

## The involuntary state construction in Serbo-Croatian

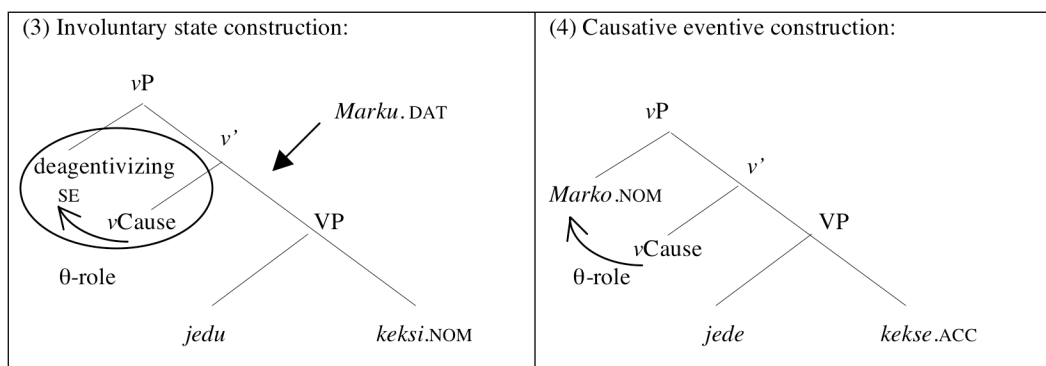
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The involuntary state construction is a puzzling construction whose meaning does not seem to be derivable from its morphosyntactic composition for several reasons. First, it occurs with an active eventive verb, and yet has a noneventive and modal meaning. Thus, the sentence in (1) does not denote an occurring event of eating cookies, but rather an involuntary desire, need, or urge to participate in the event denoted by the predicate. Second, the source of this *involuntary desiderative* meaning has no overt morphological or lexical expression, and therefore seems entirely unmotivated. Finally, even though the verb selects for an agent, the construction occurs with an unselected dative NP. Compare (1) and (2).

- (1) Marku se jedu keksi. (involuntary state construction)  
 Mark.DAT SE IMPERF.eat.PRS.3.PL cookies.NOM.PL  
 ‘Mark is in the cookie-eating mood.’
- (2) Marko jede kekse. (causative eventive construction)  
 Mark.NOM IMPERF.eat.PRS.3.SG cookies.ACC.PL  
 ‘Mark is eating cookies.’

The involuntary state construction occurs primarily in Slavic languages, and has long been overlooked in the literature. So far, noneventiveness and the involuntary desiderative meaning of this construction have been derived primarily by recourse to phonetically null elements: a null modal verb (Franks, 1995; Rivero, 2003), or a covert psych-verb with the “feel-like” meaning (Marusic and Zaucer, 2005). Starting from a similar construction in Albanian, Kallulli (2004) abstracts away from null elements and proposes a feature-based approach that involves elimination of the agent argument through suppression of the feature [+intent] on *v*, followed by creation of a new theta-role of the *affected actor* (metaphorically understood as experiencer) through bundling of [+affected] and [+act] feature.

In contrast, I argue that the meaning of the involuntary state construction emerges from its structure and the overtly expressed morphosyntactic elements in the following fashion. The involuntary state construction takes an eventive verb which selects for an agent, and combines it with the deagentivizing clitic pronoun *se*, thereby creating an unaccusative predicate, i.e. predicate with no external argument and no accusative case to assign. Simultaneously, an extra argument bearing dative case marker is added to the structure, and “sandwiched in” between the upper and the lower VP of the Larsonian style (Table below).



The deagentivizing properties of *se* stem from semantic bleaching of the feature [HUMAN], which is why it cannot refer to any potent (prototypically human and volitional) agent capable of instigating a causal event. As a result, the inherent aspectual value of *vCause* changes to noneventive, or stative. This can be summarized as follows. When an eventive predicate verb, i.e. a verb that requires an agent-instigator, adjoins a noneventive *vCause* with no external argument, it becomes likewise

noneventive, as it cannot be instigated. Such is the case with the involuntary state construction (3). In contrast, when an eventive predicate verb adjoins an eventive  $v$ Cause with a volitional agent-instigator, it remains eventive, as it can be instigated. Such is the case with the causative eventive construction (4).

Similar to Pylkkänen (2000), I argue that the stative  $v$ Cause denotes a causation which is *triggered* by the *properties* of the internal argument (i.e. stimulus), rather than *instigated* by the *activities* of the external argument (i.e. causer). This triggered causality affects the dative NP, which is the argument just below the  $v$ P, evoking a mental or psychological reaction in it, which is why this argument is interpreted as an experiencer. The duration of the temporary state denoted by the involuntary state construction is measured out by the internal argument of the VP, as the state will last only for as long as the stimulus is perceived (physically or mentally) by the affected argument, i.e. the dative experiencer NP.

Finally, as neither of the two arguments involved in this construction acts volitionally, nor has control over the triggered mental state (the stimulus can't help triggering it, and the experiencer cannot control the mental state which the stimulus triggers in it, as Arad (1998) puts it), this construction seems to resemble Finnish stative psych-verbs with the experiencer object and a causative marker (Pylkkänen (2000). Similar to deagentivizing *se* in Serbo-Croatian, which eliminates the external argument and thereby presents  $v$ Cause as stative, Finnish psych-verbs with the experiencer objects and the causative marker occur without the external argument, which also results in stativity of the causative head. It is therefore not surprising that Finnish has a Desiderative causative construction (5), which is similar both in form and meaning to the involuntary state construction in Serbo-Croatian (but restricted to unergatives).

(5) Maija-a laula-tt-a. (Finnish desiderative causative construction)  
 Maija- PARsing-CAUSE-3-SG  
 'Maija feels like singing.'

(6) Marku se peva. (Serbo-Croatian, involuntary state construction)  
 Mark.DAT SE IMPERF.sing.PRS.3.SG  
 'Mark feels/is feeling like singing.'

Both constructions occur with a derived subject bearing an oblique case (partitive and dative, respectively), express the involuntary desiderative meaning, and assign noneventive interpretations to the eventive predicate verbs by presenting them independently of their external argument which is either completely missing (Finnish), or is semantically blocked by means of the deagentivizing *se* (Serbo-Croatian). In short, Finnish makes a predicate noneventive by adding the causative head to the derivation without adding the external argument (Pylkkänen, 1999b). This is represented overtly by the causative morpheme *-tt* (5), (7). On the other hand, Serbo-Croatian, which lacks an overt causative morpheme, applies a different mechanism and uses the deagentivizing *se* as the external argument of the light verb  $v$ Cause in order to present it as noneventive (6), (8). These two constructions illustrate crosslinguistic variation on how lack of control in a construction involving an agentive predicate can be syntactically encoded in natural language.

