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Transitivity and Prototype Parameter: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective

ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the relationships between transitivity and prototype constructions from a cross-linguistic perspective. The focus of this paper is to show how the degree of semantic intensity in transitivity in a given language is correlated with the parameter of various prototype constructions with respect to force-dynamic profiles. It is demonstrated that the proposed prototype parameter captures the cross-linguistic regularity regarding the semantic intensity between verbs and grammatical arguments. This principle is also shown to constrain the applicability of some rules that change grammatical relations in German, English and Korean. This comparative perspective explains why there are cross-linguistic differences of transitive constructions with respect to the force-dynamic profiles

1. Introduction

In traditional generative grammar grammatical constructions are treated as mere features that are not naturally present but are products of the interaction between universal grammar and language-particular constraints. This is confirmed in the following paragraph:

[a] language [is not] a system of rules, but a set of specifications for parameters in an invariant system of principles of [universal grammar], and traditional grammatical constructions are perhaps best regarded as taxonomic epiphenomena – collections of structures with properties resulting from the interactions of fixed principles with parameters set one way or another (Chomsky 1989:43 cited in Michaelis 2006:73).

If we subscribe to this view, the syntactic constructions of a language do not stem from the grammar of that language. In the following we will present some empirically motivated cross-linguistic generalizations that support the existence of some regularities of form and meaning interface in a given language. This approach to the study of language is based on the assumption that linguistic form is closely linked to its function. We can analyze a given language to demonstrate the

respective functions performed by the various structural components available in the entire system of that language.

2. Some grammatical constructions in German and English

Consider the following German and Korean ditransitive constructions in (1).

- (1) a. Dem Präsidenten wurde ein Nobelpreis verliehen.
b. *Der Präsidenten wurde ein Nobelpreis verliehen
c. The president was awarded a Nobel prize.
d. ??Ku daetongryung-eykey Nobelsang-i cwue-je-ss-ta
the president – DAT Nobel prize-NOM give-pass-pret-decl.
e. Ku daetongryung-i Nobelsang-ul pat-ass-ta
the president-NOM Nobel prize-ACC receive-pret.-Decl.
'The president received a Nobel prize'

In the passive construction (1b), German does not allow the structure-dependent indirect passivization that Modern English sanctions when the recipient or benefactive argument is in the nominative case. In the German example (1a), in which the NP with an inherent dative case-marking clearly shows that it is an indirect benefactive object, we do not need secondary passivization equivalent to the English (1c). In Korean, albeit typologically different from German, we find that a passive construction (1d) with an inherent dative is usually avoided in favor of an alternative construction (1e).

We can apply this line of functional logic to the description of the following German and English comparisons as well.

- (2) Active sentences with subject and object exchanged:
a. My friend owed me a considerable amount of money.
b. I was owed a considerable amount of money by my friend.
c. Mein Freund schuldete mir eine beträchtliche Geldsumme.
d. She was being helped by her husband.
e. Ihr Mann half ihr.

In the English example (2b), a corresponding German passive construction is simply not acceptable (cf. 2c). In the example (2d), the German passive construction 'Ihr wurde von ihrem Mann geholfen' is

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

possible only marginally. Unlike Modern English, where word order is used to mark grammatical relations such as subject and object, German has a rich morphological case-marking system. Thus, we expect that in the languages with a morphological case-marking system, structural passive constructions are unproductive or not developed. The more fixed word order of Modern English makes it impossible for the pragmatically sensitive differential ordering to be available in many English structural types in which it is available in case-marked languages such as Russian, Czech and German (cf. Firbas 1992:125-134). Our approach is based upon the functional motivation that the richer the morphological case-marking system of a language, the more degenerate its system of passivization becomes.

3. Prototype theory revisited

In Section 2, we developed the functional motivation that structural passivization is not available or restricted in case-marked languages. Thus, instead of employing rules that change grammatical relation, these languages tend to resort to word-order freedom to achieve the function of the English type passivization. Faced with problems as to the structural approach to passive construction, linguists in favor of semantic explanations came up with a rationale known as a prototype theory. Prototype theory proposes that passivization is sensitive to the transitivity properties of a clause: passivizable active clauses have rich transitive properties – e.g., the verb is a typical action predicate and the active subject is a human of a high potency distinguished from the patient object which undergoes the action of the predicate (Hopper and Thompson 1980). Thus, clauses that are high in transitivity typically have agentive subjects, totally affected objects and an action predicate. Consider the following German examples.

- (3) a. *Das Buch wurde nicht gekannt. (Helbig/Buscha 1994:171)
'The book was not known.'
b. *Der Pinto wurde von ihm besessen.
'The Pinto was owned by him.'
c. *80 Pfennig werden von dem Heft gekostet. (Helbig/Buscha 1994:171)
'80 pennies are cost by the notebook.'

The German examples in (3) can also be predicted not to undergo *werden*-passivization due to the inherently non-actional lexical properties of the verbs involved. Note that the corresponding distinction in English is lost to a large extent.

Even in cases where the nature of the verb is prototypically actional, passives often fail to apply if the subject is not an agent.

- (4) Helbig/Buscha (1994:165)
- a. Die Mutter schneidet das Brot.
'The mother cuts the bread.'
 - b. Das Brot wird von der Mutter geschnitten. (passive counterpart of 4a)
'The bread is cut by the mother.'
 - c. Das Messer schneidet das Brot.
'The knife cuts the bread.'
 - d. *Das Brot wird von dem Messer geschnitten. (passive counterpart of 4c)
'The bread is cut by the knife.'

The subject in the German sentence (4c) clearly denotes an instrumental case which plays an essential part in the cutting process. However, it does not control the energy flow *per se* involved in the event. Thus, the ungrammaticality of the sentence (4c) can be explained via prototype theory.

The interpretations of prototypical transitive constructions are subject to the more general theory of cognitive grammar. According to Hopper and Thompson (1980:251), transitivity is traditionally interpreted "as a global property of an entire clause such that an activity is 'carried-over' or 'transferred' from an agent to a patient." Under this assumption, it is observed that the kinds of constructions that deviate from prototypical transitive constructions are also treated as marginal examples instantiated from the construction's prototype specification. Thus, we find the following unagent-like entities as grammatical subjects in English and Dutch.

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

- (5)
- a. This tent sleeps six.
 - b. The room seats 500.
 - c. *De kamer zetelt 500. (Dutch)
 - d. De kamer heeft 500 zitplaatsen. (Dutch: The room has 500 seats)
 - e. The fifth day saw our departure.
 - f. *De vijfde dag zag ons vertrek. (Dutch)

The fact that these unagent-like noun phrases can appear as syntactic subjects in English does not pose serious problems in cognitive grammar since they are considered mere deviations from the central semantic specification of prototypical transitivity (Taylor 1995:214). Compared to English sentences like *Peter kicked a ball* or *Tom broke a radio*, the semantic relation between subject and each event involved in (5) is less intense. The subjects in (5) do not execute the processes denoted by the verbs.

On the basis of Dutch, French and English data, Voorst (1996) demonstrates that there is cross-linguistic variation in the typical transitive constructions even with verbs such as *break* and *buy* as far as the level of intensity is concerned. Thus, transitive constructions in Dutch show a high level of intensity between the subject and the event denoted by the verb and between the event and the object, whereas in English both relations may be indirect or less intense (*The rock broke the windshield* / D.**Het steentje heeft de voorruit gebroken*). However, Voorst does not provide any account as to why this kind of cross-linguistic regularity exists. Based on the English and German examples, Taylor (1998:187-188) also admits that English idiomatically permits a much wider range of non-prototypical transitives (e.g., transitives whose subjects are not agents) than German (*This hotel forbids dogs* vs. **Das Hotel verbietet Hunde*; *The tent sleeps six* vs. **Das Zelt schläft sechs*). However, he does not try to explain why these differences between the two languages exist.

With respect to cognitive grammar, Talmy (1988) also uses "energy transfer" as the metaphor for the transitive process. In Talmy's terms, energy transfer does not take place in (5a-5f), because these subjects actually do nothing to execute the unfolding of the events denoted by

the verbs. The same kind of idea is also very much visible in the semantic analysis of transitive constructions by Voorst (1996). In the transitive constructions the relation between the subject that initiates the event and the process it triggers and the relation between this process and the affected entity (object) can have different degrees of intensity. The present author assumes that these relations also hold for the causative transitive constructions. The following causative constructions also help to clarify our explanation.

- (6) a. The terrorist threatens close US embassy in Bosnia. (CNN)
b. *De terroristische bedreigingen zorgen voor sluiting van de Amerikaanse ambassade in Bosnië (Dutch).
c. *Die terroristischen Bedrohungen schließen die US Botschaft in Bosnien.
d. Wegen der Terrorbedrohungen wurde die US Botschaft in Bosnien geschlossen.
'Because of the terrorist threats the US embassy in Bosnia was closed'.

In the event of closing an embassy, we usually expect an agent (*Ger. Handlungsträger*) to appear as a grammatical subject. In this sentence, however, 'threats' as an indirect source or cause can function as the subject in the English sentence. The corresponding German and Dutch constructions are ungrammatical. The same kind of grammatical relation holds true for the verb 'buy.'

- (7) a. That job bought him a house in Berkeley.
b. *Die baan kocht een huis voor hem in Berkeley.
c. Door die baan kon hij een huis in Berkeley kopen.
d. *Die Arbeit hat ihm ein Haus in Berkeley gekauft.
e. Wegen der Arbeit konnte er in Berkeley ein Haus kaufen.
'Because of the work he could buy a house in Berkeley.'

Job in these cases is seen as performing an instrumental function in the act of buying a house. Even though this function is not directly relevant to the act of purchasing, job can indeed appear as subject in the English construction. This rule can be applied to a more complex German causative-sentence type which shows relatively tighter argument-selectional restrictions, as compared to English:

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

(8) (Doherty 1993)

- a. The drug encourages the heart to beat more regularly.
- b. ?Das Medikament ermutigt das Herz regelmäßiger zu schlagen

How do we explain these cross-linguistic semantic distribution differences in the aforementioned transitive constructions? What interests us in an attempt to establish a more convincing and coherent account for these linguistic differences is not the research tradition that seeks to explain away the instances as mere deviations from the central proto-typicality for a given language. Rather, in order to provide a better balanced and inviting account for the constructions at issue, we want to establish a coherent relevance among typologically different types of languages that allow or disallow those deviations in a regular fashion.

4. Transitivity and objects

When it comes to passivization with respect to transitivity, there is also a misunderstanding over the identification of the transitive object. Hopper and Thompson (1980:259) suggest that "the special markings on definite objects, found in many languages, are better interpreted functionally as signals of the high transitivity of the clause as a whole." They also argue that "the arguments known to grammar as INDIRECT OBJECTS should in fact be transitive objects rather than what might be called 'accusative' objects, since they tend to be definite and animate." And this observation further supports the findings of Givón (1979:54) that, in one pair of English texts, out of 115 indirect objects, 112 (or 97%) are definite and overwhelmingly animate. This is argued to be also true of some Bantu languages where topic-related syntactic processes including passivization are correlated with the fact that the 'dative' argument takes precedence over the patient noun phrase. Despite the cross-linguistic insights by Hopper and Thompson, the present author has some reservations based upon German and Korean data. Let us look at the following dative and accusative noun-phrase serialization pattern of typical ditransitive constructions in German and Korean.

- (9) a. Hans hat dem Anwalt das Geld gegeben. (German)
'Hans has to the lawyer the money given'
b. Hans-nun pyunhosa-eykey ton-ul cwu-ess-ta.
(Korean)
TOP lawyer-DAT/BEN money-ACC give-pret.-
Decl.
'Hans gave the lawyer the money.'

In both constructions in (9a) and (9b) we note that the dative noun phrase precedes the accusative patient noun phrase as the unmarked order. In German, this is only possible if the two combinations are in free variation. This tells us that the more referential animate object appears before the inanimate object, as far as the precedence rule is concerned. However, this cannot be taken to mean that the dative animate object is *indeed* the true transitive object of the verb, since the dative marked argument cannot be promoted to the nominative case in German or Korean passives (e.g., *Der Anwalt wurde das Geld gegeben; Das Geld wurde dem Anwalt gegeben). Thus, the identification of true transitive objects cannot be established unitarily by means of syntactic tests such as passivization (cf. *Er wurde ein Preis verliehen 'He was awarded a prize.'). This in turn conflicts with another syntactic strategy called 'English dative movement' in which a beneficiary/recipient argument precedes a patient argument in the ditransitive construction. In English, 'dative movement' is also taken to support the preference selection of the dative recipient/beneficiary argument for identifying the true transitive object in English (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980:260).

- (10) a. Clara wrote a letter to Santa Claus.
b. Clara wrote Santa Claus a letter.

The two sentences in (10) have the same meaning. The only difference may be slightly in focus. In the first, the focus is on *letter*: I wrote a letter (not something else) to Santa Claus. In the second, the focus is on *Santa Claus*: I wrote Santa Claus (not someone else) a letter. Since in (10b) the human-recipient argument appears in the 'object position' adjacent to the verb, this dative object would be interpreted as the true object according to the logic of Hopper and Thompson. Since the comparable nominal as an inherent case is not subject to promotion to

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

the nominative argument in German and Korean passivization, the attempt to establish the true object in terms of animacy in ditransitive constructions does not succeed cross-linguistically. Thus, definiteness and animacy criteria associated with a high degree of transitivity cannot be a true diagnostic for selecting a true transitive object, at least with respect to passivization in German and Korean (cf. Ger. *Er wurde geholfen 'He was helped.'). In view of the criticism of the traditional transitivity theory, the transitivity parameter should be constrained in such a way that languages with high semantic transparency and an overt case-marking system proportionally correlate with less syntacticization.

In spite of the insightful prototype approach to the transitivity phenomena, the role of the morphological system of a given language is not clarified enough to explain the transitivity variations among the languages under consideration here. As we have seen in examples (3-5), the semantic restriction that inanimate entities, like instrumental or locative, have low ability to control the state of affairs of German transitive constructions predicts the less frequent application of passivization in German. This conceptual difference stemming from thematic-role assignment could be broadly interpreted so that the selectional restriction for the semantic content of the subject category in the transitive verb valency becomes stronger when we move from grammatically determined word order languages, e.g., English to pragmatically determined word order languages e.g., German and Korean (This tent sleeps four / Ger.*Das Zelt schläft vier; The key opened the door/ Ger.*Der Schlüssel öffnete die Tür).

This principle also holds for the relationships of verb and object in German and Korean. The case we have in mind is that, in English, nominals referring to very unpatient-like semantic roles appear as direct objects in transitive constructions (Taylor 1995:212).

- (11)
- a. We laid a carpet in the room.
 - b. We carpeted the room.
 - c. He loaded hay onto the truck.
 - d. He loaded the truck with hay.

In (11b) we note that the patient participant denoting a locative is incorporated into the verb. This is, however, not a syntactic rule, but a lexical derivation, i.e., conversion (explanation attributed to R. Dirven). In (11d), *the truck* is construed as the transitive object of the same locative verb in (11c). Thus, the two separate constructions of 'partitive'(11c) vs. 'holistic'(11d) readings are construed syntactically in English. In morphologically transparent systems like German and Korean, these opaque constructions are not likely to occur or are less developed.

- (12)
- a. Wir haben einen Teppich in das Zimmer gelegt.
 - b. Wir haben das Zimmer mit einem Teppich ausgelegt.
 - c. Er hat das Heu auf den LKW geladen.
 - d. Er hat den LKW mit dem Heu beladen.
 - e. *Er hat den LKW mit dem Heu geladen.
 - f. Hans hat die Wand neu tapeziert.
- 'Hans repapered the wall.' (an opaque instance similar to English)

In (12b) and (12d) the German morpho-syntax of the corresponding clauses shows much clearer lexical choices than in English. The Korean equivalents in (13a) and (13b) reveal a similar transparent paradigm.

- (13)
- a. ku-nun cwimcha-ey kuncho-lul sil-ess-ta.
 he-TOP truck-LOC hay-ACC load-pret.-Decl.
 'He loaded hay onto the truck.'
 - b. ku-nun kuncho-ro cwimcha-lul chai-u-ess-ta.
 he-TOP hay-INSTR truck-ACC fill-caus.-pret.-Decl.
 'He loaded the truck with hay.'

The fact that English grammar entails these opaque grammatical relations tells us that the English transitive construction has undergone enormous extension due to case syncretism in its history (cf. The horse jumped the fence vs. The fence was jumped by the horse [Quirk et al. 1985:749]; *Das Pferd sprang über den Zaun* vs. **Der Zaun wurde von dem Pferd übersprungen*). Languages differ in the way features of actions are encoded by lexical items. However, it is no coincidence that German and Korean show a more transparent overall encoding system for the relationship of verb and object.

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: -A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE-

Split intransitive constructions in German and Korean also fit well into our system of prototype parameters. The experience-argument of a mental state is readily encoded as a transitive subject in English (e.g., *The king* likes pears). In German and Korean, however, the existence of the dative case is held to be responsible for encoding most typically the more topical or semantically salient experiencer argument of a mental state in a valency network of lexical predicate.

- (14) a. Ich höre, dass Studenten eine Bahnkarte fehlt.
 Lit. 'I hear that students lack a discount train card.'
 b. *Ich höre, dass eine Bahnkarte Studenten fehlt.
 c. *Thomas glaubt, dass ein Fehler der Mannschaft unterlaufen ist.
 d. Ich glaube, dass guten Musikern solche Misstöne auffallen. (Duden 2009:870)
 e. Na-eykey/nun ton-i mocara-nta. (Korean)
 I-DAT/TOP money-NOM lack-Decl.
 'I lack money.'

In the examples (14b) and (14c), we see that the non-topical status of the subject NP is marked syntactically (via subject-verb inversion) (cf. Lambrecht 1994). This category mismatch becomes more complicated, when it comes to the following embedded infinitival clauses with control phenomena. Often, subject-based syntactic rules don't obtain in these constructions (Askedal 2001:67-68):

- (15) a. Ihm kommt die Hausarbeit zu schwer vor
 him.dat comes the homework.nom too difficult part.
 'He finds the homework too hard.'
 b. *Er behauptet, tüchtig zu sein, aber kommt die
 he.nom claims PRO clever to be but comes the
 Hausarbeit zu schwer vor.
 homework too difficult part.
 'He claims to be clever but he finds the homework too hard.'
 c. Er behauptet, tüchtig zu sein, aber ihm kommt die Hausarbeit
 zu schwer vor.
 he claims PRO clever to be but him.dat comes the
 homework too difficult part.
 'He claims to be clever but he finds the homework too hard.'

As the above examples (15) demonstrate, German dative arguments are translated into English nominative subjects. Given the morphological ergativity, we note that the subject-specific rules do not apply to the dative marking of an NP in the German control phenomena.

As far as mapping to grammatical relations goes, Croft (1991:181) points out that "subject and object choice is semantically highly underdetermined". A variety of basic lexical options will often be available for selecting one or the other of the "direct" roles onto subject and/or object based on various conceptual and pragmatic factors, and many languages additionally have a "construction type such as the passive that allows a 'reassignment' of argument NPs from the unmarked configuration of grammatical relations to the desired one" (150). As far as the pragmatic conditions underlying subject- and objecthood, Croft notes (151) that "when a choice for subject is involved, topicality governs the choice, (cf. Hawkinson and Hyman 1974)". Croft ultimately believes, however, that "the primary explanation for the conceptualization of subjects and objects is based on the conceptualization of verbs" (155).

As we have seen in the German examples (14-15), however, the subject-signifying behavioral and coding properties do not accrue to a single NP. Rather, they can be distributed over multiple NPs in a German sentence. Given the comparative analyses in the German examples (14-15) for the category mismatch behavior between nominative argument and dative argument within a clause, it is also not true when Croft argues that the choice for subject is governed by topicality with respect to the pragmatic conditions underlying subject- and objecthood.

The split intransitive constructions (or inversion constructions) denoting a mental state with dative-experiencer + nominative-theme arguments in the German 'middle field' (Ger. *Mittelfeld*) and Korean in (14) show that the grammatical encodings specifiable in overtly case-marked systems are neutralized in English transitive constructions. This is due to the fact that unlike Modern German, English has become relatively opaque in the declension of case marking and the comparatively tight association of agent with nominative-subject encoding.

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: -A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE-

This diachronic change also resulted in the integration into the subject category of formerly subjectless impersonal verbs with experiencer arguments (e.g., OEngl. *Him/hine hyngrede* 'He is hungry.' from Plank [1983:11]). Given the lack of isomorphism between role and overt coding in a configurational language like Modern English, Noonan (1977:377) argues that this system requires the identification of a level of grammar not relevant to direct-role marking-languages, i.e., a level of grammatical relations (e.g., subject and object). This is, then, the sense in which Noonan uses the term "subject": "the highest ranking syntactic slot in an indirect role marking system."

5. Transitivity and prototype parameter

In our prototype parameter, the distinctive status of the two types of role-marking systems can be identified with English (indirect role marking system) and German (direct role marking system) respectively. Of course, this dichotomy is not of an absolute but a relative nature. In the English system, then, reliance on traditional grammatical relations to describe the morphological and syntactic process is most clearly indispensable.

If we follow this line of logic, the traditional subject category is reduced in significance in some respects. The subject can be viewed as a nonessential category lacking the immediate semantic or discourse motivation of indispensable, universal categories such as "topic" or "agent." In English, the subjecthood has a grammatical status that does not tolerate complete reduction to semantic and pragmatic notions, in the sense that it is grammaticalized to the extent where an expletive grammatical subject is required (cf. Van Oosten 1986, Seong 2001). In this case, the English expletive subjects (e.g., *it* or *there*) contract no semantic relationship with predicates. This seems also to be in line with Fillmore's (1968) implicit view that subjecthood is regarded as involving a language-specific grammaticalization of more immediately motivated categories when he comments in a footnote that "it may be that when one device for topicalization becomes 'habitual,' it freezes into a formal requirement..." (1968:58). The view of subjects as grammaticalized topics is also implied by Fillmore's characterization of subjectivalization as "primary topicalization," as opposed to "secondary

topicalization," with the former involving language-specific grammatical requirements such as English position and number agreement and the latter involving stylistic permutations sensitive to momentary discourse requirements (1968:57). Even though Fillmore emphasizes the importance of covert categories such as grammatical properties lacking obvious 'morphemic' realizations, he leaves unaddressed the implications of syntactic or behavioral properties of nominal constituents by which many analysts in more recent work (cf. e.g., Anderson 1976 and Dixon 1979) do identify a "covert" subject category in ergative languages which is often at variance with overt morphological coding (surface case or agreement).

In contrast to English, the participant encoding strategy of pragmatically determined word order languages such as German and Korean provides a parameterized perspective with respect to the prototype-view of constructions. Thus, the Korean system might be classified as a highly transparent system in which some form of overt coding (e.g., case-marking) relates directly to semantic roles, without significant neutralization of role distinctions. Accordingly, we can take the German system to be a relatively transparent system in terms of how the form of overt coding is mapped onto the role system. The differences between Korean and German might be that the Korean system has a separate topic marker, whereas German reserves the prefield for topic position.

By analogy we can also claim that Old Scandinavian had a highly transparent verbal encoding system for transitivity, since this language had two distinctive formal means of marking nominative argument and topicality. Faarlund (1992:151) promises to "show how [the connection of the theme-rheme distribution with the function of the grammatical subject] is dependent on the structural status of the subject, and how the emergence of a structurally defined subject category in the history of Scandinavian has entailed a change in its thematic function".

Faarlund (1992) argues that the "subject" category in Scandinavian has changed from a relatively "non-prototypical" to a "prototypical" one as Scandinavian languages have evolved from non-configurationality to configurationality. He assumes that the nominative case in Old Scandinavian is associated with subjecthood, and that discourse- or reference-related strategies involving theme-rheme organization are entirely independent of case-marking. Specifically, the nominative-marked nominals in modern Scandinavian languages have gained many

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE.

reference-related (i.e., topicality in Chafe's (1976) term; cf. also Foley and Van Valin 1984) "subject" qualities that Old Scandinavian nominatives lacked. For example, while in Modern Scandinavian "the subject is always definite in some (specifiable) sense", Old Scandinavian nominatives are often indefinite (Faarlund 1992:161). Often this means that "expletives" are used in the modern translation of Old Scandinavian indefinite nominative subjects. Thus, in Old Scandinavian, topicality and primaryhood (cf. Van Oosten 1984) are coded by completely different formal means. We may assume that the emergence of a "structurally defined subject" entails a fixing of this grammatical category in an initial or near-initial position in the clause, unlike in Old Scandinavian where the nominative freely occupied any position (cf. Faarlund 2001). This would be interpreted in terms of a degeneration of case-marking. Next, we assume that the initial position retains its thematic function due to natural and common discourse constraints. Given that initial position is now associated with both theme and grammatical function (specifically, subjecthood), we have the development of a thematic category, as Faarlund describes it. The independence of topicality and primaryhood is also witnessed in Korean where pragmatic pivot and nominative argument are encoded independently (cf. Korean as subject- and topic-prominent language in Li and Thompson 1976).

Unlike Voorst (1996), our prototype parameter discussed so far explains why there is cross-linguistic regularity, as regards the semantic intensity between the subject and the verb, on the one hand, and between the verb and the object, on the other, when it comes to the transitive constructions. The approach taken in this research also demonstrates the relative degree of transitivity in the verbal encoding system identifiable among the languages investigated.

6. Clause-union constructions in English and German

There is also evidence that a certain direction of grammaticalization (e.g., transitivity, passivization and raising) is closely related to the degree of discourse prominence of a given language. An important piece of evidence comes from the diachronic change of English and German clause structures. Consider the following Middle English

example for a reinterpretation of an old construction.

(16) Middle English, Modern English und New High German

- a. [It is bet for me] [To sleen myself than ben defouled thus].
- b. It is better for me to slay myself than to be violated thus.
- c. For me to slay myself would be better than to be violated thus.
(Engl. Examples from Ebert 1978:12)
- d. ?Für mich mich selbst zu töten wäre besser als verletzt
zu werden auf diese Weise.
- e. Für mich wäre es besser mich selbst zu töten als auf diese Weise
verletzt zu werden.

In (16) we observe that the subjectification process took place to a different degree across Germanic languages, even though the category of subject functions as the preferred target of the syntactic processes (e.g., raising and passive constructions). Originally, the Middle English construction *for* + *NP* in (16a) belongs to the matrix sentence. In this case, the pronoun 'me' is interpreted as the logical or semantic subject of the Middle English infinitival construction 'to sleen myself' of the second clause. In the diachronic evolution of the construction (16a), the construction 'for me to sleen myself' can be understood as a postposed subject, since *for* + *NP* together with the infinitival construction of the subordinate clause could be preposed later on, as in example (16c) (Ebert 1978:12). We can interpret this grammatical change in such a way that the adverbial complement *for* + *NP* in the matrix clause and the infinitival construction in the dependent clause constitute together a newly formulated syntactic unit (that is, a new syndetic construction). Therefore, we can state that the original adverbial complement *for* + *NP* forms a part of the subject in the English sentence (16c). This process of subjectification has not taken place in German to the extent it has in English, because the grammaticality of the corresponding German example (16d) is still accepted marginally by German native speakers. In (16e) we note that the German construction 'für mich' has the function of the adverbial complement for the matrix clause. German native speakers also tend to place a small pause between 'für mich' and 'mich' within the prefield (Ger. *Vorfeld*) for a better reading (Für mich, mich selbst zu töten, wäre...: example from A. Huwe, p.c.). The sentence (16d) is also evaluated as a colloquial expression.

TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: -A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE-

7. Conclusion

In English we find many transitive constructions in which the grammatical differentiations available in overtly case-marking systems, such as German and Korean, are simply neutralized. With respect to these differences in grammatical relations, we can conclude that there is cross-linguistic regularity, as regards the semantic intensity between the subject and the verb. This regularity was also confirmed between the verb and the object, when it comes to the transitive causative constructions. We also demonstrated that the prototype parameter constrains the applicability of some clause-union constructions in English and German. In this respect, it is also clear that traditional relational notions of grammatical relations, such as subject and object, do not suffice to adequately describe the grammars of German and Korean, as opposed to English. Thus, German and Korean transitive constructions show a relatively transparent semantic encoding system of subject and object selection, while in English these constructions are opaque. This comparative prototype-parameter perspective provides a better explanation as to why there are cross-linguistic differences of transitive constructions with respect to the force-dynamic profiles.

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TRANSITIVITY AND PROTOTYPE PARAMETER: -A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE-

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INDEX VOLUME 19

ARTICLES

- DeWulf, Jeroen 173
Pinkster in New York: On the Dutch Community and its
Slaves in James Fenimore Cooper's Novel *Satanstoe* (1845)
- Estes, Alex 191
Semantic Conditioning Theories of Qualitative Ablaut
- Finazzi, Rosa Bianca and Paola Tornaghi 1
Gothica bononiensia: A New Document Under Linguistic and
Philological Analysis
- Hubert Haider 57
The VO-OV Split of Germanic Languages—A T3 & V2 Production
- Lieberman, Anatoly 111
Struggling with Words of Allegedly Unknown Origin: *Agog*,
Ajar, *Anlace*, and *Awning*
- Rauch, Irmengard 143
BAG XIII: On Laughter: German and English Jokes
- Sanjinés, José 81
On Inventing the Enemy: Lies and Irony in Eco's Fiction
- Seong, Sang Hwan 207
Transitivity and Prototype Parameter: A Cross-Linguistic
Perspective
- St.Clair, Michael 135
Population Genetics and the Humanities: Crimean
Goths and Contemporary European Romani.

REVIEW

- Lieberman, Anatoly 227
Guss Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*