

Teleology and animacy in external arguments

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In this paper we consider a number of phenomena in English, and other languages (Italian, Greek, Russian) involving external arguments where *prima facie* animacy seems to constrain grammaticality. Our discussion comes to the conclusions that, at least in the cases under analysis, a more appropriate notion should be evoked, i.e. the notion of teleological capability and that the inherent abilities of an entity to participate in an event is at the basis of its grammatical occurrence. In particular, we argue that the notion of teleological capability is crucial in correctly diagnosing apparent animacy effects in the interaction of grammar and conceptual structure. The relevant notion which distinguishes Agents from Causers is the subject's internal teleological capability of generating the event on their own, from start to finish—*not* the animacy of the subject. The two notions overlap in many cases, since there are many verbal events which can only be generated by animate entities, but in the case of verbal events which can be internally generated by inanimate entities, we see that the syntactic behavior of the external argument does not change. Conversely, Causers (again which maybe animate or inanimate) may trigger the initiation of an event, but do not exercise control over its unfolding, due to their teleological *incapability*.

In the second part of the paper, we discuss cases where animacy seems to have a more properly syntactic effect. In relation to this, we present the proposal put forward in Folli and Harley (2005, 2007) according to which the v° which introduces the external arguments is different when the external argument is a Causer, rather than an Agent. In particular, little *v* comes in different flavours depending on two things, the external argument it introduces and the complement it takes. True Agent-selecting v_{DO} may take a nominal complement, while the v_{CAUSE} which can introduce Causer external arguments *c*-selects for a small-clause complement. In the terms of the discussion here, v_{DO} requires a teleologically-capable Agent argument in its specifier, while v_{CAUSE} does not.

References

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