NE-CLITIZATION AS UNACCUSATIVITY DIAGNOSTIC IN CATALAN

CLÀUDIA MARTÍNEZ HERNÁNDEZ[1]

Abstract. This paper focuses on the syntactic behavior of partitive clitic *ne* in Catalan in relation with unaccusative and unergative verbs. While the clitic is prescriptively restricted to subjects of unaccusatives in Catalan, this study explores the possibility of the clitic serving as main argument of unergative verbs, as it has been noted in Italian. The research includes a thorough exploration of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis and the proposed diagnostics, then, through a series of experimental studies with native speakers, the production and acceptability of the clitic in different contexts are evaluated. The results reveal that a significant number of participants accept the use of *ne* with unergative verbs. The findings support the conclusion that the partitive's distribution may be more flexible than assumed, complicating the rigid dichotomy proposed by the UH. In sum, traditional approaches to verb classification in Romance linguistics are challenged, paving the way to further research of the clitic cross-linguistically.

Keywords: partitivity, unaccusativity, ne-cliticization, Catalan clitic *en*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Latin exhibited adverb *inde* meaning 'from there' which has been retained in some Romance languages in the form of clitic *ne/en*[2] (Giurgea 2012). This clitic is found in languages such as French, Italian or Catalan. However, not all of these languages have received equal attention in research regarding the clitic. While there is a comprehensive body of literature on *ne*-cliticization in Italian, research on Catalan is limited, none of which is empirically based.

Catalan is an Occitano-Romance language that is co-official with Spanish in the autonomous communities of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands. It is also spoken in Andorra, parts of France and Alghero, in Italy. According to the most recent data, there are approximately 10 million speakers.

The clitic in Catalan serves several functions: it can be used for the cliticization of a prepositional verbal complement, the cliticization of an adnominal complement or the cliticization of a quantified noun. This study will focus on the last function: the quantification of a noun as main argument of an intransitive verb (1).

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[1] Translation and Language Science Department, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, claudia.martinez@upf.edu

[2] Clitic in Catalan can adopt different phonological representations depending on the linguistic context. The forms *ne/en/n'* all relate to the same partitive clitic.

(1)   Ja   hi ha   molts turistes   i a l'estiu   **n**'arribaran més.
        Already there are many tourists and in the summer **en**-arrive more
        'There are already a lot of tourists and in the summer more **of them** will arrive'

Regarding the quantification of nouns, the Catalan prescriptive grammars (IEC, 2018) restricts its use to either the object of a transitive verb or the subject of an unaccusative verb. Consequently, speakers must be cognizant of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis —a theoretical framework that categorizes intransitive verbs into two groups— in order to use the clitic grammatically.

While this distinction is also applicable to the analogous Italian clitic, substantial evidence indicates that the partitive clitic cannot differentiate between these two verb classes (Mackenzie, 2006). However, there is notable paucity of comprehensive research on the Catalan clitic. Furthermore, existing studies on the Catalan clitic either do not contest the notion of the unaccusative status of the verb or fail to accurately elucidate its distribution pattern. The clitic, along with numerous other elements of the Catalan language, has often been assumed to function similarly to its counterparts in Italian or Spanish. Given that Catalan is a distinct language, it warrants independent investigation.

This study aims to test the hypothesis that the partitive clitic can function as an argument of unergative verbs like in (2) through a carefully designed experiment.

(2)   Avui a la fàbrica **en** treballen tres, de dones.
        Today in the factory **ne** work three, of women.
        'Today at the factory three women are working'

The structure of this paper will be as follows:

First, there will be a characterization of the construction in Catalan, including an overview of the explanations that other authors have regarding the role of the partitive *en* as a subject in unergative constructions. As previously mentioned, the Unaccusativity Theory (UH) is a key issue for this paper, and it will be addressed in section 3. The Unaccusativity Theory is crucial for understanding *ne*-cliticization because it is presumed to offer a theoretical basis for why some verbs allow *ne* cliticization while others do not. However, relying solely on this reasoning could lead to a circular argument: one might assume a verb is unaccusative because it occurs with *ne* cliticization, and then argue that the presence of the partitive is due to the verb being unaccusative.

There are several reasons why it is essential to discuss other diagnostics for Unaccusativity Theory, not only for this study but also for any research involving constructions used as tests for UH. By cross-referencing multiple diagnostics, we can accurately identify which verbs consistently behave as unaccusatives. Additionally, using multiple diagnostics provides a comprehensive understanding of verbal behavior across languages, allowing for the identification of verbs that exhibit mixed behavior or are context sensitive. Considering this variability results in richer data and enables us to draw stronger empirical conclusions, particularly in experimental settings like the one used in this study.

Following that, I will describe the experiment conducted, beginning with the methodology and design, followed by the presentation of the results. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion that synthesizes the findings and their implications.

2. PARTITIVE-EN IN CATALAN

In this section, I will describe Catalan partitive-*en* and summarize key findings from previous research. The construction under consideration has partitive meaning, which is typically defined as complex noun phrases referring to a part of a whole. The assumed structure for partitives in Catalan is 'Q+de+DP' where Q represents the quantifier. In these structures, certain restrictions apply to quantifiers that do not occur in quantitative structures (Martí Girbau, 2010). Specifically, quantifiers in partitive structures require a [+Spec] feature; for instance, quantifiers in set partitives must denote individuals, and not imprecise amounts the same way entity partitives must denote portions, and, again, not amounts.

This partitive construction requires an internal DP, which can be either definite or indefinite as long as it has a specific nominal projection. The partitive cannot be preceded by a definite determiner and its interpretation hinges on the relationship between the quantifier and the DP.

Leaving aside discourse factors, it has been argued that *en*-partitive can function as subject of unergative verbs, but only in the presence of a locative (Torrego, 1989). However, this proposal is problematic when considering sentences that are deemed acceptable yet do not feature a locative. It has also been proposed (Todolí, 2002) that unergatives are compatible with the partitive as subject when the sentence takes form of what is termed locative existential construction, as in (3).

(3)   Allà   **n**'hi treballen molts. [Immigrants]
        There **en**+hi work many. [Immigrants]
        'Many [immigrants] work there.'
                                        (Example from Todolí, 2002)

The locative existential construction is described as a sentence that features a prepositional phrase or an adverbial with locative value. In (3), Catalan pronoun *hi* can be seen, which replaces adverbial complements, in this case a locative one. Again, this is a highly restricted context that does not encompass the majority of sentences produced with unergatives. Another condition posited in the literature is that for the *en*-partitive to serve as subject of unergative verbs, the utterance must convey rhematic information, that is, introducing new information.

(4)   Vam passar dues setmanes a Mallorca. No, crec   que **en** vam passar tres.
        (We) spent two   weeks   in Majorca. No, (I) think that **ne** (we) spent three.
        'We spent two weeks in Majorca. No, I think we spent three.'
                                        (Example from Todolí, 2002)

The notion of new information in relation to a clitic, whose nature is anaphoric, remains unclear in the literature, despite being highlighted as a central issue. Todolí (2002) also suggests that the subject must act as the semantic patient of the action and appear postverbally. In example (4), Todolí provides a pair of sentences where the quantifier is the new information, suggesting that the concept of rheme might be limited to that accompanying quantifier.

In contrast, Rigau (2013) claimes that some intransitive verbs in Catalan can exhibit dual behavior, functioning as both unaccusatives and unergatives. These verbs, termed verbs

of local movement, alternate due to the alleged presence of a silent preposition that alters the verb's structure, making unergatives behave as unaccusatives. However, this proposal faces empirical challenges, as the said presence of a silent preposition cannot be tested and it is not predictable.

From a syntactic perspective, Rigau argues that the preposition assigns both a specifier (the clitic) and a complement (a NP), represented underneath.

[V [clitic P NP]]

In this construction, the verb selects as a complement a reduced phrase, with the silent preposition serving as the predicate and relating two elements: a locative clitic (specifier) and an NP (complement). This preposition forms a complex predicate, providing its arguments. As a result, the NP becomes the verb's complement and receives partitive case, cliticized by *en*. This responsibility for case assignment lies with the preposition rather than the verb's and it is assigned to non-defined NPs. However, the incorporation of the silent preposition gives the predicate a complex stative existential value, something that reduces the agentivity of the local movement verb, according to Rigau. Unfortunately, this would only explain the phenomenon in the so-called local movement verbs. In order to identify these verbs, the author states that what is characteristic to this category is that they have a transitive correlate with the verb *fer*+N (*make*+N) like *cridar* and *fer crits*.

Some of Rigau's assumptions do not reflect the reality of *en*-clitic use and therefore weaken her hypothesis. For instance, she opposes unaccusative with agentive behavior, yet fails to account for unaccusative verbs that can indeed express agentive actions. Additionally, she argues that genitive case should be distinguished from partitive case, even though both can be represented by *en*. An example of this purported genitive case is shown in (5):

(5)   **En** té molta de son
        En has a lot of sleep
        'Of sleepiness, he has a lot'
                    (Example from Rigau, 2013)

The example of *en* in (5) is expressing a large quantity of a noun (in this case *son*, 'sleepiness') in Catalan which, surprisingly, should be analyzed as an example of a partitive rather than genitive case.

Even though it is not a study strictly on the clitic, within the LFG framework, Alsina and Yang (2018) conclude that the argument of intransitive verbs must always bear nominative case, regardless of as a subject or object. This conclusion would explain why *ne*-cliticization occurs in object position but also as subject of both unergative and unaccusative verbs.

In summary, aside from the formalities of partitive structures and their quantifiers, initially described, we have observed that partitive-*ne* in Catalan has traditionally been considered grammatical as a subject only with unaccusative verbs. However, since the early formulations of the Unaccusativity Hypothesis (UH), there has been recognition in the literature of the acceptability of utterances where the clitic serves as subject of unergatives. These instances, however, are often treated as exceptional cases, limited to specific contexts which precludes the formulation of a predictive theory. Although no comprehensive study has been conducted on the behavior of the clitic, one can observe how the authors hint the

complex interplay the clitic seems to have between syntax, verb classes, information structure and other discourse-related factors. What remains undeniable is that considering partitive-*ne* as the main argument of unergatives challenges the traditional boundaries outlined by the Unaccusativity Hypothesis. While we have discussed how the partitive is allegedly restricted by the UH, it is equally important to examine the inverse approach, given that the partitive is also used as diagnostic for unaccusativity. Further exploration on the UH and *ne*-cliticization is therefore imperative for this matter.

3. THE UNACCUSATIVITY HYPOTHESIS

Partitive-*ne* has been strongly associated in the literature of both Catalan and Italian to the notion of deep object coming from the Unaccusativity Hypothesis. Perlmutter (1978) (later followed by Burzio, 1986) introduced the UH within the Relational Grammar framework. This hypothesis proposed the division of intransitive verbs in two categories: unergatives and unaccusatives. While both groups involve a single argument, the syntactic positioning of this argument differs. This argument in unergative verbs is external; therefore, its behaviour is said to resemble that of the subject of transitive verbs. In contrast, the argument of unaccusatives is considered to be located in the internal branch of the syntactic tree and exhibits behavior similar to that of the object of transitive verbs. The clitic *en* is claimed to be restricted to this latter group.

Although this division initially seems purely syntactic, Perlmutter also noted semantic distinctions between the two groups. Unergative verbs are typically associated to the notion of activity and can be subdivided into volitional (*to work*) and involuntary body processes (*to sneeze*). Conversely, unaccusative verbs encompass a broader range of semantic categories, all unified by their involuntary nature. These include predicates where the subject is an inherent patient (*to fall*), verbs of involuntary sensory emission (*to shine*) and existential verbs (*to exist*). Durative actions and aspectual predicates (*to continue*) also belong to the unaccusative class.

Despite its foundational role in syntactic theory, the Unaccusativity Hypothesis has not been universally accepted as a binary distinction. Several scholars have argued that unaccusativity is a gradient notion (Blake, 1990; Hopper and Thompson, 1980), with verb classes arranged along a hierarchy based on specific features, such as volition. Pragmatic considerations (Blake, 1990), which allow for the possibility of sentence interpretation in imaginary worlds, further blur the line between unergatives and unaccusatives. Consequently, the theoretical basis for the distribution of the partitive *en* is not as stable as initially thought.

Even when unergativity and unaccusativity are treated as a dichotomy, the diagnostics proposed to identify unaccusative verbs are inconsistent, both within individual languages and cross-linguistically. These discrepancies, known as unaccusativity mismatches (Dowty, 1991, among others), have been addressed through two main approaches: syntactic and semantic. The syntactic approach, initially defended by Rosen (1984), argues that no single semantic property unites all unaccusative verbs across languages. the meaning of verbs cannot solely predict the classification of the verb. In this view, also defended by Burzio (1986), verb meaning alone cannot predict a verb's classification, as demonstrated by the differing behavior of semantically identical verbs across languages. For instance, bodily

process verbs in Italian, such as *russare* (snore) and *arrossire* (blush), exhibit contrasting behavior — one as unergative and the other as unaccusative.

By contrast, the semantic approach, as articulated by Van Valin (1990), rejects the idea that unaccusativity is encoded syntactically. Instead, it posits that intransitive verb classes can be differentiated on semantic grounds. Among other arguments, he argues that the "undergoer" is distinct from the "direct object" role in multi-argument constructions like *to eat*, where the object may be a direct object but not an undergoer. The non-homogeneity of intransitive verbs stems from the compatibility of verbs with certain types of meanings. According to this approach, the distinction between unergative and unaccusative verbs reflects semantic constraints rather than syntactic features.

In the following paragraphs, I will analyze several diagnostics for unaccusativity, particularly those applied to Catalan. One of the most prominent diagnostics for Catalan is precisely *ne*-cliticization, which, according to the literature, it is supposed to draw the line between unaccusativites and unergatives. However, as noted earlier, the use of *ne* in Catalan has been claimed to be limited to unaccusative contexts. To avoid this circular reasoning, additional diagnostics for unaccusativity, albeit imperfect, will be examined.

Esther Torrego's work (1989) has been recognized as providing foundational diagnostics for unaccusativity in Spanish, a claim acknowledged by scholars such as Alexiadou *et al.* (2004). Her primary argument is that bare plurals in postverbal position serve as key diagnostic for identifying unaccusative verbs in Spanish. According to her, only unaccusatives can felicitously appear with bare plurals in this position.

(6)   a) Pasan trenes
        Pass 3-p trains
        'Trains pass'
        b) *Duermen animals
        Sleep 3-p. animals
        'Animals sleep'
                  (Examples from Torrego, 1989)

Torrego further argues that bare plurals serve as a diagnostic analogous to *ne*-cliticization in Catalan. However, this affirmation is seriously flawed. Spanish lacks the *ne* clitic, and thus, equating the distribution across the two languages can lead to erroneous conclusions. In fact, adding a locative clitic makes (6b) grammatical so the acceptability of the sentence is not, again, exclusively determined by the verb class. Torrego acknowledges the locative alternation and also claims that in Spanish it is a natural and productive process, albeit one constrained by the presence of a locative. It is also mentioned that the locative must be specific.

Ortega-Santos (2005) critiques Torrego's data, asserting that they cannot be generalized. Specifically, unaccusative verbs without adverbials cannot license bare NPs. McNally and Fontana (1995) argue that the syntactic behavior of bare plurals should not be considered a reliable diagnostic of unaccusativity, as their grammaticality is determined by information structure rather than verb class.

Deschrijver (2012) also highlights the problematic relationship between bare plural subjects and unaccusatives. Although these NPs were initially believed to be exclusive to unaccusative verbs, closer analysis reveals this is not the case. Deschrijver then examines the contexts where the mismatches occur, concluding that locative inversion is responsible for

many of the inconsistencies, thus aligning with Torrego's findings. However, Deschrijver diverges from Torrego by dismissing unaccusativity as the determining factor for bare plural distribution, instead attributing these phenomena to pragmatic constraints.

Locatives are frequently mentioned in the literature as crucial elements in UH, though not typically treated as diagnostics in their own right. Rather, locatives are viewed as a mechanism to resolve mismatches in diagnostics. Specifically, a locative element can cause an unergative verb to behave as an unaccusative, thereby preserving the integrity of the hypothesis. Levin and Rappaport (1995) explored locative inversion in English and found no connection between this construction and unaccusative verbs. However, they did note that the set of verbs appearing in locative inversion contexts was both too small and too large to draw definite conclusions. Locatives in existential utterances, as proposed for Catalan, have been explored in the previous section.

Though auxiliary selection is irrelevant for Catalan given that it uses a single auxiliary verb, it has been a central diagnostic in languages like Italian. However, mismatches with this diagnostic have been noted as well since the inception of the UH. In many Romance and Germanic languages, unaccusatives select the auxiliary *be* and unergatives select *have* (Alexiadou *et al.* 2004). Grimshaw (1986) questioned the validity of auxiliary selection as an unaccusativity diagnostic because, at the very least, it does not always yield predictable results. According to Rosen (1984), verbs from the same semantic category in a given language may not select the same auxiliary, and the same verb may choose different auxiliaries across languages.

Auxiliary selection, therefore, does not provide a stable criterion for distinguishing between unergative and unaccusative verbs. To address these inconsistencies, Antonella Sorace (2000) proposed the Auxiliary Selection Hierarchy, which ranks verbs based on semantic variables and predicts their auxiliary selection. Verbs at one end of the hierarchy consistently select *to be* while those at the other end select *to have*. The verbs in the middle of the hierarchy exhibit more fluid behavior, therefore, Sorace's proposal supports the notion that unaccusativity is a gradable characteristic, as noted by Hopper and Thompson (1980). Sorace's impactful work resonated in a lot of unaccusativity-based research, challenging the stability of one of the most widely accepted diagnostics. From this, scholars like Baker (2013) started to challenge the idea that unaccusativity even exists as a unified phenomenon across different languages or within a given one.

Dutch was one of the first languages to be extensively studied in relation to the UH. Annie Zaenen (1990) analyzed unaccusative verbs in Dutch, arguing that the UH has often been used as a vague term to explain contrasts between verbs that cannot be adequately addressed by the unergative/unaccusative distinction alone. In fact, she advocates for a deeper exploration of the interaction between syntax and semantics, believing that neither domain alone can account for the contrasts.

In summary, these lines have put into perspective not only the complexity of *ne*-cliticization as a construction but also the broader challenges associated with the Unaccusativity Theory and its related diagnostics. The goal was also to demonstrate why is it problematic to rely on alternative diagnostics to resolve the circular definition of *ne*-cliticization, as each proposed diagnostic has presented issues since their inception. In other words, the constructions proposed as diagnostics do not yield consistent verb classifications and, therefore, cannot serve as reliable diagnostics for the same linguistic phenomenon. A closer examination of the UH reveals that it fails to provide a uniform

framework across different languages and verb types. The reliance on diagnostics such as bare plural distribution, auxiliary selection and the same *ne*-cliticization shows inconsistency, within Catalan and cross-linguistically. Scholars have emphasized the probable gradient nature of unaccusativity as well as its context-dependency, rather than treating it as a binary distinction. As Grimshaw (1986) noted, the inability to definitively categorize unaccusative verbs represents a concerning gap in linguistic theory, taking into consideration the vast amount of research done relying on the allegedly binary verbal division. If we cannot determine which verbs are unaccusative, we cannot explain why are they such either, and consequently, we cannot predict their syntactic behavior. This unpredictability undermines theory's potential to offer deep insights into the relationship between syntax and semantics,

3.1 NE-cliticization as a diagnostic

This section will explore the existing literature on *ne*-cliticization as a diagnostic within the context of unaccusativity, including Italian given that the majority of relevant studies have been conducted in this language. As previously mentioned, most research done on Catalan tend to assume the unaccusative-unergative distinction as established facts with respect to the distribution of the clitic

Mackenzie (2006) provides an extensive analysis as to why the literature on French clitics should not be equated with that of Italian or Catalan. While the general characterization of cliticization across the three languages might seem comparable, Italian and Catalan are null-subject languages with high productivity in null subject-style inversion, whereas French presents expletive inversion.

As discussed, *ne*-cliticization is one of the key diagnostics proposed to distinguish unaccusative verbs (Belleti and Rizzi, 1981; Burzio, 1986). More specifically, Belleti and Rizzi (1981) argued that unergative postverbal subjects were right-adjoined to the VP and concluded that *ne* could never extract from that position. Therefore, they posited that ne-cliticization with unergative verbs was impossible under syntactic reasoning. Later, Belleti (1991) revised this suggesting that the extraction site should be spec-FP. However, Mackenzie (2006) points out that this is not a possible extracting site.

Saccon (1995) strongly advises researchers against relying on ne-cliticization as a test for unaccusativity. In his analysis, Burzio (1986) described *ne* as an object clitic, arguing that it originates in clitic position. However, this analysis does not account for the distribution patterns observed in more recent studies like the present one.

Ne-cliticization has been closely associated with the auxiliary selection test in languages with split intransitivity. Lonzi (1985) presented data demonstrating that these two diagnostics are not necessarily related. More relevant to this study, Lonzi's data already challenged the validity of *ne*-cliticization as a diagnostic. He presented examples from Italian where *ne* appears as subject of unergative verbs and examples where *ne* is not felicitous with unaccusative verbs that have animate subjects. Delia Bentley (2011) addresses the data presented by Lonzi, attempting to account for these examples. She argues that the cases identified by Lonzi are determined by information structure and maintains that the partitive construction remains a useful diagnostic for distinguishing between unaccusatives and unergatives. According to her analysis, unaccusatives are compatible with both narrow and wide focus, whereas unergative subjects can only align with wide focus. Regarding Lonzi's data, Bentley acknowledges that these examples pose significant challenges to the

Unaccusative Hypothesis and are unexpected. She notes that Lonzi attributes a value of change and novelty to *ne*, suggesting that this construction may be licensed by particular types of information structure. Nonetheless, Bentley concludes that the set of unergatives capable of cliticizing with *ne* is too large for *ne*-cliticization to be considered a reliable diagnostic for unaccusativity.

As has been demonstrated, when further exploring the Unaccusativity Hypothesis, it becomes evident that the interplay between semantics and syntax requires a more flexible theoretical approach, moving away from rigid categorizations such as those proposed by the UH. Consequently, partitive *ne*, does not serve as a definitive marker of unaccusativity but rather provides insight into the intricate syntactic-semantic relationship.

4. EXPERIMENT

4.1 Method and design

To study the phenomenon of *ne*-cliticization, an experiment consisting of two parts was conducted with native Catalan speakers. A total of 87 participants were involved, of which 54 women and 33 men. Their educational backgrounds varied, ranging from primary education to university graduates, ensuring a diverse representation of linguistic formal training. Additionally, the participants came from various regions where Catalan is spoken, namely, Barcelona, Girona, Tarragona and the Balearic Islands. This geographical variety was essential to avoid potential dialectal differences in the clitic usage and explore possible regional variation.

The first part of the experiment consisted of a fill-in-the-blanks task, in which the participants were asked to complete sentences using the elements they deemed necessary. The only instruction provided was that they had to use the verb specified in brackets, as seen in example (7):

(7)   Ahir   van treballar deu persones però demà   no sé quants ____ . (Treballar)
        Yesterday   worked   ten people   but tomorrow not know how-many___   (Work)
        'Yesterday ten people worked but tomorrow I don't know how many _____ (Work)'

This design was crucial because it allowed participants to produce natural utterances without explicit mention of the clitic ne, ensuring that any instance (if any) arose from the participants' own instincts. Consequently, any instance of ne-cliticization in a context traditionally considered ungrammatical is particularly valuable, as it reflects genuine linguistic behavior. The task included eight sentences featuring both unergative and unaccusative verbs (e.g., to work, to act, to dance, to grow, to pass, to leave, to sing, to run), as well as five distractors. The inclusion of both verb types allowed for a critical examination of whether *ne* is truly determined by the unaccusativity status of the verb.

The second part of the experiment was an acceptability judgement task, where participants were asked to evaluate the grammaticality of sentences (binary answer) featuring the clitic as the primary argument of various intransitive verbs. The clitic appeared in combination with a variety of contexts, particularly with different types of quantifiers as an approach to a different variable that might affect the clitic's acceptability. This section

allowed for a deeper exploration of the speakers' grammatical intuition and provided insight into how the clitic is perceived in a broader variety of contexts.

The selection of verbs was based on previous literature that already categorized verbs as either unaccusative or unergative. The verbs were carefully selected for Catalan, it was considered that all verbs were common and of a similar neutral register. Importantly, the author's own beliefs and conclusions on the unaccusative-unergative distinction were not imposed; instead, the categorization adhered strictly to the mentioned literature in this paper. The full set of sentences and their categorizations can be found in the annex, allowing readers to review the specific material used.

This dual-method-approach, combining production and judgement task, enhances the depth of the findings, given that it provides both intuitive and reflective insights into *ne*-cliticization patterns. Perhaps, the most significant characteristic of this methodology is the spontaneous appearance of the clitic in contexts traditionally considered ungrammatical. The fact that the participants were not biased to use it highlights the relevance of their natural linguistic intuitions.

4.2 Results

The results obtained from the study largely support our initial hypothesis. Table 1 presents the outcomes of the first task, showing the distribution of clitic production across different verbs and their corresponding percentages. It is important to highlight that the prescriptive influence regarding the use of the clitic in Catalan is significant. Many participants noted their awareness of their responses being normatively incorrect according to standard grammar and, still, they chose the answers that felt more natural to them. The main conclusion of the first task is that, as expected, there is a divergence between prescriptive norms and real language use. This means *en* can cliticize the main argument of a verb classified as unergative and, therefore, the partitive does not make a distribution adhering to the unaccusativity distinction. The results do reveal variation across the different verbs which warrants further examination. Surprisingly, the production of the clitic with the verb *créixer* (to grow), a typically classified unaccusative verb, was nearly identical to the production rates of the unergative verbs *córrer* (to run) and *ballar* (to dance).

One of the most intriguing results involves the verbs with the lowest percentage of production, namely *aprovar* (to pass) and *cantar* (to sing), both unergatives. A plausible explanation for this case is that these verbs, while used intransitively in this study, can function as transitives in other contexts. As a result, verbs like *aprovar* or *cantar* may lead the participants to subconsciously anticipate an object (e.g., an exam or a song) that can lower the production of the clitic for the subject.

Table 1

Percentage of production of the clitic in task 1

Treballar (To work)	Actuar (To act)	Ballar (To dance)	Créixer (To grow)	Aprovar (To pass)	Sortir (To leave)	Cantar (To sing)	Córrer (To run)
71%	**65%**	**75%**	**76%**	**51%**	**82%**	**55%**	**76%**

The second task, which aimed to test the acceptability of *ne* in various contexts disregarding the UH, had similarly significant results. In this part, the selected verbs included both unergatives and unaccusatives, although this was no longer a control variable. Notably, all instances had a minimum of 69% acceptability. Among the variation observed, it can be addressed that specific quantifiers such as a numeral and 'none' have slightly higher acceptability rates. However the significance of these differences requires further research to determine whether they are a reflection of a pattern or it is just mere variability.

Table 2

Percentage of acceptability of the clitic in task 2

Clitic context	Percentage of acceptability
Post-verbal indefinite pronoun *alguns* (some of them)	69% – 72%
Post-verbal numeral *dos* (two)	98%
Post-verbal pronoun *cap* (none)	85%
Post-verbal indefinite pronoun *molts* (many)	71%

There are several implications that stem from these results. First is, that the findings challenge the strict division made by the Unaccusative Hypothesis as proposed in the hypothesis. If both verbal categories can perfectly cliticize with *ne*, the syntactic distinction between both kinds of verb may need rethinking. As a consequence, we might as well conclude that the licensing conditions for ne-cliticization are actually broader than what was previously thought. Argument structure is no longer the sole factor that determines its distribution and some new elements should be taken into consideration. The results of spontaneous production are considerably high in all verbs considering the different circumstances I previously mentioned. First and foremost, when doing a fill-in-the-blanks task one might get the most salient answer from the participant which does not mean other answers are not equally valid, especially the cases with unergatives that are considered ungrammatical and therefore not produced in media or literature and will not be the first instance accessible to speakers. Taking these factors into consideration and also considering the ambitransitive status of the two verbs that got a lower production, the utterances got significant production of the clitics with both unaccusatives and unergatives. The acceptance task results boost our hypothesis and implications as well with a minimum percentage of almost 70%. Disregarding the verb class, in the second experiment we observe slight variations on acceptability with different amounts expressed, specifically, that specific amounts like numbers including zero (none) seem to work better. However, this is just an approach into testing structural factors that might affect the clitic. The main conclusion we obtain from these results is our confirmed hypothesis that the clitic's distribution does not depend on the unaccusativity status of the verb and that its acceptability is likely to be sensitive to discourse and pragmatics.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper examined partitive clitic *en* in Catalan as main argument of intransitive verbs. As noted in the introduction, prescriptive grammar in Catalan traditionally restricts the use of partitive-*ne* to objects of transitive verbs and subject of unaccusative verbs. However,

these findings reveal a deep asymmetry between the normative grammar and the actual linguistic intuitions observed among speakers.

The main outcome of this study is that the use of the partitive does not hinge solely on the unaccusativity status of the verb. This observation raises critical questions about the validity of Unaccusativity Hypothesis itself. The UH has already faced criticism across various frameworks and languages. It was originally proposed to draw a clear division among verbs based on their syntactic and semantic properties, it seeks to categorize verbs in a manner that extends to the constructions, including partitive *ne*. However, this study demonstrates that the UH is unable to provide such clear cut in verbs crosslinguistically nor can it grasp the vast variation and creativity of human language. Not only that, it fails to determine the distribution of the said diagnostics, constructions that merit independent investigation.

Having established that the UH does not explain the distribution of *ne*, there is a vast range of possibilities. In this experiment, participants were asked to produce and accept sentences featuring the clitic with minimal context. This minimizes the likelihood that the partitive's usage is contingent on external elements suggested in literature, such as silent prepositions or locatives. Previous studies had repeatedly associated locatives as enhancers of the use of *ne* due to its relationship with an existential presentation of the verb, which allegedly makes unergative verbs, exhibit unaccusative behavior. The present results challenge this assertion, as we can observe the high rates of acceptability and production of voluntary action verb, thus disregarding existential constructions or low agentivity as determinants for the construction.

This study paves the way for multiple lines of future research. The findings have indicated significant issues with the Unaccusativity Hypothesis, suggesting a need for reevaluation as a whole. However, perhaps the most intriguing part of this research lies in its implications for the understanding of partitive clitics. These results open up the possibility of gaining new insights into the range argument types that a partitive can represent, and how partitivity interacts with the semantics of other elements within an utterance. Future studies could benefit from a larger sample of verbs to examine how the partitive interacts with different quantifiers and levels of referentiality. In sum, this research challenges long-standing assumptions across several areas of linguistics and offers new opportunities to explore morphosyntactic flexibility in Catalan, as well as other Romance languages.

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ANNEX

1. **Sentences of the first task**
   a) Ahir van treballar deu persones però demà no sé quants. (Treballar)
   Yesterday ten people worked but tomorrow I don't know how many. (To work).
   Unergative
   b) En aquesta sala hi han actuat molts actors famosos i ves a saber quants més en els propers anys. (Actuar)
   In this theatre many famous actors have acted and who knows how many more in the following years. (To act)
   Unergative

c) En aquest concurs de ball hi ha molts concursants. Fins ara han ballat dotze parelles i encara _____ quatre més. (Ballar)
In this dancing competition there are a lot of participants. Up until now twelve couples danced and still ____ four more. (to dance)
Unergative

d) Al jardí de casa hi han crescut dos pins aquest any. _____ algun a casa teva? (Créixer)
At my home's garden two pines grew this year. _____ any at your house? (To grow)
Unaccusative

e) A l'examen de recuperació, s'hi han presentat trenta estudiants, però només quinze. (Aprovar)
At the recovery exam, thirty students attended it, but only fifteen. (To pass)
Unergative

f) Normalment surten cinc trens però hi ha vaga. Saps quants avui? (Sortir)
Usually five trains leave but there is a strike. Do you know how many ___here? (To leave)
Unaccusative

g) El festival dels nens va amb retard, encara no cap. (Cantar)
The kids' festival is running late, still no none. (To sing)
Unergative

h) Hi havia molts incrits a la cursa però no m'han dit quants finalment. (Córrer)
There was a lot of people signed into the race but they haven't told me how many in the end. (To run)
Unergative

2. Sentences of the second task

a) Molts dels accidentats ja s'han recuperat del tot, però encara en coixegen alguns.
Many of the injured made a full recovery but some of them still have a limp.

b) Estàs cansat? Ja en som dos!
Are you tired? That makes two!

c) Quan van arribar els serveis mèdics per donar assistència als ferits, encara en sagnaven alguns.
When the medical team arrived to assist the injured, some of them still bled.

d) Hi ha pocs grangers, no n'hauria de plegar cap.
There are few farmers, none of them should quit.

e) Venen molts nens a aquest parc? – Sí, aquí n'hi juguen molts.
Do a lot of kids come to the park? –Yes, many of them play here.