

The Russian Genitive of Negation: Theme-Rheme Structure or Perspective Structure?*

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Abstract. In recent work we have come to challenge assumptions that we shared (Borschev and Partee 1998a) with Babby (1980) concerning the role of Theme-Rheme structure in accounting for the nominative-genitive alternation in negated existential sentences (the NES construction, in the terms of Babby (1980), the classic work which we are building on). The challenge is exemplified most clearly in our “*kefir* example”:

- (i) [Ja iskal kefir.] Kefira v magazine ne bylo.
[I looked-for kefir.] Kefir-GEN_{m-sg} in store NEG was_{n-sg}
‘[I was looking for kefir.] There wasn’t any kefir in the store.’

It is an important part of the explanatory structure of Babby 1980 that in sentence (i), the Theme is *v magazine* and the Rheme is *kefir- [byl-]*. Babby takes Theme-Rheme structure to be crucial for determining the scope of negation, and scope of negation to be a necessary condition in licensing the occurrence of the genitive of negation. But arguments from word order, intonation, and pragmatics have convinced us that *kefira* in example (i) must be considered (part of) the Theme, and not the Rheme. We

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now argue that independent of Theme-Rheme structure there is a relevant “perspective structure”, a kind of diathesis choice, allowing a proposition involving a suitable verb to be structured with either of its two arguments as “Perspectival Center”. In a locative DS, the sentence predicates “being in a certain location” of the “thing” argument, whereas in an ES, the sentence predicates “having a certain thing in it” of the “location” argument. The theoretical status of such a layer of structure remains in need of further investigation.

0. Introduction

We agree with Comrie (1980) in his assessment of the significance of Babby’s (1980) account of the interaction among the formal properties of the subject genitive of negation construction and its semantic and pragmatic properties: where others had given lists of properties that facilitate or impede the use of genitive of negation, “it is in providing a more general solution to these problems that Babby’s main contribution lies.” (p. xiii) After reviewing the principal generalizations identified by Babby in that landmark work, Comrie notes that “related semantico-pragmatic properties that are often treated as arbitrary in earlier analyses are shown to be special cases of, or at least correlated with, the above-mentioned generalizations.” (p.xiv)

Our own work on this topic, starting with Borschev and Partee 1998a, has been built on the foundations of Babby’s work; our principal goal has been to try to formalize some of the semantic and pragmatic insights found in Babby’s work and to integrate them with some of the insights into lexical semantics that have come from the work of Padučeva and other members of the Moscow semantic school. As our work has progressed, we have found ourselves making modifications in certain points of Babby’s analysis. One such point of difference concerns the role Babby attributes to Theme-Rheme structure in determining the scope of negation. We now believe that the crucial distinction is not to be found in Theme-Rheme structure but needs a new structure which we call Perspective Structure. The nature of this structure and the differences between our current position and Babby’s are described below. We consider the issues far from settled, and in any case we consider our modifications as friendly amendments to Babby’s account, with which we have far more points of agreement than of disagreement.

We will follow Babby’s (1980) terminology of “negated declarative sentences” (NDS), for the sentences with nominative subjects, and “negated existential sentences¹” (NES), for those with genitive “subjects”, as in (1a) and (2a) (his (81a-b), from Ickovič 1974). We give the corresponding affirmative sentences (ADS and AES) in (1b) and (2b)².

¹ The most common term in Russian corresponding to Babby’s “existential sentences” is *bytijnye predloženiya*; see Arutjunova (1976, 1997), Arutjunova and Širjaev (1983). The contrasting term “declarative” is not widespread in the English-language literature, and is perhaps not the best choice, but there is no standard alternative term. The Russian alternative preferred by Arutjunova and Padučeva is “*sobytijnye predloženiya*, ‘eventive sentences’, but that does not apply comfortably to the stative “locative” sentences which frequently form minimal pairs with ES’s.

² In glossing our examples, we use the following abbreviations:

NOM	nominative	SG	singular
GEN	genitive	PL	plural
ACC	accusative	1	first person
M	masculine	2	second person
F	feminine	3	third person
N	neuter		

We use boldface to highlight the relevant occurrences of **NOM** and **GEN** on nouns and **N.SG** on non-agreeing

- (1)NDS (a) Otvet iz polka ne prišel.
 Answer_{NOM.M.SG} from regiment NEG arrived_{M.SG}
 ‘The answer from the regiment has not arrived.’
- ADS (b) Otvet iz polka prišel.
 Answer_{NOM.M.SG} from regiment arrived_{M.SG}
 ‘The answer from the regiment has arrived.’
- (2) NES (a) Otveta iz polka ne prišlo.
 Answer_{GEN.M.SG} from regiment NEG arrived_{N.SG}
 ‘There was no answer from the regiment.’
- AES (b) Prišel otvet iz polka.
 Arrived_{M.SG} answer_{NOM.M.SG} from regiment
 ‘There was an answer from the regiment.’

As Babby notes, the affirmative ADS and AES sentences differ (obligatorily) in the order of subject and verb, while in the negative sentences, where the difference between NDS and NES is marked by case, the word order can vary; we return to this important point later.

Here are some more standard examples.³

- (3) a. NDS: Stok talyx vod ne nabljudalsja.
 Runoff_{NOM.M.SG} melted water NEG was.observed_{M.SG}
 ‘No runoff of thawed snow was observed.’⁴
- b. NES: Stoka talyx vod ne nabljudalos’.
 Runoff_{GEN.M.SG} melted water NEG was.observed_{N.SG}
 ‘No runoff of thawed snow was observed.’ (= There was no runoff.)
- (4) a. NDS: *(#) Somnenija ne byli.⁵
 Doubts_{NOM.N.PL} NEG were_{N.PL}
- b. NES: Somnenij ne bylo.
 Doubts_{GEN.N.PL} NEG were_{N.SG}
 ‘There were no doubts.’
- (5) a. NDS: Lena ne pela.
 Lena_{NOM.F.SG} NEG sang_{F.SG}
 ‘Lena didn’t sing.’

verbs. We do not gloss irrelevant morphology.

³ Example (**Error! Reference source not found.**) is from Ickovič (1974) (cited in Babby 1980), and example (**Error! Reference source not found.**) from Babby 1980. After many years of work on GenNeg, a large collection of examples has in a sense become common property. We largely take our examples from this collection (sometimes with variations), drawing principally on examples cited by Ickovič (1974), Babby (1980), Apresjan (1980, 1985), and Padučeva (1992, 1997).

⁴ This is Babby’s translation (Babby 1980: 59); in most cases he translates nominative subjects in NDS’s with the definite article, and we believe a definite article would be appropriate in this case as well.

⁵ The status of examples like (**Error! Reference source not found.a**) as “ungrammatical (*)” or “infelicitous or semantically anomalous without a special context (#)” is a theory-dependent matter that does not have a straightforward answer. Examples (**Error! Reference source not found.a**) and (**Error! Reference source not found.b**) are very hard to improve by manipulating the context; other “bad” examples are much easier to improve by that means.

b. NES: *(#) Leny ne pelo.
 Lena_{GEN.F.SG} NEG sang_{N.SG}

Among the many puzzles about GenNeg, we have been most concerned with the characterization of the semantics of the construction. One question in this area is why, under sentential negation, some sentences allow only genitive subject, some only nominative subject, and some both. When both are possible, we want to know what the difference is. It is to be hoped that if we understand the semantics of the construction and the lexical semantics of the various verbs, the answers to those questions will follow. Here is Apresjan 1985:

The key to understanding the construction we are considering can be found in the position taken long ago in the works of S.O. Karcevskij and R. Jakobson, namely that in negative sentences with the genitive case, “the subject itself is negated” (Jakobson), and in negative sentences with nominative case, “what is negated is not the subject, but its activity” (Karcevskij), or, speaking in the words of R. Jakobson, “just the action”. (Apresjan 1985: 295)

In a certain sense, it is that same claim which is sharpened and developed in the work of Babby (1980). Babby holds that the scope of sentential negation is different in “existential sentences” (ES’s) and “declarative sentences” (DS’s), and that that difference is in turn determined by the differing communicative structure of these sentences, the structure of Theme and Rheme. According to Babby, in an ES, the entire sentence falls within the Rheme, and hence when the sentence is negated, the subject as well as the verb falls within the scope of negation. In a DS, on the other hand, the subject is the Theme and the verb (and its complements, if any) is within the Rheme; therefore, under sentential negation, the subject is outside the scope of negation.

Many other accounts have been offered from many points of view and in many different theoretical frameworks. In recent years the stream of literature on this theme has not diminished, and evidently not all “keys to understanding the construction we are considering” have been found yet. Thus for example E.V. Padučeva stresses the interaction of verbs of perception with this construction and discusses the role of “Observer⁶” (Padučeva 1992, 1997). Many works are dedicated to the syntactic aspects of the given construction, and there has been much discussion of the hypothesized centrality of “Unaccusativity” as a pivotal and explanatory property of the verbs whose “subjects” (being underlying Objects) appear in the genitive under negation.⁷ Other works focus in addition or instead on hypotheses concerning the position(s) of negation with respect to the verbal complex and its relation to the position of arguments in existential and

⁶ The linguistic notion of an *observer* is looked at in detail in the works of Ju. D. Apresjan, in particular in Apresjan (1986). The point of view of an implicit observer also plays a role in Fillmore’s analysis of English *come* and *go* (Fillmore 1971), and in a number of insightful works by Carlota Smith and by Padučeva about the manipulation by authors of fiction of the points of observation from which the reader is ‘shown’ the unfolding scene (see, for example, Smith and Whitaker 1985, Padučeva 1994, 1996.)

⁷ Pesetsky (1982) argued in favor the hypothesis that Unaccusativity is a crucial part of the explanation of GenNeg, as do Perlmutter and Moore (1999) in the framework of Relational Grammar. Babby (2001) argues against the hypothesis.

declarative sentences (Bailyn 1997, Brown 1999, Abels 2000).

While we agree with Babby (2001) that the assignment of case to the subject is almost certainly mediated by the syntax (since case assignment is unlikely to depend directly on semantics/pragmatics), in this article we remain uncommitted and agnostic about the syntax. We discuss some syntactic issues briefly in Borschev and Partee 2002a and mention just a few of them in Section 3.3 below.

Our main goal is to discuss some proposals that have been made for the description of the semantics of this construction and the issue of “different ways of looking at the same situation”. We will concentrate particularly on Babby’s approach, plus our own approaches in Borschev and Partee 1998a, 1998b, considering some of the problems and apparent contradictions among the various structural schemes that have been proposed, and possible directions of resolution. Special attention will be focussed on Babby’s central use of Theme-Rheme structure, its attractions and its problems.

In Borschev and Partee 1998a, we followed Babby in his use of Theme-Rheme structure, making certain modifications in his proposals for the sake of the semantics. But it has long been observed in the literature (for example, in Arutjunova 1976, 1997) that ES’s may be used with a wide variety of communicative structures, and many believe that the subject can well be the Theme even when it shows up with GenNeg. The acknowledgement of this possibility⁸ seems to create a major problem for the account of Babby 1980, and at least requires that the arguments be rethought. Our present position is that Babby did indeed carve out an aspect of structure, some kind of “marking” or distinguishing of some constituent(s) of the internal part-whole structure, which determines the choice of the genitive vs. nominative construction. But we no longer agree that the relevant structure is to be identified with Theme-Rheme (or Topic-Focus) structure in the classical Praguian sense; we suggest that it is a notion of “taking a perspective”, a notion we suggested (in slightly different terminology) in Borschev and Partee 1998b and will explore further here. In sentences (3a - 5a), the “marked” element is the first constituent, the *imja bytujuščego predmeta* ‘name of existing object’ in the terminology of Arutjunova, or the THING, as we have called it for brevity. In sentences (3b - 5b), on the other hand, it is the LOC(ation) (*oblast’ bytija* ‘region of existence’, in Arutjunova’s terms) that is marked, and the situation is looked at in terms of this LOCation. We call this structure of “marking” *perspective structure*, and the “marked” constituent the *Perspectival Center*; we introduce these notions more fully in Section 3.

This paper is organized as follows: In Section 1 we describe Babby’s (1980) analysis, the core of which consists of two theses: (i) that the most crucial conditioning factor for GenNeg is that the (indefinite) subject and (weak) verb both fall under the scope of sentential negation, and (ii) that the scope of sentential negation is determined by Theme-Rheme structure. As a result, the existential sentences in which GenNeg occurs are a species of “Rheme-only” sentences. We introduce some problems that have led us to doubt the correctness of the proposed link between Theme-Rheme structure and GenNeg (which has been questioned by others as well). Also in Section 1, we discuss some problems raised by Babby (1980) concerning sentences with the verb *byt’* ‘be’ with definite subjects marked with GenNeg.

⁸ This fact was brought to our attention by our colleagues Tanya Yanko, Elena Paducheva, and Sandro Kodzasov, and was confirmed by Jan Firbas and our Prague colleagues Eva Hajičová and Petr Sgall. Babby considered and rejected this “fact” in his 1980 book; we discuss his response below.

In Section 2, we review several characterizations of “existential sentences”, and outline the kernel of the evolving analysis developed in Borschev and Partee 1998a,b, 2002a,b, Partee and Borschev 2002, and in the present work, particularly our notion of “Perspectival Structure”.

Section 3 expands on our proposal that a LOCATION is always the Perspectival Center in existential sentences. We discuss the roles we call THING and LOCATION in both existential and locative sentences, and the additional perspectival structure which we posit to distinguish between those sentence types. We present arguments for favoring our use of perspectival structure over Babby’s use of Theme-Rheme structure in the analysis of GenNeg, while noting that our notion needs further support and that the issue is far from settled. We include brief discussion of the sources of presuppositions associated with existential and declarative sentences, and we close Section 3 with a few remarks about syntactic issues.

The paper ends with some concluding notes on the continuing empirical and theoretical challenges of finding an integrated view of the fascinating subtleties of this important construction.

1. Babby on “Declarative” and “Existential” Sentences

1.1. The Scope of Negation. Theme and Rheme. Problems

We noted above that Babby (1980) distinguished “declarative” from “existential” sentences. For Babby’s distinction between NDS and NES, the negative sentences, occurrence of nominative vs. genitive is criterial. For the corresponding affirmative sentences, ADS and AES, there is no absolute surface criterion; the usual basis for distinguishing between ADS and AES is to ask which case would be used on the subject if the sentence were negated. It is on this criterion that one can determine that there is normally an obligatory difference in word order in the affirmative sentences, as noted in the introduction. But since word order can be varied with accompanying changes in intonation in certain contexts, word order is not itself criterial in the affirmative case.

We note that for almost every NES, one can construct a corresponding “declarative” sentence, although, as shown by example (4a) above, the result will not necessarily be acceptable. The converse is by far less valid; it is very easy to find NDS’s with no NES counterpart.

Babby’s first main proposal about the distinction is shown in his chart (6) (Babby 1980: 72) below: DS’s and ES’s differ in their “scope of assertion/negation”.

(6)

	AFFIRMATIVE		NEGATED
EXISTENTIAL	[Scope of A VP NP] ⇒ _{NEG}		[_{ne} VP NP _{gen}]
DECLARATIVE	NP [Scope of A VP] ⇒ _{NEG}		NP _{nom} [_{ne} VP]

Thus the declarative sentence (3a) presupposes that there was some runoff of thawed snow and asserts that it was not observed, i.e. negates only that it was observed. The corresponding ES (3b) is used to negate the very existence of any runoff of thawed snow⁹. The ES also negates

⁹ Cf. the discussion of these examples in Apresjan 1985: “In contemporary terminology in cases of the type of *Stoka*

a locative topic is not overt in an existential sentence, something like it is implicitly understood.

Now, in the light of the observations of our colleagues mentioned in the Introduction and after reviewing Arutjunova (1976, 1997) and other works, we have doubts about the full correlation of the distribution of NES's and NDS's with the postulated difference in Theme-Rheme structure. Thus in examples (8-10) below, it appears to us that our colleagues are correct in claiming that the words *sobaki* 'dog_{GEN.F.SG}', *kefira* 'kefir_{GEN.M.SG}', and *otveta* 'answer_{GEN.M.SG}' are the Themes (or part of the Theme) of these sentences. Both their most natural intonation pattern and their (most likely) interpretation in the given contexts support this point of view, which argues against the generalization in (7).

- (8) Sobaki u menja net. (Arutjunova 1976)
 dog_{GEN.F.SG} at I_{GEN} not.is
 I don't have a dog. [Context: talking about dogs, perhaps about whether I have one.]
- (9) [Ja iskal kefir.] Kefira v magazine ne bylo.
 [I looked-for kefir-_{ACC.M.SG} Kefir-_{GEN.M.SG} in store NEG was-_{N.SG}
 '[I was looking for kefir.] There wasn't any kefir in the store.'
- (10) [Ja napisal emu i ždal otveta.] Otveta ne prišlo.
 [I wrote him and waited.for answer-_{GEN.M.SG}-] Answer_{GEN.M.SG} NEG came-_{N.SG}
 [I wrote to him and waited for an answer.] No answer came.

Our conception of the communicative structure of sentences is based to a considerable extent on works in the tradition of the Prague School such as Hajičová 1973, 1974, 1984, Sgall et al. 1986 and works of Russian linguists. For us the Theme is, roughly speaking, what is being talked about in a sentence, which is presupposed to be familiar to the hearer, referring back to something which was either spoken about earlier or else simply well known. The Rheme is new information which the speaker wishes to communicate.

We note that Babby, alongside the Theme-Rheme opposition, considers an additional opposition, between *old (given)* and *new information*. Judging by his discussion of similar examples, he would consider *sobaki* 'dog_{GEN.F.SG}', *kefira* 'kefir_{GEN.M.SG}', and *otveta* 'answer_{GEN.M.SG}' in (8-10) above to be *old* information but part of the Rheme. Although we consider this issue far from settled¹³, we are now inclined to treat them as (part of) the Theme of the corresponding sentences.

Even the relation of GenNeg to the scope of negation is not as clear as it has generally been believed to be. Consider examples (11-12).

- (11) [My nadejalis', čto na seminare budut studenty.] No ni odin
 [We hoped, that at seminar will.be students] But NI one_{NOM.M.SG}
 student tam ne byl
 student_{NOM.M.SG} there NEG was-M.SG
 ['We hoped that (some of the) students would be at the seminar. But not a single one of

¹³ We return to this issue in Section 3.2.2., where we mention a proposal by Erteschik-Shir according to which the sentences (**Error! Reference source not found.-Error! Reference source not found.**) are indeed Rheme-only as claimed by Babby, and *kefira* and the like have the status of a subordinate Topic (Theme) inside the main Focus (Rheme). This "subordinate Theme" could correspond to Babby's "old information".

the students was there.’

- (12) [My nadejalis’, čto na seminaru buduť studenty.] No ni odnogo
[We hoped, that at seminar will.be students] But NI one_{GEN.M.SG}
studenta tam ne bylo.
student_{GEN.M.SG} there NEG was_{N.SG}
[‘We hoped that there would be students at the seminar.] But there was not a single
student [or: not a single one of the students] there.’

The sentences (11) and (12) have the same truth conditions if looked at in simple extensional models; in both cases, the expression translated as “not one student” is necessarily under the scope of the sentential negation in its clause.¹⁴ Yet only in (12) does that expression occur in the genitive; (11), with the nominative, is equally well-formed, which seems unexpected not only under Babby’s account but under virtually all accounts of GenNeg¹⁵.

There is one important difference in the interpretation of (11) and (12). In the sentence with the nominative subject, we must be speaking of a contextually definite group of students. The background sentence, which has the same surface form in both (11) and (12), contains the bare noun *studenty* ‘students’, which is indeterminate with respect to definiteness or specificity. Given its sentence-final position, *studenty* cannot easily be definite ‘the students’, but it can have a partitive interpretation ‘some of the students’, and must have the partitive interpretation for (11) to be felicitous. The nominative *ni odin student* is also understood partitively: ‘not a single one of the students’. In (12), on the other hand, there is no such restriction. A partitive interpretation is possible but a completely non-specific interpretation is normal.

This problem and other issues concerning the scope of negation are discussed in Partee and Borschev 2002 and will not be discussed further here.

1.2. Sentences with the Verb *byt’* ‘be’ and Referential Subject

Babby (1980: 124) (like Arutjunova 1976: 225) does not include sentences like (13) among the class of NES’s, even though in all syntactic and morphological respects, including the manifestation of GenNeg, (13) looks like an ordinary NES.

- (13) Ivana ne bylo na lekcii
Ivan_{GEN.M.SG} NEG was_{N.SG} at lecture
‘Ivan wasn’t at the lecture.’

The problem is the semantics: sentences like (13) whose subject is a proper name or other clearly

¹⁴ The *ni* ‘not’ of *ni odin*, *ni odnogo* ‘not one’ always (except in certain constructions that are irrelevant here) requires the co-presence of sentential negation *ne* in its clause. Russian is a “Negative Concord” language, and expressions like *ni odin* ‘not one’ and *nikto* ‘no one’ are generally analyzed as a negative polarity items (see Brown 1999). We therefore gloss *ni* simply as ‘NI’ rather than translating it as ‘not’.

¹⁵ We discuss examples of this kind, including some noted by Babby (1980), in Borschev and Partee 2002a and in Partee and Borschev 2002.

referential definite NP do not deny the existence of the referent of the subject. And Babby has argued that the primary function of an existential sentence is the assertion (in an AES) or denial (in an NES) of existence of the/a referent of the subject NP. So NES's should normally not permit proper names or other definite NPs as subjects, as Babby indicated in his indefiniteness condition (a) in his rule (7) above. But sentences with *byt'* (and a few other typically existential verbs) do commonly allow GenNeg with proper names and other definite NPs, although other verbs rarely do.

So Babby claims that sentence (13) cannot be an existential sentence because of its definite subject and therefore must be a "locative sentence", a type of NDS, with "be at the lecture" as the negated Rheme. This, however, goes contrary to the generalization about the distribution of GenNeg in Babby's basic scheme in (6), as well as to the diagnostics developed by Chvany (1975) for distinguishing existential and locative sentences.

In Borschev and Partee 1998a, we argued that this was a weakness in Babby's treatment. The distribution of GenNeg is otherwise accounted for in Babby 1980 by a single rule, and it would seem strange for *byt'* to be an exception when *byt'* is in a sense a "basic" verb of existence ("being") and roughly speaking all NES's can be approximately paraphrased by NES's with *byt'*, as Babby himself notes¹⁶.

- (14) a. Otveta ne prišlo = Otveta ne bylo
 Answer_{GEN.M.SG} NEG arrived_{N.SG} = Answer_{GEN.M.SG} NEG was_{N.SG}
 'No answer came.' = 'There was no answer.'
- b. Posudy na stole ne stojalo =
 Dishes-_{GEN.F.SG} on table NEG stood-_{N.SG} =
 Posudy na stole ne bylo
 Dishes-_{GEN.F.SG} on table NEG were-_{N.SG}
 'No dishes stood on the table.' = 'There were no dishes on the table.'
- c. Snega na poljax uže ne ležalo =
 Snow-_{GEN.M.SG} on fields already NEG lay-_{N.SG} =
 Snega na poljax uže ne bylo
 Snow-_{GEN.M.SG} on fields already NEG was-_{N.SG}
 'Snow no longer lay on the fields' = 'There was no longer snow on the fields.'

In sentence (13), the subject is definite and denotes a concrete entity presupposed to exist, and indeed such sentences differ in some way from the "classic" existential (*bytijnye*) sentences. But in its form, according to the principles that govern the choice between genitive and nominative under negation, it does not differ at all from the various paraphrases with *byt'* 'be' in (14). Babby suggests the following explanation: when a locative sentence contains the verb *byt'*,

¹⁶ "The lexical verb in NES's can always be replaced by *byt'* or one of its functional equivalents without affecting the sentence's primary assertion." (Babby 1980: 17)

In Babby's defense, it should be mentioned that *byt'*, as an exceedingly common verb, could be expected to tolerate irregularities. Wayles Browne has pointed out to us that in Serbo-Croatian, there is no object GenNeg, and subject GenNeg happens only with the (irregular) "there is" verb; and that in Polish and Slovenian, object GenNeg is completely obligatory (no semantic conditions), whereas subject GenNeg happens only with the "there is" verb. Thus not only do subject and object GenNeg not pattern together in all Slavic languages, but some 'be' verbs have special properties with respect to GenNeg in several Slavic languages.

it is so close syntactically to the form of an existential sentence that Russian grammar “simply treats them the same with respect to genitive marking” (Babby 1980: 124).

We argued in Borschev and Partee 1998a, however, that with more careful attention to the interpretation of “existence” in “existential sentences”, in particular by claiming that “existence is always relative to a LOCATION” (see principle (17) in Section 3), sentence (13) can indeed be interpreted as an ES (an NES). We showed that Babby’s analysis could then work uniformly for GenNeg in sentences with *byt’* just as in ES’s with lexical verbs. While we now have a different view of the distinction which Babby identified as the Theme-Rheme distinction, we continue to believe that sentence (13) should be included among the class of ES’s to be accounted for by a uniform treatment of GenNeg. We return to our analysis in Section 3.

2. Existential Sentences and the “Genitive Rule”

We have mentioned that various authors use the terms “existential sentences” (*bytijnnye predloženiya*) and “genitive sentences”. The expression “genitive sentences” in this context means, by definition, negative sentences with an NP subject in the genitive which would be in the nominative in a corresponding affirmative sentence, or sometimes the affirmative sentences of which those are the negation. The expression “existential sentence” is used by some authors, including Babby¹⁷ (1980) and Borschev and Partee (1998a,b) as fully equivalent to “genitive sentence”, representing a hypothesis about the core semantics lying behind the prototypical cases of the construction and extended in some systematic way to the more marginal or novel cases.

Arutjunova (1997: 57) characterizes *bytijnnye predloženiya* ‘existential sentences’ as “a syntactic type of sentence asserting the existence in the world or some fragment of it of objects of some class or other.” As *bytijnnye glagoly* ‘existential verbs’ she cites the prototypical existential verb *byt’* ‘be’ plus “its equivalents and analogs” *suščestvovat’* ‘exist’, *imet’sja* ‘be available’, *byvat’* ‘be (frequentative)’, *vodit’sja* ‘be (found)’, *vstrečat’sja* ‘be encountered’, *popadat’sja* ‘[passive or impersonal of] come across’.

- (15) V lesu popadajutsja belye griby.
 In woods come.across_{PRES.PL.REFL} white_{NOM.M.PL} mushroom_{NOM.M.PL}
 In the woods one comes across white mushrooms. (Arutjunova 1997: 57)

Arutjunova cites the GenNeg phenomenon as a property that existential sentences all have, but she does not suggest the converse and thus does not seem to equate the class of existential sentences with the class of sentences in which GenNeg occurs. She speaks of prototypical existential verbs and of verbs which are semantically close to them or “analog” of them. She may have in mind a distinction between a narrower and more literal notion of existential sentences and a broader notion that covers the entire range of genitive sentences. Like several other authors, including Babby and the present writers, she allows extension of the notion of “existential sentence” to those in which there are certain modal or aspectual operators added to the core verbal notion.

¹⁷ As noted earlier, Babby (like Arutjunova) makes an exception in the case of genitive sentences with the verb *byt’* and a definite subject, which he classifies as “locative” rather than existential.

So our principal question is what the conditions on the “genitive rule” are¹⁸. In principle, of course, we should not have to stipulate a “genitive rule” covering the entire GenNeg construction; the assignment of genitive case should be a consequence of the interplay of a number of principles, and whatever is “special” about the Russian GenNeg construction should be identified and “localized” to an appropriate part of Russian grammar. One example of “localization” of this sort can be found in the hypothesis (Pesetsky 1982, Pereltsvaig 1997) that there is a phonologically empty quantificational head in Russian which is a negative polarity item with various other constraints on its occurrence, which itself occurs in the nominative or accusative, and which, like many other Russian quantifiers, governs the genitive case in its complement. Under such a hypothesis, the problem becomes one of explaining the distribution of that null quantifier, so as not to predict that genitive NPs can occur in every kind of sentence in which a nominative or accusative NP might occur under the scope of negation. We concentrate on the semantic factors, including communicative structure, that seem to be crucial in GenNeg, remaining agnostic about how these are reflected in the syntax.

We will consider the full range of “genitive verbs”, including those that can behave as genitive verbs only with the help of strong contextual factors. But we will take as the central paradigm case the “relation of existing” in a situation of “existing”, with the verb *byt’*.

Sentence (16) shows Arutjunova’s three components in a “classical” existential sentence: a “Localizer” (*oblast’ bytija* ‘region of existence’), an *imja bytujuščego predmeta* ‘name of an existing object’, and a *bytijnyj glagol* ‘existential verb’:

- (16) V ètom kraju (Localizer) est’ (Existential Verb) lesa (name of “Existing Object”).
 In that region is/are forests_{NOM.M.PL}
 ‘There are forests in that region.’

We have used different terms for the same notions. The “Localizer” is the name of our LOCATION, and the “Existing Object” is our THING¹⁹. As for the verb, we usually schematize and simply call it BE.

The core principles behind our analysis are as follows²⁰.

- (17) **“EXISTENCE IS RELATIVE” PRINCIPLE:**
 Existence (in the sense relevant to AES’s and NES’s) is always relative to a LOC(ation).

¹⁸ We use this term in a broad sense; we do not rule out base generation. The conditions may be of various sorts, including conditions on possible interpretations.

¹⁹ While for us, both THING and LOC are in the first instance elements of models, we often use the same terms to identify the corresponding expressions. On the one hand, this may be slightly careless terminology, but on the other hand, it corresponds to the use of a linguistic term such as Agent, which is regularly used to identify both a role of a participant in an event and the expression in a sentence that denotes the participant that plays that role. Our Russian terms for these two participants are *VEŠČ’* ‘thing’ and *MESTO* ‘place’.

²⁰ Principles (**Error! Reference source not found.**, **Error! Reference source not found.**, **Error! Reference source not found.**, **Error! Reference source not found.**) are from Borschev and Partee 1998a with little change. In that work, Principle (**Error! Reference source not found.**) was stated in terms of Theme-Rheme structure, so in that work Principle (**Error! Reference source not found.**) was not needed.

We discuss the principles that determine *which* LOCation is relevant in a given case in Borschev and Partee 1998a. The distinctions among locations associated with Perspectival Center, Perspectival non-Center, and background existence make it possible to make sense of GenNeg examples which deny the existence of the THING in a certain LOCation, possibly a perceiver's perceptual field, while presupposing existence of that THING in "the actual world" or some other LOCation invoked in the interpretation of the sentence in the given context. The distinctions discussed in Borschev and Partee 1998a were based on Theme-Rheme structure; we would now systematically modify them, replacing "Theme" by "Perspectival Center".

(18) **The Common Structure of "Existence/location situations" and their descriptions:**
BE (THING, LOC)

We share the view of many writers that in many cases, including the core cases with the verb *byt'*, existential sentences and "declarative" sentences (including "locative" sentences), have the same verb and the same participants but a different organization. Abstracting away from the difference, both describe situations involving some THING 'being' in some LOCation.

An "existence/location situation" may be structured either from the perspective of the THING or from the perspective of the LOCation. Let us use the term **Perspectival Center** for the participant chosen as the point of departure for structuring the situation. (Our *Perspectival Center* will play the role that "Theme" played for Babby 1980.) We have no special term for the complementary term, the part of the situation that is not the Perspectival Center; we will sometimes just call it a predicate. We expand on the notion of Perspective Structure in Section 4.

(19) **PERSPECTIVE STRUCTURE:**

In the following, we underline the Perspectival Center.

BE (THING, LOC): structure of the interpretation of a Locative ("Declarative") sentence.

BE (THING, LOC): structure of the interpretation of an Existential sentence.

There are many ways to imagine different syntactic structures corresponding to these different structures of interpretation: unergative vs. unaccusative, personal vs. impersonal²¹, NP as external argument vs. implicit event argument as external argument. The differences might be located only in the semantics, but that would be a problem for compositionality if we posited neither a lexical difference in the verbs nor a structural difference in the sentences. So while we remain agnostic about the syntax, we believe that what we are discussing is the semantics that corresponds to some syntactic distinction.

Perspective structure has much in common with Theme-Rheme structure. Just as we said that the Theme is what the speaker is talking about and the Rheme contains the new information the speaker wishes to convey about the Theme (what the speaker predicates of the Theme), we can

²¹ Russian grammarians often classify NES sentences as impersonal, although, as Peškovskij notes, "These sentences are impersonal only when negated. If one removes the negation, they become personal ...". (Peškovskij 1938, p334.) Babby (1980, p.43) argues that the NES's are impersonal in surface structure but have an underlying subject in deep structure. One of the difficult challenges, as Babby notes, is to capture the close correspondence between many pairs of AES's and NES's on the one hand, and the apparent personal/impersonal difference between them on the other.

also say that Perspective Structure involves picking out one participant, here the THING or the LOC, and describing it. We say more about the differences between the two notions in Section 3.2.2.

(20) **PERSPECTIVAL CENTER PRESUPPOSITION:**

Any Perspectival Center must normally be presupposed to exist.

Principle (20) allows us to derive the same presuppositions that were derived in Borschev and Partee (1998a) from the correlation of greater presuppositionality with the Theme of the sentence (Hajičová 1973, 1974, 1984, Peregrin 1995, Sgall et al 1986). In particular, from this principle it will follow that the nominative subjects in NDS's are normally presupposed to exist, whereas in NES's, only the LOCation is normally presupposed to exist, and the perspectival structure does not provide any existence presupposition for the THING. Of course there may be presuppositions derived from other sources. But we will argue that ES's have a "marked" structure in comparison to the "unmarked" structure of Locative (Declarative) sentences, and that choosing a marked structure that avoids a presupposition of existence invites an implicature of likely non-existence.

Another way of stating the core of our analysis is to say that when the LOC is chosen as the Perspectival Center, then we look at the situation in terms of the LOC and "what's in it". In the case of an NES, the main assertion is that in that LOCation x , "NEG (BE (THING, in x))". In an NDS, on the other hand, our Perspectival Center is the THING, and of that THING, we state something about its location, namely that it is not in the given LOC.

(21) **NES PRINCIPLE:**

An NES denies the existence of the thing(s) described by the subject NP *in the Perspectival center LOCation*.

This statement may be too strong in the cases where the verb of the sentence is not *byt* 'be'. In any case, until we are able to derive this or some related principle compositionally, we are not in a position to be sure exactly how strong it should be. In Borschev and Partee 1998a, we related principle (21) to the following principle, where "V" represents any lexical verb²².

(22) **PRESUPPOSED EQUIVALENCE:**

An NES presupposes that the following equivalence holds locally in the given context of utterance:

$$V(\text{THING, } \underline{\text{LOC}}) \Leftrightarrow \text{BE}(\text{THING, } \underline{\text{LOC}})$$

In the general case, we assume that verbs have their normal literal meaning, which in most cases is not simply "exist" or "be". Then in order for the presupposition to be satisfied in a given context of use, some further assumptions must be available in the context which together with the compositional semantics of the sentence will entail the equivalence. If the GenNeg construction is used, the presupposition must be satisfied for the use of the sentence to be felicitous, and the hearer uses whatever contextual information is available to support an

²² The statement as given is evidently too strong. It is meant as a first approximation, to be amended to take account of the modal and aspectual modifications of basic existential meanings discussed in Section 2.

accommodation of the presupposition. (Examples involving the interaction of additional “axioms” deriving from lexical semantics, encyclopedic knowledge, and local contextual information are given in Borschev and Partee 1998a.)

But for it to be possible to satisfy the Presupposed Equivalence, the semantics of the verb must not be directly incompatible with it. If the meaning of the main verb of a sentence is inconsistent with the presupposed equivalence, then the use of GenNeg is impossible; this is standardly the case with Agentive verbs, for instance. But it may be possible in some cases for the verb to be coerced to a weaker meaning compatible with the presupposed equivalence in the given context, in which case GenNeg may be possible²³.

We illustrate the workings of these various principles below, with examples. Some of the foundational questions about where such principles come from remain open for further research.

3. Existential Sentences: LOC as Perspectival Center

There seems clearly to be a distinction, discussed by many authors in many frameworks, involving a contrast in two kinds of sentences each having the parts we have called “BE (THING, LOC)”.

One kind of sentence is “ordinary”, and has the “THING” as ordinary subject. This kind of sentence doesn’t really have a name except when put in contrast with the other kind; this is Babby’s “Declarative Sentence”, more often called “Locational”, and often subsumed within the larger class of “Predicational” sentences, and instances of the Brentano/Marty “categorical judgment”.

The ES’s do not have that ordinary structure, but exactly what structure they do have is controversial. In some sense they seem to be turning the predication around: saying of the LOCATION that there is THING in it, or that it has THING in it. If the LOC is implicit, this is a “thetic judgment”. And insofar as various authors (see Erteschik-Shir 1997 for discussion) have argued that thetic judgments should always be understood as predicating something of a situation or of a spatiotemporal location, then perhaps statements with an explicit LOC also express thetic judgments.

But in what way and at what “level” or “levels” of structure is the predication “turned around”?

Babby (1980) proposed that the difference is a difference at the level of Theme-Rheme (or Topic-Focus) structure. A number of linguists including Babby (2001) have proposed differences in syntactic structure. We propose a difference in Perspectival Structure. But that is no more than a change in terminology until we can say more about what Perspectival Structure is and by what principles it relates to other better-recognized aspects of pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic structure. We make some suggestive remarks below, but many questions remain open. The main thing we claim, and this too needs deeper exploration, is that the structural divisions Babby drew were more or less correct, but the distinction he identified cannot be identical to the widely recognized distinction between Theme and Rheme. So the weakest form of our present view is

²³ We see the openness of the class of “genitive verbs” as resulting from the possibility of such coercion. Even an agentive verb like *pet* ‘sing’, used in examples (**Error! Reference source not found.**a-b) as a case where GenNeg is impossible, can sometimes be coerced into a ‘genitive verb’ with the help of a very strong context. We plan to discuss this issue in future work.

simply that Babby's structures need new labels, and we are suggesting that the new labels should relate to our intuitions about looking at a situation from alternative perspectives. A more substantive claim is embedded within this view, however: namely, that there is an important level of structure which does not so far have any standard representation in any theory that is familiar to us.

3.1. THING and LOC

Above we schematized the structure common to existential and locative situations as involving a THING and a LOCation related by a two-place predicate (BE in the prototypical case, other V's in the more extended cases.) In place of our LOCation, one might propose the term SCENE or STAGE²⁴ (Russian *scena* 'stage'), in the sense of the stage on which the action takes place, for ES's, and similarly for what are often called "presentational" sentences. But we will continue to use LOC. This scheme is analogous to the proposal of Jackendoff 1972, 1990 to metaphorically broaden the notion of "being in a location", mentioned in Section 1.1.

One could say that THING and LOC are *roles* of the verb *byt*, but it is undoubtedly better to consider them roles of the **participants of the situation** (or **state**) of existing or of being located. Thus, in examples (9), (13), and the examples on the right-hand side in (14), THING is (what is denoted by) *kefir* 'kefir', *Ivan* 'Ivan', *otvet* 'answer', etc., and LOC is (what is denoted by) *v magazine* 'in the store', *na lekcii* 'at the lecture', and an understood "here" in the case of (14a).

The LOC may be given explicitly, as in (9), (13), and (14c,d), or it may be implicitly understood, as in (14a,b). It is important that existence is always understood with respect to some LOCation. An implicit LOCation must be given by the context. This is usually "here" or "there", "now" or "then": at the place and time where someone is awaiting an answer which "didn't arrive", for (14a), or "feeling (or not feeling) the frost", for (14b).

The THING and the NP denoting it may belong to various sorts: concrete objects (including humans), massy stuff (kefir, money, etc.), events, pluralities, abstract entities (justice, problems); one area in need of further investigation is the difference in interpretation when the NP is an individual-level indefinite and when it is a kind-denoting term (Carlson 1977/80). Assertions of non-existence are presumably semantically somewhat different in the two kinds of cases. The problem of definite NPs is discussed further in Partee 2000.

Note that the denial of existence of a THING in a LOCation does not contradict the existence of the THING *outside* the given LOCation, for instance "in the world". Thus, for instance, the use of GenNeg in sentence (13) to deny the existence of Ivan at the lecture is compatible with the presupposition of existence "in the world" carried by the proper name *Ivan* 'Ivan'. When our Perspectival Center is the lecture, the relevant LOC is the location of the lecture, and in that LOC there is no Ivan. But the use of the proper name is itself associated with a conventional, larger

²⁴ Erteschik-Shir (1997) speaks of "stage-topics", and we like the concept of a stage on which the events described in a sentence take place. There is a problem with the already existing usage of the English word *stage* in a different sense, in *stage-level* vs. *individual-level* predicates (Carlson 1977/1980, Kratzer 1995). Russian *scena* unambiguously conveys the sense of a stage on which a performance takes place, but its English cognate *scene* unfortunately has a much more static meaning, 'what one sees before one, or what is depicted in a picture'. So in Russian we could use *SCENA* alternatively with *MESTO*, but in English we will continue to use LOC.

LOCation²⁵, the world in which the people we know exist (and continue to exist when we don't see them). Thus our rejection of the requirement that the THING be expressed by an indefinite NP is intimately connected to our adoption of the thesis that existence is always relative to a LOCation.

The much greater frequency of indefinite over definite NPs in ES's may be linked to the consideration that when the THING is a definite particular, the speaker is more likely to make a description from the perspective of that THING. But that is not an absolute preference; sentence (13) is natural because we may sometimes be more interested in knowing who was at the lecture than in knowing where Ivan was.

3.2. Perspective

In this section we elaborate our notion of perspective structure and its role in existential sentences, contrasting it with Theme-Rheme structure, and discussing the kinds of presuppositions that we believe relate most directly to choices of perspectival structure.

3.2.1. The Notion of Perspective and Its Role in Existential Sentences

The structure of a situation of existing cannot be reduced to its decomposition into the participants THING and LOC, since a situation of "being located" (corresponding to a "declarative" or "locative" sentence) has the same participants. We have proposed that the distinction between a situation of existing and a situation of being located involves a **choice of perspective**, of a point of view, from which the speaker, or sometimes the subject of a higher clause in the sentence, looks at that situation. The speaker, of course, is the one who chooses the form of expression; but if the relevant clause is an embedded one, the speaker may be representing the point of view of a higher subject of a propositional attitude. And even in the case of a simple sentence, if it occurs as part of a narrative, then the point of view of someone other than the "author" may be represented.

The situation may be described with the THING as Perspectival Center, or with the LOCation as Perspectival Center. When the THING is chosen as Perspectival Center, its existence is presupposed, and the sentence speaks of its LOCation and potentially about other properties or states or actions in the situation. When we choose the LOCation as Perspectival Center, the sentence speaks about what THINGS there are or are not in that situation and potentially about what is happening in the situation.

The choice of Perspectival Center, as so described, has much in common with the choice of Theme (Topic) on the one hand (see Section 3.2.2), and with the choice of grammatical Subject on the other: all three notions involve structuring something (a situation, a proposition, or a sentence) so that one part is picked out and the rest is in effect predicated of it.

We believe that the perspectival structuring is first and foremost a (cognitive) structuring of the situation that will be talked about. How that structuring will be reflected in the linguistic structure of the corresponding expression may vary from language to language.

Our main hypothesis with respect to the case at hand is that the role of perspective in ES's is

²⁵ Cf. Barwise and Perry's (1981) notion of a "Resource Location".

to indicate a choice among different kinds of situations within the class of situations that share the basic participant-structure V(THING, LOC): when the LOC is marked as Perspectival Center, the result is an existential sentence²⁶, as stated in the Perspective Structure principle (19) in Section 2. As noted, we consider it likely that this result is mediated by a difference in choice of syntactic structure, but are agnostic as to what the syntactic difference is.

Our current hypothesis about “where in the grammar” the choice of Perspective Structure is registered is that it is a “diathesis choice”, a choice among two alternative argument structures for verbs that can take both a “THING” and a “LOC” argument, analogous to the argument structure choices for verbs like *spray*, *load* or verbs like *give*, *send*.

What is the semantic difference between *load the truck with hay* and *load the hay on the truck*? There is no systematic truth-conditional difference, but there are oft-noted differences in which argument is understood to be “completely” affected, and there is a correlation between the one chosen as direct object and the one more likely to be a definite NP. Is there a difference in the meaning of *load* when the argument structure shifts in this way? We see these questions as similar to our questions about the status of the THING and LOC arguments in the two sentence types.

But we do not believe that perspective structure directly affects or is affected by Theme-Rheme structure; we turn to this topic in the next subsection.

3.2.2. Perspective vs. Theme-Rheme Structure

While the choice of perspective structure and the choice of Theme-Rheme structure may often coincide (in the sense that the Perspectival Center is a natural choice for Theme), we believe that they are different notions and in principle independent of one another.

Perspectival structure is basically a structuring at the model-theoretic level, a structuring of the situation the sentence describes. If the job of semantics is to associate linguistic expressions with the non-linguistic “realia” they refer to or describe, then we take perspectival structure as a property of those “realia”, in the same sort of domain as the properties that distinguish telic from atelic eventualities, or agents from experiencers, or the denotata of mass nouns from the denotata of count nouns. All of these properties reflect cognitive structuring of the domains that we use language to talk about, and are not simply “given” by the nature of the external world. Correspondingly, all of them are properties with respect to which we find differences from language to language. Two verbs in different languages, which seem to be otherwise perfect translations of one another, may nevertheless differ as to whether one of their arguments counts as a “Theme” (in the “theta-role” sense) or an “Experiencer”. Hence the verbs may govern accusative in one language and dative in the other, even when the general principles for the choice of Accusative and Dative are the same in the two languages. (E.g., the verb meaning

²⁶ Some conditions probably need to be placed on the choice of verb as well; there may be dynamic sentences that may also have the structure V(THING, LOC) with LOC as Perspectival Center that should not be classed as existential. However, we cannot simply require that the Presupposed Equivalence (**Error! Reference source not found.**) hold, since that is a requirement only on NES’s and not on AES’s; and it is a requirement on the interpretation of the sentence in context, not on the verb. At this point the most we can say is that an affirmative sentence with semantic structure V(THING, LOC) and the LOC as Perspectival Center is existential if its “corresponding negative sentence” meets (**Error! Reference source not found.**) in the given context.

“call”, as to call someone on the phone, takes dative in some of the Indo-European languages, such as Russian *zvonit’* and Spanish *llamar*, and accusative in others, such as English *call* and German *rufen, anzurufen*.) This presumably represents a different schematization of the situation-type, a different decision as to whether a given participant in the situation-type counts as an “Experiencer” or not.

Theme-Rheme structure is first and foremost a matter of information structure in discourse, although as Sgall et al (1986) have argued, it belongs in semantics and not only in pragmatics. The information structure chosen depends not only on the situation to be described but also on what aspects of that situation have been mentioned most recently, which aspects are presumed familiar to the hearer, etc.

The kind of example which has most strongly convinced us that distinction we need for explaining the distribution of GenNeg is not standard Theme-Rheme structure is our “*kefir* example” (9), repeated below as (23).

- (23) [Ja iskal kefir.] Kefira v magazine ne bylo.
 [I looked-for kefir-ACC.M.SG Kefir-GEN.M.SG in store NEG was-N.SG
 ‘[I was looking for kefir.] There wasn’t any kefir in the store.’

In (23), *kefira* ‘kefir’, in the genitive, is nevertheless part of the Theme. The evidence is twofold. In the first place, the rules governing the interplay of word order and intonation in Russian have been very well studied and repeatedly argued to be intimately bound up with Theme-Rheme structure (Kovtunova 1976, Yokoyama 1986, *Russkaja Grammatika* 1980; similarly for Czech and in general in Sgall et al 1986). According to those principles, *kefira* should be the Theme or part of the Theme in (23). Secondly, according to virtually all theories of communicative structure, the Rheme of one sentence is a favored candidate to become the Theme of the following sentence: one sentence introduces something as important, and the following sentence picks up that topic and says something about it. And in example (23), the background sentence clearly introduces *kefir* in the Rheme, so it is natural that *kefira* should be the Theme (or part of the Theme) of the following sentence.

In this example the Rheme is probably only the final *ne bylo* ‘wasn’t’, and *v magazine* ‘in the store’ is also part of the Theme. According to the most general rule of the place of negation in Russian (Padučeva 1974: 154-155; see also Sgall et al 1986), negation is associated with the Rheme.

A minimally contrasting example, in which *kefira* is indeed Rheme and the sentence fits Babby’s pattern as he predicts, is (24) below.

- (24) [Ja zašel v magazin.] V magazine ne bylo kefira.
 [I went into store.] In store NEG was-N.SG kefir-GEN.M.SG
 ‘[I went into the store.] In the store there wasn’t any kefir.’

A different kind of minimal pair is given below in (25) and (26). In this pair of sentences, the sentence-initial Theme is the same (*on/ego* ‘he_{NOM}/he_{GEN}’), anaphorically referring to the Rheme *Petja* ‘Petja’ of the preceding sentence. In (25), the THING *Petja* is chosen as the Perspectival Center: we consider *Petja*, and where he was, and we give the partial information that he was not

at the lecture. In (26) the LOCATION is the Perspectival Center; this suggests that in our search for Petja, we went to the lecture expecting to find him, but Petja was not among those at the lecture.

- (25) [Ja iskal Petju.] On ne byl na lekcii.
[I looked.for Petja.] He_{NOM.M.SG} NEG was_{M.SG} at lecture.
[I looked for Petja.] He wasn't at the lecture.
- (26) [Ja iskal Petju.] Ego ne bylo na lekcii.
[I looked.for Petja.] He_{GEN.M.SG} NEG was_{N.SG} at lecture.
[I looked for Petja.] He wasn't at the lecture²⁷.

We note again that our proposed perspective structure corresponds quite exactly with Babby's (1980) division between Theme and Rheme: our Perspectival Center corresponds to Babby's Theme. The difference could be called purely terminological and in a sense it is; the substantive issue is that Babby believed that the structure he had identified could be equated with the independently motivated Theme-Rheme structure, and we believe that it cannot be. The issues concerning the scope of negation mentioned in the Introduction and discussed in Partee and Borshev 2002 also raise substantive problems for what seemed to be additional independent motivation for using Theme-Rheme structure as the determinative structure.

But we do not consider this issue closed, and we do not consider our arguments against the use of Theme-Rheme structure totally conclusive. There are several possible kinds of arguments that may be given in defense of Babby's original proposal, or which suggest modifications that could preserve the main structure of Babby's analysis.

As noted above, Babby's own suggestion (Babby 1980: 114-120) is that in NES's, the word order no longer expresses topic-focus structure, since that is now disambiguated by the genitive marking, but rather a difference in *old (given)* vs. *new* information. Babby cites Kovtunova (1976) and Gundel (1974) in support. He cites Gundel as characterizing "given" as "what you were talking about or what I was talking about before", while "topic" is "what I am talking about now". And he claims that in NES's like our *kefir* example (9/23), the genitive NP is pre-verbal if it is "old" or "given" in that sense (contextually bound), even though it is Rheme in the given sentence. It is well-known that while Theme is often "old", and Rheme often "new", these correlations are by no means absolute, and Babby thinks that is what is going on in the NES's with initial genitive NP. To support this suggestion, one would need an account of word order and intonation in these terms.

A similar idea can be found in Padučeva 1985 (esp. 119-20), also citing Kovtunova (1976). Padučeva discusses the "dislocation of part of a complex rheme", in which the "rheme proper" is left at the end of the sentence with the main accent, and the remainder of the Rheme is dislocated leftward, usually but not always to sentence-initial position; the dislocated part receives a secondary stress with falling intonation. Padučeva (p.c.) holds that the *kefir* example (9) can have either of two communicative structures: in a context such as we present in (9), *kefira* would

²⁷ We have given these two sentences the same translations, because the difference felt between them by a native speaker of Russian, described in the paragraph preceding the examples, does not easily translate into English (see Chvany 1975: 157-158). Existential sentences with indefinite subjects usually translate into *there*-sentences in English, but that option is not normally possible with definite subjects.

indeed be Theme and unaccented, but the same sentence could occur with no prior mention of *kefir*, only of the store, and in that case *kefir* would be a dislocated part of the Rheme, with a secondary falling stress. But note that if Padučeva is correct about that, it would not support Babby's approach, because on Padučeva's approach, if *kefir* is a dislocated part of the Rheme it remains **indefinite**, and it is only when *kefir* is part of the Theme that it would be interpreted as definite. Babby was trying to account for a potentially definite interpretation still being part of the Rheme.

A second argument begins with the assertion that the LOCation (explicit or implicit) in examples like (9 / 23) is still Theme. The basis for this assertion is that it cannot be contrasted. If the LOC is still Theme, then either the THING must be part of the Rheme, or else the Rheme is only the (negation plus the) copula. The latter case is a possibility, but its semantics is mysterious: what exactly is being negated in that case? Does the negation still have sentence scope? Or is this *verum*-focus, focus only on the Affirmative/Negative polarity?²⁸ But this issue should be deferred until we have solved the other puzzles of scope of negation discussed in Partee and Borschev 2002. The not fully conclusive outcome of this argument is that if just one or the other of LOC and THING is Rheme in the *kefir* sentences, it would seem that it is still the THING *kefir* that is Rheme; but matters may well be more complex.

Erteschik-Shir's suggestion, mentioned earlier, is really an argument for greater subtlety of Theme-Rheme (Topic-Focus) structure, with internal hierarchical structure and other enrichments not dealt with in our simple adaptations of Babby's simple one-level Theme-Rheme structures. Erteschik-Shir (1997) has a very relevant notion of stage-topic, and has an articulated system that allows for nested topic-focus structures. She suggests (p.c.) analyzing our *kefir* example as follows in her terms, with an initial implicit stage-topic, and *kefir* as a subordinate topic²⁹:

(27) [s]_{TOP} [*Kefira*_{TOP-sub} [v *magazine ne bylo*]_{FOC-sub}]_{FOC}

On this proposal, both Babby and the critics could be correct, although the crucial aspects of the structures would not be isomorphic to Babby's. On Erteschik-Shir's approach, existential (thetic) sentences are characterized by having a Stage-topic, and normal 'declarative' or 'predicational' sentences have an NP, usually the subject, as topic. On the other hand, when there is an implicit Stage-topic, which is not pronounced, the subordinate topic-focus structure of the explicit part of the sentence presumably takes over in determining the word order and intonation of the pronounced sentence.

Other relevant work includes the proposals of Junghanns and Zybatow (1997) concerning the information structure of Russian; they follow Jacobs (1992) in working with two binary distinctions, Topic-Comment and Focus-Background, and under their proposal there are instances of thetic (Comment-only) sentences with the unaccusative subject moved into preverbal position although it is not topic. They also have examples of all-focus sentences which

²⁸ This suggestion was made to us for this example by Petr Sgall (p.c.). For a discussion of *verum*-focus in general, see Höhle 1992.

²⁹ It is irrelevant to the main argument whether *v magazine* 'in the store' is part of the subordinate focus, part of the subordinate topic, or a modifier of the stage-topic (another suggestion made to us by Nomi Erteschik-Shir). What's crucial is that the main topic is the Stage-topic, and *kefir* is part of the main focus (Rheme).

contain an added sentence-initial topic.

A further complication that arises in trying to evaluate the Theme-Rheme and other structures of the affirmative and negative sentences we have been considering is touched on in Babby's (1980: 119-20) discussion of Givón's observations about the different pragmatic situations in which affirmative and negative sentences are likely to be used. Givón (1975) notes that negative speech acts are typically uttered in contexts that are presuppositionally richer than the contexts typical for the corresponding affirmatives. Padučeva (p.c.) has raised our awareness of the related fact that not every affirmative sentence has a corresponding negative sentence that can be safely assumed to have the same Theme-Rheme structure. It is all too easy when testing the word order and intonation pattern of a negative sentence to pronounce it as a denial of an implicit preceding affirmative sentence (hence inviting a *verum*-focus pattern), and not always very easy to conjure up a natural context which does not involve such a denial. In fact, we can see that not every affirmative sentence has a corresponding negative sentence at all, and some of the clearest examples of this are presentational sentences like *Here comes the bus*, which are close cousins of affirmative ES's.

We conclude this subsection by reiterating that we are inclined to believe that there are sentences like the *kefir* example in which the THING manifests GenNeg and is the Theme of the sentence. We are therefore inclined to prefer the introduction of our Perspective Structure over Babby's original use of classic Theme-Rheme structure for distinguishing Declarative from Existential sentences, but we consider the issues far from settled.

3.2.3. Issues about the Sources of Presuppositions

In all of the literature and discussion of the Russian GenNeg construction, there is widespread agreement about the differences in presuppositions in various different examples, but much less agreement about the degree of strength of the various presuppositions and about their sources, i.e. how their presence is to be explained.

In Borschev and Partee 1998a, some of the crucial presuppositions were consequences of the Theme-Rheme structure, by principles articulated in Hajičová 1973, 1974, 1984, and having challenged the correctness of Babby's assumptions, we are not sure how to derive them from other principles.

The challenge for a theory like Babby's based on Theme-Rheme structure amounts to the following. It does not appear to be possible to simultaneously maintain all of the following, at least not in a simplistic form:

(28)

- (1) Theme-Rheme articulation is indicated (in Russian) by certain patterns of intonation and word order.
- (2) Theme-Rheme articulation is a determinant of the scope of negation.
- (3) Being in the scope of negation is a necessary condition for GenNeg in ES's.
- (4) The central difference between NES's and NDS's is their Theme-Rheme structure, from which their differences in scope of negation and in presuppositions follows.

We have argued in favor of maintaining (1), since it seems to represent the most solidly

established criterion for that distinction, and to replace (4) by an appeal to a somewhat similar but not identical distinction which we call perspectival structure. But since perspectival structure is a new concept, there is no pre-existing theory to connect it with scope of negation or presuppositions. In Partee and Borschev 2002 we have raised and discussed some challenges to principle (3); if principle (3) above fails, then (2) becomes moot. But we would still like to try to say something about presuppositions, since they play a role in distinguishing existential from declarative sentences.

As a working hypothesis, we will assume that any element chosen as a Perspectival Center must be presupposed to exist (in the relevant LOCation, which may or may not be the actual world). Elements that are not part of the Perspectival Center may or may not be presupposed to exist, but any presupposition of existence for them would have to come from other sources and not from the perspectival structure. In an ES, since the main assertion is an assertion of existence in some LOCation, they cannot be presupposed to exist **in that LOCation**, or else the sentence would be anomalously redundant. We thus allow for definite subjects in AES's and NES's. .

Those who classify sentences with definite subjects as automatically disqualified from being counted as ES's (we have cited examples in which Babby, Brown, Chvany, and Padučeva have done that) may be failing to accept or to exploit sufficiently Principle (17), that existence is always relative to a LOCation. The Russian GenNeg construction seems to use this principle to permit a much broader range of ES's (as manifested by GenNeg) than English permits with *there*-sentences.

Other issues related to the sources of presuppositions are discussed in Borschev and Partee 1998a, including the presupposition of existence of the LOCation in ES's and the potential absence of such a presupposition in DS's. But the issues relating to definiteness in ES's are among the areas that call for further study; see e.g., Ward and Birner 1995 and subsequent discussion.

3.3 Notes about Syntax

In Borschev and Partee 2002a, we discussed a number of syntactic issues connected with GenNeg, without reaching firm conclusions. Here we mention only a few points most relevant to Babby's approach and our variant of it.

The GenNeg construction is found in Russian not only on the "subjects" of intransitive verbs in ES's, but on the objects of transitive verbs in many kinds of sentences. And many have claimed that the verbs that can be used in ES's are all Unaccusative verbs (Chvany 1975, Pesetsky 1982, Bailyn 1997, Brown 1999), intransitive verbs whose surface subject is an underlying object. The idea that GenNeg applies only to underlying objects has great appeal in unifying the GenNeg construction. Babby (2001) argues against it. His strongest arguments are against equating the post-verbal "subject" position in ES's with the direct object position in transitive sentences. He also suggests, less conclusively, that some ES's involve Unergative verbs; but there it might be possible to appeal to type-shifting of verbs from one sort to the other, something Pesetsky explicitly acknowledged as a consequence of the Unaccusative hypothesis for Russian.

Our Russian colleagues³⁰ (and the first author) are still somewhat skeptical about the applicability of the Unaccusativity hypothesis to Russian. In our future work we plan to critically examine the Unaccusativity hypothesis and to look more closely at object Gen Neg. Initial discussions suggest that the different tests for unaccusativity don't correlate as they should (and a couple of the minor ones seem not to work at all). And the semantic differences between Acc and Gen in negated transitive sentences are not obviously identical to the semantic differences between Nom and Gen in negated existential sentences. Thus there seem to be both semantic and syntactic bases for questioning whether subject Gen Neg is best explained as a sort of corollary of object Gen Neg, but we need to do more work on the problem before we can say anything substantive.

We remarked earlier that the structure of predication in an ES seems to be in some sense inverted from that in a DS. Few authors go so far as to suggest that the LOCative can become the subject in an ES (as it can in Chicheŵa), but Kondrashova (1996) does make such a suggestion for ES's with the copula verb.

Babby 2001 is in a sense at the opposite extreme: he argues that the THING element is still the subject even in an NES or AES, but that unlike in an NDS or ADS, the subject NP is not in "canonical" subject position. The roles of subject are 'split' in ES's, Babby suggests, with the LOCative typically fronting to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle. The THING argument remains post-verbal, but not in a direct object position; it is sister to a V-bar, where it can be in a predication relation.

What these proposals and other related ones have in common is proposing a more syntactic version of the idea that what is a canonical subject in a DS somehow stays inside the VP in an ES, or at any rate stays "lower", or at least starts out "lower". It is as if a Perspectival Center LOCation "wants" to be subject of an ES, but since it is structurally unable to become subject, some non-canonical structure must be found.

4. Concluding Remarks

The problem of Genitive of Negation in Russian existential sentences is endlessly interesting and difficult because, as Babby (1980) showed, it relates to many different kinds of principles from morphology to pragmatics, and because the structures involved are of necessity highly theory dependent and hence subject to change with changes in theoretical frameworks.

We claim that the Perspectival Center status of the LOCation and the corresponding not-ordinary-subject status of the THING are both marked choices. A language which simply let one make the LOCation the subject would align subject and Perspectival Center, and syntactic predicate with what is predicated of it; that would represent a full "syntacticization" of the distinction. On the other hand, one could imagine a language in which there was no difference except word order, and the existential sentence was realized just by making the Perspectival Center the Theme and the rest of the sentence the Rheme, indicated by word order. Babby and we both believe that Russian does something in between, with some difference in syntactic structure that corresponds to a difference in information structure (Babby) or a difference in

³⁰ Thanks to Elena Paducheva, Ekaterina Rakhilina, and Yakov Testelefs for very fruitful preliminary discussions in the summer of 2002 of this and other problems related to the GenNeg construction, and to Stephanie Harves, whose dissertation then in progress provided stimulating subject matter for a good part of the discussion.

perspective structure (us). We have argued that perspective structure isn't equivalent to Theme-Rheme structure, although it may well correlate with theme-rheme choices, since both the lexical argument structure choices and the theme-rheme choices relate to "what you want to talk about".

This construction continues to be interesting not only in its own right for the many puzzles it presents, but also as a vehicle for exploring the interactions among lexical semantics of verbs, argument structures and their "rearrangements", the notion of existential constructions, and the pragmatics of assertion, negation, and presupposition. We believe that Babby identified most of the relevant principles, and simultaneously uncovered the absence of any single theoretical framework that could do them full justice. As theories develop, the Genitive of Negation provides a challenging test for them.

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