LOOKING INTO THE INTRANSITIVITY CLINE

Implicit objects as a case in point

Tania de Dios

Although the concept of intransitivity has been widely employed as a central element for the description of clausal organization in most languages, it has traditionally been defined in a quite narrow and, from my point of view, inaccurate way. Thus, the most widespread conceptualization of the category of *intransitivity* seems to have emerged as dependent on that of *transitivity*, since both notions are generally seen as the two sides of the same coin: a construction can be either *transitive*, and thus bear a direct object, or *intransitive*, and hence be used with no direct object at all. However, the association of the tag *intransitive* with the simple idea "verb without an object" does not seem to tally with the actual complexity of linguistic usage. Indeed, as Dillin Liu (2008) points out, such an employment of the term *intransitive* "may be very appealing because it makes the categorization of English null-object verbs simple, but it ignores the significant semantic and syntactic differences among different types of verbs grouped under this label" (2008: 298). The inaccuracy in the use of the label *intransitive* may have influenced our perception of objectless verbs, which in fact constitute a far more heterogeneous group than traditional accounts of transitivity have made them appear to be. The recognition of the inadequacy in the use of the term has led me to revise the most outstanding models for the classification of English verbs used without an object (cf. Quirk et al. 1985; Biber et al. 1999; Huddleston and Pullum et al. 2002; and Liu 2008). This has allowed me to spot the important differences among the various types of English objectless verbs, as well as to single out the constructions involving so-called implicit objects as the most interesting area of study. The detailed examination of this kind of structures, both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective, is the aim of my PhD thesis, on whose structure and content I will elaborate in the course of my presentation.

References

Biber, Douglas, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad, and Edward Finegan. 1999. *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. England: Longman.

Huddleston, Rodney and Geoffrey K. Pullum et al. 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liu, Dilin. 2008. 'Intransitive or object deleting?: Classifying English verbs used without an object'. *Journal of English Linguistics* 36(4): 289-313.

Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.