Parametrizing intralinguistic variation: Case assignment strategies in Russian event nominalizations

Event nominalizations in Russian

- **Argument structure** in nominalizations is associated with functional layers. (Grimshaw 1990, Alexiadou 2001)
- ***vP*** is presented within process nominals only. (Alexiadou 2001)
- **AspP** is the maximum projection that can appear in Russian process nominalization. (Pazel'skaja, Tatevosov 2008)
- Russian event nominalizations belong to **ergative-possessive** type (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2002).

(1) a. Internal argument of intransitive marked GEN.
        padenie   **kursa**   rublja
        fall   **course.GEN**   rouble.GEN
        'fall of rouble course (weakening of rouble)'

      b. External argument of intransitive marked GEN.
        vorchanie   **sosedei**
        grumbling   **neighbors.GEN**
        'neighbors' grumbling'

      c. Internal argument marked GEN and external argument marked INSTR within transitive stem.
        ispolnenie   **arii**   Shaljapinym
        performance   **aria.GEN**   **Chaliapin.INSTR**
        'performance of aria by Chaliapin'

Case marking strategies

The corpus data shows that instrumental case marking is not limited to prototypical transitive stems. The external argument of transitive nominalizations with lexically governed internal argument can be marked both GEN and INSTR.

(2) podrazhanie   **cheloveka**   prirode
     imitating   man.**GEN**   Nature.**DAT**
     'man's imitation of nature'

(3) podrazhanie   **chelovekom**   tvorcheskoj moshhi
     imitating   man.**INSTR**   creative.**DAT** power.**DAT**
     'man's imitation of the creative power'

Unergatives can also appear with external argument marked INSTR.

(4) hozhdenie   **rebenkom**   na cypochkah
     walking.around child.**INSTR** tiptoe
     'child's walking on tiptoe'

⇨ **External argument demonstrates differential case marking.**

What are the quantitative characteristics of INSTR usage with different stems?
Are speakers consistent in assigning INSTR to external arguments?

Experiment #1

Hypothesis #1: Case marking strategy is one of the parameters of intralingual variation for Russian.

- 120 participants;   ▪ via Google Forms;
- fill-in-the-blanks task: native speakers were producing arguments of nominalizations assigning cases that sounded "most natural".

(5) V tot mesjac **armija** osvobodila **stolicu**, i osvobozhdenie
     _____ _____   sil'no podnjalo boevoj duh vseh soldat.

     That month the **army.NOM** reconquered the **capital.ACC**,
     and reconquest _____ _____ lift the martial spirit
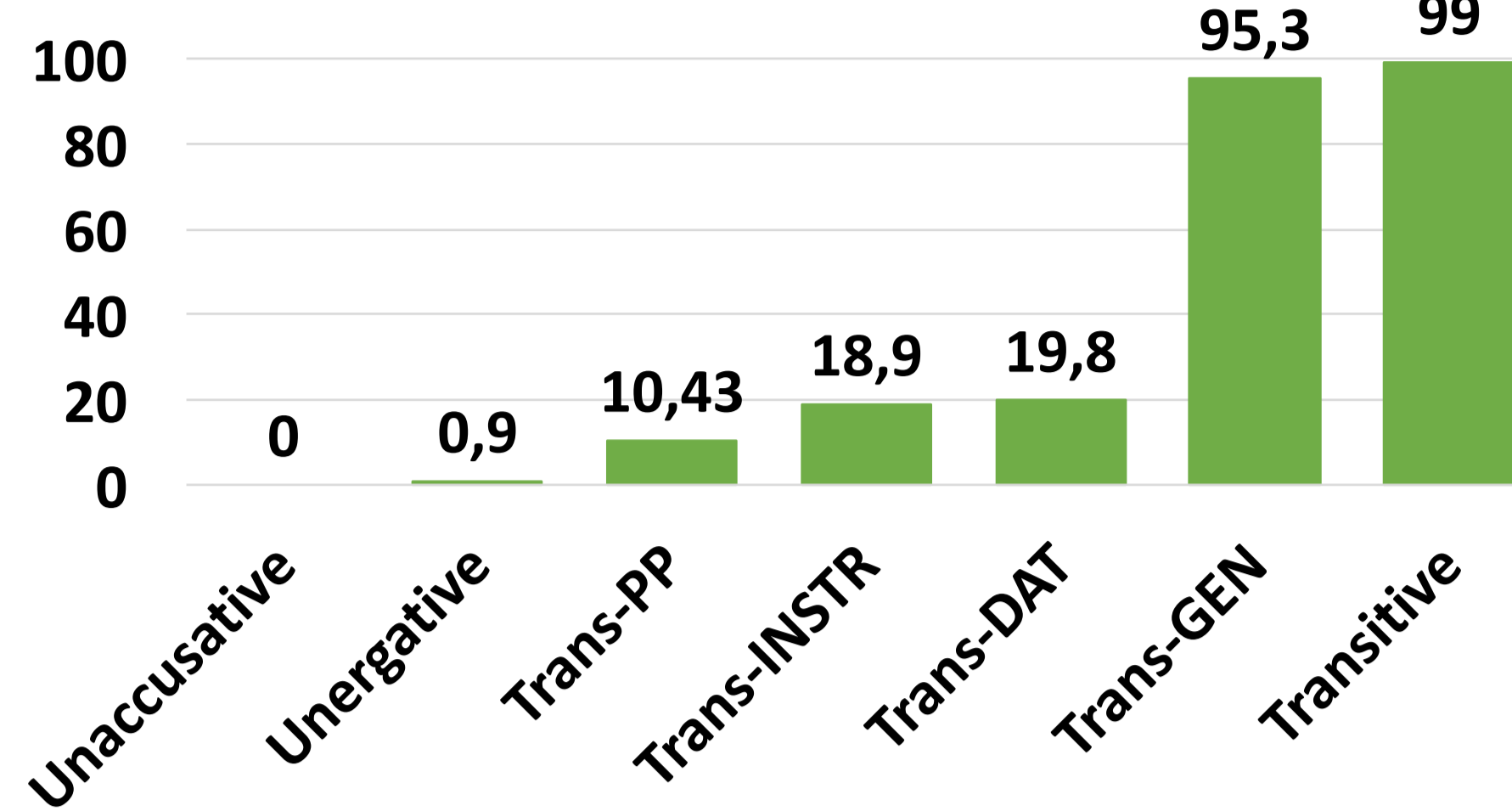
The examined stems included:
- Unergatives;
- Transitive stems with lexically governed internal argument in:
  - DAT;
  - INSTR;
  - PP;
- Unaccusatives;
- Transitives.

Results of the experiment #1:

1. 56% of respondents have at least once assigned INSTR to external arguments of nominalizations with lexically governed internal argument. ⇨ **The hypothesis #1 is accepted.**
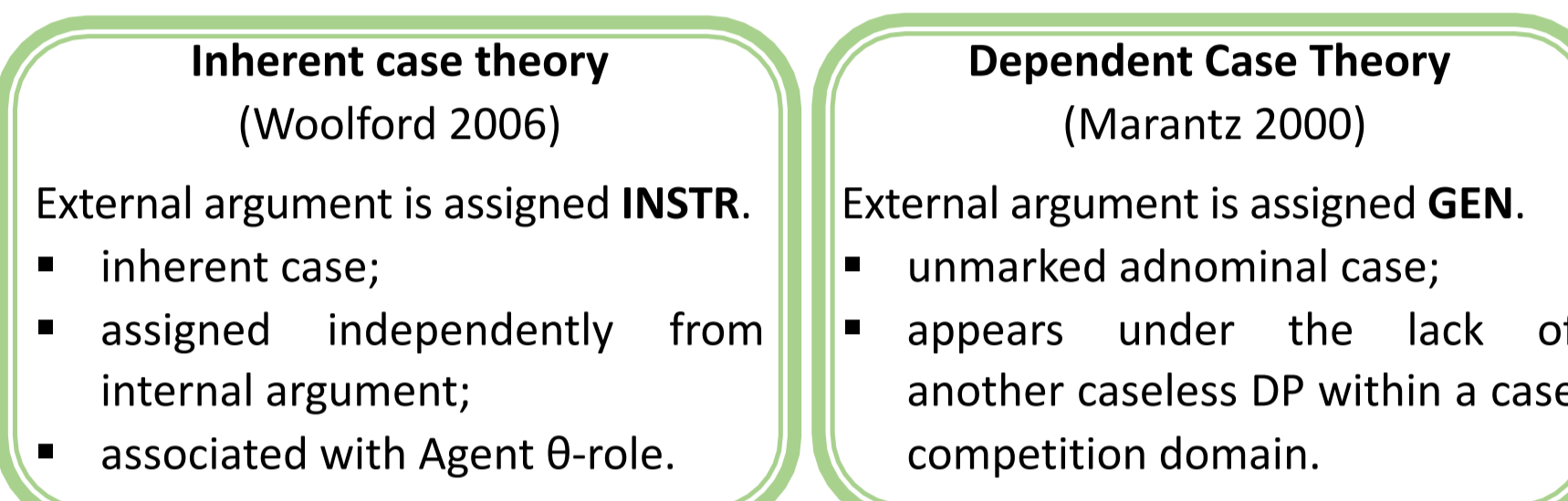
2. intransitives   →   external arguments are commonly marked GEN.

3. unegratives   →   external arguments are marked INSTR significantly rarely, but such cases exist.

4. transitives   →   ergative-posessive model is confirmed.

INSTR case marking (percentage %)

What case is predicted?

(Gerasimova, Lyutikova, Pereltsvaig 2016, forthcoming): distinct predictions about case marking for nominalizations whose internal argument is lexically governed.

Inherent case theory
(Woolford 2006)
External argument is assigned **INSTR**.
- inherent case;
- assigned independently from internal argument;
- associated with Agent θ-role.

Dependent Case Theory
(Marantz 2000)
External argument is assigned **GEN**.
- unmarked adnominal case;
- appears under the lack of another caseless DP within a case competition domain.

⇨ each theory can justify only one alternative.

Types of intralingual variation

Variation within one language falls into two options of variance

variants are distributed among the speakers;

variants coexist within the grammatical scope of one individual.

Which model of intralingual variation is represented in the case of Russian event nominalizations?
- If the ability to mark the external argument with INSTR is individual, then the two modalities of case assignment are distributed among speakers.
- If both strategies are equally available to any speaker, the case assignment mechanisms have to allow the choice between GEN and INSTR.
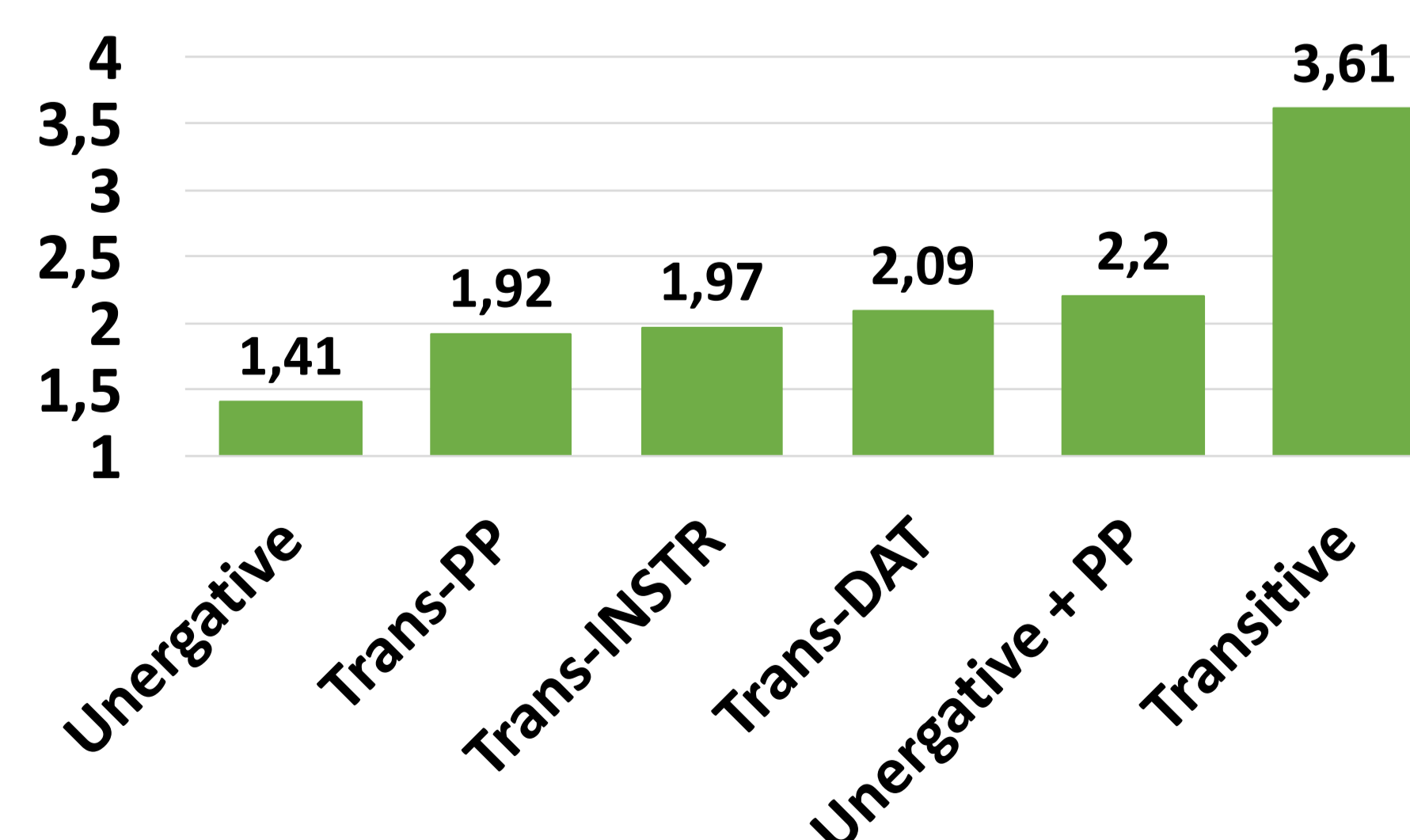
Experiment #2

Hypothesis #2: The two modalities of case assignment in Russian nominalizations are distributed among the speakers.

- 78 respondents;
- evaluation of the grammaticality of event nominal constructions with external argument marked GEN or INSTR using the Likert scale.

Results of the experiment #2:

1.1. transitives   →   INSTR is most acceptable;
1.2. stems with lexical government → INSTR is less acceptable;
1.3. unergatives   →   INSTR is least acceptable;

2. PP-modification of unergative stems significantly increases acceptability of the external argument in INSTR.

3. Russian native speakers are inconsistent in using INSTR.

Acceptability of INSTR case marking (mean values)

Experiment #1
Two clusters of speakers depending on how frequently they **used** INSTR.
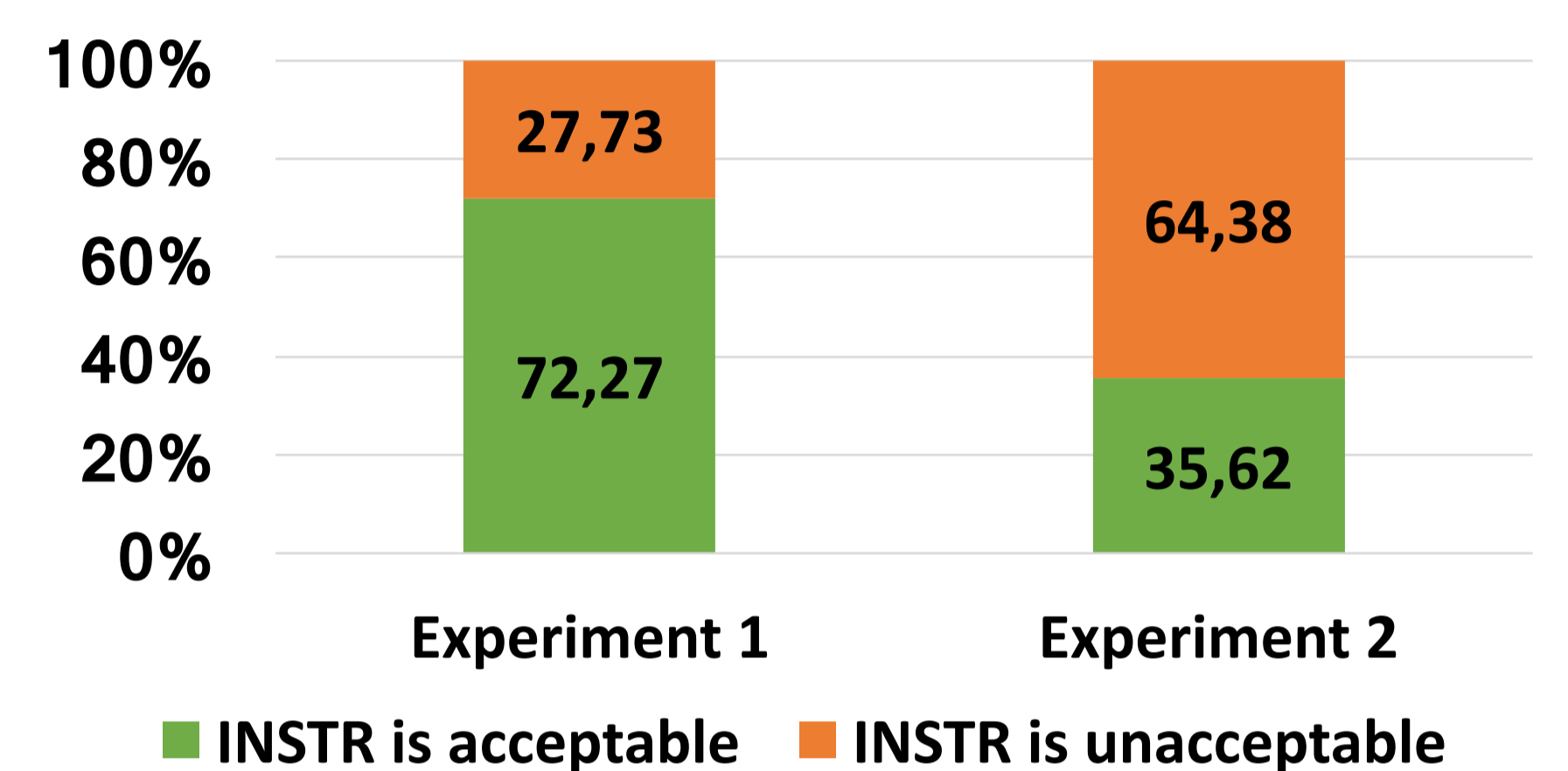
Experiment #2
Two clusters of speakers depending on how they **evaluated** INSTR.

Speakers' evaluation of the INSTR acceptability is not consistent with the grouping based on actual usage in speech.

⇨ **The two strategies of case assignment to arguments of nominalization are equally available to any speaker.**

Respondents' grouping based on INSTR acceptability

Analysis

Nominalizers can embed syntactic structures of variable size. (Kratzer 1996)
Causative-inchoative alternation in Russian (Tatevosov 2008):

  VP is nominalized   →   intransitive interpretation
  vP is nominalized →   transitive interpretation

Applying the same approach to nominalizations:

1. transitives   →   the functional structure **contains vP** (both internal and external arguments are present)
2. unaccusatives   →   **no vP** (no external argument)
3. transitive-LEX + unergatives → differential case marking is determined by the amount of structure that is nominalized

| Nominalizer embeds vP | → | external argument is assigned INSTR |
| Nominalizer embeds VP | → | external argument is assigned GEN |

PP-modification increases the acceptability of INSTR within unergatives. This argues for the greater amount of syntactic structure.

⇨ **In Russian the amount of structure that is nominalized becomes one of the parameters of intralingual variation.**

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