

ON TRANSITIVITY AND INTRANSITIVITY OF THE SAME (?)
VERB IN ENGLISH

RUTA NAGUCKA

The Jagiellonian University of Cracow

My main concern in this paper is to present some remarks and reflections on the nature of the notion transitive and intransitive with regard to the verb. To start with, I assume these two terms first in their traditional sense (cf. Jespersen 1948:116), i.e. for transitive I take any verb which is, or may be, followed by a complement, an object, as in

- (1) I chose a book for you
I didn't choose to go

and by intransitive I understand any verb which does not take any complement, e.g.

- (2) Birds fly
She was running quickly.

Or to put it differently, a transitive verb takes two arguments in its basic minimal structure, while an intransitive verb takes only one. Although considered from various standpoints the transitive — intransitive distinction has always played a substantial part in a linguistic description of the verb and also in discussions on passivity, causality, modality or localism. Whether, and in what sense, the English language draws a syntactic and semantic distinction between transitive and intransitive forms of the same verb is the question I shall concentrate on after I have introduced and exemplified the main points of investigation.

(i) The first question to ask and to answer is whether an English verb can have both transitive and intransitive forms, i.e. whether it can occur with and without an object and be treated as one and the same verb, for instance the verb *burst* in

Don't burst it — The boiler burst

(ii) The second point is connected with the answer to the first question:

(a) if the answer is affirmative we have to ask a question about a grammatical relationship between these two forms: is there any transformational dependence between them? Do we have a process of transitivization according to which *burst* changed into *burst something*? Or, is it rather a process of intransitivization involving a deletion of the object, i.e. changing *burst something* into *burst*? Or, is a grammatical object of the verb an optional deep category to the effect that it can but need not appear on the surface (e.g. *burst (something)*)?

(b) if, however, the first question is answered in the negative, which means that there are two different verbs: one with an object and another one without an object (e.g. *burst something* and *burst* as two distinct lexical units), one has to account for phonological, semantic and also syntactic affinities and even identities between these two, or more lexical items.

(iii) The third and the last problem I should like to discuss is a wide range of linguistic facts which constitute a basis on which one of the interpretations would seem to be semantically most acceptable.

Although there are quite a few formulations of the semantically relevant notions we are concerned with, i.e. object, transitive and intransitive, and all technicalities connected with them, we can recognize two concepts now widely assumed and defended both by transformationalists and by nontransformationalists. According to one assumption a grammatical object is defined in terms of deep structure if analysed within the framework of Chomsky's standard and extended standard theory of transformational grammar. Here various kinds of syntactically based models have been proposed. For example, for Chomsky (1965: 68 ff.) the notion object refers to "object-of" which is "the relation between the NP of a VP of the form $V\hat{N}P$ and the whole VP"; it "designates a grammatical function" and is "inherently relational". Also formal in its character is the object in Fillmorean case grammar although as a conception it is missing from the base structure and is "regarded as proper only to the surface structure" where it appears as a result of the process of objectivalization, "which has the superficial effect of bringing a particular nominal element into closer association with the verb" (Fillmore 1968: 3, 47). An object regarded by Stockwell (1977: 53) as one type of verb complement has also a functional meaning, which attitude he shows by the following formulations:

two-place predicate (e.g. love)
 =transitive (single-object)
 =subject+verb+object
 =NP+V+NP
 =NP+ $\underbrace{\quad\quad\quad}_{VP}$

or

three-place predicate (e.g. give)
 =transitive (double-object)
 =subject+verb+object₁+object₂
 =NP+V+NP+NP
 =NP+ $\underbrace{\quad\quad\quad}_{VP}$

Setting aside other linguistic descriptions and interpretations of the object, it seems that once it is recognized it will play some role in the semantic interpretation of sentences. This, however, is not so obvious in the case of the other, semantically based assumption, according to which there is "no reason for believing semantic representation to be different in formal nature from syntactic representation" (McCawley 1970:171). Being logically oriented, generative semanticists who are meant in this case would ignore the notion of object; it is not considered as something having a functional significance, but is regarded in accordance with predicate logic as a variable of a propositional function (e.g. love x, y).¹

Looked at from various viewpoints, then, the notion object whether accepted as a distinct grammatical function or as an argument or still as something else has always been given some recognition. It is not clear, nevertheless, in particular theories, whether the verb is to be understood as an inherently +object item and separately as an inherently -object item, or whether the same verb is an inherently \pm object item. The latter is typical of Chomsky (1965:90 ff.) for whom a strict subcategorization rule would tell us that, for instance, *grow* is analyzed as [+V, + -NP, + - #, + - Adjective]. This suggests that there is one lexical item, the verb *grow*, which can appear with the object NP or without the object, or with the adjective. Fillmore is of the same opinion when he says that the feature frame for *cook* can be +[-O (A)] which accounts for transitive and intransitive uses of the verb. It depends upon a transformational feature (the feature is of idiosyncratic nature) of the verb whether the object may be deleted or not. Fillmore openly expresses a view that it is the same lexical entry and that "instead of saying that the verb has three different meanings, we can be satisfied to say that there is a certain variety in the case frames which accept it and that it is one of the 'deletable object' verbs" (1968:28). For the same claim expressed later in a detailed discussion of the grammar of *hitting* and *breaking* see Fillmore's article 1970 in which he rejects a formulation which "requires to be two *hit's* and three *break's*" (123). As to Stockwell, in spite of the fact that case grammar is not the theoretical basis of his *Foundations of Syntactic Theory*, he seems to share the same idea of the object with Fillmore. Ac-

¹ For a simple introduction to these concepts see McCawley (1981).

according to him a sentence such as *The student drinks* contains a transitive predication "even though no direct object is formally present" (1977:53). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the three opinions quoted above strongly support a hypothesis that there is one lexical item of the verb no matter whether it is an object or objectless item. It is important to realize, however, that there are linguists who do not easily agree with the solutions suggested by Chomsky, Fillmore or Stockwell; for these other linguists things are not as simple as that. Taking meaning into account they propose that there are as many lexical entries of the verb as there are structures in which they are used. For example, Liles says that since the meaning of *ran* in *He ran fast* differs from the *ran* in *He ran the store* the verb *run* is listed in the lexicon as "two separate entries, or as two separate words" (1971:31).² Such an interpretation would make any ambiguous word to be taken for two (or more if it is multiply ambiguous) distinct lexical units and as they are distinct each of them would be assigned its own, separate lexical entry. The individuation of lexical entries because of the individuation of lexical meanings has been also proposed by McCawley (1968), enlarging upon Weinreich's conception of lexical item. Still, a recognition of the structural distinction between a verb with an object and the same verb without an object does not constitute sufficient grounds, as it looks, for some linguists to assume either of the divergent proposals about the individuation of lexical item. Perlmutter, for instance, has argued that the verb *begin* "occurs in two distinct kinds of deep structures" (1970:114) but leaves the question open whether they are two distinct verbs or a single verb.

None of the proposals is conclusive in the sense that it would not raise any questions or doubts. Taking all arguments for and against each proposal, it seems to me that the one which individuates meanings but not lexical entries better accounts both for the linguistic facts and the speaker's intuition than the one which sets as many lexical entries as there are meanings. Without going into details of theoretical nature such as simplicity measures and empirical consequences I should like to argue for the first proposal and offer additionally some evidence which has been rather neglected in current generative theories, although these issues may turn out to be quite significant.

² A more striking example quoted by Liles is *fly* which will appear in the lexicon six different times, separately for each meaning because it is used in the following contexts:

1. The bird flew out of the room.
2. The angry woman flew out of the room in a rage.
3. Last week I flew in an airplane.
4. The dust flew everywhere.
5. Last week I flew an airplane.
6. He flew off the handle. (Liles 1971: 31)

For a historical linguist it is especially important to decide first about the etymological origin of a lexical item, then about its phonological and semantic development, change of various kinds, syntactic behaviour, etc. If each meaning is given a single dictionary entry, one has to build up a complex system of relatedness that would show how the entries were related in the past, what they had in common, and what made them differ. If such a conception were accepted any theory of linguistic change would be concerned rather with the appearance and disappearance of lexical entries than with their semantic changes; it would not seem formally possible to talk about such obvious and natural properties of words as shift of meaning, narrowing or widening of meaning, acquiring a new meaning, etc. Regarded from such a point of view, ModE *choose* in (1)

- (1) I chose a book for you

would have nothing in common with OE *ciosan* in

- (3) he...pone cynedom ciosan wolde (Beowulf 2375) or that he would elect to rule the realm

because in (1) *choose* means select, take as something preferable out of all that are available while *ciosan* in (3) does not imply any selection and rather expresses acceptance of something. A natural consequence of this treatment would be to say that these are two distinct *choose*'s of which one was lost probably already in Old English, while the other, i.e. the one which has the meaning of select could be traced back to OE *ceosan* found in such sentences as

- (4) *þæt he oðer lif ma cure* (Bede 454/12) that he rather chose another life
 (5) *hi ðonne ma of þam wifeynne him cyning curan³ þonne of þam wæpnedcynne* (Bede 28/21) they should choose the sovereign rather from the female line than from the male
 (6) *him sædon þæt hie oðer dyden, oðþe ham comen oðþe hie him woldon oðerra wera ceosan* (Orosius 44/20) they said to them that they should have done something else, either they should come home or they would make a choice of their husbands

Some other issue which has come out while investigating *choose* and its earlier structural equivalents is the uncertainty, or hesitation at least, about the semantic representation of these allegedly different OE *ceosan*'s. In Beowulf there is a very simple phrase

- (7) *ær he bælcure* (Beowulf 2818)

which according to Bosworth means "ere he chose the funeral pile" and is

³ In the other manuscript, MS B, according to Miller there is "curon ðonne of ðam" (Bede II: 13)

quoted for the meaning choose, select, elect (legere, seligere, eligere); the same example has been used by the lexicographers of the NED to illustrate one of the meanings of choose, i.e. to take, accept, embrace what is offered; not to refuse. The result is that the individuation of lexical entries comes to be arbitrarily decided upon: how can it happen that for one interpreter *ceosan* in (6) and (7) means the same, hence would be considered as a single entry, while for some other *ceosan* in (6) would be a different word from *ceosan* in (7). It is important to add here that in all these sentences, i.e. (1), (3) — (7) ModE *choose* and OE *ceosan* are used in a structurally identical environment, i.e. both are followed by objects.

Should we continue the same line of argumentation, in other words should we decide to accept the individuation of the lexical entry we shall have to assume a series of accidental phenomena: two or more semantically different units would be phonologically identical, morphologically the same and so on. In all probability there would be more homonyms in a dictionary than nonhomonyms. And what about the lexical ambiguity? Would there be any grounds to think of any word having more than one meaning? By definition, one word would have one meaning only — all its other interpretations would be perception errors. For instance,

(8) Mary chose scientific books

is customarily interpreted as meaning either

(8a) Mary chose scientific books for her

or

(8b) Mary chose scientific books which are hers

Sentences (8a) and (8b) are unambiguous and structurally distinct; sentence (8) has two different meanings. This would not be the case if *choose* on the one hand, and *her* on the other were individuated: one *choose* would be followed by an indirect object (*her*) and a direct object (*scientific books*), the other distinct *choose* would be followed by a direct object only (*her scientific books*); thus there would be two *choose*'s and two different sentences. It has to be admitted, however, that this interpretation finds some support in Polish translations which run

(8a) Mary wybrała sobie (dla siebie) książki naukowe

(8b) Mary wybrała swoje książki naukowe.

For English this would further assume that in normal circumstances a native user of English would comprehend (8) in one way only, in accordance with the semantic representation which underlies this utterance. Everyone knows perfectly well that it is quite unlikely that a sentence like (8) would be understood always and on all occasions clearly and unambiguously.

Still much more empirically interesting (and provocative) is the problem of the lexical individuation when confronted with meanings which are metaphorical extensions. As far as I can tell this issue has not been fully discussed in relevant linguistic literature in connection with the above approaches, except partly in Lakoff and Johnson (1980:110 ff). who show inadequacies of the homonymy view and attack it from a different stand. Metaphor as an expression of basic concepts has been a much-discussed topic, particularly during the last few years, and has gone far beyond its relevance to poetry and rhetoric. According to Lakoff and Johnson, everyday, ordinary language is full of metaphors, and, even more, "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1980:3). Assuming after them that "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (3) one is bound to reject any individuation of lexical elements. Let us consider the following sentences:

(9) Why Wall Street worries (*Newsweek* September 21, 1981)

(10) Moscow chose the cheaper but politically bolder course... (*Newsweek* November 23, 1981)

(11) Foreign firms find a home (*Newsweek* September 28, 1981)

(12) Hollywood rules the world (*Newsweek* September 28, 1981)

When we say or when we think of *Wall Street*, *Moscow*, *Hollywood* we express some concepts in terms of some other concepts: a street or place name is used for the institution and the institution for the people, e.g. *Moscow* — the Soviet Government — people responsible, *Hollywood* — U. S. film company, industry — filmmakers, etc. The metonymic relationship accounts for using one entity, say *Hollywood*, with reference to another entity, here the U. S. film industry, which is situated in *Hollywood*, and in turn this new entity (U. S. film industry) refers to people who run the business. For a homonymy theory such an interpretation would be difficult to conceive of since *Hollywood* as a place name and *Hollywood* as the U. S. film industry would be different, distinct and unrelated concepts. Roughly speaking, one can say that any theory of metaphor is by definition incompatible with the view of the individuation of lexical entries.

Without going into further details challenging the homonymy view, it will suffice to point out that this position lacks both philosophical and linguistic foundation; furthermore, it is simply counterintuitive, which I shall try to show later. From all this it follows that various uses of the same word are semantically related, that there is one lexical entry: all differences in meaning, those which are obvious and those which are subtle and very thin, seem to be closely interrelated with differences in form understood rather widely (including among other things immediate and nonimmediate con-

texts). Thus a formal difference indicates a semantic difference. In summary, the answer to the first question posited at the beginning is yes, the same verb, i.e. the same lexical entry, can appear with an object and without an object.

Having suggested the above characteristics of the same verb we must allow in this view for relationships between various uses of a given item. That transitivity of a verb is primary when regarded in terms of intransitivity of the same verb has been somehow taken for granted. We come across such linguistic accounts as the one by Stockwell (see above) for whom a transitive verb need not be formally marked by the presence of an object; or that by Fillmore according to whom out of some deep cases a transitive verb can select, the objective case is obligatory (cf. *cook*, *open*). These decisions seem to be based chiefly on semantic criteria because formally speaking there is no difference in simplicity measures between

Verb+object→Verb (intransitivization)

and

Verb→Verb+object (transitivization)

if these structures are interpreted separately. There may be, however, other reasons also of formal nature which are not unimportant when considering either of the interpretations within the whole system. Take for instance passivization, reflexivization, complementation of different kinds, etc. which are grounded on the presence of the object. If the object were transformationally introduced each time, for the same simplicity's sake we would rather reject this solution. And there are many more processes that are connected with the transitivity of the verb than with its intransitive counterpart. It is doubtful if any formal and purely mechanical procedure (i. e. deletion or addition) for deciding about the interdependence between transitivity and intransitivity can be devised and whether this approach is intuitively sound and the best one. Although attractive for its clarity this procedure would not suffice to explain such structures as

(13) This bed was slept in

(14) The little trolley that could (Newsweek August 3, 1981)

and it appears to be obvious that some other purely formal elements cannot be neglected.

A syntactically satisfying account of the transitive — intransitive distinction should be supported by semantically satisfying factors. As we saw in the preceding section, it is more adequate to conceive of an object verb being changed into an objectless one than the other way round. What is now essential to this decision is the assumption that there is some reality

(psychological, situational, etc. on the part of the speaker) behind it. A word like *choose*, quoted earlier for illustrative purposes should be regarded as an expression referring to an action of selecting, taking by preference or in accordance with somebody's free will (NED) which action requires this something which is being selected, taken, preferred, etc. i.e. the object; for example, in a sentence

(1) I chose a book for you

a *book* having the function of the object is a thing selected out of all the books that were available. Similarly, in

(1) I didn't choose to go

to go functions in the same way as a *book*; here, there is also an idea of selection, choice, decision in accordance with the speaker's preference but this selection does not refer to a physical object but to some action, to go. In both cases we have a volitional act. Essentially, the mental act of selecting is the same although the object to be selected is different and different is a behavioural realization of this decision. Take some more examples of this kind

(15) Rather, he chose to develop his personal relationship with Reagan, regularly offering advice... (Newsweek December 7, 1981)

(16) If Ronald Reagan chose not to run in 1984, there's no way you could take that nomination away from George Bush (Newsweek December 7, 1981)

(17) She has "chosen to engender an image of Brooke Shields which is sexually provocative and exciting..." (Newsweek November 23, 1981)

All the uses of *choose* so far given display the notion of a choice between alternatives, the idea of option is very strong and so is the idea of the speaker's wilful decision; the intentional aspects of this act cannot be denied. It is not surprising then that for some lexicographers *choose+to V* stands for "fit to, to be pleased (to do so and so)" as in *He chooses to remain concealed* (NED). Owing to its volitional and intentional implications *choose* has been regarded within the framework of speech act theory. Fraser (1974) analysing vernacular (i.e. nonceremonial) performative verbs assigns *choose* to verbs of evaluating, stipulating and legitimatizing;⁴ he, obviously, takes into con-

⁴ According to Fraser (1974): "Verbs of evaluating. Intent of speaker is to indicate his objective assessment of the truth of the proposition expressed in the sentence and the basis for this judgment... (147). Verbs of stipulating. Intent of speaker is to indicate his desire for the acceptance of the naming convention expressed by the proposition... Verbs of legitimatizing. Intent of speaker is to create the new state of affairs expressed in the proposition by exercising certain rights or powers..." (149). See also comments on these classes of verbs.

sideration its semantic characteristics. Palmer (1965:160) draws our attention to some other property of *choose*: when followed by *to+V* this construction makes "reference to a future event" and can be used with a temporal adverbial expressing futurity (cf. example (16)).

Once we agree that *choose* is inherently connected with the object, not only formally but notionally above all, it will always be transitive even when used without the object in the surface structure, e.g.

(18) Just as you choose

which is equivalent to

(18a) Do just as you choose.

In sentence (18) *choose* implies various possibilities out of which one has been (or will be) intentionally selected, hence "whatever pleases you" can be taken as a fairly close paraphrase. Without the "object of" idea the objectless *choose* would hardly be conceivable. A similar approach can successfully account for all object and objectless verbs like *read*, *hear*, *dream*, *sing*, *write*, etc. I have not undertaken any statistical investigation but superficial observations allow us to assume that these verbs normally take a human subject⁵.

A similar view is expressed by G. Lakoff (1970:127), who claims that there is a transformational rule which operates optionally to delete direct objects after certain verbs; these objects are categorially expressed by indefinite pronouns, for example

John is eating something → John is eating
John is drinking something → John is drinking

Indeed, this analysis is roughly equivalent to the one I suggested earlier except that: first, it postulates a node categorially specified, i.e. an indefinite pronoun, and the operation is meant to be a formal mechanical procedure to fulfil the requirements of the syntax rather than those of the semantics; second, the optional deletion of the indefinite direct object pronoun implies the loss of a semantic concept which does not seem correct here; it would rather be a process of deconcretization than deletion; third, the rule optionally deletes an element without specifying the conditions which trigger this transformation, hence

John is eating something

and

John is eating

should be semantically identical, which is not quite the case.

⁵ A more general observation to the effect that the subject of any transitive verb is animate has been made by Barbara Hall (1965) (after G. Lakoff 1970: 145-6).

I have claimed so far that the verb is transitive or intransitive by its very nature, and it is the underlying concept which the verb is meant to express that requires a complement object or not. Our example *choose* will always imply selection of something even when it is not accompanied with the object. This conceptual object of selection concretizes externally in the form of a grammatical object as in (1) or remains latent as an unspecified, general notion and as an inherent syntactic feature, as in (2) or (18). Judging from this, one may (wrongly) conclude that it is the objectless use of the verb that is primary and the surface object realization only secondary. I am strongly convinced that it is not a problem of primary and secondary use but rather a problem of more concrete or more general. Although these problems appear almost insurmountable on theoretical grounds, natural tendency of the speaker to express his attitude, beliefs and intentions as clearly as possible would favour the structure with an overt object. We need not go into details to observe that such verbs as *choose*, *read*, *eat*, *drink* and the like are used more frequently with the object than without it.

Tentative though they are, the answers offered above to the questions asked at the beginning (ii) (a) may be used to undermine the validity of the question (ii) (b). There is no reason, I assume, to repeat the arguments against a homonymy hypothesis; a discussion on these issues is found in Lakoff and Johnson (1980); some kind of critical report on the individuation of lexical entries as seen in the early seventies has been presented in J. Fodor (1977).

Now let us return to the main topic of transitivity and intransitivity and clarify certain points which have been only superficially touched upon. Since the words transitive - intransitive are interpreted in terms of inherent semantic and syntactic properties of the verb it should be generally agreed that there is not, neither can be, any process of transitivity or intransitivity regarded within purely formal frames. When Chaucer says in the Summoner's Tale

(19) "Yif us a busschel whete, malt, or rye...

Or elles what yow lyst, we may nat cheese" (Chaucer, CT SumT 1746) Give us a bushel of wheat, malt, or rye... or whatever else you wish, we may not choose (it's not for us to choose)

he does not change a transitive *choose* into an intransitive *choose*, but uses *choose* with its concept of alternativeness in a general, nonspecified way. This is the most natural conclusion, as it seems, to be drawn from the speaker's knowledge and intuition (verbs like *choose* which require a human subject can be easily checked and verified). How then should we explain the appearance of this use only in Middle English if the process of intransitivity should be rejected? The word *choose* is found in earlier texts already in Old English (cf. (4) - (7)) and it may be sheer coincidence that the objectless

structure of that period has not been preserved in a written form. This conjecture is supported by some other, chronologically earlier constructions such as

- (20) To chiesen zief [h]y wolden hare sceappinde lufie oðer hine ferleten (a1225 Vsp. A. Hom. Creat. 219 after MED)⁶ To choose if they would love their Creator or abandon him

There are, however, less clear cases, as for example *could* in (14) and *fly* in (21).

- (21) "Airlines have to fly the planes and try to fill them", says an executive in Hong Kong (*Nesweek* November 6, 1981)

It is true that *could* without a complement is "improperly" used in (14) when regarded from the point of view of normative requirements; but it is also true that being a headline the sentence is meant to be communicatively meaningful, and it is meaningful: *can* with its various subtle shades of meaning indicates possibility, ability, capacity, etc. and concretizes when associated with another notion. If it is not followed by a complement the basic concept is still there and makes the utterance convey the meaning. *Fly* in (21) is somehow tricky because: first, *fly* is basically intransitive and there is little ground to assume that conceptually it can imply another object than the one that is flying; secondly, if this verb does not undergo any process of transitivity we have to choose between the following alternatives: either the superficial object is not a deep, notional object, or the verb *fly* is a different verb from the objectless, intransitive *fly*. It is difficult, though not impossible, to treat the superficial object of *fly* as a structural transform of the prepositional phrase: *by, in, on*+NP, which construction goes back as far as Old English, for example

- (22) þæt he mid feðer-homan, fleozan meahte (Genesis B 417) that he might fly with wings

The superficial, grammatical object, *the planes* (21) would be then understood instrumentally and/or locationally⁷ similarly to Polish: *lecieć samolotem, lecieć w samolocie*⁸. If we accept this proposal we shall immediately need to distinguish between: *fly the plane* and *fly by plane (on the plane)*, which are not paraphrases of each other. As far as their semantic interpretations

⁶ The NED gives this example to illustrate an intransitive or absolute use of *choose*, meaning: to exercise choice, to make a selection between different things or alternatives.

⁷ Cf. the boy is riding on his father's shoulders
the boy is riding a pony

Notice the semantic differences between *ride on NP* and *ride NP*.

⁸ The transitive — intransitive distinction in Polish has been extensively studied; for recent description of the transitive see Żelazko (1975).

are concerned there is enough difference between these two structures to question and reject a hypothesis based on positional — instrumental relationship of *fly*+NP.

Suppose now *the planes fly* in (21) is meant to say that this event was caused by someone's activity (the pilot, airline (metaphorically used) etc.). This is a result, an effect of some action which has been performed by an agent. This is a kind of "agentive initiation" using Lyons's words (Lyons 1977:489) and the structure is causatively understood:

Airlines $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{caused} \\ \text{got} \end{array} \right\}$ the planes to fly
Airlines made the planes fly

Going further into this question we observe that here again there are obvious semantic differences between these sentences, but the differences refer to such concepts as: more general — less general causation, direct — indirect causation, etc. and do not go beyond the limits of the semantic field of causativity as such. Besides, in earlier texts of English we find such sentences which corroborate our point:

- (23) meet me to-morrow
At Chevy Chase, I'll fly my hawk with yours (Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* I 93)
- (24) Their best Falcons are out of Russia... they fly them at choise game... (Sir Herbert Trav 233 after NED)

In (23) and (24) the verb *fly* is used causatively; it is obvious that the meaning of "setting birds flying" referred to the sport of hunting other birds and small animals with falcons and hawks; hence it implies attacking, chasing, fighting. But a causative use of *fly* need not have these implications; in (25)

- (25) ...but you must see that it would be very improper and indecent, if you were to fly your kite, or play at nine pins, while you are with Mr. Maittaire (Lord Chesterfield, Letters 1739)

fly the kite means to cause the kite to fly, to make the kite fly and move in the air like a bird. Causality which originates from some type of agency seems to be the most plausible explanation of *fly the plane*; this expression most naturally implies an agent (the pilot) who sets the machine in motion, operates the machine and makes it run (fly), etc. Very relevant and to the point are Lyons's remarks when he says: "Causativity involves both causality and agency (in so far as they are, in fact, indistinguishable). It also depends upon the fact that the distinction between a single temporally extended situation and two distinct, but causally connected, situations is not something that is given in nature, as it were" (490). Natural, "given in nature" is the bird

that flies — the plane flies because someone makes it fly. The notion of causality, as we shall see in the next part, cannot be ignored when interpreting the structure V+object; this point will be resumed later. Now let me have a quick look at *fly* which is followed by its cognate object. When Macbeth says

Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight (Shakespeare, Macbeth III, ii 40–41)

it is difficult not to consider one more hypothesis, that *fly* is basically a transitive verb like *sing*, *dream*, *die*, etc. which also take cognate objects (*sing a song*, *dream a dream*, *die a miserable death*), which object is normally not lexicalized, formally not present. In doing so, i.e. in accepting this rather tempting interpretation, one should have to revise the grammar of intransitive verbs in general: if *fly* were inherently transitive with its cognate object then other intransitives should be regarded in the same way *run* — *run a run*, or *work* — *work a work*, etc. Having offered this theoretically possible solution it must be stressed that independently of the counterintuitive implications this solution causes, it would be highly questionable by simplicity measures and empirical consequences.

Resuming the main point about how to account for the presence of the object after an originally intransitive verb (*fly*) I should like to suggest the following explanation. Although the verb *fly* is conceptually intransitive in that it does not require any complementary notion, there can be other concepts optionally associated with it (e.g. manner — *fly quickly*, place — *fly high*, instrument — *fly with the wings*, etc.) but no obligatory complement is semantically even advisable, not saying indispensable. The appearance of the surface object is a result not of transitivization (which process would in a sense contradict the basic notion of transitivity) but of causativization. The relations between the elements of

(i) NP—*fly*—*the plane*

are different from those between

(ii) NP—*choose*—*the book*

In both structures NP stands for an agent, for an instigator of some action but the action itself results in different effects: in (i) it is another action that is initiated by the NP while in (ii) it is an object (physical in this case, but it may be also nonphysical, e.g. choose the best solution). In this way (i) is a shortcut of two structures:

NP—cause—X
X=the plane flies

which we cannot say about the other, formally basic structure (ii). Allowing the intransitive *fly* to be interpreted causatively if followed by a surface object we can say that all other uses of such verbs can be accounted for in the same way. Superficial observations would rather support this conjecture, e.g.

run a horse in the Derby — cause to run
run a car into a garage — cause to move
He works his wife too hard — causes to work
Just sit me up a little — cause to sit (Hornby et al.)

Some verbs do not causativize because of the presence of independent, distinct causative verbs etymologically related, e.g. *fall* — *fell*, *lie* — *lay*, etc. As a result of various theoretical backgrounds, there are various decisions about current synchronic situations of transitive — intransitive affiliation; e.g. *grow*, *ring*, *roll* are basically intransitive for Jespersen (1948:117); according to Palmer (1965:68) *ring* has both transitive and intransitive forms “in which the intransitive functions like the passive in that the relation of the subject to the verb is transformationally similar to that of the object of the transitive...”, etc. I shall not go further into the grammar of particular verbs but will attempt to systematize the observations made so far and try to draw some generalizations.

Transitive verbs refer to notions that are not semantically independent; they conceptually require a complement. In most cases they take an animate deep subject. Their most essential characteristic, it seems, is strong reluctance to undergo any process of intransitivization or causativization: *he is eating* expresses a transitive relationship, the object being not structurally disclosed; there are two arguments taken by the verb; *he is eating bread* is a surface realization of two arguments and cannot be analyzed in terms of causative relations. Historical data confirm this⁹. It follows that there is no ground to postulate two (or more) distinct lexical entries; it is one transitive verb which on the surface appears as an object verb or as objectless verb.

⁹ Strang states that among the changes in the verb relations there is one group that concerns transitivity; “there are particular changes, such as the use of *look* as a transitive till the 17 c...” (1974: 153). This claim seems to express counterevidence against what I have said — a close inspection of old texts, however, shows that this is either a terminological variant or a different theory of transitivity since there are such OE examples as:

pas sælae... þe þu her to locast (Beowulf 1652–54) these offerings from the sea
that thou dost look at, these seatrophies which thou beholdest here
op he on þone æpeling locude (Chronicle 755 after Onions 2/15) until his eyes fell
on the atheling, until he caught sight of the atheling

in which *locian* is not transitive.

Intransitive verbs, notionally independent, do not take any complement. If used with an agentive subject they may undergo a process of causativization, not transitivization, in which case the surface verb is followed by an NP and the structure resembles that with a transitive verb and the object. It is doubtful whether a causative use of such an intransitive verb constitutes enough justification for individuating the item, since the basic meaning remains the same (i.e. the "intransitive activity"); what changes is the situation: some NP's perform the activity because they are made to perform this activity or because they are initiated into this activity — not of their own accord which is the case with transitive verbs. The idea of willingness, volition, intention pervades the NP referring to the causer, instigator, etc. of the action, not to the performer, doer of the action — since quite often the latter is inanimate (e.g. *He ran the car into a garage*). The illustrative historical material quoted earlier does not contradict these observations.

Taking into consideration the above characteristics, the distinction between transitivity and intransitivity is fairly sharp semantically, not always structurally. Notice that inherently transitive verbs and inherently intransitive verbs which have been causativized can undergo passivization. Since passivization is not always a good test, which has been emphasized on a number of occasions I shall not enlarge upon this point. How then can we formally distinguish between transitive and intransitive? What can we decide about *eat* in (27) and *fly* in (21), which structurally look alike:

(27) John is eating his dinner

(21) Airlines have to *fly* the planes?

A causative paraphrase seems to work for (21) but not for (27):

(21a) Airlines have to cause (get) the planes to fly

but not

(27a) *John causes (gets) his dinner eat¹⁰.

Sentence (21) but not sentence (27) can be analyzed into two basic structures:

(21b) Airlines have to do S
S=the planes fly.

Besides, the verb in sentence (27) can appear without the surface object,

¹⁰ To do justice to other proposals we must admit that there have been attempts to interpret transitive verbs causatively which approach has raised strong criticism and is not followed here.

which does not deprive it of its transitive character:

(27b) John is eating=John is eating something¹¹.

Although sentence (21) can be similarly "changed", this change, i.e. the objectless verb *fly*, brings forth a semantic change; it is not causative any more:

(21c) Airlines have to *fly*.

The last remark I should like to make is in connection with a great number of other constructions whose superficial forms may run counter to my observations (e.g. *fly the flight* (26)). For each such case, I am certain, there are additional circumstances, both linguistic and nonlinguistic that are responsible for structural deviations (stylistic reasons, metaphoric extensions, different conceptual images depending on possible worlds, etc.). Those that have been conventionalized and entered into normal usage are usually recorded in dictionaries with additional explanations.¹²

In view of the preceding discussion let me repeat in conclusion that conceptual transitivity, ontologically deeply rooted in our beliefs and understanding of the world, does not reconceptualize into something else. Intransitivity, on the other hand, can undergo causativization, which process remains still within the limits of the basic concept. Granting this to be a sound hypothesis, it must be recognized that it does not imply either notional or grammatical fossilization; on the contrary, this approach will claim to better account for a rich system of stylistic processes as well as for semantically and formally creative innovations.

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¹¹ For changes which result in reclassification of categorial classes see Quirk et al. (1973 : 1016 ff.) which, however, does not agree with the interpretation I am suggesting here.

¹² Interesting and valuable for its theoretical implications in this respect is a syntactic-generative dictionary of the Polish verb edited by Polański (1980). There are, however, decisions which might arouse suspicion hence criticism like the individuation of the so-called reflexive verb: *myć* - *was* and *myć* - *wash oneself* are treated as two distinct lexical units.

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