

Conceptualization of Events, Transitivity and Voice: A Cognitive Approach¹

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ABSTRACT

Conceptualization of events is intimately associated with the functional domain of transitivity and with voice. The present paper examines the syncretisms involved in coding deviations from the prototypical event view, variations in transitivity and voice alternations. It is argued that transitivity and voice are best understood in terms of a series of cognitive dimensions derived from our construal of 'real world' events.

KEY WORDS: Cognitive, event, transitivity, voice

RESUMEN

La conceptualización del evento está íntimamente asociada al dominio funcional de la transitividad y al sistema de voz. Este trabajo estudia los sincretismos existentes en la coaificación de las desviaciones de la perspectiva prototípica del evento, las variaciones en transitividad y las alternancias de voz. Se argumenta que la transitividad y el fenómeno de voz deben entenderse en términos de una serie de dimensiones cognitivas que se derivan de nuestra conceptualización de los eventos reales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cognitiva, evento, transitividad, voz

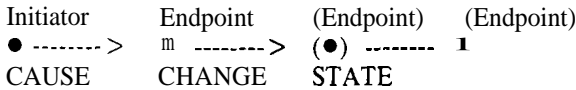
I. INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EVENTS & EVENT STRUCTURE.

From a cognitive perspective, we are concerned with the relation between 'events' in the real world, our cognition of events or 'cognitive constructions', and how this is manifested in a series of semantico-syntactic forms which are the basis for the organization

of the clause (Langacker,1990). In the coding of experience in an utterance, there is a synergetic relation between the various discourse-pragmatic, semantic and morphosyntactic aspects, such that, as Croft (1994a:32) points out:

Language use - communicative and interactive intentions in particular contexts of discourse - largely determines what semantic conceptualization of the experience is to be encoded. The conceptualization largely determines its encoding in the system of signs (words and constructions) of the language - symbolic structures joining form with meaning (the conceptualizations). Both of these processes - from context to conceptualization and from conceptualization to grammatical construction - have both cognitive and interpersonal elements. Communicative and interactional intentions are ultimately formed in the mind, and the conventions of symbolizations are socially established, maintained and altered across time and space.

Croft (1990) proposes a framework for understanding event structure in terms of causation, that is, in terms of a causal chain of events sharing participants and involving transmission of force. It is hypothesized that the internal structure of events is construed as a three-part event sequence, 'cause, change, state', so that verbs or verbal forms prototypically correspond to one of the three types of event or sequence of atomic events. The 'Idealized Cognitive Model' (cf. Lakoff,1987) of an individual event is thus characterized in the following way (Croft,1994a:37):



According to Croft (1990:65), each event view will focus on a different segment of the sequence, the whole causal event, the change of state and or the resultant state, thus foregrounding the various semantic aspects of the (unmarked) event views:

The stative implies an inherent property, without any implication as to the kind of process involved. The inchoative implies a certain kind of process, without any implication of an external (human) cause. The causative implies direct human causation, with the attendant properties of intention and responsibility.

Croft (1994a:37) suggests that verbs express specific segments of the causal chain of events, representing 'naturally' individuated events. Verbs typically select different segments of the tri-partite structure on the basis of the type of event view which is profiled: «they can be 'causative' (profiling the whole segment), 'inchoative' (profiling only the last two segments) or 'stative' (profiling only the last segment; these are often expressed as adjectives)».

- (1) a. The rock (x) broke the window (y)
- b. The window broke.
- c. The window is broken.

Any event may potentially be conceptualized according to the different *event views*

(causative, inchoative and stative), yielding both prototypical and non-prototypical associations between event class and event view. In this way, with a **dynamic** verb of creation for example, deviations from the causative view, typically associated with **this** type of event, will result in marked constructions:

- (2) a. The contractors built the cabin in three months.
 b. The cabin **got** built in three months.
 c. In three months, the cabin was built.
 (Croft, 1990:57)

Similarly, we **find** the same marked constructions in deviations from the basic stative and inchoative conceptualizations:

- (3) a. John is sick (**thanks** to the food **here**).
 b. John got sick (from the food).
 c. The food made John sick.
 (Croft, 1990:56)

- (4) a. He soon recovered from his illness.
 b. The **treatment** made him recover very **quickly**.
 c. He is now completely recovered.

In **Spanish**, the construction with *se* is found in the inchoative view of the causative event (anticausative) and of the stative event. The construction with *estar*, on the other hand codes the stative view of causative and inchoative events:

- (5) a. La puerta se abrió.
 b. Se hace tarde.
 c. La puerta está abierta.
 d. **Está** muerto.

In this paper we will be concerned with patterns of markedness associated with deviations from the most natural **construal** of events into event views. We will **also** examine deviations in transitivity, **and** their relation to voice distinctions: reflexive, **reciprocal**, middle, passive and resultative. **Finally**, we **aim** to identify the relations between these constructions **and** the resultant syncretisms **in coding in** terms of **certain** cognitive dimensions.

II. TRANSITIVITY & VOICE

Transitivity, according to Hopper & Thompson (1980:253), should be characterized as a complex *scalar* notion derived from the **presence** or absence of a series of parameters² or components which basically refer to the effectiveness and intensity with which the action is carried over or transferred from one participant to another, typically from an agent to a patient:

Transitivity, then, viewed in the most conventional and traditional way possible - as a **matter** of carrying-over or transferring an action from one participant to another - can be broken down into its component parts, each focusing on a different facet of this carrying-over in a different part of the clause. **Taken** together, they allow clauses to be characterized as MORE or LESS transitive.

In a similar fashion, Rice (1989:156) identifies a series of transitivity components³ associated with the «**intensional/construal** arsenal available to the speaker* in the interpretation of the event and in communication.

Givon (1995:76) singles out **three** semantic dimensions or core **features** of the prototypical transitive event:

- a. Agent: The prototypical transitive event involves a volitional, controlling, actively-initiating agent who is responsible for the event, thus its salient cause.
- b. Patient: The prototypical transitive event involves a non-volitional, inactive non-controlling patient who registers the event's changes-of-state, thus its salient effect.
- c. Verbal **modality**: The verb of the prototypical transitive clause **codes** an event that is perfective (non-durative), sequential (non-perfect) and realis (non-hypothetical). The prototype transitive event is thus fast-paced, completed, real, and **perceptually-cognitively** salient.

Coding options in grammars, as Givon (1989) observes, reflect different ways in which an event may be viewed **and** conceptualized, so that variations in transitivity **will have certain** morphosyntactic consequences. Thus, when the agent is stereotypical, non-referring, unindividuated or communicatively irrelevant, it is defocused **and** downgraded. The detransitivized event **is** then **coded** as a **construction** exhibiting fewer actants than the basic transitive schema, as in the case of agented or agentless passives and resultative constructions.

In discussing the parameters associated with transitivity and their correlation with foregrounded information in discourse, DeLancey (1987:54) argues that «**the** semantics of both clause- and **discourse-level constructions** are rooted in a **level** of cognitive representation prior to either ... both semantic and discourse-functional facts are reflections of underlying cognitive schemata*. According to DeLancey (1987:60), the transitive prototype is a universal and «**extremely natural category**», its natural⁴ basis being «**the** universal human understanding of the physical fact that events **have** causes, i.e. that the basis of the transitivity prototype is a simple CAUSE ----> EFFECT **schema**» (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Event **construal** is intimately associated with the domain of transitivity. As Croft (1994b) has pointed out, the causative event view represents the prototypical transitive event. DeLancey (1990:304) describes the cognitive **model** of the transitive event structure in terms of a causal chain (cause-effect), parallel to the model proposed by Croft (1990) for event structure, where each **node** represents the EFFECT of the **node** situated directly to its left, which is the CAUSE of the **node** to the right:

ACT OF VOLITION --> ACTION --> EVENT --> RESULTANT STATE

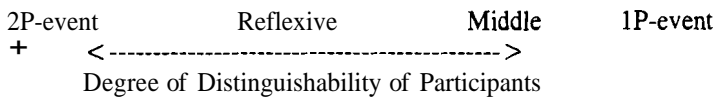
Deviations from the prototype, i.e. cases where «CAUSE and EFFECT are not perceptually distinct» or where «either the CAUSE or the EFFECT event is not fully accessible to an observer» (DeLancey, 1987:61), will give rise to detransitivization constructions.

Also from a cognitive perspective, Kemmer (1994:221-222) argues that categories of voice⁵ must be considered in relation to transitivity:

Voice systems exist in order to express **divergences** from canonical event types that fall at **opposite** extremes along a scale of semantic transitivity, a scale independently motivated by its effects on linguistic marking patterns other than voice. Thus transitivity is the broader phenomenon within the framework of which voice phenomena must be understood.

In coding transitivity **distinctions**, according to Kemmer (1994), events are conceptualized in terms of a schema that is more general than the characterization of transitivity in terms of semantic properties. The 'two-participant event schema' for the *transitive* situation type consists of two participants, Initiator and Endpoint of the event, and an asymmetrical relation between them **construed** as being directed from Initiator to Endpoint. In the *reflexive* situation type, the Initiator acts on itself as Endpoint, but the type of event involved is one in which participants are normally distinct entities. In the case of *middle* situation types⁶, on the other hand, «the two semantic roles of Initiator and Endpoint refer to a single holistic entity without conceptually distinguished aspects» (Kemmer, 1994:207). Finally, in the *intransitive* situation type, as Kemmer (1994:208) notes, «the conceptual differentiation of Initiating and Endpoint facets is uneryly non-existent: there is no Initiator, no Endpoint, but simply one participant of which a state or action is **predicated**».

Kemmer (1994:209) thus **proposes** the following 'Semantic Transitivity Continuum', in terms of the **relative distance** from the two active prototype situation types (transitive-intransitive), as a function of the semantic parameter, *degree of distinguishability of participants*⁷:



This **property** is **subsumed** under the more general conceptual dimension '*relative elaboration of events*', which, as Kemmer (1994:211) suggests, «can be thought of as the degree to which different schematic aspects of a situation are separated out and viewed as distinct by the **speaker**». In passive events, for example, the Initiator or Agent participant is defocused. Similarly, in the spontaneous process type, **the** single participant **coded** is construed as the Initiator and **also** as the Endpoint, since **it** undergoes **some** change of state as well.

III. DEVIATIONS FROM THE PROTOTYPE: SYNCRETISMS IN CODING.

We **have** observed a series of deviations in terms of **the** most natural construal of events, and in terms of transitivity and voice. We will now discuss the **existence** of certain

syncretisms between these marked constructions, both in English and Spanish.

(i) Constructions with *be*: In English, the auxiliary *be* marks both process passives (agented and agentless) and stative passives as well as objective and subjective resultative constructions or statives of basic causatives and inchoatives and of translational motion events (Nedjalkov & Jaxontov, 1988).

- (6)
- a. I was invited by Harriet's doctor, Shafik.
 - b. **Shall** champagne be **served**?
 - c. The church and the churchyard were hidden by trees
 - d. This slipper is **all** chewed up.
 - e. John's eyes are **inflamed**.
 - f. John is gone.

(ii) Constructions with *get*: Reflexive-causative, reciprocal, 'grooming or body care', and other middle situation types are coded with *get* (Givon & Yang, 1994). The passive with *get* typically implies **partial** responsibility of the subject ('catalytic passive', cf. Barber, 1975). *Get* also has the function of expressing the inchoative of basic causatives and statives.

- (7)
- a. I got (**myself**) dressed.
 - b. **After** they got married?
 - c. He got **dressed**/She got **lost**.
 - d. I got arrested **in** Montreal last year,
 - e. The passage got blocked.
 - f. This room **gets** extremely hot.

(iii) Constructions with adverbial **particles** of 'motion': In English **certain** adverbial particles of motion seem to foreground the 'completeness' or perfectivity of the event or the 'change of state' in causatives and inchoatives and thus involve an increase in transitivity ('hypercausative', 'hyperinchoative'). Middle situations, like 'change in body **posture**', are also coded by means of these particles. In the case of translational motion events we also find adverbial particles **implying** motion from **only** one locative point and/or indicating completeness of **the** event.

- (8)
- a. He ate it **all** up.
 - b. **The** bathtub **filled** up in half an hour.
 - c. She lay **down** on the **bed**.
 - d. She went away.

(iv) Constructions with *se*: *Se* is found to code various situation types, reciprocal, reflexive, middle, passive (promotional and non-promotional), and impersonal passive, with **intransitive** or stative verbs (Gómez Torrego, 1992). As in the case of *get* in English, *se* also has the function of expressing inchoativeness in basic causatives and statives (with 'hacer').

- (9)
- a. Se pegaron.
 - b. Se vió reflejada en el espejo.
 - c. Se **perdió**/**Se** **lavo**/**Se** **sentó**.

- d. La biblioteca **se** abre a las diez.
- e. **Se** atendió a los enfermos.
- f. **Se** vive bien en Madrid.
- g. ¡Qué bien **se** está!
- i. **La** puerta **se** abrió.
- j. **Se** hace tarde.

In translational motion events, DeLancey (1982) notes that there is a metaphorical extension from spacial categories to **code** distinctions in transitivity, such that the conceptualization and coding of the intransitive event from **only one locative** point, either 'source' or 'goal' implies a **decrease** in transitivity ('hyperintransitive'). In Spanish the construction with **se** is found in events implying a permanent change of location.

- (10) a. **Se** fue de casa/**Se** fue a Madrid.
- b. *Fue de casa/**Fue** a Madrid.
- c. Fue de Madrid a Logroño en tren.

In this case one might **argue** that in terms of the high transitivity **parameters** identified by Hopper & Thompson (1980), the construction with **se** seems to **indicate** 'perfectivity' of the event **and** would thus involve **an** increase in transitivity. Other cases of constructions with **se**, involving force-dynamic and perfective components **and/or** 'affectedness and individuation of O', are clearly higher **in** transitivity **than** the non-**se** analogs ('hypercausatives' or «**hypertransitives**», cf. Arce-Arenales et al., 1994) and 'hyperinchoatives').

- (11) a. Juan **se** comió todo el pastel.
- b. Juan (***se**) comió o pastel de postre
- c. **Se** murió de un ataque al corazón.
- d. (***Se**) murió en la guerra.

(v) **Constructions with ser & estar**: The construction with **ser** is found in process passives. The construction with **estar**, on the other **hand**, **codes** the stative passive as well as the stative view of the causative and inchoative events:

- (12) a. Yo había **sido** salvada del naufragio ...
- b. **Estaba** prohibida la lectura de periódicos y, ...
- c. La casa **estará** terminada en dos semanas.
- d. **Está** muerto.

IV. SEMANTIC SPACE & RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIONS: EXTENSION OF GRAMMATICAL MARKERS.

We **have** observed that deviations from the prototypical event view give **rise** to marked constructions, involving causativizing, inchoative and stative resultative morphosyntax. We **have also** observed the **existence** of a cline in transitivity along which passive, reflexive and middle situation types are **located**.

Pederson (1991) argues for the need to examine the relations between these constructions and their **recurrent** extensional structures, by plotting them on a **two-** or **three-** dimensional space where their location will **indicate** the **construals** of the event or scene they best represent. In this paper we will distinguish the following dimensions:

(a) Horizontal dimension representing the degree of transitivity of the event in terms of «the core argument expression of the number of **participants**» (**Pederson.1991:459**) or 'degree of distinguishability of participants' (**Kemmer,1994**), according to which the different event views or situation types would be placed in the following continuum:

CAUSATIVE / TRANSITIVE > PASSIVE > REFLEXIVE > MIDDLE /
INCHOATIVE / STATIVE PASS / RESULTATIVE > INTRANSITIVE

(b) Vertical dimension representing voice distinctions in **terms** of the archetypal agent role of the participant **coded** as **subject** in the event, with the attendant properties of 'volition, responsibility and directness of causal **connection**'. **DeLancey (1984:207)** notes that «the prototypical transitive event is one that can be traced back to a single cause from which an unbroken **chain** of control leads to the effect. This **ultimate** cause can **only** be an act of volition on the **part** of a (thus defined) prototypical **agent**». The two poles at the extreme ends of the continuum would thus represent the semantic properties of the two proto-roles⁸: 'Proto-Agent' and 'Proto-Patient' (**Dowty,1991**):

CAUSATIVE / TRANSITIVE > REFLEXIVE / MIDDLE / INTRANSITIVE >
PASSIVE / INCHOATIVE > STATIVE PASS / RESULTATIVE

(c) We can identify a third diagonal dimension which **correlates** naturally with the previous values, and which refers to the **internal structure** of events and the type of event view which is profiled, 'cause', 'change' or 'state', and involves prototypical and non-prototypical associations between event **class** and event view (**Croft,1990**):

CAUSATIVE / TRANSITIVE / REFLEXIVE / PASSIVE > MIDDLE /
INCHOATIVE / INTRANSITIVE > STATIVE PASS / RESULTATIVE

We can thus identify the following semantic space where each of the constructions is **plotted** according to their values on the **three** dimensions defined above:

	2-P EVENT	1-P EVENT
PROTO-A	ADV-HYPTRANS SE-HYPTRANS CAUSE GET-RECIP SE-RECIP GET-REFLEX-C SE-REFLEX GET-PASS SE-PASS-P SE-PASS-NP BE-PASS SER-PASS CHANGE ADV-HYPINCHO SE-HYPINCHO GET-INCHO-C GET-INCHO-S SE-INCHO-C SE-INCHO-S STATE	GET-MID SE-MID ADV-MID SE-HYPINT ADV-HYPINT BE-RESULT-TM SE-IMPASS-I SE-IMPASS-S BE-RESULT-C BE-RESULT-I ESTAR-RESULT-C ESTAR-RESULT-I
PROTO-P		

Fig.1. Relationships between Grammatical Constructions Coding Deviations in Event View, Transitivity and Voice.

These constructions, as can be **seen**, practically occupy **all** the semantic space in the case of nominative-accusative languages like English and Spanish, except for two **areas** (Pederson, 1991:466, n.4):

Two-participant causative event, with a **subject** low in responsibility (non-prototypical transitive verbs).

One-participant event ('medium transitivity') with a **subject** high in responsibility and a backgrounded patient (anti-passives in ergative-absolutive languages).

As regards the extensional structures of these constructions, Pederson (1991:457) observes that «**grammatical** markers typically extend historically from function to function along often predictable pathways~Although the issue is beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to note that Haspelmath (1990:54), for example, suggests the following universal paths of **grammaticization** of passive morphology:

inactive auxiliary > resultative > passive
 causative > reflexive-causative > passive
 reflexive > anticausative > passive
 generalized subject **construction** > **desubjective** > passive

In the case of Spanish, Gili Gaya (1973:105) holds that the marker *se* has gone **through** the following stages: «**reflexivo** acusativo > reflexivo dativo > dativo ético > signo de participación en la acción > signo de pasiva > signo de pasiva impersonal > signo de impersonal **activo**». A similar extensional sequence is found in Marín (1989), which is **parallel** to the one found for French *se* by Croft et al. (1987): English *get* seems to follow very similar extensional pathways (cf. Givon & Yang, 1994):

Causative-transitive > Causative-locative > Reflexive-causative > Inchoative > Get-Passive

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper we **have** observed a relation between a series of constructions, where the same marker is used to **code** a variety of **instances** of deviation from the prototype (prototypical event view, transitive prototype, unmarked voice). There appears to be a relation between **the** type of event view which is **profiled** and the degree to which the various components of the causative-transitive event are optimally distinct **and** accessible. Whenever there is a situation where these components are not perceptually distinct or directly accessible, we will **have** defective instances of the causation schema, and hence deviations from the prototype (DeLancey, 1987).

We may thus conclude that transitivity and voice are in effect related **functional** domains, and that voice options are best understood in terms of the transitive prototype. In turn, the **cognitive** dimensions which **subsume** the various parameters of transitivity are intimately **linked** to our **conceptualization** of events, as the **existence** of syncretisms in the marked coding **patterns** for these domains seems to indicate.

NOTES

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2. Hopper & Thompson (1980:252) identify the following parameters of transitivity: Participants, Kinesis, Aspect, Punctuality, Volitionality, Affirmation, Mode, Agency, Affectedness & Individuation.

3. Rice (1989:145) proposes a series of components for the two poles of the transitivity continuum. Some of the terms of opposition are the following: *contact* vs. *proximity/distance*, *force-dynamic* vs. *configurational*, *interaction between co-animatees* vs. *action within a setting*, *independence of participants* vs. *congruence of participants*, *asymmetrical participants* vs. *symmetrical participants*, *maximal differentiation of participants* vs. *minimal differentiation*, *perfective action* vs. *imperfective situation*, *non-spatial cognitive domain* vs. *spatial cognitive domain*.

4. Bernárdez (1994:10-11) notes that cognitive models are all 'naturalistic' in a very similar sense:

[L]a (percepción de la) realidad es responsable de la estructuración lingüística ... La *esquematicidad* de todos los modelos cognitivistas es un resultado de esta naturalidad, pues los esquemas representan la categorización y abstracción de estados o procesos semejantes entre sí ... en forma semejante a los *arquetipos* desarrollados por la TC [Teona de Catástrofes].

The discussion of this model is beyond the scope of this paper. The reader is referred to Thom (1985) for a catastrophe theoretic account of transitivity.

5. Klaiman (1988:46-47) provides the following characterization of voice systems:

Voice, a grammatical category of various languages, essentially represents a verbally encoded opposition in views of the Subject's relation to the sentimentally denoted action (i.e. situation). Specifically, a verbal voice system signals whether the Subject is or is not perceived as the affected entity - the participant to which accrue the principal effects of the action. However, as specific criteria for the selection of (underived) subjects differ in various languages, diathesis may be associated with different voice functions in different languages.

6. Kemmer (1993) identifies the following middle situation types: 'Grooming or body care', 'Nontranslational motion', 'Change in body posture', 'Translational motion', 'Naturally reciprocal events', 'Indirect middle', 'Emotion middle', 'Emotive speech actions', 'Cognition middle' and 'Spontaneous events'.

7. Kemmer (1994:206) defines *relative distinguishability of participants* in an event as "the degree to which a single physico-mental entity is conceptually distinguished into separate participants, whether body vs. mind, or non-contrasting Agent vs. contrasting Patient".

8. Dowty (1991:572) lists the features that characterize these role types in the following way:

Contributing propensities for the Agent Proto-Role:

- a. volitional involvement in the event or state
- b. sentience (and/or perception)
- c. causing an event or change of state in another participant
- d. movement (relative to the position of another participant)
- (e. exists independently of the event named by the verb)

Contributing properties for the Patient Proto-Role:

- a. undergoes change of state
- b. incremental theme
- c. causally affected by another participant
- d. stationary relative to movement of another participant
- (e. does not exist independently of the event, or not at all)

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