Extended Argument Structure: Progressive as Unaccusative*

Jaume Mateu Fontanals
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Departament de Filologia Catalana
08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona). Spain
jmateu@seneca.uab.es

Laia Amadas Simon
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Departament de Filologia Catalana
08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona). Spain
lamadas@seneca.uab.es

Our lexical relational analysis of the progressive construction is based on Mateu's (1999) theory of Relational Semantics. Drawing empirical evidence from cross-linguistic studies, we argue that the progressive involves a nominalization process that joins a locative unaccusative structure and the argument structure corresponding to the lexical verb. As a result, the unspecified Ground of the unaccusative structure in which the Figure is «centrally located» turns out to be the entire event coded by the lexical verb. Furthermore, a structurally-based solution of the so-called «Imperfective Paradox» is then pursued. Empirical evidence in favor of our analysis of the progressive is also shown to come from «thematically transparent» languages like Basque, where a different argument structure involves a different case assignment.

Key words: progressive aspect, unaccusativity, argument structure, Relational Semantics.

Resum. *L'estructura argumental ampliada: la construcció progressiva com a inacusativa*

La nostra anàlisi lèxico-relacional de la construcció progressiva es basa en la teoria de la Semàntica Relacional de Mateu (1999). A partir de dades d'estudis interlingüístics, defensem que la construcció progressiva implica un procés de nominalització que uneix una estructura inacusativa locativa a l'estructura argumental que correspon al verb lèxic. Com a conseqüència d'això, el fons de l'estructura inacusativa en què «se situa centralment» la figura passa a ser tot l'esdeveniment codificat pel verb lèxic. Proposem, a més, una solució estructural a l'anomenada «paradoxa de l'imperfectiu». L'evidència empírica a favor de la nostra anàlisi de la progressiva prové també de llengües que són «temàticament transparents» com el basc, en què una estructura argumental diferent implica una assignació de cas diferent.

Paraules clau: aspecte progressiu, inacusativitat, estructura argumental, Semàntica Relacional.

* We are grateful to the audience of the IX Colloquium on Generative Grammar for their comments and suggestions. Research for this paper has been supported by the Ministerio de Educación y Cultura through project PB96-1199-C04-02 and the Generalitat de Catalunya through projects 1997 SGR 00033 and 1998 XT 00065. Laia Amadas also acknowledges a FI-FIAP grant from the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Progressive as Locative

In this paper, we will analyze the progressive construction on the basis of Mateu's (1999) theory of Relational Semantics.

Our proposal is that the progressive construction must be regarded as implying an unaccusative structure over that structure assigned to the verb in the lexicon. That is, we will make it clear that the argument structure relations involved in sentences like those in (1) are those associated with the unaccusative structure into which *be* is integrated, *plus* those associated with the argument structure corresponding to the lexical verb (*break* and *laugh* in (1)).

(1) a. John is breaking the window.
b. John is laughing.

Quite interestingly, our analysis of the progressive construction as involving an unaccusative structure can be argued to be empirically motivated by cross-linguistic studies like Bybee's *et al*. (1994), where it is clearly shown that the progressive construction corresponds with or originates as a locative construction in most languages of the world:

(2) «The majority of progressive forms in our database derive from expressions involving locative elements (*cf*. Blansitt 1975; Comrie 1976; Traugott 1978; Heine and Reh 1984). (...) The locative notion may be expressed either in the verbal auxiliary employed or in the use of postpositions or prepositions indicating location —'at', 'in', or 'on'. The verbal auxiliary may derive from a specific postural verb, such as 'sit', 'stand', or 'lie', or it may express the notion of being in a location without reference to a specific posture but meaning only 'be at', 'stay', or, more specifically, 'live' or 'reside'. (...) The form of the main verb is usually nominal (cited as a verbal noun or a gerund), although serial constructions are attested.»

Bybee *et al.* (1994: 129-130)

The fact that a locative structure is involved in the progressive construction can be easily shown with examples like those in (3)-(6). A locative structure is apparent not only in the Basque progressive construction (*cf.* (3)), where the nominalized form of the verb has locative case, but also in Celtic languages (*cf.* (4)), in Germanic languages like Dutch (*cf.* (5)), in French (*cf.* (6)), or in Middle English (*cf.* (7)). Quite importantly, the spatial preposition/particle represented in bold characters

in (3) through (7) will be argued below to provide clear evidence for considering the progressive construction as containing a stative unaccusative structure.[1]

(3) a. Miren liburua irakur-tze-**n** dago. (Basque)
Miren-ABS book-ABS read-NOM-LOC be-3-SG.ABS
'Miren is reading the book'.

b. Amaia leihoa apur-tze-**n** ari da.
Amaia-ABS window-ABS break-NOM-LOC engage be-3-SG.ABS
'Amaia is breaking the window'.

Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997: 10-11)

(4) a. Mae Rhiannon **yn** cysgu. (Welsh)
is Rhiannon in sleep
'Rhiannon is sleeping'.

b. Eman va breur **o** vont a-hed an hent. (Breton)
is 1SG brother PRT go along the road
'My brother is going along the road'.

c. Tá mé **ag** tógáil teach úr. (Irish)
are I at build house new
'I am building a new house'.

d. Bha an tuathanach **ag** gearradh na craoibhe. (Scottish Gaelic)
be-PAST the farmer-DIR *ag* cut-VN the tree-GEN
'The farmer was cutting the tree'.

ex. (4a)-(4c) from Borsley & Roberts (1996: 35);
ex. (4d) from Ramchand (1997: 31)

(5) a. Ik ben **aan** het/'t werken. (Dutch)
I am on the working
'I am working'.

b. Ik ben een boek **aan** het/'t lezen.
I am a book on the reading
'I am reading a book'.

c. Ik was die film **aan** het/'t bekijken.
I was that movie on the regarding
'I was regarding that movie'.

1. According to Bybee *et al*. (1994: 132), «the conclusion concerning stative sources for progressives, then, strongly points to location as a necessary semantic element, and no clear cases of progressives formed with a copula without a locative element have been found in our data.»

d. Ik ben het huis **aan** het bouwen.
I am the house at the build
'I am building the house'.

ex. (5a)-(5c) from van Gelderen (1993: 180-182);
(5d) from Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1998: 25)

(6) a. Zazie est **en** train de miauler. (French)
Zazie is in along of miaowing
'Zazie is miaowing'.

b. Zazie est **en** train de jouer.
Zazie is in along of play
'Zazie is playing'.

Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997: 9; 1998: 25)

(7) a. He is **on** hunting. (Middle English)

b. He was **a**-coming home.

Jespersen (1949: 168), *apud* Bybee *et al* (1994: 132)

On the other hand, it is interesting to point out that the auxiliary selected in the Spanish progressive construction is *estar*, which diachronically derives from a Latin locative verb *stare* ('stand' or 'stay'): *cf.* (8). The auxiliary *estar* is typically used with either locative or stage-level predicates (*cf.* (9)). Once again note that this provides empirical evidence for the analysis of the progressive as involving a locative structure.

(8) a. Juan está estudiando. (Spanish)
Juan is studying
'Juan is studying'.

b. Estoy escribiendo un libro.
am writing a book
'I am writing a book'.

(9) a. Juan está en la habitación. (Spanish)
Juan is in the room

b. Juan está cansado.
John is tired

This also seems the appropriate place to comment on an interesting observation found in Bybee *et al*.(1994: 133), which is originally due to Dwight Bolinger. It is the case that the original function of the progressive periphrasis is to give the

location of an agent as in the middle of an activity. For example, note that this function can be shown clearly in the following English dialogue in (10):

(10) A: Where's Lou?
B: He's taking a bath (having a nap, etc.)

Bybee *et al*. (1994: 133)

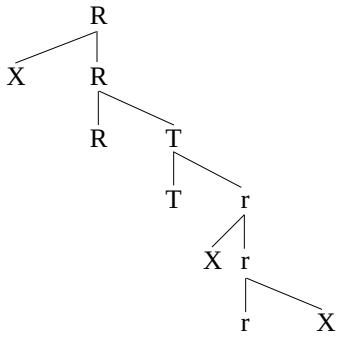
Let us summarize the main points that we will be dealing with here. Our analysis of the progressive as unaccusative will be shown to be empirically motivated on the basis of two facts: on the one hand, we will claim that there is a nominalization process joining the unaccusative structure into which *be* is integrated, and that structure corresponding to the lexical verb. On the other hand, the different argument structures assigned to two sentences like *John was breaking the window* and *John broke the window* will be seen to be on a par with their different Case properties in «thematically transparent» languages like Basque.

Before analyzing the progressive construction, it will be useful to sketch out the model of argument structure which our analysis of the progressive will be argued to depend on (*cf*. Mateu (1999)).

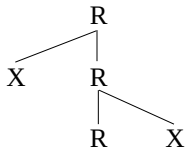
2. On the Relational Semantics of Argument Structure

The basic tenet of our theory is that there is a syntactically relevant semantic structure, which can be represented in a tree structure (*cf*. Pinker (1989), Bouchard (1995) or Juffs (1996) for the same proposal). In particular, we claim that there is an inherent semantics to the formal relations one can establish among the elements of tree structures such as those in (11) (*i.e*., the *R*(elational) *S*(emantic) *S*(tructure) of transitive structures), (12) (*i.e*., the RSS of unergative structures), or (13) (*i.e*., the RSS of unaccusative structures). For example, let us consider the more complex RSS, *i.e*., that in (11): there are two complete semantic relations (*R* and *r*). Given that each complete relational element must always involve two related elements, each of them will project up to a third level by virtue of binary branching: the related elements are situated in a different position with respect to the relational element, one occupying the specifier position and the other one occupying the complement position. *r* can be viewed as a *spatial* relation in the sense that it purely relates two non-relational elements into our cognitive space: say, «Figure» (specifier of *r*) and «Ground» (complement of *r*), to use Talmy's (1985) terminology. In (11) there is only one «relation» that has no specifier but only a complement. This «semi-relation» is *T*. *T* can be regarded as a *transition* towards the spatial relation *r*. *R* can be considered to be a *source* relation in the sense that its complement can come into existence by virtue of being immediately related with the superior relational node *R*, whose specifier can be interpreted as the «Originator» (in accordance with van Voorst's (1988) or Borer's (1994) terminology).

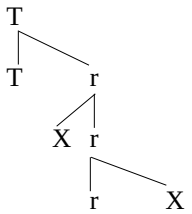
(11) **The RSS of a transitive structure = unergative structure + unaccusative structure**



(12) **The RSS of unergative structures**



(13) **The RSS of unaccusative structures**



We want to argue that the formal relations one can find in structures such as those in (11), (12), and (13) turn out to be meaningful if they represent basic relations of our cognitive space: basically, *source* relations (**R**), *transitional* relations (**T**), and *spatial* relations (**r**). Given our present purposes, we will assume that *R*, *T*, and *r* can be argued to take two different values according to their corresponding conceptual semantics (*cf.* (14)). This notwithstanding, it should be kept in mind that these binary values are irrelevant to the syntactic projection of arguments. For example, in spite of their different conceptual content corresponding to their RSS elements, two sentences such as *John is in the store* and *John went to the store* are identical with respect to the syntactic projection of their arguments.

Indeed, what is relevant at the syntax-semantics interface is that both sentences involve the same RSS, that in (13).

(14) **Relational elements**: ***R***: (+) CAUSE/DO / / (-) HAVE
T: (+) BECOME/GO / / (-) BE
r: (+) DIRECTIONAL RELATION ($\boldsymbol{r}_1$)
(-) LOCATIVE RELATION ($\boldsymbol{r}_2$)

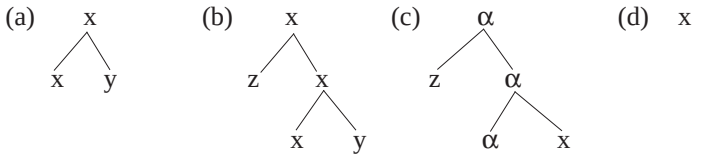
Non-relational element: ***X***

Assuming the validity of our approach to RSS's, note that Hale's (1995: 6) statement in (15) must be reconsidered in the sense that the combinations in (16) cannot be argued to be only relevant to a purely (lexico-)syntactic domain. According to Hale, lexical heads can enter into four possible combinations: that is, in (16a) *x* only takes a complement; in (16b) *x* takes a specifier and a complement; in (16c) *x* only takes a specifier, «alfa» being a host category that provides the necessary configuration for *x* to have a specifier; finally, in (16d) *x* takes no specifier and no complement either. The prototypical morphosyntactic realizations in English of the lexical syntactic heads in (16) (*i.e.*, *x*'s) are the following: *V* in (16a), *P* in (16b), *A* in (16c), and *N* in (16d).

(15) «For the lexical projections, just the relations head-complement and subject-predicate are relevant —this is part and parcel of the very notion of "lexical head"»

Hale (1995: 6)

(16) Head (*x*); complement (*y* of *x*), predicate (*x* of *z*)



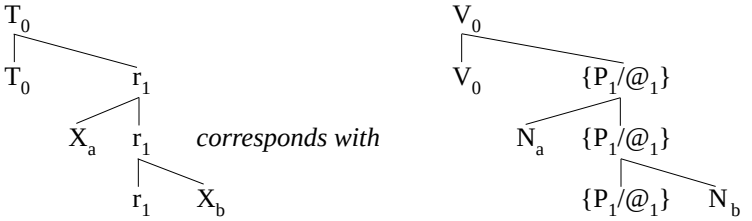
Hale (1995: 1)

Quite interestingly, the combinations in (16) can also be argued to be relevant to our meaningful RSS's. As a result, note that the relations head-complement and specifier-head are always dependent on the semantics of the relational element. Actually, note that we are trying to give explanatory power to the well-known descriptive claim that «s(emantic)-selection» has epistemological priority over «c(ategorial)-selection».

Unlike Hale (1995), we postulate that «A(djective)» is not a primitive element of grammatical theory (*cf.* the *x* in (16c)). Our claim is that «A» can be decomposed into two elements: a morphologically unspecified relational syntactic element corresponding to *r*, which is represented by the @ symbol, *plus* a non-relational

syntactic element, the latter being incorporated into the former. Accordingly, two sentences like those in (17a,b) are assigned the same RSS, that in (17d): both sentences are stative unaccusative structures. Note that the same analysis is valid for adverbs in predicative contexts (*cf.* (17c)):

(17) a. The cat is on the table.
b. The cat is happy.
c. The cat is here.
d.



The «prototypical» correspondences that can be drawn between morphosyntactic elements and RS elements are the following: *N* corresponds with *X*, *V* corresponds with {*R*/*T*}, *P* corresponds with *r*, and *Adj* and *Adv* correspond with *r*+*X* (*X* being incorporated into *r*). In non-predicative contexts, *Adj*s modify non-relational elements, whereas *Adv*s modify relational elements.

Quite interestingly, a principled explanation of the meaningfulness of argument structure relations turns out to be valid in accounting for both the very limited number of lexical syntactic categories and the very limited number of the (syntactically relevant (Baker (1997)) «theta-roles». We will not enter here into discussing Hale & Keyser's (1993) syntactocentric explanation of both of these facts.

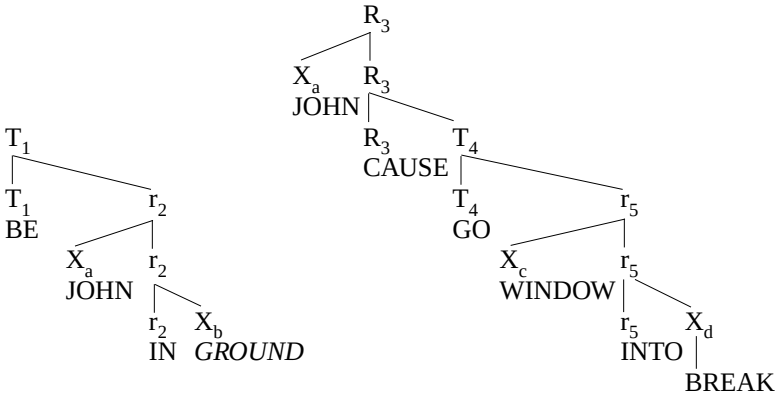
With this very sketchy review of the *R*elational *S*emantics of argument structure in mind, let us now comment on in some detail our RS analysis of the progressive construction.

3. Extended Argument Structure: the Progressive Construction

Consider the example in (1a), repeated in (18). Our claim is that two RSS's are always involved in the progressive construction (*cf.* (19)): the unaccusative RSS depicted in (19a), and the transitive RSS depicted in (19b). As noted before, we want to argue that any progressive construction involves an unaccusative structure plus that structure corresponding to the verb lexically chosen. Concerning the unaccusative RSS involved in any progressive construction, it is the case that the complement of the spatial relation (*r*) always corresponds to an unspecified «Ground»: accordingly, the interpretation associated with (19a) is «John is centrally located in some unspecified ground». On the other hand, the interpretation associated with the transitive RSS corresponding to *break* is «John caused the window to go into break», that is, «John caused the window to become broken».

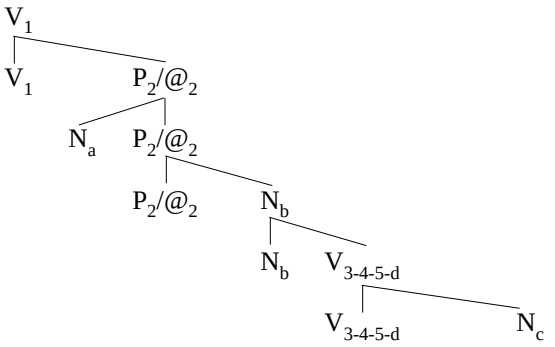
(18) John is breaking the window.

(19) a. b.



Basing our analysis on the data in (3) through (7), we claim that the progressive construction involves the integration of two RSS's (*e.g.*, those in (19)) into one lexical syntactic structure (*e.g.*, that in (20)) by means of a nominalization process. Our proposal is that the noun that corresponds to the unspecified Ground of the unaccusative structure (that is, N_b) turns out to c-select the verbal structure associated with the argument structure corresponding to the verb lexically chosen. Following Grimshaw (1990) and Picallo (1991), we assume that, as a result of such a nominalization process, the external argument corresponding to the specifier of *R* is not projected into the lexical syntactic structure in (20). We also assume that the transitive lexical verb in (20) enters the syntax as a morphological atom (but *cf.* Hale & Keyser (1993)): a lexical operation has fused the abstract ground, the complex spatial relation, the transitional relation, and the causal relation into the transitive verb. Without entering into discussing the advantages of a syntactic approach to incorporation, we also assume that the transitive verb incorporates into the noun heading the nominalization (*i.e.*, N_b), the resulting complex being then incorporated into the relational element $P_2/@_2$.

(20)



A crucial interpretive effect associated with such a lexical syntactic integration is the following: the unspecified Ground in which the Figure *John* is centrally located turns out to be the entire *breaking* event. Accordingly, the interpretation associated with the complex lexical syntactic structure in (20) is «John is centrally located in the event of causing the window to become broken». Given this paraphrasis, we assume Hale's (1985) analysis of the place relation *IN* as a «central coincidence relation».

It is also interesting to point out here that the claim that the progressive construction involves the existence of a «central coincidence relation» has been recently put forward by Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997, 1998). Let us review some of their most important claims concerning the syntax of temporal relations.

Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997, 1998) propose a uniform syntactic approach to Tense and Aspect, whose main claims are those in (21).[2]

(21) *A Uniform Syntax for Tense and Aspect*

a. Both Tense and Aspect are dyadic spatiotemporal ordering predicates taking two time-denoting phrases as arguments.

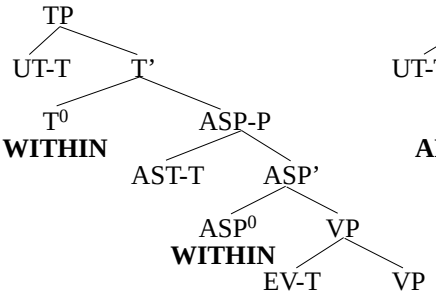
b. The external argument of Aspect (ASP^o) is a reference time (the «Assertion Time» (AST-T)), its internal argument is the time of the event denoted by the VP (the «Event Time» (EV-T)).

c. The external argument of Tense (T^o) is a reference time (the «Utterance-Time» (UT-T)), its internal argument is the AST-T.

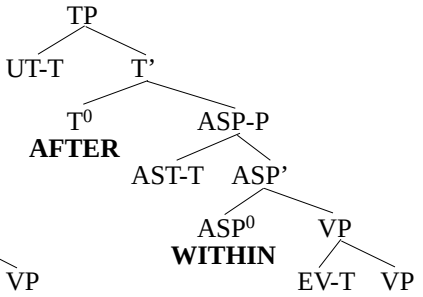
Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997: 5)

In particular, Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria's (1997, 1998) proposal concerning the progressive construction is that the «Assertion Time» is centrally located in the «Event Time». According to them, Progressive Aspect is a spatiotemporal predicate with the meaning of *WITHIN*; it orders the «Assertion Time» (that is, the Figure) *within* the «Event Time» (that is, the Ground). Their syntactico-semantic analysis of the Present Progressive and the Past Progressive is depicted in (22a) and (22b), respectively.

(22) a. Present Progressive



b. Past Progressive



Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1998: 11)

2. Following Smith (1991) and Klein (1995), Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria (1997, 1998) claim that the role of Aspect is to focus (pick up) an interval in the temporal contour of the event described by an utterance. The «Assertion Time» is the time interval in the event time of the VP that Aspect focuses.

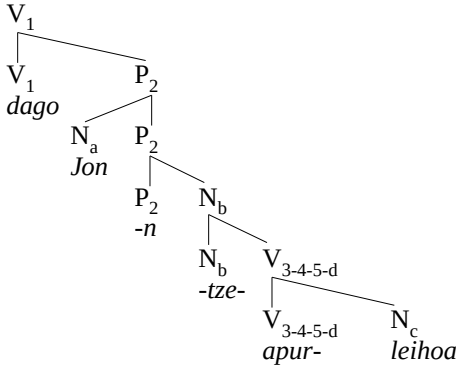
Although we are sympathetic with Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria's (1998) configurational account of temporal relations, we remain skeptical about their proposal of extending the Figure-Ground organization into the temporal domain. It should not be forgotten that what the morphosyntactic evidence actually points to is that there is only an extension of the Figure-Ground organization within the lexical domain, *i.e.*, in our terms, that concerning the RSS's. As shown above, it is quite clear that such an extension is justified in languages like Basque, French, Dutch, Welsh, etc (*cf.* (3)-(7)). For example, consider the Basque sentence in (23a). Its corresponding complex lexical syntactic structure, repeated below as (20)', can be shown to be empirically motivated: it is obtained from superimposing an unaccusative structure corresponding to a Figure-Ground organization over a transitive structure corresponding to the causative event. Note that *Jon* must be regarded as the non-relational element corresponding to the Figure, which is centrally related with another non-relational element corresponding to the abstract Ground, namely, the event of *breaking*. Indeed, the verb appears in nominal form, because it is the non-relational element corresponding to the Ground. Recall that *N* is the unmarked morphosyntactic realization of non-relational elements. The suffixal locative element in (23a) is not but the «central coincidence relation», which relates two non-relational elements: the N *Jon* and the nominalized form *apur-tze*.

(23) a. Jon leihoa apur-tze-n dago. (Basque)
Jon-ABS window-ABS break-NOM-LOC be-3-SG.ABS
'Jon is breaking the window'.

b. John is breaking the window.

c. Juan está rompiendo la ventana.

(20)'



More controversially, we have claimed that the English progressive in (23b) or the Spanish progressive in (23c) are to be analyzed essentially the same way as their corresponding surface correspondent in Basque, as far as their relational analysis is concerned. Indeed, we have claimed that the extension of the Figure-Ground organization also holds for the English and Spanish progressives. Such an extension

is not only motivated by semantic reasons (all sentences in (23) «construe» the conceptual reality in the same way), but is also empirically motivated on the basis of some morphological elements: for example, recall that the copula used in the Spanish progressive is *estar* ('stand'), which diachronically derives from a Latin locative verb *stare*. The auxiliary *estar* is typically used with either locative or stage-level predicates, both of which involve a Figure-Ground configuration, the Ground being abstract in adjectival stage-level predicates (*cf.* (8)-(9)).

So far our proposal of extending Argument Structure within the lexical (*i.e.*, non-functional) domain. With this proposal in mind, let us comment on the different aspectual properties associated with a minimal pair such as that in (24).

(24) a. John built the house.
b. John was building the house.

Our lexical relational analysis predicts why the entailment that *John* culminated the event of *building the house* is necessarily valid for the sentence in (24a), but not for that in (24b). In (24b), the Figure *John* is centrally located in the telic event of *building the house*. The culmination entailment does not hold in (24b), because a central coincidence predicate is superimposed over the causative predicate. The interpretation associated with (24b) could be decomposed as follows: «John was centrally located in the event of causing the house to become built».

Quite interestingly, our lexical relational analysis provides a structurally-based solution of the so-called «Imperfective Paradox» (*cf.* Dowty (1979), Parsons (1989), or Landman (1992), among others)). As is well-known, the imperfective paradox can be exemplified with the observation that for verb phrases expressing so-called «activities», like *laugh* or *push the car*, the inference from the past progressive to the simple past is valid, while for so-called «accomplishments», like *draw a circle* or *build a house*, it is not. That is to say, (25a) entails (25b), but (26a) does not entail (26b):

(25) a. John was laughing.
b. John laughed.

(26) a. John was drawing a circle.
b. John drew a circle.

As noted, (26a) does not entail (26b), because in (26a), there is a central coincidence relation dominating the telic event of *drawing*: «John was centrally located in the event of drawing a circle». It is precisely the central character of the locative relation dominating the telic event of *drawing a circle* what prevents the relevant entailment from being drawn.

By contrast, the atelicity of both situations involved in (25a) (*i.e.*, the stative situation corresponding to the unaccusative structure, and the dynamic one corresponding to *laugh*) explains why the relevant entailment holds at any interval.

Given the present discussion, it is clear that the extension of the Figure-Ground organization within the lexical (*i.e.*, non-functional) domain makes interesting predictions for the analysis of the progressive construction.

Finally, we will conclude our paper with how Case properties are assigned in the progressive construction. Interesting evidence from Basque will be shown to provide strong empirical support for our lexical relational analysis of the progressive.

4. Case Theory and the Progressive Construction

In this section, we will show that the different argument structures assigned to two sentences like those in (27) can also be justified when the Case properties of their corresponding versions in Ergative languages like Basque (*cf.* (28)) are taken into account.

(27) a. John (**NOM**) has broken the window (**ACC**).

b. John (**NOM**) is breaking the window (**ACC**).

(28) a. Jonek leihoa apurtu du. (Basque)
Jon-**ERG** window-**ABS** break-PP AUX-3-SG.ERG
'Jon has broken the window'.

b. Jon leihoa apur-tze-n dago.
Jon-**ABS** window-**ABS** break-NOM-LOC be-3-SG.ABS
'Jon is breaking the window'.

Before considering the different Case properties of the Basque examples in (28), let us make some brief comments on Ergative languages. Basically, Ergative languages have been argued to differ from Nominative languages with respect to the Case feature assigned to the subject of intransitive clauses. In Nominative languages the subject of an intransitive clause is assigned the same Case as the subject of a transitive clause, *i.e.*, Nominative, whereas in Ergative languages the subject of an intransitive clause is assigned the same Case as the object of a transitive clause, *i.e.*, Absolutive.

Our main assumptions concerning the analysis of the difference between Nominative and Ergative languages are the following:

On the one hand, we agree with Chomsky (1993) and Laka (1993) that the labels «Nominative» and «Ergative» both refer to the Tense Case feature, while the labels «Accusative» and «Absolutive» both refer to the Verb Case feature.

On the other hand, we assume that the different distribution of Case features between Nominative and Ergative languages is due to Laka's (1993) reformulation of the *Obligatory Case Parameter* proposed by Bobaljik (1992) (*cf.* (29)).

(29) *Obligatory Case Parameter* (OCP)
a. Activate C_V: Ergative Case System
b. Activate C_T: Nominative Case System

Laka (1993: 166)

Note that Case checking in transitive clauses is not subject to parameterization. The OCP makes no difference between Nominative and Ergative languages in transitive clauses, since the activation of both structural Cases, that of Tense and that of Verb, is required in order to check the Case features of the two arguments of a transitive structure. The differences emerge when intransitive verbs are considered.

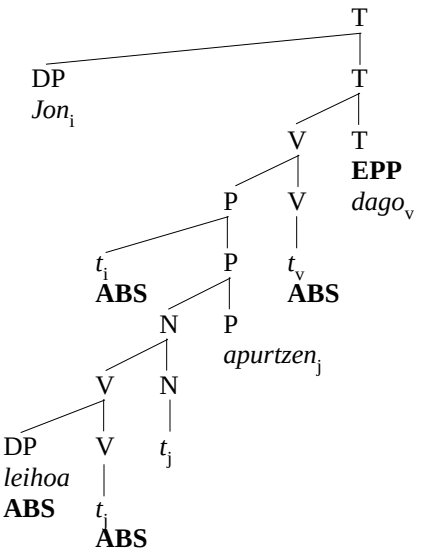
According to the Obligatory Case Parameter in (29), in Ergative languages it is the Verb Case feature (see C_V) (*i.e.*, Accusative/Absolutive) that is activated when the Case feature of a single argument must be checked. On the contrary, in Nominative languages it is the Tense Case feature (see C_T) (*i.e.*, Nominative/Ergative) that is activated when the Case feature of a single argument must be checked.

Quite interestingly, our analysis of (28b) as implying an unaccusative structure over the transitive structure of (28a) explains why the two arguments in (28b) check Absolutive Case. Note that *Jon* (*i.e.*, the subject of *be*) checks Absolutive, because in Basque, it is the Verb Case feature that turns out to be activated in an unaccusative structure.

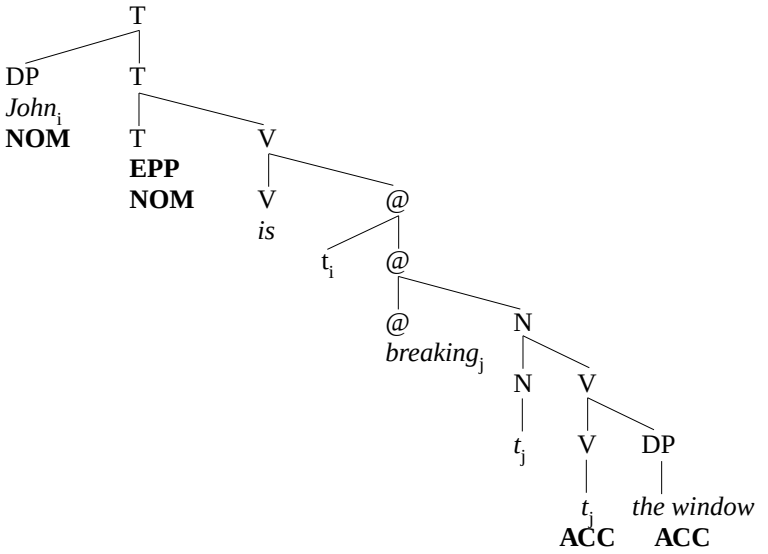
By contrast, note that in Nominative languages like English, the subject of the two sentences in (27) check Nominative Case despite the fact that they involve different argument structure relations. This is so because all subjects in a Nominative language check the Tense Case Feature.

Finally, the relevant contrast between Basque and English can be exemplified with the syntactic analyses in (30) and (31), respectively: according to the OCP, in Ergative languages like Basque the subject of unaccusative structures —*the progressive included*— checks the Verb Case feature C_V (*i.e.*, Absolutive/Accusative) (*cf.* (30)), and not the Tense Case feature C_T (*i.e.*, Ergative/Nominative), as it is the case in Nominative languages like English (*cf.* (31)).

(30)



(31)



5. Conclusions

Our lexical relational analysis of the progressive construction involves an «Extended Argument Structure» within the lexical (*i.e.*, non-functional) domain. Two RSSs (the unaccusative RSS containing a «central coincidence relation» *plus* the RSS corresponding to the lexical verb) turn out to be integrated into one lexical syntactic structure by means of a nominalization process.

The different argument structures assigned to sentences such as *John broke the window* and *John was breaking the window* have been shown to be on a par with their different Case properties in «thematically transparent» languages like Basque.

References

Baker, M. (1997). «Thematic Roles and Syntactic Structure». In Haegeman, L. (ed.). *Elements of Grammar*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Bobaljik, J. D. (1992). «Nominally Absolutive is not Absolutely Nominative». *Proceedings of the WCCFL XI*. Los Angeles: UCLA.

Borer, H. (1994). «The Projection of Arguments». In Benedicto, E.; Runner, J. (eds.). *Functional Projections*. Amherst: UMOP 17, UMass.

Borsley, R. D.; Roberts, I. (1996). «Introduction». In Borsley, R. D.; Roberts, I. (eds.). *The Syntax of the Celtic Languages. A Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bouchard, D. (1995). *The Semantics of Syntax. A Minimalist Approach to Grammar*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press.

Bybee, J. et al. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar. Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press.

Chomsky, N. (1993). «A Minimalist Program for Linguistic theory». In Hale, K.; Keyser, S. J. (eds.). *The View from Building 20*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Demirdache, H.; Uribe-Etxebarria, M. (1997). «The Primitives of Temporal Relations». University of British Columbia / University of California at Irvine: Unpublished manuscript.

— (1998). «The Primitives of Temporal Relations». University of British Columbia / University of California at Irvine: Manuscript.

Dowty, D. (1979). *Word Meaning and Montague Grammar*. Boston: Reidel.

Gelderen, E. van (1993). *The Rise of Functional Projections*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Grimshaw, J. (1990). *Argument Structure*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Hale, K. (1985). «Notes on World View and Semantic Categories: Some Warlpiri Examples». In Muysken, P.; van Riemsdijk, H. (eds.). *Features and Projections*. Dordrecht: Foris.

— (1995). «Universal Grammar and the Necessity of Linguistic Diversity». MIT: Unpublished manuscript.

Hale, K.; Keyser, S. J. (1993). «On Argument Structure and the Lexical Expression of Syntactic Relations». In Hale, K.; Keyser, S. J. (eds.). *The View from Building 20*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Juffs, A. (1996). *Learnability and the Lexicon*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Klein, W. (1995). «A Time Relational Analysis of Russian Aspect». *Language*, 71.4: 669-695.

Laka, I. (1993). «Unergative that Assign Ergative, Unaccusatives that Assign Accusative». *MITWPiL* 18: *Papers on Case and Agreement I*, Cambridge, MA: 149-172.

Landman, F. (1992). «The Progressive». *Natural Language Semantics*, 1: 1-32.

Mateu, J. (1999). «Universals of Semantic Construal for Lexical Syntactic Relations». Paper presented at the *GLOW Workshop on Sources of Universals*, University of Potsdam. Distributed as a research report (Report GGT-99-4), Grup de Gramàtica Teòrica, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Parsons, T. (1989). «The Progressive in English: Events, States and Processes». *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 12: 213-241.

Picallo, C. (1991). «Nominals and Nominalization in Catalan». *Probus*, 3.3: 279-316.

Pinker, S. (1989) *Learnability and Cognition: The Acquisition of Argument Structure*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Ramchand, G. C. (1997). *Aspect and Predication: The Semantics of Argument Structure*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Smith, C. S. (1991). *The Parameter of Aspect*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Talmy, L. (1985). «Lexicalization Patterns: Semantic Structures in Lexical Forms». In Shopen, T. (ed.). *Language Typology and Syntactic Description III: Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon*. Cambridge, MA: CUP.

Voorst, J. G. van (1988). *Event Structure*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.