

The aim of this paper is two-fold: to reflect upon the notion of intransitivity as well as outlining some problems related to metaphorisation of the intransitive construction. Let us begin with a handful of definitions of intransitivity, encompassing intransitive verbs, clauses and constructions – a formal confusion which I am not going to disentangle at this stage.

## **A. The background**

Aa. Defining intransitivity: from syntactic to semantic/conceptual criteria

1. Quirk et al. (1990): intransitive verbs require no obligatory complementation and occur in SV clause patterns, e.g. *The sun is shining*. However, the meaning of certain intransitive verbs is completed by an adverbial complement, e.g. *He lives in London*.

2. Hewings and Hewings (2005): a verb or a clause without an object are termed intransitive, e.g. *It disappeared*.

3. Givón (2001): intransitive verbs may code either states, events or actions. Their subject may be either an Agent, Patient, or Dative, e.g. *He worked (hard)*, *She dreamed (for hours)*, *It stood (there)*, *She fell*. (Note the adverbials, please.) The syntactic structure of simple intransitive clauses is the SV pattern. However, some intransitive verbs take an indirect object, most commonly marked by adposition, e.g. *He came from buffalo*. *It floated on the water*.

4. Downing and Locke (2006): intransitive verbs occur in type S-P (Predicator/verbal group), e.g. *He disappeared*. They do not admit an object but certain intransitive verbs predict a complement of space or time: certain uses of those verbs are completed by expressions of location, direction, goal, manner or duration, e.g. *She goes to school*.

5. Taylor (2002): intransitive clauses present situations as involving only one participant, which may be a Patient or Mover, an Experiencer, or a Zero nominal.

Concurrently, however, he adds: Taylor (2002: 416) “Normally, participants need to be explicitly stated while circumstances can be omitted. Nevertheless, there are cases in which the statement of what looks like a circumstance appears to be obligatory.” For example, *He lived in England*.

6. Davidse (1991: 113): intransitives are “constellations that are both non-extendible to a Goal as well as ‘non-instigatable’.” In other words, they highlight non-achievement and non-causality and are thus often referred to as describing independent activities/autonomous events (Langacker 2000, Talmy 2003).

To sum up, the above definitions point to two major areas of intransitivity related confusion. The first problem is the status of adverbial complementation, the other one concerns the notion of participation.

Let us now look at the prototype of the intransitive construction, which emerges from the traditional classification into unaccusative and unergative intransitive verbs.

Ab. The prototype of the intransitive construction: a one-participant process

1. the traditional distinction into unaccusatives (e.g. arrive, grow, collapse), where the subject is an Undergoer/an Affected participant and unergatives (e.g. run, sing, jump), where the subject is an Agent. Moreover, the former typically describe telic occurrences whereas the latter reflect non-culminating events.

2. Taylor (2002: 424): unergatives (e.g. ring, sleep) require a subject referent with the role of Zero (no interaction) while with unaccusatives (e.g. depart) the subject is a Patient or Mover.

To recapitulate, the importance of the subject- participant is not to be denied, with its semantic potential defined along the parameters of interaction, control and effectiveness: Zero, Affected, Mover, or Agent. In the same vein, the prototype of the intransitive construction is conceptually defined by Davidse as:

3. a non-effective, non-instigatable, controlled process with a volitional Actor:

*It is raining, John fell, **John is running**, The river flows, **The car moved** (non-effective, instigatable, controlled, volitional: ergative).*

Ac. The question(s): the effect of metaphorisation on the intransitive construction

Given the prototypical attributes of the intransitive construction (non-effectiveness, non-instigability, controllability and volition), which of them will be preserved in the process of metaphorization?

Given the indeterminate role of adverbials as participants with physical uses of the intransitive construction, what is their role with metaphorical extensions?

What is the nature of the relation between conceptual content and constructional distribution?

## **B. The data**

Ba. Intransitive verbs of emotions in English:

- motivation: purely lexico-semantic accounts/no constructional analysis (Barcelona 2001, Kövecses 2002);
- selection based on syntactic behaviour (no object/possible adverbial complement);
- classification based on the physical prototype for the intransitive category (conceptual criteria of non-effectiveness, non-instigability, volition and control);

Let me now explain how the two most crucial conceptual criteria, namely non-effectiveness and non-instigability can be applied to metaphorical extensions within the domain of emotions:

**non-effectiveness:** emotions are not oriented towards a metaphorical goal, i.e. the emotion remains contained within the body, Non-effectiveness can then be defined along containment/directionality/goal/ interaction scale, which translates into a distinction between *She was brimming with enthusiasm. She exploded with rage.*

**non-instigability:** external causality is hidden, e.g. *She glowed./ She boiled with fury.*

- examples classified according to the degree of subjectivisation (Traugott 1989): external/internal/ textual and metalinguistic

Bb. The examples (<http://www.google.pl/search>, previous studies, CALD): the overall effect of metaphorisation

**THE HUMAN BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS;  
HUMANS ARE LOCATIONS, CONTAINERS, OBJECTS  
EMOTIONS ARE LIQUIDS/GASES/SOLIDS**

The three sets of examples are classified according to the central mapping.

**GROUP 1: INTENSITY IS AMOUNT**

1. The tank was brimming. (intransitive/setting-container/substance)  
(She brimmed.) She brimmed with joy. (“Don’t worry,” she brimmed.)
2. The bath is overflowing. (intransitive/ergative//setting-container/substance)  
She overflowed.(rare) She overflowed with love. “Yes,” she overflowed to me. (rare)

**GROUP 2: INTENSITY IS PRESSURE (FORCE)**

**Entailment: WHEN THE CONTAINER EXPLODES, WHAT IS INSIDE IT COMES OUT, OFTEN WITH A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE**

3. The balloon burst. (intransitive/ergative)  
She burst. She burst with anger. “Get out!” she burst/ burst out.
4. The bomb exploded. (intransitive/ergative)  
She exploded. She exploded with rage. “Get out!” she exploded.

**GROUP 3: INTENSITY IS HEAT (FORCE)**

5. The sun beamed. (intransitive)  
She beamed. She beamed with pleasure (rare). “Don’t worry,” she beamed.
6. This substance glows in the dark. (intransitive)  
She glowed. She glowed with joy (rare). (“Don’t worry,” she glowed.)  
5/6 quite prototypical, non-instigatable (thus the uses of adverbials only for emphasis)  
graded effectiveness
7. The embers smoldered. (intransitive)  
She smoldered. She smoldered with rage (rare). “ I know that, “ she smoldered.
8. The kettle is boiling. (intransitive/ergative)  
She was boiling. She boiled with fury. (“Get out!” she boiled.)
9. The pot simmered. (intransitive/ergative)  
She simmered. She simmered with indignation (rare). (“Get out!” she simmered.)
10. The wood is burning. (intransitive/ergative)  
She was burning. She was burning with desire. (“Get out!” she burned.)
11. physical uses not found  
She seethed. She seethed with anger. She seethed (frequent)  
She fumed. She fumed with anger. She fumed (frequent)  
Adverbial for emphasis, high degree of subjectivity
12. intransitive uses not found  
She stewed. (She stewed with anger.) (“Get out!” she stewed.)

### **C. Conclusions**

If we remember the 4 intransitivity parameters proposed by Davidse, it is clear that with metaphorical extensions due to schematization (Szwedek 2004) certain attributes become less prominent, namely volition and control. What therefore requires detailed discussion are causality and effectiveness/ goal-achievement.

Let us begin with the notion of **instigatability**. Talmy (2003) points out that causality related to circumstances preceding a physical event is rarely expressed on the surface of the English language. In other words, sentences like *Water poured out of the tank* do not lexicalize a specific portion of our encyclopaedic knowledge about causal chains. At the same, however, Lemmens (1998) remarks that prepositional complements are frequent in the case of metaphorical extensions, e.g. *a company starving for cash*.

In my data, external/objective causality is related to conceptually autonomy and metaphorical extensions can be subdivided into independently conceived and those requiring explicit reference to concurrent causes. I therefore claim that autonomy at an abstract level is facilitated by the co-occurrence of two factors: the basicness of the verb, in other words, its entrenchment, and the degree to which metonymic/physiological motivation is highlighted, in other words, to what a degree particular uses should be viewed against external rather than internal domains (e.g. burst, explode, boil, burn). Conceptual richness or a wide experiential range of basic level items motivates the use of adverbial complementation for the sake of determining the relevant domain within a possible scope (Kovecses 2002). On the other hand, if adv. Complementation is used subordinate level verbs (beam, glow, smolder, simmer) it is only for the sake of emphasis, and is therefore fairly infrequent in the data.

All in all, conceptual autonomy at an abstract level is related to the semantic content of the verb and facilitated by the properties of the construction it is derived from. Therefore, on the one hand adverbial complements are obligatory (1) since the original constr. is highly unprototypical. On the other hand they are optional if external causation is accentuated (3,4,8,10). On still other hand, they should be avoided if an abstract sense is rooted in prototypical intransitivity (5-7), whereby instigatability is not highlighted. As Lemmens (1998) puts it: “Undoubtedly encouraging a high degree of independence of the caused process is the typical imperceptibility of the cause, especially those causes involving internal perspective.”

Finally, adverbials should not be used with extensions whose physical basis are not related to intransitive uses, which may well be restated as an ultimate contrast between examples 1 and 12.

Another conceptual parameter of prototypical intransitivity is related to **effectiveness**. Again, composite effects of the verb and the construction can be traced. In other words, the conceptual potential of the verb, as defined by Langacker 2005, makes its occurrence within a particular construction possible. The speech act readings of verbs like *explode* or *beam* are then possible because these verbs profile directionality or even a certain degree of goal-achievement, which are prerequisites for any interaction. The transitive/textual uses should be viewed as neither resulting from the polysemous nature of a given verb nor as being solely imposed by the meaning of a given construction. Rather, lexical and constructional semantics are interdependent, which among others, raises the question of the cognitive value of such concepts as transitivity or ergativity.

Another related issue concerns the nature of constructions and the thus resulting various formulations of Construction Grammar (Croft 2001, Goldberg 1995, Goldberg and Jackendoff 2006, Langacker 2003, 2005). Perhaps an apparent conflict among diverse phrasings of construction-based approaches could be at least partly resolved if we verified the data against abstract domains. As we all know, the basic function of conceptual metaphors is to highlight or utilize the most relevant aspects within domains of experience. It might then be practical to employ metaphorisation in order to further explore the assumptions of constructionism.