

Intransitivity: from conceptual schematicity to clause structure

Ariadna Strugielska (Nicholas Copernicus University, Toruń)

The notion of intransitivity seems to escape neat classifications and clear definitions. According to Quirk et al. (1990), intransitive verbs are defined as such that require no obligatory complementation and occur in SV clause patterns. However, the purely syntactic criteria postulated by the traditional paradigm do not seem adequate. Notably, the proponents of the model themselves allude to possible inconsistencies emerging from the application of exclusively syntactic standards. Quirk et al. (1990: 344) admit that although with some intransitive verbs the complementation is not clearly obligatory, their meaning is completed by the presence of the adverbial. Downing and Locke (2002) acknowledge a similar difficulty by inventing a category of pseudo-intransitive verbs. The syntactic dilemma is apparently solved by those linguists who establish correspondences between intransitivity and the absence of an object (cf. Givón 2001, Hewings & Hewings 2005). However neat such definitions occur to be, they do not appear to cope with examples like *She swam the channel*, *The guitar broke a string* or *The tent sleeps ten* on the one hand, and *She lives in Poland*, *I go to school* or *The city lies on the river* on the other hand. Therefore, a need arises for a conceptually-bound approach to verb semantics and clause structure. Consequently, methodology rooted in the Cognitive Paradigm seems a felicitous option though some refinements must concurrently be postulated. On a more specific note, the notion of intransitivity will be understood as the schematic potential of an ungrounded process (the verb) which can be contextually elaborated. Intransitivity then is not the property of the verb but seems to be the result of an interplay between the topological matrix of a relational predicate and contextual dynamics. The starting point of a cognitively real analysis should then be the conceptual potential of the verb stretched along the extremes of boundedness/ unboundedness or homogeneity/ heterogeneity (cf. Taylor 2002, Talmy 2005). The conceptual content thus delineated will interact with the schematic structures of other entities participating in the event, either facilitating or hampering contextual occurrences of a given relational predicate. Following Langacker's (2000) view upon dependent predications, prototypical intransitive clauses will be those profiling one autonomous element (participant). However, semantic roles and conceptual archetypes will be considered insufficient in establishing the limits of (in)transitivity. Force dynamics as well as image schemas are thus going to be employed to render the analysis more coherent and exhaustive. Finally, a contribution will be made concerning the typology of verbs (processes) and a classification of clause types resulting from employing the above-specified conceptually viable parameters will be tentatively suggested.