

How is it raining? Motion-Verb Weather, unaccusativity, and the genitive of negation.
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Intransitivity is traditionally classified binarily as either unaccusative, where the single argument is internal, or unergative, where the single argument is external (Perlmutter 1978). It has since been shown that within and across languages, intransitive verbs do not exhibit uniform unaccusative or unergative behavior, according to established diagnostics (e.g. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995 on English). This has led to debate questioning whether unaccusativity and unergativity should be defined as properties of verb meaning (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995) or verb phrase syntax (Marantz 2013). I present data from Russian Motion-Verb Weather (MVW) expressions, which contribute to this debate. I will explore how one diagnostic for unaccusativity in Russian – the genitive of negation – interacts with MVW and what it reveals about Russian unaccusatives.

MVW is a small class of Russian intransitive expressions that only describe snowing, raining, and the arrival of seasons (1-2). MVW is formed with a noun (precipitation type or season) and a verb of motion based on the stem *idti* “to go.” MVW differs from other weather expressions in Russian, which are formed with a copula or weather-specific verb, such as *duti* “to blow” for wind.

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| 1. | id-jot | | doždʲ |
| | go.IPF.DET-3SG.PRES | | rain.MSG.NOM |
| | “It is raining.” | | |
| 2. | priš-la | | vesn-a |
| | arrive.PRF.DET-FSG.PAST | | spring-FSG.NOM |
| | “Spring arrived.” | | |

There are five diagnostics that have been proposed to identify unaccusatives (from unergatives) in Russian: (1) genitive of negation (GN), (2) distributive *po*-phrases, (3) *na-/pere-/po-* verb prefixation, (4) discourse-neutral locative inversion, (5) optional first conjunct agreement (FCA) (Harves 2002, Pesetsky 1982, Babby 1980). There is general consensus in the Slavic literature regarding the validity of these diagnostics. Of these, GN is widely agreed to show that internal arguments (but not external arguments) can be nominative (3) and license GN (4).

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| 3. | ne | priš-el | | otvet |
| | NEG | arrive.PRF.DET-3MSG.PAST | | answer.MSG.NOM |
| | “The answer did not come.” | | | |
| 4. | ne | priš-lo | | otvet-a |
| | NEG | arrive.PRF.DET-3NSG.PAST | | answer-MSG.GEN |
| | “No answer came.” (Babby 1980: 71, <i>subject-verb order flipped</i>) | | | |

The first goal of this paper is to determine if MVW is unaccusative or unergative, according to the proposed diagnostics. As the verb (stem) in (1-2) is the same as in (3-4), if unaccusativity is a property of verb meaning, then (1-2) should exhibit unaccusative behavior.

(1-2) pass the diagnostics of discourse-neutral locative inversion (5) and optional FCA (6).

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| 5. | v | moskv-e | id-jot | | doždʲ | |
| | in | Moscow-FSG.LOC | go.DET.IPF-3SG.PRES | | rain.MSG.NOM | |
| | “It is raining in Moscow.” | | | | | |
| 6. | na | ulits-e | id-jot | doždʲ | i | sneg |
| | on | street-FSG.LOC | go.DET.IPF-3SG.PRES | rain.MSG.NOM | and | snow.MSG.NOM |
| | “Outside it rained and snowed.” | | | | | |

MVW fails diagnostics 1, 2, and 3. In relation to diagnostic 2, *snow* and *rain* are mass nouns and thus cannot take the distributive reading diagnostic 2 requires. While the seasons are count nouns, they do

not take the *po* distributive reading, as other collocations in Russian block this phrase. Similarly, the lack of *na-/pere-/po-* prefixation on the verb quantifying over the internal argument (diagnostic 3) fails with (1-2) because the verbs of motion have a closed set of prefixes and cannot combine with these quantificational ones.

As (1-2) pass FCA, and unergatives never exhibit FCA, I conclude that MVW expressions are unaccusative.

The theoretical challenge MVW present is that MVW resists GN (as seen in 7). The second goal of this paper is to determine why this failure occurs. As (1-2) are unaccusative and use the same verb as (3-4), we would expect GN to be grammatical. However, native speakers always judge MVW with GN as ungrammatical (7), allowing only negated MVW with a nominative argument (8). Further, a search in the Russian National Corpus (RNC) revealed no instances of MVW with GN.

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| 7. | *ne | š-lo | dožd-ja |
| | NEG | go.IPF.DET-PAST.3NSG | rain-MSG.GEN |
| | “There was no rain.” | | |
| 8. | ne | š-el | doždj |
| | NEG | go.IPF.DET-PAST.3MSG | rain.MSG.NOM |
| | “It did not rain.” | | |

Several properties are argued to cause nominal phrases to resist GN in Russian – agentivity, definiteness, referentiality, and animacy (Pesetsky 1977, Harves 2002). I show that *rain* in (7) has none of these properties, as in (9) where *rain* takes GN with a different verb, also traditionally analyzed as unaccusative. Given the grammaticality of the verb “*to go*” in (3-4), the ungrammaticality of (7) is not caused by the verb itself. Thus, the GN failure cannot be due to verb meaning or a property of the nominal phrase. I propose the ungrammaticality of (7) reveals the MVW verb phrases have different syntax/semantics than that of the verb phrases in (3-4).

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| 9. | zdesj | nikogda | ne | upad-jot | dožd-ja |
| | here | never | NEG | fall.IPF-3SG.PRES | rain-MSG.GEN |
| | “No rain ever falls here.” | | | (from RNC, <i>Is it true, we will always be?</i> , 1969-1981) | |

I propose GN interacts with existential syntax, in addition to direct objecthood (building on Borschev & Partee 2002). Current research in Irish (McCloskey 2014) and English (Irwin 2018) proposes that existentials have complex internal verb phrase structure. Specifically, in an existential, the verb takes a Locative Small Clause. Irwin (2012, 2014) argues for English that unaccusative objects that interact with existential syntax merge in this Small Clause.

I propose that MVW expressions show Russian unaccusative syntax similarly interacts with existential verb phrase structure. It is the resulting variation in the complement structure which impacts the grammaticality of GN. I hypothesize that GN is only licensed in the presence of existential vP syntax, when the syntax has a complex complement. When the verb has a simple complement, GN is ungrammatical.

The verb phrase syntax in (1-2) is not existential, has a simple complement, and resists GN. Conversely, the verb phrase syntax in (3,4,9) is existential and has a complex complement, resulting in grammatical GN.

In the spirit of work on English, I have proposed that vP internal arguments in Russian can merge in more than one position: as a complement of the verb or embedded within a Small Clause. I have proposed that the different syntaxes interact with, and can be diagnosed by, GN. The unaccusativity literature has often shown that motion verbs do not exhibit uniform unaccusative or unergative behavior in telic directional contexts. I have shown this is also the cause in a new empirical domain: Russian motion-verb weather expressions.