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**THE STATUS OF *NE* CLITICIZATION AS A DIAGNOSTIC FOR
UNACCUSATIVITY: EVIDENCE FROM ITALIAN UNERGATIVE
VERBS**

Relatore:
Prof.ssa CHIARA MELLONI

Laureanda:
VERONICA GIROLAMI
VR445807

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Introduction

Studies on split-intransitivity and unaccusativity diagnostics have gained importance within the generative framework since the formulation of the Unaccusative Hypothesis by Perlmutter (1978). Since then, many scholars have attempted to propose a range of diagnostics that could help to identify the split between unaccusatives and unergatives within the class of intransitive verbs.

Ne cliticization (*ne-cl*) is a famous unaccusativity test introduced by Burzio (1986) that distinguishes between unaccusative and unergative verbs in Italian. However, its status as a diagnostic for unaccusativity remains controversial as work by Lonzi (1986) showed. In the present thesis, we will try to investigate the status of *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity by analyzing its distribution with various classes of unergative Italian verbs. This dissertation will be organized as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a review of the major assumptions around the concept of split-intransitivity since its first formulation. Some preliminary considerations of the syntax and semantics of *ne* will be made in order to provide the ideal ground to discuss *ne-cl* and its syntactic representation.

Chapter 2 presents the leading assumptions around argument structure representation mostly taking into account neo-constructivist models of representation. In this chapter the syntax of *ne* constructions will be analyzed, thus providing a solid basis for the analysis of the data.

Chapter 3 illustrates the methodology of the research, presenting the profile of the speakers involved and the structure of the questionnaires designed and administered in this study.

Chapter 4 summarizes the findings obtained through the administration of the two questionnaires and discusses the results obtained. Eventually, we would like to claim that *ne-cl* could still be considered as a reliable unaccusativity diagnostic only when it patterns with unergative verbs in their analytic tense.

Chapter 1

Split intransitivity and unaccusativity diagnostics

1. *Introducing split intransitivity and unaccusativity diagnostics*

The issue surrounding split-intransitivity¹ and unaccusativity diagnostics has interested many works since its initial formulation by Perlmutter (1978). This first chapter offers a review of the main theories on split-intransitivity and the various tests that have been proposed in the literature to motivate this partition within intransitive verbs. Particular attention will be drawn to a specific diagnostic i.e., *ne*-cliticization (henceforth, *ne-cl*) by testing its status as a test for unaccusativity and its allegedly sole occurrence with unaccusative and transitive predicates. At the end of the chapter, we will be able to state the research question on the reliability of *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity and its syntactic and semantic implications. This chapter will be structured as follows: §2 will be devoted to exploring unaccusativity at the syntax-semantic interface and its implications for theories of argument structure. We will then focus our attention on some well-known diagnostics for unaccusativity mostly from a Romance perspective, with special reference to auxiliary selection and *ne*-cliticization, two of the major unaccusativity diagnostics in Italian.

1.1. *The Unaccusative hypothesis*

The Unaccusative Hypothesis (UH) was first developed by Perlmutter (1978), couched in the framework of Relational Grammar, and later on, adopted by Burzio (1986) within the Government and Binding (GB) approach. The initial UH, as formulated by Perlmutter, analyzed the class of unaccusatives as a type of intransitive verbs with a 2-arc but no 1-arc (respectively the internal and external argument) as opposed to the class of unergatives which only contained a 1-arc i.e., an external argument. Along these lines, Burzio (1986) restated the initial formulations of the UH within the GB framework, underlying the fact that unaccusatives²

¹ I will use the term split-intransitivity as a synonym of the term unaccusativity.

² The term unaccusative was originally used by Perlmutter (1978) while Burzio (1986) adopted the term ergative to refer to this verb class.

display a surface subject that is originally generated in the object position at the level of deep structure, as shown in (1).

(1)

- a) Unaccusative surface structure
[S [NP Giovanni] [VP arriva e]]
- b) Unergative surface structure
[S [NP Giovanni] [VP telefona]]

In (1a) the subject moves from its object position reaching a pre-verbal position in its passage from deep structure to surface structure. Conversely, in (1b) movement does not apply since the NP Giovanni is already generated in its subject position³.

From a semantic point of view, as Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) mention several times in their work, the class of unaccusatives, as well as the class of unergatives, is not semantically homogenous. For instance, verbs of bodily process in Italian such as *vomitare* ‘to vomit’, *starnutire* ‘to sneeze’ and *sbadigliare* ‘to yawn’ generally display unergative syntax however, a verb such as *arrossire* ‘to blush’, which, in principle, could be semantically related to the verbs mentioned above, is clearly unaccusative. This discussion could also be considered from a crosslinguistic perspective since it is clear that there are certain semantic classes of verbs that are systematically unaccusative in a vast number of languages and others that vary significantly cross-linguistically (see Rosen 1984 for relevant discussion). These mismatches show the complexity of the phenomenon of unaccusativity both from a semantic and syntactic perspective, also encompassing the broader discussion on argument structure.

2. *Unaccusativity and the syntax-semantics interface*

The issue surrounding unaccusativity at the syntax-semantics interface is extremely complex. The original UH as proposed by Perlmutter (1978) viewed unaccusativity as a phenomenon that could be derived from the semantic properties of the verb and then encoded in the syntax⁴. Thus, unaccusativity, as Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) also suggested, was

³ This is of course the case in the earliest instantiations of the GB framework which does not take into consideration, for instance, the VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis (Koopman and Sportiche 1985, 1991) and its implications for movement.

⁴ In Perlmutter (1989), he reconsiders his first proposal by claiming that unaccusativity has to be accounted as a purely syntactic phenomenon.

originally considered to be semantically determined but syntactically encoded. Following from these premises, work by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) proposes to represent unaccusativity starting from a purely semantic representation. That is, their model primarily features a lexical semantic representation that makes use of predicate decomposition templates, which subsequently map into the syntax through the use of Linking Rules. Their proposal is one of the most prominent among the exponents of the projectionist approach which assumed that the syntactic structure was projected directly from the meaning of the verb.

The projectionist view, which also was at the core of the assumptions on argument structure during the GB era (see Chomsky's 1981 on the "Projection Principle"), started to be challenged in the early nineties by Hale and Keyser's (1993, 2002) work on argument structure and later on by works in the framework of Distributed Morphology (DM) (see for instance Marantz 1997, Harley 1995 among others). Even though, Hale and Keyser still retained a sort of projectionist view on the matter, they considered the syntactic structure as the initial point to describe the properties of the verbal domain abstracting away from earlier lexicalist views. For instance, the considerations that stemmed from the UTAH (Uniformity of Theta Role Assignment) originally formulated by Baker (1988), led Hale and Keyser (1993) to challenge the notion of theta-role and to consider the possibility that syntactic positions were responsible for semantic factors as well. These assumptions on the primacy of syntax paved the way to the development of constructional and neo-constructivist approaches which dispensed with Linking Rules and theta-roles altogether in compliance with the spirit of the Minimalist Program (see Harley 2011 for discussion). Nowadays, neo-constructivist approaches such as Harley (1995), Marantz (1997 *et seq*), Mateu (2002), Borer (2003, 2005), Ramchand (2008) and many others, base their assumptions on the idea that the verb does not project the syntactic structure but that the lexical verb, or better its *root*, can actually be found in different syntactic configurations that are already given in the derivation. These configurations rely on predicate decomposition rules where each functional head is associated to a light verb. This approach was adopted first by Larson (1988) in his work on VP shells, and later by Chomsky (1995). In this view, a functional head *v* is merged on top of the lexical VP, adding a causation/agentivity projection to the derivation. The external argument, i.e., the 'doer', is merged in Spec, *v*VP occupying a higher, c-commanding position with respect to the internal argument, while the 'undergoer' or 'patient' of the event is merged lower in the derivation (either in Spec, VP or as a complement of V° , depending on its own semantic values, or on the theoretical approach).

Following this view, many studies – especially those developed within Distributed Morphology (DM) – proposed to consider the lexicon as a repository of roots, which by

definition, do not carry any argument structure nor categorial information⁵ except for their encyclopedic meaning. Thus, verbal meaning is built compositionally from the structural and the encyclopedic root meaning instead of being read off directly from the lexical item. In this view, it is more appropriate to refer to unaccusative constructions and unergative constructions instead of categorizing verbs either as unaccusatives or unergatives.

Far from being exhaustive, this brief overview serves the purpose of introducing the theoretical framework for the current analysis on split intransitivity. However, the reader is referred to Chapter 2 for a broader discussion on the different models of representations of unaccusativity and argument structure.

3. *Unaccusativity diagnostics*

As anticipated in the previous section, we will now introduce some of the main unaccusativity diagnostics in English and Romance. This brief overview over the major unaccusativity tests will provide the perfect ground to discuss extensively the status of a specific test i.e., *ne-cliticization* (*ne-cl*) and its validity as a diagnostic for unaccusativity in Italian.

Unaccusativity diagnostics can be simply defined as tests that detect split intransitivity phenomena, allowing us to categorize verbs into two different syntactic classes, namely the unaccusative class and the unergative class. The tests that can detect unaccusativity are not homogeneous cross-linguistically thus, it follows that some diagnostics might apply to certain languages but not others. For example, auxiliary selection might work for Italian and, to a certain extent, for French but it cannot apply to Spanish or Catalan.

Resultative constructions, for instance, represent one of the primary diagnostics in English, as discussed extensively by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995). We will sketch a summary of the central points on resultatives made by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) in English and then, we will shift our attention to the Romance languages.

Taking into account the definition of resultative phrases given in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995: 34) "a resultative phrase is an XP that denotes the state achieved by the referent of the NP it is predicated of as a result of the action denoted by the verb in the resultative

⁵ There is not a universal consensus on the nature of roots and which type of information they encode. If we consider a more extreme take on the matter, following (Borer 2005, Acedo-Matellán and Mateu 2014, among others) not only are roots category-less elements, therefore bared of any type of argument structure information, but their semantic type also needs to be necessarily introduced via merge of a functional category. On a completely different note, Beavers (2010 and references therein), following works by Levin, adopts a more lexicalist approach on the matter, claiming that the semantics of roots cannot be restricted to mere idiosyncratic information.

construction". Additionally, a resultative XP must be predicated of an object and not of a subject or an oblique complement. Consider the sentences in (2):

- (2)
- a) John hammered the metal flat
 - b) The river froze solid
 - c) *Julie danced tired

The XP in (2a) is predicated of the object of a transitive verb i.e., *the metal*, whereas in (2b) the XP is predicated of the subject of an unaccusative verb, i.e., *the river* which is, nonetheless, an underlying object. We do not expect unergatives to enter these syntactic constructions since they do not license a direct object as shown by the unacceptability of (2c). However, it is true that, given certain conditions, such as the presence of a non-subcategorized object or a reflexive, constructions with unergatives might receive a resultative interpretation as shown in the sentences below.

- (3)
- a) Hannah cried her eyes out
 - b) Sarah shouted herself hoarse

Despite the potential problems posited by the sentences above, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) conclude that resultative constructions still abide by a specific restriction, i.e., the Direct Object Restriction (DOR), which offers a syntactic explanation for resultatives and their distribution. As such, they can demonstrate that resultative constructions can be considered fairly good tests to detect split intransitivity at least concerning English.

Let us now review some other unaccusativity diagnostics, specifically in the domain of Romance languages, before analyzing in more detail the two major diagnostics at work in Italian, i.e., auxiliary selection and *ne*-cliticization⁶.

In a language like Spanish an interesting diagnostic for unaccusativity, as noted by Torrego (1989), concerns the distribution of bare plurals. Consider the sentences in (4) taken from Torrego (1989: 254):

⁶ I leave aside the broader discussion on Participial Absolutives and Participial Adjectives as diagnostics of unaccusativity in Italian (see Perlmutter 1989 for relevant discussion). I will only sketch a brief discussion on French/Italian Absolute Participles below.

(4)

- a) Han leído libros
have read.PP books
“They have read books”
- b) Han pasado camiones
have pass.PP trucks
“Trucks have passed”
- a. *Han dormido animales
have sleep.PP animals
“Animals have slept”

As it is possible to observe from the sentences above, unergatives do not allow bare plurals as their argument regardless of the position in which they appear, be it postverbal or preverbal. Conversely, bare plurals with unaccusative and transitive verbs in (4a, b) seem to yield perfectly grammatical sentences in Spanish. Interestingly, Torrego also claims that this test for unaccusativity in Spanish patterns with *ne*-cliticization in Italian and Catalan and that unergatives in bare plural constructions show a surprising behavior when they are preceded by a “spatiotemporal argument” as shown in (5a).

(5)

- a) *(Aquí) han dormido animales
here have sleep.PP animals
“Animals slept here”

This strange behavior of unergative verbs seems to be somewhat related to that of Italian unergatives in *ne*-cl constructions (especially concerning the resumption of the gap left behind by the stranding of *ne* by a non-subcategorized object) and also to the optional presence of an additional PP which mostly adds locative/temporal information. This is shown in (6) below where *di persone* acts as a non-subcategorized object resuming the gap left behind by *ne* and *per Milano* is a locative PP:

(6)

- Ne passeggiano molte di persone, per Milano
Ne walk many of people for Milan

'Many people walk around Milan'

This point is also supported by Mateu (2002: 121), who claims that spatiotemporal elements may be obligatory in order to license the unaccusative construction specifically concerning Italian *ne-cl* with unergatives. This hypothesis is somewhat supported by the previous assumptions made by Torrego, who claims that spatiotemporal elements must be present also in Catalan *ne-cl* constructions with unergatives. However, data from Cortés and Gavarró (1997) show that, at least in Catalan, it is not always necessary to add a locative or temporal adverb to license these constructions, as shown in (7):

(7)

a) En dormiran tres a l'habitacio de la dreta. (Cortés and Gavarró 1997: 41)

En sleep.fut three in the room of the right

“Three of them will sleep in the room on the right”

b) Tantes persones que havien de telefonar, només n'han telefonat tres

So many people that had to phone, only *en* have phone three

“Many people had to phone, only three of them did”

We will leave these issues on *ne-cl* aside for now. See § 1.2.2 and Chapters 2 and 4 for further discussion on this.

In French, as well as in Italian, Participial Absolute⁷ constructions have been claimed (cf. Perlmutter 1989, Legendre 1989) to be a good diagnostic for unaccusativity. Consider the sentences in (8) from Italian (taken from Perlmutter 1989: 67-68) and French (taken from Legendre 1989:132-135).

(8)

a) Perduti i soldi, non c'era niente da fare

‘The money having been lost, there was nothing to be done’

b) *Gridato ai bambini, Giorgio è uscito

‘Having shouted to the children, Giorgio left’

⁷ I consider the distinction between Participial Equi (PE) and Participial Absolute (PA) to be irrelevant in this case. However, note that PE are participial absolute constructions where there is a clear relation between the matrix subject and the participial clause. Legendre (1989:122) speaks of “an invisible nominal which is controlled by a matrix nominal” which differs crucially from PA construction where this relationship is not present.

- c) Sa fille née, il décida de renoncer à l'alcool et au jeu
 'His daughter born, he decided to renounce alcohol and gambling'
- d) *Le candidat parlé, l'audience se tut
 'The candidate (having) spoken, the audience turned quiet'

From the sentences above, it emerges that Absolute Participles can only appear with unaccusatives (leaving aside transitive verbs) but crucially not with unergatives as the ungrammaticality of these constructions with verbs like *gridare* (to shout) or *parler* (to talk) clearly show. Interestingly for French, unergative verbs which inevitably fail to occur in Absolute Participle constructions also fail to appear in *croire* unions⁸, Object Raising constructions, and Reduced Relatives, three other major diagnostics for unaccusativity in French (see Legendre 1989 for discussion).

In the next section, we will introduce auxiliary selection as a traditional unaccusativity diagnostic together with *ne-cl*, which will be the point of departure to the discussion that will be carried out in the next chapters.

3.1. Auxiliary Selection

Starting from Burzio (1986), auxiliary selection has traditionally been considered one of the major diagnostics for unaccusativity in Italian. Burzio originally explained the link between *essere* assignment and unaccusative verbs through the principles of binding, where the binding relation in question targeted the subject and the closest nominal to V. Following Burzio's work, many proposals have been put forward to explain the phenomenon of auxiliary selection both from a purely semantic point of view (see for instance Van Valin 1990, Centineo 1996, Sorace 2000, 2004 among others) and a more syntactic one (see for instance Rosen 1984, Kayne 1993, D'Alessandro and Roberts 2010 for person-split auxiliary systems, among others). We will review some of these hypotheses in the rest of this section making special reference to Sorace's (2000) proposal and its implications for split intransitivity.

Starting from a purely semantic take on the matter, Centineo's (1996) approach, developed under the framework of Role and Reference Grammar, gives primary importance to

⁸ Legendre (1989) follows Fauconnier (1983) in defining constructions with the verb *croire* plus a participial as a union verb since dative clitics and the clitic *y* must appear on the left of *croire*. See for instance (i) and (ii) below from Fauconnier (1983:28) in Legendre (1989:113):

(i) On lui croyait Brutus fidèle

(ii)*On croyait Brutus lui fidèle

'We believed Brutus to be faithful to him'

the semantic properties of the subject to explain the selection of the auxiliary. Centineo's proposal mostly builds on Van Valin's (1990) considerations on split-intransitivity which rest primarily on notions of *Aktionsart* and agentivity. Thus, it follows that if a verb requires an agentive subject, it will necessarily select *avere* whereas if the verb requires a "semantically affected" (Centineo 1996: 257) subject then it will certainly be labeled as an undergoer selecting *essere*.

An opposite view is developed in Rosen (1986). She builds on Perlmutter's original considerations and restricts auxiliary selection to a purely syntactic phenomenon although admitting that some semantic factors can indeed influence the selection of either *avere* or *essere*. Crucially, though, according to Rosen these semantic variables cannot be traced back to a unified semantic criterion: they all seem to play a role in the auxiliary assignment process but none of them prevails over the others.

Remaining on a purely syntactic approach, Kayne (1993) claims that the instances of *have* selection could be easily explained following the idea that *have* is nothing else but an instance of *be* with an incorporated D°/P°. This incorporation would correspond to an operation of head movement from the DP hosting the D°/P° head to the head of a *beP*. This claim is partially supported by D'Alessandro and Roberts (2010), whose work on Eastern-Abruzzese, a language that displays a person-split auxiliary system, aims at explaining the instances of *avere* in the third persons of the verbal paradigm as the result of the presence of an extra bundle of person features (see also Amato 2022 for a similar approach). I will focus on these approaches to auxiliary selection in Chapter 4, following work by Bjorkman (2011) whose claims on auxiliary selection rest on Kayne's (1993) core assumptions on the formation of HAVE as the combination of BE with a prepositional element.

Another influential approach to auxiliary selection has been proposed by Sorace (2000) whose work, differently from what we have seen so far, sheds light on the different patterns of variation displayed by certain verbs. Her considerations on variability pose some potential problems to the original assumptions formulated by Burzio (1986),⁹ in which unaccusatives simply selected *be* and unergatives straight-forwardly selected *have*. By doing so, she puts at stake the validity of auxiliary selection as a true diagnostic for unaccusativity in Italian or, better, she reformulates it in terms of gradience and gradeability. In particular, Sorace (2000,

⁹ Grimshaw (1986) already noted that auxiliary selection had to be accounted as an imperfect diagnostic for unaccusativity. She claims that since there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the choice of the auxiliary and the class of unaccusatives, auxiliary selection does not succeed in providing a clear-cut distinction between the class of unergatives and the one of unaccusatives.

2004) proposes to explain auxiliary selection through the use of a hierarchy, which she defines in terms of the Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy (ASH). She argues for a division of monadic intransitive verbs into seven semantic classes and subsequently orders them according to principles of telicity and agentivity (see 9 below from Sorace 2000: 863).

(9)

CHANGE OF LOCATION	selects <i>essere</i> BE (least variation)
CHANGE OF STATE	
CONTINUATION OF STATE	
EXISTENCE OF STATE	
UNCONTROLLED PROCESS	
MOTIONAL PROCESS	
NON-MOTIONAL PROCESS	selects <i>avere</i> HAVE (least variation)

This proposal rests on the idea that core verbs, i.e., verbs at the extremes of the hierarchy, consistently choose either *essere* or *avere* whereas the other verbs show an increasingly higher degree of variation as moving away from the extremes. According to Sorace, the selection of *essere* is tightly bound to telicity, as the placement of inherent telic verbs at the top of the hierarchy clearly shows, while the selection of *avere* strongly correlates with agentivity. However, the ASH, which Sorace (2006) restates also in terms of Split Intransitivity Hierarchy (SIH), raises some problematic issues as already noted by Loporcaro (2015) and Mateu (2002). First of all, as Mateu (2002) and also Sorace (2000) herself pointed out, the division of the verbs into seven semantic classes raises several questions on the validity of such division. Apart from the fact that the hierarchy lacks any sort of formalization¹⁰, it is indeed not clear why there are just a total of seven semantic classes and not ten or twenty. In other words, Sorace does not explain the reasons, whether syntactic or semantic, that led her to formulate a division of monadic intransitive verbs into these seven classes. Another crucial point is raised by Loporcaro (2015) who points out the fact that the behavior of verbs belonging to the same semantic class does not seem to be homogenous. Take for instance (10a).

¹⁰ In order to solve this problem, Mateu (2002, 2016) proposes to introduce a set of features that he identifies as “discrete semantic determinants” which also happen to be syntactically transparent (Mateu 2002: 113). In this way, the hierarchy would receive the rightful degree of formalization that it was lacking before. However, quite importantly, the problem pointed out by Loporcaro (2015), which I hint at below, still holds.

(10)

a) *Ho/ sono rimasto solo
have remained alone
'I have remained alone'

b) La guerra è/ ?ha durato a lungo (Sorace 2000:867)
the war be/ have last long
'The war has lasted a long time'

The verb *rimanere* belongs to the class of 'continuation of state verbs', as defined by Sorace, which is placed in the middle of the hierarchy, therefore in a peripheral position. However, even though the verbs in this position should allow a high degree of variation, *rimanere* seems to be completely ungrammatical with *avere*, differently, for instance, from a verb like *durare* (to last) as shown in (10b).

The issues concerning the ASH will be left aside for now: nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that, even though the hierarchy proposed by Sorace correctly predicts the variation displayed by certain verb classes, it does not completely settle the issue surrounding auxiliary selection and its implications for unaccusativity. Moreover, her proposal to extend the ASH to a hierarchy of split intransitivity (SIH) seems, at this point, far-fetched especially when verbs belonging to the same semantic class do not display a homogenous behavior.

3.2. *Ne-cliticization*

The discussion on unaccusativity diagnostics carried out thus far showed that sometimes these tests fail at identifying and separating neatly unergatives from unaccusatives. As shown above, even two well-known and reliable tests such as the resultative construction in English and auxiliary selection in Italian do show exceptions.

The goal of the present thesis is to investigate the reliability of a specific test for unaccusativity, i.e., *ne-cliticization* in Italian. At the end of this thesis, we will be able to state whether *ne-cl* can still be considered a reliable unaccusativity test by investigating its behavior with unergative verbs. This topic will be extensively developed throughout the next chapters. In this last section, we will review some of the basic assumptions concerning *ne-cliticization* as an unaccusativity diagnostic alongside a quick sketch of the syntax and semantics of the clitic *ne*.

3.2.1. *Ne-cliticization as a diagnostic for unaccusativity*

Ne-cliticization (*ne-cl*) was first accounted as a potential diagnostic for unaccusativity by Burzio (1986)¹¹ and to a certain extent also by Belletti and Rizzi (1981). According to their views, *ne* constructions with intransitive verbs are only allowed by unaccusatives, namely those verbs whose surface subject is an underlying object at the level of deep structure. Hence, *ne-cl* is claimed to be possible only when it targets objects but, crucially, never when it interests subjects. These premises lay the ground for explaining why unergatives, whose surface subject is generated as an external argument, are allegedly banned from such constructions (see examples in (11) from Burzio (1986:22).

(11)

- a) *Ne arriveranno molti*
ne arrive many
'Many people will arrive'
- b) **Ne telefoneranno molti*
ne phone many
'Many people will phone'

However, early work by Lonzi (1986) showed that unergatives are not categorically excluded from *ne-cl* since sentences like those in (12) seem to be perfectly grammatical.

(12)

- a) *Ne attecchirono molti (di bulbi)*
Ne take root many (of bulbs)
'Many bulbs took root'
- a) *Ne funzionano solo due (di orologi)*
Ne work only two of clocks
'Only two clocks are working'

¹¹ The discussion around *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity was also reviewed by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) who consider these constructions a diagnostic for surface unaccusativity. By doing so, they set it apart from diagnostics for deep unaccusativity such as auxiliary selection and bring it closer to another traditional diagnostics for unaccusativity in English, i.e., locative inversion. See Chapter 2 for discussion on these issues.

Crucially, according to Lonzi (2009) and Mateu (2002), the structures where unergatives pattern with *ne*-cl are unaccusative in nature. Mateu (2002) for instance speaks of a process of unaccusativization supported by the absence of the [+R] semantic feature¹², which is assigned to agentive unergatives in his framework. Following his view, these structures would then receive the typical semantic features that are assigned to unaccusatives therefore allowing them to yield fully grammatical sentences.

In any case, it should be noted that, even though sentence like those in (12a, b) seem to be acceptable in the presence of synthetic tenses (i.e., *presente*, *imperfetto*, *passato remoto*, *futuro semplice*), they do not allow periphrastic tenses such as *passato prossimo* to show up as illustrated in (13) and discussed in Centineo (1996), Mateu (2016) and Lonzi (1986, 2009).

(13)

- a) ??/*Ne hanno attecchito/i molti di bulbi¹³
- b) Ne hanno funzionato/i solo due di orologi
- c) ??/*Ne hanno lavorato/i molti di operai

Lonzi (2009) proposes to solve this problem by considering the structures in (13) to be an instance of unergative syntax and therefore to disallow the appropriate binding relation of the subject by *ne* since the position dedicated to the quantified NP object is occupied by a null category. This clearly creates a mismatch between the synthetic and the analytic structure which, if we were to follow Lonzi's assumptions, displays unaccusative syntax in the presence of synthetic tenses but unergative syntax with analytic tenses.

We will discuss these issues concerning the possibility of unergatives to appear in such constructions in Chapter 4. In the next section we will provide a quick review of the semantic and syntactic properties of the clitic *ne*. By doing so, we will also be able to clarify which

¹² Mateu assumes the presence of a set of features that he identifies as “discrete semantic determinants” which are also syntactically transparent (Mateu 2000: 113). In particular, the feature [+R] bears the same functions as the light predicate DO, which normally patterns with unergative verbs.

¹³ Interestingly, with a verb like *attecchire* *essere* seems to be allowed as in a sentence like (i).

(i) ? Ne sono attecchiti molti di bulbi

Notice that in this case agreement with the past participle is mandatory as in typical unaccusative and transitive *ne*-cl as in (ii) and (iii) respectively.

(iii) Ne sono arrivati molti (di pacchi)

‘Many packages have arrived’

(iii) Ne ho incontrate molte (di persone)

‘I have met many people’

structures we identify with the label *ne-cl*, which is also normally considered to be a synonym to ‘partitive *ne*’.

3.2.2. *On the syntax and semantics of ne*

The issue surrounding the categorial status of the clitic *ne* has been widely debated in the literature. This section aims to provide a review of the major proposal regarding the syntax of *ne* and its status as an N’, NP, PP or DP. However, before discussing the categorial status of this clitic some considerations on the various uses of *ne* are in order. Following Cordin (2001) and Mariotti and Nissim (2014) we will consider three different uses of *ne*: (i) the anaphorical use, (ii) the locative use, and finally (iii) the partitive use. Consider the sentences in (14):

(14)

- a) Ottenne finalmente la patente e ne approfittò subito (Cordin 2001:647)
‘He finally obtained his driving license and he took advantage of it from the beginning’
- b) Me ne vado
‘I am leaving’ (Mariotti and Nissim 2014:249)
- c) (Di mele), ne ho comprate tre
‘As for apples, I bought three’

Consider (14a), in this case *ne* is used as a complement of the verb *approfittare* ‘to take advantage’ and it anaphorically refers to the DP *la patente* ‘the driving license’. As Cordin (2001) correctly points out, *ne* could be optionally resumed by a PP, namely *della patente* ‘of the driving license’ and not by a simple DP in a sentence like *ottenne finalmente la patente e approfittò subito della patente*. The sentence in (14b) refers to the locative use of the clitic *ne*. In this case, *ne* can be resumed again by a PP roughly corresponding to *da qui* ‘from here’ as in *vado via da qui*. Finally, in the partitive use in (14c) *ne* normally co-occurs with a quantifier, in this case, *tre* ‘three’ and it can be optionally resumed by a PP as in (10c), where *di mele* occupies a topic position, but also by a DP as in *ho comprato tre mele*. This last use of *ne* will be our point of departure to explain the categorial status of this clitic when it appears in its (arguable) partitive use.

In the rest of this section, we are going to revise some proposals on the categorial status of *ne*, namely:

- (i) *ne* as N'
- (ii) *ne* as NP
- (iii) *ne* as PP
- (iv) *ne* as DP

One of the first proposals put forward by Belletti and Rizzi (1981) accounts for the categorial status of *ne* as an instance of N'. They propose that *ne* is found in an X' position in an indefinite quantified NP with the following structure [_{NP} Q N']. They also notice that *ne* pronominalization is only possible from object positions due to proper fulfillment of principles of government and binding. Indeed, the object position is the only position properly governed by V and therefore the only one that can be bound by *ne* extraction.

However, as Cardinaletti and Giusti (2006) point out, if we were to consider *ne* as an instance of N' we would then be forced to accept it as the only instantiation of an X'-movement. Not only is this theoretically undesirable but it also creates other serious problems, for instance, in the explanation of the behavior of adjectives like *principale*, which cannot be stranded by *ne*-cl. This is explained by Cinque's (1991) observation according to which post-nominal adjectives cannot be stranded by *ne*-cl as shown in (15) below taken from Cardinaletti and Giusti (2006:44).

(15)

- a) Gianni ha due ragioni principali per non accettare quel posto
Gianni has two reasons main for not accept that position
"Gianni has two main reasons to not accept that position"
- b) *Gianni ha due principali ragioni per non accettare quel posto
Gianni has two main reasons for not accept that position
"Gianni has two main reasons to not accept that position"
- c) *Di ragioni, Gianni ne ha due principali per non accettare quel posto
of reasons, Gianni *ne* has two main for not accept that position
"As for reasons, Gianni has two main ones not to accept that position"

We will return to Cinque's observation below, however, notice how *principale* which is taken to be a post-nominal adjective as shown in (15a) does allow *ne* extraction (15c) as predicted by Cinque (1991).

Moving the discussion to Cinque's (1991) assumptions on the clitic *ne*, we observe that he discards the possibility of having a N' analysis of the clitic *ne* considering this structural interpretation unsuitable to describe each instance of *ne*, which also displays an apparently strange behavior concerning other pro-forms found in Italian. In particular, Cinque notes that it is true that *ne* can stand for subparts of a bigger constituent; however, it is also true that by assigning the structure of an intermediate projection to *ne*, all the other instances in which the clitic instantiates an entire phrase will be left unaccounted. This is why Cinque proposes to consider *ne* as a pro-NP *contra* Belletti and Rizzi (1981). By doing so, he also demonstrates that the adjectives that can appear in a predicative position are the only ones allowed by *ne-cl* since the elements that are left behind by the stranding of *ne* are considered to be modifiers of the noun phrase occurring in the post-nominal position. Consider the sentences in (16) some of them from Cinque (1991:124):

(16)

- a) *Ne ho letto un lunghissimo
Ne have read a very long
 "I have read a very long one"
- b) Ho letto un lunghissimo libro
 have read a very long book
 "I have read a very long book"
- c) Ne ho letto uno lunghissimo
Ne have read one very long
 "I have read a very long one"

Cases like the ones in (16) lead Cinque to conclude that pre-nominal adjectives must be generated within N', whereas post-nominal adjectives can be generated outside N' therefore allowing structures like the ones in (16c) as we also noted above for the adjective *principale*.

Contrary to Cinque (1991), Kayne (1975) discusses the possibility of considering *en*¹⁴ (*ne* in French) as an instantiation of a PP. He discards the analysis according to which both *y*

¹⁴ As Cardinaletti and Giusti (2006) point out, *ne* and *en* do not display the same exact behavior. Indeed, French *en* does not trigger agreement with the past participle (as already note by Kayne 1975) contrary to Italian *ne*. This is shown in (i) and (ii) below:

- (i) De pommes, j'en ai mangé trois
 of apples, I en have eat.PP three
- (ii) Di mele, ne ho mangiate tre
 of apples, ne have eat.PP.PL.F three

(*ci* in Italian) and *en* could be considered as pro-NPs and provides evidence for a pro-PP analysis. By doing so, he also claims that in those cases where *en* is used as a partitive, even though *en* corresponds to an NP the prepositional element i.e., *de* is still present at a more abstract level of representation. This is shown in sentences (17a, b) below.

(17)

- a) Elle a trois frères
She has three brothers
“She has three brothers”
- b) Elle en a trois
She *en* has three
“She has three”
- c) De frères, elle en a trois
Of brothers, she *en* has three
“As for brothers, she has three”

Kayne also claims that in sentences like (17c), where the *de*-phrase is analyzed as a topic, the appearance of the preposition reinforces his assumptions on the nature of *en* as a PP.

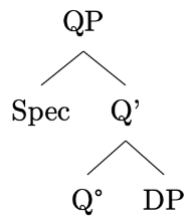
In opposition to Kayne (1975), Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992, 2006, 2017) shed light on the possibility of considering *ne* as a DP following Abney’s (1987) DP hypothesis. Their claim on the categorial status of *ne* as a DP goes hand in hand with their proposal to consider quantifiers as heads of a functional projection i.e., QP, which is also responsible for partitive case assignment when combined with a quantitative DP. Therefore, under this view, *ne* heads a DP which appears as the complement of a QP. The structure is shown in (18) below.

(18)

‘As for apples I have eaten three’

A plausible explanation, following Cardinaletti and Giusti, could be that Italian *ne* can receive phi-feature through movement to Spec, QP, whereas French *en* cannot. The discussion around these matters would take us too far afield, however, it still interesting to notice how participle agreement in these two Romance languages which, normally pattern alike in the distribution of agreement with other pro-forms such as pre-verbal clitics like *le* and *la* (see (iii) and (iv)), do not display the same behavior in the case of *ne*-cl.

- (iii) Je l’ ai vue hier
I her have see.PP.F.S yesterday
- (iv) L’ ho vista ieri
her have see.PP.F.S yesterday
‘I saw her yeaterday’



Similarly, according to Cerrone and Oda (2019) *ne* is base generated in the head of DP but, crucially, it is not considered to be the complement of a QP. As such, the DP is claimed to be contained within the stranded modifier following their main proposal according to which *ne-cl* is an instance of split-topicalization. Another crucial difference between the two proposals concerns the properties of PPs occurring in *ne* constructions. Specifically, Cardinaletti and Giusti consider quantitative *ne* as an instantiation of a quantitative phrase that necessarily takes as complements both a quantitative DP, to which it also assigns Case, and a partitive PP. This view is challenged by Cerrone and Oda’s proposal to consider the phrase headed by the preposition *di* as a topic-marker of agreement¹⁵ instead of a partitive phrase. Consider the sentence in (19) from Cerrone and Oda (2019:54).

(19)

Di ragazze, ne ho vista una bella
 Of girls, *ne* have seen one beautiful
 “As for girls, I saw a beautiful one”

In this case, if we were to follow Cerrone and Oda’s proposal, the *di* that precedes the noun *ragazze* could not be considered as an instance of a partitive PP but it would be, instead, a topic headed by a preposition which represents, crucially, a marker for topicality.

To briefly expand on this discussion on the status of the PP, Espinal, and Cyrino (2021a, b) also propose to consider *di* phrases resumed by *ne* as indefinite expressions where the preposition *di* only conveys an indefinite reading of the PP, therefore, ruling out a potential partitive interpretation. They claim the existence, within a broader Romance perspective, of a

¹⁵ A similar issue was raised by Cresti (2003) when questioning the nature of the PP resuming the gap left behind by *ne* extraction. She takes these constituents to be PPs but, crucially, she assumes that since they lack the ‘part of’ operator they are not true partitives.

DE operator which, by adjunction to a definite D, yields an indefinite interpretation of the entire phrase.

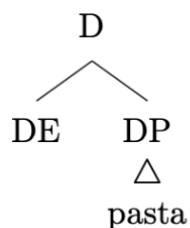
In particular, following Espinal and Cyrino (2021a, 2021b), I will assume that the *di*-phrase which is merged in the right periphery of the sentence, is not a partitive structure. I will consider *di* as the instantiation of an indefiniteness operator DE which is merged on top of the DP via adjunction. Consider the sentence in (20):

(20)

- a) Di pasta, ne ho preparata molta
 Of pasta, *ne* have prepare.PP.F.SG a.lot
 “As for pasta, I made a lot of it”

In line with Espinal and Cyrino’s proposal, in (19) the *di* in the phrase *di pasta* ‘of pasta’ is not a true partitive but an indefiniteness marker adjoined to the DP *pasta*. The structure of the DP, taken from Espinal and Cyrino (2021b), is shown in (21) below:

(21)



I will not go further into details about the nature of *di*-phrases and partitives; notice however that Espinal and Cyrino call these structures pseudo-partitives, assigning them a representation that is slightly different from the one in (8). They assume the presence of a head *n1* on top of the D which should be the locus of quantifier merge and they add the DE operator as a mediator between *n1* and *n2* (*n2* would be the noun *pasta* in (8)). Unfortunately, they do not provide an analysis of *ne*-cl nor of topicalized *di*-phrases. Since, to the best of my knowledge, there isn’t an exhaustive analysis of the structure of *ne* which also accounts for *di*-phrases in topic positions I will follow Espinal and Cyrino (2021a, 2021b)’s assumptions in considering *di* as an indefiniteness operator which adjoins to the DP, but I will follow

Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992, 2006, 2017) in considering the clitic *ne* as the instantiation of a DP which is taken as a complement by a QP as shown in (18). In doing so, I will further assume that the QP heading the DP which contains the clitic *ne* is merged within the verbal domain, namely in the internal complement position while I will take the *di*-phrase to be merged externally in the right periphery to be found on top of vP/VoiceP. I further suppose that this might also be the locus where the quantifier *molti* ‘many’ moves to a Focus projection following work by Belletti (2002). However, I do not exclude that *ne-cl* might give rise to a split-topicalization analysis as proposed by Cerrone and Oda (2019) mostly following work by Ott (2012) on German. I leave these issues aside for further research.

4. Summary

This chapter offered an overview of unaccusativity starting from the original formulation of the UH and subsequent work by Burzio (1986) in the GB framework. It briefly sketched the discussion on the relationship between syntax and semantics in the encoding of unaccusativity and discussed some of the main diagnostics for split-intransitivity in some Romance languages with a special focus on Italian. The attention was drawn to auxiliary selection and *ne-cl* as the two most prominent unaccusativity tests in Italian, showing that they do not represent a perfect tool for the identification of unaccusativity. In particular, we focused on the status of *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity and its syntactic and semantic properties.

In the next chapter, we will introduce the fundamental theoretical assumptions on the syntax of split-intransitivity. Our goal will be to discuss which syntactic representation suits the syntax of *ne-cl* better and in particular, which degree of semantic granularity needs to be encoded in the syntax. This will eventually lead to a better understanding of the interaction between *ne-cl* and unaccusativity.

Chapter 2

Theoretical background

1. *Argument structure representations*

The term ‘argument structure’ is conventionally used to refer to the properties of the predicate and its arguments. Studies on argument structure focus on the structural characteristics of the verbal domain by analyzing the properties of the verbs, the hierarchical organization of the arguments, and their structural encoding. These topics are widely debated in the generative literature, and there is little consensus among scholars on the syntactic representation of the verbal domain and the contribution of semantics to the event structure.

This chapter revises two different views on argument structure, contrasting projectionist (or lexicalist) and neo-constructivist approaches and their analysis of unergative verbs. By doing so, we aim to draw some preliminary remarks on which model of representation can describe best unaccusativity and which relevant aspects of meaning are encoded in the syntactic representation. At the end of the chapter, the general framework and the research questions will be outlined by drawing mostly on neo-constructivist approaches to argument structure, therefore providing a solid basis for the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

1.1. *Unergative verbs in projectionist approaches*

Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995) work on unaccusativity is by far one of the best-known lexicalist studies in the field of generative grammar. As anticipated in Chapter 1, according to this approach to argument structure, unaccusativity is *semantically* determined but syntactically represented. It follows that the lexical entry of a given predicate is endowed with a set of semantic features that will be mapped onto the syntactic structure through a set of mapping rules (i.e., Linking Rules).

In their description of unergative verbs, i.e., those verbs whose only argument is an external argument, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) focus in particular on two macro-classes, that of agentive unergatives and that of theme unergatives (see also Reinhart 2002). In their division of these two types of unergative verbs, one of the crucial aspects of their analysis

is the distinction between internal and external causation. In the case of verbs with internal causation, the eventuality will be brought about by the inherent properties of the subject, while, externally caused eventualities present an external cause that is responsible to bring about the eventuality. This is shown for instance in the dichotomy of verbs like *break* (in its causative alternant) and a verb like *laugh*.

Following Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995, 2000) if we assume the predicate decomposition structure in (1), it is clear that *break* is conceived as a bi-eventive predicate while *laugh* is clearly mono-eventive.

(1)

a) break: [[x do-something] caus [y become BROKEN]]

b) laugh: [x LAUGH]

(Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2010: 289)

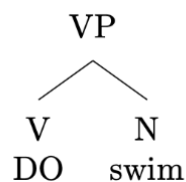
In (1b), *laugh* is conceived as an internally caused verbs since there is no external entity that causes the eventuality to take place. In general, according to the authors, all unergative verbs have to be considered as internally caused verbs such as agentive verbs of manner of motion (*camminare* ‘to walk’, *marciare* ‘to march’, *nuotare* ‘to swim’, etc.) and verbs of emission (*brillare* ‘to shine’, *sudare* ‘to sweat’, *sputare* ‘to spit’, etc.). Although not all unergative verbs are agentive, the authors consider all the members of this class to be internally caused predicates. Crucially, according to them, agentivity also subsumes internal causation. In this framework, the Immediate Cause Linking Rule is responsible for mapping the semantic representation of these verbs to their corresponding syntactic structure.

Despite these crucial assumptions on the semantics of unergative verbs, Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s approach presents the challenges of most lexicalist approaches that are discussed, for instance, by Harley (2011). She argues that the stipulation of linking rules that are responsible to map properties of predicates onto the syntax does not abide by the principles of the Minimalist Program. Within this framework, indeed, it is hard to explain the existence of a bunch of rules that apply to certain types of predicates, mostly based on their semantic properties. In the current work, I will follow a neo-constructivist approach by sketching a tentative representation of unergative verbs.

1.2. Neo-constructivist approaches

Hale and Keyser's (1993, 2002) approach to argument structure is normally considered to be a watershed between projectionist and neo-constructivist models. Their proposal to consider syntactic positions as the repository of thematic role information prompted a deep reconsideration of traditional assumptions on the lexicon/syntax interface. One of their main contributions arises from the assumption that unergative verbs derive from deeper transitive structures. In other words, Hale & Keyser hypothesized that unergatives are derived by the incorporation of an N to a light predicate DO which takes the noun as its complement. Under this view, a verb like *swim* would be created through incorporation (on incorporation, see Baker 1988) of the nominal element into the verbal root. This is shown in (2)¹⁶ below:

(2)



As shown in (2), the noun *swim* would incorporate into the light predicate, thus forming the unergative verb 'to swim'. This hypothesis concerning the structure of unergative predicates is supported cross-linguistically, especially by Basque data, where unergatives do not incorporate, thus displaying an analytic construction with the light verb *egin* (*do*). See for instance the examples in (3) taken from Hale and Keyser (2002:117):

(3)

- negar egin 'cry'
- eztul egin 'cough'
- barre egin 'laugh'
- jolas egin 'play'

¹⁶ I do not include higher projections such as TP or CP. Notice however, that Hale and Keyser (1993, 2002) consider the external argument to be merged in a higher position outside of the verbal domain, possibly corresponding to Spec, IP/TP.

Similarly, in English, for instance, many unergative verbs are denominals as shown in the list in (4) provided by Hale and Keyser (2002:14):

(4)

belch, burp, cough, crawl, cry, dance, gallop, gleam, glitter, glow, hop, jump, laugh, leap, limp, nap, run, scream, shout, skip, sleep, sneeze, sob, somersault, sparkle, speak, stagger, sweat, talk, trot, twinkle, walk, yell.

These verbs, according to Hale and Keyser's model, present a simple monadic structure represented in (2) where the nominal element undergoes incorporation. These assumptions on the derivation of unergative verbs allow the authors to find a justification, for instance, for the unacceptability of the transitive alternation with traditional unergatives. Indeed, due to the structural encoding of unergative verbs, the VP cannot project a specifier¹⁷ to host a potential object, therefore blocking a derivation such as the following **the babysitter napped the child*.

Apart from Basque and English data, their assumptions on the derivation of unergative verbs are also supported by Navajo, a Native American language, where the stems of some unergative verbs match with the corresponding nouns from which they derive. See for instance the examples in (5) taken from Hale and Keyser (2002: 117):

(5)

V	N
ghi-dloh 'laugh'	dlo
di-yih 'breathe'	-yih (< -ghih)
'i-yol 'inhale'	-yol
di-za' 'belch'	-za'
di-zheeh 'spit'	-zhéé'

The derivation from the nominal stem is clear from the examples above. This view is also supported by the derivation of other non-alternating (unergative) verbs in Navajo which display a traditional transitive structure as shown in (6) below:

¹⁷ According to Hale and Keyser (1993 *et seq*), the VP does not project a specifier unless it is forced by some other principles. For instance, unergative verbs do not present an internal subject but in the case of verbs of change of state or location verbs the predication is responsible for the appearance of a VP-internal subject. The subject of unergative verbs is therefore merged higher up in the structure, i.e., in Spec, IP, outside of the verbal domain.

(6)

'-h-hosh 'sleep'

'-h-háá 'snore'

'-h-kóóh 'swim'

(Hale and Keyser 2002:117)

These examples support Hale and Keyser's claim according to which unergatives derive from underlying transitive structures. A potential problem might arise when considering those unergative verbs which do not have a direct nominal counterpart in the lexicon from which they seem to be derived as in the case of the It. verb *dormire* 'to sleep'. I will address this issue in §1.3. However, before continuing the discussion around the theoretical background, some considerations on the treatment of cognate objects are in order.

1.2.1. *On cognate objects in Hale & Keyser's approach*

If we derive unergatives following Hale and Keyser's (2002) model as shown in (2) above, we are assuming that these verbs derive from deep transitive structures where the object position is filled by the incorporated noun. Assuming that Spec VP is not available to unergative derivations, and therefore blocking the possibility of merging an extra object in that position, a potential challenge for this claim arises when considering sentences where unergative verbs seem to allow the presence of a direct object as shown in (7):

(7) Giulia balla un tango

Giulia dance.1ps.sg a tango

'Giulia dances a tango'

Indeed, as we have already mentioned, unergative verbs are normally defined as monovalent verbs, where the only argument of the predicate is represented by the subject. However, it seems that in certain cases, unergatives can actually take direct objects as complements as shown in (7). The presence of an "extra" (cognate) object in Hale and Keyser's framework does not find a straightforward explanation since the traditional object position (Spec, VP for them) is not accessible to unergative derivations. Similarly, if we assume that objects of transitive verbs are merged as internal arguments (i.e., as complements of V°), then

it would be difficult to explain the presence of a direct object in a position that should be already filled by the trace of the incorporated noun.

Hale and Keyser (2002) tackle this problem by making a preliminary distinction between true cognate objects (8 a, b) and hyponymous objects (8 c, d):

(8)

- a) She slept the sleep of the just
- b) He laughed his last laugh
- c) He danced a jig
- d) He bagged the potatoes in a gunnysack

(Hale and Keyser 2002:71)

As shown above, the cognate objects of sentences (8a, b) are identical to their respective roots while hyponymous objects do not require this identity relation between the noun and the root to take place as shown in (8c, d). This distinction, of course, has some non-trivial syntactic consequences since, for instance, true cognate objects reject pronominalization while hyponymous objects do not:

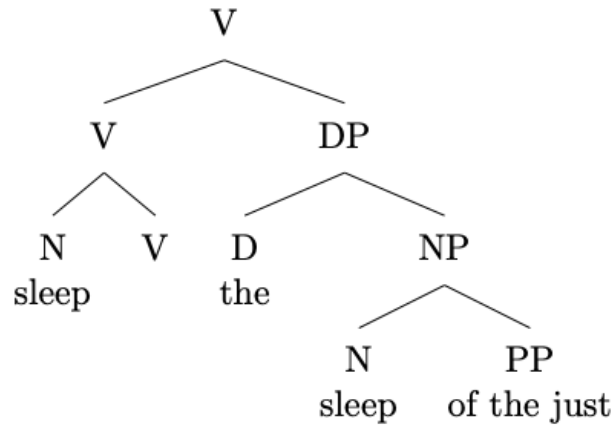
(9)

- a) *John slept the sleep of the just and Bill slept it too (true cognate object)
- b) John danced the tango and Bill danced it too

(Hale and Keyser 2002:71)

Hale and Keyser (2002), therefore, propose to account for this distinction by positing different analyses for cognate and hyponymous objects. First, they claim that true cognate objects are derived through incorporation, which they take to be an operation of head movement, where the trace left behind by the noun, originally merged in the complement position of the VP, receives a spell out. Therefore, in their analysis, cognate objects are non-silent traces. This would roughly look like the derivation in (10):

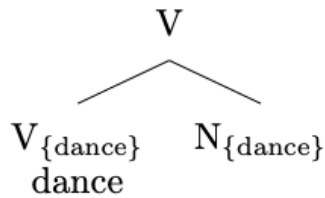
(10)



(Hale and Kayser 2002: 72)

Conversely, in the case of hyponymous objects, the verb would be directly merged in V and the hyponymous object would be licensed by the fact that it shares some semantic-selection properties with the verb. The structure is represented in (11):

(11)



(Hale and Keyser 2002:93)

This proposal would, in principle, explain why certain unergative verbs can appear with an (cognate) object even though they should disallow the appearance of an extra argument either in Spec VP (following Hale and Keyser's model) or as a complement of V°.

We will come back to these issues in §1.3.1 when discussing Cuervo's (2003) proposal on the syntactic representation of cognate objects.

1.3. Defining the structure of unergative verbs

According to Vendler's (1957) classification of predicates into activities, states, accomplishments, and achievements, unergative verbs are normally described as activities with the following representation taken from Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) similar to (1):

(12)

a) [x ACT <MANNER>]

The structure in (12), apart from these initial considerations, also shows the mono-eventive nature of predicates of the type of *laugh*, *cough*, *sleep*, etc., which is different from the representation attributed, for instance, to bi-eventive predicates of the causative type (i.e., 'break', 'open' etc.). This is very well exemplified, for instance, in Cuervo's (2003, 2015) work on causatives¹⁸.

Taking into account a traditional neo-constructivist approach, we can now state that unaccusativity must be structurally determined and that the relevant aspects of meaning are not projected from single lexical items but built compositionally in the syntax. Within this view, unergative verbs present a type of structure shown in (14) where they combine with a functional projection v_{DO} and a VoiceP¹⁹:

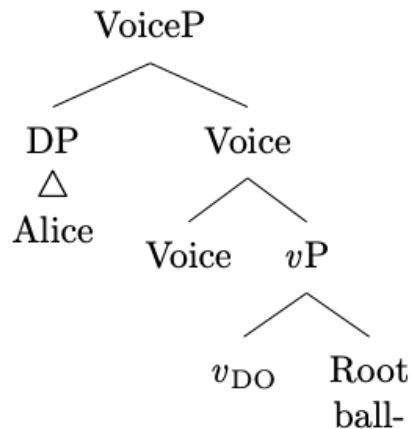
(13)

a) Alice ball-a
Alice dance.1ps.sg
'Alice dances'

(14)

¹⁸ Interestingly, Cuervo (2015) argues for a compositional structure for causatives where the causative meaning arises from the interpretation of the two eventive heads v_{DO} and v_{BE} . Similarly, she proposes the same type of derivation for unaccusative predicates of change of state which, according to her claims, involve the compositional interpretation of the two heads v_{GO} and v_{BE} .

¹⁹ The structural representation will only concern the verbal domain, leaving aside higher projections i.e., TP and CP.



As anticipated in the structure above, it will be assumed, following recent work on argument structure by Cuervo (2003), the presence of three different type of heads in the derivation:

- (i) Root: denoting the lexical content
- (ii) Event introducers: *v*
- (iii) Argument introducers: Voice and Applicative²⁰

These elements combine in the derivation as shown in the structure in (15) above.

Cuervo's (2003) work shares with Kratzer (1996) the hypothesis that external arguments are merged in a more external position with respect to the internal argument, namely Spec, VoiceP. By postulating the existence of a Voice head to be merged on top of the *vP*, the subject would occupy a *vP*-external position. This hypothesis put forward by Kratzer is based on Marantz's (1984) early observations on the rejection of external arguments as true arguments of the verb.

As in many analyses developed in the frame of Distributed Morphology (see Matantz 1997, Harley 1995, and Cuervo 2003 among others), to become a verb, a non-categorized root necessarily merges with a verbalizing head, i.e., *v* to be categorized. In the case of unergative verbs, since many of them are denominal, a feasible hypothesis is that in those cases the verbalizing head merges with a nominal root, as argued in Harley (1999, 2005).

²⁰ I leave aside the discussion on Applicative as an argument introducer head. See Cuervo (2003) for discussion on Applicative and dative arguments.

Furthermore, as originally proposed by Marantz (1997) and Folli and Harley (2006), the verbalizing head *v* comes into distinct flavors. As shown in (16) below, there are at least three types of *v* expressing corresponding *Aktionsart* meanings:

(15)

<i>v</i> _{BE}	states	<i>like, admire, lack</i>
<i>v</i> _{DO}	activities	<i>dance, laugh, sleep</i>
<i>v</i> _{GO}	changes	<i>grow, go, fall</i>

(Cuervo 2003:18)

The verbalizing element responsible for deriving unergative verbs is *v*_{DO}, which creates activities from a root that expresses some manner of acting. The external argument is licensed by the Voice head which encodes information about the ‘doer’ of the event. Clearly, unergative verbs should only license an external subject, which is taken to be merged in Spec, VoiceP as shown in the structure in (15).

Additionally, in the present work it will be assumed in line with Cuervo (2003, 2014) that objects can actually occupy different positions in the derivation according to whether they are licensed by the event structure or by the root. Indeed, different from traditional models of representation (see Baker 1997, Borer 2005) where the object always occupies the specifier position of either VP or \sqrt{P} (i.e., RootP), Cuervo argues that the object can either be merged as a complement of the root or as the specifier of the verbalizing head. In particular, the objects of inchoative structures (17a) are merged in the specifier position of a functional projection, namely stative *v*_{BE}P, while the object of unaccusative verbs of movement and happening (17 b), as well as the object of non-causative transitive verbs (17c) (cf. Cuervo 2015), is merged as complement of the root. Crucially, in Cuervo’s analysis roots cannot project specifiers but can only take complements. In particular she argues that:

“Arguments licensed by roots appear as complements of the root, but never as subjects. I assume that roots do not take subjects; subjects can only be projected by words (or predicates formed by more than one word) of a certain type e.g. adjectives stative predicate verbs.”
(Cuervo 2003:23)

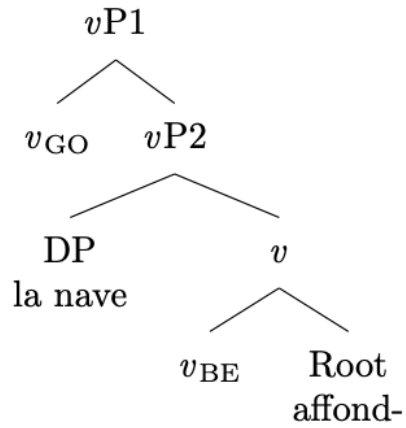
This is exemplified in the structures in (17a, b, c) below taken from Cuervo (2003:25-27):

(16)

a) La nave affondò

The ship sink.PST.3ps.sg

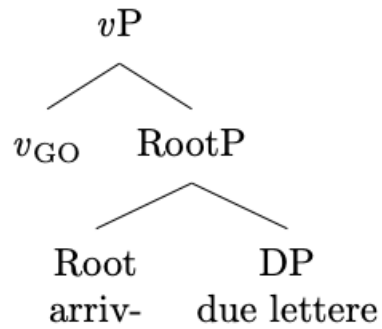
‘The ship sunk’



b) Arrivarono due lettere

Arrive.PST.3ps.pl two letters

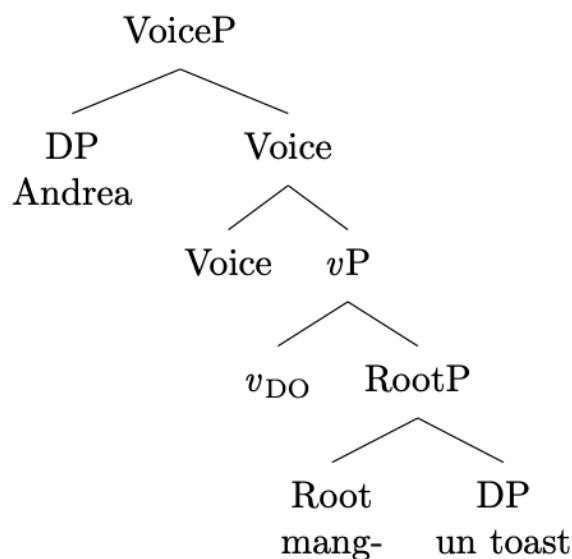
‘Two letters arrived’



c) Andrea mangia un toast

Andrea eat.PS.3ps.sg a toast

‘Andrea eats a toast’



Cuervo’s claim on the possibility of having two different structural positions for the object is non-trivial. Indeed, the possibility of roots to take complements is a highly debated topic within studies on argument structure (see for instance Harley 2014 and Alexiadou 2014). In support of her claim, Cuervo (2003, 2015) presents Spanish data concerning the distribution of bare plurals. Indeed, in Spanish, bare plurals seem to display a different syntactic behavior according to their licensing position. Consider the sentences in (18) taken from Cuervo (2015):

(17)

- a) *Ayer le perdí llaves a mi hermana (Causative)
 Yesterday Cl.dat lose.PST.1ps.sg keys to my sister
 “I lost the keys on my sister”
- b) Ayer le pedí revistas a Paula (non-causative)
 Yesterday Cl.dat ask.PST.1ps.sg magazines to Paula
 “Yesterday I ask Paula for magazines”

As shown above, in (18a) the occurrence of the bare plural *llaves* ‘keys’ within the causative construction yields ungrammaticality while the bare plural *revistas* ‘magazines’ is fully acceptable in a non-causative derivation. This syntactic restriction points to the possibility already discussed above that bare plurals, which cannot appear in subject position but should always be allowed in object position, must be licensed by the root and not by the functional

projection v_{BE} . This piece of evidence will be crucial in order to maintain the view according to which the object of transitive non-causative structures and the cognate objects of unergatives are actually licensed *semantically* as complements of the root and not by a functional projection. I will further discuss this point in §1.3.1.

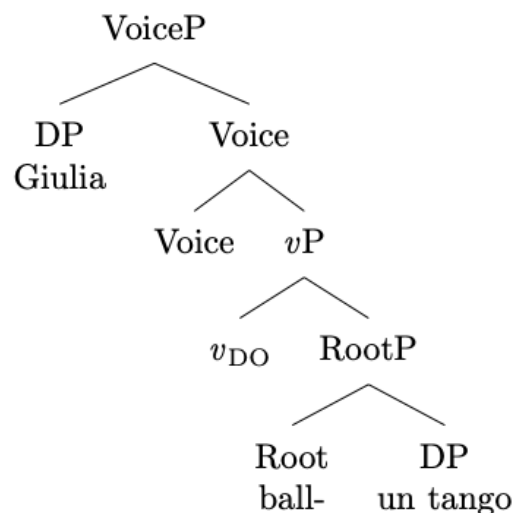
1.3.1. Cognate objects in Cuervo's approach

As far as cognate object constructions are concerned, Cuervo (2003) assumes that cognate objects (without making a distinction between hyponymous and true cognate objects) are not licensed by the event structure, but they are actually licensed semantically (Levin 1999) by the core meaning of the root which is, in turn, allowed to take complements.

Therefore, in the traditional representation of an unergative verb as shown in (18) below, it will be assumed that the root merged with the functional head v_{DO} , which is responsible to introduce the event, semantically licenses the DP object *un tango* 'a tango'.

(18)

- a) Giulia balla un tango
 Giulia dance.PS.3ps.sg a tango
 'Giulia dances a tango'



The cognate object is merged as complement of the root and receives an interpretation based on the core meaning of the root itself. This derivation equals the structure of non-causative

transitive verbs which simply denote activities e.g., *eat* where the object is, again, merged as a complement of the root and not in the specifier position of a functional projection.

To summarize, I will adopt Levin's (1999) and Cuervo's (2003) claims according to which objects of unergative verbs are not licensed by the event structure itself, but they are licensed by the meaning of the root. These preliminary assumptions on the nature of cognate objects will be useful to provide an explanation to the analysis of unergative verbs of creation/production that will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.4. The subject-object dichotomy

In this section the broader discussion on subject-object dichotomy will be introduced mostly based on Marantz (1984), Cuervo (2003) and Levin (1999). These considerations on the semantics and syntax of external and internal arguments will constitute a point of departure for the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

As discussed in Cuervo (2003), one of the fundamental peculiarities that stand out in the analysis of external arguments, i.e., subjects of transitive verbs and unergative verbs, is the possibility of condensing their semantic roles in two main macro-roles: (i) doers (i.e., agents and causers) and possessors (i.e., possessors and experiencers). This partition shows how limited the meanings associated to external argument actually are. On a slightly different note, Ramchand (2008), for instance, proposes to adopt the semantic label 'initiator' to describe the role of external arguments defining it as the participant who is responsible for bringing the eventuality into existence. Her main claims rest on the idea that even though volitionality and agentivity as semantic properties tendentially pattern with the semantics of external arguments, it is nonetheless true that causation can be considered as the crucial semantic factor in the syntactic derivation.

"I'm going to assume, therefore, that even though agency might be relevant for felicity in certain circumstances, **it does not directly determine syntactically relevant class membership** [emphasis mine]. The relevant notion here is that of causation or initiation, or more abstractly, the existence of a causing subevent, which has a DP role associated with it via the syntax (similar to Kratzer 1996) and which is specified more particularly by the lexical encyclopedic knowledge of the verb itself."

(Ramchand 2008:24-25)

These considerations on agentivity by Ramchand's (2008) make an interesting point on the role that this semantic notion has with respect to the syntactic derivation. Interestingly, her proposal to restrict agentivity to a mere conceptual/cognitive domain will prove useful in the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

Returning to the subject-object dichotomy, it is possible to observe that differently from subjects, objects of non-causative transitive verbs can receive various interpretations according to the core meaning of the verb as shown by the examples in (19) taken from Levin (1999:2)²¹.

(19)

- a) The engineer cracked the bridge (patient)
- b) The engineer destroyed the bridge (patient/consumed object)
- c) The engineer painted the bridge (incremental theme)
- d) The engineer moved the bridge (theme)
- e) The engineer built the bridge (effected object/factitive)
- f) The engineer washed the bridge (location/surface)
- g) The engineer hit the bridge (location)
- h) The engineer crossed the bridge (path)
- i) The engineer reached the bridge (goal)
- j) The engineer left the bridge (source)
- k) The engineer saw the bridge (stimulus/object of perception)
- l) The engineer hated the bridge (stimulus/target or object of emotion)

The examples above clearly show how “many objects cannot really be assigned roles from the most common semantic role inventories” (Levin 1999: 3). On a more syntactic account, following Marantz (1984), both Cuervo (2003) and Kratzer (1996) argue that this semantic mismatch arises from the mechanisms behind the licensing of internal and external arguments since internal arguments are licensed by the verb itself, while external arguments are not. Crucially, external arguments must be licensed by a functional projection to be merged on top the verbal complex, which Kratzer identifies as Voice. The Voice head secludes the doer or possessor of the event to a more external position, namely Spec, VoiceP, which is responsible

²¹ This point is also made by Marantz (1984: 25) when discussing the subject-object dichotomy. He claims that object can indeed receive various interpretation depending on the semantics of the verbs and that the choice of arguments can affect the interpretation of the subject but not the other way around.

for the introduction of the external argument. By doing so, the internal argument will eventually result as the only true argument of the verb, as opposed to the external argument which is introduced higher up in the structure. This implies that the meaning of subjects is derived compositionally from the structure, while the meaning of objects seems to depend more on the lexical properties of the root (Marantz 1984). However, by adopting the possibility that objects can be merged in two different positions, i.e., either Spec, *v*P or as complements of the root, according to the structure they instantiate, some implications for their interpretation should be discussed. The basic assumption concerning internal arguments licensed by the functional head *v* is that they receive the traditional interpretation assigned to objects such as benefactive or patient (Cuervo 2014). By contrast, it would be the case that arguments merged as complements of roots are indeed licensed by the roots themselves and that they receive an interpretation based on the idiosyncratic meaning of the root. This is a non-trivial assumption that I take to be borne out from Cuervo (2014) and that I also take to be the reason why certain unergative verbs disallow *ne-cl* as I will discuss in Chapter 4. According to Cuervo (2014), the arguments that a root can take bear the following properties in (20):

(20)

- a) Only one
- b) Licensed as complement of the root (first Merge)
- c) Non-obligatory
- d) Variable syntactic category (i.e., DP, PP or ApplP)
- e) Variable interpretation (depending on the meaning of the root)
- f) Licensed when the root is merged as a modifier (of *v*), not as a complement

Considering especially point (19e), I will demonstrate that the position of complement of the root can indeed trigger a different interpretation of the only argument of unergatives which is forced into an existential construction with *ne-cl*, as I shall discuss in §1.6.

1.5. Unergatives and transitives at the crossroads

As already discussed superficially throughout the last sections, Cuervo's approach to argument structure is not a completely new take on the characterization of objects in both simple non-causative transitive and unergative verbs, on the one hand, and causative transitives on the other. Indeed, the core idea around the possibility of treating the objects of causative and non-causative transitives in a different way has its roots way back into Rappaport Hovav and Levin

(1998) and Levin's (1999) lexicalist approach. In particular, Levin (1999), building on previous assumptions put forward in Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998), already proposed the partition seen in the structures proposed by Cuervo (2003) as the following quotation shows:

“I suggest that two distinct event structures can give rise to objects: a complex, causative event structure and a simple event structure. I argue that these two sources for objects shed light on some of the well-known challenges associated with the semantic underpinnings of objecthood.”
(Levin 1999:1)

Following from these considerations, Levin further proposed to distinguish transitive verbs into Core Transitive Verbs (CTVs) e.g., *break*, *kill*, *cut* and Non-Core Transitive Verbs (NCTVs) e.g., *jiggle*, *kick*, *pound*. Cross-linguistically, CTVs seem to be more stable with respect to NCTVs which can, in fact, display different behavior across languages (e.g., look at, it. *guardare*). The differences between these two classes of verbs prompted Levin to distinguish two different licensing positions for objects of CTVs and NCTVs. NCTVs are ultimately conceived as verbs with two arguments but with a simple event structure similar to activity verbs, just as Cuervo (2003) proposed in her analysis. Similarly, unergative activity verbs display a simple event structure with only one argument and, potentially, an additional object licensed by the idiosyncratic meaning of the root as for the object of NCTVs. On the other hand, CTVs display a complex structure with their object as “the structure participant of the second subevent” (Levin 1999:20). Take for instance a verb like *sweep*. According to Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998), in this case, the event template would only allow one variable, i.e., one argument, to be present in the structure. However, since *sweep* does allow the presence of an object as in “John swept the floor”, Rappaport Hovav and Levin conclude that this extra argument must be licensed by the *constant*, i.e., the root.

Cuervo's (2003, 2014, 2015) reinterpretation of Rappaport Hovav and Levin (1998) and Levin's (1999) original claims plays a crucial role in considering the possibility of reconciling prototypical lexicalist approaches, such as Rappaport Hovav and Levin's, and neo-constructivist models, such as Cuervo's.

1.6. Unergatives and *ne-cl*

Following the premises laid out above on argument structure, we now turn our attention to the structural implications that *ne-cl* might have on unergative verbs. Recall the

considerations put forward by Burzio (1986) and Belletti and Rizzi (1988), overviewed in Chapter 1, according to which the clitic *ne* can only bind an argument in object position. In this view, it is clear that transitive and unaccusative verbs, whose only argument is an underlying object (i.e., an internal argument), are the perfect candidates for *ne*-cl constructions. Consider the sentences in (21):

(21)

- a) Di pasta, *ne* preparo sempre troppa
Of pasta, *ne* prepare always a lot
'As for pasta, I always make a lot'
- b) Di persone, *ne* partono molte dalla stazione di Milano
Of people, *ne* leave many from station of Milan
'As for people, many of them leave from Milan train station'

In sentence (21b) the verb *partire* 'to leave' is a clear unaccusative verb, whose only argument can be resumed by *ne*-cl since it occupies an object position. The same is true for the verb *preparare* (21a) whose direct object can be resumed by the clitic *ne*. These examples, clearly demonstrate that *ne* binds arguments that are first merged in internal argument positions. On the other hand, subjects are normally excluded as shown in (22) below:

(22)

- *Di genitori, *ne* sgridano molti i figli.
of parents, *ne* scold many the children
"Of parents, many *ne* scold their children"

In (22) *ne* cannot bind the DP *genitori* 'parents' since it originates in a subject position of a transitive verb. These observations on binding restrictions, lead Burzio (1986) to consider *ne*-cl as a good diagnostic for unaccusativity. Indeed, unergatives should be banned from appearing with *ne*-cl since their sole argument is always an underlying subject (i.e., external argument).

However, as already discussed in Chapter 1, early work by Lonzi (1986) claimed that, contrary to fact, unergatives can indeed yield grammatical sentences with *ne*-cl as shown in sentences in (23) below:

(23)

- a) Ne telefonano molti di call center ogni giorno
Ne phone may of call centers every day
 ‘As for call centers, many of them call every day’
- b) Ne attecchiscono molte di piante di miglio a primavera
Ne take root many of plants of millets in spring
 ‘As for millet plants, many of them take root in spring’

In examples (23a) and (23b), both unergative verbs *telefonare* and *attecchire* yield acceptable sentences with *ne*-cl notwithstanding the fact that the only argument of these unergative verbs is an underlying subject (i.e., an external argument).

Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) tried to account for this phenomenon by considering *ne*-cl as a surface unaccusativity diagnostics, on a par with locative inversion in English, and therefore relating its acceptability with unergative verbs to discourse considerations. Their observations, however, as noted by Mateu (2002), cannot actually explain the reason why synthetic tenses seem to allow *ne*-cl with unergatives but analytic tenses do not, as shown in (24) below:

(24)

- a) Di ragazze, ne lavorano molte nelle fabbriche di Shangai
 Of girls, *ne* work.PRS.3ps.pl many in.the factories in Shangai
 ‘As for girls, many of them work in factories in Shangai’
- b) *Di ragazze, ne hanno lavorato molte nelle fabbriche di Shangai
 Of girls, *ne* have work.PP many in.the factories in Shangai
 ‘As for girls, many of them have work in the factories in Shangai’

(Mateu 2002:119)

Clearly, according to Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s reasoning and their rejection of *ne*-cl as a true unaccusativity diagnostic, (24b) should not yield unacceptability since the structure in (24a) seems to be perfectly grammatical. A potential explanation to the contrast in the acceptability of (24a) and (24b) could rely on the structural differences displayed by the two sentences. In particular, if we suppose that the underlying structural representation of (24a) does not correspond to the underlying structural representation of (24b), then we might be able to account for the difference in the acceptability of (24a) and (24b). Indeed, by assuming that *ne*-cl triggers a structure normally realized by unaccusative verbs (Hoekstra and Mulder 1990;

Mateu 2002), the unacceptability of sentence (24b) would not be surprising. Indeed, Burzio's (1986) assumptions actually predict this outcome by claiming the unacceptability of *avere* with unaccusative structures which forcedly require the selection of *essere* (Mateu 2002). In this case, it seems that the possibility of forcing unergative verbs into unaccusative constructions yields acceptability only when they pattern with synthetic tenses, while the selection of *have* with analytic tenses is blocked by the instantiation of the unergative derivation. I will come back to these issues when discussing the data in Chapter 4, for now, note that we take *ne-cl* to be a trigger for unaccusative syntax basing on ideas by Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) and Mateu (2002).

Notice, however, that if we assume that unergatives can yield acceptability when they appear in *ne-cl* constructions, we are automatically questioning the status of *ne-cl* as a potential unaccusativity diagnostic. Indeed, it seems that, *ne* is actually able to bind the only argument of unergatives when it appears in an internal object position therefore challenging Burzio's (1986) original arguments in favor of *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for split intransitivity.

1.6.1. *Ne-cl and the existential reading*

To better understand the claims put forward in §1.6, let us now review Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) study on the atypical behavior of unergatives as copular verbs. In particular, Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) claim that unergatives are capable of behaving as typical copular verbs when they are found in certain types of structures such as, for instance, locative inversion and *there*-insertion in English.

(25)

- a) Out of the barn ran a horse.
- b) Into the room walked a man.
- c) Out of the house strolled my mother's best friend

(Hoekstra and Mulder 1990:31)

As shown in (25), locative preposing is indeed possible with typical unergative verbs of the type of *run*, *walk* and *stroll*. In this case, Hoekstra and Mulder hypothesize the presence of an ergativization (i.e., unaccusativization) effect on the verb. Specifically, they argue that in those case, the unergative verb acquires the status of copular verb which takes a Small Clause

(SC) as a complement. In other words, they presuppose the existence of a sort of process of ergativization that unergatives can undergo when they subcategorize for a SC. The derivation is summarized in (24) below:

$$(26) \quad \text{NP V} \longleftrightarrow \text{V} [\text{sc NP PRED}]$$

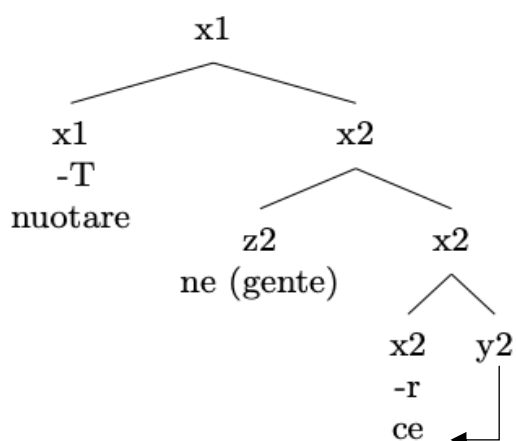
Mateu (2002) also follows this lead specifically when analyzing *ne-cl* with unergative verbs. He further argues that, if it is true that unergatives can be squeezed into unaccusative structures when patterning with *ne-cl*, it is also true that “we are not dealing with a prototypical unaccusative construction expressing a telic event, but with a non-prototypical one expressing an atelic existential situation” (Mateu 2002:121). Accordingly, Mateu (2002) proposes to account for these constructions by assuming a process of unaccusativization where the unergative verb enters the derivation and it is assigned the features [-T]²² and [+R] instead of the traditional [+R] feature assigned to unergatives. He proposes the derivation in (28) for the sentence in (27):

(27)

- a) Ce ne nuota molta di gente, in quella piscina
Ci ne swim much of people, in that pool
 “Many people swim in that pool”

²² As anticipated in Chapter 1, these features are, in Mateu’s system, “discrete semantic determinants” which are also syntactically transparent. The [+T] [-T] “subsume the {GO/BECOME/CHANGE} and {BE/STAY} functions, respectively” (Mateu 2002:33), while “the [+R] feature subsumes both the CAUSE function and the agentive {ACT/DO} function” (Mateu (2002:33).

(28)



(Mateu 2002:122)

Interestingly, also Bentley (2006:276), within the framework of Role and Reference grammar, seems to be in favor of an existential analysis of unergative predicates with *ne*-cl. In particular, she argues that unergative constructions with *ne* are sentence-focus structures where the predicate is a stage-level existential predicate introducing a topic/focus contrast. In line with her assumptions, she proposes the semantic representation in (29) for the sentence “*Ne cammina molta di gente, su quei marciapiedi*” (many people walk on those sidewalks).

(29)

a) exist' [be' (tanta *ne*_i, [be-on' (marciapiedi, [do' (*gente*_i, [walk' (*gente*_i)])])])])])])

She further argues that the possibility of activity verbs to appear with *ne*-cl is strictly bound to the appearance of the existential reading. In other words, activity verbs need to trigger an existential reading to be allowed into *ne*-cl constructions.

Another strong piece of evidence in support of the existential reading comes from the analysis of *ne*-cl constructions in northern Italian dialects. As shown by Cresti (2003), in Paduan *ne*-cl constructions seem to always pattern with the clitic *ge* ‘there’ as shown in (30) below:

(30)

a) *N'è rivà do
Ne-be arrive.PP two
“Two of them arrived”

b) *Ge n-e rivà do*

There *ne*-be arrive.PP two

“Two of them arrived”

c) #*Ge n-a telefonà do*²³

There *ne*-have phoned two

“Two have phoned”

(Cresti 2003:69)

As shown by the contrast in (30a) and (30b) in Paduan the appearance of the clitic *ne* is strictly bound to the appearance of the clitic *ge*. From the analysis of this data, Cresti (2003) claims that *ne* is an oblique version of existential *there* as shown in its overt realization in (30). Indeed, the Paduan data confirm Cresti’s claim according to which (*ge*)*ne* equals existential *there* both in its semantic and syntactic properties.

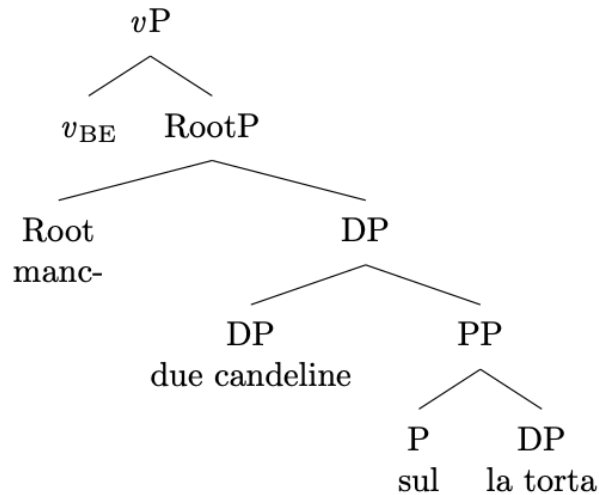
1.6.2. Structural representation of unergatives with *ne-cl*

On the premises presented in §1.6.1, we will claim that when unergatives appear with *ne-cl* they give rise to an unaccusative structure with an existential reading. Abstracting away from the SC analysis and Mateu’s approach to features, we are going to propose a derivation which follows from the theoretical premises laid out in § 1.3 in line with Cuervo’s (2003) representation of argument structure. Therefore, we will claim that these verbs will be found in unaccusative/existential constructions as shown in (31) taken from Cuervo (2003:25):

(31)

- a) *Mancano due candeline sulla torta*
lack.3ps.pl two little.candle.pl on.the cake
‘Two little candles are missing from the cake’

²³ The symbol # marks the ambiguity in the acceptability of this sentence. Indeed, Cresti (2003) noted how interdialectal variation does not allow to provide a clear-cut judgment for the acceptability of this sentence.



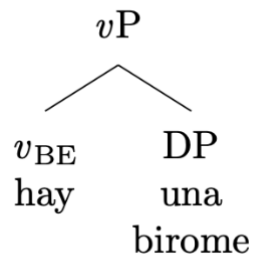
As it is possible to observe from the structure above, the basic assumption is that unergative verbs receive an existential reading when they can be squeezed into typical existential constructions with the verbalizing head v_{BE} and not v_{GO} as in typical unaccusative structures (6b). Existential constructions of the type proposed by Cuervo (2003) and shown in (31) above, therefore presuppose the existence of a v_{BE} which merges with a root, and in turn the root merges with a DP and a PP. The existential reading would therefore arise from the presence of the verbalizer v_{BE} which combines with an activity root.²⁴ In Cuervo's model, the existential predicate combines with an internal argument in the same way as the Spanish existential predicate *haber* (there be) combines with a complement as shown in (32) below:

(32)

a) Hay una birome

There is a pen

²⁴ A question that might arise when claiming that unergatives in *ne-cl* give rise to existential syntax is whether this reading can be extended also to unaccusative and transitive verbs. This claim should be supported by further evidence, however, as Bentley notes, building on Cresti (2003), there is a lot of variation among speakers especially when it comes to the interpretation of transitive verbs in *ne-cl* constructions. Indeed, in the case of a sentences such as *Gianni non ne ha risolti molti* the reading can be both 'it is not the case that John solved many ne' and 'there are many ne that John did not solve' (Bentley 2006:279).



(Cuervo 2003:174)

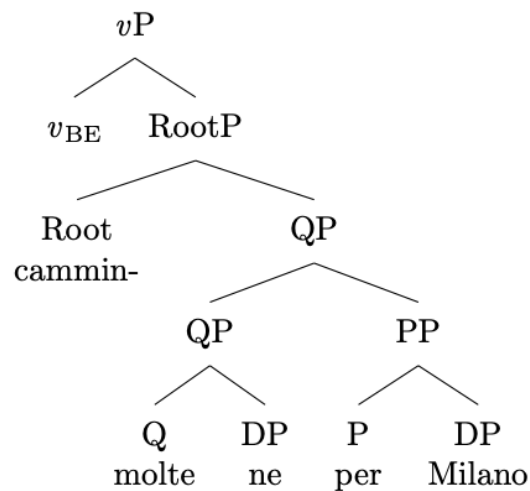
This analysis of *ne*-cl with unergatives as existential constructions would, in principle, also explain why it seems more natural to add a prepositional phrase (adding spatio-temporal information) to sentences like (33) below as also noted by Mateu (2002). However, as anticipated in Chapter 1, the status of this prepositional phrase remains unclear (see for instance Torrego 1989; Cortés and Gavarró 1997 for discussion). Mateu (2002: 121) claims that the PP is somehow necessary to license the unaccusative construction even in those sentences where it does not appear overtly. However, it would also be plausible to think of this PP as a sort of element introduced to satisfy discourse/pragmatic conditions of informativity, and not directly to requirements of the syntactic derivation. I leave these issues aside for further research.

Consider now, the sentence in (33) and its respective structure in (34):

(33)

- a) *Ne camminano molte di persone per Milano*
Ne walk.3ps.pl many of people around Milan
 ‘Many people walk around Milan’

(34)



Sentence (33) is a clear example of how an unergative verb found in *ne-cl* constructions gives rise to the existential reading ‘*ci sono molte persone che camminano per Milano*’ (there are many people that walk around Milan) similar to Bentley’s proposal above (29).

2. Summary and research questions

This chapter aimed at providing the theoretical background on which data analysis will be based. By sketching the major assumptions underlying the lexicalist and the neo-constructivist approaches, we proposed a model of representation for unergative verbs mostly based on work by Cuervo (2003, 2014, 2015). In particular, we claimed that unergative verbs are derived through merging the root with a verbalizing head i.e., *v_{DO}* giving rise to a similar structure as non-causative transitive verbs. We further hypothesized that cognate objects, when they appear in the derivation, are semantically licensed by the root and not by a functional projection as in the case of causative/inchoative predicates. Additionally, we proposed to consider *ne-cl* with unergative verbs to be a trigger for unaccusative syntax giving rise to an existential reading mostly relying on Hoekstra and Mulder (1990), Mateu’s (2002) and Bentley (2006).

The discussion carried out so far around the possibility of finding unergative verbs in *ne-cl* constructions prompts two different questions. First of all, can *ne-cl* still be considered as a diagnostic for unaccusativity despite its appearance with unergative verbs? But also, do all

unergative verbs freely enter into these constructions? Or are there any limitations to their appearance with unaccusative/existential syntax?

We will try to answer both questions throughout this thesis, supporting our claims with a set of empirical data. Eventually, we will be able to understand whether *ne-cl* imposes some constraints on the type of verbs that can appear in these constructions and whether Burzio's (1986) original claim on *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity should be dispensed with altogether or not.

In Chapter 3, we will briefly outline the methodology of data collection and finally, in Chapter 4 we will provide an analysis for the non-homogeneous behavior of unergative verbs in *ne-cl* constructions.

Chapter 3

Methodology

1. Methods of data collection

The aim of the present work is to investigate *ne*-cliticization (*ne-cl*) constructions in relation to unaccusativity and argument structure properties. As extensively discussed in the previous chapters, we will test the reliability of *ne-cl* as a diagnostic for unaccusativity by testing both synthetic and analytic structures of twenty unergative verbs. The discussion around the data will be carried out extensively in Chapter 4.

In this section we will only illustrate the methods of data collection and the reasoning behind the design of the questionnaires. A primary overview of the results will be outlined, especially concerning the profile of the informants i.e., their geographical origin, knowledge of other languages and age.

1.1. Step one: selection of the verbs

As discussed in the previous chapters, the verbs which notoriously yield ungrammaticality with *ne-cl* are unergative verbs, namely those verbs whose external argument originates as an underlying subject. The reasons for this unacceptability are explained by the crucial assumption that the clitic *ne* can bind an object but not a subject. This is the reason why unaccusatives, i.e., those intransitive verbs whose only argument is an underlying object, can participate in these structures as well as the objects of transitive verbs.

However, early work by Lonzi (1986) argued that (many) unergative verbs can, in principle, also participate in *ne-cl* constructions yielding grammatical sentences. In order to verify this claim and to understand to what extent these constructions are deemed acceptable, several unergative verbs were selected mostly from Jezek's (2003) verb lists, and subsequently divided into different semantic classes, as shown in Table 1. The semantic division was carried out through the use of VerbNet (<http://verbs.colorado.edu/verb-index/index.php>) whose database relies mostly on Levin's (1993) work on English verb classes. Table 1 below shows the list of unergative verbs that were selected and their related sentences with *ne*-cliticization.

Semantic classes	Verbs	Sentences with <i>ne</i>
<i>Verbs of light emission</i>	brillare (to shine)	Ne brillano pochi di diamanti grezzi Few diamonds in the rough shine bright
<i>Verbs of sound emission</i>	gracidare (to croak)	Ne gracidano molte di rane negli stagni Many frogs croak in the ponds
	citofonare (to intercom)	Ne citofonano molti di corrieri UPS Many UPS couriers intercom
	canticchiare (to sing)	Ne cantano molti di attori famosi Many famous actors sing
	ululare (to howl)	Ne ululano molti di cani abbandonati Many abandoned dogs howl
<i>Verbs of smell emission</i>	profumare (to perfume)	Ne profumano pochi di saponi artigianali Few handmade soaps perfume
<i>Verbs involving the body</i>	sputare (to spit)	Ne sputano molti di lama allo zoo di Falconara Many llamas spit at the zoo in Falconara
	sanguinare (to bleed)	Ne sanguinano molte di ferite (d'arma da fuoco) Many gunshots wounds bleed
	sudare (to sweat)	Ne sudano molti di atleti olimpici Many Olympic athletes sweat
	tossire (to cough)	Ne tossiscono molti di anziani malati Many sick elderly cough
<i>Psych-Verbs</i>	meditare (to meditate)	Ne meditano molte di persone introverso Many introvert people meditate
	delirare (to rave)	Ne delirano molti di pazienti schizofrenici Many schizophrenic patients rave
<i>Judgment verbs</i>	abusare (to abuse)	Ne abusano tanti del caffè la mattina/ Ne abusano molti di studenti del caffè Many people abuse coffee in the morning / many students abuse coffee
	brindare (to toast)	Ne brinda molta di gente a Capodanno Many people toast at New Year's Eve
<i>Verbs of communication</i>	telefonare	Ne telefonano molti di operatori Telecom

	(to telephone)	Many Telecom operators call
	scherzare (to joke)	Ne scherzano molti di amici fra loro Many friends joke among each other
	parlare (to talk)	Ne parla molta di gente alle cene di lavoro Many people talk at business dinners
<i>Verbs of change of state</i>	fruttificare (to fructify)	Ne fruttificano molte di piante selvatiche Many wild plants fructify
	deragliare (to derail)	Ne deragliano molti di vecchi convogli Many old convoys derail
	proliferare (to proliferate)	Ne proliferano molte di varianti del covid Many covid variants proliferate
<i>Verbs of existence</i>	oziare (to laze)	Ne oziano molte di persone in spiaggia Many people laze on the beach
	dormire (to sleep)	Ne dormono poche di persone ansiose Few anxious people sleep
	regnare (to reign)	Ne regnano molti di sovrani ingiusti Many unjust sovereigns reign
<i>Verbs of combining and attaching</i>	aderire (to join)	Ne aderisce poca di gente alle manifestazioni per il clima Few people join climate manifestations
	scioperare (to go on strike)	Ne scioperano molti di operai della Barilla / Ne scioperano molti di dipendenti Trenitalia Many Barilla workers go on strike / Many Trenitalia employees go on strike
<i>Verbs of removing (possessional deprivation)</i>	barare (to cheat)	Ne barano molti di giocatori di poker Many poker players cheat
	abdicare (to abdicate)	Ne abdicano molti di re spagnoli Many Spanish kings abdicate
	bluffare (to bluff)	Ne bluffano molti di giocatori di briscola Many briscola players bluff
<i>Verbs of motion</i>	passeggiare (to stroll)	Ne passeggiano molte di persone per i giardini di Versailles Many people stroll around Versailles gardens
	camminare	Ne camminano molte di persone per Milano

	(to walk)	Many people walk around Milan
	marciare (to march)	Ne marciano molti di militari dell'esercito Many army soldiers march
	barcollare (to stagger)	Ne barcollano molti di ubriachi per le strade Many drunks stagger through the streets
	pedalare (to pedal)	Ne pedalano molti di ciclisti per le strade Many cyclists pedal in the streets
<i>Verbs of change of possession</i>	optare (to choose)	Ne opta molta di gente per le vacanze in montagna Many people choose to go on vacation in the mountains
	contribuire (to contribute)	Ne contribuiscono molti di gas all'inquinamento atmosferico Many gas contribute to the air pollution
<i>Wish Verbs</i>	pensare (to think)	Ne pensano molti di filosofi all'origine dell'universo Many philosophers think about the origin of the universe
	sognare (to dream)	Ne sognano molte di specie animali Many animal species dream
<i>Verbs of lingering and rushing</i>	esitare (to hesitate)	Ne esitano molte di persone prima di prendere una decisione Many people hesitate before making a decision
	temporeggiare (to stall)	Ne temporeggiano molti di investitori in borsa Many investors in the stock market stall
<i>Verbs of social interaction</i>	divorziare (to divorce)	Ne divorziano molte di coppie in questo periodo/ Ne divorziano molte di coppie sposate Many married couples divorce in the last period / Many married couples divorce
	civettare (to flirt)	Ne civettano molte di ragazze alle feste Many girls flirt at parties
	flirtare (to flirt)	Ne flirtano molti di ragazzi in discoteca Many boys flirt in clubs
	lottare (to fight)	Ne lottano molte di persone contro la miseria Many people fight against misery
<i>Verbs of conspire</i>	peccare (to sin)	Ne peccano molte di persone d'invidia Many people sin of envy
	protestare	Ne protestano molti di studenti universitari

	(to protest)	Many university students protest
<i>Others</i>	mentire (to lie)	Ne mentono molti di testimoni nelle aule dei tribunali Many witnesses lie in court
	ubbidire (to obey)	Ne ubbidiscono molti di sudditi al proprio re Many subjects obey to their king
	esordire (to debut)	Ne esordiscono molti di giocatori in questa stagione Many players debut this season
	beneficiare (to benefit)	Ne beneficiano molte di persone dei contributi statali Many people benefit from government grants
	lavorare (to work)	Ne lavorano molti di professori nelle scuole private Many teachers work in private schools
	sgobbare (to slog)	Ne sgobbano molti di operai nelle fabbriche italiane Many Italian factory workers slog
	nuocere (to harm)	Ne nuoce molto di fumo alla salute delle persone Much smoke harms people's health

Table 1 – Semantic verb classes

Selecting verbs from different verb classes met the purpose of understanding if there are differences among them in their proneness to enter *ne-cl* constructions.

After dividing the verbs into several semantic classes and providing a sentence for each verb, I selected a total of 20 sentences and eventually built two questionnaires. By designing two different questionnaires, I was able to test 20 target sentences from the ones given in Table 1. The sentences featured in the questionnaires were selected according to their higher or lower degree of agentivity mostly following the assumption put forward in Lonzi (2009), according to which agentive unergative verbs cannot appear in *ne-cl* constructions. Indeed, she claims that the unacceptability of *ne-cl* relies on the impossibility of certain unergative verbs to undergo a process of objectification. This is why agentive predicates should, in principle, resist an unaccusative/existential construction. To test her claim, apart from other agentive verbs, I also selected the verb *meditare* ‘to meditate’, which was used by Lonzi (2009) to back up her hypothesis on the objectification process and to prove the unacceptability of agentive unergative verbs in sentences like (1) taken from Lonzi (2009:116):

(1) *Ne meditano tante, di persone, qui.

Ne meditate many, of people, here

‘Many people meditate here’

By testing the acceptability of the agentive verbs like *meditare* with *ne-cl*, I will be able to either confirm or dismiss Lonzi’s (2009) original claim on the role played by agentivity in licensing (or not) these constructions.

1.2.Step two: building the questionnaire

In this subsection I will briefly illustrate the design of the two questionnaires. I will primarily focus on the profile of the speakers who participated in the survey and then, I will focus on the organization of the sentences selected for the study.

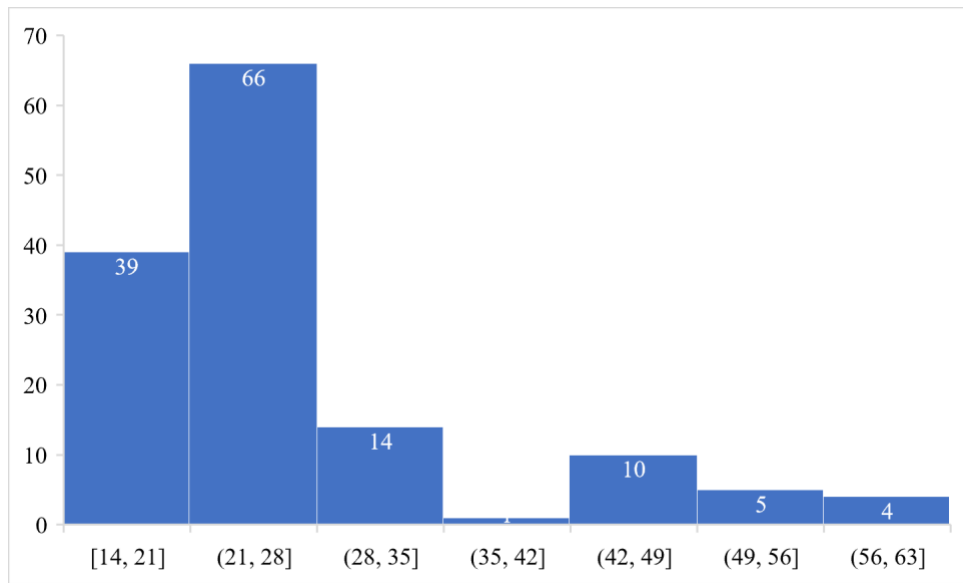
1.2.1. Part 1: Profile of the speakers

The questionnaire was designed through Google Forms, and it comprised two different parts. In the first part, the participants were asked to provide basic personal information such as: (i) age, (ii) gender, (iii) education, (iv) foreign languages, (v) geographical origin.

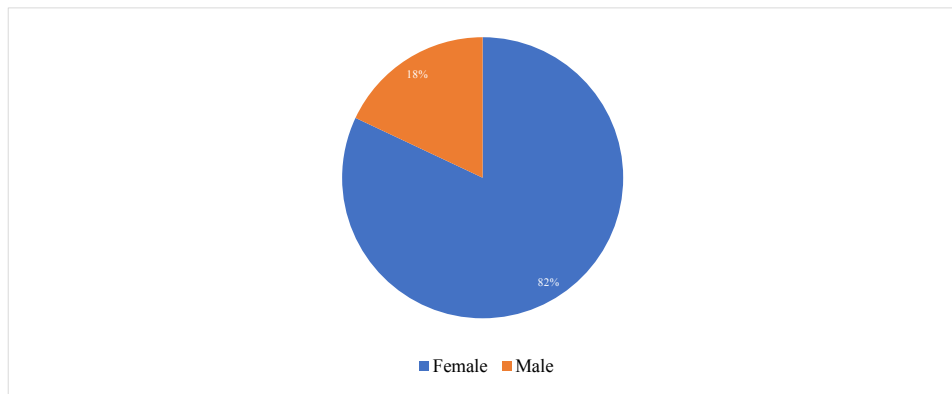
The results are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 below: Table 2 summarizes the results of the first questionnaire while Table 3 summarizes the results from the second questionnaire.

Notice that the data collected for the first questionnaire are slightly more abundant: the responses for the first questionnaire were 139 while those obtained for the second questionnaire were 107. The total number of participants is therefore, 246.

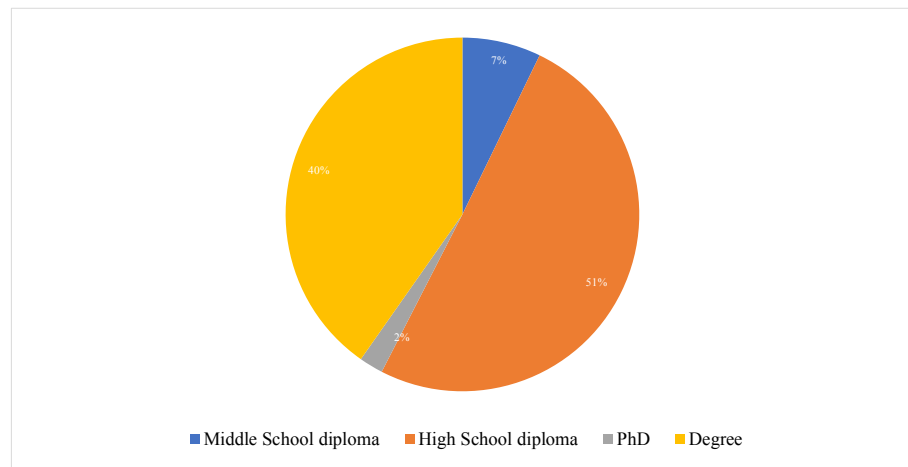
Age



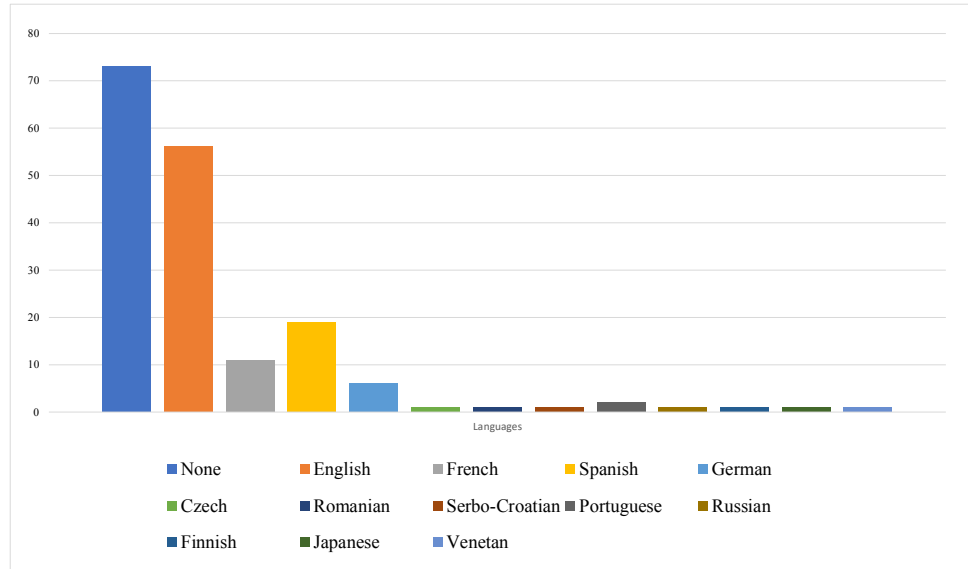
Gender



Education



Foreign Languages



Geographical origin (by region)

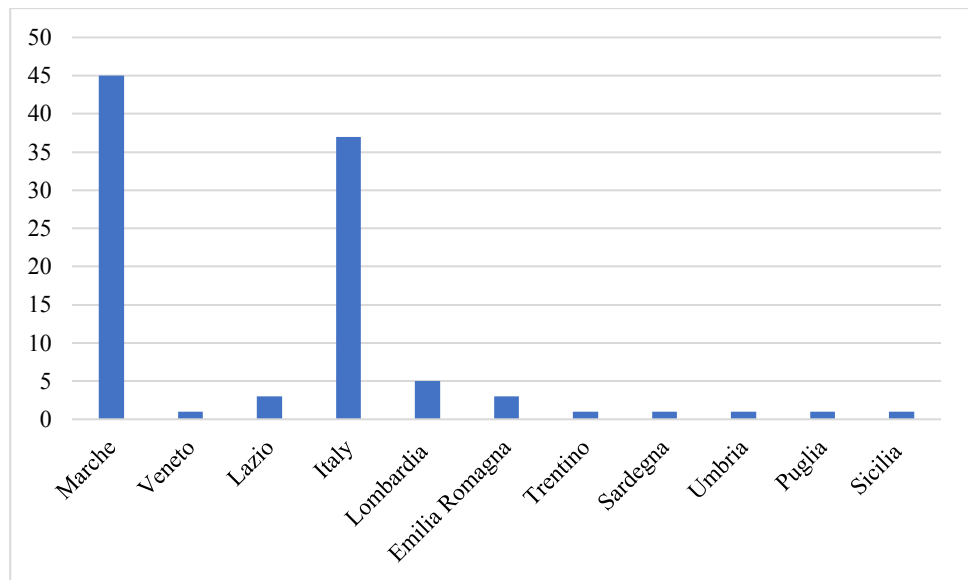
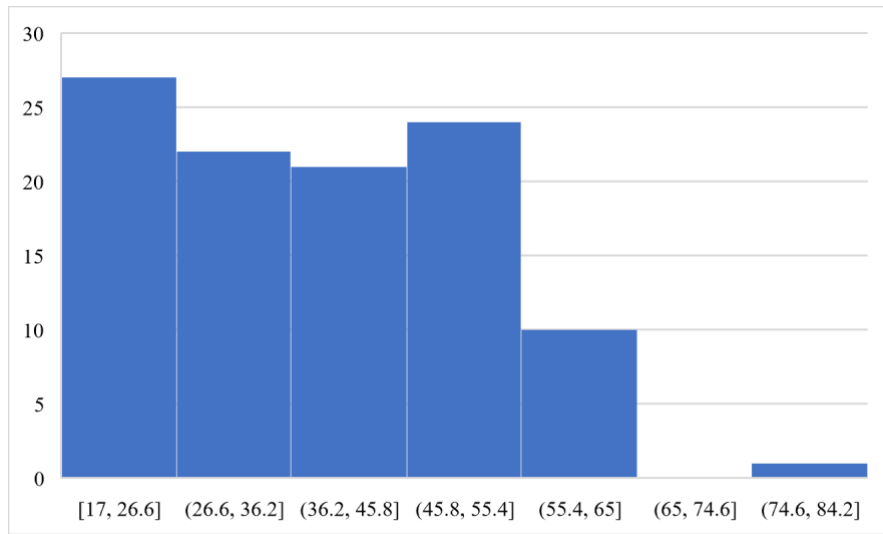
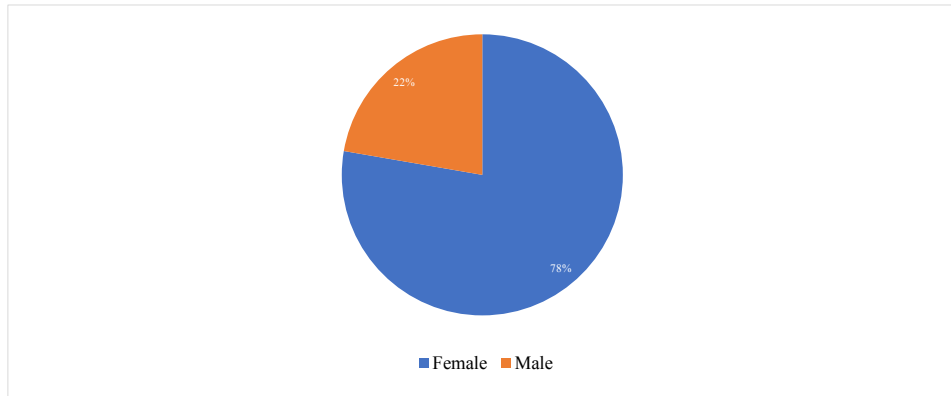


Table 2 – Questionnaire 1 (personal information)

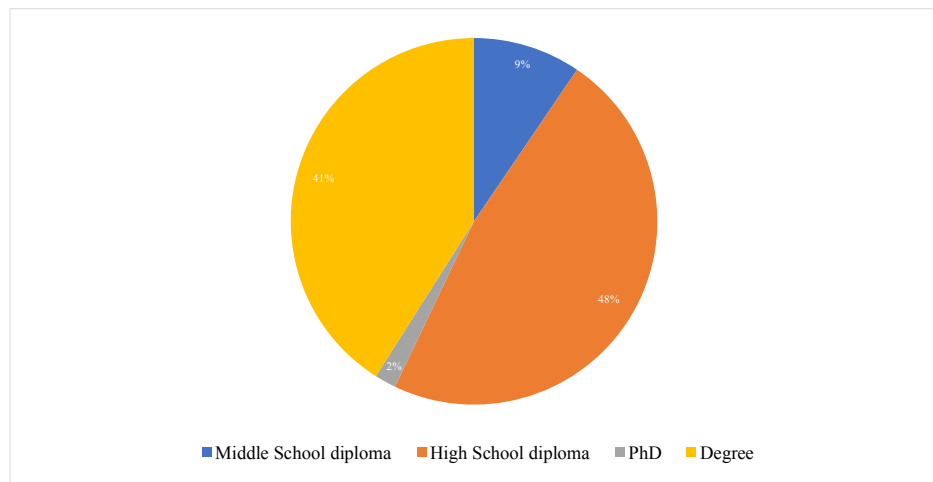
Age



Gender



Education



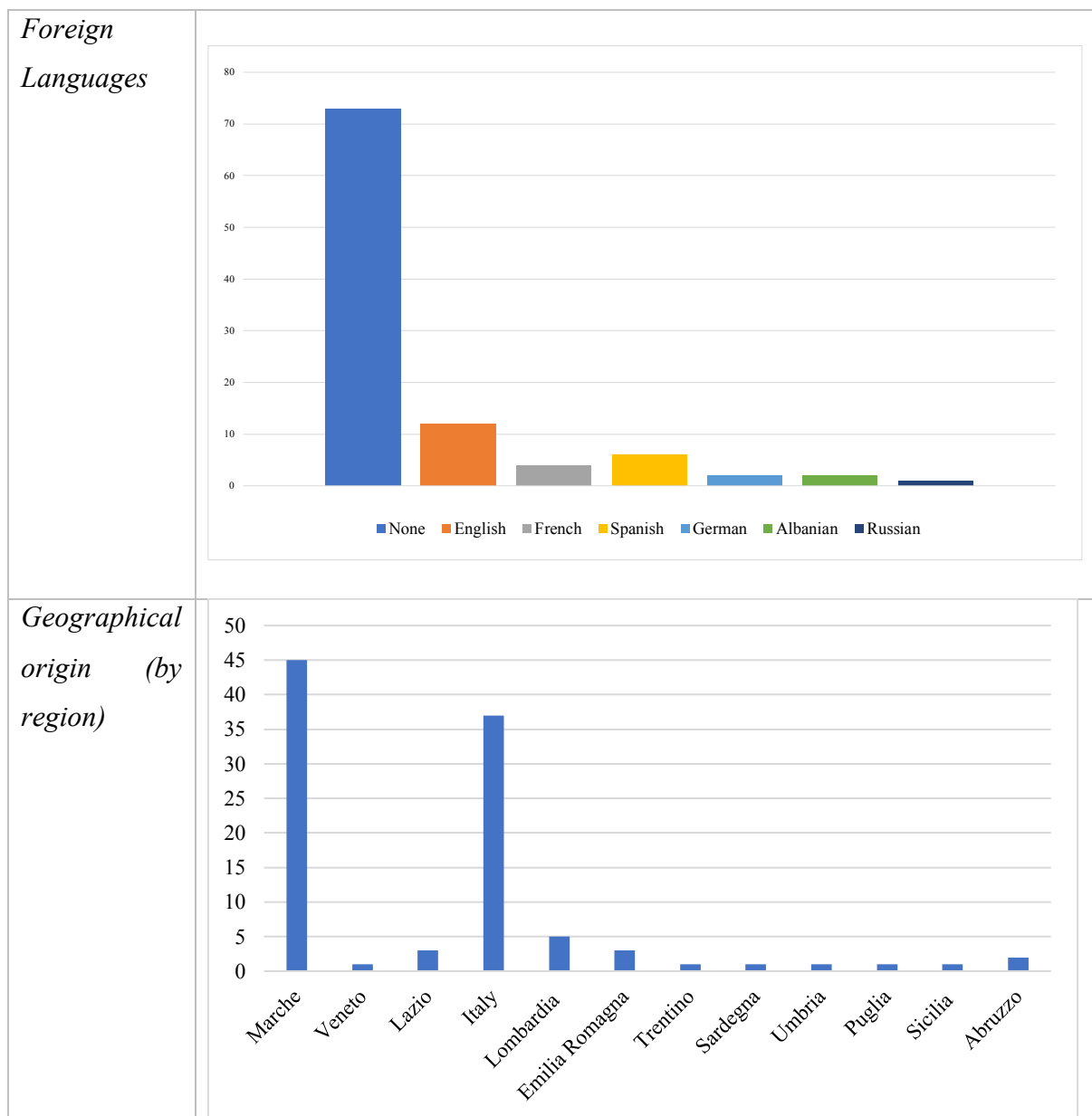


Table 3 – Questionnaire 2 (personal information)

As shown in the graphs above, the majority of the speakers were aged between 20 and 30 and were mainly females. Since the questionnaires were spread through social media, the geographical origin of the participants is not homogenous. Unfortunately, it is also impossible to trace back to the geographical origin of several participants since many of them preferred to answer the question on their provenience by mentioning their country of origin instead of signaling their regional provenience. Those who mentioned their province of origin were predominantly from the Marche region, as shown by the graph above.

Most participants also declared not to be bilinguals, while some others listed the languages that they speak both at an advanced and beginner level. English and Spanish are the two languages which are mentioned the most.

As far as the participants' education, as shown by the graphs in Table 2 and Table 3, most of them acquired either a high school diploma or a degree. Just few participants hold a doctorate degree or a middle school diploma.

1.2.2. Part II: Acceptability judgments

The second part of both questionnaires comprised a total of 45 sentences divided as such: 10 target sentences with *ne* from Table 1 in the synthetic form; 10 target sentences with *ne* from Table 1 in the analytic form; 5 sentences with *ne* with unaccusative and transitive verbs and 20 distractor sentences: 10 of them were grammatical, the other 10 were agrammatical.

The 10 target sentences in the first questionnaire were tested in their analytic form in the second questionnaire and vice-versa. By doing so, both the synthetic and the analytic construction of 20 sentences with *ne* and unergative verbs were tested. The sentences that were selected are given in Table 4 and Table 5 below.

Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2
<i>Ne citofonano molti di corrieri UPS</i> Many UPS couriers intercom	<i>Ne hanno citofonato molti di corrieri UPS</i> Many UPS couriers have intercomed
<i>Ne telefonano molti di operatori Telecom</i> Many Telecom operators call	<i>Ne hanno telefonato molti di operatori Telecom</i> Many Telecom operators have called
<i>Ne brillano pochi di diamanti grezzi</i> Few rough diamonds shine bright	<i>Ne hanno brillato pochi di diamanti grezzi</i> Few rough diamonds have shone bright
<i>Ne camminano molte di persone per Milano</i> Many people walk around Milan	<i>Ne hanno camminato molte di persone per Milano</i> Many people have walked around Milan
<i>Ne fruttificano molte di piante selvatiche</i> Many wild plants fructify	<i>Ne hanno fruttificato molte di piante selvatiche</i> Many wild plants have fructified

<i>Ne sputano pochi di Lama allo zoo di Falconara</i> Many llamas spit at the zoo in Falconara	<i>Ne hanno sputato pochi di Lama allo zoo di Falconara</i> Many llamas have spat at the zoo in Falconara
<i>Ne barano parecchi di giocatori di poker</i> Many poker players cheat	<i>Ne hanno barato parecchi di giocatori di poker</i> Many poker players have cheated
<i>Ne meditano molte di persone introverso</i> Many introverted people meditate	<i>Ne hanno meditato molte di persone introverso</i> Many introverted people have meditated
<i>Ne marciano molti di militari dell'esercito</i> Many army soldiers march	<i>Ne hanno marciato molti di militari dell'esercito</i> Many army soldiers have marched
<i>Ne nuoce molto di fumo alla salute</i> Much smoke hurts people's health	<i>Ne ha nuociuto molto di fumo alla salute</i> Much smoke has hurt people's health

Table 4 – Target sentences Questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 2	Questionnaire 1
<i>Ne proliferano molte di varianti del covid</i> Many covid variants proliferate	<i>Ne hanno proliferato molte di varianti del covid</i> Many covid variants have proliferated
<i>Ne regnano molti di sovrani ingiusti</i> Many unjust sovereigns reign	<i>Ne regnano molti di sovrani ingiusti</i> Many unjust sovereigns have reigned
<i>Ne sgobbano molti di operai nelle fabbriche italiane</i> Many Italian factory workers slog	<i>Ne hanno sgobbato molti di operai nelle fabbriche italiani</i> Many Italian factory workers have slogged
<i>Ne peccano molte di persone d'invidia</i> Many people sin of envy	<i>Ne hanno peccato molte di persone d'invidia</i> Many people have sinned of envy
<i>Ne abdicano molti di re spagnoli</i> Many Spanish kings abdicate	<i>Ne hanno abdicato molti di re spagnoli</i> Many Spanish kings have abdicated
<i>Ne delirano molti di pazienti schizofrenici</i> Many schizophrenic patients rave	<i>Ne hanno delirato molti di pazienti schizofrenici</i>

	Many schizophrenic patients have raved
<i>Ne temporeggiano parecchi di investitori in borsa</i> Many investors in the stock market stall	<i>Ne hanno temporeggiato parecchi di investitori in borsa</i> Many investors in the stock market have stalled
<i>Ne sudano molti di atleti olimpici</i> Many Olympic athletes sweat	<i>Ne hanno sudato molti di atleti olimpici</i> Many Olympic athletes have sweated
<i>Ne flirtano molti di ragazzi in discoteca</i> Many boys flirt in clubs	<i>Ne hanno flirtato molti di ragazzi in discoteca</i> Many boys have flirted in clubs
<i>Ne cantano molti di attori famosi</i> Many famous actors sing	<i>Ne hanno cantato molti di attori famosi</i> Many famous actors have sung

Table 5 – Target sentences Questionnaire 2

All the sentences were tested on a Likert scale of 4 points. Thus, the participants were asked to assess the acceptability of the sentences they were presented with according to the four points of the scale, namely:

- (i) 1: full acceptability
- (ii) 2: partial acceptability
- (iii) 3: partial unacceptability
- (iv) 4: full unacceptability.

As far as the distractor sentences are concerned, both simple declarative sentences such as *Il cane di Paola è un barboncino* ‘Paola’s dog is a poodle’ and topicalized sentences such as *Il pane, Gianni l’ha comprato ieri* ‘the bread, Gianni bought it yesterday’ were used in the questionnaire. A total of 5 distractor sentences were also used: they were clearly unacceptable sentences, such as *Il musica che ascolta Gino non mi piace* ‘I don’t like the type of music Gino listens to’ where the mistake resides in the article/noun gender agreement.

Table 6 below summarizes the acceptability judgements for *ne-cl* with unaccusatives and transitives of both questionnaires to show the degree of acceptability of those sentences which should be always considered acceptable with *ne-cl*.

Grammatical sentences with <i>ne</i>	High Acceptability (1+2)	Low acceptability (3+4)
<i>Ne ho già mangiata molta di pasta</i> “I have already eaten a lot of pasta”	84,5%	15,5%
<i>Ne ho conosciuti molti di amici di Lorenzo</i> “I have met many friends of Lorenzo’s”	79,6%	20,4%
<i>Ne ho visti molti di film gialli</i> “I have seen many thriller movies”	88,2%	11,8%
<i>Ne ho comprate parecchie di mele</i> “I have bought many apples”	89%	11%
<i>Ne sono arrivati molti di pacchi questa settimana</i> This week, many packages have arrived	88,6%	11,4%

Table 6 – Acceptability judgments for unaccusative and transitive structures with *ne*-cl

As shown by the results above, overall, if we consider together both the values 1 and 2 on the one hand and 3 and 4 on the other, we obtain acceptability for the five sentences above as expected. Interestingly, we do not find any case of plain acceptability for none of the sentences in Table 6 even though, in those cases *ne* always binds an object. This is probably related to the fact that these sentences with *ne* are mostly used in speech or embedded in a context which, in this case, was lacking. Hence, it is plausible that some low acceptability rates were due to pragmatic/discourse factors rather than reflecting *stricto sensu* grammaticality judgments.

2. Summary

In this Chapter, we presented the methodology of the research by focusing on the profile of the speakers involved in the study and on the design of the two questionnaires. We analyzed the profile of the speakers and focused on the sentences selected for the questionnaires. Some preliminary results on the acceptability judgments of unaccusative and transitive structures with *ne* were given in order to provide a term of comparison for the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Analysis of the data

1. *Approaching data analysis*

The analysis of the data will proceed as follows: I will first consider the acceptability of *ne*-constructions against two factors: presence/absence of control in the event description, and presence/absence of an underlying object. Ultimately, the analysis will provide the ideal ground to analyze the (un)acceptability of some unergative verbs with *ne*-cl by taking into consideration both structural and semantic factors.

At the end of the chapter some preliminary conclusions on the differences in the acceptability of analytic and synthetic structures will be addressed. The primary claim would be to consider the analytic structure as an instantiation of unergative syntax while maintaining the view that the presence of the synthetic tense, on the other hand, gives rise to unaccusative syntax (see also Lonzi 2009). This will be the point of departure to claim that *ne*-cl might still be considered as good unaccusativity diagnostics as also argued by Mateu (2002).

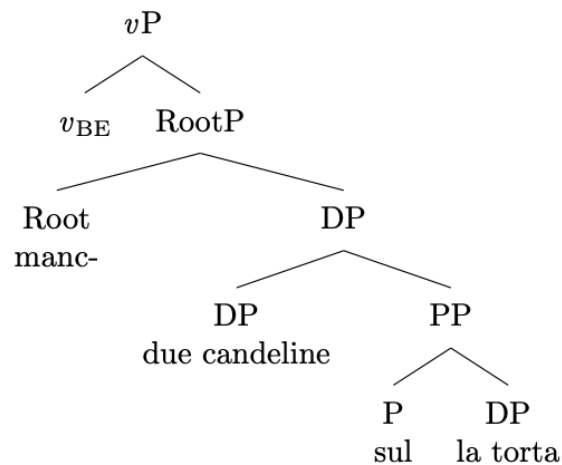
2. *Introducing the problem*

Recall the assumptions on the structure of unergatives with *ne*-cl put forward in Chapter 2. The core claim was to consider *ne*-cl as a trigger for unaccusative (existential) syntax following leading assumption by Hoekstra and Mulder (1990) and Mateu (2002), with the structure repeated in (2) for the sentence in (1) taken from Cuervo (2003).

(1)

- b) Mancano due candeline sulla torta
lack.3ps.pl two little.candle.pl on.the cake
'Two little candles are missing from the cake'

(2)



Interestingly, though, the data collected through the two questionnaires described in detail in Chapter 3, shows some interesting differences in the (un)acceptability of unergative verbs with *ne-cl*. Indeed, the fact that not all unergative verbs behave in the same way when patterning with *ne-cl* may point to potential structural and semantic differences across the members of this syntactic verb class. The analysis carried out in the next section will divide the set of verbs issued in the questionnaire into three different groups:

- (i) simple unergative activity verbs
- (ii) unergative verbs of creation²⁵
- (iii) prepositional verbs.

This preliminary distinction will be the point of departure to explain the reasons behind the difference in acceptability judgements of unergative verbs with *ne-cl*.

2.1. *Unergative activity verbs*

²⁵ The classification of unergative verbs into the class of creation verbs follows from a semantic criterion which does not take into consideration, for instance, the division between bounded and unbounded roots (which correspond to “Roots that denote Things that are either delimited (bounded) or non-delimited (unbounded)” proposed by Harley (2004:49). Indeed, the class of verbs of creation comprises both verbs deriving from bounded root (e.g., *fruttificare* ‘to fructify’ and *sputare* ‘to spit’) and verbs deriving from unbounded roots (e.g., *sudare* ‘to sweat’).

The discussion on unergative activity verbs will proceed as follows: I will concentrate first on those verbs where the notion of control seems to play a crucial role in the acceptability with *ne-cl*. Subsequently, I will sketch an analysis for other unergative verbs, e.g., *abdicare* ‘to abdicate’, *regnare* ‘to reign’ and *sgobbare* ‘to slog’ which are surprisingly judged as acceptable by the majority of the speakers despite their traditional agentive reading.

Recall the assumptions put forward by Lonzi (2009) on the acceptability of *ne-cl* with unergative verbs. As anticipated in Chapter 3, she claims that, even though unergatives can be found in *ne-cl* constructions *contra* Burzio’s (1986) initial claims, not all unergative verbs yield equal acceptability when patterning with these structures. In particular, she claims that the subject of unergatives, when patterning with *ne-cl*, needs to undergo a process of “objectification” in order to yield acceptability. She further adds that, since the subject receives a *theme* theta-role due to structural requirements, it follows that it must not display a high agentive component. To support this claim, she argues that the unacceptability of the verb *meditare* ‘to meditate’ in a sentence like **ne meditano molte di persone, qui* (many people meditate here), depends on the impossibility of the only argument of *meditare* to undergo a process of objectification. However, she does not provide any further evidence in support of her claim, which presupposes a process of objectification, similar to what Mateu (2002) defined as “unaccusativization”. In this section we are going to test Lonzi’s original hypothesis on objectification on the basis of the data collected through the two questionnaires. In doing so, we will be able to refine the constraints that allow or disallow *ne-cl* taking into account the theoretical premises laid out above and in Chapter 2.

The unacceptability of the verb *meditare* will be further discussed in section 2.2, as for now, I would like to shift my attention to a different group of verbs which, on the contrary, seem to yield a good degree of acceptability when pairing with *ne-cl*. These verbs, surprisingly, are traditional unergative verbs which, contrary to Lonzi’s claims, display a clear degree of agentivity but which, nonetheless, seems to yield acceptability with *ne-cl*. Indeed, apart from *proliferare* ‘to proliferate’ and *brillare* ‘to shine’, which are traditionally conceived as internally caused predicates with no degree of agentivity nor control, all the other verbs present an agentive component that makes it difficult to explain their acceptability with *ne-cl* constructions if we were to follow Lonzi’s original claim.

2.1.1. Unergative activity verbs: the notion of control

Focus on the results shown in Table 1 for this first set of verbs²⁶. By looking at the percentages, it is possible to notice that many traditional agentive verbs such as for instance *telefonare* ‘to phone’ and *citofonare* ‘to intercom’, do not seem to yield unacceptability (3 or 4 ratings) when patterning with *ne-cl*, contrary to predictions.

VERB	HIGH	LOW
	ACCEPTABILITY (1 + 2)	ACCEPTABILITY (3 + 4)
<i>CAMMINARE</i>	82%	18%
<i>REGNARE</i>	79,4%	20,6%
<i>BRILLARE</i>	79,9%	20,1%
<i>TELEFONARE</i>	79,8%	20,2%
<i>CITOFONARE</i>	77%	23%
<i>PROLIFERARE</i>	72%	28%
<i>SGOBBARE</i>	71,9%	28,1%
<i>ABDICARE</i>	61,7%	38,3%
<i>MARCIARE</i>	57,6%	42,4%
<i>FLIRTARE</i>	51,4%	48,6%
<i>TEMPOREGGIARE</i>	41,1%	58,9%
<i>BARARE</i>	33,8%	66,2%

Table 1 – Acceptability judgments with unergative activity verbs

Given the results in Table 1, it is possible to notice that even though agentivity might be playing a role in licensing unaccusative syntax with traditional unergative verbs, it is not the relevant property that determines the acceptability of verbs such as *telefonare* or *citofonare*, which normally select for an agentive subject.

In the present work, we will take the notion of agentivity to be a non-syntactically relevant notion on the lines of Ramchand (2008), therefore restricting it to a more cognitive-conceptual domain. On these premises, I would like to claim that there is another semantic

²⁶ Table 1 summarizes the acceptability judgment for the verbs in (1) by grouping together the first two points (1: full acceptability; 2: partial acceptability) of the Likert scale and the last two (3: partial unacceptability; 4: full unacceptability).

notion that needs to be taken into account when analyzing acceptability judgements of unergative verbs with *ne-cl* construction, namely the semantic notion of control. Indeed, I would like to claim that it is this notion of control that plays a crucial role when examining acceptability judgments of unergatives with *ne-cl*. However, similarly to the notion of agentivity, I will take control to be linked to a cognitive-conceptual sphere of the language.

To clarify this notion of control, we are going to review some of the most influential claims on the matter which can be found in the existing literature.

2.1.1.1. Defining control

The concept of control was introduced for the first time by McLendon (1978) in an article on the alignment system of Eastern Pomo. He discusses “protagonist” control together with agentivity, highlighting the importance of the speaker’s perception with respect to the event described by the verb. Focus on the quotation below:

[...] agents naturally occur with verbs that involve a significant degree of what I would like to call protagonist control (to avoid notions of causality and responsibility). Patients naturally occur with verbs that presuppose a lack of protagonist control, verbs that presuppose that the protagonist(s) is/are significantly involved in the activity, but without a controlling role. The protagonist is caught up in the activity described, as when one is overcome with a fit of sneezing or suddenly faints. [...] Other verbs can occur with either patients or agents depending on the speaker's perception of the presence or absence of protagonist control [...].

(McLendon 1978:4)

Control is therefore understood as the capability of the subject to hold a significant (or not) degree of command over the outcome of the event that is taking place. Interestingly McLendon takes into consideration the importance of the speakers’ perception over the event and ultimately their judgement on the presence or absence of control²⁷.

²⁷ Zaenen (1993) also considered “controllability” to be a potential factor in determining the (un)acceptability of impersonal passives in Dutch. Indeed, it seems that Dutch impersonal passives are sensitive to protagonist control since only those verbs which are defined as “controllable” can be found in these constructions. However, her definition of controllability significantly overlaps with the notion of volition as formulated in Dowty’s (1991) work.

Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) also adopt this notion, albeit keeping it separate from the concepts of internal and external causation. According to their view, control patterns with animacy and it is closely related to agentivity, as shown by the behavior displayed by most verbs of emission which lack both agentivity and control. They make an interesting example precisely when discussing internal and external causation in relation to unergative verbs of emission. I will come back to verbs of emission in the analysis of the data, notice however, that they consider a verb like *buzz*, when used in its external causation sense, to be dependent on the characteristics of the device it refers to. Indeed, they consider the device to be self-controlled, therefore independent of the control of the subject.

As anticipated above, I would like to define controllability/control as a property of the idiosyncratic meaning of the root which focuses on the degree of command that the subject has over the outcome of event but also detached from the concept of volition contrary to Zaenen (1993). I will also take control to be strictly related to the perception that the speaker has of the role of the subject over the event. This is why, control might be considered as a gradable property in relation to the knowledge that the speakers have of the real world and their perception of the eventuality described by the predicate.

For the purpose of this work, it is fundamental to mark the difference between the notion of agentivity, volition and control. Recall the discussion around the concept of agentivity, volitionality and causation/initiation carried out in Chapter 2, § 1.3.1. We proposed, following Ramchand (2008), that causation is the only relevant semantic notion which needs to be taken into account when examining the semantics of external arguments. Conversely, agentivity and volition, which do not determine syntactically relevant classes, should be relegated to a conceptual/cognitive domain. Nonetheless, it is also true that agentivity and volition often pattern with causation as also highlighted by Ramchand (2008). At this point of the discussion, I would like to propose that causation/initiation is the only notion relevant to the syntactic derivation and that the bigger notion of agentivity subsumes the notions of volition and control. To clarify this point, it will be assumed that agentivity can be defined as the teleological capability of the subject to participate in an event (see Folli and Harley 2007 for discussion); on the contrary I take volition to be related to the willingness of the subject to engage in an event and finally, I consider control to refer to the degree of command that the subject has over the event. In these terms it could also be possible to define the notion of control as ‘outcome control’ stressing the involvement of the subject over the outcome of the entire event.

In distinguishing these three notions I will be able to show that *ne-cl* is mostly sensitive to control.

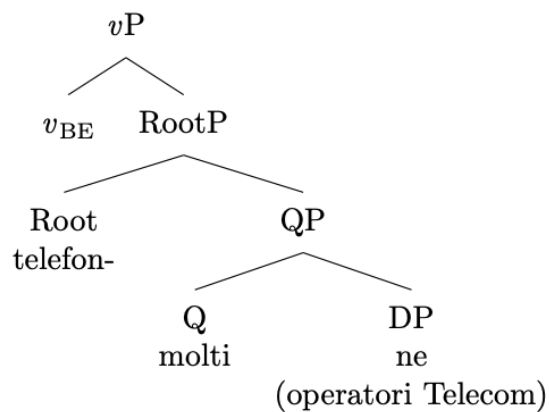
2.1.1.2. *Ne-cl and control*

To prove the points made above, take for instance the verbs *telefonare* ‘to phone’ and *citofonare* ‘to intercom’, two clearly agentive unergative verbs which, surprisingly, are not judged as unacceptable when patterning with *ne-cl* as shown in Table 1. In those cases, as argued by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) for verbs like *buzz*²⁸, both *telefonare* and *citofonare* presuppose the presence of a device i.e., *telefono* ‘phone’ and *citofono* ‘intercom’ which is manipulated by a person to bring about the eventuality. As argued above, this device is considered to be “self-controlled”, therefore depriving the subject of the entire command over the event. Hence, in a sentence like ‘*Maria ha telefonato due volte ieri (ma il telefono non ha squillato)*’ (Mary has phoned two times yesterday (but the phone hasn’t rang)) Maria is clearly the agent of the event, and she willingly engages in it, but she has little control over the outcome of *telefonare*. Indeed, if the phone is broken, either Maria’s or her interlocutor’s, the event cannot be said to have entirely taken place. This would explain why *telefonare* and *citofonare*, despite presenting a clear agentive and volitional subject, do not yield unacceptability when patterning with *ne-cl* as shown in the sentences below. A tentative structural description of (3) and (5) is attempted in (4) and (6) below:

- (3) *Ne telefonano molti di operatori Telecom*
Ne phone many of operators Telecom
“Many Telecom operators call”

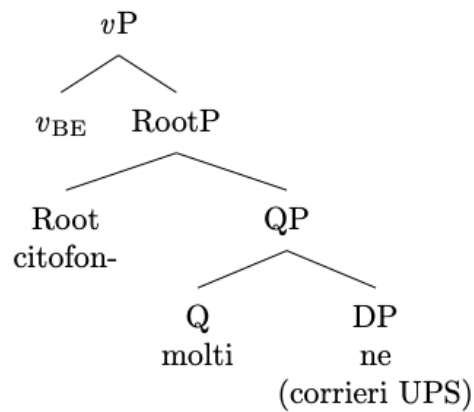
²⁸ Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) take into consideration the meaning of the verb ‘to buzz’ analyzing its properties when it is used to describe both the sound emitted by animals and the sound emitted by certain devices. Clearly, in the former case, the buzzing of a bee, for instance, describes an internally caused eventuality, brought about by the internal characteristics of bees that allow them to produce the sound. On the other hand, when considering a sentence like ‘the postman buzzed’ the eventuality described is clearly externally caused, hence brought about by a participant who manipulates an instrument. Interestingly, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995:118) argue that the possibility of the verbs ‘to buzz’ to be interpreted as either internally caused or externally caused according to the properties of the subject “is a matter of real-world knowledge”.

(4)



(5) Ne citofonano molti di corrieri UPS
Ne intercom many of couriers UPS
“Many UPS couriers intercom”

(6)



As anticipated in Chapter 2, the structure that I take to be instantiated by *ne-cl* is an unaccusative/existential type of structure where the only argument of unergatives is merged in the complement position of the root. In (4) and (6) the derivation clearly shows the absence of a Voice head on top of the *vP* which we would expect in a traditional unergative derivation.

Similarly to *telefonare* and *citofonare*, the difference in the results obtained for two verbs of motion i.e., *camminare* ‘to walk’ and *marciare* ‘to march’ could also find a possible explanation through the notion of control. Notice that, in this case, the verbs in question are

both listed as “agentive verbs of manner of motion” by Levin’s (1993) and Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995) semantic division of verbs. However, although we are aware that semantic classifications do not always correspond to a similar syntactic behavior, in this case we would expect to find both *camminare* and *marciare* to yield the same degree of acceptability. Interestingly, though, they produce different results when patterning with *ne-cl* as shown in Table 1. Focus on the sentences issued in the questionnaire and repeated in (7a) and (7b):

(7)

- a) Ne camminano molte di persone per Milano
Ne walk.1ps.pl many of people around Milan
 “Many people walk around Milan”
- b) Ne marciano molti di militari dell’ esercito
Ne march.1ps.pl many of soldiers of.the army
 “Many soldiers of the army march”

According to the data collected, (7a) was accepted by 80% of the speakers while (7b) was still accepted by the majority of the speakers but with a lower percentage of 57,6%. This difference in acceptability judgement cannot be fully explained if we rely entirely on the notion of agentivity, since both *camminare* and *marciare* are agentive verbs. Clearly, they both describe an event of movement where the subject is performing a series of activities that bring about the eventuality described by *camminare* and *marciare*. Indeed, the potential difference, in terms of the type of event that they describe, relies on the degree of control. Consider for instance the activity denoted by the verb *camminare*. Due to our knowledge of the world, we know that when someone is walking, they are moving their legs in an automated way without concentrating on the type of movements they are performing. Indeed, when people walk, they, of course, engage willingly into the activity but they do that unconsciously, without actually thinking about how they articulate every single movement they perform. On the other hand, when someone is marching, the movements that they are carrying out are highly controlled. For instance, marching might require a specific length of the step or the way the arms move to mimic the movement of the legs, etc. This presence of a higher degree of control over the event by the subject restricts the possibility of squeezing unergatives into unaccusative structures, hence the lower degree of acceptability of *marciare*.

To conclude this section, I would like to bring the attention to the last three verbs affected by control i.e., *flirtare* ‘to flirt’, *temporeggiare* ‘to take time’ and *barare* ‘to cheat’. In

this case, according to the discussion carried out in this section, I would like to claim that the impossibility of these verbs to appear in *ne-cl* construction is due to their high degree of control but also high degree of agentivity and volition. Indeed, in these cases, agentivity, volition and control strongly pattern together, resulting into the unacceptability or strong marginality of the sentences in which these verbs appear. Consider the sentence in (8):

- (8) *Ne barano molti di giocatori di poker*
Ne cheat many of players of poker
“Many poker players cheat”

In this case, the verb *barare* “to cheat” describes an event where the agentive subject is carrying out a series of actions such as for instance replacing some cards in a deck, that could lead them to the victory. Clearly, they strongly engage in the event and have a high degree of control over it. In this sense, the impossibility of *ne-cl* to appear with these types of verbs is precisely given by their lexical semantic characteristics (i.e., patterning of agentivity, volition and control), which constraint the objectification process described by Lonzi (2009).

2.1.2. *Unacceptability and affectedness of the subject*

In this subsection, we will try to provide an explanation for the results obtained for the verbs *abdicare* ‘to abdicate’, *sgobbare* ‘to slog’ and *regnare* ‘to reign’ which, surprisingly, yield acceptable sentences when patterning with *ne-cl*, as shown in Table 1. In this case, it seems that, even though these three verbs describe activities where the subject is agentive, they nonetheless allow the process of objectification to take place.

Take for instance the verb *abdicare* which roughly means “to give up power”. Now, clearly, the subject *il re* ‘the king’ in a sentence like the one in (8) is of course held responsible for resigning from his role as king, hence its agentive component, but he is nonetheless also affected by the outcome of event. Indeed, after abdicating, the king will be devoid of all his powers as monarch.

- (9)
a) *Il re di Spagna ha abdicato*
The king of Spain has adicate.PP

“The king of Spain has abdicated”

This possibility of interpreting the subject as an affected²⁹ object is exactly what allows *abdicare* and *sgobbare* (which literally means to work very hard) to yield acceptability when they appear in unaccusative/existential syntax with *ne-cl*. In other words, since the idiosyncratic (lexical) meaning of these verbs permits to interpret the subject according to the typical object-like properties, it consequently does not block their appearance with *ne-cl*. The same could be applied to *regnare* ‘to reign’, which, differently from *sgobbare* and *abdicare*, allows for a stative interpretation. *Regnare* means to exercise the sovereign power of king, but ultimately it also means to be king. This stative interpretation of the subject, in principle, could explain the reason why forcing the existential structure on this verb does not result into unacceptability as shown by the sentence in (10) judged acceptable by 80% of the speakers.

- (10) Ne regnano molti di sovrani ingiusti
Ne reign many of sovereigns unjust
“Many unjust sovereigns reign”

This analysis mostly based on the lexical/idiosyncratic meaning of the verbs discussed above, actually patterns very well with the original claim made by Lonzi (2009) around the process of objectification. It seems that in this case, these unergative verbs (i.e., *regnare*, *sgobbare* and *abdicare*) allow for a process of objectification to take place due to the characteristics of their lexical meaning which permit the reinterpretation of the root as either stative or comprising an affected participant. In the analysis of these verbs, the semantic notions of agentivity, volition and control do not seem to be relevant when discussing their unacceptability with *ne-cl*. Indeed, it seems that in those cases the only relevant component to be taken into account are the lexical meaning of the root and the speakers’ real-world knowledge.

Overall, it is possible to conclude the analysis of this first set of data by stating that Lonzi’s (2009) original intuitions on the presence of an objectification process can still hold. However, it seems that, differently from what she originally claimed, the semantic notion which

²⁹ In his description of proto-patients, Dowty’s (1991) mentions the entailment “causally affected by another participant” to describe one of the typical properties displayed by objects. In this case, even though I do not abide to Dowty’s entailment system I would like to claim that the subject is both the agent and the affected participant of the action.

can be said to play a significant role in the acceptance of *ne-cl* with unergative verbs is the one of control (when relevant). I take this to be borne out on the basis the analysis of the verbs *telefonare*, *citofonare*, *camminare* and *marciare* which despite their agentive (and volitional) component show different degree of acceptability. Regardless of this, it is of course undeniable that agentivity and volition, when patterning with control can indeed affect acceptability judgements as in the case of verbs like *flirtare*, *barare* and *temporeggiare*.

Apart from the presence of a process of objectification and its possibility of being restrained by protagonist control, the role played by the verbs of creation needs to be taken into account.

In the next section we will specifically focus on the results obtained for unergative verbs of creation.

2.2. Creation verbs

The next class of verbs that we will focus on is the class of creation/production verbs (in disguise). Before analyzing the results, I would like to clarify what I mean by ‘unergative verbs of creation’ and which verbs I consider to be part of this class. Similar to canonical transitive ‘creation verbs’ such as *bake* as in ‘John baked the cake’ where *the cake* is syntactically expressed as a direct object, I take unergative verbs of creation to conceptually encode the presence of an object which is, crucially, the product of the activity described by the semantics of the predicate³⁰. I would like to claim that the peculiarity of these verbs, shown in (1) below, resides in the presence of an object, merged in the complement position of the root, which I will take to correspond to the product of the event encoded by the verb. Clearly, many of these

³⁰ Harley (2005) briefly discusses the differences between verbs of creation which allow conflation and verbs of creation which do not conflate. She argues that, interestingly, those verbs of creation which allow this process of conflation to take place “are restricted to cases where the subject is creating the Theme in an inalienable way, usually ‘out of’ the subject’s own body” (Harley 2005: 63). Conversely, when conflation does not take place, these restrictions do not hold as shown in (i), (ii) and (iii) below:

(i) Jill drooled

(ii) Jill caked

(iii) Jill made a cake / Jill wrote a letter.

As Harley argues, the reasons behind this phenomenon are poorly understood and must be left aside for further research.

verbs are verbs of emission, in particular verbs of substance emission³¹, e.g., *sputare* ‘to spit’ and *sudare* ‘to sweat’ and sound emission e.g., *cantare* ‘to sing’³².

Interestingly, there are cases in which these verbs allow the presence of an object as in the following expressions: *sputare sangue* ‘to spit blood’, *meditare un inganno* ‘to meditate a deceit’, *cantare una canzone* ‘to sing a song’, etc. It is also worth noting that, in line with Cuervo’s (2003) approach, simple transitive (non-causative) verbs present the same structure as unergative activity verbs. Both are lexicalized by the verbalizing head v_{DO} with the only difference that transitives normally display a direct object in the complement position of the root while unergatives do not. Crucially, though, the objects appearing with both unergatives, and simple transitives display a similar behavior. Indeed, with transitive activity verbs like *mangiare* ‘to eat’, *disegnare* ‘to draw’ or *leggere* ‘to read’ the object can be left unspoken. Levin (1999), for instance, refers to these transitive verbs as non-core-transitive verbs in opposition to core transitive verbs (e.g., *break* and *melt*) as already mentioned in Chapter 2. The formers allow their objects to be omitted as already pointed out above or to be prepositional cross-linguistically (e.g., look at, it. *guardare*) (Cuervo 2014). This clearly points to a similarity in the behavior of these verbs and unergatives which would be worth investigating further.

Going back to creation verbs, I also take to be part of this class a verb of change of state e.g., *fruttificare* ‘to fructify’ and two verbs of thinking/psych verbs e.g., *delirare* ‘to rave’ and *meditare* ‘to meditate’.

- (1)
 - (i) *sputare* (to spit): to produce spit
 - (ii) *mediare* (to meditate): to produce relaxing thoughts
 - (iii) *fruttificare* (to fructify): to produce fruits
 - (iv) *sudare* (to sweat): to produce sweat
 - (v) *delirare* (to rave): to produce delirious thoughts
 - (vi) *cantare* (to sing): to emit/produce sounds

³¹ Verbs of light emission such as *brillare* (to shine), which was also tested in the questionnaire, will be discussed later. In that case, I don’t take *brillare* to be a production/creation verb since the event it describes is one of simply reflecting light and not actively producing it.

³² I take *cantare* to be a creation verb in the sense that the eventuality is brought about by an animate agentive subject which is responsible for the creation of the sound. See Levin (1991) for discussion on the semantic properties of verbs of sound emission.

VERB	1 + 2	3 + 4
<i>SPUTARE</i>	20,8%	79,2%
<i>MEDITARE</i>	30,2%	69,8%
<i>CANTARE</i>	43%	57%
<i>SUDARE</i>	43%	57%
<i>DELIRARE</i>	46,8%	53,2%
<i>FRUTTIFICARE</i>	49,7%	50,3%

Table 3- Acceptability judgment of creation verbs

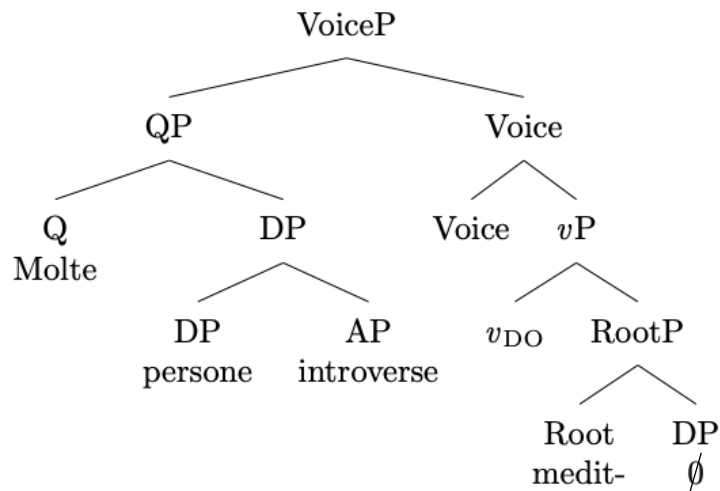
Interestingly, the results shown by a typical verb of change of state such as *fruttificare*, or even verbs like *sudare* and *delirare*, which lack the components of agentivity, volition and most importantly control still result into unacceptability when patterning with *ne-cl*. These preliminary observations are fundamental in order to understand the reasons why creation verbs need to be accounted separately from the other verbs discussed in §2.1. However, as it will become clearer later on in the analysis, the relevance of control might still be useful to account for some of the differences displayed in the data set. Indeed, the percentages of unacceptability reported in Table 2, show that verbs of creation display different degrees of unacceptability and are not equally judged by the speakers.

In order to provide a potential explanation for these results, let us focus first on the derivation of what we defined “unergative creation verbs”. Consider the structure in (12) below for the sentence in (11):

(11)

- a) Molte persone introverse meditano
 Many people introvert meditate
 ‘Many introvert people meditate’

(12)

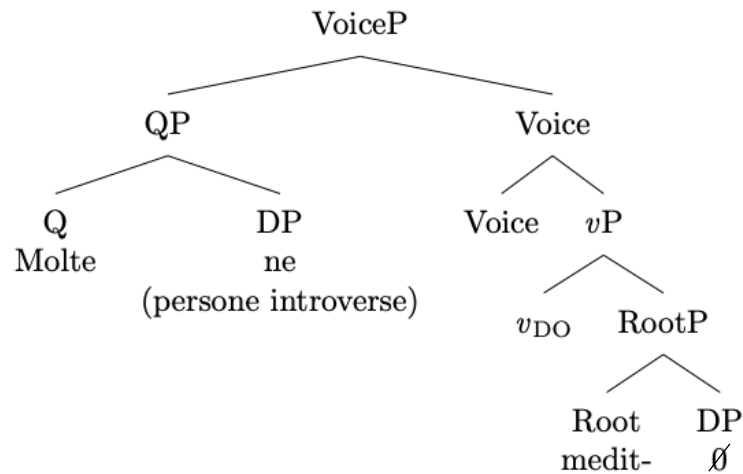


The structure in (12) shows a traditional derivation of an unergative verb on the basis of the theoretical premises laid out in Chapter 2. The only difference that I take to be fundamental in the derivation in (12) with respect to simple unergative activity verbs is the presence of an extra DP in the complement position of the root. Following from the assumptions on cognate objects mostly based on Hale and Keyser (2002), Levin (1999) and Cuervo (2003), I will take this extra DP to exhibit a similar behavior to cognate objects and therefore to occupy the same syntactic position in the derivation³³. Crucially, this object, which is licensed semantically by the root, does not receive a spell out but it nonetheless prevents the verb *meditare* to enter in an unaccusative/existential construction instantiated by *ne-cl*. Indeed, since the position of the object is already filled by a null DP object it would therefore be impossible for these verbs to be squeezed into an unaccusative type of structure where the subject of the sentence is forcedly merged in the object position. By forcing the verb *meditare* with its unergative derivation into a *ne-cl* constructions the clitic *ne* would be clearly binding a subject as shown in the derivation in (13) below and therefore result into ungrammaticality:

(13)

- a) **Ne meditano molte di persone introverse*
Ne meditate many of people introvert
'Many introvert people meditate'

³³ In this case, it may be possible to neutralize the difference between true cognate objects and hyponymous objects and treat all of them as true cognate objects semantically licensed by the root (Levin 1999).



Focus now on the percentage of acceptance of the verb *sudare* ‘to sweat’ and the verb *sputare* ‘to spit’, both verbs of substance emission. The sentence in (14a) was rejected by 57% of the speakers while the sentence in (14b) was judged as unacceptable by 80% of the speakers.

(14)

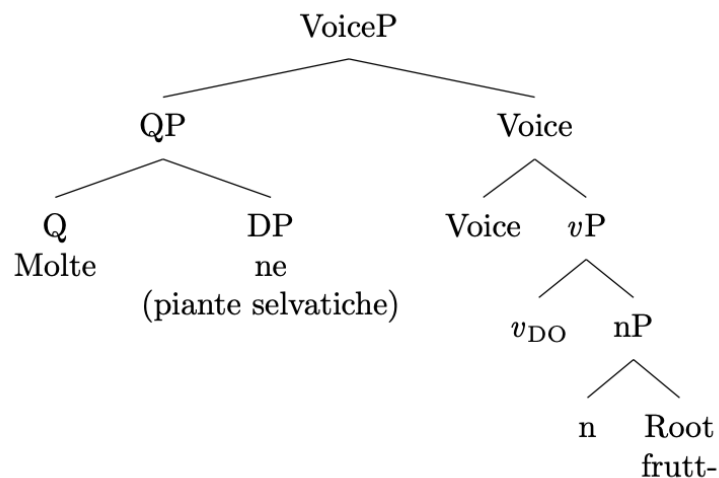
- a) ??/*Ne sudano molti di atleti olimpici’
ne sweat many of athletes Olympic
 “Many Olympic athletes sweat”
- b) *Ne sputano molti di lama allo zoo di Falconara
Ne spit many of llamas at.the zoo of Falconara
 “Many llamas spit at the Falconara zoo”

The results show that, as anticipated above there seems to be a difference between the percentages of rejection of verbs like *meditare* and *sputare* on the one hand and verbs like *sudare*, *cantare*, *fruttificare* and *delirare* on the other. As I argued above, in the sentence in (14b) the presence of the substance emitted, which is to be considered as the result of the activity of spitting, is structurally encoded as a sort of cognate object. As in the case of *meditare*, I take the unacceptability of *sputare* with *ne*-cl to derive from the presence of this additional object, which does not receive a spell out, and from the presence of a high degree of control implied by the verbal root. Conversely, in the case of verbs like *sudare* or even *fruttificare* and *delirare*, the activity described by these predicates clearly points to the lack of control of the participants involved in the event since they are all internally caused predicates. In particular, especially in

the case of *fruttificare*, the unacceptability would not be expected especially because this type of predicate describes a typical internally caused eventuality, which also patterns more with the syntactic behavior of verbs of change of state, that are normally unaccusatives. Indeed, *fruttificare*, similar to a verb like *brillare*, which is accepted with *ne-cl* as shown by the results in Table 1, selects for an inanimate subject which is not directly responsible for bringing about the eventuality. The lack of agentivity, volition and control should, in principle, allow this verb to appear in the unaccusative structure. *Fruttificare*, nonetheless, literally means “to produce fruits”, as also indicated by the presence of the suffix *-ific-*, and therefore implies a production process. In this case, however, the derivation follows a different path with respect to other verbs of production, as shown in the structure in (15) below:

(15)

- a) ??/**Ne fruttificano molte di piante selvatiche*
Ne fructify many of plants wild
 “Many wild plants fructify”



In this case, the unacceptability of *ne-cl* with *fruttificare* can be explained without assuming the presence of a silent object. Indeed, if we consider that the suffix *-ific-* spells out the functional head v_{DO} , then it clearly follows that it would be impossible for the root, *frutt-*, to be derived from a v_{BE} . Additionally, in this case, the root cannot merge directly with the functional head v_{DO} since it must be categorized first by merging with a *nP*. As shown in the structure above in (15), the root in this case occupies the position of the complement of *nP*, therefore blocking the unaccusative derivation instantiated by *ne-cl*.

This would also be expected of other similar verbs like *ramificare* ‘to ramify’ which I claim to yield the same degree of unacceptability with *ne-cl* as shown in the sentence in (16):

(16)

- a) **Ne ramificano pochi di alberi secchi*
Ne ramify few of trees dry
‘Few dry trees ramify’

To summarize these preliminary findings, verbs like *meditare* ‘to meditate’ and *sputare* ‘to spit’ cannot be forced into an existential/unaccusative structure due to two main reasons:

(i) both roots license the presence of an object DP which has to be understood as a sort of result of the creation process implied by the verbal root. As anticipated above, this argument is not licensed syntactically by the verbalizing head, but it is licensed semantically by the core meaning of the root. I further assume that this object does not receive a spell out, it is therefore a silent object occupying the complement position of the root (except for *fruttificare*, as discussed above). By making these claims, forcing the clitic *ne* in a traditional unergative derivation would clearly result into unacceptability, since the clitic would be clearly binding a subject which is merged in Spec, VoiceP.

(ii) In both cases the subject of these verbs has the properties of being agentive, volitional and to show a high degree of control.

By contrast, in considering the structure with the verb *sudare* ‘to sweat’ as in (14a), it is clear that the acceptability judgements given by the speakers are not as straight-forward as for *sputare* or *meditare*. Indeed, even though they still yield a good degree of unacceptability, their judgments are less clear. This is possibly given by the fact that *sudare* is an internally caused verb as well as *fruttificare* or *delirare*. Thus, properties of internal causation together with lack of control and volition may contribute to making the sentence slightly more acceptable compared to those with *sputare* or *meditare*, where the control of the subject over the event is clearly more prominent.

In the next subsection I will concentrate on a specific semantic class of verbs, namely verbs of emission which happen to be well represented in the questionnaire as opposed to other semantic classes. Interestingly, as shown in section 2.1.1., verbs of light emission do not seem to block *ne-cl* contrary to verbs of substance and sound emission.

2.3. Verbs of emission: substances vs light emission

In this subsection I will briefly illustrate the differences between verbs of substance and sound emission, which we have considered to be verbs of creation, and verbs of light emission. The class of verbs of light and substance emission issued in the questionnaire are: *brillare* ‘to shine’, *sudare* ‘to sweat’, *sputare* ‘to spit’ and *cantare* ‘to sing’. Before addressing the acceptability judgements of these verbs with *ne-cl*, let us quickly review some of the main characteristics shared by the semantic class of verbs of emission.

According to Levin (1993) and Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995:91) verbs of emission can be divided into four different classes according to the properties of the emitted elements as shown in (17) below:

(17)

- (i) Sound emission: burble, buzz, clang, crackle, hoot, hum, jingle, moan, ring, roar, whir, whistle, ...
- (ii) Light emission: flash, flicker, gleam, glitter, shimmer, shine, sparkle, twinkle, ...
- (iii) Smell emission: reek, smell, stink
- (iv) Substance emission: bubble, gush, ooze, puff, spew, spout, squirt, ...

These verbs display interesting characteristics in that “the eventualities described by such verbs come about as a result of internal physical characteristics of their argument” (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 92). They are therefore considered as internally caused predicates where the event is brought about by the internal properties of the subject. Despite their classification as intransitive, unergative verbs, their syntactic status cannot be straightforwardly defined since their only argument is normally taken to be non-agentive and devoid of control (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). However, evidence from Italian, with respect to auxiliary selection, confirms their classification as unergatives. Indeed, verbs of emission consistently select auxiliary *have* e.g., *ho tossito* (I have coughed), *ha brillato* (it has shone), in line with all the other unergatives.

Among these verbs, verbs of substance emission, such as *sweat* and *spit*³⁴, always include an emitter which can be considered the source of the event described by the verb (Levin 1993).

³⁴ Levin (1993) does not include *spit* into the class of verbs of substance emission. Rather, she includes it into the class of “Breathe Verbs” within the class of “Verbs including the body” (Levin 1993: 217). However, I believe that it can be safe to consider both *sweat* and *spit* as verbs of substance emission due to their shared meaning

They can also optionally express the substance emitted through a direct object as shown in (18b) below:

(18)

a) The fountain gushed

b) The well gushed oil

(Levin 1993:237)

Similarly, some verbs of sound emission, may also include the presence of a direct object and they can also appear in locative inversion constructions as well as verbs of substance emission and light emission. Despite the obvious similarities shared by all verbs of emission, it is nonetheless possible to spot some differences in the type of activities that these verbs describe and also in the type of participants that they involve. Indeed, if we focus on the lexical semantics of these verbs, it is possible to notice that in the case of verbs of substance emission the substance emitted can be either actively produced by the source, as in the case of *sweat*, or leak from a source as in the case of *bleed*. A similar condition applies to verbs of light emission where the light can be either actively produced by a source as in (19a) or reflected by something else (e.g., diamonds) (19b).

(19)

a) The sun shines in the sky

b) The diamonds shine under the light

In those cases where it is clear that the emitted element is actively produced by the source (e.g., sweat or sing), *ne-cl*, as already discussed, should be blocked by the presence of a null DP which stands for the emitted element. This hypothesis is borne out by the results obtained for verbs such as *sudare*, *cantare* and *sputare* on the one hand, and *brillare* on the other. In other words, I take this difference in the mode of emission to be the reason why verbs such as *brillare* cannot be considered verbs of creation. Notice again that in the sentence in (20) it is true that the diamonds have internal properties that allow them to shine but it is also true that the diamond, in and of itself, does not produce light, it simply reflects it. This potentially explains why other verbs of emission such as *sputare*, *sudare* and *cantare* yield unacceptability when patterning with *ne-cl* but not *brillare*, which is accepted by almost 80% of the speakers.

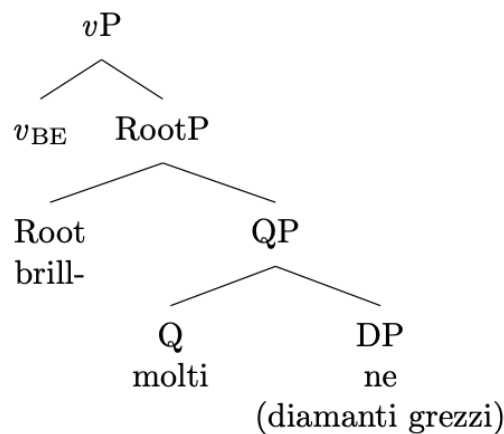
components (i.e., both involve bodily processes). Nonetheless, it is true that, unlike most verbs of substance emission, spit is agentive and shows a high degree of protagonist control.

In this latter case, there is no null cognate object that occupies the complement position of the root allowing this verb to be squeezed into the unaccusative/existential construction instantiated by *ne*-cl as shown in the structure in (21).

(20)

Ne brillano molti di diamanti grezzi
Ne shine.1ps.pl many of diamonds raw
 “Many diamonds in the rough shine”

(21)



Of course, it could be possible to claim that the acceptability of the sentence in (20) depends merely on the fact that the subject of *brillare* is inanimate and displays no degree of control nor volition. This claim could be borne out if other verbs with such characteristics i.e., *fruttificare*, displayed the same results. But as already discussed in section 2.2, this is not the case.

These preliminary findings, which point to a potential structural difference among verbs of emission require, nonetheless further research.

2.4. Prepositional verbs

In this subsection I will concentrate on the results concerning prepositional verbs i.e., those verbs which require the presence of a prepositional phrase to saturate their valency. In particular, I will focus on the acceptability of *ne*-cl with the verbs *peccare* ‘to sin’ and *nuocere*

‘to harm’ which are normally accompanied by the prepositions *di* ‘of’ and *a* ‘to’ respectively as shown in the example in (22) below:

(22)

- a) Il fumo nuoce alla salute
The smoke harm to.the health
“Smoke harms people’s health”
- b) Molte persone peccano d’invidia
Many people sin of envy
“Many people sin of envy”

As I will discuss throughout this section, these verbs categorically block *ne-cl* as shown by the results in Table 3 below:

VERB	1+2	3+4
<i>NUOCERE</i>	6,5%	93,5%
<i>PECCARE</i>	37,4%	62,6%

Table 3 – Acceptability judgements with prepositional verbs

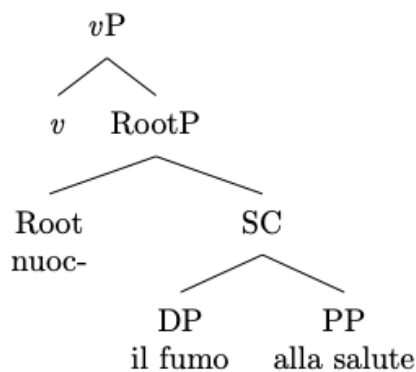
The possible explanation behind the ungrammaticality of these verbs with *ne-cl* could be found in Demonte’s (1992) analysis of Spanish prepositional verbs. In her analysis Demonte divides prepositional verbs into two classes: the first class receives an interpretation based on the idea that these verbs, which she takes to be a subset of unaccusative verbs, take a small clause as a complement. On the other hand, the second class of verbs takes a PP as a complement where the preposition is analyzed as a mere marker of agreement. In the latter case, she argues that these verbs share properties both with transitive (accusative) structures in allowing two arguments and with unergative verbs since their internal argument is not case licensed by the verb itself. Interestingly, if we take into consideration the case of *nuocere* and *peccare*, they do not seem to fall under the same class of prepositional verbs proposed by Demonte (1991). Indeed, if we apply the coordination test to set apart the two classes, we can see that *nuocere* seems to pattern more with the verbs of the first class i.e., the ones taking the SC as a complement, while *peccare* fits better into the second class. Consider the sentences in (23) below:

(23)

- a) Il fumo nuoce alla salute e *(al)l'ambiente
The smoke harm to.the health and to.the environment
“Smoke harms people’s health and the environment”
- b) Molte persone peccano d’invidia e cupidigia
Many people sin of envy and greed
“Many people sin of envy and greed”

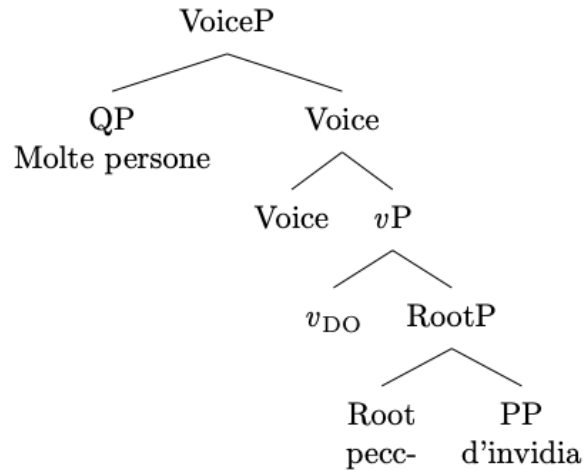
This simple coordination test allows us to consider two different representations for *nuocere* and *peccare* following Demonte’s proposal³⁵ as shown in (24) and (25) for sentences (22a) and (22b) respectively. This is the case since in (23a), it is not possible to omit the preposition when coordinating the DP *l’ambiente*, while as shown in (23b) the preposition *di* does not need to be repeated when coordinated with the noun *cupidigia*. Another crucial difference between the two verbs resides on the impossibility of omitting the phrase *alla salute* in (22a) while in (22b) the phrase *d’invidia* can be freely omitted. Following from these observations, we could argue that *nuocere* takes a SC as a complement while *peccare* doesn’t.

(24)



(25)

³⁵ I did not include the inflection head (INFL) shown in Demonte’s structures. Moreover, I tried to adapt her structural descriptions to the theoretical premises laid out in Chapter 2.



The derivation in (25) clearly shows why *ne-cl* is blocked with the verb *peccare*, as shown by the results in Table 3. Indeed, the prepositional phrase in the complement position of the root does not allow for an unaccusativization process to take place. In this case, the external argument cannot be squeezed into an unaccusative structure because the object position is already filled by the PP *d'invidia*. Conversely, the derivation proposed by Demonte (1991) for verbs like *nuocere* constitutes a potential problem for the analysis of the data. Indeed, if the structure in (24) mirrors the typical unaccusative derivation as argued by Demonte, it follows that *ne-cl* shouldn't result into unacceptability. However, as the results in Table 3 show, *nuocere* was judged as unacceptable almost unanimously by the speakers. This brings up a series of questions around the nature of these constructions and the possibility of extraction out of small clauses. Indeed, the agrammaticality of the structure in (24) might arise from the presence of this SC which is incompatible with the structure instantiated by *ne-cl*. We leave these issues aside for further research.

3. Interim summary

The analysis of the data above has shown how *ne-cl* cannot be considered as a reliable unaccusativity diagnostics as also argued in a recent study by Cerrone and Sprouse (2019). Indeed, even though some unergative verbs yield unacceptability when pairing with *ne-cl*, we demonstrated that this is mostly due to either their nature as 'creation' verbs taking an underlying object, or to the impossibility of undergoing an 'objectification' process due to the control and other agentive features of the subject. Moreover, the notion of control proved to be useful in explaining why certain verbs that present salient agentive and volitional characteristics can still be acceptable when pairing with *ne-cl*. In §4, we will review the results obtained for

the analytic counterpart of the verbs analyzed above, claiming that, after all, *ne-cl* might still be considered as a good unaccusativity diagnostic when considering its analytic form.

4. *Analytic vs synthetic: is ne-cliticization still a good diagnostic for unaccusativity?*

In Chapter 2 we anticipated the discussion around synthetic and analytic construction with *ne-cl* and unergative verbs. We argued, following work by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) and Mateu (2002, 2016) that even though *ne-cl* can pattern with certain unergative verbs in their synthetic form, it nonetheless cannot appear with unergative verbs in the analytic variant. To solve this apparent mismatch, Lonzi (2009) argued that in the former case, the unergative verb can be squeezed into an unaccusative derivation while, in the latter case the structure appears to be the traditional unergative one. Interestingly, this hypothesis seems to be borne out by the data shown in Table 4 below.

VERB	1 + 2	3 + 4
<i>NUOCERE</i>	7,5%	92,5%
<i>SUDARE</i>	8,7%	91,3%
<i>SPUTARE</i>	10,3%	89,8%
<i>CANTARE</i>	11,5%	88,5%
<i>TEMPOREGGIARE</i>	12,9%	87,1%
<i>MEDITARE</i>	13%	87%
<i>FLIRTARE</i>	16,5%	83,5%
<i>CAMMINARE</i>	16,8%	83,2%
<i>DELIRARE</i>	20,9%	79,1%
<i>SGOBBARE</i>	22,3%	77,7%
<i>BRILLARE</i>	23,3%	76,7%
<i>FRUTTIFICARE</i>	23,4%	76,6%
<i>PECCARE</i>	24,5%	75,5%
<i>TELEFONARE</i>	26,2%	73,8%
<i>BARARE</i>	27,1%	72,9%
<i>MARCIARE</i>	31,7%	68,3%
<i>ABDICARE</i>	34,5%	65,5%
<i>REGNARE</i>	35,3%	64,7%

<i>PROLIFERARE</i>	37,4%	62,6%
<i>CITOFONARE</i>	39,3%	60,7%

Table 4 – Acceptability judgments of unergative verbs with analytic structures and *ne-cl*

The results obtained for unergative verbs in their analytic tense and *ne-cl* show that these constructions yield unacceptability regardless of the semantic characteristics of the verbs involved. Indeed, it seems that the shift to the analytic tense does not permit the appearance of an unaccusative/existential construction therefore resulting into unacceptability.

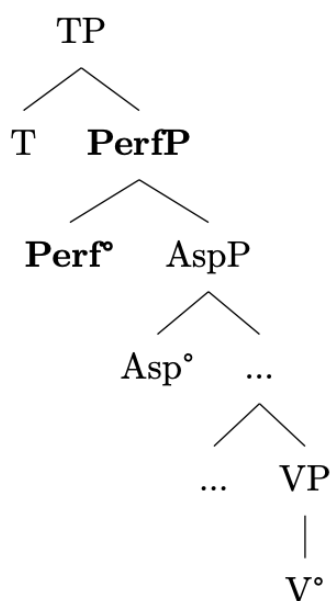
In this last paragraph I will try to provide evidence that the switch to the analytic construction results into the presence of unergative syntax and most importantly I will also explain why *ne-cl* might, after all, still be considered as a good unaccusativity diagnostic. To do so, I will mostly rely on Bjorkman’s (2011) approach to auxiliary selection which is also in line with recent proposals by D’Alessandro and Roberts (2010) and Amato (2022) on the interaction of Agree with auxiliary selection.

In order to provide an exhaustive explanation for the data in Table 4, recall the discussion on auxiliary selection as an unaccusativity diagnostics anticipated in Chapter 1. We argued that, traditionally, unergative and transitive verbs select auxiliary HAVE, while unaccusatives select BE. Indeed, as also argued by Sorace (2000) HAVE seems to pattern more with agentive predicates, as opposed to BE which tends to appear with non-agentive, telic predicates. Leaving aside the discussion on the factors which subsume variability in auxiliary selection, I would like to briefly discuss the implications that auxiliary selection has on the syntactic derivation.

Let us start by considering the merging position of the auxiliary with respect to the syntactic spine. Contrary to recent work by Ramchand and Svenonius (2014), which consider the perfective auxiliary to be merged on the head of the Tense Phrase³⁶, I will mostly follow Bjorkman’s (2011) claim in assuming the presence of a dedicated projection i.e., PerfP to host inflectional features of the type [INFL:PERF]. This projection is to be found between TP and AspP as shown in (26) below taken from Bjorkman (2011:137).

(26)

³⁶ Ramchand and Svenonius (2014), in their attempt to reconcile the minimalist and the cartographic approach, assume that since the perfect auxiliary “can be temporally disjoined from the VP” (Ramchand and Svenonius 2014:159), it must be located higher up in the structure (i.e., on T), namely outside of the VP area and above Asp*.

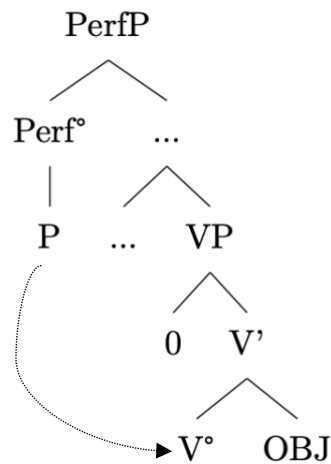


As shown in (26) above, the Perf head is located just above AspP and below T and it is basically the locus where the auxiliary appears as a sort of repair strategy. Indeed, in Bjorkman’s framework, auxiliary verbs such as BE or HAVE are not directly projected onto the syntax but they are basically inserted into the derivation as a last-resort operation to spell out inflectional material that, for some reason, could not attach to the main verb. In particular, she proposes, partially following Kayne (1993), that HAVE selection arises from the presence of a prepositional element on the Perf head, encoded as a prepositional feature [P], which fails at agreeing with the verb. In other words, HAVE selection and BE selection depend on the possibility of this prepositional feature, to agree (or not) with the verb. Specifically, in the case of BE selection [P] will be able to reach V° ³⁷ and successfully agree with it as shown in (27)³⁸, while HAVE selection would basically arise from the impossibility of [P] to agree with V° , as shown in (28) taken from Bjorkman (2011:149).

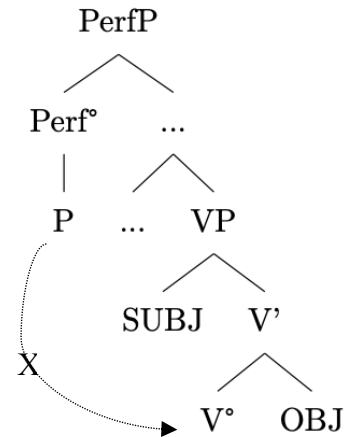
³⁷ In the framework that I adopt, V° basically coincides with the categorized verb i.e., $v + \text{Root}$.

³⁸ I reported (27) and (28) directly from Bjorkman (2011) for sake of simplicity. However, I hypothesize, following the theoretical premises laid out in Chapter 2, that the verbal domain is built compositionally from merging a root with a verbalizing element i.e., v . Following these considerations, in (27) the VP would be basically substituted by a vP and in (28) the external argument would be introduced in Spec, VoiceP. Regardless of these differences, I assume that the basic assumptions presented in Bjorkman can still hold even within a more DM approach.

(27)



(28)



As shown above, (27) describes the typical derivation for unaccusative verbs, where [P] agreement is successful, unlike typical unergative and transitive structures in (28), due to the absence of an external argument in Spec, VP. Indeed, in the derivation shown in (27), [P] can agree with the verb since there is nothing that intervenes between Perf° and V°, therefore triggering the spell-out of BE. On the other hand, in (28) the presence of the external argument prevents [P] from agreeing with the verb thus resulting into HAVE insertion.

Given these premises, I would like to argue that once the auxiliary HAVE appeared in the derivation, [P] agreement is blocked by the presence of the external argument acting as an intervenor. More specifically, in the case of analytic *ne-cl* constructions with unergatives, the appearance of HAVE in sentences like (29a, b) below, signals the presence of an unergative derivation which ultimately rejects *ne-cliticization*.

(29)

- a. Ne hanno abdicato molti di re ingiusti
Ne have adicate.PP many of kings unjust
 “Many unjust kings have abdicated”
- b. Ne hanno meditato molte di persone introverse
Ne have meditate.PP many of people introvert
 “Many introvert people meditated”

To put it differently, the selection of the auxiliary HAVE signals the presence of an external argument in the derivation which blocks [P] agreement. This clearly points to the fact that analytic constructions with *ne-cl* give rise to unergative syntax, therefore rejecting *ne-cl* altogether.

To conclude, I would like to argue that, given the results in Table 4, when *ne-cl* patterns with another unaccusativity diagnostic such as auxiliary selection, it might still be considered as a reliable test to determine split-intransitivity. Indeed, it rightfully prevents unergative verbs to appear in typical existential/unaccusative syntax triggered by *ne-cl*, therefore setting them apart from traditional unaccusative verbs.

Nonetheless, it must be recognized that many issues remain to be explained. We have already argued in Chapter 1 that auxiliary selection, although it is traditionally considered as a good unaccusativity diagnostic, sometimes proves to be inaccurate as also shown by Sorace's (2000) work on variability. To prove this point, take for instance the verb *attecchire*, which we consider to be a typical unergative selecting auxiliary HAVE.

(30)

- a. *Ne attecchiscono* molte di piante di miglio
Ne take.root.3ps.pl many of plant of millet
 "Many millet plants take root"
- b. *Ne sono attecchite* molte di piante di miglio
Ne be take.root.PP.F many of plants of millet
 "Many millet plants have taken root"
- c. **Ne hanno attecchito* molte di piante di miglio
Ne have take.root.PP many of plants of millet
 "Many millet plants have taken root"

As shown in the sentences (30), *attecchire* blocks³⁹ *ne-cl* with auxiliary HAVE but allows it with auxiliary BE, therefore patterning with the behavior of a traditional unaccusative verb. At this point, we might ask ourselves what kind of information this interaction between these two unaccusativity diagnostics reveals about unaccusativity on the one hand and unergativity on the other. Could we consider *attecchire* one of those verbs that can enter both an unaccusative and an unergative derivation or do we still consider it a strictly unergative

³⁹ In my variety of Italian, the sentence in (30c) is unacceptable. However, since the verb *attecchire* was not tested in the questionnaires I cannot safely argue that this is also the case for the majority of Italian native speakers.

verb? What are the factors that determine the possibility for certain verbs to display a similar behavior to the verb *attechire*?

Apart from this, other problems arise when considering again the assumptions made earlier on with respect to *ne-cl* and auxiliary HAVE. Indeed, we have argued that the presence of HAVE in unergative *ne-cl* construction is a signal for unergative syntax. However, it is still unclear whether it is the verb HAVE itself that prompts the derivation to follow a typical unergative pattern or, whether there are other semantic/syntactic factors involved.

Unfortunately, since the answer for these questions falls outside of the scope of this dissertation, we must leave them for further research.

Conclusions

In this thesis, we questioned the status of *ne*-cliticization as a diagnostic for unaccusativity, claiming that its appearance with unergative verbs makes it an unreliable test for split-intransitivity.

We also argued that, even though many unergative verbs can indeed appear in *ne*-cl constructions, their occurrence in this unaccusative construction seems to be constrained by syntactic and semantic factors. In particular, we discussed the hypothesis that the external argument (i.e., the subject) of these verbs may, to a certain extent, undergo a process of objectification. For this process to be licensed, the subject needs to have an incomplete ‘control’ over the action, or its agentivity can be loosened up. Under these conditions, if the auxiliary is not expressed, many unergative verbs appear as acceptable in the context of *ne*-cl, whereby the only argument is coerced into an unaccusative construction and merged internally. Moreover, we also argued that unergative verbs of creation yield unacceptability when patterning with *ne*-cl due to the incompatibility of unaccusative syntax with the covertly transitive derivation instantiated by creation verbs. Indeed, we assumed that *ne*-cl gives rise to an unaccusative/existential derivation with unergative verbs in their synthetic form.

Conversely, we were able to demonstrate that the analytic counterpart of the verbs tested in the questionnaires unanimously yields unacceptability when appearing with *ne*-cl. This, according to the analysis above, proved that the analytic counterpart triggers a traditional unergative derivation therefore maintaining the status of *ne*-cl as a reliable diagnostic for unaccusativity. This last claim, however, requires further research especially in relation to the behavior of highly variable verbs (e.g., verbs in the middle of Sorace’s hierarchy), which might exhibit a different behavior when patterning with the auxiliary (either *essere* or *avere*) in the analytic form. We leave these issues aside for further research.

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