

# Remarks on Object Case in the North Russian Perfect

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## ABSTRACT

This paper assesses two competing strategies for the assignment of object case. The configurational strategy states that nominative is the first structurally assigned case in the clause, thereby predicting the licit and widespread appearance of nominative on the object in the North Russian Perfect, in which the subject appears in an oblique *u* ‘at’ + NP:GEN prepositional phrase. Configurational case is tested against a case-assignment strategy that relies on local agreement with features of functional heads, such as subject-predicate agreement (for nominative) and Voice (for accusative), as in recent generative models. On this latter strategy, we would expect no source for nominative on the object in the absence of subject-predicate agreement, i.e. in the non-agreeing variety of the North Russian Perfect. It is claimed here that nominative occurs regularly on the object in the North Russian Perfect by (auxiliary) agreement only. In absolute non-agreeing varieties of the construction, nominative objects are rare, contrary to the predications of the configurational case-assigning strategy, while entirely consistent with the local, feature-based theory of object case advanced in this paper.

## 1. Introduction: Configurational Case<sup>1</sup>

There is a long tradition in the literature of treating the nominative as “innocent” or “default” in the sense that it is the most unmarked case (Jakobson 1936) and therefore expected to be deployed on the object precisely in those circumstances in which it fails to appear on the subject or Agent (Timberlake 1974; Comrie 1975). The common thread in this thinking about nominative is that it is the least “costly” case. Structural case, conceived of in this way, is referred to as “configurational.” The configurational strategy for structural-case assignment states that the particular case-marking on one nominal depends on whether there is another nominal in the same clause. Case is thereby assigned by refer-

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1 The North and Northwestern Russian data presented here come from published sources on the syntax of these dialects, particularly Matveenko 1961, Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971, Markova 1987, and Kuz'mina 1993.

ence to the properties of *both* structurally case-marked arguments taken together. While accusative is normally assigned on the object in the presence of a nominative-marked subject, if the subject is marked by an oblique case or prepositional phrase, then the next highest argument (the direct object) is assigned nominative, as the unmarked case, with no loss of distinguishability. This mechanism of case assignment is often referred to as a “global strategy,” since case is crucially not determined on this account locally. Configurational case finds its formal implementation in Marantz’s (1991) mechanism of “dependent case” and Bittner & Hale’s (1996) “case competitors” (cf., also, Yip et al. 1987). The most current manifestation of this global case-assignment strategy is found in the constraint-based proposals of Woolford 2003 and Malchukov & de Hoop 2011. In all such approaches, coding is subject to the functional notion of distinctiveness as the relevant factor in case assignment. This provides an apparently straightforward account for the distribution of nominative objects: nominative occurs on the object, as the unmarked case, if there is no higher, structurally-marked argument in contrast to which the object must be identified. Simply put, “[t]he object gets nominative Case when there is no (nominative) subject” (Woolford 2003: 303).

On this global strategy nominative objects are predicted to appear naturally in constructions with oblique subjects. The North (and Northwest) Russian (NR) Perfect in (1) should thereby follow naturally: the construction consists of (i) an oblique-marked subject (*u* ‘at’ + NP:GEN), which is not always overtly expressed; (ii) a past passive participle, frozen in form—either the etymologically neuter singular *-no/-to* or masculine singular *-n/-t* (glossed as INVARIANT); and (iii) a nominative object.

(1) NR Perfect

a. [...] *u Olega byl obrezan kotu uši*  
 at Oleg.GEN AUX.PST.M.SG cut-off.PPP.INVAR cat.DAT ears.NOM.PL  
 ‘Oleg had cut off the cat’s ears’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 79)

b. *u nix byl postavljen konjušnja*  
 at them.GEN AUX.PST.M.SG built.PPP.INVAR stable.NOM.F.SG  
 ‘They had built a stable’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 79)

- c. *malinka*                      *bylo*                      *posoženo*  
 raspberries.NOM.F.SG AUX.PST.N.SG planted.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘They had planted raspberries’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 36)

In point of fact, however, I will argue that the nominative object in NR is costly and unstable. It is shown below that while nominative occurs on the object, as in (1), it is dispreferred and exceedingly rare (in the absence of agreement with an auxiliary—that is, as an impersonal). The instability of such nominative object marking is evidenced by an apparent restriction on transitives in the NR construction, such that the Perfect occurs predominantly with intransitive predicates, as observed by Kuz'mina (1993: 134) and Wiemer (*forthcoming*), as illustrated in (2).

(2) NR Perfect

- a. *u nego*      *v derevne*      *mnogo žito*  
 at him.GEN in countryside much lived.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He has lived in the countryside a long time’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 97)
- b. *u menja*      *vezde*      *byto*  
 at me.GEN everywhere been.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘I have been everywhere’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 109)
- c. *u nego*      *desjat' raz*      *razženenos'*                      *i*  
 at him.GEN ten times divorced.PPP.INVAR.REFL and  
*ženenos'*  
 married.PPP.INVAR.REFL  
 ‘He has divorced and married ten times’. (Kuz'mina 1993: 140–141)
- d. *u babki*      *naverno*      *kosit'*      *ujdeno*  
 at woman.GEN probably to-mow left.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The woman has probably gone off to cut down the hay’.  
 (Matveenko 1961: 123)
- e. *u prokurora*      *bylo*                      *priexano*  
 at prosecutor.GEN AUX.PST.N.SG arrived.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The prosecutor had arrived’. (Markova 1987: 169)

To be sure, there is no semantic incompatibility with the Perfect and two-place predicates. The preference for intransitives, on the present analysis, has to do instead with the “weak” configurational source for non-agreeing nominative. Indeed, quite contrary to the configurational case-assignment strategy outlined above, *accusative* appears on the object instead in much greater frequency than the non-agreeing nominative in (1).<sup>2</sup> Examples of accusative replacement are given in (3):

(3) NR Perfect

a. *u deda*                      *bylo*                      *lisenjat*                      *pojmano*  
 at grandfather.GEN    AUX.PST.N.SG    fox-cub.ACC    caught.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘Grandpa had caught some fox cubs’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 38)

b. *u bat'ki*                      *u tvoego*                      *saženo*                      *berezku*  
 at father.GEN    at your.GEN    planted.PPP.INVAR    birch.ACC  
 ‘Your grandfather planted a birch tree’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 38)

c. *ego*                      *poraneno*                      *bylo*                      *v lëxkuju*  
 him.ACC    wounded.PPP.INVAR    AUX.PST.N.SG    in lung  
 ‘He was wounded in the lung’. (Matveenko 1961: 107)

It is precisely in the case of the NR Perfect, where the agent (when present) is obliquely marked, that we can test configurational case against a case-assignment strategy that relies on local agreement with features of functional heads, such as Tense and Agreement (for nominative) and Voice (for accusative), as in the recent generative model of Chomsky 2001 (for related discussion, see Lavine & Franks 2008; Lavine 2010a, 2012; and, in particular, Baker & Vinokurova 2010, in which both configurational and local strategies are shown to operate in the single language, Sakha). The aim of this paper is (i) to assess whether configurational case operates in NR; and (ii) to consider whether languages are parameterized as to the availability of purely configurational case versus case by local agreement with functional heads only.

2 The examples in (3) are from North and Northwestern Russian dialects that are geographically distinct from Ukrainian, in which accusative marking on the object of passive participial predicates is the norm (Wiemer, *forthcoming*; Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 28; Matveenko 1961: 106–14).

To summarize, on the configurational strategy, the oblique subject in the NR impersonal sets up a structure in which nominative on the object is unmarked and, it follows, is the least costly case and should occur widely, *if the configurational strategy is operational in the language*. In what follows, I show that case is not assigned configurationally in NR, as evidenced by the transitivity restriction and accusative replacement described above. The article is structured as follows. First, in section 2, I describe the distribution of nominative objects in the NR Perfect. In section 3, I consider the transitivity restriction, which is likewise observed in the Lithuanian Inferential Evidential. Finally, in section 4, I take up accusative replacement in the NR impersonal and consider the problem it poses for the configurational case-assignment strategy. If accusative is dependent on the higher deployment of nominative, how can it appear in the presence of an oblique-marked subject? An alternative case-assignment strategy is proposed, based in part on a superficially-similar impersonal construction in Ukrainian, for which case is assigned *locally* and, thereby regardless of which, or whether, case is assigned to the subject.

## 2. *The Status of Non-Agreeing Nominative Objects*

Since North Russian, like Contemporary Standard Russian, has a null *be* copula/auxiliary in the present tense, it is not immediately obvious what to make of the oft-cited nominative object construction in (4):

### (4) NR Perfect

<i>u lisicy</i>	<i>uneseno</i>	<i>kuročka</i>
at FOX.GEN	carried-off.PPP.INVAR	hen.NOM.F.SG

'A fox has carried off a young hen'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 27)

While the frozen, invariant morphology on the participial predicate in (4) suggests that this is a non-agreeing construction, we cannot *a priori* rule out the possibility of agreement with a null tense-marking auxiliary (the present tense counterpart of *byla.AUX.PST.F.SG*). Indeed, in the presence of an overt past-tense auxiliary, agreement (of the auxiliary) is reported as more typical with the nominal than with the invariant participle (Matveenko 1961: 108–109; Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 36, 52; Kuz'mina 1993: 137–38). In other words, the most frequent pattern of

nominative objects is that given in (5), an *agreeing* structure, rather than that of the non-agreeing nominative objects initially exemplified in (1).

(5) NR Perfect

a. *krovat'*            *byla*            *kupleno*            *u jej*  
 bed.NOM.F.SG    AUX.PST.F.SG    bought.PPP.INVAR    at her.GEN  
 'She bought the bed'. (Matveenko 1961: 109)

b. *u nemcev*            *otobran*            *koni*            *byli*  
 at Germans.GEN    taken.PPP.INVAR    horses.NOM.PL    AUX.PST.PL  
 'The Germans had taken the horses'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 79)

c. *u nas*            *takoj byl*            *bol'šoj* *tramplin*  
 at US.GEN    such    AUX.PST.M.SG    large    trampoline.NOM.M.SG  
*sdelano*  
 made.PPP.INVAR  
 'We had made such a large trampoline'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko  
 1971: 42)

d. *u menja svoj rebenok*            *byl*            *vzjato*  
 at me.GEN REFL child.NOM.M.SG    AUX.PST.M.SG    taken.PPP.INVAR  
*v Slancy*  
 to Slantsy  
 'I had taken my child to Slantsy'. (Kuz'mina 1993: 137)

While animate plural *koni* 'horses' in (5b) and animate masculine singular *rebenok* 'child' in (5d) are unambiguously nominative (i.e., they have distinct nominative and accusative forms), *krovat'* 'bed' in (5a) and *tramplin* 'trampoline' in (5c) are syncretic for nominative and accusative and thus admit ambiguity as to their case-marking. Since the vast majority of attested examples of the NR Perfect occur without an auxiliary, it is standard practice, as noted, for example, by Matveenko (1961) and Kuz'mina (1993), to rely on those examples with overt, past-tense auxiliaries to disambiguate those cases of syncretic forms. Thus, (5a) and (5c) are nominative by virtue of agreeing (for gender and number) with feminine singular *byla* and masculine singular *byl*, respectively. It follows that the semantic objects in (5) function as grammatical subjects (Russian:

*подлежащее*). Sobolev (1998: 74, 80) likewise treats *kuročka* ‘young hen’ in (4) as the grammatical subject.

Since auxiliary agreement, when present, is predominantly with the noun, and not with the invariant participle, particularly with the frozen masculine singular form in *-n/-t*, more typical of northwestern varieties, we might characterize the examples of unambiguous nominative forms in the absence of an auxiliary as nominative by (null) agreement (following Sobolev 1998), rather than as impersonals. Genuine non-agreeing nominative objects in the NR Perfect are rare (as Kuz'mina & Nemčenko (1971: 79) note with regard to (1a–b) above). It is interesting to observe that of the 213 tokens of unambiguous nominative objects occurring with the *-no/-to* Perfect reported in Kuz'mina & Nemčenko (1971: 36), only 13 are non-agreeing, by which I mean that only 13 occur with an overt non-agreeing auxiliary. Moreover, 12 of these 13 examples are feminine *-a*-stem nouns (there are no occurrences of masculine singular animates or plural animates, and only a single occurrence with a pronominal form). It has been suggested that the feminine form in *-a* is a holdover of the infinitival construction of the *zemlja* ‘land.NOM’ *paxat* ‘to-plow’ type from Old NR (see Timberlake 1974 for details). Kuz'mina & Nemčenko (1971: 45–47) suggest the possibility that these nominals in *-a*, while nominative in form, function syntactically as accusative. Timberlake (1974: 104–13) refers to this process in modern NR as “nominative syncretism,” whereby the nominative feminine singular form in *-a* substitutes for the accusative. Indeed, as Timberlake observes (1974: 110), “the [nominative object] rule became limited in its application among nouns to *-a*-stem nouns in the singular.” Note, for present purposes, that this extension in the range of the *-a* desinence is a strictly morphological rule (accusative in function, while nominative in form) and, crucially, one that raises doubt about the status of feminine *-a*-stem nouns as genuine instances of non-agreeing nominative objects, as a syntactic phenomenon, echoing Kuz'mina & Nemčenko's concern.

Leaving aside the precise status of these *-a*-stem nouns, we are left, in any event, with rather weak evidence for the kind of regular appearance of nominative objects that would be predicted by the configurational case-assigning strategy. The vast majority of nominative objects are best analyzed as syntactic subjects, agreeing, in many cases overtly, with a tense-marking auxiliary. For the few counterexamples cited — where

nominative occurs with a non-agreeing auxiliary — the analysis is confounded by the uncertain morphological status of *-a*-stem nouns in the dialects. The result is no different from the better-studied case of agreeing nominative objects in Icelandic, as in (6):

(6) Icelandic

*Henni leiddust þeir.*

her.DAT bored.3.PL they.NOM

‘She was bored with them’. (Taraldsen 1995: 307)

On the standard analysis of Icelandic nominative object constructions, the subject, as an oblique-marked NP, cannot engage in subject-predicate agreement. As a result, the predicate agrees with the object. It appears reasonable to adopt the same mechanism for the nominative objects in NR (4–5): predicate agreement, marked by a tense-bearing auxiliary (not always overt), agrees for gender and number with the object, thereby licensing nominative, since agreement with the oblique subject does not occur. Note crucially that case assignment of this kind is local and feature-driven: nominative is assigned by agreement with a Tense head bearing active agreement features (the finite Tense head in Icelandic (6) and the agreeing auxiliaries in (5), also hosted by Tense). Recall that on the configurational approach, agreement is not required; nominative appears on the object as an automatic reflex of some other, non-structural, case appearing on the subject. It follows that we may take the sporadic appearance of genuinely *non-agreeing* nominative objects in the NR Perfect as evidence for the non-application of the configurational strategy.

Still, there are genuinely non-agreeing nominative objects that are well known to occur in Old North and Northwest Russian. Such examples, in addition to similar constructions in conservative varieties of modern Lithuanian, occur in infinitival clauses, where the object cannot receive case via subject-predicate agreement, as it does in Icelandic (6). Consider the examples in (7–8):

(7) Old North and Northwest Russian Independent Infinitival Clauses

a. *tʉbě rʉže svʉja snjati*

you.DAT rye.NOM SELF.NOM to-cut

‘It is for you to cut your own rye’. (Zaliznjak 1995: 137; 14<sup>th</sup> century)



- b. *čtob̃ kak̃ nam̃ nedrugū svoemu litovskomu*  
 so-that PRT us:DAT enemy.DAT SELF.DAT Lithuanian.DAT  
*nedružba svoja [...] dovesti*  
 aggression.NOM SELF.NOM to-carry-out  
 ‘In order for us to carry out our own aggression against our  
 enemy the Lithuanians’. (Timberlake 1974: 82; from 1517)

(8) Lithuanian Embedded Infinitival Clauses

- a. *Jiems buvo neįdomu [radijas klausyti].*  
 them.DAT AUX.PST uninteresting radio.NOM to-listen  
 ‘It was boring for them to listen to the radio’.
- a'. *Jiems buvo neįdomu [klausyti radiją].*  
 to-listen radio.ACC
- b. *Man atsitiko vakar [geras arklys pirkti].*  
 me.DAT happened yesterday good horse.NOM to-buy  
 ‘I was fortunate yesterday to buy a good horse’.  
 (Jablonskis 1928/1957: 560)

Case assignment on a strictly configurational basis correctly predicts nominative to appear on the object of these infinitivals. This is because there is no higher, *structurally-marked* argument, against which nominative is opposed. The distinctiveness condition is thereby met. The problem, however, is how to account for the word order facts in (7–8) on this non-local (and, indeed, non-syntactic) case-assigning strategy.<sup>3</sup> The syntactic movement of the object to a position above the verb (Object Shift) produces a systematic OV order in an otherwise VO language. This kind of syntactic activity is completely unmotivated on a strictly configurational model of case assignment.<sup>4</sup> Object shift in Franks & Lavine (2006) is taken as movement of the object into a position in which it is visible for

3 Marantz's (1991) "Dependent Case," the purest expression of the configurational strategy, is further developed as the "Mechanical Case Parameter" in Harley 1995. The idea in both Marantz and Harley is that case is a morphological property of the clause, with syntactic reflexes, rather than a syntactic property *sensu stricto*.

4 The predominantly OV order for nominative objects of infinitives in the Novgorod Birch Bark Letters is reported by Zaliznjak (1995: 137) as the rule. In the case of Lithuanian, the nominative object is historically on the decline and is found only among conservative speakers of East High Lithuanian. This said, it was likewise the rule in recent stages of the modern language (see Ambrazas et al. 1997: 520).

case via local feature matching with a higher functional head. Regardless of the details in Franks & Lavine (2006), any account of the facts in (7–8) would have to explain the combination of a nominative object precisely in this non-finite context and the object's syntactic displacement. Note, interestingly, that the rise of accusative marking in this construction among present-day speakers of Lithuanian correlates with the predominant VO order, as indicated in (8a'), suggesting as plausible that the object shift had something to do the licensing of nominative — namely, that movement of the nominative object placed it into a position in which it was visible to a higher, nominative-licensing head.

To summarize, configurational case fails in the NR Perfect because it falsely predicts the wide occurrence of non-agreeing nominative objects. It was shown that nominative objects occur by and large in the NR Perfect by subject-predicate agreement instead. Where nominative objects do occur in a non-agreeing environment, as in the case of Old NR and conservative modern Lithuanian, the configurational strategy fails to account for the attested word order facts. Note that it is not our purpose here to evaluate the configurational strategy beyond the empirical scope of this paper. Indeed, the appearance of nominative in non-finite, non-agreeing contexts is instantiated widely in the world's languages, along the lines prescribed by configurational case. This pattern is often encountered in the form of absolutive case in ergative languages (though, even here, absolutive case frequently agrees with the predicate, as pointed out by Ilja Seržant, p.c.). Thus, we might best conceive of the configurational strategy as parameterized across languages. That is, while evidence thus far has been adduced against its application in NR, the configurational strategy appears to account for nominative objects in the Icelandic examples in (9), which, in contrast to (6), appear to occur in the *absence* of subject-predicate agreement (i.e., in infinitival clauses, as in (7–8), but without the additional syntactic activity of object shift):<sup>5</sup>

(9) Icelandic

- a. [Að líka slíkir bílar] er mikið happ.  
 to like such cars.NOM is great luck  
 'To like such cars is very lucky'.

5 See Sigurdsson (2012) for extensive discussion of the case-assigning and positional-licensing mechanisms for examples such as (9b).

- b. *Hann taldi henni [hafa verið gefnir hattarnir].*  
 he believed her.DAT to-have been given hats.NOM  
 ‘He believed her to have been given hats’. (Harley 1995: 149)

We now turn to two consequences of the non-application of configurational case in NR. First, if the presence of an oblique subject fails to result in the appearance of nominative on the object, then in non-agreeing predicates — where nominative is not available via subject-predicate agreement — there should be no source for object case. Nominative on the object in such cases is syntactically “adrift.” This leads to the observed preference for intransitive predicates, thereby avoiding the problem of object case in the NR Perfect altogether. The preference for intransitives, which I refer to as a transitivity restriction, is taken up in section 3. In section 4, I take up the widespread use of *accusative* on the object of the NR Perfect, a fact that further demonstrates that NR is not a configurational case language, but which raises new questions about the appearance of accusative in nominativeless structures.

### 3. A Transitivity Restriction

#### 3.1 *The Dispreference for Non-Agreeing Nominative Objects*

Transitivity restrictions in the literature typically refer to conditions on the appearance of accusative.<sup>6</sup> Here, I refer to a restriction on object case, more generally (as in Lavine 2010b). In constructions in which the object systematically fails to be case-marked, we expect to find a preference for intransitives (as in the examples in (2)). This, by hypothesis, is the case in the NR Perfect, precisely in those dialects that do not exhibit auxiliary agreement with the semantic object. The statistical preference for intransitive verbs in the non-agreeing varieties of the NR Perfect is noted in Kuz'mina (1993: 134) and Wiemer (*forthcoming*). This preference for intransitives, as Wiemer notes, is reminiscent of the (cognate) Lithuanian Inferential Evidential, another oblique-subject construction built on impersonal passive morphology (Holvoet 2007; Lavine 2010b).<sup>7</sup> Thus, while Lithuanian speakers accept examples of the impersonal evi-

6 See, for example, Hiraiwa 2005.

7 The Inferential Evidential is a feature of East and South High Lithuanian (Ambrasas 1990: 207, 228).

dential built on two-place predicates with nominative objects, as in (10), they show a general preference for use of the construction based on intransitives, such as those in (11):

(10) Lithuanian Inferential Evidential

a. *Motinos sudeginta savo namas.*  
 mother.GEN burned-down.PPP.INVAR SELF house.NOM  
 ‘The mother apparently burned down her own house’.

b. *Jo rašoma laiškas.*  
 he.GEN write.PRPP.INVAR letter.NOM  
 ‘He is evidently writing a letter’. (Ambrasas 1990: 207)

(11) Lithuanian Inferential Evidential

a. *Eskimų tenai ne kartą gyventa.*  
 Eskimos.GEN there not once live.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘Eskimos must have lived there more than once’.  
 (Geniušienė 1973: 125)

b. *Mano užmigta.*  
 me.GEN fall-asleep.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘I must have dozed off’. (Holvoet 2007: 102)

c. *Ledo staiga ištirpta.*  
 ice.GEN suddenly melted.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The ice must have suddenly melted’.

d. *Panašių atsitikimų būta ir kituose kraštuose.*  
 similar events.GEN be.PPP.INVAR and other areas.LOC  
 ‘There were apparently similar events in other areas as well’  
 (Geniušienė 1973: 123)

The Lithuanian Inferential Evidential, like the NR Perfect, is a good testing ground for the configurational case-assignment strategy. On the “Nominative First” stipulation of configurational case, the oblique (genitive) subject in the Lithuanian construction should pattern with nominative on the object. Yet, while nominative is indeed accepted by speakers, as indicated in (10), judgments vary as to which case is most felicitous on the object. As reported in Lavine (2010b), most speakers consulted prefer

nominative, with a strong dispreference for accusative. However, others show no preference for nominative or accusative, while still others allow neither, and accept the construction exclusively with intransitive verbs.

We can take the transitivity restriction (i.e., the preference for intransitives) in the Lithuanian Inferential Evidential and the non-agreeing NR Perfect to indicate that the object position in both instances has no source for case. Like predicate-final *-ma/-ta* in the Lithuanian construction, the NR Perfect (in the absence of auxiliary agreement with the object) fails to participate in subject-predicate agreement — the syntactic relationship responsible for nominative, including nominative on the object.<sup>8</sup> The transitivity restriction is exactly what we expect to find in the absence of syntactically-determined case. Object case in these NR and Lithuanian constructions is achieved neither by syntactic agreement, nor by the algorithm of configurational case (i.e., Subj.OBL → Obj.NOM). If configurational case were operational in either construction, there would be no preference for intransitive verbs. Instead, nominative occurs in the non-agreeing NR and Lithuanian constructions by default. And the transitivity restriction that holds of these constructions, and constrains their productivity, demonstrates the costly nature of this instance of default case.

### 3.2 *On the NR Perfect as a Morphological Ergative*

The wide use of the NR Perfect with intransitive verbs (as in (12–13) below) bears directly on the hypothesis that the NR Perfect encodes “emerging ergativity” (see, among others, Orr 1989; Lavine 1999; Jung 2009, 2011). The ergativity analysis is initially plausible due to the familiar pattern of oblique marking on a transitive subject coupled with nominative marking on a transitive object. Further support for the ergative hypothesis is

8 Jung (2011: 168–70) proposes an alternative theory for the appearance of the nominative object in the non-agreeing NR Perfect, according to which the Tense element (the auxiliary) undergoes “multiple agree” with both the participle and the object. While this analysis correctly accounts for the fact that the auxiliary agrees, in apparent free variation, with either the participle, yielding a non-agreeing construction, or with the object noun, it falsely predicts that the two structures — the agreeing nominative and the non-agreeing nominative — should similarly occur in free variation. We have observed that this is not the case. The agreeing structure is strongly preferred, while the non-agreeing structure — giving nominative by default on the present analysis — gives way to a preference for intransitives. There is simply no empirical evidence in the literature for a productive *non-agreeing* nominative object construction of the sort: *u NP.GEN bylo.AUX.PST.N.SG -no/-to.PPP.INVAR NP:NOM*.

based on the typological correlation of the *be*-possessive perfect with split-ergative languages.<sup>9</sup> Note, however, that intransitives are formed in the NR Perfect with no constraint whatsoever on the predicate's underlying argument structure. That is, agentive intransitives, or “unergatives” (as in (2a), repeated below as (12a), with additional examples) are no more felicitous than intransitives whose sole argument is a semantic object (known as “unaccusatives”), such as the examples in (13), some of which also appear in Seržant (2012: 371–72) in related discussion.

## (12) NR Perfect

- a. *u nego v derevne mnogo žito*  
 at him.GEN in countryside much lived.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He has lived in the countryside a long time’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 97)
- b. *pribegano u medvedja v lodku*  
 ran.PPP.INVAR at bear.GEN in boat  
 ‘A bear ran into the boat’. (Markova 1987: 169)
- c. *u nego v okoško vyskočeno i bežit sjuda*  
 at him.GEN in window jumped-out.PPP.INVAR and runs here  
 ‘He has jumped out of the window and is running here’.  
 (Markova 1987: 170)

## (13) NR Perfect

- a. *u nego prostuženo*  
 at him.GEN caught-cold.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He caught a cold’. (Matveenko 1960: 356)
- b. *u nego roženo*  
 at him.GEN born.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He was born’. (Matveenko 1961: 126)

9 See Trask (1979) and Mahajan (1994) on the reinterpretation of oblique markers of possession in *be*-languages as ergative case markers. See Seržant (2012) for detailed argumentation against the ergativity hypothesis for the North Russian Perfect, particularly against treating the NR Perfect as a possessive construction.

- c. *u cvetov sovsem zasoxnuto*  
 at flowers.GEN completely withered.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The flowers have completely withered’. (Markova 1987: 169)
- d. *zdes’ u skotiny byto, xoženo*  
 here at livestock.GEN been.PPP.INVAR walked.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘There has been livestock here, roaming about’. (Matveenko 1961: 123)

The striking fact here for the ergativity hypothesis is that while unergative obliques occur cross-linguistically as ergative subjects, unaccusative obliques crucially do not (Marantz 1991; Bobaljik 1993).<sup>10</sup> Dixon (1994) states this difference in terms of his “Fluid-S” system, whereby, for certain languages, the sole participant of an intransitive event or state is marked ergative (“S<sub>a</sub>”) if it is ascribed volition or sentient control, and is otherwise marked absolutive (“S<sub>o</sub>”), when such control is lacking (78–79). In Marantz’s (1991: 237) formulation, “though ergative case can be assigned to the subject of an intransitive verb, it will not appear on a derived subject”. Clearly, the subjects in (13) are derived, in the sense that they are underlying semantic objects — i.e., undergoers of the events denoted by the verb, rather than initiators. In (13b), for example, the surface subject, ‘he’, could not possibly have given birth, but rather was the affected entity, the one being born. This argument from oblique “derived” subjects, together with the typological and diachronic arguments adduced in Seržant (2012), turn sharply against the ergativity hypothesis for the NR Perfect.

#### 4. On Accusative Object Case

##### 4.1 Accusative Substitution

Further evidence for the syntactic instability of the non-agreeing nominative object is the rise of accusative substitution, particularly in the Northwest Russian varieties. Timberlake (1974: 120–22) treats accusative as a later innovation in those NR dialects that appeared earlier with nominative objects. Seržant (2012: 370) observes that accusative was first attested in the Middle Russian period of the sixteenth and seventeenth

<sup>10</sup> Jung (2011: 137–38, 144–47) claims that the NR Perfect cannot be formed on the basis of unaccusative verbs, thereby denying the unaccusative status of the examples in (13).

centuries. Note that North and Northwest Russian dialects are not linked geographically to their Ukrainian and Polish counterparts, such that the accusative object of the passive-participial predicate in the NR Perfect appears to be an independent phenomenon (Wiemer, *forthcoming*; Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 28; Matveenko 1961: 106–114), rather than a syntactic calque of superficially similar Polish and Ukrainian *-no/-to* + accusative.<sup>11,12</sup>

In what follows, I argue that accusative substitution in the NR Perfect is internally motivated. First, I take up the question of why there should be accusative substitution at all. This, to be sure, is a non-trivial question, which extends far beyond the scope of this paper. Let me offer only the following short observations. I have argued above that the non-agreeing nominative object was weak, as a default case. First, an earlier syntactic rule gave way to a low-level morphological stipulation in the case of *-a*-stem nouns (Timberlake 1974). Second, we have already noted that the overwhelming majority of NR Perfect examples in *-no/-to* occur in cases in which the object is syncretic in form between nominative and accusative (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 40–43). This kind of surface ambiguity is typically not tolerated by language learners. Following much recent work on diachronic syntactic change (e.g., Lightfoot 2002; and Roberts & Roussou 2003), we can posit with some confidence that the underlying case-assigning mechanism was eventually reanalyzed to produce a uniform structure giving a single case. Consider the examples in (14):

(14) NR Perfect

- a. *institut*                      *končeno*                      *u obeix*  
 institute.NOM=ACC finished.PPP.INVAR at both.GEN  
 ‘They have both graduated the institute’. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko  
 1971: 41)

11 In fact, as discussed in Lavine 2005, and *forthcoming*, the Polish and Ukrainian constructions themselves exhibit quite divergent underlying syntax, exhibiting only surface similarities.

12 See Seržant (2012: 380), and sources cited therein, for an alternative account of the rise of accusative in the NR Perfect as a *common* development that was initially much broader across Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Polish dialects.



- b. *u počty brošeno gazety*  
 at post-office.GEN thrown.PPP.INVAR newspapers.NOM=ACC  
*v okoško*  
 in window  
 'The post office threw the newspapers into the window'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 42)

- c. *u menja slez reki prolito*  
 at me.GEN of-tears rivers.NOM=ACC spilled.PPP.INVAR  
 'I have spilled rivers of tears'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 42)

The object in these examples is either nominative, with an agreeing auxiliary, null in form, or accusative, with a similarly covert *non*-agreeing auxiliary. When syncretic (NOM=ACC) forms occur with an *overt* auxiliary, the auxiliary appears either in agreeing form (indicating nominative) or in the form of non-agreeing *bylo*. Non-agreeing *bylo* occurs rarely with nominative objects. In Kuz'mina & Nemčenko's 1971 corpus, there is only one non-*a*-stem example (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 34–36), which is given here in (15):

(15) NR Perfect

- a on [syn] razbombleno*  
 andhe.NOM.M.SG son bombed/destroyed.PPP.INVAR  
*bylo dorogoj*  
 AUX.PST.N.SG road.INS  
 Lit: 'and he was bombed by the road'  
 'He was beaten down by the long road'. (Kuz'mina & Nemčenko 1971: 36)

Regardless of the earlier predominance of nominative objects in the NR Perfect, the erosion of a syntactic motivation for nominative objects in modern NR dialects (such as that described by Timberlake 1974), coupled with the lack of any ostensible configurational strategy, might reasonably lead modern speakers to treat the objects of the non-*a*-stem examples in (14) as accusative. The interpretation of syncretic (NOM=ACC) object forms with the non-agreeing auxiliary *bylo* as accusative, such as in (16), is reinforced by the widespread accusative object examples, as in (17), for

which non-agreeing *bylo* is the only possible form of the auxiliary ((3a) is repeated as (17a)).

## (16) NR Perfect

a. *u nix bylo sdelano šnur*  
 at them:GEN AUX.PST.N.SG made.PPP.INVAR cable.NOM=ACC.M.SG  
 ‘They had made a cable’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 43)

b. *gruši bylo privezeno u ej*  
 pears.NOM=ACC.PL AUX.PST.N.SG delivered.PPP.INVAR at her.GEN  
 ‘She had delivered pears’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 43)

## (17) NR Perfect

a. *u deda bylo lisenjat pojmano*  
 at grandfather.GEN AUX.PST.N.SG fox-cub.ACC caught.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘Grandpa had caught some fox cubs’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 38)

b. *u menja bylo telenka zarezano*  
 at me.GEN AUX.PST.N.SG calf.ACC slaughtered.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘I had slaughtered a calf’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 38)

c. *u menja už ee bylo prošeno – zaxvati*  
 at me.GEN already her.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG asked.PPP.INVAR grab  
*paročku barankov*  
 a-few “pretzels”  
 ‘I had already asked her – grab a few *baranki*’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 38)

To summarize, modern speakers of NR dialects were faced with a nominative object construction for which there was no underlying motivation (i.e., the construction in (15) is frozen, on the present analysis, and, therefore, unanalyzable). To be sure, an agreeing auxiliary has remained common in Northwestern dialects with invariant *-n/-t*, in which case the nominative NP appears as the grammatical subject (*подлежащее*), as discussed above. But the structural opacity of the *non*-agreeing nominative-object construction, as well as the syncretic NOM=ACC constructions in (14) and (16), were likely subject to reanalysis, as speakers sought to bring the surface form in line with a licit underlying representation. The fol-

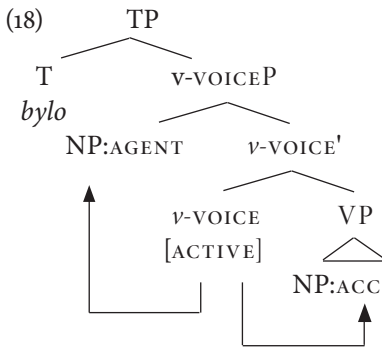
lowing section provides some indication as to how positing an accusative object in the NR Perfect removed the complication (for speakers) of nominative in this position when unanchored by agreement.

#### 4.2 *On the Source of Accusative*

On the basis of the nominative object construction, we have concluded that the configurational case-assigning strategy — namely, assign nominative to the object if no structural case is assigned to the subject — plays no direct role in realizing object nominative in the NR Perfect. Instead, nominative, as a rule, is linked to the agreement feature of the functional head, Tense, which hosts tense-marking auxiliaries. Theories of configurational case, rooted in markedness and the functional notion of distinguishability, are weaker still when it comes to the licensing of nominativeless accusative, as in (17). Alternatively, if we are to conclude that object case in the NR Perfect is related to features of functional heads, then what kind of feature (of what kind of head) licenses accusative in this construction? Further, what kind of mechanism allows the licit appearance of accusative in the presence of passive-participial morphology, even when no longer voice-altering?

On the standard view in recent syntax (Chomsky 1995; Kratzer 1996), a VOICE head is responsible for both (i) the projection of an Agent; and (ii) the predicate's accusative case-assigning property. This is schematized in the tree diagram in (18), in which T = Tense (and hosts tense-marking morphology and auxiliary verbs); *v*-VOICE is the projection just described, the functional layer above the lexical verb, which introduces the Agent argument in its specifier and whose head is responsible for accusative assignment, as indicated by the arrows; and VP introduces the core verbal event and any internal arguments of the verb, such as its direct object.<sup>13</sup> The *v*-VOICE head hosts the *-no/-to* morphology. For the moment, we gloss over the role that passive-participial morphology typically plays in suppressing accusative on the object (and mark the head as ACTIVE).

13 The *u* 'at' + NP:GEN coding of the subject does not concern us here. Note that this *u* + GEN Agent phrase typically appears in the specifier of TP to satisfy T's EPP-feature, which states that the clause-initial position must be filled.



The idea in (18) is that there is a correlation between a predicate's *external* thematic property and its *internal* (accusative) case-assigning property (known as “Burzio’s Generalization”). Thus, on the analysis that the *u* + GEN argument is a genuine subject (rather than a passive *by*-phrase), the correlation between the argument-projecting property of the VOICE head and its accusative case-assigning property is maintained. But what then are we to make of the occurrence of accusative in the *absence* of an Agent, as in the examples from Northwestern Russian in (19)?

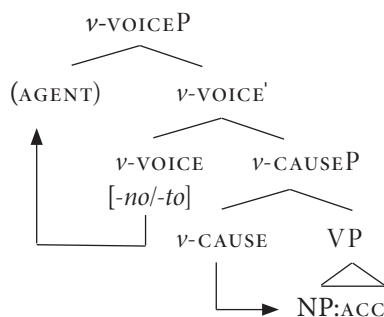
(19) NR Perfect

- a. *ruku poezdŭm otrezano*  
 hand.ACC train.INS cut-off.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The (his/her) hand has been severed by a train’. (Matveenko 1961: 122)
- b. *muža sukom udareno*  
 man.ACC tree-branch.INS struck.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The man has been struck by a branch’. (Matveenko 1961: 107)
- c. *spinu sorvano*  
 back.ACC torn.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘My back got twisted’. (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971: 58)

If accusative is available *without* projecting an Agent, then the two properties of the VOICE head, indicated earlier, must not (necessarily) operate in tandem in NR, but rather can be separated, giving the “split-VOICE” structure in (20). Here, VOICE bears features relating only to agentivity and argument deployment; and CAUSE, when identified by a non-voli-

tional causer, such as *poezdŏm* ‘train.INS’ in (19a), is responsible for accusative assignment on the Theme argument, *regardless of the predicate’s specification for VOICE*, so long as VOICE and CAUSE are unbundled (split) in the language (Pylkkänen 2008).<sup>14</sup>

## (20) Split-VOICE



This predicts that the Theme argument of anticausatives, which assert no external causation, as well as other unaccusatives, should fail to be marked accusative in NR, which is borne out in (21), repeated from (13):

## (21) N/NW Russian Perfect: Unaccusatives

a. *u nego prostuženo*  
 at him.GEN caught-cold.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He caught a cold’. (Matveenko 1960: 356)

b. *u nego roženo*  
 at him.GEN born.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘He was born’. (Matveenko 1961: 126)

c. *u cvetov sovsem zasoxnuto*  
 at flowers.GEN completely withered.PPP.INVAR  
 ‘The flowers have completely withered’. (Markova 1987: 169)

14 To be sure, we have seen numerous instances in which *-no/-to* in *v-VOICE* co-occurs with an *u* + NP.GEN Agent in its specifier. In such cases, it is the Agent itself that sets the event in motion, thereby identifying CAUSE as an active accusative-case assigner.

- d. *zdes' u skotiny byto, xoženo*  
 here at livestock.GEN been.PPP.INVAR walked.PPP.INVAR  
 'There has been livestock here, roaming about'. (Matveenko 1961: 123)

Returning now to the question of the co-occurrence of accusative and passive-participial morphology, observe that on the split-VOICE analysis, the source for accusative (CAUSE) is crucially separated from the head that hosts passive morphology (VOICE).<sup>15</sup> The key point of contrast between the examples with accusative in (19) and those without accusative in (21) is the presence versus absence of external causation, respectively. In (19a–b), the event is set in motion by the non-volitional instrumental NPs: the train and the tree branch identify that the event is caused, which is sufficient to activate the accusative property (the CAUSE head). In (19c) the event is construed as containing an unspoken causer. Note that *sorvat'* 'tear-off, twist' is a two-place predicate. Its non-Theme argument is present in conceptual structure only. That is, (19c) is interpreted as one's back being twisted *by some unknown force*, like modern Russian *nogu svelo* 'I have a cramp in my foot', which, crucially, is caused, even if we cannot name the process that initiated the cramping event.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, there is no way in which the events in the examples in (21) can be construed as caused. (21a), for example, is derived from *prostudit'sja* 'catch a cold', a one-place predicate, and not *prostudit'* 'to let/cause catch cold'. Likewise, (21d) asserts only the existence of livestock, not the event that causes or brings the livestock into existence.<sup>17</sup> To summarize, causation is a sufficient condition for accusative in languages and dialects in which the argument-projecting and case-assigning features of VOICE are structurally distinct.

Independent evidence for this analysis comes from Ukrainian, which, while not a source language for Northwestern Russian dialects, exhibits the same distribution in its impersonal passive and passive-like constructions, and occurs with the same invariant passive morphology and accusative object (Lavine 2005, *forthcoming*). Recall that a condition on ac-

15 Naturally, not all languages allow the co-occurrence of passive-participial morphology and accusative. The question of whether or not the VOICE head is split is thus taken here as one way in which languages differ (cf. Pylkkänen's 2008 "Voice-bundling parameter").

16 See Lavine 2010a for much relevant discussion.

17 Markova, for example, reports *\*skotinu byto* as ungrammatical (pers. comm.).

cusative assignment in passive-participial predicates is the independent operation of CAUSE, such that the accusative property is teased apart from the VOICE head proper. The principal diagnostic for the independent operation of CAUSE is the appearance of Transitive Impersonals: predicates in which accusative occurs in the absence of an Agent argument. The examples in (19) are, thus, Transitive Impersonals, as are the following, structurally identical, examples in standard Ukrainian, given in (22):

## (22) Ukrainian Transitive Impersonals

- a. *aortu napolovynu perekryto trombom*  
 aorta.ACC halfway blocked.PPP.INVAR clot.INS  
 ‘The aorta is halfway blocked by a clot’. (Wieczorek 1987: 558)
- b. *derevo bulo vypaleno soncem*  
 wood.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG burned.PPP.INVAR sun.INS  
 ‘The wood was burned/warped by the sun’.
- c. *xatu bulo spaleno blyskavkoju*  
 house.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG burned-down.PPP.INVAR lightning.INS  
 ‘The house was burned down by a strike of lightning’.
- d. *kulju bulo rozirvano cvjaxom*  
 balloon.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG pierced.PPP.INVAR nail.INS  
 ‘The balloon was pierced by a nail’.

Observe that these Ukrainian examples are crucially not passive: there is no underlying Agent. They are dyadic unaccusatives (two-place predicates with no Agent argument). The necessary causative element appears either in the form of an Instrument, as in (22d), or as a Natural Force, as in (22a–c) — all examples of non-volitional causers, sufficient to activate the accusative-assigning CAUSE head.<sup>18</sup> It follows, as in NR (21), that in the

18 Polish, in contrast, does not exhibit the split-VOICE head, necessary to produce Transitive Impersonals. The Polish impersonal passive-like expression, as a result, requires an Agent (unspoken). The Polish counterpart of Ukrainian (22b) is thereby ruled out:

(i) Polish  
 \**drzewo spalono słońcem*  
 wood:ACC burned:PPP.INVAR sun:INST  
 [Intended: ‘The wood was burned by the sun’.]

absence of causation, accusative likewise fails to occur in the Ukrainian construction. The examples in (23) are one-place predicates. They denote a burning-down event (23a) and a bursting event (23b) only; there is no place in the basic conceptual structure of these verbs for a causative sub-event.

(23) Ukrainian Passive Impersonal: Anticausatives

- a. \**xatu*      *bulo*                      *zhoreno* (cf. (22c))  
 house.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG burned-down.PPP.INVAR  
 [Intended: ‘The house burned down’.]
- b. \**kulju*              *bulo*                      *trisnuto* (cf. (22d))  
 balloon.ACC AUX.PST.N.SG burst.PPP.INVAR  
 [Intended: ‘The balloon burst’.]

As for the NR Perfect examples that contain an Agent, CAUSE is activated (trivially) by the Agent’s role in initiating the event. It follows that accusative substitution is not merely facilitated by the unstable non-agreeing nominative object construction, but language-internally by the arrangement of syntactic heads in the dialect, i.e., the discrete operation of VOICE and CAUSE in the functional domain dominating lexical VP.

##### 5. Concluding Remarks on Object Case

The NR Perfect raises interesting questions regarding object case. While the basic valency of predicates in *-no/-to* and *-n/-t* is not altered, the case-assigning potential on the object may be. We have discerned three patterns of object case: (i) the non-agreeing nominative object; (ii) the agreeing nominative object; and (iii) the accusative object. Configurational case, which calls for nominative assignment on the object if it does not appear on the subject, predicts, contrary to fact, that nominative objects should appear normally in the NR Perfect, regardless of whether or not the object is syntactically anchored by agreement. Indeed, “mechanical case” of this sort was shown to apply to Icelandic and has been argued to apply widely, particularly in the case of split-ergative languages. In the NR construction, we observed, instead, either (i) a preference for intransitives, which avoids the problem of object case altogether, and is rooted, by hypothesis, in the lack of a source for nominative (outside the agreeing



variety); or (ii) accusative substitution. Accusative in the presence of passive-participial morphology was argued to be available due to a parceling out of the argument-introducing property of VOICE and its accusative case-assigning property, which was shown to be the case independently in Ukrainian. Neither the preference for intransitives, nor the substitution of accusative, could be claimed to follow from a theory of case based on the requirement of mere distinguishability. Rather, object case was shown to be determined by local relations with functional heads: agreement with Tense for nominative; and licensing by an independent CAUSE head for accusative, which was shown to admit volitional causers (Agents) and non-volitional causers (Instruments, Natural Forces), alike. We might conjecture, as a result, that default case, as exemplified by the non-agreeing nominative, can be costly.

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