages by stating that “[i]n English, overt case marking is confined to a few pronouns (*I/me; they/them*), but some other languages such as German, Russian, Latin, Basque and Finnish, exhibit elaborate case systems typically involving about three to six distinct forms, but sometimes a dozen or more”. Regarding how cases are assigned, Polinsky and Preminger (2014: 1) state that within the framework of generative grammar “[c]ertain constituents in clause structure are known to determine the form and/or position of other clausal constituents. In particular, verbs and adpositions determine the morphological form of their associated nouns”. This connects the case marking of an element with the choice of its semantic role, as both are selected depending on the verb in the construction, or rather its syntactic or semantic characteristics. Polinsky and Preminger (2014: 7) also state that “[t]he number of distinct overt cases in a single language may vary significantly”, but that this is distinct from what they call argument cases, which consist only of the cases of subject, object, possessor and indirect object, and that their availability in a given language is organised hierarchically in that sequence, while other forms are “represented by locative (adjunct) cases, which encode location and direction”. Traditional grammar makes a more basic division of cases, as Bussmann (2006: 156) states that the general division is into “*casus rectus* (nominative) and oblique cases (genitive, dative, accusative, etc.)”. A similar type of division can be found in Croatian grammars, as Silić and Pranjković (2005: 199) state that Croatian cases can be independent or main (cro. *samostalni ili glavni*), or dependent or oblique (cro. *nesamostalni ili kosi*), which are divided based on whether they are dependent on another

element in the phrase or clause, the former containing the nominative and the vocative case, and the latter containing the genitive, dative, accusative, locative and instrumental case. This type of division is also inherently connected to syntactic functions, as they also state that both the meaning and the function of a particular case will determine which function an element will have in a phrase or clause, which can be an independent function, such as a subject, objects and adverbial, or a dependent function, such as an attribute and apposition (2005: 199). On the other hand, as was stated by Trask (1996: 35), English does not generally have overt case marking, except on pronouns. Additionally, in Quirk et al.'s (1985: 336) description of the English case system, it is obvious that it is not as elaborate as Croatian, but that they are closer to number and type to Polinsky and Preminger's argument cases, as they state that English nouns and most pronouns have only the common and genitive case (*children* vs. *children's*), but that personal pronouns also have subjective and objective cases. Thus, the subjective form of personal pronouns is *I, we, you, he, she, it, they, who*, the objective is *me, us, you, him, her, it, them, who(m)*, and the genitive is *me/mine, our/ours, your/yours, his, her/hers, its, their/theirs, whose* (cf. 1985: 336). Quirk et al. (1986: 337) also state that there is a general equivalence between the English and more complex case systems found in inflectional languages, as "formal English follows the normative grammatical tradition which associates the subjective pronouns with the nominative case of pronouns in inflectional languages such as Latin, and the objective case with the oblique cases (especially accusative and dative cases) in such languages". However, given the fact that the English case system is much less complex, this indicates that there cannot be complete equivalence, and that some aspects which pertain to cases in inflectional languages will not be a part of the English cases. Additionally, the fact that the meaning of cases is also considered when determining the syntactic function of a given element in Croatian indicates that cases as a category face the same issues as subjects, in that they are a hybrid of syntactic and semantic characteristics. This is also reflected in other case divisions that form two basic categories of grammatical and semantic cases, depending on which property is in focus. Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 71) state that the difference between grammatical and semantic cases that was first put forward by Kuryłowicz (1949), where the former "mostly or exclusively mark core arguments and express grammatical relations" and are "determined by the verb", while the latter "mostly or exclusively mark peripheral constituents (adverbials) and express semantic roles", and "are independent of the verb". This definition indicates that the cases that mark subjects in general, both prototypical and oblique, should belong to the category of grammatical cases. This division exists also under other names, as Barðdal (2010: 621) writes on how it was adopted by Chomsky in the generative grammar framework as the division between structural

and inherent cases, where the former are connected to the structure of a sentence, and include the nominative in the subject position and the accusative in the object position in a sentence, and the latter are also called thematic cases and are connected to a particular  $\theta$ -role. This definition seems to contradict what Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 71) state, as oblique subjects are connected to the semantic role of experiencer, indicating that they would use a thematic rather than a structural case. Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 71) also expand on the Chomskyan approach, and state that structural and inherent case are instances of non-overt or abstract case, which exists even in languages that do not have morphological cases, and present a division similar to the one given by traditional grammars, where the former contains the nominative and accusative, and the latter cases such as genitive. This provides the first clue in the issues related to the choice between the nominative and the dative case, particularly in the subject position, as dative is considered to be a semantic case, and thus not tied to a syntactic role, but rather a semantic one. Despite the attempts of these divisions to connect particular cases, whether overt or covert, to certain syntactic functions, Polinsky and Preminger (cf. 2014: 11) explain why this practice is problematic in general on the example of the English complementizer *for*, as it assigns objective case on the subject of two clauses:

- (8) [For him/\*he to admit such a thing] is impossible.  
 (9) It is impossible [for him/\*he to admit such a thing].

For this reason, it is necessary to look more closely into the cases that concern experiencer subjects, namely the nominative and the dative, to examine their particular syntactic and semantic characteristics, and how they affect the syntactic function they are typically connected with.

#### 4.2. Issues with Croatian cases - nominative and dative case

As was stated, nominative case assignment is considered to be an essential coding property of subjects in Croatian, and conversely, Silić and Pranjković (2005: 199) state that the subject is the primary syntactic function of nominatives. This makes it clear that Croatian grammars indicate a connection between independent cases (cro. *samostalni padeži*), such as the nominative, and independent syntactic functions (cro. *samostalni članovi rečeničnog ustrojstva*), such as the subject. However, the nominative is not exclusively tied to the subject, and can appear in dependent syntactic functions (cro. *nesamostalni članovi rečeničnog*

*ustrojstva*), such as predicate nominal constructions, adverbial phrases, stand-alone expression, attributes and appositions (cf. Silić and Pranjković 2005: 199-200). It was stated before that nominative case assignment and agreement with the VP are problematic as distinguishing features of subjects because they are not cross-linguistically applicable. However, Zovko Dinković (2012: 1) gives two syntactic aspects that make the nominative case problematic within Croatian as well: 1) the syncretism of nominative and accusative forms, which Busmann (2006: 1062) defines as the “formal collapse of different, originally separate grammatical functions, especially apparent in the case system of various languages”, and which leads to sentences such as “Ledenjak je razbio ledolamac.” being interpreted as either “The iceberg crushed the icebreaker.” or “The icebreaker crushed the iceberg.”, and 2) the existence of binominative constructions where both arguments are in the nominative case, such as in “Moja sestra je njezina najbolja prijateljica.”, “My sister is her best friend”., where word order is needed to determine the subject in the sentence. Zovko Dinković (2012: 1) states that “we may therefore conclude that in Croatian case marking is a necessary, but not a sufficient property of subjects (or objects for that matter) in all types of sentences. So we have to see if we can find other morphological and/or syntactic criteria which would enable us to characterize the grammatical role of subject unambiguously”. This highlights why subject analyses focus on behavioural instead of coding properties. Another crosslinguistic issue regarding the semantic role of the nominative case is that it is specific to a particular morphological case system. Polinsky and Preminger (2014: 3) base the division on the way three core arguments are marked morphosyntactically:

Cross-linguistic accounts of the variation in case marking among core arguments employ three argument-structural primitives: S—the sole argument of a one-place verb; A—the agent or most agent-like argument of a two-place verb, and P—the theme (patient) or most patient-like argument of a two-place verb (Comrie 1978, 1989; Dixon 1994; among others).

Another term for this type of categorisation is *alignment*, which Dixon (cf. 1994: 6) defines as the way in which the intransitive subjects, transitive subjects and transitive objects (or the so-called ‘syntactic-semantic primitives’) are marked. The two prevalent types of alignment are the nominative-accusative (also called accusative), and the ergative-absolutive alignment (cf. Luraghi and Parodi 2008: 55). Despite the two alignments being named after cases, this is a morphosyntactic typology, meaning that the core arguments can be marked in other ways apart from case marking, depending on the language and its coding and behavioural properties.

Bickel and Nichols (cf. 2009: 305) state that alignment can be manifested in other ways as well, such as verb agreement, word order, argument sharing, etc. The issue regarding the nominative case can be seen in the contrast between the nominative-accusative and the ergative alignment. Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 55) state that in the former the nominative is the unmarked case, found on both subjects of intransitives and subjects of transitives, while the accusative is the marked case found on objects of transitives, as can be seen in the examples (emphasis added):

(10) **He** went home.

(11) **He** saw her.

In ergative languages, the subject of intransitive verbs receives the unmarked, absolutive case, and the same case is found on objects of transitives, while agentive subjects of transitive verbs receive a special case called ergative, which can be seen in these examples from Basque<sup>3</sup> (emphasis added):

(12) *Umea kalean erori da.*

**child.the:ABS** street.in fall 3SG:be

‘**The child** fell in the street.’ (Basque)

(13) *Emakumeak gizona ikusi du.*

woman.the:ERG **man.the:ABS** 3SG:see 3SG:have

‘The woman saw the **man**.’ (Basque)

This indicates that the difference lies in how the semantic aspect of the subject is marked in the two alignments, specifically its agentivity. It has been stated that the nominative case is considered to be the prototypical case connected to subjects in Croatian, as well as the semantic role of agent. Taking into account other types of case alignments, it can be said that the choice of nominative case is a language-specific aspect, as the nominative case is not the only case that is prototypically connected to that role. In addition, Polinsky and Preminger (2014: 25) argue that “the link between ergative case and the thematically agentive event participant seems quite strong; it is stronger than the link between nominative case and the agent role”. On the other

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<sup>3</sup> Bussmann (2006: 376) states that “the basic (=unmarked) case in these languages, the absolutive, designates the patient of transitive verbs as well as the single argument of intransitive verbs regardless of its thematic relation. The marked case, the ergative serves to express the agent of transitive verbs”. However, this is not always the case, as Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 55) state that “[m]any languages exhibit what is called split-ergativity, that is, they present ergative alignment limited to a given verbal tense or aspect, as in Georgian and Hindi-Urdu, or to nouns that rank low on the animacy scale”.

hand, Kučanda (2003: 198) also states that a further issue exists within syntactically ergative languages, as “the absolutive NP has a greater number of subject-like properties than the ergative NP, which typically encodes the semantic function Agent”, illustrating that agentivity is not a universal aspect of syntactic subjects, as well as giving another general example that shows the issues that can arise when encoding syntactic functions and semantic roles through cases.

On the other hand, the dative case belongs to a different category of cases, which Silić and Pranjković (2005: 200-1) call dependent or oblique, and state that they can have various syntactic functions, including direct and indirect objects, adverbials, attributes and appositions, and can be parts of the predicate and complements of larger units that have those functions. A particular syntactic issue regarding the dative is similar to the one that the nominative has, namely the syncretism of forms with the locative case, as well as the use of the same prepositions with both cases. Rukavina (2013: 33-4) summarizes the discussion regarding the preposition *prema*, stating that most contemporary grammarians assign it to either the locative, or both the locative and dative case, and that the criteria for differentiating the use of the preposition is semantic, as it is generally considered to be a dative preposition if it occurs with verbs of movement, and a locative preposition with stative verbs, although this type of division was found to be insufficient. She singles out Silić and Pranjković as the only ones who defined *prema* as a dative preposition, as they concluded that meaning itself cannot be a differentiating criterium, and that the best option would be to simply divide the prepositions between the two cases, rather than share them (cf. 2013: 35). The dative’s complexity in meaning creates issues in other areas as well, as Belaj states that “[u] svim jezicima koji ga imaju, a posebno u slavenskim, dativ je bez sumnje jedan od najproblematičnijih padeža kako s obzirom na svoje semantičkopragmatičke aspekte tako, posljedično, i s obzirom na svoj sintaktički status” (2015: 3). Its complex nature is presented by Silić and Pranjković (2005: 219), who give the following explanation of the basic meaning of dative in Croatian:

Temeljno je značenje dativa negranična direktivnost, a to znači odnos između dvaju predmeta koji pretpostavlja približavanje jednoga predmeta drugomu, i to tako da jedan predmet služi kao orijentir drugomu (kad se kaže *ići šumi* ili *k šumi*, to ne mora pretpostavljati da će se u šumu doista i doći, za razliku od akuzativnoga značenja: *ići u šumu*, v.par. 887). Iz toga su se onda razvila značenja cilja, davanja, pripadanja, namjene i sl.



They go on to list 8 categories of meaning for the dative case that are based on the basic one, and which can be translated as: 1) dative of direction (cro. *dativ negranične direktivnosti* or *dativ smjera*), 2) dative of purpose (cro. *dativ namjene*), 3) dative of positive or negative effect (cro. *dativ koristi ili štete*), 4) exclamatory dative (cro. *usklični dativ*), 5) dative of possession (cro. *posvojni dativ*), 6) ethical dative (cro. *dativ interesa* or *etički dativ*), 7) dative with infinitive (cro. *dativ s infinitivom*), and 8) emphatic dative (cro. *emfatični dativ*) (2005: 219-20). This division changes in other grammars, with some categories being added and others excluded, but their meanings are fairly similar, and the fundamental meaning of the dative remains the same. Regarding the syntactic function of dative in Croatian, Rukavina (2013: 38) states that it is prototypically considered to encode indirect objects, and that it is principally governed by the verb, but can also be governed by predicate nominal phrases or adverbs. However, because the dative is a non-structural case, the connection between syntactic function and semantic role is less straightforward than might be argued for the nominative case, as the complexity of the semantic aspect of the dative case makes it more difficult to connect to a single function, or even a single role. Firstly, Silić and Pranjković (2005: 303) state that the indirect object function can be expressed by multiple cases in Croatian, which includes not only the dative, but also the genitive, locative and instrumental. Additionally, Daković (2015: 163) states that from a cognitive linguistic view, the pairing of the indirect object function with the dative case is primarily connected to the semantic role of recipient and goal, and that the experiencer role is less prototypical for the dative in general. She goes on to state that the recipient can become the experiencer as an additional role, since it is usually conscious of the transfer of an object into its sphere of influence, as well as the mental reactions that result from possession (cf. 2015: 163). Luraghi and Parodi's (2008: 168) definitions of recipient and goal do seem to fit with Silić and Pranjković's descriptions of the dative's basic meaning, with recipient seemingly being most connected to the function of indirect object, as it is "a participant, usually a human being, who is the goal of a transaction, as in *I gave a book to Mary*". The recipient role can be connected to the dative of purpose, for which Silić and Pranjković (2005: 219) say denotes an object or a person for which something is intended, and is the indirect object of verbs of giving or speaking. On the other hand, the role of goal seems to embody the fundamental meaning of the dative in Croatian, as Luraghi and Parodi define it simply as direction (cf. 2008: 168-9), meaning it would be connected to Silić and Pranjković's (2005: 219) first category of dative of direction. However, there are many other semantic roles listed by Luraghi and Parodi that would correspond to the categorisation of the dative case by Silić and Pranjković, including the beneficiary/benefactive (and malefactive), and dative of

positive or negative effect, addressee and dative of purpose, and possessor and dative of possession. This shows how traditional grammars try to connect the semantic and syntactic features through cases, although the terminology and definitions do not always match those found in theoretical approaches. They even include pragmatic aspects, as in the case of ethical dative, which is considered by some to be pragmatically, rather than semantically motivated, as it has predominantly a communicative function, it is used most often in spoken conversations, and it can be dropped from the sentence without changing the meaning (cf. Bijelić 2015: 31-2). Additionally, the experiencer role is not tied exclusively to the dative case. Daković (2015: 168) also states that there are certain subjectless constructions that encode experiencers, but that in Croatian, they take on the accusative case when the predicate contains an adverbialized noun, such as in the sentence *Stid me je*. Finally, volitionality is not exclusively expressed with the dative case, as Kučanda (1999: 84) states that it can also be expressed with the nominative case, giving the adjectives *žedan* ‘thirsty’, *gladan* ‘hungry’, and *sit* ‘full’ as Croatian examples of constructions that have nominative subjects, and effectively express the same level of volitionality as *toplo* ‘warm’, *hladno* ‘cold’, and *udobno* ‘comfortable’, which have dative subjects. Additionally, in some languages, such as German, the same adjective can appear with both a nominative and a dative NP construction, which leads Kučanda (1999: 84) to the conclusion that while the dative is bound to psychological predicates, the reverse is not true. All these issues indicate that so far, no single theoretical solution has been found that can adequately explain the interaction of syntactic and semantic characteristics within the category of cases in Croatian.

#### 4.3. Issues with English cases – subjective and objective case

Despite the fact that the English case system is smaller in size, English pronouns might prove to be a problematic area for matching case assignment and syntactic function. Quirk et al. (cf. 1986: 336-7) state that the subjective case is typically used for the function of subject, while the objective marks the object and prepositional complement, however, both can also be used for subject complements, which can be seen in the examples (emphasis added):

(14) It was **he**.

(15) It was him.

They state that the subjective is used in formal situations and is stipulated by prescriptive grammar, while the objective “is normally felt to be the natural one, particularly in informal style” (1986: 336-7). However, the overlap of the two cases in the function of subject complement is not the only problematic instance when combining case and function. Another aspect that has to be taken into account regarding the assignment of syntactic functions is that, unlike in Croatian, word order in English appears to play a more important role than case marking, as Zovko Dinković (2012: 1) states that “[t]he importance of coding properties in Croatian in general is **case marking > agreement > word order**”. On the other hand, Quirk et al. (1986: 337) state that in English “there is a broad division of the finite clause into ‘SUBJECT TERRITORY’ (the preverbal subject position) and ‘OBJECT TERRITORY’ (which includes all noun-phrase positions apart from that immediately preceding the verb)”. Bussmann (2006: 1290-1) states that the principal aspects of word order are the division between rigid and free, as rigid means “that a change in the order of elements within a phrase changes the syntactic function and the semantic interpretation of these elements, e.g. *That man sleeps vs man that sleeps*”, while free means “that linear rearrangements do not trigger such grammatical changes, e.g. *Philip I saw vs I saw Philip*”. Additionally, Bussmann (2006: 1290-1) states that “[t]he characteristic word order which is most often discussed is the relative order of S(ubject), O(bject), and V(erb)”, and that “the most common patterns are SOV (e.g. Turkish, Japanese), SVO (e.g. English, French), and VSO (e.g. Irish, Maori)”. English therefore possesses a rigid word order, where the sequence of arguments is subject-verb-object, and a change in the sequence of words will result in a change in their function, and consequently their meaning, as the specific position in a phrase is connected to a particular syntactic function. Luraghi and Parodi (cf. 2008: 205) contrast word order and case marking when expressing syntactic relations on the examples of English and Latin ((16) and (17) respectively), and their statements can also be applied to Croatian, since, like Latin, it has a relatively free word order and a more complex case system. These examples show the differences in the marking of grammatical relations in the two approaches (emphasis added):

- (16)     **the mother** loves the child     ≠     **the child** loves the mother  
 (17)     **mater** amat puerum             =     puerum amat **mater**  
            **mother:NOM** love:3SG child:ACC child:ACClove:3SG **mother:NOM**  
            ‘The mother loves the child.’

This interaction between word order and case marking is also what seems to lie at the heart of the issue in the sentences given by Polinsky and Preminger (2014: 11): [*For him/\*he to admit such a thing*] is impossible, and *It is impossible* [*for him/\*he to admit such a thing*], as the subject territory is filled with an element coded in the objective case. Quirk et al. (1985: 14) describe how there are other cases in which a mismatch between function and case form can occur as a result of prescriptive influences which can lead to hypercorrection, for example, in the use of the objective form *whom* as a subject, while the subjective pronoun *I* is used in the objective territory in phrases such as *between you and I*. This is why the objective form, which is considered as the unmarked case form, is more acceptable in informal English, and the reason why it is used in subject complements, while the subjective form appears in noun phrases in object territory (1985: 338). However, there are also cases in which the reverse is true, that the objective case is preferred, despite the fact that a particular element has different functions in different clauses. Quirk et al. (1985: 338) describe that in the sentence *It was she/her (that) John criticized*, “there is a conflict of functions, and neither pronoun form is felt to be completely satisfactory. Since *her* is the object of *criticize*, however, the objective form is superficially more acceptable, and is preferred in informal usage”. This illustrates that, despite the relative simplicity of the English case system compared to Croatian, marginal situations can still occur leading to issues in the combination of syntactic functions and case marking.

### 5. Theoretical issues regarding experiencer subjects

The overview of the issues regarding the nominative and the dative case in particular, as well as the subject function and the experiencer role in general, all seem to indicate that the source of their issues lies principally in the dual syntactic and semantic nature that they all possess. Various approaches have attempted to either consolidate them into a single definition, or focus only on one aspect of the individual elements, whether syntactic or semantic. Therefore, it can be said that the issues surrounding the concept of experiencer subjects are the result of the combination of the issues surrounding each of the individual elements. Considering all the previously discussed separate issues of subjects, semantic roles, and cases, their individual effects that manifest when combined into the concept of experiencer subjects across various languages, and English and Croatian in particular, can be summarised into 3 points:

- 1) not all semantic experiencers are encoded with the dative case, and not all instances of the dative case encode semantic experiencers;

2) not all semantic experiencers are encoded as syntactic subjects, and not all syntactic subjects encode semantic experiencers; and

3) not all syntactic subjects are encoded with the dative case, and not all instances of the dative case encode syntactic subjects.

The following section will present an overview of how various theoretical approaches treat the issue of experiencer and oblique subjects in various languages, including English and Croatian, to see how they relate the combined concept to the issues that are specific to the individual elements.

### 5.1. Experiencer and oblique subjects in English and Croatian

The existence of the concept of experiencer subjects is overall not a disputable one. Kunzmann-Müller (2008: 12-3) enumerates the possible semantic roles that subjects can have in Croatian in German, which includes not only the agent role, but also the patient, instrument, locative, and experiencer, which she also calls the recipient and benefactive. She also states that it contains a noun or nominal phrase which denotes a living being that is not actively involved in an action, but is a passive recipient, such as in the example *Petar pati od jakih bolova* ‘Peter is suffering from a lot of pain.’ (cf. 2008: 12-3). Experiencer subjects exist in English as well, which can be seen in Luraghi and Parodi’s example for the experiencer role, *Paul likes pears* (2008: 168). However, the problem arises when such experiencer arguments are not coded by the nominative case but by another case, usually the dative. This is the reason why this particular type of experiencer (subject) arguments is also called dative subject. Dative subjects can be considered a subtype of a larger category called quirky subjects, which essentially denotes any subject that is not in the nominative case, because quirky subjects are instances of quirky case, as Bickel (2006: 183) defines it: “...QUIRKY CASE, i.e. as explicitly listed nonstandard morphological case assignment to standard G[rammatical]F[unction]s“. Thus, it is possible to talk about not only quirky subjects, but any grammatical function bearing a non-prototypical case. This also establishes the apparent dominance of the nominative as the prototypical subject case, despite the fact that other morphological cases can also be used to encode subjects, as was shown with ergative-absolutive languages. A possible reason for this is that, as Bussmann claims (2006: 805), all European languages belong to the nominative-accusative alignment, except for Basque and Caucasian languages. Kučanda (2002: 198) also calls them oblique subjects, preverbal oblique nominals, and oblique subject-like NPs, which is based on the case division between the nominative as the casus rectus, and the remaining cases which are called

oblique. Although English possesses experiencer subjects, the same is not true of oblique subjects, as Kučanda (2003: 199) states:

On the other hand, in languages without case marking distinctions and with fixed word order (e.g. English, Mainland Scandinavian), the question of oblique subjects does not arise at all. The explanation that the loss of case marking in English was caused by changes in word order is often attributed to van der Gaaf (1904) and Jespersen (1909-49).

Bussmann (2006: 1162) states that syncretism is the reason for this development, as “grammatical categories come to be no longer morphologically marked: for instance, syncretism in the development of English led to the loss of case marking and the stabilization of word order”. The lack of a case system and a rigid word order is also why the main strategy of expressing volitionality in English is through adverbials, as they do not have overt case marking, and do not encode volitionality in their verbs as Croatian verbs do. Oblique subjects in Croatian traditional grammars were often discussed under the name of logical subjects, which occur with reflexive subjectless verbs or an infinitive with the auxiliary *biti* ‘be’ in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form (cf. Bijelić 2015: 10). Kučanda (cf. 1999: 75) claims that the term was used to denote the semantic role of agent if it did not possess the syntactic features of subjects, as well as subjects coded by an oblique case, most frequently the dative, which is why this construction became known in foreign linguistic literature as the Dative Subject Construction (DSC). Rukavina (2013: 19-20) gives a list of seven sentence types in which logical subjects can appear, under the name of agentive dative (cro. *dativ vršitelj*): 1) in sentences where typically a reflexive verb denotes a physical or psychological state, as in *Smučilo mu se* ‘He felt sick’ ; 2) when the dative referent is under the impression of the verb, as in *Čini mi se* ‘It seems to me’; 3) with non-reflexive verbs with various meanings, often with an infinitival complement, as in *Uspjelo mi je to obaviti* ‘I succeeded in doing it’; 4) with reflexive forms of non-reflexive verbs expressing a desire for something, as in *Meni se čita* ‘I feel like reading’; 5) with verbs like *biti* ‘be’ and *postati* ‘become’ coupled with an adverb or a nominal predicate, as in *Ivanu je teško* ‘It is hard for John’ and *Muka mi je* ‘I feel sick’; 6) with the verb *biti* ‘be’ in the phrase *biti komu što* ‘be something with somebody’ , as in *Što mu je?* ‘What’s with him?’, or with the construction *biti do + genitiv*, ‘feel like’, as as in *Nije mi do zabave* ‘I don’t feel like having fun’; and 7) dative with infinitive, which is considered archaic, as in *Da mi je to vidjeti!* ‘I wish I could see that!’. Although Rukavina follows Kučanda’s (1999: 75) definition of logical subject as the semantic agent, it is clear from the examples that the dative is the agent only in the

sentences of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> type, while the rest are experiencers, so it seems that the term logical subject is not always accurately applied, or that it is used as a kind of umbrella term for different kinds of dative constructions. However, despite these instances of the dative being traditionally called a logical subject, Rukavina (2013: 50) concludes that in Croatian the dative case can encode any constituent of a sentence except for the subject, which shows that Croatian traditional grammar strongly rejects the concept, based on the features that distinguish them.

## 5.2. Theoretical criticism of Croatian oblique or dative subjects

Oblique or dative subjects are theoretically defined by certain syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features, of which the dative case is considered to be the fundamental aspect. Kučanda (1998: 94) states that “dative subjects are characterized by anomalous coding properties (oblique case marking and lack of agreement), and on the other hand they never encode an Agent”, and thus “do not fit nicely into any of the above characterizations of subject, except the pragmatic definition of subject as topic”. Additionally, multiple definitions of experiencer subjects in general have shown that they are typically connected with state verbs which convey processes of perception and sensation, and experiencers encoded with the dative case seem to be associated with a special subclass of psych verbs. This is shown in Belletti and Rizzi (1988: 291-2), who claim that there are three primitive lexical classes of psych verbs found in Italian, but are also frequently found in other languages as well, which involve “an EXPERIENCER, the individual experiencing the mental state, and a THEME, the content or object of the mental state”. In the first class “the subject is the Experiencer and the object is the Theme”, in the second “the subject is the Theme and the object is the Experiencer”, and the third “involves a dative Experiencer and a nominative Theme” (Belletti and Rizzi 1988: 292). Landau (2010: 5-6) demonstrates how this division works in English:

a. *Class I*: Nominative experiencer, accusative theme

*John loves Mary.*

b. *Class II*: Nominative theme, accusative experiencer

*The show amused Bill.*

c. *Class III*: Nominative theme, dative experiencer

*The idea appealed to Julie.*

Additionally, he states that “[a]ll class III verbs are stative; consequently, they can never be used agentively” (Landau 2010: 6), which is also indicated by Kučanda’s (1998: 94) claim that they never encode an agent, and by Van Valin (2007: 38) in his *Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy*, which defines experiencers as undergoers which are associated with state predicates. As in traditional grammar, Croatian dative subjects are also rejected within various modern theoretical frameworks, by treating them primarily as indirect objects because of the dative case which typically encodes them. A general division exists between various approaches, which can roughly be based on the division given earlier by Kučanda and Belaj (cf. 2007: 2), between formalist and functional approaches, where the former focus on the autonomy of syntax, and the latter on the combination of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, although there are others that typically lean more towards either of those groups based on that basic focus.

### 5.2.1. Formalist approaches

Kučanda (1998; 1999; 2002; Buljan and Kučanda 2004; Kučanda and Buljan 2005; Belaj and Kučanda 2007) made the largest contribution to the discussion of dative subjects in Croatian. Although he is not a formalist, as he also discusses the importance of semantic and pragmatic features of subjects, one of Kučanda’s issues with dative subjects is that they do not exhibit the necessary syntactic features. His argument for focusing on the syntactic aspect is based on an analysis of English subjects “in which *it*, *there* and idiom chunks behave like subjects with respect to raising and tag questions although they have neither a semantic nor a pragmatic function” (1998: 5). In order to prove that Croatian dative subjects are not really subjects, Belaj and Kučanda (cf. 2007: 4-5) cite a small number of behavioural properties of prototypical subjects that Croatian dative subjects do not exhibit. The first is reflexivization, as generally only nominative subjects can antecede the possessive-reflexive pronoun *svoj*, as in the examples:

- (18) Petar je jeo svoj sendvič.  
 (19) \*Petru se jeo svoj sendvič.

The second property he cites is the omission of implicit or *Equi*-subjects in infinitival clauses, which is also reserved only for nominative subjects:

- (20) Petar je došao kući i legao je spavati.



(21) \*Petar je došao kući i spavalo (mu) se.

Belaj and Kučanda (2007: 11) conclude that dative subjects are in fact “non-prototypical indirect objects”, because “[i]t has the coding properties of an indirect object, but it has the semantic and pragmatic properties of prototypical subjects”, which led him to emphasise the need to distinguish morphosyntactic properties in subject definitions.

Greenberg and Franks (1991) analyse the topic of dative subject cross-linguistically, providing a wider view of the concept. In their research of dative subjects in Russian and other Slavic languages, they conclude that Serbo-Croatian<sup>4</sup> dative subjects, or particularly dative experiencers, are indirect objects, while only datives with infinitives can be considered subjects. Their research is structured in the framework of the Government and Binding (GB) theory, which, according to Trask (cf. 1991: 120), emphasises researching universal principles of grammar, which exist alongside parameters that can vary between languages. Greenberg and Franks approach the research to dative subjects structurally, in examining their placement within tree diagrams of phrase structure that involve the relation of domination between constituents (cf. Bussmann 2006: 1226). Greenberg and Franks (1991: 71-2) examine the diagrams of two different types of structures in particular, where “a dative NP [...] appears to bear the same semantic roles as do canonical subjects, but is not in an agreement relation with the predicate”, the first being datives with impersonal or category-of-state predicates, and the second datives with infinitives. They conclude that these two structures that encode the dative case differ in their case assignment strategies. Firstly, dative NPs that appear with infinitives, which are marked by a lack of tense and agreement properties, are the result of structural case assignment of the dative, rather than lexical, likening them to indirect objects to which they are structurally equivalent, and which “are configurationally marked dative by virtue of being sister to V” (1991: 79). They also state that “the dative arises not merely in the configuration “sister to V,” but may also occur in the parallel generalized relation of “sister to X” (1991: 79), and because of this “generalized dative case assignment rule”, they conclude that in the example *Gde mne bylo spat* ‘Where I was to sleep’, “[t]he subject *mne* is ineligible for nominative case since the clause lacks AGR(eement), but may be assigned dative case under sisterhood to I’ (1991: 79-80). They contrast datives with infinitives with structures of dative experiencers with

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<sup>4</sup> The term Serbo-Croatian has been used prior to the 1990-ies to denote either of the two languages, Serbian or Croatian, in anglophone linguistic literature. It is clear from the examples that the authors are referring to Serbian in particular, although the same conclusions apply to Croatian.

impersonal predicates, because “*all* the Slavic languages allow dative experiencers with impersonal predicates” (1991: 85), while “[s]ome languages allow dative subjects in infinitive phrases and others do not” (1991: 83). This led them to conclude that these two types of constructions encode different syntactic functions, where datives with impersonal predicates, i.e. dative experiencers, should be assimilated to indirect objects, “by dint of their VP-internal status” (1991: 89), since “dative is the case used for internal goal arguments of the verb, e.g. experiencers and benefactives” (1991: 89-90). On the other hand, datives with infinitives are regarded as “external arguments of the verb, i.e. as true subjects”, because they are not semantically restricted, and are assigned dative due to the ‘sister to I’ structural rule, as an extension of the ‘sister to X’ rule (cf. 1991: 90). They also connect datives with infinitives to the existence of another type of construction, the so-called Second Dative, an NP in the dative case that appears in some sentences containing secondary predicates, which Greenberg and Franks define as “an adjective that makes an adjunct predication of some item in the sentence, auxiliary to the main subject-predicate relation” (1991: 80). The Second Dative appears on “two special SPs, which we refer to as semipredicative pronominal adjectives, *odin* ‘alone’ and *sam*, ‘oneself’” (1991: 80), an example of which would be:

- (22)     Ja       poprosil     Ivana       pojti   odnomu.  
           I(N)   asked         Ivan(A)     to-go   alone(D)  
           ‘I asked Ivan to go alone.’ (1991: 81)

Their connection exists based on the same structural rule of ‘sister to X’ that they applied to datives with infinitives, as it “cannot be in the VP since it is predicated of PRO, which it must c-command; it is instead the accidental, non-argument target of structural case assignment because it happens to be sister to I’, which is dative position” (1991: 92). Consequently, as they are governed by the same structural rule of “assigning dative to the sister of an I’ lacking AGR.” as dative subjects with infinitives, their distribution in Slavic languages will mirror that of the dative subjects with infinitives (1991: 92). This is evident in their conclusion regarding the existence of these two types of dative structures in Slavic languages, as they state that “the languages which have the Second Dative phenomenon are precisely those languages that have dative subjects in infinitival sentences”, which consist of Russian and Polish, while they list Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian and Slovak as not having datives with infinitives, as the default case of the semipredicatives is the nominative, not the dative case, which indicates that they are not subject to that particular structural rule (cf. 1991: 89). However, what they say of Serbo-

Croatian datives with infinitives is not applicable to Croatian, as they claim that it does not allow for the use of datives with infinitives, and instead uses sentences with *da*-constructions with a nominative subject, but these are characteristic of Serbian, and not of Croatian (cf. 1991: 84), as can be seen in the example:

- (23) Nemamo šta ovde da radimo. (S-Cr)  
 we-don't-have what here COMP we-do

Instead, the conclusions about Slovenian can be applied to Croatian, as they more closely resemble the dative with infinitive construction that is considered somewhat archaic in modern Croatian as it is in Slovenian, as can be seen in example (24.b). They also include the more likely alternative, the nominative with infinitive construction, which is normally found in modern Slovenian and Croatian, as can be seen in example (24.a) (cf. 1991: 83):

- (24) a. Moramo iti domov. (contemporary)  
 we-have to-go home  
 b. Iti nam je domov. (archaic)  
 to-go us(D) Copula home  
 'We have to go home.'

Nevertheless, because of the rarity of this construction, Greenberg and Franks still deem that it does not exist in the same capacity as in Russian, which leads them to conclude that neither Slovene, nor Serbo-Croatian at the time, have datives with infinitives, and thus essentially no dative subjects, as they have been replaced with the nominative with infinitive constructions. However, they still possess experiencer datives, as all the other Slavic languages that they examined, but they are considered to be indirect objects, which is the same conclusion Belaj and Kučanda (2007: 11) arrived at.

### 5.2.2. Functional approaches

Some approaches that discuss dative subjects do not focus on the autonomy of syntax over semantics and pragmatics, but instead state that it is necessary to take all aspects into account when defining the subject in general. For example, Klaiman (1980: 292) states that volitionality “may have some bearing on language universals of a restricted kind”, but it has

been poorly explored as a possible semantic typological characterisation of languages, since the focus so far has been on researching formal features. However, he also claims that “the sharing of formal features (such as dative subject constructions) which define a language area may be due to common conceptual structure”, which has led to the development of “[t]he hypothesis that language areas may be definable in terms of the sharing of semantic parameters” (1980: 292). This view is an example of a principle that is found in cognitive grammar, which states that grammar symbolises thought. Trask (1996: 48) writes that this approach “maintains that syntax and semantics are inseparable, and seeks an integrated theory of linguistic structure, rejecting the conventional separation of linguistic description into different components; it also rejects a good deal of the formalization typical of most other approaches”. Belaj (2015) approaches the topic of dative subjects in Croatian from the perspective of Cognitive Grammar, and also comes to the conclusion that while dative subjects do possess semantic and pragmatic characteristics of subjects, they do not possess the syntactic ones. However, he takes his research further by focusing on the syntactic characteristics of dative subjects, which encode it as an object, stating that if grammatical structures symbolise meaning, dative subjects must therefore also possess semantic and pragmatic characteristics of objects (2015: 8). Thus, his findings match those of Kučanda (2007: 11), but with a more elaborate explanation, as he claims that the subject status of dative subjects stems from them taking over the characteristics of subjects in constructions where a grammatical subject and direct object are not expressed. This is possible because the dative referent is encoded as an experiencer and can also display some agent-like features of subjects, since it is a role that acts as an active participant in the target domain that can perceive the process which affects it, giving the role itself a dual status, existing between the source and target domain of the action chain (cf. 2015: 11-2). He is also more specific than Kučanda, as he separates the types of dative constructions which encode experiencers from datives with infinitives, as do Greenberg and Franks (1991: 71-2). Belaj’s (2015: 13) statements on these constructions echo what Greenberg and Franks claim about Slovene constructions, in that they are rare and highly marked, as well as being considered archaic forms. He does not dismiss them outright as non-existent, however, he seems to come to a similar conclusion about datives with infinitives as Greenberg and Franks. The dative referent has no semantic or pragmatic features of objects in that construction, but it is coded as an object, which he explains is due to the infinitive being a hybrid category, since it possesses the verbal features of aspect and transitivity, but not the external features of tense and agreement (2015: 13). Given that it does not express person, it creates a kind of depersonalised construction which expresses no external doer of an action, and given that some form of doer

needs to be expressed, the dative takes its place as the target referent of the process (2015: 13). This leads Belaj to the conclusion that datives with infinitives are the only types of dative constructions that could arguably be considered dative subjects (2015: 14), similar to the conclusion Greenberg and Franks (1991: 90) make.

### 5.3. Dative subjects in other languages

Despite the fact that dative subjects are not an accepted concept in Croatian, they are an acknowledged part of many other languages. Croatian also seems to share features with other languages' dative subject constructions, including syntactic and semantic ones. The feature which Croatian dative subjects most often have in common with other languages is volitionality. For example, Sridhar states that "the dative subject construction (or DSC, hereafter) is a pan-South Asian feature" (1979: 100), focusing in particular on the Kannada language, stating that it is characterised by stative predicates, and that the subject is "conceived of (pragmatically?) as a nonvolitional experiencer or recipient rather than as a volitional agent" (1979: 103). Regarding coding properties, the DSC differs from the prototypical Kannada subject by being in the dative case and not governing verb agreement, but it still occupies the subject, or the sentence-initial, position (1979: 104). Behaviourally, it also emulates the prototypical subject, as it passes most of Sridhar's subjecthood tests, namely reflexivization, coreferential subject deletion, causativization, and partially equi-NP deletion (1979: 116). He also presents four ways of analysing DSC's properties: "(i) the null hypothesis; (ii) the dative subject hypothesis; (iii) the nominative subject hypothesis; and (iv) the squishy subject hypothesis" (Sridhar 1979: 120), of which only the second, DSH, he finds acceptable. Sridhar (cf. 1979: 120-1) goes on to claim that within that hypothesis, the DSC was an underlying subject which lost certain subject features, like verb agreement, as the result of a relation changing rule, which turned it into an indirect object with dative marking, while the underlying subject became the surface object. Despite the similarity in the semantic aspect of volitionality, the formal characteristics of Kannada DSCs distinguish them from Croatian ones, as they do possess prototypical syntactic subject properties. Bengali, on the other hand, is a language with dative subjects which are distinguished principally on the basis of volitionality. According to Klaiman, (1980: 280), "an understanding of how dative subject constructions are used in Bengali cannot be had by scrutinizing their formal characteristics, but must be inferred from their semantics". He dismisses two theories as inadequate regarding the semantics of dative subject constructions, namely the Subjective Hypothesis, where "dative subject constructions express subjective

experiences, i.e., events that occur solely within the body or mind of the experiencer” (1980: 280), and the Recipient Hypothesis, where “dative subjects are semantically recipients” (1980: 281). His conclusion is similar to that of Sridhar, as he is in favour of the Volitionality Hypothesis, since Bengali dative subjects cannot occur with adverbials expressing volition (cf. 1980: 286), can only occur in the imperative if they express a wish, not a command (cf. 1980: 286), and cannot passivize (cf. 1980: 288). However, Klaiman (1980: 291) concludes that “[i]t seems unlikely that many languages emulate Bengali in possessing systematic dative/direct counterparts; yet it is only the contrast between such counterparts in Bengali which proves the viability of the parameter of volitionality “, which at least is not true in the case of Croatian dative subjects, as they differ from nominative subjects in a number of coding and behavioural properties as well.

With regard to Indo-European languages, apart from the aforementioned Russian analysed in the work of Greenberg and Franks (1991), Icelandic is a language that is frequently cited as having dative subjects, because their oblique coding properties do not prevent them from having the behavioural properties that are associated with prototypical nominative subjects, such as raising, reflexivization, subject-verb inversion, extraction, indefinite subject postposing, subject ellipsis and infinitive complements (cf. Zaenen et al. 1985: 455-7). Icelandic is often contrasted with German, as both are Germanic languages and have the same morphological cases. Croatian shares with both languages a rich case system and a relatively free word order, which Kučanda (1998: 14) considers to be the features that are regularly found in languages with dative subject constructions. However, unlike Icelandic, German does not exhibit the behavioural properties of syntactic subjects, as Zaenen et al. (1985: 478) state for German that “the same type of tests that show that oblique NPs can be grammatical subjects in Icelandic show that the German analogues cannot be analyzed as such”. The reason for the differences between Icelandic and German that Zaenen et al. cite is that the two languages are governed by different association principles, which dictate how thematic roles and grammatical functions are combined. Although they share a number of universal principles, they differ in a language-specific one – in Icelandic, “[c]ase marked THEMES are assigned to the lowest available G[rammatical] F[unction]” (1985: 466), while in German, “[c]ase marked THEMATIC ROLES are assigned to 2OBJ” (1985: 479).

## 6. The issues with existing research on dative subjects

Taking into account all the research presented on dative subjects in general, and Croatian in particular, there is a strong case against accepting Croatian dative subject constructions into the subject category. A comparison of formalist and functionalist approaches to Croatian dative subjects shows a theoretical agreement regarding the status of experiencers that are coded in the dative case, claiming that they are indirect objects rather than subjects. This seems to corroborate the statement that although it is not a universal cross-linguistic characteristic, the assignment of nominative case is an essential aspect of Croatian subjects, as was stated by Zovko-Dinković (2012: 1). Additionally, a comparison with other languages which have dative subjects showed that, although Croatian does possess a lot of similarities to them, it lacks a number of both syntactic and semantic features which were key in allowing other languages' dative constructions to be included in the category. However, there are several issues and oversights that are evident in current research on dative subjects when compared to the approach in Barðdal and Eythórsson (2018), who define subjects as the first argument of the argument structure of the predicate. Their research highlights three aspects that are either problematic in other dative subject research, or are simply not given enough attention: prototypicality, historical comparative research, and the inclusion of native speakers when researching the acceptability of linguistic structures.

### 6.1. Prototypicality vs. classical theory

The conclusion that most current studies on Croatian dative subjects have reached so far is that it lacks prototypical subject features, since the dative is tied to indirect objects, which are in turn tied to the semantic roles of goals, recipients and experiencers. Kučanda and Buljan seem to support this notion, as they state: “*pridruživanje gramatičke relacije subjekta nekoj semantičkoj ulozi ne ovisi toliko o semantičkoj ulozi koliko o udaljenosti od semantičkog prototipa subjekta*” (2004: 90). Consequently, most of the research presented in this thesis also bases subjecthood on the prototype theory, requiring potential subjects to fulfil multiple criteria in order to be included in the category. However, it was also shown that only a few of the theories have provided explanations as to why dative subjects possess both subject and indirect object features, while others have settled on calling them half-subjects or giving them an inconclusive status, each using a different set of criteria. This indicates that while there might be an apparent agreement between the results of different types of research, their approach

based on prototype theory is not unified, and can therefore produce issues in its application. Barðdal and Eythórsson (2018: 261) have pointed this out specifically in the uneven way in which various behavioural subject tests are applied in Icelandic and German. This also implies that if no criteria are established as the minimum needed in order to be considered a subject, the benchmark for membership become the most prototypical members of that category. However, this is impossible to apply cross-linguistically, as different languages have different prototypical subjects. Kučanda (1999: 76) echoes this in his criticism of the croatocentric view of subjects being determined by the characteristics of the predicate, while the nominative feature, which is one of the most common, cannot be considered due to the existence of case systems where it does not exist. However, considering this need for cross-linguistic applicability, it seems that syntactic features do have a stronger claim as the defining characteristics of subjects, as Kučanda (1998: 5) and Luraghi and Parodi (2008: 196) pointed out that English has syntactic subjects which display no semantic or pragmatic characteristics.

Barðdal and Eythórsson's (2018) definition seems to avoid those issues, as it offers a principled method based on a syntactic feature that can seemingly be applied to various languages. They have also shown the cross-linguistic potential of their definition, as through its application they determined that dative subjects are a feature of both Modern and Old Germanic languages, including Old and Early Middle English (Barðdal and Eythórsson 2005: 873), despite the fact that English no longer possesses them as a result of the loss of case marking. Additionally, as the definition has also included German in the category of languages possessing dative subjects (2005: 831), it seems to not be as exclusive as some other approaches, despite being based on the classical theory of categorisation with a single defining feature. Their opposition to such an exclusive attitude is also evident in their criticism of nominative case marking as a necessary feature for subjecthood, as it would lead to a circular definition of subjects and exclude subjects with other types of case marking (cf. Barðdal and Eythórsson 2018: 257). This makes their definition seems to allow for more variation within the category of subject itself than research based on prototype theory. It can therefore be argued that Barðdal and Eythórsson's (2018) definition is not in opposition with prototype theory itself, rather, their problem with it lies in its use as a criterium to determine category membership. Additionally, this definition has pragmatic value as well, as it is simple and easily applicable, which is a significant criterium that is often brought up when valuing theoretical approaches. For example, Sridhar states it as a criterium for preferring the dative subject hypothesis over the squishy subject hypothesis as it "eschews the complications and contradictions in the latter" (1979: 124).



In order to determine the cross-linguistic validity of their theory, it needs to be applied to multiple different languages, therefore, this thesis will give a preliminary example of its application in Croatian based on the examples provided in Barðdal and Eythórsson's (2005) research. As was previously stated, they define the subject as "the first argument of the argument structure" (2018: 263), so in order for the definition to be applied to Croatian, it would require the subcategorization frames of predicates which are used to determine the subjecthood of their arguments. Barðdal and Eythórsson (2005: 828-30) have shown the principle of their approach on three verbs in particular, *repeat*, *bother* and *like* in English, Icelandic and German. They state that all three have the same type of subcategorization frame, consisting of two arguments, as was given in example (3), but that they differ in the semantic entities these arguments represent, as well as the coding properties: *repeat* consists of "two arguments, a nominative subject and a reflexive accusative object" (2005: 828); *bother* belongs to "two-place predicates with a causal structure" (2005: 829), whose arguments have the same cases as *repeat*, but denote different semantic entities, as the first argument of *bother* is considered the stimulus, while the second "typically refers to humans" (2005: 829); and in the case of the *like*, "its leftmost argument is the experiencer argument, while its rightmost argument denotes the 'liked entity'" (2005: 830), which are marked the same way as with the previous two verbs in English, but are marked by the dative and the nominative case with the Icelandic verb *lika*. However, they claim that all three behave as syntactic subjects, giving the example of the subjecthood test of control infinitives that targets them, which they claim is "one of the most reliable subject tests for many languages" (2005: 827-8). This shows that their organisation of arguments does not depend on the possible differences in the meaning of individual arguments or their forms, but that it is "the order of arguments RELATIVE TO EACH OTHER, and not relative to any postulated thematic hierarchy, that determines the argument linking of each predicate" (2005: 831), as the sequence of arguments is the result of "derivatives of event type, conceptual structure of predicates, and the force-dynamic relations between the participants" (2005: 831).

The arguments of the Croatian verbs *ponoviti* 'repeat' and *smetati* 'bother' exhibit the same features as the English, Icelandic and German ones with respect to semantic entities, case marking and control infinitives, and can therefore be said to have the same subcategorization frames for those event types. However, if the same event type of the verb *like* was applied to the equivalent Croatian verb *sviđati se*, its subcategorization frame would consist of a dative experiencer and a nominative liked entity, as the Icelandic verb *lika*, which would define the experiencer argument as the subject. However, an example of a sentence with this verb and subcategorization frame would be interpreted in the opposite way in the framework of

traditional grammar, since the website *Hrvatska školska gramatika* claims that it is the nominative that is the subject in the following sentence (emphasis added):

- (25) **Mara** mi se sviđa.  
 ‘I like Mara.’ (lit. ‘Mara likes to me.’)

On the other hand, dative subjects in Croatian can also control infinitives, which is confirmed in multiple papers (cf. Kučanda 1998: 10; cf. Kučanda 2002-2003: 207; cf. Zovko Dinković 2012: 7), and can be seen in the example given by Zovko Dinković (2012: 7) (emphasis added):

- (26) Hladno **mi** je stajati na kiši.  
 ‘I feel cold standing in the rain.’ (lit. ‘It feels cold to me...’)

However, this feature is not limited to subjects, as three arguments can control ellipsis in infinitives, namely nominative subjects, accusative direct objects, and dative indirect objects (cf. Zovko Dinković 2012: 7), which weakens its status as a subjecthood test, at least in the case of Croatian.

This preliminary analysis shows that although the definition seems to be easily applicable to English, it is necessary to conduct a more thorough research regarding the application on Croatian dative subjects in order to determine its validity. However, even if their definition is found to be unsatisfactory when applied to Croatian or other languages, the criterium of first argument in the argument structure of the predicate has been shown to be a common feature of many languages’ prototypical and dative subjects. This merits further research to determine why this connection exists, even if it is not sufficient to include dative subjects into the subject category.

## 6.2. The importance of historical comparative research

An important part in developing their definition was the historical comparative research Barðdal and Eythórsson (2005) performed on Germanic languages, in order to determine why dative subject constructions differ in various Germanic languages, such as Icelandic and German. Through their research, Barðdal and Eythórsson have also shown how historical analyses can lead to false conclusions about the existence and development of certain linguistic structures. They claim that “[t]raditionally in the linguistic literature, it has been assumed that

oblique or non-nominative subjects in the world's languages have developed from objects to subjects, hence their non-canonical case marking" (2009: 2). They discuss in particular the object-to-subject hypothesis, according to which "behavioural subject properties are acquired historically prior to coding subject properties" (Barðdal and Eythórsson 2005: 826), and that this process occurs in three historical stages. After breaking down the analysis done on multiple languages, they conclude that the stage placement of various languages is incorrect, as "there is no evidence whatsoever for assuming that subject-like obliques ever were at stage A in the history of Germanic, either in Gothic, or in German. Nor is there evidence of stage A in the history of Georgian or Polynesian, or any other language we know of" (2005: 873). They base their criticism on "[a] fundamental principle of historical linguistics [which] is that one should not reconstruct prehistorical stages that may be at odds with what is known about language in general and about language development" (2005: 873).

They pointed out that one of the inconsistencies of the object-to-subject hypothesis is an assumption that Gothic, as "the earliest attested Germanic language" (2005: 832), was at the stage where datives of impersonal constructions did not possess any coding or behavioural properties of subjects. This is based on the research of the Gothic verb *galeikan* 'please, like' in control infinitive constructions as an example of a behavioural feature of subjects. However, they did not take into account that the verb can occur with different argument structures which change the meaning of the verb, as the meaning 'please' occurs with a Nom-Dat frame, while 'like' occurs with a Dat-only, Dat-PP, or a Nom-Dat frame (cf. 2005: 832-3). Barðdal and Eythórsson argue that the corpus of Gothic which was used to research oblique subjects only provided four examples of the verb in a control infinitive, and that all the examples involved a Nom-Dat argument frame with the meaning 'please', which they claim is "not of the right kind to illustrate the syntactic behavior of the oblique" (2005: 832), as the nominative would naturally possess subject features according to their definition. However, this was used as the basis to place three languages in the first stage of development in the object-to-subject hypothesis, as having neither coding nor behavioural subject properties, namely Gothic, which was incorrectly analysed, Modern High German, which developed from it, and Proto-Germanic, which preceded Gothic (cf. 2005: 826). Barðdal and Eythórsson counter this by providing evidence for obliques fitting their definition of subjects in both Old and Modern Germanic languages, specifying in particular Modern High German, and thus state that "[t]he oblique subject analysis is superior to the object-to-subject analysis because it does not need to invoke a mechanism to explain a change from objecthood to subjecthood, but instead assumes that no

change has taken place in Icelandic, Faroese, and German, where oblique subjects have been preserved” (2005: 873).

In comparison, there is no research on dative subjects in Croatian that would explore the history of this construction in the Croatian language, which is something Kučanda (2003: 210) emphasized as well, “[s]ince datives do not behave like indirect objects either (as is sometimes claimed), their syntactic function in Croatian is not clear and what is needed is further diachronic and synchronic research into the nature of subject-like dative NPs”. Because Barðdal and Eythórsson’s comparative historical research was essential in the creation of their proposed subject definition, a diachronic research of the apparent lack of grammaticalization of dative subjects in Croatian would provide insight regarding both the dative subject construction in Croatian, and the validity of their theory. The research on the dative subject construction in Slavic languages conducted by Greenberg and Franks (1991) is a good indicator of a potential historical link between Slavic languages, as they highlight that the dative with infinitive construction is accepted as a subject only in some languages, such as Russian, while in others, such as Croatian, it is not, while all Slavic languages share the construction of datives with impersonal predicates. A historical analysis of Slavic languages would provide an insight as to the reason why this particular difference exists between Slavic languages, and at what point the languages diverged from one another, as Barðdal and Eythórsson’s research has shown in the case of English and its historical development in comparison to other Germanic languages.

### **6.3. Testing acceptability with native speakers**

Another important aspect of researching historical language change is that it is rooted in the natural everyday use of a language’s speakers, who enact these changes for various reasons. Thomason (1999: 23) says that

the question of linguistic possibility of a change — in this case a deliberate change — is settled as soon as a single speaker produces a single instance of the change at a single time. Whether a deliberate change will become a permanent part of that one speaker's idiolect or of the speech community as a whole is then a matter of social and linguistic probability, not possibility.

This makes it clear that native speakers are an important factor which needs to be surveyed when researching the process and results of a particular language change. Some of the research on dative subjects does include some basic inquiry into speakers’ attitudes about dative

constructions, however, it is not very extensive. For example, Kučanda (cf. 2003: 209) claims the sentences “Meni se sviđa biti pomognut” and “Ivan je gladan, ali mu se ne jesti” are unacceptable, based on his own intuition and that of his native speaker informants, although he does not specify their number. On the other hand, Barðdal and Eythórsson included two surveys with groups of university students that are native speakers of German or Icelandic in their research, questioning the acceptability of certain marginal dative constructions in both languages (cf. 2005: 856-8), which makes it clear that they put a stronger emphasis on native speakers’ opinions. Their surveys revealed that “there is a positive correlation between acceptability and frequency in actual language use” (2005: 858), and that even attested examples might be judged as unacceptable if they are not frequently used (cf. 2005: 858). Additionally, the students were divided into two groups, those who were studying their native language, either German or Icelandic, and those who were studying English, and it was found that the students of German and Icelandic were much less accepting of the marginal dative structures than students of English, despite the fact that they were also questioned on their native language, indicating that there might be a strong influence of prescriptive standards (cf. 2005: 857-8). Therefore, a survey was also conducted as a part of this thesis, having a similar goal to the ones conducted by Barðdal and Eythórsson, as it aimed to determine whether dative constructions would be considered acceptable as subjects in Croatian.

### 7. Analysis of survey of acceptability of Croatian dative constructions as subjects

The survey on the acceptability of dative subjects was conducted on 30 Croatian university students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University in Zagreb, who study at least one philological course from any year of study, with the following breakdown (see Tables 1 and 2):

**Table 1.** Student respondents by year

<b>Year of study</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> year	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	7

4 <sup>th</sup> year	6
5 <sup>th</sup> year	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

**Table 2.** Student respondents by program major

	<b>Foreign language</b>	<b>Croatian language</b>	<b>Linguistics</b>	<b>Non-philology</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>First major</b>	28	2	-	-	<b>30</b>
<b>Second major</b>	16	-	3	10	<b>29*</b>

\* one participant had no second major

The purpose of this criterium was influenced by the results of Barðdal and Eythórsson's surveys, indicating that prescriptivism is a potential influence on the acceptability of dative subject constructions. This would indicate that a higher awareness of current linguistic definitions and research could sway the opinion of Croatian speakers' perception of dative constructions. This prescriptive influence would likely also be stronger for students of the Croatian language, who are presumably exposed to both traditional grammar and modern linguistic research, both of which claim that dative subjects do not exist in Croatian. However, if a significant number of students surveyed do not adhere to that opinion, it could indicate that the particular grammatical features which are deemed as essential characteristics of Croatian subjects, primarily nominative case marking and controlling agreement, are not as significant a criterium for defining subjects, and that other aspects of the subject, either semantic, pragmatic, or both, have a greater influence. Because of the small number and a somewhat specialised pool of respondents, this can only be considered a preliminary survey regarding the acceptability of dative subjects for native speakers of Croatian.

The survey consists of 30 Croatian sentences that were sourced from a number of analyses presented in this thesis discussing the topic of dative subjects (see Appendix 1). The respondents were asked to name the subjects of those sentences, or write "none" if they did not find any. The sentences were also divided into two sections, the first containing simple, and the second complex sentences, in anticipation that the latter would pose more difficulty for respondents to analyse, as there would be multiple possible subjects that they would have to cite. In the section containing complex sentences, the respondents were also instructed to name

multiple subjects if they found more than one. 27 sentences in the survey contain a dative NP, while three sentences contain an accusative NP, the NPs in both cases having the experiencer role. This was done to provide another way to test the respondents' grammatical awareness, and to see if they would be more or less inclined to label the accusative or the dative NP as subject. Some of the simple and complex sentences also contain clauses with nominative NPs as subjects, to see whether the introduction of the prototypical subject would have an effect on the respondents' opinions of dative NPs as subjects. Additionally, the complex sentences included four sentences with an expressed nominative subject, and six sentences with an unexpressed nominative subject. No instruction was given regarding citing unexpressed subjects in order to determine whether the respondents would be aware of them, and if it would make the dative NP more or less likely to be cited as the subject in those sentences.

The overall result of the survey shows that the dative NP was cited as the subject 199 times out of 810, or 24.5%, while the accusative NP was cited 24 times out of 90, or 26.6%. The dative NP in any given sentence was cited by at least five, and at most nine respondents, which is between 16.6% and 30%, while the accusative NP was cited by at least seven, and at most nine respondents, which is between 23.3% and 30%. However, this pertains only to the responses that cited the dative NP in the form in which it was written in the sentence, as a significant number of responses singled out the referent of the dative NP, but cited it in the nominative form. For example, in the simple sentence "Ivanu je teško.", nine respondents cited "Ivanu", while seven cited "Ivan". Given that the cited nominative NP in such responses denotes the referent of the dative NP, those responses should be included into the tally of dative NPs in general, in which case, the number of dative NP responses increases to 324 times out of 810, or 40%, while the accusative NPs increases to 37 times out of 90, or 41.1%, with the following breakdown per sentence (see Table 3):

**Table 3.** Number of dative and accusative NP responses including the nominative form for all simple and complex sentences

<p><b>Simple sentences (1.-19.):</b></p>	<p>1.Vinogradu ne treba molitva nego motika.: 9  2.Zgadio mu se taj razgovor.: 9  3.Strah me je.: 14  4.Petru je žao svoje sestre: 18  5.Hladno mi je.: 15  6.Uspjelo mu je to obaviti.: 11  7.Meni se čita.: 16  8.Ivanu je teško.: 16  9.Nije mi do zabave.: 15  10.Dosadilo mi je slušati tvoje pritužbe.: 15  11.Žuri mi se.: 16  12.Uspjelo mu je pobjeći iz zatvora.: 11  13.Ne spava mi se.: 16  14.Iskliznuo mi je tanjur iz ruke.: 11  15.Zebe me za ruke.: 11  16.Hladno mi je stajati na kiši.: 14  17.Većini učenika film se sviđa.: 11  18.Boli me glava.: 12  19.Stipi je godilo piti vino sa svojim društvom...: 13</p>
<p><b>Complex sentences (1.-11.):</b></p>	<p>1.Smrzli su mi se prsti dok sam brao jabuke: 5  2.Mi radimo, a njemu se drijema.: 16  3.Klara je učinila sve da mu bude ugodno...: 6  4.Iako sve vidi, ipak joj se čini da sniva đavolski san: 6  5.Čudno mi je što je Ivan došao.: 15  6.Premda mi je slatka, i jako je volim...: 6  7.Laknulo mi je jer sam kukavica.: 10  8.Krivo mi je što nisam dobio pravu priliku.: 10  9.Bilo mu je hladno i otišao je u krevet.: 11  10.On je gladan i jede mu se.: 7  11.Čini mi se da Ivanu nije dobro.: 16</p>



The highest number of dative NP responses was found for the sentence “Petru je žao svoje sestre”, which had a total of 18 responses of either “Petru” or “Petar”, or 60%. The response rate for dative NPs was at least 50% for nine more sentences if nominative NPs with dative referents are taken into account. The sentence “Petru je žao svoje sestre” was additionally selected because it was criticized by Kučanda (cf. 1998: 7), who claimed that dative NPs cannot control reflexivisation. However, Belaj (cf. 2015: 7) claimed that this is untrue, and that constructions where nominative NPs control reflexivisation are simply more neutral. The examples Belaj gave to support his claim, “Stipi je godilo piti vino sa svojim društvom u svojoj vikendici” and “Klara je učinila sve da mu bude ugodno u kući svojih roditelja”, were also included in this survey, but were modified. The second reflexive “svojoj” was dropped from the first sentence to lessen the potential influence of interpreting the dative NP as the subject, and the reflexive “svojih” was changed into “njihovih” in the second sentence for the same reason. The sentence “Stipi je godilo piti vino sa svojim društvom u vikendici” also had a relatively high rate of dative NP responses, 13 counting the cited nominative form, or 43.3%. However, the rate was much lower for the sentence “Klara je učinila sve da mu bude ugodno u kući njihovih roditelja”, which had 6 dative NP responses counting the cited nominative form, or 20%.

A similar pattern can be discerned between the simple and complex sentences in general, as the dative NP was cited as the subject at a slightly higher rate in the simple sentences, 123 times out of 480, or 25.6%, while in complex sentences it was cited 76 times out of 330, or 23%. The most significant difference between simple and complex sentences occurred when including the nominative NP with the dative referent, as it increases the responses to 216 in simple sentences, or 45%, but in complex sentences it increases only to 108, or 32.7%. There is an additional issue concerning the interpretation of the responses of the complex sentences. Many of the responses single out only one potential subject, despite the sentences having multiple clauses and potential subjects. In cases where the two potential subjects have different referents this does not present an issue, since if only the subject from one clause is singled out, the other clause is not considered to have a subject. However, in some sentences where the referent in all clauses is the same, it is harder to determine whether the dative NP would be included in the cited subject. For example, in the sentence “Iako sve vidi, ipak joj se čini da sniva đavolski san”, six respondents cited “ona” as the subject, which can apply to all three clauses, including the one with the dative NP. Additionally, because the subject is unexpressed in the first and the third clause, it is unclear if the referent is male or female and can be interpreted either way. This is evident from two responses which cited “on” as the only subject,

which would clearly exclude the dative NP in the second clause. If these single subject responses were counted as including the dative NP, the number of responses for complex sentences would rise to 115, or 34.84%.

As no instruction was given for unexpressed subjects, it is hard to determine whether all respondents were aware of them, as the citation “none” could be interpreted as referring only to expressed subjects. However, a portion of the responses still referred to them, although sometimes incorrectly. In simple sentences which Silić and Pranjković would consider to be subjectless (cf. 2015: 316-8), or which contain a nominative subject, 16 responses stated that they contained an unexpressed subject, or 3.3%. In the sentences where the only referents were the dative or accusative NP, it can be speculated that the cited unexpressed subject refers to them, as in the sentences “Hladno mi je” or “Strah me je”. The sentence “Zgadio mu se taj razgovor” points to this interpretation, as one response specified that the unexpressed subject was “on”, the referent of the dative NP. In complex sentences, which contained both clauses with unexpressed nominative subjects and clauses with dative NPs, 30 responses cited an unexpressed subject, or 9.09%, out of which seven cited the dative NP as the unexpressed subject, or 2.12%. Additionally, in some of the sentences which contained expressed nominative subjects in at least one of the clauses, the nominative was not cited as the subject. For example, in the sentence “Čudno mi je što je Ivan došao”, two responses stated that there is no subject, and in the sentences “Mi radimo, a njemu se drijema” and “On je gladan i jede mu se”, one response stated the same, excluding both the nominative and the dative NP.

However, the grammatical features of nominative subjects also have a considerable influence on the respondents’ choices, even when the cited NP is not necessarily the subject in the sentence. For example, in the sentence “Većini učenika film se sviđa”, 19 respondents cited “film” as the subject, or 63.3%, despite the inverted word order which made the dative NP seem more subject-like. However, in the sentence “Strah me je”, three respondents cited “strah” as the subject, which Silić and Pranjković call an adverbialized noun in a subjectless sentence, which typically has a complement in the genitive or the accusative case (cf. 2005: 317). In simple sentences that have both a nominative and dative NP, the rate of dative NPs cited as subjects is not significantly higher or lower than in other sentences, although they are on the lower end of the scale of the response rate. Two out of four simple sentences with nominative NPs have the smallest dative NP response of 30% when including the dative referent cited in the nominative form, namely “Vinogradu ne treba molitva nego motika” and “Zgadio mu se taj razgovor”, while for “Iskliznuo mi je tanjur iz ruke” it is 36.6%, and for “Boli me glava” it is 40%. Additionally, the sentence “Vinogradu ne treba molitva nego motika” was placed in the

section with simple sentences, as it contained only one predicate, however, it is described as a complex sentence with an adversative conjunction (cro. “*suprotni veznik*”) by Silić and Pranjković (cf. 2005: 326), and there is only one predicate as the second clause drops the elements that it has in common with the first. This makes the responses more varied than for the sentence “*Većini učenika film se sviđa*”, as 14 respondents cited “*molitva*”, and four cited “*molitva, motika*”. There was also no significant difference between sentences with expressed and unexpressed nominative subjects, as in the six complex sentences with unexpressed nominative subjects, the dative NP was cited as the subject 41 times out of 180, or 22.7%, while in the four sentences with expressed nominative subjects, the dative NP was cited 26 times out of 120, which is 21.6%.

There are several possible interpretations for these results. It seems that accusative NPs were cited as the subject at a slightly higher rate than dative NPs, but they were only included in three sentences. Considering that both capped at 30% of the responses for the form given in the sentence, it is possible to speculate that there would not be much difference between them if more sentences with accusative NPs were included. The fact that they have a similar rate of responses if the cited referents in the nominative are also included supports this interpretation. The cited nominative forms of both accusative and dative referents indicate that the semantic features of the accusative and dative NPs influenced the respondents’ choice of subject. However, as they cited the referent in the nominative form, it can be argued that the respondents’ knowledge of prototypical subjects’ grammatical features influenced them as well, although arguably to a lesser degree. In the case of the sentences including dative NPs with reflexives, the difference between the rates of the three sentences could be attributed to the increased complexity of the sentences, as there is a general decrease in dative NP responses between the two categories, particularly considering that it was a sentence containing a reflexive which got the most dative NP responses. However, the inclusion of the reflexive may also have influenced the respondents, making the dative NP more likely to be labelled as the subject. There is still a five-response minimum for dative NPs in all complex sentences, which indicates that it has a persisting influence on the respondents’ choice of subject, even if the prototypical nominative subject is also present, whether in the same clause in the simple sentences, or in a different clause in the complex sentences. However, the fact that several nominative NPs were not recognised as subjects can be interpreted as either the dative NPs’ features being stronger than the nominative NP’s features for those respondents, or that their attention was lowered in the process of completing the survey.

Overall, these results indicate that both dative and accusative constructions have a relatively significant influence on the perception of Croatian native speakers which leads to them being identified as subjects. The results are also significant given the pool of respondents, as all are university students who study languages, and can be assumed to have a better understanding of grammar in general. There were only two respondents who study Croatian, so no significant conclusion can be drawn about the influence of prescriptivism, however, their responses were curious, as both were 5<sup>th</sup> year graduate students, and one chose almost exclusively the dative NP as the subject, while the other cited “none” or the nominative NP in most sentences, even when it was the incorrect response, which can be interpreted as hypercorrection. This implies that the influence of prescriptivism can vary even in environments where it is usually expected. However, a larger and more varied pool of respondents is needed in order to determine at which rate dative NPs would be selected as subjects by Croatian native speakers in general.

## **8. Conclusion**

The research presented in this thesis has shown that oblique or dative subject-like arguments remain a problematic subject category, as they represent a non-prototypical combination of syntactic function and semantic role, and thus also contain the issues pertaining to subjects, experiencers, and morphological cases. Dative subjects are also more affected by their individual issues, as they add more distance from the prototypical nominative subject, although they are an issue only in Croatian, since they do not exist in English. Their subjecthood has been denied as a result of a lack of prototypical syntactic features, and they are more likely to be defined as indirect objects, although not in all analyses. However, there are also methodological problems with the approaches that have been used in the research of oblique subjects. On the one hand, both English and Croatian traditional grammars present the subject as a combination of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features, and tend to focus specifically on coding properties, which can lead to definitions that are too language specific. On the other hand, many modern linguistic theories are predominantly based on the approach of prototype theory, which defines subjects as bundles of features, often focusing either on syntax or semantics, but without specifying which ones or how many are necessary for subjecthood. Although this was touted as an advantage of the prototype theory over the more limiting classical theory of categorisation, it can be argued that the lack of a single unifying criterium has been one of the main obstacles in establishing the subject as a universal category in linguistic research. However, the definition offered by Barðdal and Eythórsson seems to avoid

the problems of both linguistic approaches, as it is based on a single syntactic feature, and it has been successfully applied to multiple languages. A preliminary application of it to Croatian dative constructions shows some potential of them being categorised as subjects, but it would require more research to provide a conclusive answer, although it would put it in direct opposition to the conclusions that have so far been made by both traditional grammar and modern linguistic theories. The survey done as a part of this thesis indicates that the opinion of Croatian native speakers still skews heavily towards the claims that Croatian dative constructions are not subjects, however, roughly a third of the respondents do not seem to agree with that interpretation. This is particularly significant in view of Barðdal and Eythórsson's findings that even attested linguistic constructions can be deemed largely unacceptable by native speakers, particularly if they are rare. Thus, a more comprehensive survey of native speakers' opinions on dative subjects would be necessary to determine the degree of the acceptability of dative subjects in Croatian. Additionally, there is also a need for a historical comparative analysis of Croatian dative subjects as a part of Slavic languages, as the one conducted by Barðdal and Eythórsson on Germanic languages was essential in the development of their subject definition, and has also shown how in the history of English oblique subjects developed and eventually were eliminated as a result of changes which occurred in its case marking system. A similar analysis for Slavic languages would provide significant insight in the process of grammaticalization of dative subjects in Croatian that could indicate if there are any similarities with the how the structure developed in English, and a comparison with other Slavic languages could provide a better explanation as to why certain differences developed between them. Even if Barðdal and Eythórsson's definition is not proved to be valid in Croatian, it has highlighted the inadequacies of the methodologies and results of a number of modern linguistic research on dative subjects. Finally, although its status as a subject definition is still inconclusive, so far Barðdal and Eythórsson's definition has shown the potential to prove Chomsky's claim wrong, as through exploring the "peculiarities and exceptions" of dative subjects in multiple languages, they have shown that their definition could lead "to the discovery of deeper generalizations" regarding the whole category of subjects.

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## Appendix 1. – Survey questions

Istraživanje u svrhu izrade diplomskoga rada na studiju engleskog jezika i književnosti -  
Izdvajanje subjekta iz rečenica

1. Fakultet:
2. Godina studija (1-5):
3. Filološka studijska grupa:
  - Strani jezik (npr. engleski, talijanski, njemački, etc.)
  - Kroatistika
  - Lingvistika
  - Fonetika
  - Klasična filologija
4. Druga studijska grupa / nema:

Izdvajanje subjekta iz jednostavnih rečenica

Napišite na crtu ono što smatrate subjektom u navedenim jednostavnim rečenicama. Ako smatrate da u rečenici nema subjekta, napišite "Nema ga."

1. Vinogradu ne treba molitva nego motika.
2. Zgadio mu se taj razgovor.
3. Strah me je.
4. Petru je žao svoje sestre.
5. Hladno mi je.
6. Uspjelo mi je to obaviti.
7. Meni se čita.
8. Ivanu je teško.
9. Nije mi do zabave.
10. Dosadilo mi je slušati tvoje pritužbe.
11. Žuri mi se.
12. Uspjelo mu je pobjeći iz zatvora.
13. Ne spava mi se.
14. Iskliznuo mi je tanjur iz ruke.
15. Zebe me za ruke.
16. Hladno mi je stajati na kiši.

17. Većini učenika film se sviđa.
18. Boli me glava.
19. Stipi je godilo piti vino sa svojim društvom u vikendici.

Izdvajanje subjekta iz složenih rečenica

U složenim rečenicama izdvojite sve subjekte. Odvojite ih zarezima. Ako smatrate da u rečenici nema subjekta, napišite "Nema ga."

1. Smrzli su mi se prsti dok sam brao jabuke.
2. Mi radimo, a njemu se drijema.
3. Klara je učinila sve da mu bude ugodno u kući njihovih roditelja.
4. Iako sve vidi, ipak joj se čini da sniva đavolski san.
5. Čudno mi je što je Ivan došao.
6. Premda mi je slatka, i jako je volim, ne znam koliko ću izdržati.
7. Laknulo mi je jer sam kukavica.
8. Krivo mi je što nisam dobio pravu priliku.
9. Bilo mu je hladno i otišao je u krevet.
10. On je gladan i jede mu se.
11. Čini mi se da Ivanu nije dobro.