Bring the Functions of Russian -sja Together

The Russian verbal enclitic -sja is known as a ‘reflexive’ morpheme due to its historical development from the reflexive pronoun. However, recent work has illustrated that it has many other uses (Ahn 2006, 2012; Fehrmann et. al 2014; Haspelmath 1993 among others). Some of its proposed functions, in addition to reflexive include reciprocal, anticausative, passive, habitual, antipassive and characterization. However, there is as yet no unified syntactic analysis of the various functions of -sja.

My analysis is partially unified. It is unified in the fact that it analyzes -sja as a functional head which signals intransitivization of the verb. Intransitivization clearly must affect the argument and thematic structure of the verb; however, -sja is underspecified as to how it affects said structure. The data indicates that -sja can affects the argument/thematic structure in all three logical possible ways, giving rise to the different constructions in which -sja is found.

First, -sja can remove an internal argument, while simultaneously causing coreference of the AGENT and the THEME. This can give rise to both reflexive and reciprocal constructions, as seen in (1) and (2), respectively. Secondly, -sja can remove the external argument along with the AGENT theta role, giving rise to an anticausative construction, as seen in (3). Lastly, -sja can remove the internal argument along with the THEME theta role, leading to an antipassive construction, as seen in (4).

My analysis unifies all these constructions, that -sja removes an argument from a transitive verb, resulting in the intransitivity attested in all constructions, while allowing for underspecification as to which argument is removed, and how this affects the thematic structure. This underspecification gives rise to the three different possible combinations of thematic roles seen in the constructions described above, resulting in four uses of -sja.

(1) a. Otec moet sobaku
   Father.NOM wash dog.ACC
   ‘Father is washing the dog’

   b. Otec moet-sja
   Father.NOM wash-SJA
   ‘Father is washing himself’

(2) a. Ivan i Maria celovali sobaku
   Ivan.NOM and Maria.NOM kissed dog.ACC
   ‘Ivan and Maria kissed the dog’

   b. Ivan i Maria celovali-s’
   Ivan.NOM and Maria.NOM kissed-SJA
   ‘Ivan and Maria kissed each other’

(3) a. Ivan otkry-l dver’
   Ivan.NOM open.PST.M door.ACC
   ‘Ivan opened the door’

   b. dver’ otkry-la-s’
   door.NOM open-PST.F-SJA
   ‘The door opened’

(4) a. Mnogo l’udej prijexali i sobaka ukusila odnogo čeloveka
   many people.GEN arrived and dog.NOM bit one.ACC person.ACC
   ‘Many people arrived and the dog bit one person’

   b. Mnogo l’udej prijexali i sobaka ukusila-s’
   many people.GEN arrived and dog.NOM bit-SJA
   ‘Many people arrived and the dog bit (one/some of the men).’

