

A semantic analysis of the intransitive construction and the passive construction in English and Swedish

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Based on data from the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, this talk explores semantic characteristics such as verb processes, participant roles, animacy, and degree of transitivity in the active intransitive construction and the passive construction. The analysis draws on my PhD thesis (Fredriksson, 2016), which shows a close relationship between the constructions (cf. also Shibatani, 1985; Kemmer, 1993; Solstad & Lyngfelt, 2006; Lyngfelt, 2007). The following examples illustrate some aspects that will be discussed in the seminar.

(1a) The huge bascules [*Patient; inanimate*] **are raised** [*trans; Pr:mtrl*] to let big ships through. (SUG1/orig)

(1b) De väldiga broklaffarna [*Patient; inanimate*] **går upp** [*intrans; Pr:mtrl*] för att släppa igenom stora fartyg. (SUG1/transl)

Although both (1a) and (1b) display material processes – something is done or happens (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), there is a shift from a transitive clause (1a) to an intransitive clause (1b). The shift results in loss of the agentive participant that is implicit in the passive in (1a), and (1b) is thereby lower in degree of transitivity than (1a).

(2a) The greatest revolutionary rising of the nineteenth century, the Paris Commune of 1871 [*Patient; inanimate*], **had been defeated** [*trans; Pr:mtrl*], Lenin argued, because it placed too much faith in conciliation and too little in force. (CAOG1/orig)

(2b) Den största revolutionära resningen under 1800-talet, Pariskommunen 1871 [*Actor; inanimate*], **hade enligt Lenin misslyckats** [*intrans; Pr:mtrl*] därför att regimen satte för stor tro till försonligheten och för liten till makten. (CAOG1/transl)

In (2), we find the deponent verb *misslyckas* ('fail') in the translation (2b). This means a change in lexis from the transitive and highly agentive *defeat* to a verb with lower degree of transitivity. The implicit Actor of the passive in (2a) is strongly agentive whereas the translation (2b) presents the Subject participant as weakly agentive.

(3a) Sedan isbiten frusit fast i träringen, utfördes försöket genast - o under! - den lille såg med strålände ögon huru ett under isen lagt mångdubbelt papper [*Patient; inanimate*] **antändes** [*trans; Pr:mtrl*] och **genombrändes** [*trans; Pr:mtrl*]. Därefter försökte och lyckades han även att på samma sätt antända faderns tobakspipa. (KF1/orig)

(3b) When the piece of ice had frozen inside the wooden ring, his first experiment was begun. Oh miracle! With shining eyes the little boy watched as a piece of paper, folded several times and placed under the ice [*Patient; inanimate*], **ignited** [*intrans; Pr:mtrl*] and **burned through** [*intrans; Pr:mtrl*]. After that he tried and succeeded in lighting his father's tobacco pipe using the same method. (KF1/transl)

Examples (3a) and (3b) show a close functional and semantic correspondence between the agentless passive and the active intransitive construction. Here, the latter depicts events that seem to be happening spontaneously without an external Actor but are, in fact, initiated by the Actor given in the context.

The aim of the talk is to discuss relations and recurrent patterns between semantic characteristics and construction type.

References

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