Event-structural prominence and forces in verb meaning change

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Philippine languages are well-known to exhibit a set of verbal affixes that signal *how* the arguments are involved in the event depicted by the verb, e.g. whether they fail, succeed or are out-of control. It is rarely stressed that this function to indicate how the arguments participate in the event extends also to the so-called focus or voice affixes of simple activity verbs. These do not only determine the most prominent argument/ subject, they also determine the interpretation of verbs, based on the fact that Actors and Undergoers are viewed as participating differently in Actor and Undergoer Voice sentences. Best known are those cases in which Undergoer Voice leads to a telic reading, while Actor Voice leads to an atelic reading, as shown in (1) and (2).

(1) a. L-um-angoy   **sila**   sa ilog.
       AV:UM-swim   3p.NOM   DAT river
       'They went swimming in the river.'
    b. Ni-languy   nila   **ang ilog**.
       UV.REALIS- swim   3p.GEN   NOM river
       'They swam the river (and conquered it).'   (Nolasco 2005)

(2) a. Na-nood   **si Alex**   ng Extra Challenge.
       AV:MA.REALIS-watch   NOM Alex   GEN extra challenge
       'Alex watched Extra Challenge (and other shows).'
    b. P-in-anood   ni Alex   **ang Extra Challenge**.
       UV.REALIS-watch   GEN Alex   NOM extra challenge
       'Alex watched the Extra Challenge.'   (Saclot 2006)

However, Undergoer Voice does not always have a bearing on the aspectual interpretation of verbs. In (3) the choice of Undergoer Voice leads to a change in the direction of the movement depicted by the verb, while in (4) it seems to lead to a change with respect to the nature of the event.

(3) a. L-um-abas   **si Pedro**   sa kapit-bahay.
        AV:UM–go.out   NOM Pedro   DAT neighbour('s house)
        'Pedro left the neighbour('s house).'
    b. L-in-abas   **ni Pedro**   ang kapit-bahay.
        UV.REALIS-go.out   GEN Pedro   NOM neighbour('s house)
        'Pedro went out to go to his neighbour (= He went out to fight with his neighbour). '

(4) a. P-um-asok   **ka**   ng/sa bahay.
        AV:UM-go into   2s.NOM GEN/DAT house
        'Go into a/the house.'
    b. Pasuk-in   mo   **ang bahay**.
        go into-UV:IN   2s.GEN   NOM house
        'Break into the house (Go into the house to steal).'

As the examples show, with activity verbs taking animate Actor arguments, a prominent Undergoer is preferably construed as the motivation/reason for the Actor to bring about the event, and it is the involvement of the Undergoer in the event that is viewed as determining the run-time of the event. If the Actor is the prominent argument, then the reasons for the occurrence of the event (and the run-time) are tightly linked to the Actor (or properties of the Actor) and not to the Undergoer. Saclot (2006) and others have tried to capture this distinction by the rather problematic notions 'voluntary' versus 'deliberate' action and 'centripetal' (action moving towards the Actor) versus 'deliberate'/ 'centripetal'(action moving away from the Actor) event. One of the reasons why these notions are problematic is that they only seem to make sense for animate Actors. It must be noted, however, that with inanimate Actors the Undergoer forms still induce similar changes in meaning, as the example in (5) shows.

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(5) a. T-um-angay   ang agos ng mga kahon.
   AV:UM-carry away NOM current GEN PL box
   'The current carried away boxes (among other things).'

 b. T-in-angay   ng agos ang mga kahon.
   UV.REALIS-carry away GEN current NOM PL box
   'The current carried away the boxes.'   (Dell 1984: 198)

Given these facts, it is clear that the notion of force (the Undergoer as purpose, cause or reason) in the examples with animate Actors above is something that falls out as a side-effect from something more basic, which I suggest is event-structural prominence of arguments. Event-structural prominence implies that an argument plays a crucial role for the event depicted, i.e. the start and the run-time of the event are viewed as tightly linked to this argument. Obviously event-structural prominence is a matter of the speaker's perspective on the event. As the discussion of multiple examples will show, based on differences in event-structural prominence(, and taking into account verb meanings, properties of Undergoer arguments as well as socio-cultural factors,) not only the changes in verb meaning in (1)- (5), but also the ungrammaticality (or lack) of certain voice forms in Tagalog can be explained. The question of the status and the possible representation of phenomena like event-structural prominence will be discussed in the remainder of the paper.

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