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SOME CONSTRAINTS ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF BARE NOMINALS IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract: In this paper, we highlight some constraints on the distribution of bare nominals in Romanian. First, we argue that inchoatives can take bare nominals, but the syntactic structure assigned to them is similar to the one assigned to verbs of change of location: following Cuervo (2003), bare nominals are projected in a non-specifier position due to their semantics (they are NPs cf. Abney 1987). Sentences containing unaccusatives with bare nominals are semantically defective, and need a subject of predication which is usually fulfilled by an adverbial phrase of time or place. Second, we argue that in Romanian se-marked unaccusatives and even unergatives can take bare nominals in the presence of an adverbial which functions as subject of predication. Thus, bare nominals are constrained by the predication requirement, and do not represent an unaccusativity diagnostic.

Keywords: : bare nominals, inchoative, unaccusative, unergative, Romanian

1. Introduction

Bare nominals are semantically deficient noun phrases which have proved crucial to understanding phenomena like predication or entailment. The distribution of bare nominals also reveals that they cannot be exclusively associated to unaccusative verbs. Such issues are discussed in this paper which is organized as follows:

In Section 2.1., we review some arguments put forth in the literature for the exclusion of bare nominals from transitive (causative) and intransitive (inchoative) verbs of change of state. Although we believe that the exclusion of bare nominals from inchoative structures is straightforward due to the lack of result entailment, in Section 2.2 we show that bare nominals can be accommodated by *se*-marked inchoatives in the presence of an adverbial.

Section 3 lists the Romanian unaccusative verbs that allow bare subject complements by argument structure, while Section 4 shows that bare nominals are also possible with Romanian unergatives. Their acceptability with unaccusatives and unergatives is conditioned by the selection of an adverbial that satisfies the subject of predication requirement. As for information structure, bare subject intransitives with adverbials of time or place exhibit a topic-comment organization, whereby the adverbial represents the topic, and the rest of the verb phrase constitutes the comment.

2. Verbs of change of state

The verbs that we discuss next participate in the causative-inchoative alternation which is mainly characteristic of verbs of change of state (i.e. verbs with the meaning "break", "close", "open", etc). The causative-inchoative alternation is a transitive-intransitive alternation whereby the intransitive variant denotes a change of state, while its transitive counterpart specifies the cause for the change of state. Syntactically, such verbs are

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unacccusatives with optional transitivity; semantically, the subject of the intransitive (cf. (1b)) has the same role as the object of the transitive (cf. (1a)), i.e. theme or patient.

(1) a. *I broke the window.*
b. *The window broke.*

Next, we discuss two arguments put forth in the literature against the presence of bare nominals in causative sentences. Arguably, their exclusion from inchoative structures implicitly follows from the transitive-intransitive (or causative-inchoative) alternation.

2.1.Previous assumptions

In Cuervo (2003), the exclusion of bare nominal themes from causatives is a consequence of the mono-eventive activity structure imposed by such phrases which is at variance with the result entailment typical of bi-eventive verbs of change of state. According to this author, Spanish transitives with [+animate] subjects can give rise to either a causative (cf. (2a)) or an activity (cf. (2a)[1] and (2b)) reading, mainly depending on the properties of the theme argument that they take.

(2) a. *Emilio derritio la manteca.* (causative)
Emilio melt.PST.3SG DET butter
"Emilio melted the butter."

b. *Emilio derritio manteca.* (activity)
Emilio melt.PST.3SG butter
"Emilio melted butter." (Cuervo 2003: 115, (16a,b))

As is more obvious, [-intentional] inanimate subjects are unacceptable with bare objects in certain tense/aspect contexts (cf. (3b)), meaning that bare objects require [+intentionality] on the part of the subject ("active involvement" in Cuervo 2003); in this author's opinion, bare objects only show up in activities performed by sentient subjects.

(3) a. *El sol derritio la manteca.* (causative)
DET sun melt.PST.3SG DET butter
"The sun melted the butter."

b. **El sol derritio manteca.* (*activity)
DET sun melt.PST.3SG butter
"The sun melted butter." (Cuervo 2003: 115, (17a,b))

At first glance, the absence of bare nominals from inchoatives implicitly follows from their exclusion from the transitive counterpart, i.e. bare nominals cannot form causatives, consequently, they cannot be part of inchoatives either. In particular, the Romanian sentence below is predicted not to allow an inchoative change of state reading, only an impersonal *se*-passive reading: *se* is naturally derived from the agentive subject in the transitive.

[1] (2a) allows both a causative/accidental and an activity reading in which the external argument is actively involved in the melting process.

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(4) *S-* *au* *spart* *vaze.*
SE AUX.3PL break.PTCP vase.PL
"People broke vases."

On the other hand, according to Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2002), the object argument of change of state verbs must be an incremental theme. In view of the fact that incremental themes need to be identified in order to be "measured", nonquantized objects are out. By this reasoning, bare object arguments are excluded from change of state verbs because they cannot constitute incremental themes; change of state cannot be entailed if the object is not referentially identified/discrete. Telicity tests are illustrative of this point.

As is generally accepted in the literature, the telicity of a sentence is usually closely related to the quantificational properties of its object as is apparent in (5a) and (5b) below:

(5) a. *Dana read poetry for/*in an hour.* (nonquantized object; atelic)
b. *Dana read the newspaper for/in an hour.* (quantized object; telic) (Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2002: 5, (11))

Going back to sentences containing change of state verbs, that transitives containing bare objects describe atelic activities is evinced by the felicity of *for*-phrases as in the Romanian example (6b). *In*-phrases are infelicitous in this context (cf. (6a)) as the result state is not entailed due to bare nominals.

(6) a. **Ion* *a* *spart* *vaze* *într-* *un* *minut.*
Ion AUX.3SG break.PTCP vase.PL in a minute
"Ion broke vases in a minute."

b. *Ion* *a* *spart* *vaze* *timp* *de* *un* *minut.*
Ion AUX.3SG break.PTCP vase.PL time of a minute
"Ion broke vases for a minute."

Both views stress that verbs of change of state necessarily entail the new state as a consequence of the semantic type of the theme object that they take. Unifying the approaches, bare nominals cannot be incremental themes, rather they impose atelic event structures typical of activities. The atelicity (i.e. lack of entailment) dictated by bare nominals is at variance with the change of state entailment that defines causatives and inchoatives.

Cuervo (2003) proposes that inchoatives and verbs of change have distinct event structures. The author shows that in Spanish adverbs like *casi* "almost" do not give rise to ambiguity in interpretation with mono-eventive verbs of change like *salir* "go out", while such adverbs are ambiguous with bi-eventive inchoatives, i.e. in the Spanish example (7a) *casi* can scope either over the event of change or the final state.

(7) a. *La* *puerta* *casi* *se* *cierra* *con* *el* *viento.*
DET door almost SE close.PRS.3SG with DET wind
"The door almost closed because of the wind." (Cuervo 2003: 137, her (64))

Her explanation is as follows:

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"In the reading where it modifies the event of going, the sentence can be used in a situation when the wind was strong and made the door shake or somehow it gave the impression the door would start to close, but that did not happen. *Casi* can have narrower scope, by modifying the state of the door, in which case the sentence means that the door is partly closed but not completely." (Cuervo 2003: 137-138)

Expectedly, the same ambiguity arises in (7b), the Romanian counterpart to (7a). The fact that the adverb can modify the state signifies that the state is present in the event structure of the verb, consequently, the result is entailed.

b.	*Uşa*	*aproape*	*că*	*s-*	*a*	*închis*	*de la*	*vânt.*
	door.DET	almost	that	SE	AUX.3SG	close.PTCP	from	wind

Nonetheless, the transitive-intransitive alternation manages to explain why *se*-marked intransitives with bare complements "derived" from transitives receive a *se*-passive reading (as in (4) above). Our data will show that this is merely a tendency, and languages like Romanian and Spanish register *se*-marked unaccusatives with bare subject complements.

2.2.*Se*-marked unaccusatives

Recall that we mentioned above that the Romanian sentence in (4) and its Spanish counterpart (cf. Cuervo 2003 for this type of sentences in Spanish) favour the passive agentive reading when uttered out of the blue. However, the unaccusative reading of *se*-marked bare subject intransitives is not banned in Romance languages.

Below we give some examples collected from the internet comprising *se*-marked unaccusatives for the Romanian (cf. (8) and (10)) and Spanish (cf. (9) and (11)) counterparts to English *break* and *collapse*.

(8)	*Li*	*s-*	*au*	*crăpat*	*pereţii*	*caselor,*
	CL.3PL.DAT	SE	AUX.3PL	crack.PTCP	wall.PL	house.GEN
	s-	*au*	*spart*	*geamuri…*		
	SE	AUX.3PL	break.PTCP	window.PL		

"Their house walls cracked, windows broke…"
(http://www.satumareonline.ro/cp/7/11924/Drum-ocolire-a-municipiului-Satu-Mare,-%C3%AEntre-Lazuri-%C5%9Fi-Dorol%C5%A3)

(9)	*En*	*un*	*grupo*	*elevado*	*de*	*naves*	*agricoles*
	in	a	group	tall	of	hall.PL	agricultural.PL
	se	*han*	*caido*	*muros,*	*se*	*han*	*roto*
	SE	AUX.3PL	fall.PTCP	wall.PL	SE	AUX.3PL	break.PTCP
	ventanas…						
	window.PL						

"In a group of tall agricultural halls, walls fell down, windows broke…"
(http://www.hoy.es/v/20101207/regional/extremadura-alerta-amarilla-lluvia-20101207.html)

(10)	*S-*	*au*	*dărâmat*	*clădiri*	*şi*	*poduri,*	*alimentarea*
	SE	*AUX.3PL*	*collapse.PTCP*	*building.PL*	*and*	*bridge.PL*	*supply.DET*

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cu	*energie*	*electrică*	*a*	*fost*	*compromisă.*
with	*energy*	*electric*	*AUX.3SG*	*be.PTCP*	*compromised*

"Buildings and bridges collapsed, the electric power supply was switched off."
(http://www.ziarulring.ro/stiri/49742/cele-mai-costisitoare-catastrofe-naturale-din-lume---pagube-de-miliarde-de-dolari-pentru-economie-si-asiguratori)

(11)

Por	*cuenta*	*de*	*la*	*intensa*	*lluvia*	*se*
for	account	of	DET	intense	rainfall	SE
han	*desbordado*	*rios,*	*derribado*	*puentes,*	*derrumbado*	
AUX.3PL	overflow.PTCP	river.PL	collapse.PTCP	bridge.PL	fall down.PTCP	
montes	*y*	*collapsado*		*vias.*		
mountain.PL	and	collapse.PTCP		road.PL		

"Rivers overflew, bridges collapsed, mountains fell down and roads collapsed because of the heavy rainfall."
(http://inflacion.com.co/precio-de-alimentos.html)

It is worth mentioning that Romance languages are predicted to form *se*-marked inchoatives from verbs with the meaning "break", "melt", "open", etc, i.e. typically externally caused change of state verbs that "imply the existence of an "external cause" with immediate control over bringing about the eventuality denoted by the verb" (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 92). In other words, externally caused events give rise to a transitive verb that necessarily contains a cause whose suppression is marked by the *se/si* morpheme in the intransitive variant[2].

As is well-known, *se/si* has multiple functions in Romance: (i) it is a blueprint of reflexives proper; (ii) it gives rise to *se*-passives where it stands for an unknown or impersonal Agent in syntax (see the English paraphrase for example (4) above); (iii) it is present in *se*-marked inchoatives where we take it to be merely a mark of unaccusativity as inchoatives have no cause in syntax (against Chierchia 2004, Koontz-Garboden 2009). However, *se*-marked intransitive sentences are often ambiguous between a *se*-passive interpretation and an unaccusative interpretation.

The fact that bare object themes are characteristic of activities might engender the view that bare nominals only support a *se*-passive reading and are prohibited from *se*-unaccusatives. While we agree that bare nominals are excluded from inchoative structures (cf. Cuervo 2003) because of the lack of result entailment, our data show that languages like Romanian or Spanish do register *se*-marked unaccusatives with bare nominals. Such unaccusative readings are accommodated in the presence of a stage topic, usually a locative, that is either overtly realized in the sentence or deduced from (extra-linguistic) context. As pointed out in the literature (e.g. Mackenzie 2006), sentences are constrained by a subject of predication requirement that can only be ensured by phrases with independent reference. Since bare nominals are predicative non-referential phrases (they are NPs in Abney 1987), the subject of predication must be satisfied by some other phrase, typically a stage topic.

To sum up, *se*-marked bare subject intransitives allow an unaccusative interpretation in languages like Romanian and Spanish. Because *se*-marked unaccusatives with bare

[2] See also Haspelmath (1993) for a typological survey.

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nominative complements do not entail a result state, it is plausible that bare nominals are projected in a non-specifier position (cf. Cuervo 2003).

The next section is dedicated to Romanian verbs of change with respect to a location which allow bare nominals by argument structure.

3. Verbs of change with respect to a location

Hale and Keyser (2000) argue that verbs of appearance/disappearance and verbs of inherently directed motion, lexically select a nominal phrase (e.g. *frunze* "leaves" in the Romanian example (12)), as well as a prepositional phrase (PP) or locative (e.g. *pe cărare* "on the path"): appearance/disappearance or falling occurs relative to a place pointing to a seemingly universally valid argument structure.

(12) *Au* *căzut* *frunze* *[PP pe* *cărare].*
AUX.3PL fall.PTCP leaf.PL on path
"Leaves fell on the path."

Even though, in principle, either the noun phrase or the locative PP subcategorized by these verbs can constitute the subject of predication, nominals are further constrained by semantics. Thus, in (12) the complex consisting in the verb *a cădea* "fall" and the bare noun *frunze* "leaves" forms a monadic predicate which needs an argument with independent reference in order to qualify for an assertion. PP locatives like *pe cărare* "on the path" are inherently referential and can satisfy the subject of predication requirement avoiding sentence clash.

Expectedly, bare subjects are freely allowed with the verbs that we identified as denoting a change with respect to a location in Romanian precisely because of the lexically selected locative.

(13) **Romanian unaccusative verbs that express a change with respect to a location**
Verbs of inherently directed motion (cf. the classification in Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995): *a acosta* "to accost", *a ajunge* "to arrive", *a ameriza* "to alight (on the sea)", *a apunta* "to land (on aircraft carrier)", *a aseleniza* "to moonland", *a ateriza* "to land", *a cădea* "to fall", *a debarca* "to land", *a decola* "to take off", *a ieşi* "to go out", *a intra* "to enter", *a pleca* "to leave", *a sosi* "to arrive", *a veni* "to arrive".
Verbs of appearance: *a apărea* "to appear", *a dispărea* "to disappear", *a pieri* "to disappear", *a reapărea* "to reappear", *a surveni* "to occur, happen".

As they are designed for presentational contexts by argument structure (cf. Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, Mackenzie 2006, among others), most of the verbs above can display a null locative that can be easily recovered from context.

However, not only verbs that lexically select a locative in argument structure can accommodate bare nominative complements. Languages like Romanian also register bare subject inchoatives as well as unergatives as will be discussed in the next section.

4. Unergative verbs with bare subjects

Unlike verbs of change with respect to a location, unergatives are intransitive verbs that refer to activities and do not select a locative by argument structure. For instance, a sentence like *John smiled*, does not convey the meaning that there is a location where the

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event took place, and solely encodes the activity. Consequently, bare subject complements are infelicitous in the absence of an overt locative taking over the function of subject of predication[3].

Below, we present some prototypical examples of unergative verbs in Romanian that exhibit imperfective aspect characteristic of descriptive contexts.

(14) a. *Prin* *coridor* *umblă* *pasageri* *şi* *vorbesc.*
through corridor walk.PRS.3PL passenger.PL and talk.PRS.3PL
"Passengers are walking and talking in the corridor."
(https://bibliotecapemobil.ro/content/scoala/pdf/Schite_-_ILCaragiale.pdf)

b. *Pretutindeni* *muncesc* *oameni.*
everywhere work.PRS.3PL person.PL
"People work everywhere."
(http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0173043/)

c. *Peste* *tot* *mişunau* *insecte.*
over everything *swarm.IPF.3PL* *insect.PL*
"Insects were swarming all over the place."

(http://www.emag.ro/colectia-de-povestiri-stiintifico-fantastice-nr-4-anticipatia-9776069895789/pd/DJ36QBBBM/)

Recall that bare subjects are part of a monadic predicate that needs an argument with independent reference in order for an assertion to be made and a truth value to be assigned. This argument is usually the locative. In verbs of change with respect to a location, the locative is present in argument structure; in other unaccusatives and unergatives, it is asked by sentence pragmatics. It should be mentioned that sentences containing bare subjects in postverbal position exhibit a topic-comment organization, whereby the locative ensures the topical anchoring of the sentence, and the monadic predicate constitutes the comment.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we argued that bare subjects are compatible with verbs of change with respect to a location, *se*-marked inchoatives and even unergatives usually in the presence of a locative. Thus, bare subjects are constrained by the predication requirement and fail to identify unaccusative verbs to the exclusion of unergatives. Consequently, bare nominals do not represent an unaccusativity diagnostic.

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[3] Mackenzie (2006) reached a similar conclusion based on Spanish data.

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