Transitivity and Causation and their Impact on Translation

Zahri Harouni
. Université Constantine

Abstract

The notions of transitive/intransitive and causative are not only syntactic, i.e. do not imply only distributional notions but also semantic ones in the sense that verbs in general can be inherently transitive or inherently intransitive or inherently both. This paper attempts therefore to examine each case by taking an illustrative sample of verbs in Arabic, English and French in order to show the transferability of lexico-semantic properties from one language to another in translation.

In general, the main distinction we can make among these two categories of verbs, i.e., intransitive on the one hand and transitive/causative on the other, is based on the fact that one category includes verbs which are self-sufficient semantically in the sense that they may be followed by zero collocates while the other category includes verbs which always require a specific kind of collocates which function syntactically as object complements.

The former, i.e., the verbs which do not require an object complement, are referrered to by the term 'intransitive'. Nonetheless, these verbs may have special modifications or other types of complements of time, place, manner, accompaniment and other modalities under which the denoted action takes place. These verbs are defined by the following rule:

(a) Vintr. $\rightarrow$ V + O

V + Mod. Compl.

In which 'Vintr.' Means intransitive verb, 'V' means verb, 'O' means zero or no complement at all, and 'Mod. Compl.' Means modality complement which is the syntactic term for all sorts of

complements which, in turn, can be described as prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases, infinitive phrases etc. and semantically function as [Source], [Goal], [Manner], [Purpose] and so on since they function as such or fulfil such conditions in the realization of the action.

The latter, i.e., the verbs which are not self-sufficient semantically in the sense that they require an object complement, are referred to by the term 'transitive'. These verbs are defined by the following rule:

(b) Vtr. → V + Obj. Compl.

However, it should be pointed out that the distinction between these two verb cases is not always so clear-cut, especially with all the uses of some individual verbs. It frequently occurs that some verbs which are originally intransitive become transitive through adding other usages to their original ones. The passage from one category to the other does not always take place without any syntactic, morphological and even semantic change into the inherent nature of the verb especially in certain languages. In what follows, we are therefore attempting a brief contrastive account of all these aspects in the three languages which concern us here.

I. Intransitive case

As defined earlier, it is the case of the verbs which may or may not collocate with complements specifying the circumstances or conditions under which the action takes place. They have been formally represented by rule (a) given earlier which accounts for the following examples:

- They arrived from London yesterday

    S + V + Mod.. Compl.1 + Mod. Compl.2

    [_____Agent + Source + Time]

- dja:ʔa aTTiflu ʔila: almadrasati
V + S + Mod. Compl.
[_____Agent | Goal]

- L'ennemi avance
S + V
·[_____Agent]

Though all the verbs which are accounted for by means of rule (a) are considered to be intransitive, they by no means constitute a homogeneous class as far as this very intransitivity is concerned. There are verbs which are originally intransitive, i.e., basic or primary intransitive. These can be labelled primitive intransitives. Others are derived intransitives, i.e., non-basic or non-primary intransitives and a final category labelled reflexives which, in turn, includes those which are originally reflexive and those which are pronominalized or reflexivized. In the following section, each group is examined individually.

I.1. Primitive intransitives

These are the verbs which are originally intransitive in character and exist only as such. This means that they are not derived from other verbal forms. Their intransitivity is due neither to the presence of a specific feature nor to the context in which they occur. The following examples are illustrative:

- Haraba (flee, escape), qadima (arrive, come), qafaza (jump), saqaTa (fall) etc.
- proceed, retreat, dive; depart, go, come, arrive, progress, head etc.
- aller, partir, arriver, affluer, décoller, échapper, sautiller, surgir etc.

As specified earlier, these primitive intransitives are considered pure intransitives because they fulfil one important condition, i.e., they can never be used transitively. This means that they are

always re-written as [V+O] or [V+Mod. Compl.]. These two options correspond respectively to the case frames [___Agent] and [___Agent + Modality(Source, Goal, Instrument, Manner, Purpose etc.)]. This class of verbs can further be subdivided into restricted construction verbs and multiple construction verbs. Restricted construction verbs are verbs which occur in certain contexts but not in others, i.e., verbs which select their collocates or whose collocates obey certain features of selection-restriction, whereas multiple construction verbs are verbs which occur in a relatively large number of contexts, i.e., whose collocates are not determined by a limited number of features hence all the translation problems encountered particularly in the case of restricted construction verbs. The reason is that the latter, in contrast with the former, are heavily marked semantically and therefore have a poorer collocational range as observed by Willems (1982,p.154), who, in studying the various syntactic constructions of verbs notes: "Plus le sémantisme du verbe s'enrichit, plus s'appauvrissent les possibilités syntaxiques."

I.2. Derived intransitives

These verbs are also intransitive in character but in opposition to the previous category, they are derived from other verbal forms. Here is an illustrative sample: **emerge, emigrate, immigrate, decamp; décamper, parvenir, survenir, accourir, repartir; ?aqbala** (come). Most of these verbs are derived by means of prefixes which do not necessarily have a syntactic function or more precisely an intransitive function, i.e., do not serve primarily to detransitivize these verbs as the latter already come from an intransitive primitive. Instead, these prefixes fulfil semantic functions, i.e., either mark different orientations or specify the manner or aspect etc. of the action as in **accourir** [venir + en courant] and **repartir** [partir + encore ou à nouveau] respectively.

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I.3. Reflexive intransitives

In general, all reflexive verbs are intransitive though some languages may also have reflexive transitives. Reflexive intransitives which constitute the object of concern of the present section come from different origins. Consequently, they are either only reflexive and exist only as such or they are reflexivized, i.e., derived from other transitive or intransitive verbal bases by means of reflexivization markers which come under various forms in various languages. Therefore, similarly to the previous intransitives whether primitive or derived, these reflexives are also intransitive in character; i.e., conform to the following structure [V+O] or [V+Mod. Compl.]. This class of verbs is thus divided into those which come only under the form of reflexive intransitive and therefore do not have any other uses and those which exist under other forms and in fact are derived from such forms. The former can be illustrated here with **s'évader** which has the property of reflexive intransitive as a unique verbal form, without any other verbal counterpart whereas the latter which have other forms can be illustrated with **ʔiqtaraba** (approach, near), **ʔinTalaqa** (depart, take off), **taqaddama** (advance), **ʔirtadda** (withdraw) etc., and **se sauver, se diriger, s"avancer, s'engoufrer, s'acheminer** etc. It should be noted that reflexivization is realized by a change into the morphological pattern of the verb in Arabic whereas in French, it is marked by the presence of a reflexive pronoun inserted before the verb.

II. Transitive case

It is the case of the verbs which require an object complement that may or may not be affected by the action identified by the verb. They have been formally represented by rule (b) given earlier and which accounts for the following examples:

- Ils atteignirent la frontière vers minuit

$$ S + V + \text{Obj. Compl.} + \text{Mod. Compl.} $$
$$ [\underline{\qquad}\text{Agent} + \text{Goal} + \text{Time}] $$

- The troops reached the village
  S   +   V   +   Obj. Compl.
  [_____Agent   +   Goal]

- ?anzala almusa:firu haqa:?ibahu
  V   +   S   +   Obj. Compl.
  [_____Agent   +   Patient]

Though these verbs obey the same rule and therefore cannot have any other uses, similarly to the intransitive ones, they also constitute a heterogeneous class. There are important discrepancies not only of a syntactic but also of a semantic nature implied by this notion of transitivity. In other words, there are verbs which are pure transitive not only from a structural point of view, i.e., non-derived, but also from a semantic point of view, i.e., non-causative. There are also verbs which are derived transitives. Finally, the class of transitives also includes causatives which, in turn, can be either derived or primitive. All these groups are examined separately in what follows.

II.1. Pure transitives

In this category, we find all the transitive verbs which, alone, can never be used causatively, i.e., whose subject can never function as [Initiator] or [Cause] as illustrated with the first two preceding examples. These verbs are further sub-categorized into:

II.1.1. Primitive transitives

These are the verbs which are basic or primary transitive, i.e., verbs whose transitivity is not due to other factors whether morphological or collocational as can be exemplified with **reach, cross, follow, precede, chase** etc.; **franchir, gravir, quitter, suivre** etc.; **rakiba** (board, embark), **lahiqa** (follow), **sabaqa** (precede) etc. It should be specified that a few of these verbs require specific object complements, i.e., collocate with object

complements which are characterized only by the feature [-Animate] whereas the other verbs impose less restrictions on their object complements. These collocational restrictions and flexibilities also apply to the subject collocates of these verbs.

II.1.2. Derived transitives

These verbs are formed out of other verbal forms by affixation. These other verbal forms which constitute the basis for derivation can themselves be transitive or intransitive. The following examples are illustrative: **poursuivre, pourchasser, survoler; ta:ba9a, la:haqa** (follow, chase, pursue), **gha:dara**(leave). As can be noted, **poursuivre** and **pourchasser** are derived from transitive simple verbal forms whereas **survoler** is derived from an intransitive simple verbal form (**voler:fly**). In Arabic, the three verbs correspond to form III, i.e., the **fa:9ala** pattern. English, in contrast, does not have derived pure transitives, i.e., transitives which can neither be used intransitively or causatively nor obtained by any morphological means.

As specified, the identification of these verbs, whether primitive or derived, as pure transitive verbs is that they cannot be used causatively on their own, hence the functions of their subject collocates and their object complement collocates are limited.

II.2. Causatives

In this class, we find all the originally transitive verbs whose subject functions as [Initiator] or [Cause] of the action. Consequently, the object complement functions as [Agent], [Instrument] or [Patient] according to whether it stands for the entity which acts by itself, when operated or acted upon as illustrated with:

The general sent the army to the battlefield
S + V + Obj. Compl. + Mod. Compl.
[_____Initiator + Agent + Goal]

These transitive verbs with a causative component can also be divided into primitive or lexical causatives and derived or morphological causatives.

II.2.1. Primitive causatives

These are all the transitive verbs whose causative component is not obtained by any morphological means or by any syntactic construction which the verbs enter into. In other words, these verbs constitute causative bases as illustrated with **take, bring, send, guide** etc.; **envoyer, diriger, conduire, guider** etc. and **ba9atha** (send), **qa:da** (lead), **?axada** (take) etc. Similarly to the other verbs, among these primitive causatives, we also have certain verbs which collocate only with [+Animate] subjects and object complements; whereas others impose less constraints and therefore accept both [+/-Animate] subjects and object complements.

II.2.2. Derived causatives

In opposition to the previous category, these causative verbs are derived from other forms or exist under other forms. We have **acheminer, amener, emmener, reconduire**,etc. ; **?arsala**(send), **?ab9ada** (move/take away), **qarraba** (bring near), **?awSala** (conduct/make arrive with), **qaddama** (bring/take forwards), **?adxala** (take in, make go/come into with), **?anzala** (bring/take down) etc . It should be specified that in English, by contrast with French and particularly Arabic, morphologically derived causatives or simply morphological causatives are not common. Apart from **fell** which can be taken as the derived causative of **fall,** there are few other verbs which are similar to the french ones such as **exile, expatriate** the derivation of which is rather questionable in English since these

verbal forms are not the most characteristic of English but borrowings from other languages.

In Arabic, however, morphological causation is very productive and in opposition to English more particularly, primitive causatives are less common. Consequently, the lexical or primitive causatives in English and French are rendered in Arabic by affixation or by preposition insertion after the verb as can be seen in **?ata: bi** (bring), **dhahaba bi** (take).

III. Transitive/Intransitive case

This class includes the verbs which can be used transitively and intransitively in conformity with rules (a) and (b). To obey one rule or the other is dependent upon the collocational environment of the verb in question or more specifically the context in which the verb occurs. Originally, these verbs are transitive or intransitive and it is not always possible in every language to specify which comes first. However, in opposition to the other verbs, they accept other uses due to their syntactic flexibility. In a language such as Arabic in which morphological derivation plays an important part in semantics and syntax, it is less complex to decide upon the basic or primary use of a given verb by isolating its affixes; whereas in other languages in which such features are lexical rather than morphological, it is obviously not always an easy task to distinguish the initial character of such verbs. These verbs with a double syntactic construction and therefore with less collocational restrictions can be illustrated with **jump, return, climb, enter, penetrate** etc.; **monter, passer, approcher, avancer, sortir** etc.; **marra** (pass), **waSala**(arrive), **daxala** (enter), **ha:djara** (emigrate, leave), **nazala** (descend, go/come down) etc. It goes without saying that the transitive use of certain verbs is not always purely transitive but can also be causative. It should be specified, however, that in Arabic, the latter case, i.e., the case of the verbs whose transitivity also implies causation, is obtained through various lexicalization processes. More specifically, these verbs are

obtained by means of morphological derivation or periphrastic combinations as illustrated respectively in what follows: the intransitive/pure transitive verb **waSala** (arrive) when adopting the second transitive behaviour, i.e., the causative, becomes? **awSala** (make arrive with) which corresponds to the English and French lexical causatives **conduct** and **conduire**. The intransitive/pure transitive verb **daxala** (enter) which becomes **daxala bi** or **?adxala** (take/bring into) constitutes another example of non-lexical or non-basic causation in Arabic which corresponds to lexical or primitive causation in English and French. These discrepancies also exist in certain cases between French and English. For instance, the intransitive character of certain transitive/intransitive verbs in English is rendered in French by reflexivization as in the intransitive **withdraw** and the reflexives **se retirer** and **se replier.**

The foregoing contrastive account has put into focus many linguistic facts and contrasts which reveal some of the most interesting phenomena of language transfer which may lead to translation problems.

IV. The transferability of lexico-syntactic properties and translation

As explained earlier, a significant number of verbs sharing the same semantic features in the three languages vary with respect to their collocational features, namely selection-restriction features and syntactic features. Consequently, in identifying similar semantic features between the verbs of different languages, the translator may also identify similar collocational and syntactic features. The transferability of such features may take several forms. A common case is the one in which some co-occurrence restriction features specific to the source language are also found in the target language. In this way, selection rules such as [+Animate] only or [-Animate] only or [+/-Animate] which apply to the collocates of certain verbs in the source language will be generalized to the collocates of the

corresponding target language verbs the collocational environment of which will, without any doubt, be affected.

Another case which, this time, also affects the syntactic environment of target language verbs is reflected in the translator's identification of the same sort of complement collocates on the basis of similar semantic components with the source language verbs. Consequently, certain intransitive verbs in the target language may be rendered transitively, i.e., transformed into transitive ones in the sense that they will be used with an object complement collocate instead of a modality complement collocate or vice versa depending upon the syntactic environment of the corresponding verbs in the source language. The transferability of such lexical and syntactic properties does not take place without affecting the semantic functions played by the various collocates of the verbs such as [Agent], {Instrument], [Patient] and so on in the target language.

On the other hand, we also find in the target language cases which show transferability of purely semantic information such as the neutralization of the deictic component of the pair **emigrate** and **immigrate**. This semantic property, i.e., irrelevance of the deictic component, is specific to the source language, here Arabic, in which the verb **Ha;djara** (emigrate/immigrate) is unmarked with respect to such a component and whose specific direction is determined by the context in which it occurs or the situation it describes. This case and other similar ones have been discussed by Harouni (1998) with reference to advanced students' productions in English which reveal that some reflexive verbs in French influence the produced English verbal forms as in "he exiled himself for political reasons" for "il s'éxila pour des raisons politiques" where the produced English string proves transferability of a pronominal agentive verbal form from French whereas in English the same verbal form conveys both pronominal agentivity and non-pronominal causativity as also shown in Adjemian (1983) who presents cases of transferability of lexical

properties of francophone Canadian students learning English as a second language. These are just brief illustrations of the interaction of syntactic and semantic features in the practical aspects of language.

In conclusion, we can therefore say that further research is certainly needed in applied language studies particularly at the contrastive dimension to determine not only the correlation between the componential and collocational levels but also the collocational preferences and tendencies within the vocabulary of the source language and the target language. For example, as far as the present account is concerned, the enquiry could be pushed further to include phrasal verbs which constitute a core component of the English language in the sense that these verbs represent the most characteristic or idiomatic forms of authentic English and by selecting such forms, a translator shows the degree of his mastery of the target language or more precisely the extent to which he can interpret and translate native-like.

Phonetic identification of transliterated consonants and vowels used in the Arabic examples:

?	glottal stop
th	voiceless inter-dental fricative
dj	voiced affricate
h	voiceless pharyngeal fricative
x	voiceless velar fricative
dh	voiced inter-dental fricative
S	emphatic voiceless alveolar fricative
T	emphatic voiceless denti-alveolar plosive
9	voiced pharyngeal fricative
gh	voiced uvular fricative
q	voiceless uvular fricative
H	voiceless glottal fricative
W	voiceless bilabial semi-vowel
:	This indicates a long vowel

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