

## Agent prominence and the behavior of the agentivity feature *movement* in Polish and Russian

In my talk I want to address the following questions:

1.) Can agent prominence and flexible feature prioritization provide a better explanation for agentivity effects than the prototype approach and feature accumulation in Dowty's (1991) sense?

1.1.) A sub-question is whether *movement* is a high weighted feature in comparison to other agentivity features? How can we measure that?

2.) Should the feature *movement* be conceptualized as a gradual category, thus considering a fast-moving participant 'more prominent' than a slow-moving participant?

I will provide new empirical evidence from a corpus study and from two rating experiments on impersonal constructions in Polish (*reflexive impersonal*), as in (1) and Russian (*3pl impersonal*), as in (2). Throughout this paper we will refer to this type of constructions as *arbs* (= constructions with arbitrary interpretations) as proposed by Malamud (2013):

- |     |                                     |                   |                  |                  |                        |
|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| (1) | <i>Da</i>                           | <i>się</i>        | <i>wszystkim</i> | <i>prezenty.</i> | [Polish]               |
|     | give.FUT.3SG                        | REFL              | everybody-DAT    | presents-ACC     |                        |
|     | 'One will give everybody presents.' |                   |                  |                  | (Krzek 2011: 68)       |
|     |                                     |                   |                  |                  |                        |
| (2) | <i>Ego</i>                          | <i>uważaj-ut.</i> |                  |                  | [Russian]              |
|     | him.ACC                             | honour-3PL        |                  |                  |                        |
|     | 'People honour him.'                |                   |                  |                  | (Švedova 1980: § 2515) |

Recently conducted acceptability judgement studies for Polish (Bunčić 2019) and German (Kretzschmar et al. 2019: 104) show that in *arbs*, some verbs perform better than others, and some are rather unacceptable, even if the implicit subject is human.

The theoretical background of this paper is the notion of agentivity in Dowty's sense (1991). In his framework Dowty defines two superordinate proto-roles, the *proto-agent* and the *proto-patient*, only by bundles of entailments generated by the verb's meaning. The *proto-agent* is defined by four entailments or alternatively 'agentivity features': *volition*, *sentience*, *causation* and *movement*. According to Primus (2012: 27) a 'maximum *proto-agent*' is the privileged candidate for agent demotion in impersonal constructions and personal passives. However, Dowty's proposal about feature accumulation being the key factor for identifying the prototype is fixed and does not hold across linguistic constructions. This finding leads to the assumption that the availability and acceptability of *arb* constructions depends on a prominence relation in the sense of Himmelmann & Primus (2015) in this case involving the agentivity of the verb. According to this hypothesis, *arb* constructions which demote the subject are only good with a 'prominent' agent and less good with a 'less prominent' agent (Bunčić 2019: 67).

Kretzschmar et al. (2019) proposed that agentivity features may be ranked depending on various factors, including the language, the construction itself and its discourse function, which meets the above-mentioned prominence notion elaborated by Himmelmann and Primus. In the study for German, sentience verbs with identical number of agentivity features achieved different acceptability ratings in the tested constructions. Analogous to this finding, we expected that motion verbs could behave similarly, since the most straightforward gradual difference in movement is speed. One might suppose that the faster the agent, the more prominent it is.

In two rating experiments focusing on imperfective intransitive motion verbs in past tense, we proved the prototype approach and the prominence hypothesis on the example of the *reflexive impersonal* in Polish, and the *3pl impersonal* in Russian and the personal construction with an overt subject. The test items were in both languages identical and distributed over four different verb groups exhibiting different numbers of Dowty's agentivity features, as shown below:

- (i.) (VOLITION, SENTIENCE, MOVEMENT): 'walk'-group
- (ii.) (VOLITION, SENTIENCE): 'shiver'-group
- (iii.) (SENTIENCE): 'fear'-group
- (iv.) (no features): 'glisten'-group

To test the second hypothesis, we created a group of verbs denoting fast and slow movement on foot, and thus added an additional nuance to the agentivity feature *movement*, namely speed which is indicated in our test items with ‘fast’.

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|-----------|---|
| (i.+fast) | (VOLITION, SENTIENCE, MOVEMENT): ‘run’-group  |
| (i.±fast) | (VOLITION, SENTIENCE, MOVEMENT): ‘walk’-group |
| (i.–fast) | (VOLITION, SENTIENCE, MOVEMENT): ‘pace’-group |

The test items in our acceptability rating studies consisted of an introductory sentence presenting the context, followed by the critical sentence:

- (3) *Vo vremja sessi ne bylo lenit’sa. **Spešili** s lekcii na lekciju, čtoby zdat’ ekzamen.* (Ru. 3pl)  
(4) *W czasie trwania sesji nie było okazji na leniuchowanie. **Pędziło się** z wykładu na wykład, żeby zdać egzaminy.* (Pol. reflexive impersonal)  
‘There was no time to be lazy. One rushed from lecture to lecture to pass the exam’.

In the personal construction the analysis shows no agentivity clines, which cannot be explained by agent prototypicality. The experimental data show, that the first hypothesis (the more prominent the agent the more acceptable the construction) could be confirmed, whereas the second hypothesis (movement as a gradual category) could be falsified. Consequently, movement cannot be conceptualized as a gradual category, although in the real world it is conceived gradual.

In addition to this, we conducted a large-scale explorative corpus study for the *reflexive impersonal* of 33 intransitive verbs in Polish. The expectation that the frequency of the arbs in the corpus would be proportional to the number of agentivity features could be confirmed. To measure the weight of the agentivity features we compared different verb groups exhibiting different numbers of features. E.g. we contrasted verb groups with (i.) *volition, sentience, **movement*** vs. (ii.) *volition, sentience* and verb groups with (iii.) *sentience, **movement*** vs. (iv.) *sentience*, whereby the bold-marked feature is that being analyzed. The results are convergent with that of the actual acceptability judgement studies and with the study of Bunčić (2019), insofar as *movement* seems not to increase the agentivity of arbs in the same degree as e.g. *sentience* or *volition*.

## References

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