

Unaccusatives and the Lexicon: The Value of Meaning

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is the unaccusative hypothesis?

The Unaccusative Hypothesis was first stated by David Perlmutter in the 1978 *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*; it is stated as such:

Certain intransitive clauses have an initial 2 but no initial 1. [7, pg 160]

He follows his definition with the quintessential example, presented here in a simplified stratal diagram, rather than the diagram from the original text:

2	P
1	P
Gorillas	exist

Perlmutter presents his hypothesis as a rebuttal to the analyses that had arisen of impersonal passives in languages such as Dutch which proposed that the impersonal passive should be characterized as an (unmotivated or spontaneous) demotion of 1 to chômeur. Several years earlier, Perlmutter had proposed with Postal that the passive could universally be treated as 2 to 1 advancement. The alternate proposal would have posed a serious challenge to his and Postal’s Motivated Chômeur Law (MCL). Let us digress momentarily and discuss the MCL within the context of the foundations of Relational Grammar. In *Studies in Relational Grammar (SRG)* Perlmutter, Rosen, et al. describe the Chômeur Law as “one of the cornerstones¹ of the relational approach to clause structure” [10]; the law states that (put informally), in a clause, if a term N_a bears a relation in a stratum and a different term N_b bears that relation in the following stratum, then the first term N_a will bear the chômeur relation in that following stratum. That law leaves open the logical possibility that a term will bear the chômeur relation as a result of some other situation besides its antecedent; the MCL explicitly closes that possibility—it essentially adds an *iff* to the Chômeur Law, which implies that chômeurs can only arise as a result of relation shifts of other

¹Presumably, along with the Stratal Uniqueness Law

terms and forbids chômeurs in initial strata, as well as so-called ‘unmotivated’ or ‘spontaneous’ chômeurs.

Perlmutter goes on to differentiate the unaccusative from the passive in that the unaccusative is advancement from an *intransitive* stratum. It is important to note that the Unaccusative Hypothesis has independent motivation—it provides an explanation for the ‘impersonal’ passive, but is not merely an accommodation of it. Indeed, unaccusative verbs have been attested in myriad languages. In Dutch, Perlmutter provides ample examples of the linguistic relevance of the unergative/unaccusative distinction of intransitive verbs. Unergatives allow the impersonal passive, while unaccusatives do not. A particularly clear example is the pair²:

- (68) a. In de zomer wordt er hier vaak gezwommen.
‘In the summer it is swum here frequently.’
b. *In de zomer wordt er hier vaak verdronken.
‘In the summer it is drowned here frequently.’

This technique is an example of what we can call an ‘unaccusativity test.’ These tests are generally language-specific, although historically related languages may share tests.

1.2 The unaccusative hypothesis and the lexicon: alternatives

Later on in his seminal 1978 article, Perlmutter elaborates on the nature of the unaccusative hypothesis across languages. Since his formulation is the basis for the present paper, we present it in its original form [7, pg 161]:

One can distinguish (at least) three different forms of the Unaccusative Hypothesis.:

- (17) a. Initial unaccusativity vs. unergativity varies from language to language. There is no way to predict which clauses in a given language will be initially unergative and which initially unaccusative.
b. There exist principles which predict initial unergativity or initial unaccusativity for a certain class of initially intransitive clauses in all languages. There exists another class of such clauses whose initial unergativity vs. unaccusativity varies from language to language.
c. There exist universal principles which predict initial unergativity vs. unaccusativity for all initially intransitive clauses in all languages. Initial unergativity vs. unaccusativity therefore cannot vary from language to language.

Perlmutter indicates that (17c) is the “strongest and most interesting hypothesis” and suggests that it “be tested thoroughly for a variety of languages.” He does not

²Where possible, the author’s original numbering is used.

make a serious attempt to settle the issue, but does provide guidance to those who are to take up the task. We will return to the topic of semantic guidance in Section 1.3.2.

Our goal in this paper is twofold: (1) to make some statement about which of the three versions (17a-c) of the Unaccusative Hypothesis is the most plausible, based on a cross-linguistic study, and (2) to introduce some unaccusativity tests for languages that are new in this realm—such as Bulgarian.

1.3 Previous work

1.3.1 In a Relational Grammar framework

As Perlmutter suggested, others have taken up the question of the specific nature of the Unaccusative Hypothesis. Carol Rosen explored the topic in volume two of SRG [11]. She makes reference to a generalization of the idea implied in the three versions (17a-c) of the Unaccusative Hypothesis: the Universal Alignment Hypothesis (UAH). The UAH says that

There exists some set of universal principles on the basis of which, given the semantic representation of a clause, one can predict which initial GR [Grammatical Relation] each nominal bears.

Rosen provides evidence from Italian, Sanskrit, Albanian, Choctaw, Dutch, Lakhota, and Turkish that support a conclusion contrary to the UAH:

That initial GRs *cannot be reconstructed by means of any possible algorithm that refers to meaning alone*

Building on Perlmutter's 1978 treatment of Italian (which later appeared in Probus [8]), Rosen considers several forms of evidence for the valence of an intransitive predicate (whether it is unergative or unaccusative): choice of auxiliary (*essere* vs. *avere*), distribution of the *si* clitic, participial absolutes, and the partitive clitic *ne*. She considers an even weaker statement of the UAH, one she terms the Little Alignment Hypothesis:

For any one predicate in any one language, there is a fixed mapping which aligns each semantic role with an initial GR [Grammatical Relation]. This alignment remains invariant for all clauses with that predicate.

However, after finding evidence such as:

- (50) a. Aldo ha fuggito ogni tentazione.
 'Aldo fled all temptation.'
- b. Aldo è fuggito.
 'Aldo fled.'
- (51) a. Bertini ha deviato il colpo.
 'Bertini deflected the blow.'

- b. Il colpo ha deviato.
'The blow went awry.'

Rosen concludes that “in these rare cases where the Little Alignment Hypothesis is disconfirmed, so is the Universal Alignment Hypothesis, a fortiori” [11].

Here we realize the values of this sort of work, on the lexicon and grammatical relations. As Rosen notes, the results from Italian and the other languages she considers indicate that the lexicon must register, at least in some cases, the initial grammatical relations of verbs. Moreover, these results lead us to make a prediction about the increased ‘cost’ of entries for verbs that differ in the initial role they assign as intransitives from what would be expected given their transitive form (such as Rosen’s (50) and (51) above). Finally, they suggest that syntactic rules in a phrasal rewriting framework absolutely must have access to initial grammatical relations “for that fact has definite syntactic consequences.” [11, pg 55]³

It is these sorts of assertions that the present work hopes to scrutinize.

1.3.2 Guidance

In [11], Rosen recognizes that there are patterns of ‘resemblance’ or ‘tendencies’ in intransitive predicate type, such as those provided by Perlmutter in [7] and repeated by Perlmutter and Postal in [9]. Let us briefly repeat this list—although in abridged form—here.⁴

1. Predicates determining initially unergative clauses:
 - (a) Predicates describing willed or volitional acts. Examples: work, play, speak, talk, smile
 - (b) Involuntary bodily processes. Examples: cough, sneeze, hiccough, belch
2. Predicates determining initially unaccusative clauses:
 - (a) Predicates expressed by adjectives in English. Examples: (This is a very large class, including predicates describing sizes, shapes, weights, colors, smells, states of mind, etc.)
 - (b) Predicates whose initial nuclear term is semantically a Patient. Examples: burn, fall, drop, sink, float
 - (c) Predicates of existing and happening. Examples: exist, happen, occur, transpire, inchoatives such as arise, ensue, end up
 - (d) Involuntary emission of stimuli that impinge on the senses. Examples: shine, sparkle, glow, snap, stink

³Rosen’s article also provides support for a major theme of the SRG series, that monostratal frameworks are not adequate for representing generalizations about grammatical relations across languages. See chapter one of SRG volume 2 [10] for a review of several monostratal theories and the passive.

⁴Perlmutter credits earlier linguists who have noticed similar distinctions. [7, pg 165] Many such distinctions have revolved around the notion that some verbs express actions while others verbs express state. The presented tendencies build upon more basic distinctions such as those.

- (e) Aspectual predicates. Examples: begin, start, stop
- (f) Duratives. Examples: last, remain, stay, survive (Note: perhaps these should be considered a subclass of group 2c above.)

After their presentation of the list, Postal and Perlmutter go on to assume the Universal Alignment Hypothesis and discuss its interactions with the 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law, which we will not discuss here.

Postal and Perlmutter’s position is much stronger than Rosen’s and thus much more difficult to defend. Rosen finds flaws in the volitional category of unergative verbs as it applies to Choctaw. She presents a list of predicates that are non-volitional and in fact broadly cover the categories for unaccusative predicates provided above, but, in particular languages, *nevertheless take initial 1s*, including: sparkle, float, creak, loom, stink, and foam. She relabels the inadequately named ‘involuntary bodily processes’ as ‘Processes whose domain is an animate body,’ but finds that a class by any other name would still present the same difficulty for the UAH; Italian, Albanian and Dutch assign ‘snore’ an initial 1 and ‘blush’ an initial 2. More difficulty abounds in establishing clear semantic boundaries when, as Rosen has, we examine the class of motion verbs. Directionality and manner affect the choice of unergative vs. unaccusative for verbs such as run: ‘Ugo ran better yesterday’ assigns an initial 1, while ‘Ugo ran home’ an initial 2.

In the present work, we continue the investigation into the validity of the UAH. We will consider verbs from a few languages, including Basque, Lakhota, and Bulgarian, in the hope that the argument against the UAH will be made stronger. Another goal of this work, as stated earlier, is to add to the list of known unaccusativity tests based on an analysis of Bulgarian.

2 Methodology

2.1 Basque

Basque is a language isolate spoken in Northern Spain, surrounded by Romance languages yet itself pre-Indo-European. It is commonly cited as an ergative-absolutive language but has also been called ‘extended’ ergative. This is because—although, as in traditional ergative-absolutive languages, bivalent (transitive) verbs assign their 1 ergative case and their 2 absolutive case—monovalent (intransitive) verbs can assign their surface subject *either* ergative or absolutive case. The unaccusatives assign absolutive (NOR) case, which is 0-marked, the unergatives assign ergative (NORK) case [2]:

- (499) a. *Jonek ardoa ekarri du.* (transitive)
Jon.ERG wine.DET.(ABS) bring AUX
‘Jon brought the wine.’
- b. *Jonek saltatu du.* (unergative)
Jon.ERG jump AUX
‘Jon jumped.’

- c. *Jon etorri da.* (unaccusative)
 Jon(ABS) come AUX
 ‘Jon came.’

A very thorough treatment of the nature of Basque intransitive verbs exists credit to Beth Levin and Jon Ortiz de Urbina [1, 3, 6]. The evidence for two classes of intransitive verbs as indicated above includes the distribution of the partitive case [6, pg 48], auxiliary selection of *izan* and *uzak*⁵ [6, pg 44], and the [Noun *egin* - ‘to do’] construction.

2.1.1 Brief introduction to Basque verb classes

According to Beth Levin, true Basque intransitive verbs are overwhelmingly unaccusative. Transitive verbs are NOR-NORK verbs; they assign NORK to their initial 1 and NOR to their initial 2. She presents ‘The NOR Verb Hypothesis’ [3, pg 298]:

Only verbs with a patient single argument are NOR verbs. Other verbs will not be NOR verbs. (They might be NOR-NORK verbs or NORK verbs.)

In other words, verbs that assign their lone argument an initial 2 role are NOR verbs. She goes on to suggest that the reader:

Consider the make up of the NOR verb class. There are certain distinct semantic generalizations associated with the agent and patient classes.

This is reminiscent of Perlmutter’s semantic correlates and thus we repeat Levin’s list here:

1. Verbs of motion: joan ‘to go’, etorri ‘to come’, ibli ‘to walk’, etc.
2. Verbs of Change of State or Position: ireki ‘to open’, apurtu ‘to break’, etc.
3. Verbs of Emotional Reaction: harritu ‘to be surprised’, izutu ‘to be frightened’, etc.
4. Verbs of Existence and Occurrence: gertatu ‘to happen’, egon ‘to stay/be’, agertu ‘to appear’, etc.
5. Aspectual Verbs: amaitu ‘to end’, hasi ‘to begin’, bukatu ‘to end’, etc.
6. Other: ezkondu ‘to be married’, maitemindu ‘to fall in love’, baliuatu ‘to make use of’, etc.

She goes on to refer to the NOR class as a ‘patient verb class’ [3, pg 300]. We will return to her list and consider NOR verbs in more detail in Section 3.

The monovalent verbs initializing their argument as a 1 in other languages are often expressed using what Levin calls ‘The N EGIN Construction.’ This construction can

⁵Reminiscent of the distribution of the *essere* and *avere* in Italian

be translated as ‘to do *N*,’ where *N* takes values such as ‘greet, laugh, shout, cough, escape, wink, work’, etc. Levin explains that these verbs ‘correspond to intransitive verbs in English whose argument bears the agent semantic role’—in other words, the monovalent verbs that initialize a sole argument as a 1: unergatives. We will return to the N EGIN class in Section 3.

2.2 Bulgarian

Bulgarian is a Slavic language of the Southern or Eastern South Slavic family spoken in Bulgaria and neighboring communities, including Macedonia, Romania, Greece and others. The only grammar of Bulgarian currently available in English is Scatton [12]. Two candidates are considered here as clues to unaccusativity in Bulgarian: the distribution of the *se* reflexive marker and participial adjectives.

2.2.1 The *se* reflexive marker

Scatton’s grammar [12, pg 341-346] explains that there exists a class of verbs always accompanied by *se*, which are themselves always intransitive⁶:

1. Smjaj se ‘laugh’
2. Strahuvaj se ‘fear’
3. Boj se ‘fear’
4. Gordjaj se ‘be proud of’
5. Bori se ‘fight, wrestle’

Se can also adorn the intransitive form of some transitive verbs:

1. Vylnuvaj⁷ (se) ‘excite [someone] (be excited)’
2. Jadosvaj (se) ‘anger [someone] (be angry)’

Se can also be used productively for the present passive:

1. Tuk se prodava xlab. ‘Here bread is sold. (lit: Here *se* sold bread.)’
2. Kak se kazvate? ‘What is your name? (lit: How *se* called [2ndSG]?)’

And for the desiderative:

1. Spi mi se. ‘I want to sleep. (lit: Sleep to me.)’
2. Ne mi se jade. ‘I do not want to eat. (lit: Not to me eat.)’

And to indicate permission:

⁶These five are given in the imperative

⁷We use < *y* > here to represent the mid-central vowel that has been called both *schwa* and *wedge*

1. Tuk ne se pushi. ‘No smoking. (lit: Here not is smoked.)’
2. V drugata staja se tantsuva. ‘The other room is for dancing. (lit: In the other room is danced.)’

And, of course, for truly reflexive as well as reciprocal verbs:

1. Mija se. ‘[1stSG] wash [myself].’
2. Oblichate se. ‘[2ndPL] dress [yourself/yourself].’
3. Tseluvat se. ‘[3rdPL] kiss one another.’
4. Obichame se. ‘[1stPL] love one another.’

The *se* marker clearly will not make for a reliable test of unaccusativity vs. unergativity in Bulgarian, but it does beg for analysis—and especially within a relational framework. The desiderative and permission uses seem particularly interesting and may provide evidence for an interesting analysis of *se*; the unergative-seeming ‘laugh’ and ‘fear’ of the first set of examples are also inviting—an analysis incorporating retroherent unaccusative and antipassive constructions may be possible there.

Let us briefly sketch out such an analysis, while keeping in mind that it is *very tentative*. The goal of an analysis of *se* is a statement about the distribution of it that ideally is not disjunctive; the same rule should account for all of its uses. The reflexive and reciprocal uses of *se* immediately point us toward a multiattachment analysis. First, though, consider that there exist two forms of the passive in Bulgarian:

The passive participle with ‘to be’ auxiliary:

2		P	1
1		P	Cho
1	P	Cho	Cho
Pismoto	shte byde	napisano	ot mene.
letter.DEF	be.3rdSG.FUT	write.PP	1stSG.BY
The letter	will be	written	by me.

And a more common form with ‘se’:

2		P	1
2,1		P	Cho
1		P	Cho
1	P	Cho	Cho
Pismoto	shte	se izprati	ot mene.
letter.DEF	be.3rdSG.FUT	SE.send.3rdSG.PAST	1stSG.BY
The letter	will be	sent	by me.

The *se* marks multiattachment, and we can consider the second form of the Bulgarian passive to be the retroherent passive. The initial 2 of ‘send’, ‘letter,’ advances to 1 but also maintains its 2-hood.

Our analysis of the reflexive and reciprocal⁸ verbs is now also one of multiattachment:

⁸Here is an interesting wrinkle: *si* is the form of *se* that marks the presence of an indirect object. We analyze it as marking 1,3 multiattachment, but this issue warrants further investigation.

1,2 P
 1 P
 Nadka *se* mie.
 Nadka SE.BEN.wash.3rdSG
 Nadka washes (herself).
 1,3 P
 1 P
 Te ne *si* govorqt.
 3rdPL NEG.SE.speak.3rdPL
 They do not speak (to eachother).

Now we begin to unravel some of the opaque uses of *se*, such as for intransitive forms of transitive verbs:

1,2 P
 1 P
 Detsata *se* skriha.
 Children.DET SE.hide.3rdPL
 The children hid (themselves).

And the permission-type constructions (which are really Impersonal Constructions):

Obl P 1
 Obl P 1,2
 Obl P 1
 Tuk ne *se* pushi.
 Here NOT.SE.smoke.3rdSG. [Unspec]
 Smoking is not allowed here

We analyze these as retroherent anti-passive constructions. The initial 1 of ‘smoke’ is demoted to 2, maintaining its 1-hood, and then advances back to 1 to uphold the Final 1 Law.

Within these *se* constructions, we can start to look for an indication of verb valence. Consider the desiderative *se* with a transitive verb:

P 1 2
 P 3 2
 P 3 2,1
 P 3 1
 Pie mi *se*.
 Drink.3rdSG 1stSG.TO.SE [Unspec]
 I feel like drinking.

And now with an intransitive we expect to be unergative:

P	1	2
P	3	2
P	3	2,1
P	3	1
Raboti mi <i>se</i> .		
Work.3rdSG	1stSG.TO.SE	[Unspec]
I	feel like working.	

Finally, let us attempt what we can now call *retroherent desiderative inversion* with an unaccusative:

P	*2/3	2
P	3	2
P	3	2,1
P	3	1
Pokazva mi <i>se</i> .		
Appear.3rdSG	1stSG.TO.SE	[Unspec]
I*	feel like appearing.	
It	appears to me.	

This example is unambiguous—the only grammatical reading is that an unspecified third-person singular something is appearing. A more appropriate translation may be ‘Something reveals itself to me.’ The reading wherein the speaker is the thing that appears or reveals itself is impossible. It would be expressed as a biclausal with the desiderative conjugated in the third-person singular regardless of the subject of the main verb, using the versatile conjunction *da*:

Iska mi se da porastna.
 I want to grow up.
 (lit: [Unspec] wants to me to grow up.)

After a deeper understanding of *se* is obtained and the analysis sketched out here is set on more solid ground, it is in this family of desiderative constructions that we should look for alternations in the intransitive verbs.

2.2.2 Participial Adjectives

A robust clue to initial role selection (another name for unergativity vs unaccusativity) is the ability to create a participial adjective from a predicate. This idea is due to Perlmutter’s early work on the Unaccusative Hypothesis and appears as ‘Argument Two’ in [8, pgs 69-71]. As Perlmutter points out, in Italian, transitive verbs can form a participial adjective construction:

- (29) a. le arancie mangiate
 ‘the oranges (that were) eaten’
 b. le arancie mangiate dai bambini
 ‘the oranges eaten by the children’

As can some initially intransitive verbs:

- (31) a. Le persone *comparse* all'improvviso non hanno detto niente
 'The people who appeared unexpectedly said nothing'
 b. Le persone *rimaste* sono tutte ubriache
 'The people who remained are all drunk'

But not others:

- (32) a. *le persone parlate
 'the people spoken'
 b. *le donne gridate
 'the ladies shouted'

Under the Unaccusative Hypothesis, the condition on participial adjectives in Italian is:

- (34) A participial adjective can be formed on a nominal heading a 2-arc.

The formulation of this argument is nearly identical to the argument for a similar criterion on participial absolutes, which precedes it in the text [8, pgs 67-68]. We attempt to export this construction to Bulgarian and use it to make the same distinction:

1. Portokalite brani vchera ot dvora...
 'The oranges picked yesterday in the yard...' (transitive)
2. Horata izoztanali tuka vsichki sa piqni.
 'The people who remain here are drunk.' (unaccusative)

And progress to the unergative example:

1. Horata pluvani v ezeroto kapeha.
 'The people swum in the lake dripped.' (unergative)

And are disappointed to find that it is *grammatical* in Bulgarian. In fact, the participial is completely productive over verbs. Let us reconsider the transitive case:

1. Horata brali portokali vchera se izpekoha.
 'The people (who) picked oranges yesterday tanned.'

This reading is impossible in English, as well as Italian and Slovenian [5], but is fine in Bulgarian, as are participial constructions that act on initial 1s of unergatives, initial 2s of unaccusatives, and either initial argument of transitive verbs. Just as with English -ing gerunds, grammaticality of Bulgarian participial adjectives is not conditioned upon valence; the same loss of restriction occurred with participial adjectives in Russian.

2.3 Alternatives and Possibilities

Where can we turn now? Our standard inventory of unaccusativity tests is sadly unavailable in Bulgarian. The ‘It is danced here’ impersonal passive used in Dutch [7] is completely productive to form the ‘permission’-type sentences with *se*; the Russian genitive-under-negation does not work; Bulgarian lacks monoclausal causatives, and Bulgarian has no auxiliary selection, which would be most clear. We are not the first to seek unaccusative tests and come up empty-handed: Angelina Markova reached the same finding [4]. Although she supposed that a ‘locative inversion’ clue from Russian may be applicable, her diagnostic would expect examples such as ‘In the garden play the children’ and ‘In the handkerchief sneezed the man’ to be ungrammatical. Unfortunately, they are not.

And where does this leave us? We can do no more at this juncture than to reiterate that *se* begs for in-depth analysis; Scatton repeatedly hints that ‘certain’ classes of intransitive verbs pattern with *se*—although his examples fall seemingly arbitrarily across the categories provided by Perlmutter. Adequate explanation of its distribution must be provided, and may shed light on the nature of so-called ‘split intransitivity’ in Bulgarian, as well.

3 Results

3.1 Basque

3.1.1 N EGIN anomalies

The first anomaly we will mention is from Ortiz de Urbina’s Government and Binding approach to Basque [6]. Recall the [Noun *egin*] construction in Basque. Ortiz de Urbina and Levin both describe this construction, which allows nouns that form traditionally unergative predicates:

lan - work	negar - cry
irri - laugh	hitz - talk
alde - leave	galde - ask
igeri - swim	ihes - flee

However, as Ortiz de Urbina says [6, pg 45]:

It should be noticed that this set of verbs is not made up exclusively by semantically unergative predicates, although they make up the vast majority of *egin* verbs. Unaccusative and transitive verbs like the following can also be found: *laprast egin* ‘to slip’, *porrot egin* ‘to go bankrupt’, *agur egin* ‘to greet’, etc.

The class also contains several other curiosities. From Perlmutter’s ‘Predicates whose initial nuclear term is semantically a patient,’ we find the intransitive form of ‘to boil’ *irakin* as well as two forms of the ‘Non-voluntary emission of stimuli that impinge

on the senses' category member 'to shine': *diztira egin* and *argitu*⁹ Note, however, that this category, which also includes 'sparkle, glitter, glisten, jingle, pop, stink' and many others, has already been shown to consist mainly of unergative predicates.

etsi - 'to get disillusioned'

sufritu - 'to suffer'

iraun - 'to last'

jarraitu - 'to continue'

In the same footnote, he addresses *irakin* - 'to boil', mentioned above.

One might be tempted to include [it] as another [exception]. However, this may be a bona fide unergative predicate, since it is also treated as such in Georgian. It may be considered a member of the 'emission of stimuli' semantic class.

3.1.2 Levin's NOR classes

Recall that Levin hypothesized NOR verbs to be exclusively initially unaccusative—that they initialize a lone 2 argument. The semantic characterization of this class of so-called 'patient verbs' according to Levin also contains several inconsistencies. In her 'Verbs of Motion' class, we find *ibli* 'to walk;' look no further than the very first set of Perlmutter's initially unergative clauses 'willed or volitional acts' subclass and you will find a verb that (except in the case of somnambulism) is unequivocally volitional: *walk*.

It is no subtle clue to the difficulty of establishing rules of universal alignment that Levin included one miscellaneous category in her characterization: *Other*. Although one can imagine cases in which the act would not be volitional in the traditional sense, *ezkondu* 'to be married' appears in this class, as does an even more convincing example: *baliatu* 'to make use of.' There is no situation that comes to mind in which the initial argument of *baliatu* could be anything but a 1.

She also mentions in a footnote that her hypothesis is not without exception [3, pg 307]:

I know of only one exception, the verb *mintzatu* "to speak" is a NOR verb. This appears to be the only verb of communication that is a NOR verb. In fact this is the only counter-example I am aware of to the generalization concerning NOR class membership. And, it appears that there is a dialectal variation as to what auxiliary it requires. [It is cited] as a NOR-NORK verb in the Navarro-Labourdin dialect.

The last bit about dialectic variation should not be taken as a mere curiosity. One may respond to our attempt here as unfair: of course we will find inconsistencies with Perlmutter's semantic tendencies across languages. A true defense of the strongest statement of the Unaccusative Hypothesis should be preconditioned upon a set of semantic correlates that has been well-developed and investigated—the first pass at

⁹Ortiz de Urbina does not provide the *egin* form of this second example, although *argi egin* seems likely.

such a set is inevitably going to contain inaccuracies. Armed with an example such as *mintzatu*, however, we can leverage a critique not of the strongest statement of the Unaccusative Hypothesis modulo Universal Alignment Hypothesis, but *at its weakest form* (as stated by Perlmutter). Recall:

Initial unaccusativity vs. unergativity varies from language to language. There is no way to predict which clauses in a given language will be initially unergative and which initially unaccusative.

Now we can go one step further:

Initial unaccusativity vs. unergativity varies from *dialect to dialect*. There is no way to predict which speakers of the language will consider a given term initially unergative and which initially unaccusative.

We could call this *The Absolutely No Alignment Hypothesis* and look for dialectical variation in initial grammatical roles in other languages of the world in an attempt to solidify its acceptance. However, that would be missing the point. Recall Levin's introduction of the NOR verb class; in our earlier reference to it, we omitted her important qualification [3, pg 299]:

There are certain distinct semantic generalizations associated with the agent and the patient classes, *even if a precise semantic characterization of either class impossible*.

4 Conclusion

Clearly, semantic tendencies such as those noted by Perlmutter and by Levin are not completely happenstance. It is very *likely* that a monovalent predicate that is semantically volitional will assign its argument a 1 role, and the exceptions to that tendency are exactly that—exceptions. That they exist does not mean we should ignore semantic tendencies altogether and adopt something like the Absolutely No Alignment Hypothesis. As we investigate verb classes across languages, we should keep in mind the suggested tendencies, since some of them have a good chance of pointing us in the right direction. However, we should not blindly adopt the strongest statement of the Unaccusative Hypothesis, and we should not treat the Universal Alignment Hypothesis (or the Universal Theta-Role Assignment Hypothesis) as given—clearly, calling them *Universal* is wishful thinking. The reality is that there are exceptions to these tendencies and our grammatical descriptions of languages need to be based on observed and analysed phenomena within those languages (and possibly within specific dialects of them, as we saw with Basque); we cannot transplant our conclusions about valence directly from one language to another.

There is also something to be said about the lexicon, based on what we have found here. As Rosen concluded in [11], it is clear that, at least for some predicates in a language, the lexicon must contain explicit information about initial grammatical

roles. It may be that—without exception—adjectives or nouns assign their argument a 2 role, and other such universals may apply to a language. We must acknowledge, though, that some intransitive verbs in languages exhibiting so-called split intransitivity must be associated explicitly with their grammatical roles in the lexicon.

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