

An RRG approach to pronominal constructions of transitive Object-Experiencer verbs – anticausatives or antipassives?

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Pronominal constructions of transitive object-experiencer (OE) verbs, as found in many European languages, e.g. in French, Spanish or German (1), are not easy to classify:

- (1) a. French: *Le garçon* *s'* *irrite.*
 The boy PRO upset-PRES.3sg
- b. Spanish: *El muchacho* *se* *enoja.*
 The boy PRO upset-PRES.3sg
- c. German: *Der Junge* *ärgert* *sich*
 The boy upset-PRES.3sg PRO
 'The boy gets angry.'

Obviously, these are not reflexive constructions as in the French example (2), in which the actor and undergoer of the corresponding transitive construction coincide:

- (2) a. *Paul* *rase* *Pierre*
 Paul shave-PRES.3sg Peter
- b. *Paul* *se* *rase*
 Paul PRO shave-PRES.3sg

Rather, the undergoer of the transitive construction remains realizable and the pronoun cannot be commuted by a pronoun that refers to an entity other than the PSA argument:

- (3) a. *La critique* *irrite* *le garçon*
 The criticism upset-PRES.3sg the boy
 'The criticism irritates the boy'
- b. *Le garçon* *s'* *irrite* *de* *la critique*
 The boy_i PRO_i upset-PRES.3sg of the criticism
 'The boy gets angry at the criticism'
- c. *Le garçon* **l'* *irrite* *de* *la critique*
 The boy_i PRO_j upset-PRES.3sg of the criticism

In a RRG framework, Gonzáles Vargara (2009) assumed that the actor of the corresponding constructions in Spanish were deleted and described the pronominal constructions of OE verbs as analogous to pronominal passive and anticausative constructions.

Herslund (1997) refers to Foley / Van Valin (1985) and describes them as “backgrounding antipassives”. In current RRG, we would speak of “PSA modulation as antipassive” (Van Valin 2005). According to Herslund (1997), the antipassive construction in psychological verbs in French demotes the undergoer macrorole and the undergoer argument of the transitive basic construction becomes the actor and thus the PSA of the pronominal construction. Therefore, the pronominal constructions of OE-verbs differ from pronominal passive and anticausative constructions, in which the actor macrorole is canceled.

In fact, there is a clear contrast in terms of the degree of activity of the PSA argument between the pronominal constructions of the OE verbs and the corresponding (non-pronominal) passive constructions in (4) (Kailuweit 2005):

- (4) a. *Paul est irrité par Pierre*
 Paul be-PRES.3sg irritate-PART by Peter
 ‘Paul is irritated by Peter’
- b. *Paul s’ irrite contre Pierre*
 Paul PRO upset-PRES.3sg against Peter
 ‘Paul gets angry with Peter’

In the literature, the claim that the pronominal constructions of OE-verbs are instances of antipassive constructions in accusative languages is not new. It can be found in Cresti (1990) and Masullo (1992). Other authors (e.g. Alexiadou / Iordachioaia 2014; Acedo / Mateo 2015) consider these constructions anticausatives.

The aim of this contribution is to consider whether the pronominal constructions of transitive OE-verbs more closely resemble antipassive constructions or passive constructions in the broader sense (anticausative constructions). The question is whether the PSA in these constructions is an actor or an undergoer. In this context, the aktionsart of the pronominal constructions and the semantics (LS) of the corresponding transitive constructions must be discussed.

It shall also be discussed to what extent the assumption of antipassive constructions in accusative languages makes sense. Finally, it will be shown how both the pronominal construction and the corresponding transitive basic construction can be modeled in RRG and how they relate to each other.

References

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