Context Sensitive Unaccusativity in Russian and Italian

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Introduction. Since the formulation of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis (Perlmutter (1978), Burzio (1986), numerous data pieces in various languages have been claimed to be at odds with it (Rizzi and Belletti (1982), Hoekstra and Mulder (1990), Lonzi (1986), Babby (1980), (2001), Van Valin (1990)). In this paper, I make a parallel between the puzzling pieces of data in Russian and Italian, whereby verbs that are typically described as unergative, in the presence of an explicit existential context*,* can reveal unaccusativity properties.

Data. Babby (1980), (2001) points to the relevance of an existential context for Gen of Neg in Russian (unaccusativity diagnostic). Verbs which are typically listed as unergative verbs (play, work, hide) and normally resist taking Gen of Neg subjects (VP-internal position), can take Gen of Neg subjects on the existential reading of the verb facilitated by an explicit context, as well as a preverbal Loc PP (see (1), (2)). Lonzi (1986), Calabrese and Maling (2009), Bentley (2006), Calabrese (p.c.) note that many of the verbs selecting *avere* (Have) auxilliary in Italian (Have-unergative/Be-unaccusative) allow *ne*-cliticisation (VP-internal position)(3). On a parallel to Russian data, the use of *ne*-cliticisation with these verbs requires a special interpretation of the verb in Italian: 'eventive' with no agentive theta role (Lonzi (1986));   stage level existential (Bentley (2006); stative reading (Calabrese and Malling (2009)). Calabrese (p.c.) observes that a shift in auxiliary choice (with alternating verbs) is required when the verb expresses a process of no inherent duration (4).

Analysis. Following Borschev and Partee (1998), (2002), I assume that what underlies optional acceptability of Gen of Neg subjects with unergative predicates is the *existential* vs *predicative* verb distinction. I argue that structurally any unergative (potentially any non-delimited) predicate is a choice between the two argument structures available to the speaker: (i) regular vP structure with an Agent argument position in Spec, vP matched to a full lexical verb (ii) a vP structure with a Theme argument matched to an existential verb. The choice is determined by means of Perspective Structure (Partee et al (2011)). The two argument structures are reflected by the auxiliary choice on the surface in Italian but are covert in Russian.

(1) Meždu   brevnami   ne skryvalos' tarakanov   Babby (2001:50)
    in between beams$_{LocPP}$ not hide   cockroaches
    'There were no cockroaches btw the beams'
(2)*vorov   ne skryvalos' ot polizii
    thieves$_{Gen}$ not hid   from policii
    'Thieves were not hiding from the police'
(3) Ne camminerà tanta (di gente) su quei marciapiedi
    ne walk   many of people on those sidewalk
    'many will walk on those sidewalks'
Context: *In questo giardino* (in this garden)…
(4)a. hanno attecchito liane   b. sono attecchite liane
    have   taken root vines   be   taken root vines
    'Vines have taken root (for a while)'   'Vines have taken root' (no duration)

Selected References
Babby, Leonard. 2001. The genitive of negation: a unified analysis. In *Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics, the Bloomington Meeting 2000*, ed. S. Franks, T. King and M. Yadroff, 39-55. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Slavic Publications.