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TRANSITIVE IMPERSONALS IN SLAVIC AND GERMANIC: ZERO SUBJECTS AND THEMATIC RELATIONS

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SUMMARY

- Transitive impersonals in Russian, Ukrainian and Icelandic can be accounted for in terms of Mel'čuk's zero lexemes.

- An alternative analysis resorting to Burzio's Generalization fails to make correct predictions.

- The distribution of impersonals in Russian and Ukrainian has nothing to do with the intransitive split into unaccusatives vs unergatives.

- Most Russian verbs labeled 'psych' in the previous research are semantic causatives or agentive verbs with an external argument and valency grid <Agent, Patient>

BURZIO'S GENERALIZATION (BG)

- In its original form BG claims that only verbs that can assign (structural) accusative to some object, can assign an external theta-role (Agent) to its subject [Burzio 1986: 178].
- A revised form of BG stipulates that an object only gets Nominative case when there is no Nominative subject.
- Both versions are falsifiable.

WRONG PREDICTIONS BASED ON BG

- a) verbs without an Agent subject cannot assign (check) accusative.

- b) any verb with an Agent subject can assign (check) accusative.

FRAMEWORK-INTERNAL PROBLEMS

- Passive verbs do not assign case.
- (1) Ukr. **Statt'u** ACC.SG.F. <u>bulo</u> PRT.3SG.N. <u>vidhyleno</u> PRT.3SG.N.. 'The paper has been declined'
- Psych verbs lack an external subject argument and have two internal arguments <Expericiencer, Stimulus>.
- Russ. *ego*ACC.SG.M *eto*NOM.SG *ochenj tjagotit*PRS.3SG

Is *tjagotit'* 'be a burden to someone' a psych verb?

PHRASE-STRUCTURAL ACCOUNTS OF BG

- Little *v* is a phrasal category responsible both for the projection of an external argument and structural accusative assignment (Chomsky 1995).

- (i) [$_{voiceP}$ External Argument [v-Voice v-Fate [$_{v\text{-}CauseP}$ v-Cause [$_{v\ \varphi/AgrOP}$ [$_{v\text{-}TELIC/QUANTP}$ v-TELIC/QUANT [$_{VP}$ Acc]]]]]].

A SILENT ARGUMENT

- Sigurðsson (2011)
- FATE is a special uncontrolled process feature blocking or turning off the usual Voice feature that otherwise introduces AGENT.
- If a sentence is about uncontrolled events the Agent argument is not projected since the *v*P in a 'Fate' context is defective but a transitive verb still assigns Accusative case.
- (5) Icel. ***Bát-inn***$_{ACC.SG.M.DET}$ <u>*rak*</u>$_{PRT.3SG}$ *að landi*$_{DAT.SG}$ 'The boat drifted ashore.'

ZERO-SUBJECT-THEORY AND Φ-FEATURES

- Zero subjects control φ-features of the verb form in 3Sg in (5) and (6).
- The subject in (6) is a pronoun $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ in the nominative case, 3Sg.N., cf. Zimmerling (2007).
- (6)   Russ. **Lodk-u**$_{ACC.SG.F}$ _prigna-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ _obratno k beregu_$_{DAT.SG}$. 'The boat drifted back ashore'.
- The plural form of the Russian verb _prignat'_ prompts that its controller is a zero pronoun $\varnothing^{3Pl}$ in the Nominative case, 3Pl, cf. (7)
- (7) Russ. _Lodk-u_$_{ACC.SG.F}$ _prignal-i_$_{PRT.3PL}$ _obratno k beregu_$_{DAT.SG}$.
- 'One drove the boat back ashore'.

COMPLIMENTARY DISTRIBUTION OF ZERO PRONOUNS IN RUSSIAN

- In Russian, zero subjects of the 3rd p. are distributed complimentary in situations denoting processes controlled by a human Agent ($\varnothing^{3Pl}$) and processes not involving any human Agent ($\varnothing^{3Sg}$).

- The participant triggering uncontrolled processes is called Elements in [Mel'čuk 1995] and Causer in [Lavine 2012].

- I define it as non-animated Agent since all Russian and Icelandic transitive impersonals have a thematic argument (Patient).

TRANSITIVE IMPERSONALS AND EVENT STRUCTURE

- (ii) Transitive impersonals in Russian, Icelandic and Ukrainian have event structure with an overt Patient expressed by an accusative DP and a covert argument with the value 'non-animated, non-human Agent with a generic reference'.

- (iii) Russ. $\varnothing^{3Sg}$: Zero pronoun, Nominative case, 3rd person singular, neuter, non-human, non-animated generic Agent triggering a non-controlled process.

- (iv) Russ. $\varnothing^{3Pl}$: Zero pronoun, Nominative case, 3rd person plural, generic animated Agent triggering a controlled process.

MODERN ICELANDIC

- No zero subjects associated with 3Pl.
- Generic human subject is expressed by an overt indefinite pronoun *maðr* 'one' in Nom.Sg.
- The 3Sg form is linked both with generic non-human Agentsand with generic human Agents. The latter is possible in two types of passives – impersonal passives from verbs taking dative and genitive objects and impersonal passives from transitive and ditransitive verbs.
- (8) Icel. *Bátu-num*$_{DAT.PL.DET}$ *var*$_{PRT.3SG}$ *hvolf-t*$_{PARTII.SG.N}$ *viljandi*$_{PARTI}$.

'The boats have been turned down <by some people> **on purpose**'.

- (9) Colloq. Icel. *Var*$_{PRT.3SG}$ *skamma-ð*$_{PARTII.SG.N}$ *big*$_{2ACC.SG}$?

'Were you scolded?'

- (v) Icel. $\varnothing^{3Sg}$: Zero pronoun, nominative case, 3rd person singular, neuter generic Agent.

UKRAINIAN

- Ukrainian shares with Russian both types of zero subjects $\varnothing^{3Pl}$ and $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ distributed complementary in active sentences, and adds one more type – impersonal transitive passive.

- Since Ukrainian retains generic human Agents associated with 3Pl, this may lead to contextual synonymy of active and passive sentences without an overt subject.

(10) Ukr. a. ***Tyremnyj***$_{ACC.SG.M}$ ***termin***$_{ACC.SG.M}$ *Berlusconi* $\varnothing^{3Pl}$ <u>*skoroty-l-y*</u>$_{RT.3PL}$ *do odnogo roku.*

'The prison sentence of Berlusconi was abridged up to one year.'

- b. ***Tyremnyj***$_{ACC.SG.M}$ ***termin***$_{ACC.SG.M}$ *Berlusconi* (<u>*bulo*</u>$_{PRT.3SG.N}$) <u>*skoroche-n-o*</u>$_{PARTII.SG.N}$.

'The prison sentence of Berlusconi has been abridged'

LICENSING OF TRANSITIVE IMPERSONALS

- In Russian and Ukrainian transitive impersonals are not licensed by a single semantic feature. The necessary condition is that a verb can take an Agent subject. The sufficient conditions for Russian are that A) the verb does not select for + Animate subjects only, B) the resulting event can be interpreted as an outcome of some non-controlled activity.

- (15) Russ. *etu$_{ACC.Sg.F}$ ostanovku$_{ACC.SG.F}$ proexa-l-o$_{PRT.3SG.N}$.

Int. 'The vehicle missed a stop as a result of an uncontrolled motion.'

- (16) Russ . a. **Ego**$_{3SG.ACC.M}$ kol'nu-l-o$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ v ščeku$_{ACC.PREP}$ Komar$_{NOM.SG.M}$?

'He felt a sting in the cheek. A mosquito?'

- b. ***Ego**$_{3SG.ACC.M}$ ukusi-l-o$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ v ščeku$_{ACC.PREP}$ Komar$_{NOM.SG.M}$?

CAUSATIVES AND PSYCH VERBS

- (17a)   a. *Mal'čika$_{ACC.SG.M}$ _napuga-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ **igruškoj**$_{INSTR.SG.F}$.

- (1a')   'The sub-event associated with the second participant expressed by an Instrumental DP _igruškoj_ cannot be interpreted as part of the effect of an uncontrolled process triggered by a covert argument and taking over the first participant expressed by an Accusative DP _mal'čika_'.

- (17b) $^?$_Mal'čika_$_{ACC.SG.M}$ _napuga-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ **vspyškami**$_{INSTR.PL}$ **molnii**$_{GEN.SG.F}$

WET BEHIND THE EARS

- In short, an event like 'A toy frightened a boy' cannot be interpreted in Russian as contributing to an event 'A boy was frightened by an uncontrolled process', while an event 'Flashes of lightning frightened a boy' marginally can.

- This has nothing to do with either the conjecture that *napugat'* is an unaccusative or to the conjecture that it is a psych verb.

THERE ARE NO PSYCH VERBS

- I claim that the Accusative argument of all Russian verbs selecting an overt {+ Human} object is Patient (Theme), not Stimulus, and they select an overt or covert Agent argument in the Nominative case.

- (vii) So called psych verbs licensing transitive impersonals in Russian are transitive agentive verbs, typically with a grid <{-Human Agent}, {+ Human Patient}>.

ANTI-PSYCH HYPOTHESIS

- The φ- and role-and-references features a of Russ. $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ {- Human, - Animate Agent of an uncontrolled process} do not depend on either the fact whether the Patient (Theme) argument is specified as {+ Human} or {- Human} or on the fact whether a sentence is about non-controlled physiological reactions or about other non-controlled processes.

TWO CONSTRUCTIONS OR ONE AND THE SAME?

'Psych transitive impersonal'

(20) Russ.   a. **Pacienta**$_{ACC.SG}$ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ _vyrva-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$
    _i_ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ _prones-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$·

'The patient vomited and his bowels moved (due to the impact of an outer uncontrolled process).'

'Non-psych transitive impersonal'

b. _Uragannym_$_{INSTR.SG.M}$ _vetrom_$_{INSTR.SG.M}$ **pacienta**$_{ACC.SG.M}$ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ _vyrva-l-o_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ _iz gamaka_$_{PREP.GEN}$ _i_ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ _proneslo_$_{PRT.3SG.N}$ _des'at' metrov_   _po vozduxu_.

'The patient has been pulled out from a hammock by a hurricane (due to the impact of an outer uncontrolled process) and got carried away ten meters through the air.'

DITRANSITIVE IMPERSONALS

- (21) Russ. *Emu*$_{3SG.Dat.M}$ {+ Human} *nogu*$_{ACC.SG.F}$ {- Human} $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ *sve-l-o*$_{PRT.3SG.N}$.

'He got a cramp in his leg'.

- (22) Russ. *Emu*$_{3SG.DAT.M}$ {+ Human} *pam'at'*$_{ACC.SG.F}$ {- Human} $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ *otšib-l-o*$_{PRT.3SG.N}$.

'He had a lapse of memory.'

UKRAINIAN TRANSITIVE IMPERSONALS

- (23) Ukr.*$Xlopčyka_{\text{ACC.SG.M}}$ <u>nalyaka-l-o</u>$_{\text{PRT.3SG.N}}$ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ {-Human} $spoloxamy_{\text{INSTR.PL}}$ <u>blyskavky</u>$_{\text{GEN.SG.F}}$.

Intended: 'The boy was frightened by flashes of lightning.'

- (24) Ukr. *$Xlopčyka_{\text{ACC.SG.M}}$ $bu\text{-}l\text{-}o_{\text{PRT.3SG.N}}$ <u>nalyaka-n-o</u>$_{\text{PARTII.SG.N}}$ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ {+ Human} $spoloxamy$$_{\text{INSTR.PL}}$ <u>blyskavky</u>$_{\text{GEN.SG.F}}$.

- An overly similar verb $zalyakati$ 'to bully', 'to frighten' licenses impersonal passive.

- (25) Ukr. $ïx$ $_{3.\text{ACC.PL}}$ $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ {+ Human} <u>zalyaka-n-o</u>$_{\text{PARTII.SG.N}}$ і $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ {+ Human} <u>zmuše-n-o</u>$_{\text{PARTII.SG.N}}$ $movčaty_{\text{INF}}$.

'They were bullied and forced to keep silent.'

CAUSATIVE VS DECAUSATIVE

- A sentence like *Dark forests bullied the boy* is impossible in English, while a sentence like *Dark forests frightened the boy* is OK. The same holds for Ukr. *zalyakaty* and *nalyakaty*, respectively.

- There is a decausative *nalyakatys'a*, but not *zalyakatys'a* (|| Russ. *zapugat'sa*). *Zalyakaty* 'to bully' only selects {+ Human} Agentive subjects while *nalyakaty* also takes {-Human} subjects in the active voice.

TRANSITIVE PASSIVE IMPERSONALS

- (26) Ukr. *Zgadajte*_{IMP.2PL}, *jak Varku*_{ACC.SG.F} *peklom*_{INSTR.SG.N} <u>*zalyaka-l-o*</u>_{PRT.3SG.N}.

'Remember, how Barbara was frightened by hell/by stories about hell.'

- The well-formedness of (26) indicates that $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ in Ukrainian active sentences is not associated with the value {-Human}.

- Either the woman in (26) was frightened by Hell as an imagined reality - {-human Agent} or by stories about Hell told by some people -{+human Agent}.

- The meaning of (26) is vague, not two-way ambiguous.

- Ukrainian passive construction with $\varnothing^{3Sg}$ and Ukrainian active construction with $\varnothing^{3Pl}$ are both unambiguous.

A DIGRESSION: MORPHOSYNTAX

- The Ukrainian participle ending 3Sg.N.–*o* used in impersonal passives like (1), (10b) and (27) is morphologically different from the agreeing participle ending 3Sg.N.–*e*.
- This parameter has a typological dimension: overt and covert controllers of Ukrainian subject agreement seem to have different properties.
- However, since Ukrainian impersonal passives are copular structures with a slot for an overt copula *bu-l-o* 3Sg.N. in the past tense, one can give a uniform description of Ukrainian, Russian and, probably, Icelandic passives with participle II and a zero subject.
- An exact parallel is known from Modern Swedish.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. Transitive impersonals can be explained in terms of zero subject pronouns controlling φ-features and showing role-and-reference properties of non-referential Agents.

- 2. BG does not predict the distribution of transitive impersonals. Phrase-structural accounts of BG add problems by stipulating fake categories as 'Accusative-of-fate-P', *'Accusative-of-nausea-P' etc. Licensing of transitive impersonals is conditioned by grammar, not in the lexicon.

- 3. Unaccusatives are at best a syntactic group, not a semantic class. So called psych verbs are a loosely related group of verbs selecting a {+human} argument.

- 4. BG, the unaccusative and psych hypotheses have

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