# Affectedness-driven phenomena? A short overview
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## 1 Introduction

The notion of affectedness, linked to the idea of change that a participant undergoes or to the notion of transmission of force towards a participant, has been claimed to play a role in a wide range of linguistic phenomena at the syntax-semantics interface. In particular, the relation between affectedness and a transitive encoding is widely present in the literature since Fillmore (1968) and Dowty (1991). Likewise, a correlation has been established between a greater or lesser degree of affectedness and a higher or lower degree of transitivity, as can be seen in the words of Hopper & Thompson (1980: 252): 'The degree to which an action is transferred to a patient is a function of how completely this patient is affected.'

## 2 Affectedness-driven phenomena?

The idea that some sort of affectedness underlies the choice of a transitive encoding (as opposed to an oblique, e.g. dative encoding) has been present in the literature for many years.[1] Blume (1998), in an extensive cross-linguistic study comparing Indo-European and Polynesian languages, establishes a correlation between dative case-marking and non-patient objects, i.e. objects that refer to participants which are *active* (as opposed to *patient*) in at least one of the subevents that are part of the complex event described by the predicate (Blume 1998: 254).[2] In such dative configurations, unlike transitive ones, there is no

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[1] In addition to the correlation between affectedness and accusative case, and lack of affectedness and dative case, there is also an important tradition which correlates affectedness with lexical aspect (Tenny 1992, 1994). Likewise, in the realm of Slavic languages, Richardson (2007) has delved into the link between aspect and case: non-accusative (lexical) case appears with atelic verbs whose event structure is not compositional, and accusative (structural) case appears with verbs that have a compositional structure. Svenonius (2002) also links accusative case with the existence of a temporal overlap between the events described by the verb, and dative case with the lack of this overlap. Finally, Kratzer (2004) establishes a connection between telicity and accusative case in German and English.

[2] The idea of *activeness* and, somehow, affectedness, is also found in García (1975: 314–315), who claims that, among the semantic notions involved in the distribution of Spanish accusative and dative clitics, there are social status and gender. She provides the following two examples, produced by the same informant:

(i) a. *María  tiene           mucho  trabajo  en  la  casa,  pero  el   marido  nunca*
       Mary   have.PRS.3SG    much    work    in  the  house  but  the  husband  never
       ***la*     *ayuda***
       CL.ACC   help.PRS.3SG
       'Mary has a lot of work at home, but her husband never helps her.'

   b. *María  tiene          una  muchacha  que  **le**     ayuda         en  el   trabajo*
       Mary   have.PRS.3SG    a    girl       who  CL.DAT   help.PRS.3SG   in  the  work
       *de  la   casa*
       of   the  house
       'Mary has a maid who helps her in the house work.'

According to García, accusative is used when 'Mary's social superior (her husband) [sic!] is in focus' (1a), in which case Mary is referred to 'least active' and 'most distant' with respect to her husband, whereas dative is used when 'her social inferior (a maid, actually under her orders) is in focus' (1b), in which case Mary is just 'less active' and 'closer' with respect to her maid. In other words, the husband would be in a position of producing a greater degree of affectedness on Mary than the maid.

affectedness, since 'the activity of the nominative participant never manipulates or affects the activity of the dative participant' (Blume 1998: 268).

The notion sketched by Blume (1998) can account, for example, for the following contrast in Catalan, noted by Solà (1994: 174–174). In (1b), where the object takes dative case, the subject undertakes some action to encourage the other participant to succeed in doing another action, so that both are agent active participants:

(1)  a.  *Jo  l'      ajudo.*
          I    him.ACC  help.PRS.1SG
          'I help him.'

      b.  *Jo  li       ajudo     a    acabar   els   deures.*
          I    him.DAT  help.PRS.1SG  to  finish.INF  the  homework
          'I help him finishing his homework.'

The idea that a difference of affectedness lies behind dative/accusative alternations is explored by Pineda (2012, 2014, 2016, 2020) for several Romance languages, such as Catalan, Spanish, Aragonese and Italian varieties, with a wide range of verbs. See the contrasting contexts for *robar* + accusative and *robar* + dative in Catalan:[3]

(2)  a.  *Uns   lladres  el        van apallissar  i   el        van robar.*
          some  thieves  him.ACC  beat.PST.3PL    and  him.ACC  rob.PST.3PL
          'Some thieves beat him and robbed him.'

      b.  ***Li**     van robar   mentre  era        al    bar,  no  se'n  va adonar.*
          him.DAT  rob.PST.3PL  while  be.IPFV.3SG  at.the  bar
          'They robbed him while he was at the bar, he did not realise.'

Likewise, if we compare the two alternants of the locative alternation, we realise that in (3a) the stones (the accusative object) correspond to a participant which has been totally affected by a change of location, whereas in (3b) it is the cart which has been totally affected by a change of state:

(3)     a. *The children loaded the stones on the cart.*
        b. *The children loaded the cart with stones.*

The link between affectedness and accusative (/absolutive) encoding, and lack of affectedness and dative encoding, has also been investigated by Smith (1987) for German, Palmer (1994) for Hungarian, Georgian, Tabassaran, Dyirbal or Chichkchee, Barððal (2001) and Jónsson (2013) for Icelandic, and Dixon (1994) and Kittilä (2007) for a variety of languages, among others.

The idea of affectedness as a determinant of transitivity, and as a defining notion of patient arguments, is however complex. Beavers (2007: 1), for example, conceives it as 'a three-

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[3] However, note that this connection is not always straightforward, for example with *phone*-verbs, as exemplified for Catalan:

(i)  a.  *Jo  el        telefono.*
          I   him.ACC  phone.PRS.1SG

      b.  *Jo  li       telefono.*
          I   him.DAT  phone.PRS.1SG
          'I call him by phone.'

place relationship, relating an event, an affected entity, and a property scale' and defines 'varying "degrees" of affectedness that form an implicational Affectedness Hierarchy', such as holistic vs. potentially partial affectedness (e.g., *John wrote his dissertation* vs. *John wrote on his dissertation*), or actual impingement vs. unspecified impingement (e.g., *John hit the wall* vs. *John hit at the wall*).

Affectedness has also been claimed to be relevant for the account of the distribution and the diachronic expansion of differential object marking (DOM) in languages such as Spanish (Torrego Salcedo 1999; von Heusinger & Kaiser 2007, 2011; von Heusinger 2008). In particular, different verb classes can be distinguished on the basis of their degree of affectedness (e.g., 'kill' has a greater degree of affectedness than 'see'), and each of these classes has a different impact on the presence or absence of DOM. More specifically, there is some correlation between verb classes high on affectedness and higher frequency of DOM, as shown by the following contrast between two Spanish examples from the 14th century (von Heusinger & Kaiser 2011: 606):

(4)  a. *Tomará        también  vuestras  fijas […].*
        take.FUT.3SG  also      your      daughters
        'He will also take your daughters […].'

     b. *había            muerto    á    cuchillo  á     todos  los  profetas*
        have.PST.3SG  kill.PTCP  by  knife      DOM  all    the  prophets
        'He had killed all the prophets with a knife.'

Likewise, from the synchronic point of view, Romero Heredero & García García (in press) show that affectedness has also a significant influence on the acceptability of DOM with human indefinite NPs among present-day European Spanish speakers (see also Spitzer 1928, Pottier 1968 and Torrego 1998, 1999).

Affectedness has also been advocated as a relevant semantic factor in determining the accusative or dative encoding of the causee in the Romance *faire*-infinitive constructions. For example, in Spanish, when the embedded infinitive is transitive, one expects dative case marking for the causee. However, Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) can occur, and then accusative marking arises. This is shown by Strozer (1976: 442–443) by means of the following contrasts (see also Treviño 1992: 316–318 for similar claims based on the distinction between direct and indirect causation):[4]

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[4] Beyond ECM with transitive embedded verbs, Spanish also shows variability when the embedded verb is intransitive. For example, Strozer (1976: 441) provides the following contrasting examples, where adding a context that evinces the forcefulness of the event (and thus the affectedness of the causee) makes dative no longer available (ib), whereas if a context which implies lack of force is added, accusative tends to be dispreferred (ic).

(i)  a. ***La/Le***              *hice*                   *entrar.*
        her.ACC/her.DAT    make.PST.1ST    go.in.INF
        'I made her go in.'

     b. ***La/*Le***             *hice*                   *entrar*       *a patadas.*
        her.ACC/her.DAT    make.PST.1ST    go.in.INF    kicking.her
        'I kicked her in.'

        *Le pedí que entrara y después de que entró le expliqué por qué*
     c. ***le/*la***              *había*              *hecho*           *entrar.*
        her.DAT/*her.ACC    have.PST.1SG    make.PTCP    go.in.INF
        'I asked to go in and after she went in I explained to her why I had made her go in.'

(5) a. **_La/Le_** _hice_ _probarlo._
   her.ACC/her.DAT  make.PST.1SG  try.INF=it
   'I made her try it.'

   b. **_La/*Le_** _hice_ _probarlo_ _a la fuerza._
   her.ACC/her.DAT  make.PST.1SG  try.INF=it  by.force
   'I made her try it by force.'

   c. **_Le/*La_** _hice_ _probarlo_ _diciéndole_ _que_ _era_ _riquísimo._
   her.ACC/her.DAT  make.PST.1SG  try.INF=it  tell.GER=her.DAT  that  was  delicious
   'I made her try it telling her that it was delicious.'

ECM is also found in Catalan, as the survey carried out by Pineda & Sheehan (in press) shows. In (6), 25/25 speakers accepted dative, and 7/25 also accepted accusative. In (7), 25/25 speakers accepted dative, and 10/25 also accepted accusative.

(6) **_Li/%l'_** _he_ _fet_ _rentar_ _els_ _plats._
   him.DAT/ACC  have.1SG  made  wash.INF  the  dishes
   'I have made him wash the dishes.'

(7) **_Li/%l'_** _he_ _fet_ _escombrar_ _el_ _menjador._
   him.DAT/ACC  have  made  sweep.INF  the  dining room
   'I have made him sweep the dining room.'

ECM patterns are also found in Italian (Burzio 1986: 232) and French (Hyman & Zimmer 1976, Rouveret & Vergnaud 1980, Abeillé, Godard & Miller 1997, Sheehan 2020). Interestingly, at least for a number of speakers, there seems to be a semantic contrast between the dative causee and the ECM (accusative) pattern, since the latter implies a higher degree of affectedness or coercion. The idea that a different degree of control of control of the event by the causee is associated with a dative/accusative alternation is also described for Japanese by Shibatani (1973). More recently, von Heusinger & Kaiser (2021) have also discussed whether and how affectedness influences the case marking of the embedded subject in the Romance _faire_-infinitive. As they explain, in connection to affectedness, closely related notions such as the level of force that the causer exercises on the causee, or the level of control of the causee over the event expressed by the embedded verb, are worth investigating in order to disentangle what is exactly determining the choice of one syntactic pattern or the other.

## 3 Conclusion

The role of affectedness in the syntactic realisation of argument structure has long been discussed, for many languages and within different theoretical approaches. The notion itself, though, is still far from having been defined in an unambiguous, unanimous way. Notwithstanding, there are numerous studies on the role affectedness plays in phenomena such as case alternations in two-place predicates (agent-object), the emergence or expansion of differential object marking, and case alternations in causative constructions. Certainly, exploring related semantic notions, as well as expanding the range of phenomena under study, will help us understand more about the notion of affectedness itself and how it actually interacts with syntactic structure.

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