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A unifying approach to impersonality in Russian

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Summary: Despite the ever-growing number of studies about impersonal constructions, there is still no unanimity about which constructions actually fall under the label of impersonality. Consensus on how to define impersonals, even within one language, remains elusive in part because of the opposition between formal (subject-centred) and functional (agent-centred) approaches to impersonality, as outlined by Siewierska (2008). The paper attempts to combine both lines of reasoning. It suggests that the impersonal domain in Russian is represented by a network of constructions that are all related to one another by the formal marker of impersonality on the verb (i.e., third person singular neuter) and by semantic and pragmatic characteristics (namely, deviation from prototypical subject properties; Malchukov & Ogawa 2011).

Keywords: Russian, impersonal constructions, non-canonical subjects, impersonal form/morphology, subject-like obliques, subject-properties

1 Introduction: formal versus functional approaches to impersonality

Siewierska (2008) distinguishes between a subject-centred and an agent-centred view on impersonality. The subject-centred view focuses on formal (i.e., morphological, syntactic, and behavioural) subject properties. On that basis, it classifies subjectless sentences and sentences with expletive subjects as impersonal. The formal distinction between impersonal and personal constructions thus crucially depends on the notion of subject. Since a generally accepted definition of subject does not even exist for one language, the formal approaches often come up with different evaluations of identical construction types. The identification of impersonality with subjectlessness is prevalent not only in modern generativist re-

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search (e.g. Babby 2010) but has a long tradition in Slavic linguistics that goes back at least to Miklosich (1883).¹

The agent-centred view, on the other hand, associates impersonality with the semantic notion of agent. As the term *agent* is understood in a very broad sense as “the causal participant” (Siewierska 2008: 121) of an event, Siewierska prefers the term *instigator* instead of agent. In the agent-centred approach, impersonal constructions are constructions that in some way displace the instigator from the centre of attention. This is achieved by demoting the instigator from the syntactic subject² position in different ways or by completely deleting it from the surface structure of the sentence. Since the agent-centred approach defines impersonal constructions based on a common, discursively determined function (i.e., instigator defocusing), the agent-centred concepts of impersonality will be labelled *functional* here.

The basic assumption of this paper is that a lack of formal subject properties in impersonal constructions indicates a lack of functional (semantic and pragmatic) subject properties in Russian. The goals of the present contribution are as follows:

1. To establish a coherent, formally and functionally (form-and-function-)based description of impersonal constructions in Russian, with the versatility to be adapted to other Slavic languages, and possibly non-Slavic languages, as well.
2. To contribute to the ongoing theoretical discussion of form-meaning relationship in grammar by testing (actually, the inverse of) what has been labelled the “Principle of No Synonymy in Grammatical Forms” (cf. Goldberg 1995: 3).³

First, it will be necessary to clarify the notion of subject, which is so central to the discussion of impersonality (Section 2). To achieve goal 1, I will examine the various concepts of impersonality in formalist (subject-centred) and functionalist (agent-centred) accounts for their strengths, shortcomings and areas of common

1 Galkina-Fedoruk (1958: 40–95) gives a detailed description of the early research history on Slavic impersonal constructions.

2 A syntactic subject, in this contribution, is an NP that fulfils the syntactic function of subject, which means that it answers to the question of *kto/čto* ‘who/what’ and is not part of a nominal predicate. Syntactic subjects include canonical and non-canonical subjects, but not subject-like obliques (see Section 2 for a more detailed definition).

3 The “Principle of No Synonymy in Grammatical Forms” postulates that difference in form always indicates difference in meaning. The inverse conclusion of this principle implies that identity in form indicates identity in meaning, which is what will be tested here with regard to impersonal constructions.

ground (Section 3). I will go on, in Section 4, to present Malchukov & Ogawa's (2011) proposal for a classification of impersonal constructions based on deviance from prototypical subjecthood. Section 5 applies Malchukov & Ogawa's criteria to the centre of the impersonal domain in Russian, i.e., to constructions that most researchers classify as impersonal. Section 6 discusses different kinds of constructions that typically go beyond the scope of impersonality in Russian. These include constructions with different kinds of non-canonical subjects, such as the "genitive subjects" in (primarily negated) existentials and in some kinds of numeral constructions. The results of these analyses will allow for a clearer and more adequate account of impersonality in Russian than have been offered in previous accounts of any theoretical disposition (Section 7). The achievement of goal 2 will follow as a by-product of the analyses presented in the following sections.

2 Preliminaries: Prototypical subjects, canonical subjects, non-canonical subjects and subject-like obliques

The discussion of subjecthood in language is strenuous and fatiguing, and this is (at least to some extent) so because different aspects are often not kept apart or because phenomena crucially belonging together (such as semantic and formal properties) are notoriously isolated from each other. Even when limiting the discussion to Slavic languages, and, more precisely, to Russian, the notion of subject is not a straightforward one.

Different aspects of subjecthood have been justifiably labelled formal, semantic, and pragmatic subject properties (most prominently, probably, in Keenan⁴ 1976). A *prototypical subject* represents the idealised unification of all formal, semantic, and pragmatic subject properties of a language. In Russian, the most important formal properties of subjects include imposition of agreement on the finite verbal predicate, nominative case marking, positioning to the left of the finite verbal predicate, binding of reflexive possessive pronouns, control of PRO in different construction types, and control into gerunds.⁵ Semantically, a proto-

⁴ Instead of "formal" subject properties, Keenan (1976: 312) distinguishes syntactic subject properties from semantic and pragmatic ones. I think that "formal" is more appropriate than "syntactic" here, since this label covers all kinds of overtly observable subject properties, including morphological and positional properties.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of formal subject properties in Russian, see Testelec (2001: 317–349).

typical subject is agentive; i.e., it is animate and in control of the action denoted by the verb. Pragmatically, it is topical, which includes a certain level of referentiality.⁶ As a result, prototypical subjects are agentive, topical, and, ideally, also transitive.

Canonical subjects are formally full-fledged subjects that may or may not be prototypical. Russian canonical subjects impose agreement on the verbal predicate and require nominative case marking. As such, they usually also display all kinds of behavioural subject properties, while pragmatic and semantic properties may vary considerably.

Non-canonical subjects differ from canonical ones in that they do not dispose of morphological subject properties (i.e., nominative case marking and agreement with the finite verb). According to Seržant (2013: 320) “[non-canonical subjects] refer to oblique NPs that are not endowed with canonical subject case-marking and have no access to (canonical) verbal agreement; at the same time, they are characterized by the endowment with behavioral subject properties and are syntactically full-fledged subjects [...]” One can state in a somewhat simplifying way that non-canonical subjects are non-nominative NPs that nevertheless answer to the question of *kto/čto* (‘who/what’). This is why non-canonical subjects are syntactic, but not morphological subjects. In Russian, non-canonical subjects are typically intransitive subjects, for instance in the genitive case of negated sentences, with definite or indefinite numerals or infinitives in subject position.⁷

Subject-like obliques differ from non-canonical subjects in that they “considerably deviate from the subject prototype, lacking not only morphological, but also *most* behavioral subject properties” (Seržant 2013: 320; emphasis mine, K. S.⁸).

The strange manners of negated intransitive subjects and numeral subjects have given rise to a vast body of research, which usually addresses the issues from the perspective of agreement research or unaccusativity diagnostics. In Sections 6.1 through 6.3 of this paper, the essential results of this research will be checked for the clues it provides for a better understanding of the impersonal domain in Russian.

⁶ Following Junghanns & Zybatow (2009: 693), only referential entities can be topics.

⁷ Non-canonical subjects of different kinds will be dealt with in Section 6.

⁸ The emphasis is important, since some behavioural subject properties typically do occur with subject-like-obliques (see Section 5 for discussion).

3 Impersonal morphology: semantically empty default or meaningful linguistic sign?

There is no doubt that Russian disposes of a large set of impersonal constructions, regardless of what the exact criteria of definition thereof may be. Although many authors do not acknowledge this explicitly, constructions that fall under the suspicion of being impersonal usually dispose of the so-called impersonal form (*bezličnaja forma*) on the finite verbal predicate. The impersonal form shows the morphological marking of the third person singular, and, when put into the past tense, is always in the neuter form. In accordance with Harves (2002, 2009), this verbal form will be referred to as impersonal morphology (IM) in this paper. Cases of ellipses, in which the third person neuter form of the predicate anaphorically refers to a nominative NP whose head is a neuter noun or pronoun, are of course no instances of IM. It almost goes without saying that instances of third-person-neuter morphology agreeing with an overt neuter NP in the nominative (i.e., a canonical subject) do not fall under the label of IM, either.⁹ Unlike the criterion of subjectlessness, IM is a formal criterion that can be determined unambiguously in any given construction and across different theoretical frameworks.

Most occurrences of IM include typical impersonal constructions such as weather impersonals (e.g. *temneet* – ‘it is getting dark’) or emotional state impersonals (e.g. *mne (bylo) grustno* – ‘I am (was) sad’). In these cases, both IM and subjectlessness seem to be reliable formal criteria for impersonal constructions. At the same time, there exist a number of other uses of IM in constructions whose status as impersonal is subject of controversial discussion. This holds above all for constructions with non-canonical subjects, but also for many constructions with subject-like obliques.

The idea that the occurrence of IM is a formal indicator of impersonality is of course not new. Suffice it to refer to Vinogradov (1947: 465) here, who states that the use of the impersonal form/IM¹⁰ (*bezličnaja forma*) is the basis (“ležit v

⁹ There is, however, a motivational link between the neuter gender of nouns and the fact that the neuter form is employed in impersonal constructions at least in Indo-European languages. The neuter gender originally emerged as *ne-utrum* and was presumably designed to name non-countable semantic classes of substantives such as collectives (cf. Weber 2000) and, probably only secondarily, not fully grown members of species, including humans (cf. Old Church Slavonic *tele* – ‘calf’, *žrebe* – ‘foal’, or Russian *ditja* – ‘child’). For more reasoning about the origin of the impersonal form in Russian, cf. Šeljakin (2009).

¹⁰ The labels “impersonal form”, its Russian counterpart *bezličnaja forma* and my definition of “impersonal morphology” are considered synonymous and mutually exchangeable throughout this paper.

osonove”) of impersonal constructions. Šeljakin (2009) also addresses the central role of the impersonal form for the definition and understanding of impersonal constructions but comes to conclusions very different from the ones drawn here (see Section 3.2). It is actually only a little step further to assume the impersonal form/IM is not semantically empty. This is what has been proposed, for instance, by Smith (1994) (see Section 3.2). Other insights into the function of IM that have not yet been interpreted with regard to impersonal constructions come from agreement studies and the extensive discussion about unaccusativity diagnostics in Russian.¹¹

My aim is to apply the findings from agreement and unaccusativity research to the domain of impersonality. For that purpose, it is promising to focus on constructions with non-canonical subjects in which variation between IM (or grammatical agreement) and personal morphology (or semantic agreement) occurs. Such constructions are highly instructive for the question of whether impersonal form (IM) indicates some identifiable “impersonal meaning” or if it is only a grammatical default¹² used whenever there is simply (for different and rather unrelated reasons) no nominative NP to agree with. In the first case, IM turns out as a meaningful linguistic sign that systematically indicates some kind of impersonal semantics. In the latter case, IM is some sort of morphological homonym, a dummy form that shows up whenever there is just nothing there to agree with. It is the goal of this contribution to find out if an overall impersonal function can be isolated in all instances of use of IM and, if this is the case, to describe this impersonal function. Šeljakin (2009) believes other accounts on impersonality have been unsuccessful because of their unilateral concentration on form at the expense of meaning:

Na naš vzgľad, vsja problema bezličnyx slovoform zaključaetsja v tom, čto oni ne vse i ne vseгда interpretirujutsja s točki zrenija obščej teorii bezličnosti, a vydělajajutsja tol'ko po ich grammatičeskoj forme. (Šeljakin 2009: 35)

¹¹ Harves (2002, 2009), for instance, argues that the occurrence of IM is actually a diagnostic of syntactic unaccusativity in Russian.

¹² As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the default function of the impersonal form may also be defined as signaling lack of the personal form and its functions. The meaning of the impersonal form would thus be to articulate the feature –person. This, in my view, also results in a functional explanation of the impersonal form. The only difference is that I intend to decompose the feature [–person] into functional subject properties (namely, [–agentivity], [–referentiality], and [–topicality], see Section 4). Contrary to such a “meaningful” concept of default marking is the formalist account that assumes that there is no motivating factor behind the use of the default but that it is simply induced by the absence of a noun phrase that imposes agreement. It is in this latter sense that the notion of default is used here.

In our view, the whole problem of impersonal forms exists in the fact that they are not all, and not always, interpreted from the point of view of a general theory of impersonality, but that they are distinguished only by their grammatical form.¹³

Although Šeljakin's claim is basically right, it turns out that he falls into another extreme by concentrating only on (some aspects of) the meaning of IM, which eventually leads him to assume two different kinds of IM: the real, semantically motivated impersonal form and the only formally induced (but semantically void) use thereof (see Section 3.2). What the present contribution promotes is, at first glance, exactly what Šeljakin seems to reject: a semasiological account of impersonal constructions that starts out from a formal characteristic (namely, IM, and not subjectlessness) and tries to identify the relevant semantic and pragmatic meaning(s) attached to it.

3.1 Formalist concepts of impersonality

Most formalist approaches start from the assumption that impersonality manifests itself in subjectlessness. This tradition can be traced back at least to the first systematic contributions about Slavic impersonals by Miklosich (1883), Jagić (1899: 13–22), Potebnja (1968 [1899]: 317–380), or Vondrák (1928 [1906]: 420–436). In this view, any construction with an NP in syntactic subject position, be it a canonical or a non-canonical subject, will be excluded from the impersonal domain. Expletive subjects are usually allowed for in this definition, owing to the observation that expletives often serve as mere placeholders in languages in which formally subjectless sentences are impossible (cf. Siewierska 2008: 116).¹⁴ For a textbook definition of impersonality in this view consider the following citation from Galkina-Fedoruk (1958: 123):

[B]ezličnoe predloženie – èto bespodležaščnaja konstrukcija s odnim glavnyim členom – skazuemym, v forme kotorogo ne vyraženo značenie lica i net ukazanija na nego v dannom kontekste.

An impersonal sentence is a subjectless construction with one main constituent; the predicate, whose form does not express the meaning of person and where there is no indication of such a meaning in the given context.

¹³ If not stated otherwise, here and in the following translations are my own.

¹⁴ Since expletive subjects play only a minor role in Slavic, and, at least in the Russian standard language, do not exist, it is not necessary to discuss the status of expletive subjects in the subject- and in the agent-centred approaches in detail.

Constructions with non-canonical subjects do not fall under this definition. I do not deny that non-canonical subjects are subjects, or that many impersonal constructions are indeed subjectless. The problem with the subject-centred account is that the identification of impersonality with subjectlessness obscures the parallels between some instances of non-canonical-subjecthood and subjectless impersonal constructions. I assume that these parallels are indicated by a different, unambiguous common formal characteristic, namely IM. Another problem lies in the controversial notion of “subject” itself, which has often caused adherents of the subject-centred approach to impersonality to arrive at mutually contradictory assessments of one and the same construction type (see Sections 5 and 6).

3.2 Functionalist concepts of impersonality

The agent-centred views are functionally oriented and consequently tend towards a very broad understanding of impersonality, including many constructions not traditionally regarded as impersonal. While identifying impersonality with agent-defocusing (or lack of an agent altogether) is unproblematic in the core of the impersonal domain, it leads to an undesirably broad, fuzzy and heterogeneous understanding of the concept at its periphery.

The first construction type to name here are indefinite-personal constructions (*neopredelenno-ličnye konstrukcii*)¹⁵, which are notoriously counted among impersonal constructions (e.g., Malchukov & Ogawa 2011: 28; Siewierska 2008: 125) when only the criterion of instigator-defocussing is applied.¹⁶ From the agent-centred view, even decausatives (also labelled anticausatives; e.g.: *vaza razbilas'* – ‘the vase broke’) may figure among impersonals (Siewierska 2008: 125). Since decausatives have a nominative subject and an agreeing predicate, they clearly fall outside the scope of the formalist accounts, but also outside the understanding of impersonality advocated here.¹⁷ Personal passives may also fall under such a broad definition of impersonality (Siewierska 2008: 122). Passives by definition

¹⁵ Interestingly, the traditional label correctly suggests that indefinite-*personal* constructions should be treated separately from impersonal constructions, although they are of course closely linked to the impersonal domain, namely by the feature of [–referentiality] (but not by the feature of [–person], see also Section 7).

¹⁶ Since indefinite-impersonal constructions are a rather clear case of subjectlessness, the formal and functional approaches usually coincide here as well.

¹⁷ It will become clear in Section 4 that decausatives can be excluded from the impersonal domain on semantic and pragmatic grounds as well, because their subjects usually display the properties of topicality and referentiality.

defocus the instigator, either by means of syntactic demotion from core argument status or by deleting it from the surface structure altogether. Finally, even certain nominalisation patterns (e.g.: *The circling of the camp* [by the tribe]) may be labelled as impersonal from this perspective. Focusing on the event, they naturally defocus the agent/instigator (cf. Siewierska 2008: 124).

Two functionally oriented approaches to impersonality do consider the central role of IM in impersonal constructions. Smith (1994), referring to what I call formalist, subject-centred approaches here as “autonomist accounts” (Smith 1994: 33), puts forward an explanation for the use of IM by interpreting impersonal constructions as “setting-subject constructions” (Smith 1994: 38) and “[a]nalyzing the setting as the subject of impersonals” (Smith 1994: 37). Smith bases his analysis on the cognitivist assumption that grammatical structures are always meaningful and that there is a non-arbitrary relationship between form and content of syntactic constructions. However, Smith (1994) does not include all instances of IM in Russian into his analysis, but discusses only some constructions in which IM is obligatory. These constructions are rather unproblematic in other accounts as well, since most of the formalist approaches classify them as subjectless and most of the functionalist approaches as agentless. Although Smith’s reasoning is sound and points towards the cognitive explanation developed here, it remains fragmentary since it does not address the use of IM in constructions that are only controversially included into the impersonal domain. Second, the notion of “setting-subject” seems unnecessarily vague and opaque in light of the findings about the use (and, hence, the semantic and pragmatic function) of IM that will be given in Sections 5 and 6.

Šeljakin’s (2009) account of impersonality is best included into the functionally oriented, agent-centred accounts as well. Although Šeljakin identifies the impersonal form as the essential indicator of impersonal meaning, he reduces this meaning to a very literal understanding of impersonality, namely, the absence of a person in the entire event or state denoted by the impersonal construction. Šeljakin’s definition of impersonality assumes that there is always some kind of *external* force behind the state or event described by an impersonal construction. This strict conception of impersonal semantics results in an unusual categorisation. According to Šeljakin, the category of impersonal constructions includes, among others, weather impersonals, adversity impersonals¹⁸ of different kinds (transitives and intransitives), reflexive impersonals, and what I will refer to (for

18 Adversity impersonals (e.g., Babby 1994), traditionally referred to as “stixijnye konstrukcii” (‘elementary constructions’, with reference to Mel’čuk’s (1974) assumption of a syntactical zero indicating “stichii” – ‘elements’) by Russian linguists, are impersonal sentences such as “*ee-ACC obdalo-IM volnoj-INST*” – ‘she was poured over by a wave’.

lack of a better term) as the *paxnet*-construction (for instance, *v komnate paxlo-IM cvetami-INST* – ‘the room smelled of flowers’) (Šeljakin 2009: 40).

While this classification is in line with most formalist and functionalist approaches, including the unifying approach promoted here, Šeljakin goes on to exclude emotional and physical state impersonals (Šeljakin 2009: 40), modal infinitive constructions (Šeljakin 2009: 41) or impersonal passives (Šeljakin 2009: 44–46) from the impersonal domain. To explain the use of IM in these constructions, Šeljakin (2009: 40) argues that its use is justified only formally because there is a (usually human) experiencer participant, often expressed by a dative phrase, to which the situation relates in some way. Being the only finite verbal form that is grammatically neutralised (“grammatičeski nejtalizovana”, Šeljakin 2009: 40) with regard to the expression of person, number, and gender, IM is suitable also for these constructions, which all dispose of “oblique subjects” (“v sočetaanii s podležaščimi, oboznačennymi kosvennymi padežami”, Šeljakin 2009: 40). This is why Šeljakin (2009: 48) suggests labeling such constructions, for which he assumes that the use of IM is only a formal default, “formally impersonal sentences” (*formal’no-bezličnye predloženiya*). Although Šeljakin derives this allegedly only formally motivated use of IM from its “semantic” use (i.e., from its “real” impersonal use), his account ultimately leads to a disintegration of IM into two different homonymous forms, and, consequently, to a disintegration of impersonal constructions. As I will show in the remainder of this paper, it is possible to account for all uses of IM in Russian on similar functional grounds, which makes the distinction between semantic and formal uses of IM dispensable.

The inconsistencies arising from the agent-centred accounts as described by Siewierska (2008) obviously originate from the broad semantic notion of “instigator-defocusing” and from the neglect, exclusion, or misinterpretation of formal characteristics. The achievement of the agent-centred view is to point out the common denominator of “instigator defocusing”¹⁹ of formally and functionally heterogeneous constructions, which ultimately makes it possible to integrate impersonal constructions into an even bigger network that I suggest referring to as the “network of instigator defocusing constructions”. In a similar, but reverse way, Šeljakin’s (2009) understanding of impersonal meaning seems too narrow to capture the various uses of IM. In what follows, the agent-centred view will not play a major role precisely because of its disregard of formal criteria for impersonality.

¹⁹ Especially if “instigator defocusing” includes cases in which there is no instigator at all and hence cannot even be defocused.

4 Impersonality as deviance from prototypical subjecthood: Malchukov & Ogawa's (2011) approach

Starting from Keenan's (1976) classical work on subjecthood, Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) propose that the common function of impersonals is to signal lack of a subject NP with (some of the) prototypical "functional subject properties" (Malchukov & Ogawa 2011: 19). The authors subsume these properties under the three cover-terms agentivity, topicality, and referentiality. They go on to classify impersonals with respect to the functional subject property they lack most as *A-*, *T-*, and *R-Impersonals*.

Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) do not provide a definition of the three functional subject properties. Although there is of course a common-sense understanding of the terms among linguists, I consider it important to provide short definitions when introducing the three functional types of impersonal construction distinguished by Malchukov and Ogawa (2011).

A-Impersonals primarily signal lack of an agentive subject NP:

- (1) *Ej povezlo.*
her-DAT was-lucky-IM
'She was lucky.'
- (2) *Mne skučno.*
me-DAT boring
'I am bored.'
- (3) *Dnepropetrovsk zasypalo krupnym gradom.*²⁰
Dnepropetrovsk-ACC covered-IM big hailstones-INST
'[The city of] Dnepropetrovsk was covered by big hailstones.'

Agentivity is a gradual property of a whole clause, its subject and its verbal predicate. An agentive subject is thus the subject of an agentive verb. Strongly agentive verbs are often transitive (e.g., *ubit'* – 'kill', *celovat'* – 'kiss', *bit'* – 'hit'). However, there are also transitive verbs that are semantically only poorly agentive (such as *polučit'* – 'receive', *imet'* – 'have'). Among intransitive verbs, unergatives

²⁰ Source: <http://gottstat.com/news/dnepropetrovsk-zasypalo-krupnym-gradom-foto-1579532.html>. Last access: 04/03/2017.

(such as *obedat* – ‘have lunch’, *rabotat* – ‘work’) are agentive and unaccusatives (such as *umret* – ‘die’, *stradat* – ‘suffer’) are not.²¹ There is of course a strong link between agentivity and the prototypical subject property of animacy. The degree of agentivity is higher when the instigator of an event is animate, and highest when the instigator is human (and hence a prototypical agent). The presence of an agent does not imply that it occupies the syntactic subject position. This is most clearly the case in passive constructions, which by definition downgrade the syntactic position of the agent from subject to adjunct. Complete absence of an agent or instigator may result in an impersonal construction, as for instance in weather impersonals or physical or emotional state impersonals.

The second class of impersonals distinguished by Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) are *T-Impersonals*. T-Impersonals lack a topical NP in subject position, and often they lack an overt topic altogether. A topic is the part of an utterance that the utterance is about. Several tests for topicality have been introduced for different languages. In Russian, topics are located on the left periphery of the sentence, very often sentence-initially. Topics may consist of only one constituent and always relate to a referential entity (cf. Szucsich 2002: 203). Although there may be cases in which the topicality of a constituent is not free of doubt, topicality as such is a dichotomous category. In other words, topicality, unlike agentivity, is not a matter of degree. Among T-impersonals figure some existential constructions in colloquial English, which may allow for singular marking on the verb despite the presence of a subject noun phrase in the plural when the subject is not topical:

- (4) *It seems like there's a lot of people who just do not understand satire.*²²

Another case in point are constructions with “topic expletives” (von Fintel 1992) in German:

- (5) *Es kamen Jäger in den Wald.*
 it-TOP.EXP came-3PL hunters into the forest
 Lit.: ‘It (there) came hunters into the forest.’
 (modified from von Fintel 1992: 6)

Note that the topic expletive does not impose agreement in German. Instead, the verbal predicate agrees with the non-topical NP in syntactic subject function

²¹ In line with Paducheva (2007: 361), the labels “unergative” and “unaccusative” are understood as purely semantic terms in the context of this paper.

²² Source: <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/mikejudge236108.html>. Last access: 02/15/2017.

(*Jäger* – ‘hunters’). In contrast, (6) illustrates an existential clause, in which the verbal predicate agrees with the topic expletive. The latter is at the same time the subject expletive, which results in IM:

- (6) *Es gibt viele Leute, die gerne Gemüse*
 it-TOP.EXPL gives-IM many people-NOM.PL who gladly vegetables-ACC
essen.
 eat-3PL
 ‘There are many people who like eating vegetables.’

It seems that T-impersonals are not prominent in Russian. This is probably because word order is the most important device to mark information structure in Russian. Consequently, non-topical subjects can keep their formal status as subjects by simply moving toward the right periphery of a clause:

- (7) a. *Papa prines cvety.*
 Daddy-NOM.TOP brought flowers-ACC
 ‘Daddy brought (the) flowers.’
 b. *Cvety prines papa.*
 flowers-ACC.TOP brought Daddy-NOM
 ‘The flowers were brought by Daddy.’²³

However, topicality seems to be an issue in constructions in which IM varies with regular agreement. As Corbett (e.g., 1983, 2000, 2010) and others have observed, the likelihood for IM increases when a quantified subject NP occurs in non-topical position (i.e., in post-finite verbal predicate position). The relationship between functional subject properties and IM in constructions with quantitative subjects will be the subject of Section 6.2.

The last group distinguished by Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) are *R-impersonals*. R-impersonals signal lack of a referential subject NP. A clear case in point are weather impersonals:

- (8) *Temneet.*
 gets/is-getting-dark-IM
 ‘It is getting dark.’

²³ As the English translation shows, English makes use of a change in diathesis from active to passive (or some other devices) to achieve the information structural effects that Russian expresses by changing the linear order of the sentence.

Weather impersonals show that the distinction between impersonals of the three different types is not clear-cut, and that most (maybe all) impersonals indicate lack of more than one prototypical subject property. In weather impersonals, there are no participants in the situation at all. Consequently, there is present neither a referential, nor a topical, nor an agentive entity.

Referentiality, like agentivity, is a scalar property. Like topicality, referentiality is a property of a participant, not of an entire clause. Furthermore, referentiality is a semantic property of participants that relates to their status in the “real world”, i.e. referentiality is no language-immanent property. This implies that referentiality is also determined by pragmatics, but less so than topicality. Rather, a referential noun phrase is a noun phrase whose head has an equivalent (a referent) in the outside world. However, this referent does not have to be physically real, it can also be real in the context of a narrative, in which even fairies and pixies can have a referential status. The more individuated a given noun phrase, the higher its referentiality. This means that mass nouns are usually less referential than count nouns, and that nouns denoting animate entities tend toward higher referential status than inanimate nouns. The degree of referentiality may also be indicated by determiners (for instance, in the case of Russian, by demonstrative pronouns indicating definite reference such as *ètot* – ‘this’ or *takoj* – ‘such a’).

A more typical exponent of R-impersonals than weather impersonals are the so-called *-no/-to*-constructions in Polish, which obligatorily include a human agent (and consequently are not A-impersonal):

- (9) *Wypito całą butelkę.*
 drank-out-TO-FORM whole-ACC bottle-ACC
 ‘The whole bottle was emptied.’
 (Rothstein 1993, cited by Bunčić 2015: 6)

It is impossible to express the human agent overtly in *-no/-to*-constructions, which indicates that the agent is not referential. The construction is therefore either topicless, or the accusative actant functions as topic. The agent of *-no/-to*-constructions, whatever may be its real referential status in a given *-no/-to*-construction, is thus at least *construed* as if it were not referential.

A comparison between *-no/-to*-constructions and personal passives or decausatives, which have misleadingly been considered impersonal within the context of some agent-centred approaches, reveals why there are canonical subjects in the latter, but not in *-no/-to* constructions. The canonical subjects of passives and decausatives are usually topical and referential, albeit not agentive. In other words, these subjects constitute the centre of communicative interest in the

respective constructions. The exclusion of personal passives and decausatives from the impersonal domain is thus justified not only on formal, but also on functional grounds.

The three functional subject properties are of course closely interrelated. For instance, a high degree of agentivity entails a certain level of referentiality, and referential agents often function as topics. Likewise, a topic constituent must dispose of a certain level of referentiality in order to function as a topic.

Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) design their proposal as the outline of a universal typology of impersonality. The three different types of impersonals are in all probability distributed unevenly among languages, and the very applicability of the concept of impersonality to, for instance, ergative languages, is subject of intense discussion.²⁴ The present paper is thus also a first attempt to apply Malchukov & Ogawa's proposal to a specific language.

The next two sections discuss Russian impersonals in the centre of the impersonal domain, showing obligatory IM-marking on the verb (Section 5), and constructions with facultative IM-marking on the verb (Section 6) with regard to their status as A-, T-, and R-impersonals.

5 The centre of the impersonal domain: subjectless constructions and constructions with subject-like obliques

Despite the differences between formalist and functionalist accounts on impersonality, the intersection of what both accounts classify as impersonal constructions is still considerably big. These constructions form the centre of the impersonal domain. A typical example are weather impersonals²⁵, but also predicative constructions of the type (*zdes'*) *xolodno/dušno* – 'It is cold/stuffy (in here)' are typically included in works about impersonality in Russian. The reason for the clear status of these constructions is that they display the formal *and* the functional features that are most typically associated with the notion of impersonality.

²⁴ Some references to contributions about the notion of impersonality in ergative languages are given in Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) and Siewierska (2008).

²⁵ It is, however, also possible to construe weather phenomena as personal constructions, with the weather phenomenon in question encoded as a canonical subject, and a semantically bleached finite verb form, e.g.: *šel-3sg dožd'-nom* – 'it was raining'. Non-Indo-European languages seem to make more extensive use of this option than do modern Indo-European languages (Malchukov & Ogawa 2011: 2–27).

The problems with the agent-centred views on impersonality are mostly due to a too broad and fuzzy notion of impersonality (see Section 3.2). This is why the following two subsections address the subject-centred accounts.

5.1 Problems of the subject-centred accounts I: the “dative-as-subject analysis” in modal infinitive constructions

Since most impersonal constructions are indeed subjectless, the formalist account yields reliable results for many impersonals (e.g., weather impersonals, reflexive impersonals, adversity impersonals). However, unanimity among the adherents of the formalist view ends when it gets to the classification of the various Russian constructions with dative experiencers.

Babby (2010), for instance, suggests a rather counterintuitive classification of modal infinitive constructions such as (10–13) as personal:

(10) *Emu ne rešit' ètoj zadači.*
 him-DAT not solve-INF this problem-GEN
 ‘He won’t be able to solve this problem.’

(11) *Teper' nam platit' ego dolgi.*
 now US-DAT pay-INF his debts-ACC
 ‘Now we have to pay his debts.’
 (all Babby 2010: 30)

As Babby (1998, 2000, 2010²⁶) and others (e.g. Franks 1995: 255, 270; Livitz 2012; Perlmutter & Moore 2002) argue, infinitive sentences do not license nominative, but only dative subjects: “surface subjects of finite clauses are nominative, while those of infinitival clauses are dative” (Perlmutter & Moore 2002: 620).

They base their argumentation on certain behavioural properties that the dative actants of modal infinitive constructions display.²⁷ Specifically, Babby

²⁶ Note, however, that in an earlier work, Babby (1994: 26) does indeed refer to “Dative-Infinitive impersonal sentences”, giving examples such as ‘*nam-DAT ne uspet'-INF v teatr'* – ‘we won’t make it to the theatre,’ which are a clear instance of the construction type illustrated by the examples (10–13) above.

²⁷ Babby (2010: 24) explicitly also refers to pragma-semantic criteria to distinguish infinitival sentences with “dative subjects” from sentences which are in his view “really” impersonal: “[...] impersonalisation is related to *thetic* semantics [...]: the event denoted by V is dissociated from its

(1998: 22–24) argues in favour of a dative-as-subject analysis because of the ability of the subject-like datives in modal infinitive constructions to bind reflexive pronouns:

(12) *Možet, mne vzjat' ego s soboj.*
 maybe me-DAT take-INF him-ACC with me-REFL
 'Maybe I should take him with me.'

(13) *Vam samoj ne spravit'sja.*
 you-DAT yourself-REFL not manage-INF
 'You won't be able to manage yourself.'
 (Babby 1998: 23)

As has been argued above, these formal properties are typical for subject-like-obliques and do not require or justify classifying them straightforwardly as subjects. Furthermore, the inclusion of subject-like-obliques into the category of subject results in an undesirably heterogeneous class of subjects in Russian that does not account for the specific properties of canonical subjects, non-canonical subjects, and subject-like obliques as outlined in Section 2. As I will show later on in this section, the ability to bind reflexives is not a prerequisite of the primary dative actants in modal infinitive constructions, but also available for the primary dative actants of other impersonal constructions. Significantly, not all adherents of the subject-centred view classify modal infinitive constructions as impersonal. For instance, Galkina-Fedoruk (1958: 212–219) includes modal infinitive constructions into the impersonal domain on the ground that they are subjectless.²⁸

One may also doubt the assumption that the primary actant (whether called a subject or not) of an infinitive predicate construction will always be in the dative case. Some infinitival structures in Russian seem to allow nominative subjects, although these are obviously rare and stylistically marked. An overused illustration of the construction type in question (a *nominative infinitive construction*, in the terminology of this paper) is the textbook example from Puškin's famous

subject and its semantics shifts from predication to a *thetic judgment*, which focuses narrowly on the perception of the event itself" (italics in original). However, since Babby's account crucially relies on the identification of impersonality with subjectlessness and his semantic criterion does not even apply to all constructions classified as impersonal by him (Babby 2010: 25), he still holds as an example of the subject-centred view.

28 It comes as no surprise that functionally oriented researchers count modal infinitive constructions among impersonals as well (e.g. Creissels 2007: 23; Veyrenc 1979: 19), which is why I will not discuss these approaches here.

Skazka o mertvoj carevne i o semi bogatyřjax ('The tale of the dead princess and the seven knights'):

- (14) *I carica xoxotat' i plečami požimat'.*
 and tsarina-NOM giggle-INF and shoulders-INST shrug-INF
 'The tsarina giggled and shrugged her shoulders.'

Although the nominative infinitive construction is far less common than the modal infinitive construction, I have been able to attest it in contemporary Russian as well:

- (15) *Kto kuda, a my tancevat'.*²⁹
 who where_to, and we dance-INF
 Lit.: 'Who where to, and we to dance.'
 'To each their own, as for us it's dancing.'

- (16) a. *Ona – zarabatyvat' i otdyxat' ot šuma v dome, a on –*
 she-NOM earn_money-INF and relax-INF from noise in house and he-NOM
*privykat' k miru bez ženščiny.*³⁰
 get-used-INF to quietness without woman
 Literally: 'She to earn money and to relax [...] he to adjust to the quietness [...].'
 'For her it's earning money and recovering from the noise in the house, while for him it's adjusting to the quietness without a woman.'

While one may object that (15) is an instance of ellipsis³¹, an interpretation of (16) as elliptic is less plausible, since it is not possible to recover the elliptic element(s) unequivocally from the context. As for the subject properties of the nominative NPs above, they precede the predicate just like the subject-like datives do, hereby usually fulfilling the pragmatic function of topic. Second, the binding of reflexive possessive pronouns seems to be available for nominative subjects in infinitive sentences as well:

²⁹ Headlines of a commercial article about a dancing school. <http://www.msk.kp.ru/daily/26052/2964300/>. Last access: 08/21/2015.

³⁰ Kira Surikova. 2003. *Čečenec*, retrieved from the Russian National Corpus (www.rnc.ru). Last access: 08/21/15.

³¹ With the full form of the sentence being something like *kto poidet kuda, a my poidem tancevat'* (lit. 'Who will go where, we will go dancing.'). However, the notion of ellipsis usually requires that the omitted element can be reconstructed unequivocally, which is not necessarily the case in (15).

- (16) b. *Ona – zarabatyvat' i otdyxat' ot šuma v svoem dome.*
 She-NOM earn_money-INF and relax-INF from noise in her-REFL house
 'For her it's earning money and recovering from the noise in her house.'

Although in the above constructions the infinitive is traditionally defined as predicate (e.g. Šaxmatov 1963: 205), this is not the only possible interpretation. Alternatively, one may also assume that the nominative phrase is a syntactically independent topic frame. In this reading, the infinitive is rather part of a nominal construction without a predicate. The English translation, as well as the graphic separation of the nominative phrase from the rest of the clause by the dash in (16), argue in favour of this second interpretation. At the present state, I am unable to give a final evaluation of the data.

The observation that primary dative actants are far more common in constructions with infinitive predicates (modal infinitive constructions and existential infinitive constructions³²) than nominative subjects may result from the modal reading that the infinitive itself has been associated with (most frequently, obligation).³³ A modal reading combines more naturally with the dative as a prototypical experiencer case than with the nominative. However, modality seems to be at issue in the nominative infinitive construction as well. The study of nominative infinitive constructions constitutes a topic of its own that goes beyond the scope of this paper. The decisive point here is that nominative infinitive constructions exist and that they are not a straightforward instance of finite-predicate ellipsis.

Babby's (2010) view also disregards the inability of *all* kinds of subject-like datives, including those of modal infinitive constructions, to impose agreement on the verbal predicate, resulting in the occurrence of IM in all constructions with subject-like obliques, be they regarded subjectless or not.³⁴ Among the constructions discussed so far, IM is unavailable only in nominative infinitive construc-

³² Infinitive existentials will be briefly addressed in Section 6.1.

³³ Cf. Plungian (2005: 143), who suggests that "the Russian infinitive is better analyzed as a special *mood* [italics in original], alongside with 'conditional'. The main semantic component of this mood is external necessity [...]". This stands in clear contrast to Babby's (2010: 31) assumption that "infinitives are not inherently modal".

³⁴ Another interesting point about the agreement properties of different kinds of "dative subjects" is made in Moore & Perlmutter (2000: 389–396). The authors classify only such dative phrases in infinitive sentences as subjects that are able to impose instrumental case in secondary predicates such as: *Fil'mam Kislovskogo ne byt' dostupnymi-INST publike.* – 'It's not (in the cards) for Kieslowski's films to be accessible to the public' (Moore & Perlmutter 2000: 393). However, this characteristic is not discussed by Babby (2010), and it does not seem to be a suitable means to differ between the datives of modal infinitive constructions and the datives of predicative constructions either, because it apparently works for the latter as well: *Nikomu ne prijatno byt'*

tions, the nominative phrases of which are a special case of non-canonical subjects. Since modal infinitive constructions most frequently occur in the present tense, the presence of IM cannot be determined directly. Transposition into the past, however, shows that IM is indeed obligatory in modal infinitive constructions:

- (17) *Emu bylo ne rešit' ètoj zadači.*
 him-dat was-IM not solve-Inf this problem-Gen
 'He was not able to solve this problem.'
 (Babby 2010: 30)

In affirmative modal infinitive constructions, IM does not seem to be directly available. In order to put an affirmative modal infinitive construction into the past tense, a finite predicate as in (18), or a predicative as in (19) is necessary:

- (18) *Mne udalos' rešit' ètu zadaču.*
 Me-DAT was-able-IM solve-INF this problem-ACC
 'I was able to solve this problem.'

- (19) *Mne nužno bylo rešit' ètu zadaču.*
 Me-DAT be.necessary was-IM solve-INF this problem-ACC
 'I had to solve this problem.'

Given that there is ample evidence of the existence of zero forms of *byt'* – 'to be' in Russian in the present tense, it seems plausible to assume a zero copula in modal infinitive constructions as well.

A point in Babby's discussion of modal infinitive constructions that I have not been able to find an answer to touches upon the question of the status of modal infinitive constructions without overt subject-like datives. In these cases, there is no overt dative phrase, and it is thus unclear whether they figure as personal or impersonal in Babby's framework. It is likely that Babby does not regard them as impersonal, but as instances of subject ellipsis. However, things may not be that easy, for in a sentence like (20), the headlines of an article in an online adviser, it seems hard to recover the subject unequivocally from the context:

obmanutym-INST. – 'nobody likes to be cheated,' or *emu stydno byt' slabym-INST* – 'he is ashamed to be weak'.

- (20) *Kak vyvesti pjatna krovi?*³⁵
 how remove-INF stains-ACC blood-GEN
 ‘How to remove blood stains?’

Modal infinitive constructions without primary dative actants typically receive a generic and/or arbitrary interpretation. Lack of an overt dative seems to parallel formally and functionally with other kinds of syntactic zeros as established by Mel’čuk (1974), especially with his zero form \emptyset_{ljudi} – ‘people’ that he suggests for Russian indefinite personal constructions (*neopredelenno-ličnye konstrukcii*).

The existence of nominative infinitive constructions, together with Seržant’s (2013) notion of subject-like obliques, poses a non-trivial challenge to the presupposition that Russian infinitive subjects be dative. In what follows, we will see that other subject-like oblique datives may display behavioural properties very similar to those of the datives in modal infinitive constructions.

5.2 Problems of the subject-centred approaches II: subject properties of other subject-like obliques

Babby (2010) does not interpret the dative constituents in predicative constructions such as (21) as subjects, despite formal and semantic-pragmatic parallels between these dative constituents and the datives in modal infinitive constructions:

- (21) *V komnate nam bylo dušno.*
 in room US-DAT was-IM stuffy.
 ‘It was too stuffy for us in the room.’
 (Babby 2010: 24)

In a similar way, he does not classify the dative phrases in constructions such as (22) as subjects, and, consequently, views the constructions as impersonal:

- (22) *Ej vseгда vezet.*
 her-DAT always is-lucky-IM
 ‘She is always lucky.’
 (Babby 2010: 30)

³⁵ <http://ru.wikihow.com>. Last access: 04/07/2017.

A justification for this position seems to be the claim that the dative case in modal infinitive constructions is structural, while the datives in (21) and (22) are lexical (Franks 1995: 249–256, 270–276; Zimmerling 2009: 254; Babby 2010). However, the distinction between lexical and structural case is theory-dependent and not an empirical fact. Under any circumstance, if “lexical” implies that case is assigned by the valency structure of the verb, this may hold for (22), but certainly not for (21). In my view, the dative case in (21) is not determined by valency structure, which is why it could figure as “structural” just as well. Furthermore, the assumption of two different (i.e., structural and lexical) “dative cases” in modal infinitive constructions on the one hand, and in constructions such as (22) and in predicative impersonals such as (21) on the other, ignores the obvious formal and functional parallels between the distinct, but related constructions. As the following example shows, binding of reflexives and control into gerunds is available for the dative phrases in some predicative constructions as well:

- (23) *Mne stydno gljadja na igru svoej komandy.*
 Me-DAT shameful looking-GER on play-ACC my-REFL team-GEN
 ‘I feel ashamed when looking at the play of my team.’
 (Zimmerling 2009: 255)³⁶

The dative actant in (24) is also able to bind a reflexive pronoun and a gerund:

- (24) *Leninu povezlo umeret', leža v svoej posteli.*
 Lenin-DAT was_lucky-IM die-INF lying-GER in OWN-REFL bed
 ‘Lenin was lucky to die lying in his own bed.’

This means that behavioural subject properties do not apply exclusively to the datives in modal infinitive constructions. The sentence initial position of the dative phrases in impersonals such as (22), (23) and (24), and in modal infinitive constructions is due to their pragmatic function of topic,³⁷ one of the prototypical subject properties outlined in Section 4. Topicality as such is of course not a prerequisite for subjecthood in Russian, although a prototypical subject is an idealisation that combines topicality with all other formal and functional subject properties.

³⁶ As Zimmerling (2009: 255–256) also shows, placement of the reflexives and gerunds left or right of the dative phrase is not decisive for the availability of the reflexive possessive pronoun.

³⁷ In the rare cases when the dative is not topical, it moves away from sentence initial position as in the following example: *Oj, bežat'-INF Vase-DAT za pivom!* – ‘Oh, <I am afraid> Vasja cannot escape running for beer!’ (Zimmerling 2009: 259).

However, it is also obvious that the dative phrase in constructions such as (21) does not as readily exhibit the behavioural subject properties discussed here as the dative phrases in modal infinitive constructions, or those in examples (22) through (24). The positional criterion – and probably most behavioural ones as well – do not seem to apply to the dative phrase in (21). This is why Zimmerling (2009) introduces a further distinction among subject-like dative obliques. He suggests the label “weak dative subjects”³⁸ for predicative impersonals and classifies only the datives in modal infinitive constructions as “strong dative subjects”. In light of the data discussed above, it seems justified to introduce a further differentiation within the class of datives in predicative impersonals. As the modifications of (21), repeated below in its modified version as (25), show, the non-reflexive possessive pronoun seems much more appropriate than the reflexive one:

- (25) a. *V našej/??svoej komnate nam bylo dušno.*
 in our/??OUR-REFL room US-DAT was-IM stuffy
 ‘It was stuffy for us in our room.’

Reversing word order does not change much, which suggests that the topicality of the dative oblique *nam* does not strengthen its behavioural subject qualities substantially. (26b) shows that a gerund is also barely acceptable:

- (26) a. *Nam bylo dušno v našej/??svoej komnate.*
 US-DAT was-IM stuffy in our/? OUR-REFL room
 b. *?Provedšij ves’ den’ v lesu, v komnate nam bylo dušno.*
 having_spent-GER whole day in forest, in room US-DAT was-IM stuffy
 Intended: ‘Having spent the whole day in the forest, it was stuffy for us in the room.’

The differences in behavioural subject properties of the primary dative actants in predicative constructions may be due to a semantic difference between emotional predicatives such as *stydno* – ‘ashamed’, *grusno* – ‘sad’, *neudobno* – ‘uncomfortable’ and physical predicatives such as *dušno* – ‘stuffy’, or *xolodno* – ‘cold’. Emotional predicatives necessarily define the emotional state of humans, while physical predicatives may occur independently from a human experiencer. Con-

³⁸ Interestingly, labelling the dative phrases in question as “subjects” does not impede Zimmerling (2009: 254) from classifying both, in his terms, “dative-infinitive-structures” and “dative-predicative-structures” as impersonal. This suggests that he does not consider subjectlessness and impersonality to be mutually exclusive, which indeed this paper suggests as well.

sequently, the subject-like datives of emotional predicatives are semantically more “subject-like” than the datives of predicatives denoting physical states. This semantic property is obviously also reflected in the behavioural properties of the two different, yet related, constructions.

In view of the above reasoning, Babby’s (2010: 24) distinction between the datives in question as either “dative subjects” (in modal infinitive constructions) or as “experiencers”³⁹ (in predicative and other impersonal constructions) seems unfortunate. Although not all subject-like datives are equal, the differences can be included into a classification of subject-like datives and do not have to result in a categorical cut across them, especially when the division into subjects and obliques results in classifying some as personal and others as impersonal.

The differences in the behavioural subject properties of primary dative actants are of a gradient rather than categorical nature. This is even more important if, as in the subject-centred view, classifying some subject-like datives as subjects involves exclusion of the respective construction types from the impersonal domain. The differences between subject-like datives can be captured by Zimmerling’s (2009) notion of “strong” and “weak dative subjects”, or by the notion of “agent experiencer” introduced by Divjak & Janda (2008: 163). In this way, different constructions with subject-like datives can be integrated into the obviously bigger group of Russian impersonals with subject-like obliques of different kinds, such as prepositional genitives or accusatives in (27) and (28):⁴⁰

(27) *U menja otleglo od serdca.*
 by me-GEN relieved-IM from heart-GEN
 Lit.: ‘It relieved me from the heart.’
 ‘I felt a sense of relief.’

(28) *Menja tošnit.*
 me-ACC feel-sick-IM
 ‘I feel sick.’

³⁹ At least in Babby (2010), no other label than that of “experiencer” for the datives in predicative constructions is given. The juxtaposition of “dative subjects”, on the one hand, and of “experiencers”, on the other, mixes different levels of linguistic description, namely the level of syntactic and the level of semantic roles. When referring to primary dative actants (i.e., subject-like obliques in the dative case) of different kinds, it is exactly this term coined by Grillborzer (2014) that seems most appropriate. A careful analysis of different constructions with primary dative actants can find out which semantic roles these datives fulfill and which subject properties they dispose of.

⁴⁰ Guiraud-Weber (2002) gives a succinct but illuminating discussion of the behavioural subject properties of different kinds of subject-like obliques.

Another inconsistency in Babby's (2010) account exists in the way he treats yet another construction type with subject-like dative obliques. In constructions such as (29), Babby (2010: 22) cannot identify the datives straightforwardly as subjects because there already is a syntactic subject, consisting of an infinitive and its complement (*zanimat'sja muzykoj* – 'to study music'):

- (29) a. *Emu imelo smysl zanimat'sja muzykoj.*
 him-DAT had-IM sense-ACC engage-INF music-INST
 'It made sense to him to study music.'
 (Babby 2010: 22)
- b. *Emu imelo smysl zanimat'sja svoej muzykoj.*
 him-DAT had-IM sense-ACC engage-INF OWN-REFL music-INST
 'It made sense to him to study his (own) music.'

As the modification in (29b) shows, the dative phrase is able to bind a reflexive pronoun as well.⁴¹ Babby's solution to the problem of having two subjects within one clause is to identify *emu zanimat'sja muzykoj* as the subject (Babby 2010: 22), which, in my view, is a highly unusual approach. As Babby equates impersonality with subjectlessness, he excludes examples such as (29) from the impersonal domain on the same grounds that he excludes modal infinitive constructions. I contend that a conglomerate of constituents such as *emu zanimat'sja muzykoj* cannot be the subject of a clause. Instead, it makes sense to classify *zanimat'sja muzykoj* as the subject of (29), since it answers to the canonical subject question of *kto/čto*. Almost needless to say, an infinitive is not a canonical subject, let

⁴¹ An anonymous reviewer pointed out the possibility that the reflexive pronoun in (29b) may not be bound by *emu*, but by the PRO subject of *zanimat'sja*. I do not prefer this analysis for the following reasons: First, the subject of (29) is *zanimat'sja muzykoj*, which makes it improbable and unnecessary, at least for Russian, to assume another PRO in subject function. Second, the introduction of a PRO subject that is co-referential with *emu* would again result in the analysis that *emu* is not (part of) the subject of examples (29). Introducing a PRO subject to the infinitive *zanimat'sja* is thus compatible with my analysis, since it does not affect my interpretation of *emu* as a subject-like oblique in the sense of Seržant (2013). However, although I do not deny the usefulness of phonetically zero forms in Russian syntactic analyses, I contend that an analysis without zero-forms should be preferred over zero-analyses whenever possible. In examples (29), it is possible to posit an analysis without recourse to syntactic zeros. Second, the grammatical form of an alleged PRO is not entirely clear, either: If it is in the nominative, it would be a regular nominative subject and no "dative-as-subject-analysis" would follow. If it is in the dative case, it would still prove my initial point that subject-like obliques in the dative do bind reflexive pronouns, with the only difference being that under the PRO-analysis, it is a silent dative binding the reflexive, while in my account it is an overt dative.

alone a prototypical one. However, in being the syntactic subject of the clause, it is a non-canonical subject.

Example (29) is also a good illustration of how constituents with different behavioural, morphosyntactic, pragmatic, and semantic potential for subjecthood “compete” with each other. The dative phrase exhibits positional, behavioural and pragmatic subject properties, and the semantic subject property of animacy (not agentivity⁴²). The infinitive phrase *zanimat’sja muzykoj*, although lacking all of these properties, is still in syntactic subject position, answering to the question of *kto/čto*. In my view, this situation is best captured by identifying the dative phrase as a strong subject-like oblique (in line with Zimmerling 2009), or, to reuse the semantic term of Divjak & Janda (2008), as an “agentive experiencer”, and the infinitive phrase as a non-canonical subject. Unlike assuming a discontinuous, structurally highly unusual syntactic subject, the co-occurrence of a non-canonical subject and a subject-like oblique within one clause is not problematic at all.⁴³

The behavioural, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the different subject-like datives discussed in this section are all consistent with Seržant’s (2013) notion of subject-like obliques introduced in Section 2. Given the parallels in the formal behaviour and in the functional properties of subject-like datives, and the inconsistencies that arise when treating them separately, a unifying analysis seems to provide a more adequate description of the data than the subject-centred view.

With regard to the behavioural differences between dative experiencers discussed above, it seems that agentivity is the most salient subject property here. Deviance from the agentive prototypical subject type in constructions with subject-like obliques seems to be mandatory, while referentiality and topicality of the dative phrases seem to be less crucial. The varying degrees of decreased agentivity of the dative experiencers are reflected in their behavioural properties.

The dative actants of physical state predicatives range low in agentivity because these predicatives may also apply to places, and reference to a potentially affected entity is not mandatory. Predicatives expressing physical states require only a place for which the respective physical condition is asserted. This is also why constructions with predicatives expressing physical states are typically part of presentational existentials, with the location occupying the sentence initial position and serving as a topic frame. In emotional state impersonals, the

⁴² Note that the participant encoded in the dative case (*emu*) in (29) is not an agent yet, but that he will be the agent in the event of studying music.

⁴³ As Zimmerling (2009) points out, intra-sentential competition for subjecthood between (certain types of) subject-like datives and other subject-like constituents (e.g., semi-expletive pronouns) is not uncommon.

human dative experiencer usually functions as topic, and the entity expressing the source of the emotion (if there is one) rather stands in post-verbal position, such as in (30):

- (30) *Mne grustno, potomu što ja tebjja ljublju.*
 me-DAT sad because I you-ACC love-1SG
 ‘I am sad because I love you.’
 (M. Ju. Lermontov. 1840. *Otčego.*)

The dative actants in modal infinitive constructions and emotional state impersonals constitute the upper end with respect to their behavioural subject properties. In the case of modal infinitive constructions, this is so because the dative experiencers are at the same time the potential agents of the verb expressed by the infinitive. In emotional state impersonals, the behavioural and functional subject properties of the subject-like datives are due to the typically human nature of emotions.

This discussion of subject properties of different dative experiencers is of course not exhaustive. Furthermore, the centre of the impersonal domain includes many more constructions with and without subject-like obliques. I decided to focus on impersonals with dative experiencers because they best illustrate the shortcomings that arise when impersonality is defined as subjectlessness on purely formal grounds. By including semantic and pragmatic factors into the analysis, the behavioural subject properties of subject-like datives in impersonal constructions become quite clear.

In the quest to ascertain the semantics of impersonal morphologic marking on the verb (IM), the centre of the impersonal domain is not very conclusive. Although the above analysis suggests that functional subject properties in the sense of Malchukov & Ogawa (2011) are reflected in the behavioural properties of subject-like obliques, this does not tell us much about the role of IM – it is simply obligatory. To find out whether IM fulfils the function of marking deviance from the subject prototype, it is more instructive to investigate those constructions in which variation between regular agreement and IM occurs. To this end, the next Section will deal with what I have decided to refer to as the “periphery of the impersonal domain”.

6 Constructions with non-canonical subjects

The different construction types discussed in this chapter have non-canonical (non-nominative) subjects. Consequently, their evaluation as impersonal differs largely among the adherents of the subject-centred approach to impersonality.

6.1 Genitive subjects

Syntactic subjects in the genitive case most often occur in negated existential sentences. Therefore, Babby (2010: 20, 26–27) excludes negated existentials from the impersonal domain and classifies them as personal. On the other hand, Perlmutter & Moore (2002) conclude that the genitive noun phrases in negated existentials (and related phenomena, such as the genitive of negation in passives and with unaccusatives) are not subjects and that, consequently, the respective constructions are impersonal. This is in line with classical contributions about impersonality in Russian such as Peškovskij (1956 [1914]: 365–367) and Potebnja (1968 [1899]: 376–380), who both assumed that all instances of the genitive of negation (henceforth GoN) in subject position are impersonal, while their affirmative counterparts are not.

My proposal is to simply not engage any further in the discussion about the subjecthood of GoN. The GoN is a clear instance of a non-canonical subject as defined in Section 2. Instead of focusing on the notion of subject, I will analyse the conditions under which IM combines with GoN. The availability of IM suggests that deviance from prototypical subjecthood may be at issue, which relates negated existentials and other instances of GoN to impersonal constructions from the centre of the impersonal domain.

In search for the impersonal meaning of negated existentials, it is instructive to take a look at the extensive literature about negated existentials and GoN in general (be it in subject or object position). It turns out that notions such as “referentiality” and “individuation” notoriously figure among the semantic and pragmatic factors influencing the choice of the genitive case. Partee & Borschev (2007: 169) summarize the results of previous research about GoN in Russian as follows:

A Gen Neg NP (subject or object) has decreased referentiality and tends to be (existentially) quantificational’ (Babby 1980, Bailyn 2004, Jakobson 1971/1936, Neidle 1982, 1988, Pesetsky 1982, Timberlake 1975). In the case of Object Gen Neg, many factors contribute to the (probabilistic) choice of Gen vs. Acc: factors favoring Gen include decreased ‘individuation’ of the NP and decreased transitivity of the verb (Mustajoki 1985, Mustajoki and Heino 1991, Timberlake 1975, Ueda 1993). (Emphasis K.S.)

The underlined parts of the citation are highly instructive for our case in point: GoN indicates lack of referentiality; “decrease of individuation” and “existential [...] quantification[...]” are only slightly different labels for decreased referentiality as defined in Section 4. “Decreased transitivity” points to a low degree of agentivity. GoN, which usually triggers IM on the verbal predicate, might thus be a promising indicator for an impersonal form that is motivated by lack of the subject properties of referentiality and agentivity. Given the quantity of literature on the topic, only three examples of GoN alternating with nominative or accusative shall suffice here to illustrate this point:

- (31) *Do menja do six por ne došli pis'ma, otpravlennye v*
 to me to these times not came-3PL letters-NOM sent_out-3PL in
*načale dekabrja.*⁴⁴
 beginning December
 ‘I still haven’t received the letters that were sent out at the beginning of December.’

- (32) a. *U nix ne bylo detej.*
 by them-GEN not was-IM kids-GEN
 ‘They did not have (any) kids.’
 b. *U nix deti ne byli xorošo vospitany.*
 by them-GEN kids-NOM not were-3PL well behaved
 ‘Their kids were not well behaved.’

Example (31) is obviously about a distinct, thus highly referential set of letters, whose existence, albeit not in the right place, is beyond doubt. (32) is particularly instructive for the case in point. In (32a), there are no kids at all, with non-existence probably being the lowest possible degree of referentiality. In contrast, (32b) is a predication about the behaviour of certain kids, which obviously raises the degree of referentiality.

It is noteworthy that IM may occur in affirmative existentials as well:

- (33) *Tam bylo raboty na dve nedeli.*
 there was-IM work-GEN on two weeks
 ‘There was work for two weeks.’
 (Peškovskij 1956: 351)

⁴⁴ Source: http://fut.ru/info/help_secondlink/. Last access: 08/25/2015.

Note the non-topical position of the syntactical subject *raboty*, its non-animacy, non-agentivity and low referentiality, four factors adding up to a considerable degree of deviance from prototypical subjecthood.

There is yet another type of existential constructions that should be mentioned briefly here, namely infinitive existential constructions such as (34):

- (34) *Nam est' (ne)gde spat'.*
 US-DAT is-COP (no)where sleep-INF
 'There is (no/some)where for us to sleep.'
 (Babby 2000: 1)

Infinitive existential constructions constitute an interesting subject of their own (for discussion see Livitz 2012, or Mazzitelli forthcoming), but they do not seem to be particularly instructive for the case in point here. Infinitive existential constructions show obligatory IM on the verbal predicate (manifest in the past tense), and the subject-like oblique dative does not seem to differ in any substantial way from the dative phrases in modal infinitive constructions. In any case, although the subject-like datives in infinitive existential constructions are usually referential, topical and, of course, animate, the construction expresses a considerable degree of lack of agentivity of its primary (and only) actant. This prompts the idea that the dative NPs in infinitive existential constructions are another instance of “agentive experiencers” in the sense of Divjak & Janda (2008) and as introduced in Section 5.

6.2 Quantified subjects

Constructions with so-called “quantified subjects” are another construction type in which IM may alter with personal morphology. Some proponents of the subject-centred view, such as Galkina-Fedoruk (1958: 105–107), classify numeral phrases in combination with IM as subjects, and, consequently, the constructions must be personal. Again, other adherents of the subject-centred view have classified identical constructions as subjectless and hence impersonal (e.g. Potebnja 1968: 378–379; Vondrák 1928: 422–423). The typology of subjects introduced in Section 2 suggests that quantified subjects are non-canonical subjects as well.

But how do numeral subject constructions with IM fit into the picture of impersonality developed here? To account for the semantic and pragmatic subject properties of quantified subjects, it is worthwhile to take a look at the factors that have been identified as decisive for agreement resolution with quantified subjects in agreement research. Corbett (e.g., 1983: 136–156; 2000: 213–216; 2010), Robblee (1993) and others have shown that animacy, word order, and the size of the

number have measurable influence on agreement resolution, with animacy, preverbal position of the quantified subject, and low numbers increasing the likelihood for regular (semantic, personal) agreement.

Animacy and preverbal position obviously relate to the two subject properties of agentivity and topicality, respectively. The observation that high numbers and indefinite quantifiers (such as *mnogo* – ‘many’ or *neskol’ko* – ‘some’) are more likely to trigger the use of IM evades such a straightforward connection with prototypical subject properties. A possible explanation could be that the human ability to conceive of the different entities of a unit as discrete, individual objects decreases when their number increases. This phenomenon has been referred to as “subitizing” – a term coined by Kaufman et al. (1949) to refer to the human ability of quickly and correctly assessing small numbers of items without estimating or calculating them.⁴⁵

Robblee (1993), Glushan (2013), Mikaelian (2013), and others have also stressed the salience of individuation in agreement resolution with quantified subjects. As established for the GoN in Section 6.1, a decrease in individuation reduces the degree of referentiality. The same seems to hold for quantified subjects. To illustrate this, it is instructive to look at how numeral subjects are most commonly used. Numeral phrases typically occur in non-topical position, display a low degree of agentivity even when animate, and show a reduced degree of individuation and, hence, referentiality, since the entities included in the numeral phrase are conceived of as homogeneous parts of a whole, not as individuals. Typically, the number of entities is given only once in a text, with the quantified subject being part of a presentational construction. All these features coincide in the beginning of the following Serbian joke:

- (35) *U vlaku – Vozilo se nekoliko mladića u istom*
 on train – were_riding-IM REFL some youngsters-GEN in same
kupeu s svećenikom. Mladići psovali i
 compartment with priest. youngsters-NOM were_cursing-3PL and
ružno govorili, a svećenik šutio i
 ugly were_speaking-3PL but priest remained_silent-3SG and
molio. Mladići su htjeli ...
 prayed-3SG. youngsters-NOM.PL AUX wanted-3PL

⁴⁵ The observation that Russian, among other Slavic languages, tends to use IM with numbers ≥ 5 actually makes sense if we consider that the human ability to subitize starts collapsing with numbers higher than five. The tendency in languages to mark entities ≥ 5 differently from paucal numbers also corresponds naturally to our bodily experience of having five digits on each hand and foot (cf. also Janda 2006).

‘On a train – Some youngsters were travelling in a compartment with a priest. The youngsters were cursing and using bad words, but the priest remained silent and prayed. The youngsters wanted [...]’

Information about the number of youngsters, however unspecific, is given only at their first mention. Here the youngsters are part of a topicless, presentational construction. In the further mentions of the youngsters, their number is not given any more but they are referred to by an agentive, referential, topical, and, consequently, canonical nominative subject.

From the unifying perspective, it also comes as no surprise that introduction of the definite pronoun *èti* blocks IM in Russian, even if the quantified subject is non-topical, non-agentive and the numeral value is more than five:

- (36) *Nedavno postroeny i èti sem' domov.*
 recently built-3PL also these seven houses-GEN.PL
 ‘These seven houses were also built recently.’
 (Rozental’ et al. 2005: 465)

We will now check if the choice for or against IM with quantified subjects reflects prototypical subject properties in some real-life data:

- (37) *Za poslednie pjat' let v Moskve pojavilos' 400km novyx dorog.*⁴⁶
 for last five years in Moscow appear-IM 400km new streets
 ‘During the last five years, 400km of new streets have appeared in Moscow.’
- (38) *Druz'ja, na svet pojavilos' 9 zamečatel'nyx ščenjat.*⁴⁷
 friends onto earth occurred-IM 9 remarkable puppies
 ‘Friends, nine remarkable puppies have come into the world.’
- (39) *CIK⁴⁸ zaveršila registraciju kandidatov v nardepy: pojavilis' ešče 9 Dartov Vejderov.*⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Source: <http://www.tvc.ru/news/show/id/74043>. Last access: 08/21/2015.

⁴⁷ Source: http://pikabu.ru/story/chelyabinsk_druzja_na_svet_poyavilos_9_zamechatelnyikh_shchenyat_otdam_v_khoroshie_ruki_eshchyo_foto_vnutri_i_telefon_2689848. Last access: 08/26/2015.

⁴⁸ *Central'naja izbiratel'naja komissija* – ‘Central Electoral Commission’.

⁴⁹ Source: <http://glavred.info/politika/cik-zavershila-registraciju-kandidatov-v-nardepy-poyavilis-esche-9-dart-veyderov-291603.html>. Last access : 11/07/2017.

CIK finished registration candidates-GEN into members of parliament: appear-3PL more 9 Darth Vaders
 ‘The Central Electoral Commission has finished the registration of candidates for Member of Parliament: nine more Darth Vaders have shown up.’

In all three examples, the quantified subject is in post-verbal, non-topical position and the numbers employed are ≥ 5 , with 400km of course being the highest number. The use of IM in (37) and (38), but not in (39), illustrates two different semantic shades of the verb *pojavit'sja* – ‘to appear, occur’: While roads do not occur by themselves and the nine puppies were not in control of when and where being born, the nine jesters registering for the parliamentary elections as Darth Vader did so quite on purpose. The use/non-use of IM in the above examples is obviously triggered by various degrees of agentivity. The salience of agentivity for the choice for or against IM also manifests itself with transitive verbs, which imply a potentially higher degree of agentivity of the quantified subjects than intransitive verbs:

- (40) *Pjat' xuliganov bili v Peterburge priparkovannye avtomobili.*⁵⁰
 Five hooligans hit-3PL in St. Petersburg parked-Acc cars-Acc
 ‘Five hooligans hit parked cars in St. Petersburg.’

The subject numeral phrase in (40) is animate, agentive, and topical, which is reflected in semantic agreement and in the absence of IM. Another case in point is the following beginning of a math calculation, where IM is used even with the numeral *dva* – ‘two’. As it turns out, the quantified subject *dva splava* – ‘two rafts’ is non-topical, non-agentive and, at its first mention, naturally low in referentiality:

- (41) *Imeetsja dva splava. Pervyj soderžit [...]*⁵¹
 have-IM two rafts. first contains
 ‘There are two rafts. The first one contains [...]

An observation made by Mel'čuk (2001: 180) seems to be motivated by prototypical subject properties as well:

⁵⁰ Source: <http://rustelegraph.ru/news/2014-12-08/Pyat-khuliganov-bili-v-Peterburge-priparkovannye-avtomobili-23069/>. Last access: 08/26/2015.

⁵¹ Source: <https://znaniya.com/task/2001517>. Last access: 01/27/2017.

- (42) a. *Na mostu stoit/stojalo tri vagona.*
 on bridge stands-1M/stood-1M three carriages
 ‘On the bridge stand/stood three carriages.’
- b. *Na mostu stojat/stojali tri vagona.*
 on bridge stand-3PL/stood-3PL three carriages
 ‘The three carriages stand/stood on the bridge.’

Mel’čuk (2001: 180) relates this phenomenon to the communicative opposition between *Given* and *New*, which again points to issues of referentiality and topicality.⁵²

The agreement behaviour of quantified subjects is of course also related to the origin of numerals in Slavic. While numbers from one to four behave like adjectives, numbers ≥ 5 were originally feminine nouns of the *i*-declension (cf., for instance, Comrie 1992). The difference in origin again reflects the difference in perception and cognition and, consequently, in the different construal of paucal and non-paucal numbers. With paucal numbers, the counted entities are still in the focus of interest and construed as discrete individual units. With non-paucal numbers, the counted entities are less and less individualised and the numeral itself is construed as a discrete entity, which is why it occurs in the shape of a noun. The counted items receive genitive marking with partitive and quantificational semantics. The difference in origin of paucal and non-paucal cardinal numerals combines well with the attested agreement behaviour of paucal and non-paucal numeral phrases.

It remains to discuss a potentially challenging phenomenon discussed in Franks (1993, 1995). Franks notices that singular agreement (1M, in our terms) is blocked when the quantified subject binds a reflexive pronoun (43b) or when the quantified subject controls into a gerund (44b):

- (43) a. *Pjat’ ženščin smotreli/smotrelo na Ivana.*
 five women-GEN.PL look-3PL/look-1M on ivan
 ‘Five women were looking at Ivan.’
- b. *Pjat’ ženščin smotreli/*smotrelo na sebja.*
 five women-GEN.PL look-3PL/look-1M on themselves-REFL
 ‘Five women were looking at themselves.’

⁵² Mel’čuk (2001: 180) further mentions restrictions on animacy and verb semantics that impose an interpretation in terms of varying degrees of agentivity.

- (44) a. *Po doroge domoj, pjat' mal'čikov zašli/zašlo v magazin.*
 On way home, five boys-GEN.PL dropped-by-3PL/IM in store
 'On the way home, five boys dropped by a/the store.'
- b. *Vozvraščajas' domoj, pjat' mal'čikov zašli/*zašlo v magazin.*
 returning-GER home, five boys-GEN.PL dropped-by-3PL/*IM in store
 'Walking home, five boys dropped by a/the shop.'
- (all Franks 1993: 46; 1995: 121)

Franks (1993, 1995) suggests that the quantified subjects in (43b) and (44b) are noun phrases and as such obligatorily impose plural agreement on the verb. This is so because the head of the quantified subjects is a noun (*ženščiny* – 'women' and *mal'čiki* – 'boys'). Since the head of a quantified subject phrase is a noun in the plural, it imposes plural agreement on the verb. In (43a) and (44a), on the other hand, the quantified subject phrase can function either as a noun phrase or as a quantifier phrase. In quantifier phrases, the structural head is a quantifier (the numeral *pjat'* – 'five' in the above examples); when this is the case, IM occurs.⁵³

Although this is an adequate description, its explanatory value is, in my view, limited to the generativist framework within which it is formulated. However, the above examples pose a challenge for the unifying approach as well, since the difference in agreement behaviour cannot be attributed straightforwardly to differences in functional subject properties of the quantified subjects. Concededly, one might argue in the case of (43b) that a reflexive action implies a slightly higher degree of individualisation of the 'five women' than in the case where all the women are looking at Ivan. In (44b), however, it is not plausible at all to argue that the constituent 'five boys' disposes of any more functional subject properties than in (44a).

My suggestion is to interpret Franks' examples as an illustration of what one might refer to as "the power of form": When a behavioural property of canonical subjects, such as binding of reflexives or control into gerunds, is given (contextually, as in [43b], or by choice of the speaker, as in [44b]), this seems to tip the scales in favour of plural agreement. IM is only available when these behavioural subject properties are absent.

Although formal structural properties as in the above examples may play an additional role in agreement resolution, the results of previous research and the

⁵³ Potebnja's (1968: 350) observation that a numeral subject phrase that triggers personal agreement on the verbal predicate answers to the question of "who" (*otvečaeť na vopros 'kto?'*), while a numeral subject with IM-marking on the verbal predicate answers to the question of "how many" (*otvečaeť na vopros 'skol'ko?'*) nicely illustrates Franks' (1993, 1995) reasoning.

exemplary data given in this section show that the likelihood for IM increases when the functional subject properties of the quantified subjects decrease. In other words, the dynamic interaction of agency, referentiality and topicality observed with quantified subject constructions results in formal agreement resolution that is semantically motivated.

6.3 Distributive *po*-phrases

Constructions with so-called distributive *po*-phrases as non-canonical subjects are another construction type in which variation in predicate agreement occurs. This is why *po*-phrases in syntactic subject function have been discussed as a diagnostic for syntactic unaccusativity. Kuznetsova (2005) argues against *po*-phrases as an unaccusativity diagnostic, pointing out that some *po*-phrases in syntactic subject function do not trigger IM:

- (45) [K]aždogo uznika veli po troe konvojnyx.
 every prisoner-ACC guided-3PL *po* three guards-GEN.PL
 ‘Each prisoner was guided by three guards.’
 (Kuznetsova 2005: 173)

With the previous reasoning in mind, it is evident that the non-canonical transitive subject *po troe konvojnyx* – ‘three guards’ is highly agentive, albeit non-topical. Its non-topicality, however, is already indicated by its post-verbal position, which is why [–topicality] does not have to be additionally signalled by IM. Instead, [+agentivity] seems to overrule [–topicality], which is why semantic agreement occurs.

Since *po*-phrases in subject position are relatively rare, I conducted a short survey about the agreement patterns of *po*-phrase subjects of different kinds. The participants of a computer survey distributed via facebook were asked to evaluate *po*-phrase subjects with different degrees of agentivity regarding their ability to induce grammatical (IM) or semantic (plural) agreement on the verbal predicate. In case the participants ruled out both options, they had the opportunity to indicate alternatives. The results were as follows.

Test sentence 1: *Na každom dereve sidelo/sidela po ptice.* (n=22)

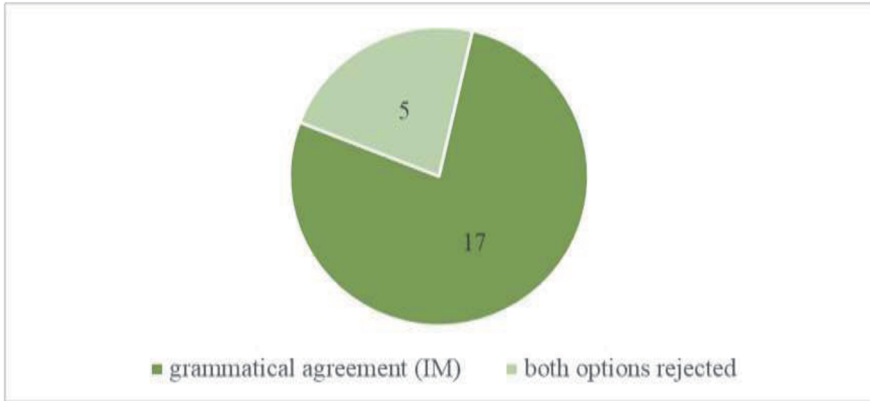


Figure 1: Native speakers' evaluations of test sentence 1

Test sentence 2: *Na každom dereve pelo/pela po ptice.* (n=21)

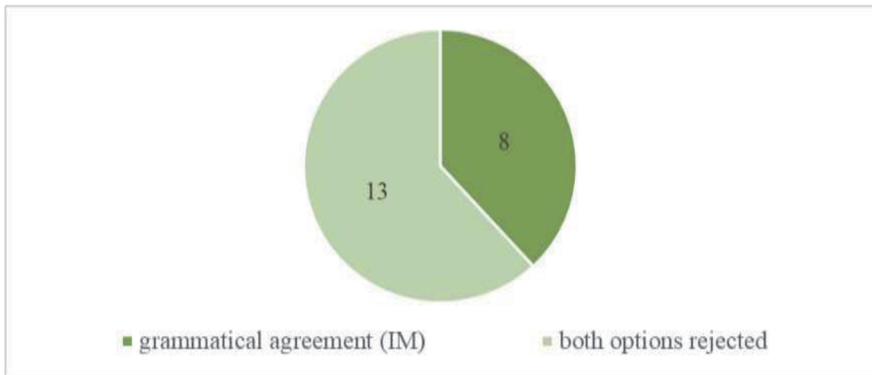


Figure 2: Native speakers' evaluations of test sentence 2

Test sentence 3: *Za každym stolom sidelo/sidela po devočke i pisalo/pisala domašnee zadanie.* (n=22)

With test sentence 3, all participants rejected grammatical *and* semantic agreement and gave alternative options instead, for instance: *Za každym stolom sidelo po devočke. Oni pisali domašnee zadanie./Za každym stolom sidela devočka i pisala domašnee zadanie./Za stolami devočki delali domašnee zadanie.*

Semantic (plural) agreement was also rejected in the first and second test sentences. The acceptance of grammatical agreement (IM) clearly decreased with the increase of agentivity. However, the participants did not favor semantic agreement instead, but rather ruled out the sentences altogether, providing different kinds of alternative formulations. These alternative formulations very often avoid a *po*-phrase, especially with the unergative verb *pet'* – ‘sing’, and the transitive verb *pisat'* – ‘write’, and in combination with the animate subject *devočka* – ‘girl’.

The participants’ evaluations obviously have to do with the semantics of *po*-phrases. The entity denoted by the *po*-phrase is de-individuated, since it is construed as just one part of a homogenous whole. Although they are originally individuating nouns, the entities included in a *po*-phrase turn into generic names. Objects of transitive verbs and subjects of unaccusative verbs are more likely to dispose of the semantic features implied by a *po*-phrase than transitive or unergative subjects. This is why *po*-phrases have been associated with unaccusativity diagnostics (cf. also Kuznetsova 2005: 178–179). As example (45) and other examples in Kuznetsova (2005) show, strong presence of subject properties in the semantic head of a *po*-phrase may trigger plural agreement nevertheless.

6.4 Impersonal passives

Impersonal passives fall under what Babby (2010: 25) calls “epiphenomenal impersonals”. In other words, impersonal passives do not belong to the centre of Babby’s concept of impersonality. This is so because impersonal passives, despite their obvious lack of a subject, do not display what Babby considers “impersonal semantics”. As mentioned briefly in footnote 27, Babby assumes that all impersonal constructions in Russian displaythetic semantics. Under the agent-centred view, on the other hand, impersonal passives do not pose any particular problem since instigator-demotion is one of the key functions of personal and impersonal passives (cf. Xrakovskij 1974: 15).

However, impersonal passives pose a potential problem for the unifying approach, since there is a quite prototypical subject (agentive, usually human, often transitive) underlying the semantic structure of impersonal passives, e.g.:

- (46) *S’edeno bylo mnogo sladkogo, i noč’ju.*
 eaten was-IM many candy-GEN and night-INST
 ‘Lots of candy was eaten, even at night.’
 (Babby 2010: 22)

As Babby (2010: 33) rightly points out, impersonal passives are not very productive in Russian, and their use is often constrained to idiomatical uses (e.g., *skazano – sdelano* – ‘said – done’).

Šeljakin (2009: 44–45), when comparing impersonal passives and indefinite-personal constructions, comes to the conclusion that they are synonymous constructions and that neither of them should be classified as impersonal because there is always a human agent underlying both of them. Although the situations referred to by means of impersonal passives and indefinite-personal constructions are indeed similar, Šeljakin does not take into account that they are not always mutually interchangeable and that there is a difference in construal underlying the two constructions.

In impersonal passives, an action carried out by a human agent is formally made up (construed) as if it were not carried out by a human being. This results in IM-marking on the verb and lack of an overtly expressible subject. The reason for this construal may be either that the agent is unknown (and hence low in referentiality), or that the speaker does not wish to indicate who the agent is (for different pragmatic reasons). Thus, not agentivity, but topicality and referentiality seem to be the subject properties at issue here.

As mentioned above, impersonal passives and indefinite-personal constructions are not always interchangeable. Consider, for instance, what happens when an impersonal passive such as (48) is changed into an indefinite-personal construction:

- (47) *S’eli mnogo sladkogo, i noč’ju.*
 eaten-3PL many candy-GEN and night-INST
 ‘They ate a lot of candy, even at night.’

As the translation shows, a sentence like (47) is not normally understood as being indefinite-personal but rather as a case of pro-drop. The above examples suggest that impersonal passives are preferred when there is a likelihood of confusion with pro-drop uses of the third person plural ending. The semantic and pragmatic differences between impersonal passives and indefinite-personal constructions constitute an interesting topic of its own that cannot be discussed within the scope of this paper. However, again a difference in form seems to suggest differences in function. This does not exclude that impersonal passives and indefinite-personal constructions may be mutually interchangeable in some contexts (as seems to be the case in the examples given in Šeljakin 2009: 44–45).

6.5 Infinitive subjects, clause subjects and other non-canonical subjects

Babby (2010) excludes infinitival subjects from the impersonal domain on the very same grounds on which he excludes *po*-phrases, genitive subjects, quantified subjects, and even constructions with subject-like obliques (namely, infinitival sentences, as discussed in Section 5). Consequently, Babby classifies infinitival subjects as in (29), repeated here as (48), as personal:

- (48) *Emu imelo smysl zanimat'sja muzykoj.*
 him-DAT had-IM sense-ACC engage-INF music-INST
 'It made sense to him to study music.'
 (Babby 2010: 22)

I would like to emphasize again that I do not refute classifying *zanimat'sja muzykoj*⁵⁴ as the syntactical (albeit non-canonical) subject of the above sentences. My whole point is that IM occurs in Russian not only in subjectless sentences, but also in combination with non-canonical subjects of different kinds. Obviously, infinitives are instances of non-canonical subjects as well. Again, formal and functional properties of infinitives constitute a surprisingly harmonious picture. Despite their nominal origin in prehistoric times, infinitives are verbal forms construed as if they were nouns when they occur in syntactic subject or object position (cf. also Veselaya 2012: 75). The verbal semantics of the infinitive is construed as if it were a discrete, noun-like entity. Of course, an infinitive can never bear the role of a semantic agent, it is always inanimate and uncountable. Since infinitives cannot be individual entities but only nominalised processes or states, they are also immanently low in referentiality. The only functional subject property that infinitival subjects can dispose of is topicality, such as in (49):

- (49) *Ljubit' značit stradat'.*
 love-INF means suffer-INF
 'To love means to suffer.'

Infinitival subjects do not pose any problem with regard to the function of IM assumed here.⁵⁵ As has been argued in Section 5, the presence of a primary dative

⁵⁴ However, I do dispute that the subject of (48) is *emu zanimat'sja muzykoj*, as posited by Babby (2010: 22) and discussed in Section 5.

⁵⁵ There has been a lot of dispute within the subject-centred views concerning the question of whether different constructions with infinitive subjects are impersonal or not. The positions

actant with infinitive subjects is not a problem either, since these datives fall into the class of subject-like-obliques, despite the semantic and pragmatic subject properties that they may dispose of (such as topicality, animacy, and potential agentivity with regard to the action expressed by the infinitive), and not into the class of non-canonical or canonical subjects. The co-occurrence of a subject-like-oblique and a non-canonical subject is completely fine, just as is the fact that formal and functional subject properties are split between them.

7 Conclusion: impersonality, subjectlessness, and the relative importance of functional subject properties

The interpretation of the results of previous studies, in combination with further reasoning and corroborated by numerous examples, have driven me to the conclusion that the use of IM in Russian is indeed determined by functional (i.e., semantic and pragmatic) factors.⁵⁶ More precisely, these factors boil down to the prototypical subject properties of agentivity, referentiality and topicality as suggested by Malchukov & Ogawa (2011). From this perspective, IM is the common formal denominator of a network of constructions that share the property of deviance from prototypical subjecthood.

I have had the opportunity to engage in numerous discussions about this topic, in some of which I have encountered also criticism. While I have been able to integrate most points of criticism into the present paper, there remains one potential point that I have not yet dealt with, which points to a possible danger of circularity in my argumentation: If my central point, namely, that there is a systematic relationship between impersonal form (IM) and impersonal meaning (deviance from prototypical subjecthood) is true, it logically follows that any given instance of IM indicates impersonal meaning. This is, as I see it, not circular since it is possible to establish criteria by which deviance from prototypical subjecthood can be determined independent of the occurrence of IM. Among the independent variables figure referentiality, animacy and the topic function of the primary actant, and the semantics of the verb in a given instance of a construc-

oscillate between the assumption that they cannot be impersonal because of the infinitive's subject status and the claim that infinitives can never be subjects, which makes all constructions in question impersonal (see Veselaya 2012: 81–85).

⁵⁶ One could thus state that the use of IM in Russian is consistent with Goldberg's (1995: 3) "Principle of No Synonymy in Grammatical Forms".

tion. Although the evaluation of functional subject properties must be put on a conceptually and methodologically more solid footing in the future, the assessment of instances of IM as indicating deviation from prototypical subjecthood in all the above examples has not been circular. In any case, alleged, but only superficial, circularity seems to be a logical by-product of my hypothesis, insofar as it is correct; that is, if the form of IM does indeed signal impersonal meaning, defined here as deviance from prototypical subjecthood. As for any theoretical endeavour, it is also true of the unifying approach that counter-examples could potentially falsify it. For as long as such counter-examples have not been raised, the unifying account can offer much by providing a formally and functionally consistent picture of the use of IM in Russian, and, possibly, in other languages as well.⁵⁷

After all, the gap between my account and both subject- and agent-centred definitions of impersonals is not as large as it may seem. Impersonal constructions always lack canonical subjects, and I leave it open to terminological discussion to determine if all constructions with IM should be labelled impersonal. The major goal of this paper was to show that IM is not a semantically empty default, but that there is some underlying, however abstract, common function of all possible uses of IM in Russian. Since this function has been defined as the signalling of deviation from prototypical functional subject properties, the unifying approach should satisfy most functionalist views as well.

The classification of subject-like obliques is another field requiring more empirical evidence and theoretical discussion. However, I assume most researchers agree that all primary dative actants differ from nominative subjects in some way (although, of course, some differ more than others), since the difference in case marking and agreement is indisputable. I have explained why I favour Seržant's (2013) distinction between canonical subjects, non-canonical subjects and subject-like obliques, but this does not preclude that there may be reasons to refer to some subject-like obliques as "oblique subjects" or by a similar such term insofar as one wishes to stress that they dispose of a significant set of behavioural, semantic and pragmatic subject properties. I am also aware that constructions with IM are functionally and formally linked with constructions without IM, which are often labelled as impersonal by other researchers. The indefinite-impersonal constructions in Russian or the *man*-constructions in German are cases in point that are often analysed as belonging to the impersonal domain, and

57 For instance, a pilot investigation of the use of IM in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian corroborated the significance of subject properties in these languages as well, however less significantly than in Russian (cf. Schlund forthcoming).

not unjustifiably so. However, a different formal device than IM indicates the functional intersection between some impersonals and indefinite-personal constructions. As suggested by Mel'čuk (1974), this formal similarity is the presence of syntactic zero subjects of two different kinds, namely $\emptyset_{\text{people}}$ and $\emptyset_{\text{elements}}$, and the impossibility of replacing these zero elements with any overt pronominal form.

The idea that IM is the formal indicator of impersonality is actually neither new nor revolutionary. For instance, Peškovskij (1956: 348) has already pointed out that “[...] *bežličnoe predloženie est' prežde vsego nesoglasuemyj ni s čem glagol*” [“An impersonal sentence is, above all, a verb that does not agree with anything”].

The assumption that impersonal constructions signal a lack of prototypical subjecthood has been put forward by Malchukov & Ogawa (2011); the factors favouring IM with non-canonical subjects have been established by research on agreement. Finally, it was Harves (2002, 2009) who stated that the occurrence of IM should be considered a diagnostic for syntactic unaccusativity in Russian. What remained to be done at the onset of the present undertaking was to put together these various strings of thought, which turned out to be highly compatible and mutually supportive.

I nevertheless attach importance to the fact that the unifying approach is more than merely a combination of previous research. By introducing IM as a formal criterion of impersonality, the unifying approach detaches impersonality from the notion of subject and relativizes the infelicitous identification of impersonality with subjectlessness. It hereby also avoids a premature assessment of the nature of expletive subjects, which play an important role in the description of impersonal constructions in Germanic and Romance languages.⁵⁸ The formal criterion of IM makes it possible to identify the relevant sets of constructions and to conduct comparative studies not only among Slavic languages, but also in Germanic and Romance languages. In this way, the unifying approach offers a consistent way to classify impersonals and related phenomena both within a given language and, potentially, also across languages.

An important task for the future will be to establish more thorough criteria for the assessment of the status of impersonal constructions as A-, T- or R-imperso-

58 Expletives may or may not be obligatory and serve various functions in languages that do not (or at least do not always) allow formally subjectless sentences (compare German *es regnet* – ‘it is raining’ with obligatory *es* and *mir ist (es) kalt* – ‘I am cold’ with facultative *es*). While the investigation of the mechanisms governing the use of expletive pronouns is of course mandatory in a language like German, expletives do not constitute a reliable cross-linguistic formal criterion for impersonality. Note, on the contrary, that both German examples display IM.

nals. Ideally, such a classification will permit one to locate any potentially impersonal construction of a given language within a three-dimensional grid of coordinates, as illustrated in the following diagram.

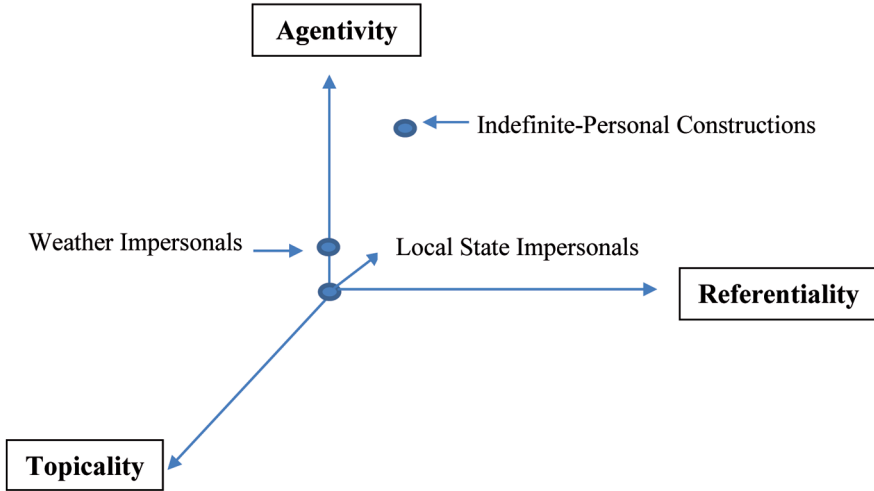


Figure 3: Three-dimensional coordinate system of impersonal and related constructions

The three axes measure the extent to which the respective property is present in a given construction type. The absolute zero point indicates a complete lack of either of the three subject properties. For illustrative purposes, local state impersonals such as *xolodno* – ‘it is cold’ have been located there.⁵⁹ Weather impersonals rank equally low in referentiality and topicality, but are slightly more agentive because they indicate a somewhat “dynamic state”. I have included the indefinite impersonal constructions of Russian on the upper end of the agentivity axis to indicate their usually high level of agentivity, while their level of referentiality is somewhat higher than zero as well. The reason for why they range higher for referentiality than for topicality is that, while a topical agent cannot be referred to by means of an indefinite-personal construction in Russian, the mere existence of an agent includes a certain degree of referentiality. In some contexts, the agent may even be highly referential but left out for pragmatic purposes. The various constructions were merely intuitively plotted within the grid. Developing an exact method for calculating the A-, T- and R-values of different constructions

⁵⁹ The introduction of a dative experiencer (e.g., *mne xolodno* – ‘I am cold’) would of course require a different localization in the grid.

remains a task for the future. Given the complex mutual interdependencies between the three dimensions, this task is highly complex.

It is also promising to compare the use of IM cross-linguistically. For instance, Russian indefinite-personal constructions (*neopredelenno-ličnye konstrukcii*) constitute the approximate functional equivalent of Polish *-no/-to*-constructions (cf. Wiemer 1995). The interesting point is that Russian, unlike Polish, does not employ IM here. Since both constructions obligatorily imply human agents that are non-topical and usually low in referentiality, it seems that the feature of [+agentivity] alone may suffice to block the use of IM in Russian, while lack of topicality and a low degree of referentiality seem sufficient to trigger IM in Polish (namely, a *-no/-to*-construction). From this perspective, the extensive and usually obligatory use of the Genitive of Negation in Polish seems to be another instance in which a lack of referentiality imposes IM in Polish, though it is not mandatory in Russian.

With the development of an algorithm to locate constructions of the impersonal domain of different languages into a coordinate system of the kind given above, a typological comparison of impersonal constructions in different languages will become possible, and most probably yield highly instructive insights into the relative weight of the three prototypical subject properties in the respective languages. There is still a long way to go, and I hope that my paper constitutes a modest contribution towards initiating research in this direction.

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