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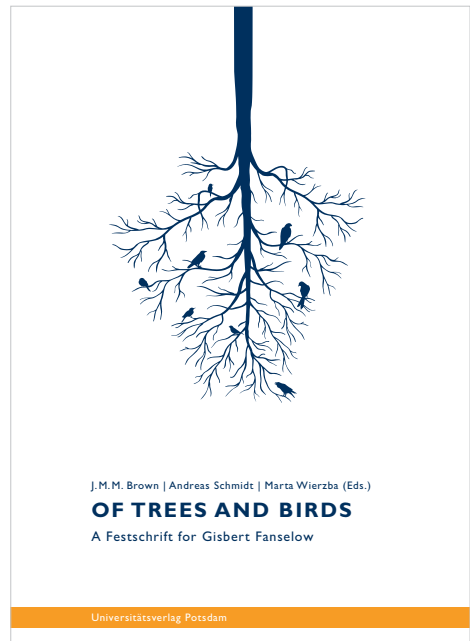J.M.M. Brown | Andreas Schmidt | Marta Wierzba (Eds.)

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Accusative Unaccusatives

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This chapter argues, contra Lavine & Freidin (2002), that the so-called accusative unaccusative constructions, found in Slavic languages such as Russian and Ukrainian, do not belong to the category of unaccusatives but are in fact monotransitive structures with the instrumental case assigned to the external argument for interpretive reasons. The claim is based on the argument structure of the predicates used in these constructions and the thematic interpretation of the instrumental argument. It is further demonstrated, contra Lavine & Freidin (2002), that the order of arguments in such constructions is not free but regulated by the Argument Prominence Hierarchy (Titov 2017).

1 Introduction

The so-called *accusative unaccusative constructions* (AUCs), as in (1) and (2), have received some attention in the linguistic literature due to the observation that neither argument in such constructions surfaces in the nominative form, resulting in the default third person singular agreement on the verb (see (1) and (2)). Absence of a nominative argument has led researchers to believe that predicates found in such constructions fail to assign an external θ-role. Thus, Lavine & Freidin (2002) analyse constructions as in (1) and (2) as unaccusative in the sense that they belong to "a class of constructions in which a nominal expression that functions as a complement of a predicate shows up in PF in canonical subject position (i.e. Spec-TP)".

(1) a. Vetrom   i   doždjami   sbilo
wind.INSTR and   rains.INSTR knocked-down.3SG.NEUT
     seti.
     nets.ACC

'(The) wind and (the) rain knocked down some/the nets.'

b. Volnoj   oprokinulo   lodku.
wave.INSTR overturned.3SG.NEUT boat.ACC

'A/the wave overturned a/the boat.'
(Kovtunova 1980: 354, as in Lavine & Freidin (2002: 258))

(2) a. Soldata   ranilo   pulej.
soldier.ACC wounded.3SG.NEUT bullet.INSTR

'A/the soldier was wounded by a/the bullet.'

b. Podvaly   zatopilo   livnem.
basements.ACC flooded.3SG.NEUT downpour.INSTR

'The basements were flooded by a downpour.'

c. Ženščinu   zadavilo   kovrom samolëtom   v
woman.ACC crushed.3SG.NEUT carpet   airplane.INSTR in
     parke   Gor'kogo.
     park.PREP Gorky.GEN

'A/the woman was crushed by a/the flying carpet [attraction]
in Gorky Park.'   (Московский Комсомолец 9/13/99,
as in Lavine & Freidin (2002: 258))

The authors claim that AUCs contain no thematic external argument and
that discourse-neutral word order is established in them by locating either the instrumental or the accusative complement of the predicate in
a preverbal position, as in (1) and (2), respectively. Since neither type of
complement has to be discourse linked when preverbal, Lavine & Freidin (2002) conclude that the argument order in AUCs is free, i.e., not
regulated by any interpretive demands.
In what follows, I argue that the sentences in (1) and (2) are monotransitive constructions in which the external argument with the Cause thematic interpretation optionally surfaces in the instrumental form to sig-

nal that no controller of the action expressed by the predicate is conceivable. The order of arguments in the resulting SVO and OVS constructions is not free but regulated by the Argument Prominence Hierarchy (APH) (Titov 2012, 2013, 2017).

2 Predicates and their argument structure

By definition, unaccusative constructions contain unaccusative predicates, that is, predicates that are incapable of taking an external argument. If the constructions in (1) and (2) were indeed unaccusative, we would expect both arguments to receive thematic interpretations assigned to internal arguments. Assuming that the accusative argument in (1) and (2) is a Patient, the instrumental argument must be an Instrument, as no other thematic interpretation is conceivable for this argument on the assumption that it is internal. However, a sentence containing an Instrument, as in (3a), presupposes a controller of the action expressed by the predicate, as in (3b), but in an AUC, as in (4), no controller of the action is conceivable (see (4b)).

(3) a. Ključ   otkryl   dver'.
       key.NOM opened.3SG.MASC door.ACC
       'The key opened the door.'

   b. Ivan otkryl   dver'   ključom.
      Ivan opened.3SG.MASC door.ACC key.INSTR
      'Ivan opened the door with a key.'

(4) a. Vetrom   otkrylo   dver'.
       wind.INSTR opened.3SG.NEUT door.ACC
       'The wind opened the door.'

   b. *Ivan otkryl   dver'   vetrom.
      Ivan opened.3SG.MASC door.ACC wind.INSTR
      'Ivan opened the door with the wind.'

In fact, none of the sentences in (1) and (2) can be construed as having an implicit controller of the action expressed by the predicate, making the analysis of the instrumental argument as an Instrument implausible. Thus, in (1) and (2b), the relevant arguments are represented by natural forces, such as 'wind', 'rain', 'wave' and 'downpour'. In (2a), the argument *pulej* 'bullet.INSTR' cannot be analysed as an Instrument because the sentence cannot be construed as meaning that someone wounded the soldier with a bullet. The bullet here is interpreted as a force that is not controlled by any sentient being from the point it has left the gun. Similarly, in (2c), the unlucky woman was crushed by the flying carpet attraction that had gone out of control. That is, the sentence cannot be construed as meaning that someone crushed the woman with the attraction.

Moreover, true Instruments fail to occur in AUCs (see (5)), strongly suggesting that the instrumental argument in these constructions is not an Instrument but a Cause. Crucially, unlike Instrument arguments, Cause arguments can never be internal (compare (3b) and (4b)).

(5) *Ključom   otkrylo   dver'.
     key.INSTR opened.3SG.NEUT door.ACC

Hence, an analysis of the instrumental arguments in (1) and (2) as internal is based on nothing but the unusual case they carry. Strikingly, the same arguments can surface in a nominative form, as in (6) and (7), in which case the predicates in (1) and (2) agree with them.

(6) a. Veter   i   doždi   sbili   seti.
        wind.NOM and rains.NOM knocked-down.3.PL nets.ACC
        '(The) wind and (the) rain knocked down some nets.'

    b. Volna   oprokinula   lodku.
       wave.NOM overturned.3SG.FEM boat.ACC
       'The/a wave overturned a boat.'

(7) a. Soldata ranila pulja.
soldier.ACC wounded.3SG.FEM bullet.NOM
'The soldier was wounded by a bullet.'

b. Podvaly zatopil liven'.
basements.ACC flooded.3SG.MASC downpour.NOM
'Basements were flooded by the downpour.'

c. Ženščinu zadavil kovër samolët v
woman.ACC crushed.3SG.MASC carpet.NOM airplane.NOM in
parke Gor'kogo.
park.PREP Gorky.GEN
'A woman was crushed by the flying carpet [attraction] in
Gorky Park.'

Even more strikingly, all of these predicates can take an Agent argument,
as in (8) and (9).[1]

(8) a. Deti namerenno sbili seti.
children.NOM intentionally knocked-down.3.PL nets.ACC
'(The) children have deliberately knocked down some nets.'

b. Marija namerenno oprokinula tarelku.
Mary.NOM intentionally overturned.3SG.FEM plate.ACC
'Mary deliberately overturned a/the plate.'

(9) a. Soldata namerenno ranila medsestra.
soldier.ACC intentionally wounded.3SG.FEM nurse.NOM
'The soldier was deliberately wounded by a nurse.'

b. Podvaly special'no zatopil sosed.
basements.ACC deliberately flooded.3SG.MASC neighbour.NOM
'The basements were deliberately flooded by a neighbour.'

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1. The adverbs 'intentionally', 'deliberately' and 'accidentally' in (8) and (9) are used to
ensure that the nominative argument is an Agent.

c. Ženščinu   slučajno   zadavil   voditel'
woman.ACC   accidentally   crushed.3SG.MASC   driver.NOM
  gruzovika.
  lorry.GEN
'The/a woman was accidentally crushed by the lorry driver.'

The above observations strongly suggest that we are not dealing with unaccusative predicates. Unaccusative predicates cannot take a nominative argument with the Cause/Agent thematic interpretation together with an accusative argument with the Patient thematic interpretation (see (6)–(9)). Hence, the predicates in (1) and (2) must be transitive. In line with that, all of the predicates in (1) and (2) can be passivized with the Cause/Agent argument occurring in the instrumental 'by-phrase', as in (10) and (11).

(10) a. Vetrom/doždjami/det'mi   byli   sbity   seti.
wind/rains/children.INSTR were.3.PL knocked-down nets
'The nets were knocked down by the wind/by the rain/by children.'

   b. Volnoj/Mariej   byla   oprokinuta lodka.
wave/Mary.INSTR was.3SG.FEM overturned boat
'The boat was overturned by the wave/by Mary.'

(11) a. Soldat byl   ranen   pulej/medsestroj.
soldier was.3.sg.MASC wounded bullet/nurse.INSTR
'The soldier was wounded by the bullet/by the nurse.'

   b. Podvaly   byli   zatopleny livnem/sosedom.
basements were.3.PL flooded   downpour/neighbour.INSTR
'The basements were flooded by the downpour/by the neighbour.'

c. Ženščina byla   zadavlena kovrom
woman   was.3SG.FEM crushed   carpet.INSTR

samolëtom/voditelem gruzovika.
airplane/driver.INSTR lorry.GEN

'The/a woman was crushed by the flying carpet/by the lorry
driver.'

Passivization is only available for transitive predicates that assign an external θ-role, strongly suggesting that the structures in (1) and (2) are transitive and the Cause arguments receiving the instrumental case are external arguments of the predicates. If so, Cause arguments in Russian have the option of occurring either in the nominative or the instrumental case. It follows, then, that morphological case cannot be analysed as merely a morphological reflex of abstract case, at least not in the matter of instrumental case. Instead, instrumental case must be performing some additional function in the sentence.

3 The role of instrumental case

Economy considerations dictate that the nominative/instrumental alternation that is available for Russian Cause arguments is motivated. The position that the present chapter takes is that it is motivated interpretively. That is, the instrumental case is used to signal that no controller of the action expressed by the predicate is conceivable. We have seen that an argument with the Instrument thematic interpretation fails to occur in an AUC and receive instrumental case (see (5)). This is unsurprising, given that such arguments require either an implicit or an explicit controller of the action expressed by the predicate (see (3a) and (3b), respectively). If so, arguments with the Agent thematic interpretation are also expected to fail to occur in AUCs and bear instrumental case. This prediction is indeed borne out (see (12)–(13)).[2]

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2. The sentence in (12a) is marginally acceptable on the construal that some force threw the children onto the nets.

(12) a. *Det'mi   sbilo   seti.
       children.INSTR knocked-down.3SG.NEUT nets.ACC

   b. *Mariej   oprokinulo   tarelku.
       Mary.INSTR overturned.3SG.NEUT plate.ACC

(13) a. *Soldata   ranilo   medsestroj.
       soldier.ACC wounded.3SG.NEUT nurse.INSTR

   b. *Podvaly   zatopilo   sosedom.
       basements.ACC flooded.3SG.NEUT neighbour.INSTR

   c. *Ženščinu   zadavilo   voditelem   gruzovika.
       woman.ACC crushed.3SG.NEUT driver.INSTR lorry.GEN

Our analysis entails that predicates that occur in AUCs are exclusively predicates that take either an Agent or a Cause argument, with the instrumental case used to disambiguate the construal of the sentence by depriving it of the interpretation involving a controller of the action expressed by the predicate. If so, absolutely any predicate that takes a Cause/Agent argument should be able to occur in these constructions. This prediction also appears to be borne out (see (14)).

(14) a. Žuravlja   zakrylo   tučej.
       crane.ACC hid.3SG.NEUT raincloud.INSTR
       'The crane was covered by a raincloud.'

   b. Čajku   zaxlestnulo   volnoj.
       seagull.ACC swept.3SG.NEUT wave.INSTR
       'The seagull was swept by a wave.'

   c. Tsaplju   skrylo   kamyšami.
       heron.ACC concealed.3SG.NEUT reeds.INSTR
       'The heron was concealed by the reeds.'

   d. Snegirja   priporošilo   snegom.
       bullfinch.ACC powdered.3SG.NEUT snow.INSTR
       'The bullfinch was powdered by the snow.'

e. Solov'ja   zaglušilo   voron'im   karkan'em.
nightingale.ACC muffled.3SG.NEUT corvine.INSTR caw.INSTR
'The nightingale was muffled by the caw of a raven.'

f. Uraganom   povalilo/slomalo   derev'ja.
hurricane.INSTR fell/broke.3SG.NEUT trees.ACC
'Hurricane fell/broke the tree.'

g. Gradom   vybilo   stëkla.
hail.INSTR knocked-out.3SG.NEUT glass.ACC
'Hail smashed the glass.'

If instrumental case is indeed used to signal that the predicate is deprived of the construal involving a controller of the action expressed by the predicate, the question is why such an indication is needed. The most apparent answer to this question is that instrumental case marking resolves ambiguity in sentences where either a Cause or an Agent construal is conceivable for the external argument, as in (15a) where the nominative argument can be interpreted either as an involuntary cause of the action of crushing the goose or as a performer of this action. Conversely, in (15b) the instrumental argument can only be interpreted as an involuntary cause of the action expressed by the predicate.

(15) a. Gusja   pridavila   korova.
goose.ACC crushed.3SG.FEM cow.NOM
'The goose was crushed by a cow.'

b. Gusja   pridavilo   korovoj.
goose.ACC crushed.3SG.NEUT cow.INSTR
'The goose was crushed by a cow.'

We have seen that no other thematic interpretation but Cause is available for instrumental arguments in AUCs, suggesting that instrumental case is directly linked to the Cause thematic interpretation. If so, one might wonder why nominative case is available for Russian Cause arguments as well (see (6) and (7)). That is, why do Cause arguments not consistently surface in the instrumental case, as in (1) and (2)? The

hypothesis that I would like to put forward is that the availability of nominative case marking for Russian Cause arguments is due to purely grammatical reasons. To be precise, a Cause argument may occur in structures where instrumental case marking results in ungrammaticality, as in (16b). As can be seen from (16a), the predicate that surfaces in the second conjunct in (16b) can occur in an AUC and take exactly the same arguments. Yet, in (16b), the presence in the first conjunct of an intransitive verb that must agree with a nominative subject renders the sentence with a default agreement on the verb in the second conjunct ungrammatical regardless of the case carried by the subject. This is because an instrumental subject clashes with the requirement of the predicate in the first conjunct to agree with its subject, whereas a nominative subject conflicts with the requirement of the predicate in the second conjunct not to agree with its subject. Given that the requirement for agreement cannot be dropped for predicates like the one that surfaces in the first conjunct in (16b), the grammar of Russian must allow for Cause NPs to enter into an agreement relation with the predicate and thus surface in the nominative form. As expected, a sentence with a nominative subject and an agreeing verb in both conjuncts is grammatical (see (16c)).

(16) a. Vetrom   raspaxnulo   okno.
        wind.INSTR threw-open.3SG.NEUT window.ACC
        'The wind threw open the window.'

   b. *Veter/Vetrom   vorvalsja   v komnatu i
        wind.NOM/INSTR rushed.3.sg.MASC in room.ACC and
           raspaxnulo   okno.
           flung.3SG.NEUT window.ACC

   c. Veter   vorvalsja   v komnatu i   raspaxnul
        wind.NOM rushed.3SG.MASC in room.ACC and flung.3SG.MASC
           okno.
           window.ACC
        'The wind rushed into the room and threw open the window.'

4 The Argument Prominence Hierarchy

As can be seen from the data in the previous sections, the order of arguments in AUCs can be either SVO, as in (1), or OVS, as in (2). As mentioned in the introduction, Lavine & Freidin (2002) analyse both orders as neutral and claim that neither order achieves an interpretive effect that is unavailable for the other. In Titov (2012, 2013, 2017), on the other hand, I analyse argument order alternations as regulated by the so-called *Argument Prominence Hierarchy* (APH). On the latter analysis, syntax produces all and only grammatical representations that are filtered out at the post-grammatical level of discourse (Reinhart 1995, 2006). The filtering is regulated by the interface economy, whereby a syntactically marked OVS construction is chosen by the interface system iff it captures an interpretive effect that an unmarked SVO structure with the same numeration and truth-conditional interpretation fails to express.[3] The relevant effect has to do with the relative interpretive prominence of arguments. By hypothesis, the interpretive component contains a well-formedness constraint given in (17). That is, there is a requirement for interpretively prominent material to precede interpretively non-prominent material. At the interface between the syntactic and the interpretive component a mapping rule operates that demands transparent mapping of syntactic structures onto the template in (17).

(17) [+prominent] $\gg$ [−prominent]

The syntactically simplest SVO construction must be able to capture the majority of possible configurations related to the relative interpretive prominence of objects (see (18)). After all, this is the unmarked structure that is chosen by the interface economy over the marked structure for its simplicity. It does, however, fail to capture one specific interpretation (see (18d)), in which case interface economy allows for the cheapest unmarked structure to be replaced with a costlier marked construction, as

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3. In Titov (2012, 2013), I account for syntactic markedness of OVS constructions by adopting the idea developed in Neeleman & van de Koot (2002, 2012) that scrambled structures are marked with respect to canonical constructions because they involve an inverse order of θ-role assignment, which makes them syntactically costly.

long as the latter captures exactly the interpretation that the unmarked construction fails to express, as in (19).

(18) a. $S_{[+prominent]}$ V $O_{[-prominent]}$

  b. $S_{[+prominent]}$ V $O_{[+prominent]}$

  c. $S_{[-prominent]}$ V $O_{[-prominent]}$

  d. $^*S_{[-prominent]}$ V $O_{[+prominent]}$

(19) $O_{[+prominent]}$ V $S_{[-prominent]}$

In Titov (2012, 2013, 2017), I argue that the relative interpretive prominence of arguments is established on the basis of the interpretations on the APH in (20). These interpretations are ranked with respect to each other, with the lowest-ranked [±animate] interpretation regulating the order of arguments iff all the higher-ranked interpretations are inoperative, i.e., both arguments carry the same value (either positive or negative) with regard the relevant features, resulting in the configurations in (18b) and (18c).

(20)

Argument Prominence Hierarchy

[±presupposed]

  [±referential]

    [±animate]
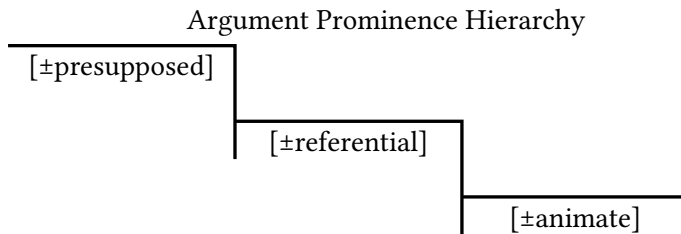
Now that we have outlined the mechanism regulating the mapping from syntax onto discourse, let us apply it to the AUCs in (1) and (2) and see whether the order in them is indeed free or, as predicted by the analysis presented here, regulated by the APH. Since no data in this chapter contain any contextual licensing, the [±presupposed] feature that regulates the relative order of focused and backgrounded arguments is inoperative in all of the examples used here. If so, the order of arguments in (1) and (2) can only be regulated by the [±referential] or the [±animate]

feature. In (1), (2a), and (2c), both arguments can be construed either as referential or as non-referential (see the translations), suggesting that the feature [±referential] is also inoperative in these examples, i.e., the structures correspond to the configurations in (18b) and (18c) within the referentiality domain. Whenever these arguments have an equal value as regards the [±animate] feature, as in (1), rendering this feature equally inoperative, the unmarked SVO order surfaces because the construal of the arguments is neutralised with respect to all of the interpretations on the APH. Conversely, the OVS order in (2a) and (2c) results from the configuration in (19) within the animacy domain, as the accusative object here is animate and the instrumental subject is inanimate.

The above analysis predicts that the OVS sentence in (2b) that hosts two inanimate arguments is licensed by the feature [±referential], as neither [±presupposed] nor [±animate] are operative here. Indeed, as can be seen from the translation in (2b), the accusative object is interpreted as referential, while the instrumental subject as non-referential. As expected, in the SVO version of this sentence both objects can be interpreted either as referential or as non-referential (see (21)).[4]

(21)   Livnem   zatopilo   podvaly.
       basements.ACC flooded.3SG.NEUT downpour.INSTR
       'A/the downpour flooded (the) basements.'

5 Conclusion

In this chapter I hope to have demonstrated that AUCs are not unaccusative constructions with two internal arguments but monotransitive constructions in which the subject with the Cause thematic interpretation optionally surfaces in the instrumental form to signal that no controller of the action expressed by the predicate is conceivable. The order of arguments in the resulting SVO and OVS constructions is not free but regulated by the APH.

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4. There is a tendency for inanimate Cause arguments to be interpreted as non-referential, which results in an apparent link between instrumental case assignment in AUCs and the non-referential interpretation (Titov 2012).

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