

## THE RIDDLE OF "X WAS NOT AT Y" CONSTRUCTIONS IN POLISH\*

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### ABSTRACT

In Polish there is one type of construction that bears a strong resemblance to the constructions found in split-ergative languages like Hindi or Georgian. In the latter languages a special case marking, i.e., the ergative marking is triggered by a particular tense or aspect. Similarly in Polish, depending on the aspectual properties of the verb *być* 'to be', the "subject-NP" in "X was not at Y" constructions is marked either for NOM or GEN. Two major questions discussed in the paper are: (i) the origin of the GEN marking of the "subject-NP", and (ii) the correlation between the NOM marking of the "subject-NP" and the habitual aspect in the constructions in question. These are puzzling questions since the GEN marking in "X was not at Y" constructions cannot be subsumed under the general rule of GEN of Negation in Polish. Nor can the properties of these constructions be made follow from some general properties of BE-constructions in Polish. To solve these problems, an unusual claim is made, namely, that Polish in some sense behaves like an ergative language. The main aim of the paper is to check to what extent this claim might turn out to be true.

### 1. The issue

This paper deals with the puzzle posed by the Polish examples in (1). Both of these examples are exceptional in some sense: (1a) is exceptional because of the GEN(itive) marking of the subject<sup>1</sup>. Normally it is only the object of a transitive verb that gets a GEN marking under negation in Polish. (1b) is exceptional because of the NOM(inative) marking of the subject. In negated existential-locative sentences with the verb BE the subject is normally marked for GEN, as in (1a), and not for NOM. The habitual marking of the verb in (1b) seems to somehow force the NOM marking of the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "subject" is used here in a purely descriptive pre-theoretical sense.

- (1a) Jana nie było na przyjęciu.  
 John<sub>GEN</sub> NEG BE<sub>3.SG.N.PAST</sub> at party<sup>2</sup>  
 'John was not at the party.'
- (1b) Jan nie bywał na przyjęciach.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> NEG BE<sub>3.SG.M.PAST.HABIT</sub> at parties  
 'John didn't use to come to parties.' (Lit.: 'John was not at parties.')

The examples in (1) give rise to a number of questions. Firstly, we want to know why the subject in (1a) occurs in GEN and where this GEN comes from, i.e., is the GEN in (1a) the same GEN as the one we find in regular Genitive of Negation (GoN) constructions in Polish?

Secondly, we would like to know why the habitual aspect seems to prefer the NOM marking of the subject. And finally, the question arises as to whether the sentences in (1a) and (1b) have the same or rather different syntactic structures.

In approaching the answers to these questions, I would like to point out one very interesting fact which has gone unnoticed in the literature so far, namely that the contrast in the case marking of the subject in the Polish examples in (1) strongly resembles the situation we find in split-ergative languages like, e.g., Hindi; cf. (2) (Mahajan 1994: 323, 318). The case marking of the subject in such languages also depends on the aspectual properties of the predicate. In (2b), the ERG(ative) marking is triggered by a particular tense/aspect: the perfective tense.

- (2a) raam vah kitaabē parhtaa thaa.  
 Ram<sub>NOM.M</sub> those books<sub>PL.F</sub> read<sub>IMPERF.SG.M</sub> be<sub>PAST.SG.M</sub>  
 'Ram used to read those books.'
- (2b) raam-ne vah kitaabē parīī thīī.  
 Ram<sub>ERG.M</sub> those books<sub>PL.F</sub> read<sub>PERF.PL.F</sub> be<sub>PAST.PL.F</sub>  
 'Ram had read those books.'

The claim, a fairly unorthodox one in fact, which I want to put forward in this paper is that Polish in some sense behaves like an ergative language. The actual goal of the paper is thus to see to what extent this claim might turn out to be true. It will be shown that applying a kind of analysis proposed for ergative languages to Polish (existential)-locative constructions as in (1) might indeed offer an elegant and simple solution to otherwise puzzling data.

The proposed analysis will proceed in a few steps. First, in section 2, I will show that the GEN marking of the subject NP in (1a) cannot simply be subsumed under the general GoN-rule in Polish (§2.1). Nor can (1a) be explained by claiming that

<sup>2</sup> In the glosses N stands for neuter, M for masculine, and F for feminine.

GEN in (1a) is GoN of the Russian sort (§2.2). Next, in section 3 it will be shown that the facts in (1) cannot be explained by appealing to some special properties of BE-constructions in Polish. To solve the puzzle posed by the data in (1), I will assume in section 4 that (1a) displays an ergative structure known from (split)-ergative languages. Section 5 will conclude the paper.

## 2. Basic facts about GoN

### 2.1. GoN in Polish: Distribution and semantics

In Polish, like in many other languages, direct objects of transitive verbs normally receive the ACC(usative); cf. (3a). However, when the verb is negated, the case of the direct object obligatorily changes to GEN (hence the name: "Genitive of Negation"); cf. (3b).

GoN in Polish is a very restricted phenomenon: its occurrence is confined only to the structural ACC position. Oblique objects (cf. (4)) and subjects<sup>3</sup>, even subjects of unaccusative verbs which are – according to the standard assumptions – base-generated in the direct object position (cf. (5)), are excluded from the GoN-rule.<sup>4</sup>

- (3a) Jan lubi ✓Ewę /\*Ewy.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> likes ✓Eve<sub>ACC</sub> /\*Eve<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'John likes Eve.'
- (3b) Jan nie lubi ✓Ewy /\*Ewę.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> NEG likes ✓Eve<sub>GEN</sub> /\*Eve<sub>ACC</sub>  
 'John doesn't like Eve.'
- (4) Jan nie pomaga ✓Ewie /\*Ewy.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> NEG helps ✓Eve<sub>DAT</sub> /\*Eve<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'John doesn't help Eve.'
- (5) ✓Studentci /\*Studentów nie przyszli.  
 ✓students<sub>NOM</sub> /\*students<sub>GEN</sub> NEG came<sub>3.PL</sub>  
 '(The) students didn't come.'

<sup>3</sup> As indicated in (3) and (4) the subject is marked for NOM both in affirmative and negative variants. The GEN marking of the subject is drastically ungrammatical; cf. (i):

(i) \*Jana nie lubi Ewy.  
 John<sub>GEN</sub> NEG likes Eve<sub>GEN</sub>

<sup>4</sup> Notice also that even the default, non-agreeing form of the verb does not improve the acceptability of the GEN in such examples; cf. (i):

(i) \*Studentów nie przyszło.  
 students<sub>GEN</sub> NEG came<sub>3.SG.N</sub>

Now, given the fact that GoN in Polish is restricted to the direct (ACC) object position of a transitive verb, it is not clear where the GEN marking in (1a) comes from.

The next problem is that unlike what we observe in (1), the aspect of the verb does not seem to have any influence on the case marking of the direct object in negated sentences; cf. (6). Irrespective of the aspectual properties of the verb, the object is always marked for GEN. More importantly, the special “habitual” morphological marking of the verb, as in (6c), does not have any influence on the case marking of the object: the object is marked for GEN just as in other negated sentences. Thus, given these facts, it is not clear why the case marking in (1) should be sensitive to the aspectual properties of the predicate. These facts seem rather to suggest that the GEN found in the regular GoN-constructions in Polish and the GEN marking in (1a) are not the same phenomenon. But if this is so, could the GEN in (1a) be a GoN of the Russian sort instead?

- (6a) Nie czytałam tej gazety.  
NEG read<sub>1.SG.F.PAST.IMPERF</sub> [this newspaper]<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘I didn’t read this newspaper.’
- (6b) Nie przeczytałam tej gazety.  
NEG read<sub>1.SG.F.PAST.PERF</sub> [this newspaper]<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘I didn’t read (completely) this newspaper.’
- (6c) W młodości nie czytywałam gazet.  
in youth NEG read<sub>1.SG.F.PAST.HABIT</sub> newspapers<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘In my youth I didn’t use to read newspapers.’

## 2.2. GoN in Russian: Distribution and semantics

GoN in Russian shows a broader distribution. Like in Polish, we find GoN in the direct object position, and like in Polish, oblique objects, transitive and unergative subjects are excluded from the GoN-rule; cf. (7).<sup>5</sup> However, unlike in Polish, in Russian subjects of unaccusative, passive and so-called existential predicates might be marked for GEN under negation as well; cf. (8).<sup>6</sup>

- (7a) Ivan ne kupil žurnala.  
Ivan NEG bought magazine<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘Ivan didn’t buy a magazine.’

<sup>5</sup> The Russian examples in this section are quoted from Harves (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Given these distributional facts, GoN is usually taken to be a diagnostic for unaccusativity in Russian, since it only affects the underlying direct object position (see Harves 2002 and the references cited there).

- (7b) Ivan ne upravljaet ✓fabrikoj /\*fabriki.  
Ivan NEG directs ✓factory<sub>INSTR</sub> /\*factory<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘Ivan doesn’t direct the factory.’
- (7c) \*Studentov ne čitajut /čitajet (“Vojnu i mir”).  
students<sub>GEN</sub> NEG read<sub>3.PL/3.SG</sub> (“War and Peace”)  
(intended: ‘Students don’t read (“War and Peace”).’)
- (8a) Otveta ne prišlo.  
answer<sub>GEN</sub> NEG come<sub>3.SG.N.PAST</sub>  
‘No answer came.’
- (8b) Ne bylo polučeno gazet.  
NEG was<sub>3.SG.N</sub> received<sub>3.SG.N</sub> newspapers<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘No newspapers were received.’
- (8c) Moroza ne čuvstvovalos’.  
frost<sub>GEN</sub> NEG felt<sub>3.SG.N</sub>  
‘No frost was felt.’

Another important difference between Polish and Russian is the fact that GoN in Russian is syntactically not obligatory, i.e., it may alternate (giving rise to different interpretations) with the ACC (cf. (7a) vs. (9a)) or the NOM (cf. (8a) vs. (9b)).

- (9a) Ivan ne kupil žurnal.  
Ivan NEG bought magazine<sub>ACC</sub>  
‘Ivan didn’t buy the magazine.’
- (9b) Otvet ne prišel.  
answer<sub>NOM.M</sub> NEG came<sub>3.SG.M</sub>  
‘The answer didn’t come.’

As far as the influence of the aspect on the case marking of the object is concerned, it has recently been claimed by Pereltsvaig (1999) that there is no direct connection between the aspect of the verb and the case of its object. However, there is a connection between generic verbal aspect and case; cf. Table 1. According to Pereltsvaig, GEN can be used if the verb is used generically, as in (10a). In their episodic readings both imperfective (with the progressive reading), as in (10b), and perfective, as in (10c), take ACC objects.

Table 1. Aspects, their possible readings and case of the object

Aspect	Perfective	Imperfective	
Use	---	progressive	habitual
Reading	episodic		generic
Case of the object NP	Accusative		Genitive

- (10a) Ona nam obeda ne gotovila.  
 she for-us dinner<sub>GEN</sub> NEG prepared<sub>IMPERF</sub>  
 'She used not to prepare dinner for us.'
- (10b) Kogda ona zašla v komnatu,  
 when she entered into room  
 on ne kuril sigaretu/\*sigarety.  
 he NEG smoked<sub>IMPERF</sub> cigarette<sub>ACC/\*GEN</sub>  
 'When she entered the room, he was not smoking a cigarette.'
- (10c) Ona nam obed ne prigotovila.  
 she for-us dinner<sub>ACC</sub> NEG prepared<sub>PERF</sub>  
 'She didn't prepare dinner for us.'

Now that we know the facts about GoN in Russian, we can turn to our initial question of whether the GEN in (1a) in Polish could be taken to be a GoN of the Russian sort. But if this were indeed the case, why – given that GoN in Russian is a diagnostic for unaccusativity (cf. footnote 6) – is the Polish version of this GEN confined to BE-sentences? Furthermore, it would not be clear why the habitual aspect triggers the NOM marking of the subject and not the GEN contrary to what is actually predicted by Table 1.

The discussion hitherto has shown that the GEN marking of the subject in (1a) cannot simply be subsumed under the general rule of GoN in Polish, nor can it be explained away by claiming that this is a GoN of the Russian sort.

So, what else can we do about examples like (1)? Since the simple rule of GoN didn't help us much here, what about appealing to some special properties of BE-sentences in Polish?

### 3. Basic facts about BE-sentences

#### 3.1. What is BE in Polish?

As far as the analysis of BE is concerned, the range of the proposed accounts varies considerably – from denying that there is a lexical verb BE at all to assuming more than one verb BE.<sup>7</sup> The question now is what kind of element BE is in Polish.

In Polish regular copular sentences have different properties than existential-locative sentences. This might in fact suggest that there are two different BEs in Polish: a predicative BE and an existential BE. The most important difference between predicative and existential-locative sentences concerns the negation. In regular predicative copular sentences negation has no influence on the case marking of the subject NP; the subject is always marked for NOM and agrees with the copula; cf. (11). Unlike in predicative sentences, there is a difference between affirmative and negative variants of existential-locative sentences: in negated existential-locative sentences the subject NP obligatorily appears in GEN; cf. (12). There is no agreement between the GEN subject NP and the copula.<sup>8</sup>

- (11a) Jan był nauczycielem.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> was<sub>3.SG.M</sub> teacher<sub>INSTR</sub>  
 'John was a teacher.'
- (11b) Jan nie był nauczycielem.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> NEG was<sub>3.SG.M</sub> teacher<sub>INSTR</sub>  
 'John wasn't a teacher.'
- (11c) \*Jana nie było nauczycielem.  
 John<sub>GEN</sub> NEG was<sub>3.SG.N</sub> teacher<sub>INSTR</sub>
- (12a) Na stole była książka.  
 on table was<sub>3.SG.F</sub> book<sub>NOM.SG.F</sub>  
 'There was a book on the table.'
- (12b) Na stole nie było książki.  
 on table NEG was<sub>3.SG.N</sub> book<sub>GEN.SG.F</sub>  
 'There was no book on the table.'

<sup>7</sup> See Harves (2002) for a recent overview of different BE-approaches.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that (12c) is actually grammatical on a contrastive/narrow scope reading of negation; cf. (i):

(i) Na stole nie była książka, ale gazeta.  
 on table NEG was<sub>3.SG.N</sub> book<sub>NOM.SG.F</sub> but newspaper<sub>NOM.SG.F</sub>  
 'There was not a book but a newspaper on the table.'

- (12c) \*Na stole nie była książka.  
on table NEG was<sub>3.SG.F</sub> book<sub>NOM.SG.F</sub>

Recently, Harves (2002) has argued that “BE in Russian is not a lexical verb, but, rather, it is the morphological spell-out of a functional predicational head, Pred<sup>0</sup>, raising overtly to T<sup>0</sup>” (p. 214). She bases her claim on the “special” properties of BE which make it different from lexical predicates, e.g., the lack of the present tense form, a special non-agreeing verbal form *est’* used in existential-locative sentences, and a special negative form *net’*, which is used only in existential-locative sentences.<sup>10</sup>

However, the facts are different in Polish. In Polish there is (i) a present tense form of BE, (ii) there is no special (frozen) “existential” form like *est’*, and (iii) there is no special negative form like *net*. Would that mean that BE is a true lexical verb (of existence) in Polish?

If this were the case, BE would be a very special verb of existence since no other verb in Polish used to indicate existence of an object at some place takes a GEN subject under negation. According to Grzegorek (1984: 107), the basic verb of existence and location in Polish is *być* ‘to be’. However, she notices that in many utterances other notional verbs are used which can replace under specific conditions the verb *być* ‘to be’; cf. (13).<sup>11</sup> However, unlike negated *być*, no other “notional verb” requires its subject to be marked for GEN; cf. (14). Moreover, no other lexical verb takes a different form in the present tense when it is negated; cf. (15): the negated present form is actually *nie ma* ‘not has’.

<sup>9</sup> *Net* is derived historically from the sentential negation marker *ne* ‘not’ plus the existential form of BE *est’*: *net* = *ne* + *est’*.

<sup>10</sup> These properties are illustrated in (i)-(iii), respectively.

- (i) Maša p’janaja.  
Maša<sub>NOM</sub> Ø drunk<sub>NOM</sub>  
‘Maša is drunk.’
- (ii) V Moskve *est’* tramvai.  
in MOSCOW BE streetcars<sub>NOM.PL</sub>  
‘There are streetcars in Moscow.’
- (iii(a)) \*Maši *net* p’janaja /p’janoj.  
Maša<sub>GEN</sub> NEG-BE drunk<sub>NOM</sub> /drunk<sub>GEN</sub>
- (iii(b)) V xolodil’nike *net* edy.  
in refrigerator NEG-BE food<sub>GEN.SG</sub>  
‘There is no food in the refrigerator.’

<sup>11</sup> Which verb is chosen depends on the properties of the referent of the subject. Sometimes a given verb occurs because it forms a fixed collocation with the subject nominal; cf. (i)-(iii).

- (i) słup – stoi (pillar – stands)  
(ii) książka – leży (book – lies)  
(iii) strumień – płynie (stream – flows)

- (13) Na stole leżała /była książka.  
on table lie<sub>3.SG.F.PAST</sub> /be<sub>3.SG.F.PAST</sub> book<sub>NOM.SG.F</sub>  
‘There was a book on the table.’

- (14a) Na stole nie leżała książka/\*książki.  
on table NEG lie<sub>3.SG.F.PAST</sub> book<sub>NOM/\*GEN</sub>

- (14a’) \*Na stole nie leżało książki.  
on table NEG lie<sub>3.SG.N.PAST</sub> book<sub>GEN</sub>

- (14b) Na stole nie było książki.  
on table NEG be<sub>3.SG.N.PAST</sub> book<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘There was a book on the table.’

- (15a) Na stole jest książka.  
on table be<sub>3.SG.PRES</sub> book<sub>NOM</sub>  
‘There is a book on the table.’

- (15b) Na stole nie ma książki.  
on table NEG have<sub>3.SG.PRES</sub> book<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘There is no book on the table.’

### 3.2. Aspectual properties of BE

What is also special about BE is its aspectual properties. BE in Polish (also in Russian) has a separate iterative/habitual paradigm, in contrast to most other verbs; see Table 2.<sup>12</sup>

Table 2. Aspectual forms of BE

	ASPECT	
	ITERATIVE <i>bywać</i>	IMPERFECTIVE? <i>być</i>
FUTURE	będzie bywać	będzie
PRESENT	bywa	jest
PAST	bywał/-a/-o	był/-a/-o

<sup>12</sup> Normally, it is just an imperfective form that is used to express an iterative meaning of a given verb; cf. (i).

- (i) Jan często chodził na przyjęcia.  
John often go<sub>3.SG.M.PAST.IMPERF</sub> to parties  
‘John often went to parties.’

## 4. Investigation

## 4.1. Proposal

In the previous sections we have seen that BE (especially the existential-locative BE) displays peculiar behavior. A particularly puzzling pattern is that displayed by the examples in (1). No other lexical or copular verb shows such properties.

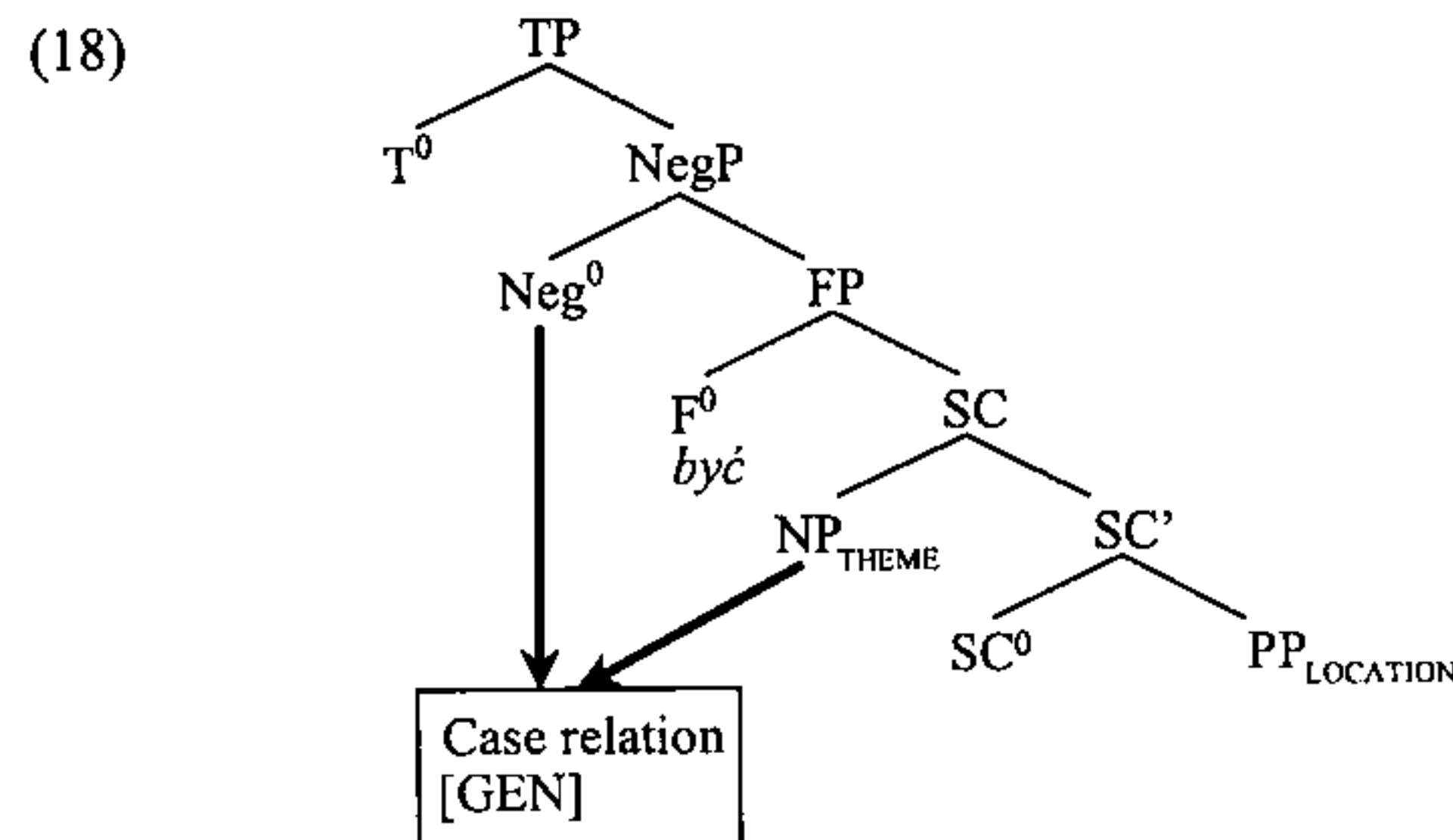
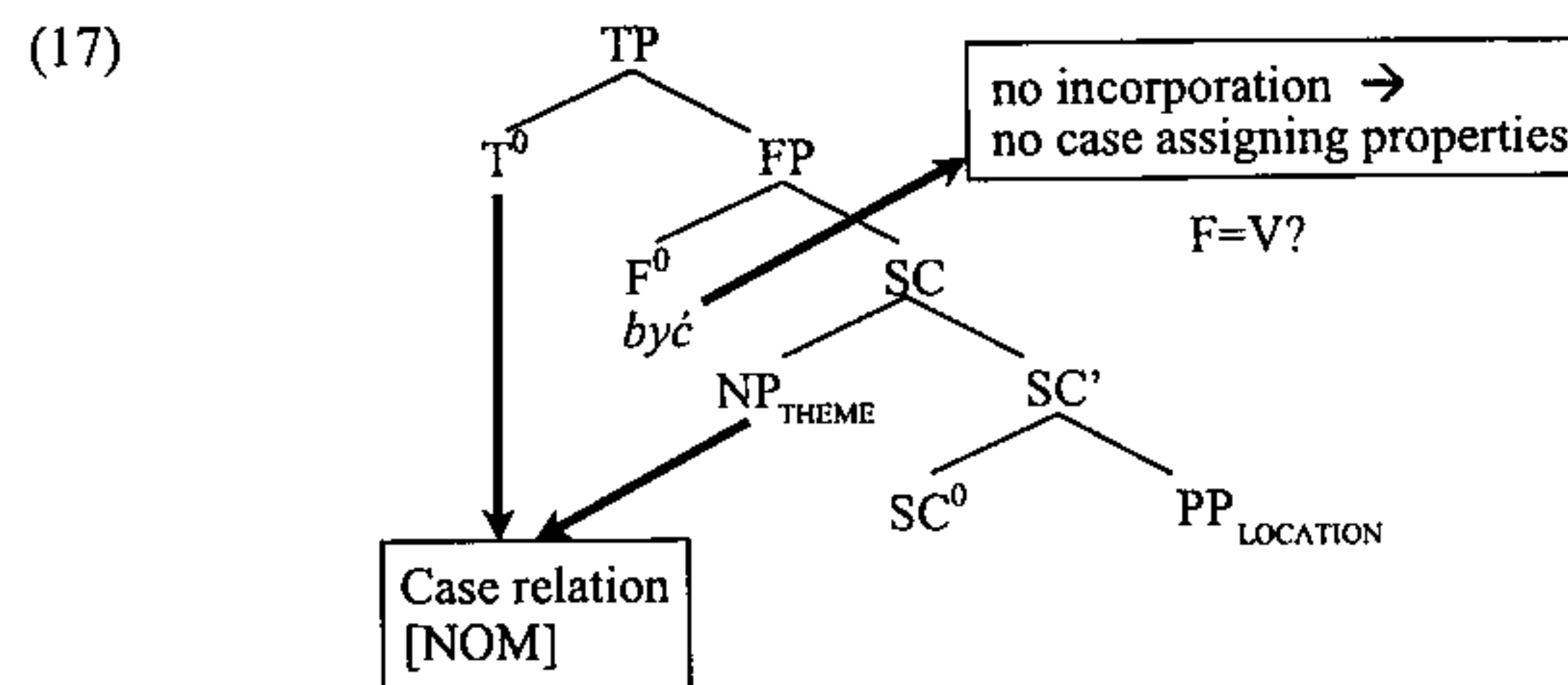
One possible way of looking at the puzzling facts in (1) is to assume that (1a) displays an ergative structure known from (split)-ergative languages (whatever analysis turns out to be correct here). Speaking about so-called split-ergative languages, it should be noted that a split in the case marking system might be conditioned by various factors, one of them being aspect or tense. There is a universal observation that whenever a language shows a split conditioned by tense or aspect, it is always the perfective aspect (or perfective tenses in general) which shows ERG(ative)/ABS(olutive) marking, whereas the imperfective aspect (or imperfective tenses) go together with NOM/ACC marking (see, e.g., Plank 1979, Dixon 1994).

Thus, there appears to be a close connection between perfectivity and ergativity. Why should this be the case? The relevant observation in this connection is that both perfective and ergative structures focus on the event or a state resulting from an event. This goes hand in hand with the observation that many telic events are actually events without agents, i.e., we often find unaccusative verbs like fall, arrive, etc. in such structures (cf., e.g., Smith 1997). This is so because what counts for the aspectual composition is the internal argument, the theme, and not the agent. The agent, if present, is understood as being somehow external to the event. The situation is different in imperfective tenses. Here the emphasis is on the process or the progression of the action as such. Here the agent plays an important role: the progression of the action depends on the agent; the agent is so to speak the controller of the action. The agent is somehow understood as being internal to the action, as being part of the action. From this it follows that imperfective sentences are preferably those whose subject has an agent role, that is, we will preferably find unergative verbs in such structures and not the unaccusative ones.

To account for the ERG case pattern, Mahajan (1994) and Hoekstra (2000) among others take transitivity to be a derived property. The “ERG pattern”, normally restricted to perfective sentences, is claimed to be basically unaccusative. So we have a BE-(NOM assigning) auxiliary in ergative structures in contrast to a transitive (ACC assigning) HAVE-auxiliary; ERG case marking results from the non-incorporated P(reposition) (of the possessor/locative phrase). (In ACC languages this preposition is incorporated into BE, resulting in HAVE and NOM-marking of the possessor.) Schematically, the underlying structure is something like the one in (16) from Hoekstra (2000).

(16a) [<sub>AgrsP</sub> Agrs TNS [<sub>AgroP</sub> Agro [<sub>FP</sub> F [<sub>SC</sub> DP<sub>1</sub> P DP<sub>2</sub>]]]]  
F lexicalized as BE

(16b) [<sub>AgrsP</sub> Agrs TNS [<sub>AgroP</sub> Agro [<sub>FP</sub> F [<sub>SC</sub> DP<sub>1</sub> P DP<sub>2</sub>]]]]  
↑  
Incorporation  
F lexicalized as HAVE (= BE + P)

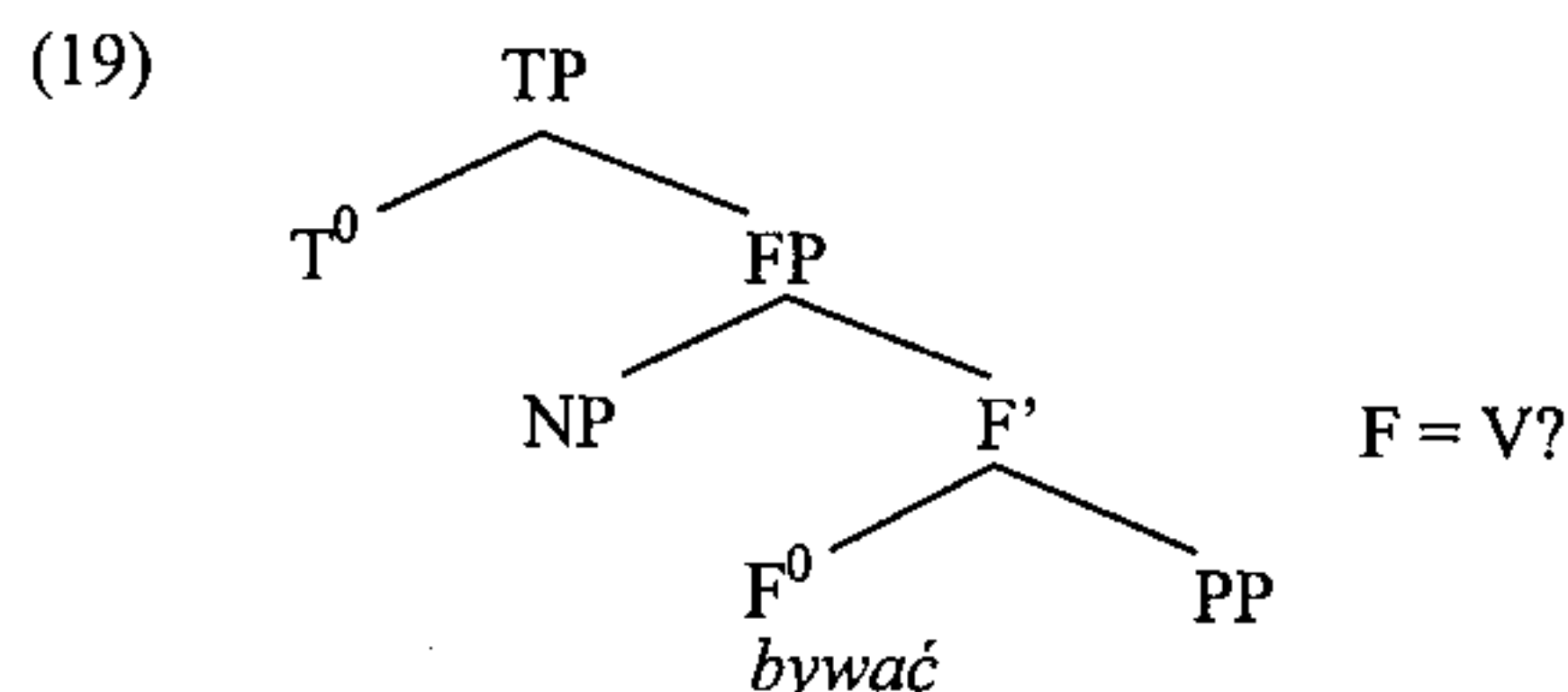


Now, we might speculate that something along these lines is going on in the Polish example (1a): BE itself is a non-case-assigning verbal head taking a small clause (SC) consisting of an NP “theme” and a PP “location”; this is schematically indicated in (17)<sup>13</sup>; nothing incorporates into BE, hence BE remains a non-case-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Harves (2002: 215) for a similar structure for existential-locative clauses in Russian.

assigning category; in affirmative sentences an NP can be assigned case only by T (hence the NOM marking) since there is no other case assigner in the clause. In negative sentences, however, there is a closer case assigner than T, namely, NEG (hence the GEN marking); cf. (18).<sup>14</sup>

For this analysis to go through, it must be shown that (i) there is an aspectual difference between *być* and *bywać*, desirably in terms of *być* being perfective (to explain why *być* but not *bywać* triggers an ergative pattern); and (ii) there is a structural difference between *być* and *bywać* in that *być* triggers an “ergative” (unaccusative) pattern and *bywać* is in a sense unergative. Under this assumption the “subject” NP of *bywać* would be generated as its external argument; cf. (19). Given that it is only internal arguments that can get a GEN marking in Polish (or Russian), the lack of the GEN marking in this case (cf. (1b)) could be attributed to this fact.



#### 4.2. Is *być* “perfective”?

So let us begin with the first point, namely the aspectual difference between *być* and *bywać*.

Speaking of *być* in terms of perfectivity seems to be a strange idea at first sight. *Być* is a stative verb and statives are normally imperfective. However, there are some facts which could be taken to indicate that *być* is perfective in some sense.

It has been noted in the literature that the suffixes employed by what are traditionally called future tense forms of *być* (‘to be’) in Russian (i.e., the *budet*-forms)

<sup>14</sup> The existence of the form *nie ma* ‘not has’ in the present tense (cf. (15b)) requires a separate discussion which, for reasons of space, cannot be offered in this paper. In short, I assume that *nie ma* is an idiosyncratic form (i.e., *ma* ‘has’ is not the result of P into BE incorporation). See, however, Witkoś (2000) for a somewhat different analysis, in minimalist terms, of existential-locative sentences (including *nie ma*) in Polish.

are actually ordinary present tense suffixes of Russian verbs.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the *budet*-forms, despite being, morphologically speaking, present tense forms, have future time reference exclusively. This is characteristic of perfective verbs in Slavic; cf. (20). Eriksen (2000: 27) assumes therefore the following paradigm in Table 3, where *byvat’* is imperfective, and *byt’* is perfective (see also Franks 1995, Junghanns 1997).

- (20) Ona            pišet/napišet            pis’mo.  
 she<sub>NOM</sub>        writes<sub>IMPERF</sub>/writes<sub>PERF</sub>    letter<sub>ACC</sub>  
 ‘She is writing/will write a letter.’

Table 3. Aspectual forms of (the Russian) BE

	ASPECT	
	IMPERFECTIVE <i>byvat’</i>	PERFECTIVE <i>byt’</i>
FUTURE	(budet <i>byvat’</i> )	budet
PRESENT	byvaet	(est’)
PAST	byval/-a/-o	byl/-a/-o

Another “perfective” feature of *byt’* has been pointed out by Ferrell (1953) (as reported in Eriksen 2000: 29): The future form of *byt’* shares a series of exclusive properties with perfective verbs. For instance, it is compatible with the complex conjunction *poka ne* or *zanim nie* in Polish in the meaning of ‘until/before’; cf. (21). One might thus assume that *być*, even though not obviously perfective, is compatible with both perfective and imperfective viewpoints, as has recently been claimed by Matushansky (2001: 298). *Bywać*, on the other hand, has exclusively imperfective properties.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The same holds for the Polish “future forms” of *być*, the *będzie*-forms; cf. (i).

- (i)    *będę*-ę (1.SG.)        *pisz*-ę (write-1.SG.PRES)  
       *będzi*-esz (2.SG)    *pisz*-esz  
       *będzi*-e (3.SG)      *pisz*-e  
       *będzi*-emy (1.PL)    *pisz*-emy  
       *będzi*-ecie (2.PL)   *pisz*-ecie  
       *będ*-ą (3.PL)        *pisz*-ą

<sup>16</sup> One should presumably speak of *być* not in terms of perfectivity but rather in terms of telicity along the lines proposed by Kiparsky (1998) for stative verbs in Finnish. Kiparsky takes verbs like *omistaa* ‘to own’ in Finnish – as far as their morphosyntactic properties (especially their case syntax) are concerned – to be telic verbs, even though semantically they remain atelic verbs.

(21a) Nigdzie nie wyjdę, zanim nie  
 nowhere NEG go<sub>1.SG.PRES.PERF</sub> before NEG  
 napiszę/\*piszę tego listu.  
 write<sub>1.SG.PRES.PERF/\*IMPERF</sub> this letter<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'I won't go out before I have written this letter.'

(21b) Nie zadzwonię do nikogo  
 NEG phone<sub>1.SG.PRES.PERF</sub> to no-one  
 zanim nie będę w domu.  
 before NEG be<sub>1.SG.PRES?PERF?</sub> at home  
 'I won't call anyone before I get home.'

#### 4.3. Diagnostics for unaccusativity/unergativity in Polish

Let us turn to the second point, namely the question of possible structural differences between *być* and *bywać*.

Usually BE is taken to be an unaccusative verb par excellence (cf. Babyonyshev 1996, Brown 1996; see also Moro 1997). Cetnarowska (2000) argues that there is a convenient deep unaccusativity diagnostic in Polish, namely the existence of resultative adjectives terminating in *-ły*. She notices furthermore that there is a correlation between the occurrence of resultative adjectives terminating in *-ły* and the nonoccurrence of related verbs in the impersonal *-no/-to* constructions. These latter constructions are taken to be a diagnostic for unergativity. Resultative adjectives can be derived from telic verbs only; cf. (22). The only exceptions, which are related to stative verbs, are largely lexicalized; cf. (23) (Cetnarowska 2000: 87).

(22) resultative adjectives  
 (a) *przybyły* 'arrived' (b) *upadły* 'fallen' (c) *zmarły* 'dead'

(23a) *rosły* 'tall' (cf. *rosnąć* 'to grow')

(23b) *były* 'former' (from *być* 'to exist')

(23c) *bywały (w świecie)* 'experienced, knowledgeable' (cf. *bywać* 'to frequent')

Since the forms in (23) have idiomatic meanings, this test cannot be used to decide on the difference between *być* and *bywać*. The second test, i.e. the *-no/-to* test, offers a better result. As already pointed out, *-no/-to* constructions are taken to be a diagnostic for unergativity. They can be built from transitive verbs (24a) and from unergative verbs (24b), but not from unaccusative verbs (24c). Applying this test to *być* and *bywać*, we observe that this test works in the case of *bywać*, cf. (25b), but not in the case of *być*, cf. (25a).

- (24) impersonal *-no/-to* constructions
- (24a) Zbudowano szpital (\*przez żołnierzy).  
*no*-built hospital<sub>ACC</sub> (\*by soldiers)  
 'They built a hospital.'
- (24b) Zatańczono (\*przez Jana).  
*no*-danced<sub>PERF</sub> (\*by John)  
 'They danced.'
- (24c) \*Umarło z głodu.  
*to*-died<sub>PERF</sub> from hunger  
 'They died of hunger.'
- (25a) \*Było na przyjęciu.  
*to*-was at party
- (25b) ✓Bywano na przyjęciach.  
*no*-was<sub>HABIT</sub> at parties  
 'They were at parties./They used to go to parties.'

This would mean that *bywać* indeed has properties of an unergative verb. Additional support for this assumption comes from the examples in (26). They show that subject-oriented intentional adverbs are possible in the case of (26b), but not in the case of (26a). Since such adverbs require a subject to have some agent properties, it follows that the subject in (26b) is indeed an external (agent) argument, hence the verb is an unergative one. In contrast, the "GEN subject" in (26a) remains an internal theme argument, hence we have an unaccusative/ergative structure.<sup>17</sup>

- (26) subject-oriented intentional adverbs
- (26a) \*Jana nie było chętnie w pracy.  
 John<sub>GEN</sub> NEG was willingly at work
- (26b) Jan nie bywał chętnie w pracy.  
 John<sub>NOM</sub> NEG was<sub>HABIT</sub> willingly at work  
 Lit.: 'John was willingly at work.'

Note, however, that there is something special about the iterative/habitual interpretation; cf. (27) vs. (24c): (27) actually shows that if an unaccusative verb has an iterative or a habitual reading, it is in fact possible to build a *-no/-to* form from it. This might be taken to mean that the habitual interpretation makes an unaccusative verb somehow agentive, thus enforcing an unergative frame.

<sup>17</sup> Also other tests such as binding or control indicate that the NP "John" occupies different syntactic positions. See Witkoś (2000) for a general discussion.



- (27) Podczas wojny umierano z głodu.  
 during war *no*-died<sub>IMPERF</sub> from hunger  
 'People would die from hunger during the war.'

Such a change in the syntactic behavior is in fact nothing strange. On the contrary, variable behavior of intransitive verbs is a well-known fact, as discussed extensively for instance in Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (1995). Here, the relevant fact pointed out in the literature, which brings us back to our initial observation, is that unaccusativity correlates with telicity/perfectivity and unergativity with an atelic/imperfective interpretation.<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, there is indeed some evidence that different aspectual properties of *być* and *bywać* correlate with syntactically different structures. Moreover, we have seen some arguments for adopting an "ergative analysis" postulated for split-ergative languages for existential-locative constructions with *być* in Polish. Such an analysis, even though certainly not solving all of the problems, certainly gives a better insight into what is actually going on in such constructions. Thus, eventually the somewhat strange claim that Polish is ergative in some sense turns out to be justified to a certain extent or at least promising.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. (i) from Hoekstra & Mulder (1990: 8). In (i(a)) the locative PP denotes an endpoint that is arrived at as a result of the activity (e.g., 'John jumped into the ditch'); in (i(b)), on the other hand, the locative PP does not denote an endpoint, but rather the place where the activity occurs (e.g., 'John was jumping around in the ditch').

- (i(a)) unaccusative  
 dat Jan in de sloot gesprongen is  
 that John in the ditch jumped is
- (i(b)) unergative  
 dat Jan in de sloot gesprongen heeft  
 that John in the ditch jumped has

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