

Title: Transitivity in Czech and Russian: The Animacy Paradox  
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Hopper and Thompson (1980) proposed parameters according to which the transitivity of a clause could be judged. Those parameters included the volitionality of the subject, and the affectedness and individuation (including animacy) of the object. Hopper and Thompson further proposed a Transitivity Hypothesis, according to which opposing features of transitivity could not be obligatorily combined.

Their parameters seem quite applicable to issues of the choice of case in objects in Czech and Russian. However, there are examples from Slavic which could be interpreted as contradictions of the Transitivity Hypothesis. Genitive-accusative syncretism in animate nouns is one such apparent anomaly, since the genitive typically indicates lower transitivity, whereas animate objects belong to a high-transitivity category. Klenin (1983) resolved this paradox by claiming that some structures typically used to indicate low transitivity can sometimes be used to indicate “abnormally high” transitivity. Klenin’s explanation may apply as well for the Czech verb *točit* ‘turn, spin’ and other semantically related verbs, which have a tendency to take *s* + INST for human objects but only the prepositionless instrumental with inanimate objects.

The current study also suggests that, in addition to Hopper and Thompson’s use of volitionality as a relevant parameter for the subject, and of animacy for the object, both volitionality and animacy are relevant to both subject and object. Perhaps more importantly, the volitionality and animacy of the subject *vis-à-vis* that of the object can influence the markedness of the utterance. Thus, *točit s* + INST with human objects is explained in terms of abnormal transitivity, because in such expressions, the will of an animate object is subordinated to that of an animate subject. In this instance, abnormally high semantic transitivity is indicated by a form which usually indicates low transitivity.