

At the edge of valence

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This work focuses on an overlooked construction: the *tritransitive*. In contrast to more familiar ditransitive sentences (*Alex gave Casey a book*), the tritransitive construction has an additional argument, as in (1), for a total of three internal arguments: a direct object (*a pat* - the Theme), a locative argument (*the shoulder*) and an external possessor (*Casey*). As such, this construction challenges the notion of valency as a property of particular verbs or verb classes, as no verbs have been identified as inherently tetravalent. Several novel questions regarding the syntactic and semantic relations between arguments, and sources of crosslinguistic variation, are addressed by a comparative study of tritransitives in English, French and Spanish. We propose that the variation is determined by licensing of the external possessor.

The work first focuses on the lexical scope and semantic properties of the construction, as well as its morphosyntactic properties. The comparison shows that the range of variation in tritransitives relates to (i) the verb types compatible with tritransitives (from seemingly only *give* in English to *give* and *put*-type verbs in French, to all sorts of predicates in Spanish, including unaccusatives like *caer* 'fall', (Davies 2002), (ii) the expression of inalienable possession (via case, definite or possessive determiner), (iii) word order, (iv) pronominalization, and (v) the range of locative prepositions.

- (1) a. *Alex gave Casey a pat on the shoulder.*
b. **Alex put Casey a hat on the head.*
- (2) a. **Jean a mis à Marc un chapeau sur la tête.* (Metropolitan French, ok in Quebec French)
b. *Jean lui a mis un chapeau sur la tête.*
- (3) a. *Vera le=dio una palmada en el hombro a Emilio.*
Vera DAT=gave a pat in the shoulder DAT Emilio
'Vera gave Emilio a pat on the shoulder'.
b. *Vera le=puso crema entre los dedos a Emilio.*
Vera DAT=put cream between the fingers DAT Emilio
'Vera put lotion between Emilio's fingers'.
c. *Vera le=gritó la verdad a la cara a Emilio.*
Vera DAT=told the truth at the face DAT Emilio
'Vera shouted the truth at Emilio's face'.

Variation defines a continuum of languages in terms of subtypes of tritransitives available, with opposing ends of the spectrum occupied by Spanish (very productive) and English (only apparent), with French in the middle. Crosslinguistic variation rules out verbal meaning as the source of language-internal variation.

Constituency tests (e.g., clefting, pseudoclefting) suggest that English (1a) has only two internal arguments ([Casey], [a pat on the shoulder]), tritransitivity being only apparent. On the other hand, the productivity of tritransitives in Spanish and French correlates with the availability of non-core datives (Boneh & Nash 2012, a.o). In terms of Cuervo's (2020) typology of applicatives, dative possessors in tritransitives seem to share properties with middle applicatives: (as shown by hierarchy tests) the dative is merged above (external to) the predicational structure of Theme and Locative, and is interpreted as affected by the change of location of the Theme (as in middle applicatives). The possession interpretation arises by the dative DP acting as c-commanding antecedent for the body-part in the Locative. Licensing of the dative DP by a specialized head (e.g., an Applicative, or Wood & Marantz's (2017) $\bar{*}$) explains why tritransitives are not restricted by the valency of the verb. Preliminary consideration of other Romance languages and varieties (e.g., Quebec French) support and enrich this approach.

Tritransitives have been rarely noted as such (but see Armstrong 2021, and Kittilä 2007 for a different use of the label *tritransitive*) and there are no previous detailed analyses or studies on their frequency and crosslinguistic distribution (but see Lomashvili 2011 for Georgian; McGinnis & Gerdtts 2004 for Kinyarwanda).

References

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