

On Accusative First*

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This paper explores the source of case patterns in various monadic and dyadic unaccusative constructions in Russian and Ukrainian in light of the tension between what we call “Nominative First” and nominativeless “Accusative First” case assignment strategies. *Nominative First* states that if nominative is available it must be used; *Accusative First* is then the assignment of accusative regardless of whether there is a nominative. While these emerge in a natural way from top-down versus bottom-up systems, respectively, we show here that this tension can be resolved in a purely bottom-up fashion, by first assigning structural cases at the vP level, where accusative is the only possibility, and again later at the TP level, where nominative and accusative compete. The solution thus capitalizes on the lack of availability of nominative at the vP level. This is, however, only part of the story, since even within vP accusative is not always assigned. Our principal task is thus to identify the conditions that give rise to Accusative First syntax, that is, to the assignment of accusative case in the absence of a clausemate nominative (agentive) NP, thus apparently flouting Burzio’s Generalization. We do not propose an Accusative First parameter, but seek instead to explain apparently exceptional Accusative First patterns in an otherwise Nominative First language. We argue that the decisive factor is opposition with a higher argument of the right type, namely, one implying external causation.

1. General concerns

We now examine the distribution of structural case on the basis of Russian unaccusatives. We will be mainly concerned with the following two types of constructions:

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only *as opposed to* a higher one, whose meaning specifies external causation (see Markman 2004 and section 3.3 below). In (3a) the Locative is lower (and thematically less prominent) than the Theme, whereas in (3b) the Experiencer/Theme predicate lacks causative semantics (there is no Causer, in the sense of Pesetsky 1995).

Another issue concerns the Accusative First construction in (4):

- (4) Mamu tošnit ot golovnoj boli.
mother_{ACC} is-nauseated from head ache_{GEN}
'Mother is nauseous from a headache.'

Why does the *tošnit*' type of impersonal, although apparently monadic, pattern with dyadic (1b)? Clearly, any answer to this question must address the fact that the Nominative First strategy is for some reason overridden. We explore a possible solution in section 3.2, but first briefly survey two competing approaches to case as a morphosyntactic system.

2. Approaches to case

Much recent research addresses inadequacies in the traditional “government” view of case assignment as an absolute association between NPs and syntactic positions, arguing instead that choice of case is better seen as contingent upon what other targets for case marking are available in the structure at hand.

2.1 Pure syntactic valuation

In GB and its successors, case is valued in the syntax proper. Under traditional government or the subsequent spec–head mechanism, the positions of both assigner and assignee were fixed. Later, with minimalism’s “probe,” although the source of case remained fixed the locus of the target (or “goal”) became relative. In Chomsky’s widely accepted system, v^0 probes accusative and T^0 probes nominative. Given the assumption that only “phi-complete” v values accusative—where a phi-complete v is one that projects an Agent in its specifier—the Accusative First pattern is predicted not to occur with unaccusatives.¹

¹ This is the formulation of Burzio’s Generalization in Chomsky 1995, ch. 4.

2.2 Syntax–PF mapping systems

The Nominative First alternative stems at least from Yip, Maling & Jackendoff (1987); YM&J’s idea that accusative is somehow *dependent* on nominative has since attained considerable currency. Their system, which operated in a purely linear fashion, first assigned nominative, then accusative only if nominative had already been deployed. Similarly, Marantz (1991) expressed this intuition by assigning accusative to the lower NP in some domain only when there are two NPs in need of structural case. Neither approach is however compatible with the Multiple Spell–Out theory of Chomsky (2001): the former assumes a left-to-right mapping (but could be sensibly recast into a top-down system), while the latter requires simultaneous inspection of the entire structure.²

2.3 Our compromise proposal

We argue that the insights of both traditions are on the right track and can be combined in a Multiple Spell–Out model of how the output of syntax is mapped into PF. Specifically, as in the standard minimalist account, accusative is valued when vP is sent to Spell–Out. Crucially, as we show, this applies *only* to the lowest (thematically least prominent) argument and it occurs *only if* there is another vP -internal argument with the right semantics. Accusative First is thus an intrinsic consequence of cyclicity: nominative cannot be valued at this point since T^0 has not yet been merged into the structure. Only later, when TP is sent to PF, can nominative be valued. Taking advantage of Multiple Spell–Out by building Nominative First into an essentially bottom-up model, mediated by the vP -internal dependency we develop, is our principal innovation.

3. Dependent Case

Nominative First asserts that nominative, if available, must be assigned in every clause (YM&J, Marantz 1991, Woolford 1997, Sigurðsson 2003, Woolford 2003). The two structural cases, nominative and accusative, are treated as operating in competition, with nominative the

² Sigurðsson (2006) does offer a bottom-up solution, achieving Nominative First by literally merging the nominative argument first in the derivation, below the accusative.

“active” case—the one that must be assigned first; cf. Bobaljik 1993.³ This accounts for the monadic pattern in (1a), but not for Accusative First in (1b). The pattern in (1b) is sometimes handled by assuming a null external argument, “activating” v^0 ’s case-assigning potential in the absence of morphological nominative (see Szucsich 2007 for a recent proposal along these lines for Russian transitive impersonals). This approach invokes Burzio’s Generalization as a principle of grammar, accommodating Accusative First syntax within a traditional framework. For us, Accusative First constructions arise as a direct consequence of the vP -internal dependency described above: the Theme is marked accusative in opposition to a thematically higher argument position within vP (cf. Baker 2008, for a similar proposal based on the Turkic language, Sakha). Accusative case thus fills a “distinctiveness” function with respect to a higher argument, in the sense of Sigurðsson 2003. This higher vP -internal argument (for example, an Instrument or Source) can also be implicit, coercing a grammatical reading for (5), so long as the speaker assumes its presence:

- (5) Razbilo vazu ... [čem-to]
 broke vase_{ACC} something_{INST}
 ‘The vase was broken [by some unknown force].’

Nominative First—absent our vP -internal dependency—falsely predicts that (1b) should only occur as (6), i.e., with a full set of agreement features on T^0 :

- (6) Molnija oslepila ego.
 lightning_{NOM} blinded him_{ACC}
 ‘The lightning blinded him’

However, while grammatical, (6) is neither necessary nor particularly common. Following Babby (1994b), we assume that the argument structures in (1b) and (6) are the same: there are two internal arguments, the higher Instrument *molnija* ‘lightning’ and the lower Theme *ego* ‘him’. The difference is that *molnija* can either be marked instrumental

³ The absolutive, according to Bobaljik 1993, is the active case in ergative systems.

vP-internally, as in (1b), or, as the highest argument, it can be treated as the subject and be marked structural nominative, as in (6).⁴

We now turn to a closer examination of the case dependency itself. Unlike YM&J's "Case in Tiers" system, in which accusative is only associated with an argument once nominative has been deployed, we follow Marantz's (1991) conception of Dependent Case. According to Marantz, a Theme argument is not marked accusative in opposition to the presence of morphological nominative, but merely in opposition to some other argument position (potentially within vP). Nominative First is then a default of sorts, which occurs in the absence of this opposition. This is why we find accusative marking of Theme arguments in dyadic unaccusatives, but not in monadic ones. It is only when an unaccusative Theme is opposed to some higher vP-internal argument that it functions as a complete propositional unit and is thereby valued as accusative and spelled out, together with the higher argument, in a Multiple Spell-Out system. It is precisely the opposition of the theme to a higher argument (fulfilling the distinctiveness function of case) that gives rise to early Spell-Out with unaccusatives.⁵

3.1 *The role of thematic prominence*

We assume the following thematic hierarchy, aspects of which date back at least to Jackendoff 1972:⁶

- (7) Agent > Causer > Experiencer > Instrument/Goal/Source >
Theme > Location^{7,8}

⁴ Note that the instrumental marking on *molnjej* 'lightning' in (1b) is inherent in the sense that this instrumental is assigned by association with the NP's theta role. It is not lexical case, since the same NP can appear as a nominative subject and does not realize a quirky lexical feature of a particular head. Indeed, this same instrumental can appear with virtually any Russian verb. Babby (1994a) refers to this type of inherent case as "semantic," distinguishing it from pure quirky case. According to Babby (1994b and forthcoming), (6) is derived via a morpholexical operation (a realignment of argument positions) prior to the syntax proper.

⁵ Tsedryk 2004 links early Spell-Out in constructions like (1b) to the status of such dyadic unaccusatives as thetic predications. See section 3.3 below for a discussion of Tsedryk's analysis and an alternative explanation that does not rely on the distinction between thetic and categorial judgments.

⁶ A consideration of the various alternatives proposed in the literature would take us too far afield, but see Grimshaw 1990, Franks 1991, or Pesetsky 1995 for discussion.

We now return to the dyadic unaccusative in (1b), repeated in (8):

- (8) Ego oslepilo molniej.
him_{ACC} blinded_[-AGR] lightning_{INST}
'He was blinded by lightning.'

The Theme argument occurs as one of two internal arguments, crucially for our purposes, as the less prominent one, subordinate to the Source (Natural Force) *molniej* 'lightning' at the relevant point in the derivation.

In the standard minimalist probe-goal system, v^0 values accusative case on the first NP in its domain. Although we concur with this general claim, it might seem at first blush peculiar that accusative is assigned to the lower rather than the higher potential target. The Source *molniej* not only does not get in the way but is in fact required for accusative to be assigned. We implement this intuition by merging the higher vP -internal argument, so long as it marks external (albeit, inanimate) causation, in the specifier of v_{CAUS} , where it does not intervene between v and its Theme target; this is shown in the structure in (19) below. v_{CAUS} is thus related to the caused event (denoted by V) via assignment of the Causer theta-role.⁹ Consider now the locative inversion structure in (9), repeated from (3a):

- (9) V komnatu zašli gosti.
into room entered guests_{NOM}
'Guests entered the room.'

⁷ Note that this account assumes a Larsonian model in which adjuncts and low roles such as Location are merged low syntactically.

⁸ We will see evidence that the non-Theme argument of dyadic unaccusatives (Instrument, Source, Natural Force) functions as a Causer, extending the domain of Pesetsky's original 1995 usage, which referred to the subject of Object Experiencer verbs. *Razbilo* 'broke' in (5) is thus "bimorphemic," containing in Pesetsky's theory null causative morphology. Compare (5) to its anti-causative counterpart in (i):

- (i) Vaza razbilas'.
vase_{NOM,F} broke_F
'The vase broke.'

In (i), *razbilas* 'broke' is a monadic unaccusative; the single Theme argument is correspondingly marked nominative.

⁹ See Pylkkänen 2000 for discussion, though not endorsement, of this view. Markman (2004) does not address the status of the Instrument/Source/Natural Force (Causer) argument in the dyadic unaccusative.

In (9), at the relevant point in the derivation, the Locative *v komnatu* ‘into the room’ is lower than *gosti* ‘guests’.¹⁰ Accusative is not valued in (9) because the probe first encounters the caseless Theme, but has no reason to value it as accusative since no other argument is yet visible; when the Location is encountered it is too late, there is no back-tracking. The observed pattern thus follows.

3.2 Implicit thematic prominence

Note that accusative occurs in the apparent monadic unaccusatives in (10–11), cited by Babby (forthcoming):

(10) Mašinu zaneslo na povorote, razvernuv ee poperek
 car_{ACC.F} threw_[-AGR] at bend having-turned_{GER} it_{ACC.F} across
 šosse.
 highway
 ‘The car skidded at the bend, having hurled it across the highway.’

(11) Lodku švyrnulo o pribrežnye kamni, čtoby tut že
 boat_{ACC} threw_[-AGR] against coastal rocks COMP immediately
 obrosit’ obratno v more.
 to-throw back into sea
 ‘The boat was thrown against the coastal rocks, only then to throw
 (it) back into the sea.’

Babby observes that there is an implicit Natural Force/Source argument which controls into the gerund in (10) and into the infinitive in (11).¹¹ This suggests that there is some kind of additional argument, i.e., not just

¹⁰ That is, accusative fails to be assigned at the *vP* level and it is only after *T*⁰ is merged that Locative Inversion (aka movement of the Locative to Spec, TP) can occur. EPP movement (cf. Lavine & Freidin 2002 or Bailyn 2004) applies more generally to derive the surface word order.

¹¹ Similar examples are mentioned in Mel’čuk 1995, and are further discussed in Testelec 2001 and Szucsich 2007. For Szucsich, the controller is a null, external “semantically bleached D,” the same argument that activates *v*⁰’s case-assigning property: “... *external select* is the prerequisite for [ACC] to be active” (2007, section 3.1). Note that, for us, this implicit argument is *vP-internal*. This analysis is suggested by the fact that an overt Natural Force/Source argument does not cooccur with this implicit controller. External causation, we will show, need not entail the presence of an external argument.

the Theme, even when that is all that is expressed. The accusative, then, follows in (10–11), as would be predicted on our account for any dyadic unaccusative: the Natural Force/Source establishes the necessary opposition that enables the accusative to be assigned to the Theme.

We now return to the absolute impersonal *tošnit* ‘to nauseate’. The example in (4) is repeated below as (12a), with some additional examples in (12b–c):

- (12) a. Mamu tošnit ot golovnoj boli.
 mother_{ACC} is-nauseated from head ache_{GEN}
 ‘Mother is nauseous from a headache.’
- b. Ot ètix DJ-ev tošnit očen’ mnogix ljudej.
 from these DJs_{GEN} is-nauseated very many people_{ACC}
 ‘A lot of people are sickened by these DJs.’ [Google]
- c. Ego stošnilo.
 him_{ACC} became-nauseated
 ‘He vomited.’

The case and valency pattern instantiated by *tošnit*, though rare, presents a problem for the analysis developed here, assuming that *tošnit* is monadic. If it is, then either Nominative First must be inapplicable (presumably, due to T⁰’s lack of agreement features, as proposed, for example, in Lavine & Freidin 2002) or else the examples in (12) are irrelevant to our analysis because they do not involve structural case at all. Harves (2002) contends that the Theme argument of *tošnit* is assigned lexical case. Lavine & Freidin (2002, section 3.1) argue explicitly against such an account based, in part, on the impossibility of a double-accusative construction in Russian, which is falsely predicted to occur on the lexical accusative analysis.¹² Moreover, as Lavine & Freidin point out, the same lexical accusative would also have to be posited for similar non-agreeing *-no/-to* passive constructions in Ukrainian, but these freely admit Genitive of Negation and Partitive Genitive, both diagnostics of

¹² Icelandic, which *does* have a lexical accusative, has double-accusative constructions such as (i), in which the Experiencer *okkur* ‘us’ is assigned lexical accusative case.

(i) Okkur vantaði vinnu.
 us_{ACC} lacked job_{ACC}
 ‘We lacked/needed a job.’

[Sigurðsson 2003]

structural case (although *tošnit'* admittedly resists them).¹³ A second problem with the lexical accusative proposal is the fact that it does not occur elsewhere in the language, aside from similar transitive impersonals, such as *ruku_{ACC} svelo* ‘my arm cramped’ or *uši_{ACC} založilo* ‘my ears clogged up’.

The general account we have proposed for other Accusative First constructions leads, instead, to the conclusion that *tošnit'* must in point of fact be dyadic. When overt, a Source argument is expressed by an *ot*-phrase, as in (12a–b), but even when silent, as in (12c), a Source is implicit. In this regard, *tošnit'* is no different from the dyadic unaccusatives in (10) and (11), where only the Theme is overt. The same analysis applies to *svelo* ‘cramped’ and *založilo* ‘clogged’ mentioned above: some unknown Force must be responsible for the cramping and clogging.

There is, of course, one sense in which *tošnit'* is unique: it has no counterpart, like (6) for (1b), in which the Source can be nominative. Apparently, nominative is unavailable here, due to specific lexical properties of the verb: *tošnit'* is morphologically defective in that it has no agreement features. Hence T⁰ cannot value nominative, so accusative valuation by *v*⁰ is the only option.

3.3 Variations on a Theme

Many open questions remain. In this section we return in light of the above proposals to several constructions that are potentially problematic for our account of Accusative First syntax. The most important of these is the so-called Psych Verb construction, as in (3b), repeated in (13):

- (13) Mne nadoela èta gazeta.
 me_{DAT} bored this newspaper_{NOM}
 ‘I’m tired of this newspaper.’

Clearly, in order for our system to accommodate (13), the Experiencer *mne* ‘me’ cannot be considered when cases are imposed on arguments in the mapping to PF, otherwise the Theme *èta gazeta* ‘this newspaper’

¹³ Genitive of negation on the object of Ukrainian *-no/-to* is illustrated in (i):

- (i) Genitive of Negation
 Na druhyj den’ ne bulo znajdeno joho čovna.
 on next day NEG was found_{NO/-TO} his boat_{GEN}
 ‘On the following day his boat wasn’t found.’

would be marked accusative. Tsedryk (2004) refers indirectly to thematic prominence in his account of the non-occurrence of impersonal transitive psych verbs, as in (14) compared to (15):

(14) *Ivana napugalo igruškoj.
Ivan_{ACC} frightened_[-AGR] toy_{INST}

(15) Ivana pridavilo igruškoj.
Ivan_{ACC} crushed_[-AGR] toy_{INST}
'Ivan was crushed by a toy.' [Tsedryk 2004: 434]

For Tsedryk, the contrast in grammaticality between (14) and (15) is due to a difference in predication. In the case of the psych verb, the Experiencer is singled out as the subject of a categorical predication and, correspondingly, lies outside the scope of the propositional VP. Dyadic unaccusatives, as in (15), contain athetic predication, identifying only the event, with no privileged “subject of” argument. Our treatment of the Experiencer argument relies on the intuition that the Experiencer VP is crucially not dominated by a v_{CAUS} projection. In other words, while the Experiencer predicate is arguably a dyadic unaccusative, with the Experiencer (in Spec, VP) higher than the Theme (as V’s complement), the mere thematic prominence of the Experiencer is not a sufficient condition to license accusative valuation on the Theme. To the extent that we can imagine the Theme *igruškoj* ‘toy’ in (14) as a Causer—for example, if the toy were flying around the room causing Ivan to be frightened—the sentence becomes more grammatical. Compare (14) to (16), where the Theme *igruškoj* is replaced by a Natural Force argument, yielding a dyadic unaccusative with the right semantics (v_{CAUS}) for accusative valuation (*groznoj* ‘storm’ introduces external causation, while the Theme *igruškoj*, conceived of as a toy lying on a shelf, does not):

(16) Ivana napugalo groznoj.
Ivan_{ACC} frightened_[-AGR] storm_{INST}
'Ivan was frightened by the storm.'

In a similar vein, note the ungrammaticality of (17), adapted from (1b), in which a monadic unaccusative (Theme only, no Causer) is coerced into a dyadic structure, with accusative on the Theme:

(17) *Šarik lopnulo gvozdem.
 balloon_{ACC} burst_[-AGR] nail_{INST}

(17) is ungrammatical because *lopnulo* ‘burst’ is not morphologically complex (it does not contain null causative morphology), as opposed to dyadic unaccusatives such as *razbilo* ‘broke’. Compare (17) with (18), where v_{CAUS} is needed to introduce instrumental *vetrom* ‘wind’:

(18) Šarik podbrosilo vverx vetrom.
 balloon_{ACC} threw upwards wind_{INST}
 ‘The balloon was thrown upwards by the wind.’

To summarize, Experiencers are excluded from the otherwise necessary thematic opposition for accusative valuation because they lack external causation, a property which they share with monadic unaccusatives. A phrase-structural account for these facts is provided by Markman (2004), following Pykkänen (2002). We adapt Markman’s structure to accommodate the Causer argument of dyadic unaccusatives, as in (19):¹⁴

(19) [_{V-CAUSEP} DP_{CAUSER} v_{CAUSE} [ACC] [VP [V’ V DP_{THEME}]]]

As Markman notes, the structure in (19) implies that dyadic unaccusatives contain two events: the causing event and the event denoted by the verb. On our analysis, V raises to v_{CAUS} to join with its null causative morpheme, where it is in a position to theta-mark (and thereby assign “semantic case” to) its specifier. The accusative probe, indicated by the dotted line, is the v_{CAUS} itself. Note that monadic (or “true) unaccusatives are mono-eventive. Accusative First syntax then arises as a result of the

¹⁴ We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the merger of the higher vP argument in Spec, vP, thereby allowing the Theme to be visible for v’s accusative probe. See Pykkänen 2002 for details on the relationship between v_{VOICE} and v_{CAUS} crosslinguistically. The v_{VOICE} head projects an Agent (following Kratzer 1996) and v_{CAUS} introduces causative semantics, via an overt Causer on our analysis. See Lavine 2000, Lavine & Freidin 2002, and Bowers 2002, *inter alia*, on the necessity of treating Agency and a predicate’s accusative case-assigning potential as distinct properties.

presence of the argument introducing the causing event. According to the thematic dependency we have described, in order to yield accusative marking on the Theme argument of dyadic unaccusatives it is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition that the Theme be opposed to a higher argument, linked to covert causative morphology in *v* (cf. *lopnut'* versus *razbit'*).¹⁵ As Markman proposes, if Burzio's Generalization is modified to state that accusative is dependent on *some* form of external causation, rather than on the presence of an Agent *per se*, then the often made claim from Slavic linguistics that dyadic unaccusatives in Russian contradict Burzio's Generalization is significantly weakened.

4. Extensions to Ukrainian

Finally, we extend our findings to Ukrainian *-no/-to* + accusative constructions.¹⁶ The passive *-no/-to* construction in (20a–b), a derived unaccusative, is decidedly monadic.¹⁷ Since accusative surfaces on the Theme, this is potentially problematic for our account:

- (20) a. Narešti cju mohylu bulo vzjato pid oxoronu deržavy.
 finally this grave_{ACC} was taken_[–AGR] under protection state_{GEN}
 'Finally this grave was taken under the protection of the state.'
 b. Hroši bude znajdeno.
 money_{ACC} will-be found_[–AGR]
 'The money will be found.'

The examples in (20) show that Accusative First syntax must have a source beyond the *v*P-internal dependency we have described. If the inflectional system of a language makes available an impersonal (defective) paradigm, accusative ceases to compete with nominative for

¹⁵ We follow the standard assumption that projection of v_{VOICE} , with its attendant external (Agent) argument, is also a sufficient condition to activate the accusative case assigning potential of the *v*-complex in the more common case of transitive predicates.

¹⁶ Polish *-no/-to* + accusative is actually an active construction with a fully thematic external argument, hence is not relevant to our analysis; see Lavine 2005 for discussion.

¹⁷ Implicit subject tests, such as binding and control into embedded gerundive clauses, systematically fail in Ukrainian *-no/-to* passives (cf. e.g. Lavine 2005).

case-marking of the predicate's sole argument.¹⁸ Accusative marking is in fact the only option. Non-agreeing Tense does not admit nominative marking; cf. Haider 2000, Lavine & Freidin 2002, and Lavine 2005. Note that this type of analysis extends naturally to the Russian *tošnit'* type discussed in section 3.2, under an alternative analysis of *tošnit'* as a monadic unaccusative. Indeed, default or non-agreeing morphology as a lexical resource is a necessary condition for any of the impersonal transitive constructions we have discussed. These constructions will not occur in languages lacking this lexical resource (such as English).¹⁹

There is no requirement, however, that Ukrainian *-no/-to* pattern exclusively with predicate types that are passivizable. The construction in (21a–b) is a dyadic unaccusative, like Russian (1b), resulting in the expected accusative marking on the Theme. Ukrainian *-no/-to* applies to these dyadic unaccusatives (Instrument/Source + Theme) with no change in the underlying case pattern: the Theme surfaces as accusative, in opposition to the thematically more prominent Causer_{INST} argument:

- (21) a. Nyzynu zalyto vodoju.
 lowland_{ACC} flooded_[-AGR] water_{INST}
 ‘The lowlands have been flooded with water.’
 b. Joho oslipleno blyskavkoju.
 him_{ACC} blinded_[-AGR] lightning_{INST}
 ‘He was blinded by lightning.’ [compare Russian (1b)]

Note that if Ukrainian *-no/-to* + accusative can apply to unaccusative (agentless) predicates, one might wonder, as we did earlier, why accusative is not available more generally in this construction. Since nominative is not available for the sole argument of monadic unaccusatives in *-no/-to* (due to non-agreeing Tense), it is reasonable to ask, in light of the data in (21), if accusative can be assigned instead. Basic unaccusatives in Ukrainian do not have a *-no/-to* form, as exemplified in (22); cf. Russian (17):

¹⁸ As indicated by the gloss in (20) and elsewhere, Ukrainian *-no/-to* is not neuter, but is rather a dedicated marker of non-agreement. The neuter singular ending is *-e*.

¹⁹ As Pyllkänen (2000 and 2002) notes, English also lacks a v_{CAUS} projection independent from v_{VOICE} , hence accusative case valuation and external agency are not separable properties in the language; see also Markman 2004.

(22) * Šar lopnuto (cvjaxom).
 balloon_{ACC} burst_[-AGR] nail_{INST}

The hypothetical form *lopnuto* ‘burst’ does not exist, precisely due to its monovalence (or, more specifically, its mono-eventive interpretation).

Now consider (23):

(23) Cju dorohu bulo zrujnovano.
 this road_{ACC} was destroyed_[-AGR]
 ‘This road was destroyed.’

Interestingly, it is possible to interpret (23) as a non-passive if the event is conceived of as containing a null Natural Force/Source/Instrument argument to which the Theme is opposed (e.g., *hrozaju* ‘storm’ or *tankamy* ‘tanks’); cf. comparable Russian (5).

In this paper we have examined the long-standing controversy between (dependency-based) Nominative First and (bottom-up) Accusative First approaches to case. We argued that a compromise model, one couched in terms of Multiple Spell-Out but modulated by the presence of thematic opposition, is best suited to resolve empirical problems in the analysis of various transitive impersonal constructions in Slavic. Burzio’s Generalization is reduced to a statement of Nominative First in conjunction with the *v*P-internal dependency we describe. Accusative valuation can occur “early,” within the *v*P phase, with accusative subsequently spelled out, whether or not the predicate is Agentive and prior to T⁰’s merger.

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