

Title: On the Aspectual Theory of Accusative

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The idea that an aspectual head values accusative has been argued for Finnish (Kiparsky 1998), Scottish Gaelic (Ramchand 1997), and Hebrew (Borer 2005), where the telic or “quantity” property of a predicate has been shown to correlate with accusative marking on the object. Richardson (2007) makes the case for Slavic, where the key aspectual feature is “lexical” aspect (or event structure). This paper takes up the problem of one class of verbs for which the aspectual theory of accusative seems particularly well suited, but fails. Unaccusative verbs, such as *break*, *freeze*, and *die*, are defined as a class precisely in the aspectual terms believed to be responsible for accusative assignment – they are telic and quantized, yet their sole argument is assigned nominative. Borer (2005:80-81) and Richardson (2007:100-105) append to the aspectual theory of accusative a Nominative First stipulation: accusative is sensitive to aspect, so long as nominative is already deployed. Unaccusatives are thereby accommodated, but at the cost of a stipulation that makes no reference whatsoever to aspect or event structure.

On the analysis advanced here, accusative is related to causation – potentially abstract causation – which extends beyond the notion of external agency. Accusative fails in the case of unaccusatives due to the lack of a causative, rather than telic, *v*. When *break*, *freeze*, and *die* are causativized, accusative occurs normally, with no change in aspect. A [+CAUSE] *v* has the additional benefit of predicting the grammaticality of unaccusatives that do occur with accusative, such as Russian: *daču:ACC sožglo (čem:INST)* ‘the dacha was burned down’, where the natural force, indicated by *čem* ‘what:INST’, is sufficient to identify (match) the appropriate causative feature in *v*. This paper explores the idea that there are multiple varieties of *v* (e.g., [+QUANTIZED], [+CAUSE]), more than one of which is sufficient for accusative valuation.

References:

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- Ramchand, G. 1997. *Aspect and Predication: The Semantics of Argument Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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