

# Russian *–sja* as a Verbalizer

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## 1. Introduction

The clitic *–sja* in Russian is a polyfunctional clitic, appearing in both reflexive (1) and anticausative (2) constructions (Babby 1975, Say 2005, Medová 2009, Guhl 2010 and many others). This syncretism is not unusual to Russian and appears with reflexives and anticausatives in a number of languages, both within (Spanish, Italian, German, etc.) and outside (Chukchi, Diyari, and others) of the Indo-European language family.

(1a) Medsestra breet pacienta.  
Nurse shave patient  
The nurse is shaving the patient.

(1b) Pacient **breet-sja**.  
Patient shaves-SJA  
The patient shaves.

(2a) Anton otkryl dver'.  
Anton opened door  
Anton opened the door.

(2b) Dver' **otkryl-s'**.  
door open-SJA  
The door opened.

Though extensively studied, an analysis of this syncretism remains elusive (for some recent ideas, see Embick 2007 and Schaefer 2008). One particular issue concerns whether or not the reflexive clitic itself is nominal or verbal. In this paper, I argue that this clitic is a verbalizer; the clitic merges with a structure which contains an existentially closed event argument and discloses this argument (Dekker 1993), recreating a predicate of events that then can combine with tense and other event operators.

### 1.1. Assumptions about Clause Structure

In what has become the standard view of clause structure (Larson 1988, Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996), we understand the verb phrase to be composed of two elements, a little *v* that introduces the external argument and its complement VP that introduces the internal arguments and the verb itself.

(3) [<sub>VP</sub> NP<sub>SUBJ</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> v [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>v'</sub> [ V (NP<sub>OBJ</sub>)]]]]]]

I propose three extensions to this structure that have been mentioned in the literature. First, there are two positions for the internal (theme or undergoer) argument, one internal and one external to the VP (Basilico 1998, Hale and Keyser 2002, Svenonius 2003, Ramchand 2008, Alexiadou and Schäfer 2011, Cuervo 2014). This distinction results from an argument structure distinction amongst verbs; some verbs are predicates of events ( $\lambda e$  [V(e)]), with their internal argument projected in a separate *v* head, while other verbs are relations between an event and an entity ( $\lambda x \lambda e$  [V(e,x)]), projecting their

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internal argument within the VP. The internal argument of the former are integrated into the semantic representation in a Kratzerian (1996) fashion: they are introduced as an argument of a thematic role predicate, with the event argument of the thematic role predicate identified with the event argument of the verb.

- (4a)  $[_{VP} NP_{OBJ} [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} V]]]$ :  $\lambda e [V(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, NP)]$   
 (4b)  $[_{VP} V NP_{OBJ}]$ :  $\lambda e [V(e, NP)]$

Second, there is a low functional projection above the base position for the internal argument but below the head that introduces the transitive external argument (Johnson 1991, Basilico 1998). This functional projection is PredP, for Predication Phrase. The internal argument generated in the specifier of  $v[UND]P$  moves to the specifier of PredP, giving an ‘internal’ predication (Basilico 1998).

- (5)  $[_{VP} NP_{SUBJ} [_{v'} v[TRANS] [_{PredP} NP_{OBJ} [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} ~~NP_{OBJ}~~ [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} V ]]]]]]]]$

In this view, VP and  $vP$  are event descriptions, while Pred’ gives a predicate of individuals, with the NP in the specifier of PredP being the ‘subject’ of this internal predication. Movement of the internal argument creates a lambda operator, while Pred closes the event argument. Borrowing from Kleunder (1990), who bases his discussion on Kuroda (1972), the semantics of PredP is as follows.

- (6) PredP:  $\lambda x \exists e [V(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, x)](NP_{OBJ})$

The  $v[TRANS]$  projection introduces the external argument, assigns case to the  $NP_{OBJ}$  in the specifier of PredP, and recreates a verbal projection syntactically by projecting a  $v$  head and semantically by existentially disclosing the event argument. Finally, in addition to  $v[TRANS]$ , there is a  $v$  head that also combines with PredP but does not introduce an external argument and does not assign case. However, it does verbalize the PredP projection both syntactically and semantically. It is in this projection that the *-sja* clitic appears.

- (7)  $[_{VP} v[SJA] [_{PredP} NP_{OBJ} [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} ~~NP_{OBJ}~~ [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} V ]]]]]]]]$

## 2. The Transitive and Anticausative Derivation

With this background, I give the derivation for both the transitive and anticausative. I argue that both are based on a verb which gives only a predicate of events, with the internal argument generated outside the verb. The structures will be identical up to PredP.

- (8a)  $[_{VP} [v \ otkryl]]$   $\lambda e [open(e)]$   
 (8b)  $[_{VP} dver' [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} otkryl]]]$   $\lambda e [open(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, door)]$   
 (8c)  $[_{PredP} dver' [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} ~~dver'~~ [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} open ]]]]]]$   $\lambda x \exists e [open(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, x)](door)$

At this point, the structures diverge. In the transitive,  $v[TRANS]$  will be added, introducing the external argument and valuing the case features of the object noun phrase in PredP. Because this  $v$  head can disclose the event argument, it returns an open event argument, allowing the event of the lower V to be identified with the event of the agent predicate introduced by  $v[TRANS]$ .

- (9a)  $[_{VP} v[TRANS] [_{PredP} dver' [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} ~~dver'~~ [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} otkryl ]]]]]]]]$   
 (9a')  $\lambda x \lambda e [open(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, door) \ \& \ AGENT(e, x)]$   
 (9b)  $[_{VP} Anton [_{v'} v[TRANS] [_{PredP} dver' [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} ~~dver'~~ [_{v'} v[UND] [_{VP} otkryl ]]]]]]]]]]$   
 (9b')  $\lambda e [open(e) \ \& \ UNDERGOER(e, door) \ \& \ AGENT(e, Anton)]$

In the anticausative,  $v[SJA]$  is merged with PredP. The event argument is disclosed, but no external argument is introduced. In addition, there is no case marking of the noun phrase in PredP; this noun phrase will then undergo further movements (not shown) and be case marked by T.

- (10a) [<sub>VP</sub> v[SJA] [<sub>PredP</sub> dver' [<sub>Pred'</sub> Pred [<sub>VP</sub> ~~dver'~~ [<sub>v'</sub> v[UND] [<sub>VP</sub> otkryl ]]]]]]]]  
 (10b) λe [open(e) & UNDERGOER(e, door)]

This analysis easily explains why the reflexive is not compatible in a transitive structure. Because v[TRANS] and v[SJA] both merge with PredP, they are in complementary distribution.

- (11) \*Anton otkryls' dver'.  
 Anton open-SJA door.  
 Anton opened the door.

Further support for this structural similarity between the transitive and anticausative comes from transitive, anticausative, and unaccusative 'triplets' discussed in Tatevosov (2012).<sup>1</sup>

- |       |                            |                     |               |            |
|-------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|
| (12a) | Vasja                      | <b>suš</b> -it      | bel'je.       | TRANSITIVE |
|       | Basil                      | dry.IPVF-PRS.3SG    | linen.ACC     |            |
|       | Basil is drying the linen. |                     |               |            |
| (12b) | Bel'je                     | <b>suš</b> -it-sja. | ANTICAUSATIVE |            |
|       | linen                      | dry-PRS.3SG-REFL    |               |            |
|       | The linen is drying        |                     |               |            |
| (12c) | Bel'je                     | <b>sox</b> -n-et.   | UNACCUSATIVE  |            |
|       | linen                      | dry.IPVF-CL-PRS.3SG |               |            |
|       | The linen is drying.       |                     |               |            |

There are two things to note in the above examples. First, one intransitive form contains the reflexive, and the other one does not. Second, the verbal root in the intransitive example with the clitic is the same as that in the transitive, and different from the intransitive without the clitic.

Adapting an analysis of intransitives with and without the reflexive clitic in Spanish given in Cuervo (2014), I argue that the verbal roots underlying these examples have differing argument structures. The verb which underlies the transitive and anticausative is a predicate of events, with its internal argument added within a separate v[UND] head. The verb which underlies the unaccusative, on the other hand, is a relation between an event and an entity.

- (13a) suš: λe [dry(e)]  
 (13b) sox: λxλe [dry(e,x)]

Thus, the sole argument of the unaccusative verb will be merged within the VP. If we assume that in the absence of a v[UND] head, there is no PredP, the lack of reflexive morphology follows. Without PredP, which existentially closes the event argument, there is no need for reverbalization, and thus no need for -sja. In this case, the VP combines directly with Tense. The anticausative structure is given in (14a), with the unaccusative in (14b).

- (14a) [<sub>VP</sub> v[SJA] [<sub>PredP</sub> bel'je [<sub>Pred'</sub> Pred [<sub>VP</sub> ~~bel'je~~ [<sub>v'</sub> v[UND] [<sub>VP</sub> suš ]]]]]]]]  
 (14a') λe [dry(e) & UNDERGOER(e, linen)]  
 (14b) [<sub>VP</sub> sox [<sub>NP</sub> bel'je]]]  
 (14b') λe [dry(e, linen)]

In addition, since we give a similar syntax for the v[TRANS] head and the v[SJA] head, we would expect that if v[SJA] cannot merge, v[TRANS] cannot either. This expectation is met; while the

<sup>1</sup> There are about 35 verbs which can appear as 'triplets'; other examples include *kip-et-t'/kipjat-i-t'-sja/kipjat-i-t'* 'boil', *zamerz-nu-t'/zamoroz-i-t'-sja/zamoroz-i-t'* 'freeze', *osty-t'/ostud-i-t'-sja/ostud-i-t'* 'cool down'. Szczesniak (2008) discusses a similar phenomenon in Polish.

anticausative has a transitive counterpart, the unaccusative does not. Thus, in the absence of PredP, both  $v_{[TRANS]}$  and  $v_{[SJA]}$  are not introduced.<sup>2</sup>

- (15) \*Nika visohla byelyo. Szczesniak (2008)  
 Nika dry-PST underwear  
 Nika dried the underwear.

### 3. The Reflexive Derivation

As we have seen, the *-sja* clitic is also present in clauses interpreted reflexively. However, unlike Spanish, for example, the use of the clitic to give a reflexive reading is limited to certain ‘self-reflexive’ actions, such as ‘wash’ and ‘shave’. For example, the verb *vidit* ‘see’ does not occur with the reflexive clitic, though it does occur with the reflexive pronoun (Say 2005).

- (16a) \*On vidit-sja v zerkale.  
 he.NOM sees-SJA in mirror  
 He saw himself in the mirror.  
 (16b) On vidit sebja v zerkale.  
 he.NOM sees self.ACC in mirror  
 He sees himself in the mirror.

So those verbs that allow a reflexive interpretation are lexically restricted. In addition, in some cases the clause with the reflexive clitic is not synonymous as the using the same verb with the reflexive pronoun. The following sentence is not possible because, as Say (2005) states, the reflexive verb doesn’t just mean ‘to shoot oneself’ but “to commit suicide by way of shooting oneself” (260).

- (17) \*On slučajno zastrelil-sja  
 He.NOM unintentionally shot-SJA  
 He unintentionally shot himself (e.g. shivered while holding a gun in his hands).

I propose that those verbs which occur with the *-sja* clitic with a reflexive interpretation have two lexical representations. In one, the verb gives a predicate of events. In the second, the verb is a relation between an entity and an event, with the requirement that the entity be a bound variable.

- (18a)  $breet_1$   $\lambda e$  [shave(e)]  
 (18b)  $breet_2$   $\lambda x \lambda e$  [shave(e, x)] where x is a bound variable

At the level below PredP, the reflexive structure introduces its argument within the VP. In this case, its argument will be PRO. Importantly, and in another departure from the standard structure, the agent argument can appear in a vP projection that merges with VP. We can think of this vP as hosting either an undergoer predicate, or an agent predicate. In this case, the agent predicate appears in vP.

- (19)  $[_{VP} \text{ patient } [_{V'} v_{[AG]}] [_{VP} \text{ breet PRO}]]$   $\lambda e$  [shave(e, PRO) &  $AGENT(e, \text{patient})$ ]

The derivation will be the same as with an anticausative with a  $v_{[UND]}$  head. The PredP argument will be merged, attracting the noun phrase in the specifier of  $v_{[AG]}P$ . Importantly, because this movement creates a lambda abstraction over the argument position introduced by  $v_{[AG]}$ , a lambda operator is present that also binds PRO. In this way, we get the reflexive interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> There are semantics differences between the anticausative and unaccusative that space prevents me from fully discussing here. Tatevosov (2012) reports that “the unaccusative denotes change of state subevents (brought about by a causing subevent); the anticausative has causing subevents in its extension (which bring about some change of state subevent)”(10).

- (20a) [<sub>PredP</sub> pacient [<sub>Pred</sub> Pred [<sub>vP</sub> ~~pacient~~ [<sub>v</sub> v[<sub>AG</sub>] [<sub>VP</sub> breet PRO]]]]  
 (20b)  $\lambda x \exists e$  [shave(e, x) & <sub>AGENT</sub>(e, x)](patient)

Finally, v[SJA] is introduced to reverbitalize the structure and disclose the event argument.

- (21a) [<sub>vP</sub> v[SJA] [<sub>PredP</sub> pacient [<sub>Pred</sub> Pred [<sub>vP</sub> ~~pacient~~ [<sub>v</sub> v[<sub>AG</sub>] [<sub>VP</sub> breet PRO]]]]]  
 (21b)  $\lambda e$  [shave(e, patient) & <sub>AGENT</sub>(e, patient)]

The presence of the *-sja* clitic in both the reflexive and anticausative results from the presence of a vP below PredP. However, in the former case vP has an agent predicate, while in the latter it contains an undergoer predicate. Thus, even though the reflexive and anticausative have different semantics, they are structurally identical, which explains why both have the *-sja* clitic.

One last point with respect to this structure is that the vP that hosts the agent and undergoer thematic role predicate does not assign case. Thus, if an argument is introduced within the VP, then this argument must either not need case, as with the reflexive sentence, or will later move to T to get case, as with the unaccusatives.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1. Possessor-reflexive *-sja*

Treating reflexive verbs as introducing specifying a relation between an entity and an event allows us to explain a related use of the *-sja* clitic which Say (2005) likens to a ‘lexical antipassive’ structure.

- (22a) Ja            zažmuril            glaza  
           I            screwed.up        eyes.ACC  
           I screwed up my eyes.  
 (22b) Ja            zažmuril-sja.  
           I            screwed.up-sJA  
           I screwed up my eyes.

In this construction, the internal argument of the verb is semantically incorporated, and linked to the subject by a possession relation. Other verbs which appear in this construction include *vymorkat* ‘to blow’/*vymorkat’sja* ‘to blow one’s nose’, *zastegnut* ‘to button up’/*zastegnut’sja* ‘to button up one’s clothes’, *pečatat* ‘to publish, to print’/*pečatat’sja* ‘to have one’s works published’, etc.

The analysis of these verbs is similar to that of the reflexive verbs given above; the reflexive verb is a relation between an entity and an event. However, the entity argument is a possessor argument of a semantically incorporated theme, and not the theme argument itself.

- (23a) zažmuril<sub>1</sub>:  $\lambda e$  [screw up(e)]  
 (23b) zažmuril<sub>2</sub>:  $\lambda x \lambda e \exists y$  [screw up (e, y) & eyes(y) & poss(x, y)], where x is a bound variable

The syntax would proceed exactly as above with the plain reflexive. In the transitive structure, the internal argument is introduced by a v[<sub>UND</sub>] head and the external argument is introduced by v[<sub>TRANS</sub>]. In the possessor-reflexive structure, a possessor argument (of the semantically incorporated theme) is introduced within the VP as PRO, and the agent is introduced within v[<sub>AG</sub>]. The movement of the agent

<sup>3</sup> A low introduction of the external argument could also occur if the verb inherently case marks its internal argument or the internal argument is introduced by a P element. Spanish may show examples of this type with certain ‘antipassive’ verbs (Masullo 1990), in which the *se* clitic appears with an internal argument introduced by *de*.

- (i) Juan        confiesa sus        pecados.  
       John        confesses his        sins  
 (ii) Juan        se        confiesa (de        sus        pecados).  
       John        se        confesses (of        his        sins)  
       John confesses (his sins).

to PredP creates a lambda abstraction, and the lambda operator binds the entity argument of the agent predicate and the possessor argument, generating the possessive-reflexive reading.

(24a)  $[_{VP} \text{ja} [_{V'} \text{v}[_{TRANS}] [_{PredP} \text{glaza} [_{Pred'} \text{Pred} [_{VP} \text{glaza} [_{V'} \text{v}[_{UND}] [_{VP} \text{zažmuril} ]]]]]]]]]]$

(24b)  $\lambda e [\text{screw up}(e) \ \& \ \text{UNDERGOER}(e, \text{eyes}) \ \& \ \text{AGENT}(e, I)]$

(25a)  $[_{VP} \text{v}[_{SJA}] [_{PredP} \text{ja} [_{Pred'} \text{Pred} [_{VP} \text{ja} [_{V'} \text{v}[_{AG}] [_{VP} \text{zažmuril} \text{PRO}]]]]]]]]]$

(25b)  $\lambda e \exists y [\text{screw up}(e, y) \ \& \ \text{eyes}(y) \ \& \ \text{POSS}(I, y) \ \& \ \text{AGENT}(e, I)]$

The reflexive appears in those cases which are transitive semantically but intransitive syntactically because the verb further specifies particular aspects of its undergoer argument. If the verb specifies more completely its undergoer, it must introduce the undergoer argument as part of its lexical representation. This argument appears within the VP, so the external argument can also be introduced low, within the vP structure below PredP.

#### 4. The Absolutive

Another construction where we see *-sja* clitic is the absolutive. Like the reflexive and unlike the anticausative, the sole argument of the verb is an agent.

(26a) *sobaka kusaet mal'čik-a.*  
 dog bites boy-ACC  
 The dog bites a/the boy.

(26b) *sobaka kusaet-sja.*  
 dog bites-SJA  
 The dog bites (is a biter).

Here, the action of the verb is a characteristic property of the subject. Although this construction is also sometimes likened to an antipassive, the interpretation of the understood undergoer is not existential, as with typical antipassives, but more generically; the interpretation of (26b) is not that there exists a person that the dog bites, but the dog has the characteristic property of biting people in general. The absolutive construction is confined to the verbs of physically aggressive behavior, such as *bodat'(sja)* 'to butt', *ljagat'(sja)* 'to kick', etc. (Say 2005).

The use of the *-sja* clitic to mark the anticausative, reflexive and absolutive is mirrored in other languages; Kozinsky et. al. (1988) show that the same morphology is used to mark all three constructions in Chukchi.

(27a) *tewla-nen* 'he shook it off. → *tewla-tko-γə* 'he shook himself.'

REFLEXIVE

(27b) *ejpə-nin* 'he closed it.' → *ejpə-tku-γi* 'it closed.'

ANTICAUSATIVE

(27c) *ʔəttʔ-e juu-nin* 'the dog bit him.' → *ʔəttʔ-ən nə-jyu-tku-qin* 'the dog bites.'

ABSOLUTIVE

So in the absolutive, the undergoer argument must receive an arbitrary interpretation. Since this argument is semantically specified, the verb must be a relation between an entity and an event. So we have two verbs here with two different argument structures.<sup>4</sup>

(28a)  $\text{kusaet}_1 \quad \lambda e [\text{bite}(e)]$

(28b)  $\text{kusaet}_2 \quad \lambda x \lambda e [\text{bite}(e, x_{ARB})]$

The syntax of the transitive and absolutive is as expected; the undergoer argument appears within the VP as PRO, and the agent argument is introduced within  $v[_{AG}]$ . However, unlike the reflexive case, this PRO is not a bound variable but is arbitrary PRO.

<sup>4</sup> Since the absolutive also has a 'characteristic property' reading, there may also be a change in the type of event argument introduced by the verb.

(29a)  $[_{VP} sobaka [_{V'} V[TRANS] [_{PredP} mal'čik-a [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} mal'čik [_{V'} V[UND] [_{VP} kusaet]]]]]]]]]$

(29b)  $\lambda e$  [bite(e) & UNDERGOER(e, boy) & AGENT(e, dog)]

(30a)  $[_{VP} V[SJA] [_{PredP} sobaka [_{Pred'} Pred [_{VP} sobaka [_{V'} V[AG] [_{VP} kusaet PRO_{ARB}]]]]]]]$

(30b)  $\lambda e$ [bite(e, ARB) & agent(e, dog)]

## 5. The Unergative

While this analysis easily explains the presence of the clitic in the reflexive and anticausative, it has difficulty accounting for the presence of the clitic with some unergatives. Furthermore, this analysis also has does not explain the lack of the clitic in most unergatives; if we consider that the external argument in (32) is generated in  $v[AG]$ , then we would expect  $-sja$  to be present.

(31) My smeljais'.  
we laughed-SJA  
We laughed.

(32) Turisty gulja-l-i.  
tourists walk-PST-PL  
The tourists walked/were walking.

I begin the discussion of these unergative forms by noting that in some languages, that *reflexive and anticausative syncretic morphology is also used as a denominal verb*. Space precludes me from giving many examples, but the following shows the syncretism between the anticausative, reflexive and denominal use of the  $-tku$  suffix in Chukchi (Kozinsky et.al. 1988), as seen in (27) above and (33), and Icelandic (Wood 2012), as seen in (34).

(33) wəlpə 'spade' → wəlpə-tko 'to dig with a spade'

(34a) Jón dulbjó-st sem prestur.  
Jon disguised-st as priest  
John disguised himself as a priest.

(34b) Dynar opnu-ðu-st.  
door opened-st  
The door opened

(34c) Ég væri til að gítarast með yllur.  
I would.be up in guitar-st with you.pl  
I would be up for guitaring with y'all.

Kallulli (2013) remarks that many inherent reflexive verbs in Romance and Germanic are denominal or deadjectival, concluding that reflexive morphology is a verbalizer.

If we follow Haley and Keyser (2002) and treat unergatives as covert transitives, together with the fact that anticausative and reflexive morphology is syncretic with denominal morphology, then we can analyze the unergative examples with  $-sja$  as involving a low verbalizing clitic; the  $-sja$  clitic is a V element that merges with a nominal root to create an unergative verb. These V elements introduce their external argument within the VP. The difference between unergatives with and without the clitic results from differing verbalizing morphology.

(25a) smejat:  $\lambda x \lambda e$  [DO(e, x, LAUGH)]

(25b)  $[_{VP} [_{NP} my] [_{V'} V[SJA] \sqrt{smejat} ]]$

(26a) guljat  $\lambda x \lambda e$  [DO(e, x, WALK)]

(26b)  $[_{VP} [_{NP} turisty] [_{V'} V \sqrt{guljat} ]]$

The clitic in these unergative cases is in a lower position than the clitic in the reflexive and anticausative cases, though both are verbalizers.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper gives a unified analysis of *-sja* as a verbalizer. However, this verbalizer can occur in two different positions, one which is high in the structure and is found in reflexive, anticausative and absolutive constructions, and another which is low in the structure and is found in inherent reflexive constructions that are unergative. By exploiting two theoretical innovations (i) that the undergoer (internal) argument, can be severed from the verb and (ii) that the internal argument can appear in two different positions, reflecting whether the verb is a predicate of events or a relation between an event and an entity, we give a unified analysis of the appearance of the *-sja* clitic. Furthermore, it extends the theory by allowing even the external argument to be generated in different positions, correlating with transitive or intransitive syntax. Because the  $v_{[AG]}$  does not assign case, it can only appear in intransitive clauses, but such clauses can be semantically transitive if the internal argument does not need case. In fact, in this analysis, the agent and the undergoer argument can appear in structurally the same position, thus complicating our understanding of the relationship between syntactic structure and thematic relations.

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