Conceptualization of Events, Transitivity and Voice: A Cognitive Approach

JUANA I. MARÍN ARRESE
Dpto. de Filologías Extranjeras y sus Lingüísticas
U.N.E.D.
c/Senda del Rey, s/n
28040 Madrid

ABSTRACT

The conceptualization of events is intimately associated with the functional domain of transitivity and with voice. The present paper examines the synchronisms 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 transividad y al sistema de voz. Este trabajo estudia los sincronismos existentes en la codificación de las desviaciones de la perspectiva prototípica del evento, las variaciones en transividad y las alternancias de voz. Se argumenta que la transividad 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, transividad, 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
match 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):

Initiator Endpoint (Endpoint) (Endpoint)
• --------> m --------> (●) -------- 1
CAUSE CHANGE STATE

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 antecedent 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 resultantive. 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 parameters 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:

Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa, 612, 1997, pp.319-332
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 components 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 natural 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 voice 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 types, 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 unerly 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
2P\text{-event} & \quad \text{Reflexive} & \quad \text{Middle} & \quad 1P\text{-event} \\
+ & \quad \text{_______________} & \quad \text{>}
\end{align*}
\]

Degree of Distinguishability of Participants

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

Cuadernos de Filologia Inglesa, 6/2, 1997. pp.319-332
Juana I. Martín Arrese

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.
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 ‘hypertransitivess’, 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 estaría 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 constmctions, 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-roles:

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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTO-A</th>
<th>ADV-HYPTRANS</th>
<th>SE-HYPTRANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAUSE</td>
<td>GET-RECIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-RECIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET-REFLEX-C</td>
<td>SE-REFLEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET-MID</td>
<td>SE-MID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ADV-MID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-HYPINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET-PASS</td>
<td>ADV-HYPINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE-PASS-P</td>
<td>SE-PASS-NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE-PASS</td>
<td>SER-PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CHANGE</td>
<td>ADV-HYPINCHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-HYPINCHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GET-INCHO-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GET-INCHO-S</td>
<td>SE-INCHO-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-INCHO-S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STATE</td>
<td>BE-RESULT-TM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-IMPASS-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE-IMPASS-S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE-STPASS</td>
<td>BE-RESULT-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESTAR-STPASS</td>
<td>BE-RESULT-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESTAR-RESULT-C</td>
<td>ESTAR-RESULT-I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 1. Relationships between Grammatical Constructions**

_Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa, 6/2, 1997, pp.319-332_
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-panicipant 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

1. This paper is based on work supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture under Research Project DGICYT P94-0014 (Project Director: Dr. Enrique Bernárdez).


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-animates vs. action within a setting, independence of participants vs. coningence 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 (1994:101) notes that cognitive models are all "naturalistic" in a very similar sense:

La (percepción de la) realidad es responsable de la estmcturación 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. Kliaman (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 sententially 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 accme 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', 'Nontranslationai 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. Dowry (1991:572) lists the features that characterize these role types in the following way:

Contributing properties for the Agent Proto-Role:
- a. volitional involvement in the event or state
- b. sentence (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
WORKS CITED


*Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa, 612*, 1997. pp.319-332