

Linguistic Typology

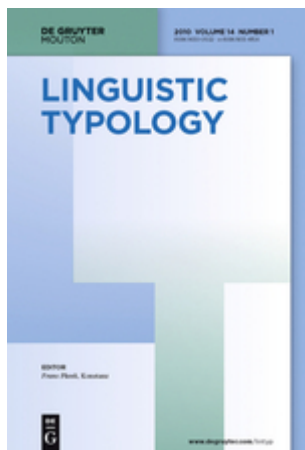
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Book Reviews

William Croft, *Verbs: Aspect and causal structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. xvii + 448 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-924858-2, GBP 89 (hardback); ISBN 978-0-19-924859-9, GBP 33 (paperback).

Reviewed by **Domenica Romagno**

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William Croft's *Verbs: Aspect and causal structure* assembles, in a unitary model, the main issues which influenced the author's wide-ranging and widely noted research across the years: the cognitive processes underlying language production and comprehension (Croft 2001, Croft & Cruse 2004), crosslinguistic variation and its implications for language change (Croft 2003, 2000a), and the relationship between formal and functional sides of language (Croft 2001). Croft's important contributions to theoretical and typological linguistics – including the strand of typological investigation that aims at identifying the interaction between cultural and natural factors in language organization and change – provide the background for this book, which focuses on one of the author's chief areas of interest, namely verbal semantics and specifically the representation of event structure and the mechanisms for argument realization.

The encoding of event types and their participants is analyzed and discussed here within the framework of Construction Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Croft 2001; among others) and specifically Croft's "radical" version of it, which strongly emphasizes the non-independence of the so-called modules of language or, rather, of language analysis: that is, the formal dimensions of language systems (including syntax, morphology, and phonology) and the functional dimensions (including semantics, pragmatics, and discourse). The Construction Grammar model was developed within the general frame of Cognitive (and Functional) Linguistics, where the central idea is the interaction between forms and functions and, specifically, the interface between semantic (and pragmatic) properties and morphosyntax. Construction Grammar exploits "schematic" templates to provide the most comprehensive analysis of linguistic data, in order to show that "there are universals of language, but not in syntactic structures taken by itself. The universals of language are found in semantic structure and in symbolic structure, that is, the mapping between linguistic function

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and linguistic form” (Croft 2001: 61). Constructions are abstract (“schematic”) units, entrenched in speakers’ knowledge about language, consisting of a pairing of form and meaning. Therefore, they refer to either complex syntactic structures, such as the transitive construction, or concrete lexical items, such as *kiss* (p. 19). Meaning refers here to the semantic structures for an experience: that is, the ways of representing our apprehension of the world, that are relevant to linguistic coding. These semantic structures are called construals. Different linguistic constructions “profile” different features of the construals.

The empirical generalizations for which this book offers explanations pertain mainly to two families of constructions, tense-aspect constructions and argument structure constructions, specifically, the so-called “coding constructions”, such as case marking, agreement (or indexation), and word order, which directly encode the participant roles for events. Since grammatical categories such as subject and object appear to be not only language-specific, but also construction-specific, the analysis aims at investigating the semantic factors underlying argument coding. The guiding idea of the book is that event structure primarily determines argument realization.

Chapters 2 to 4 focus on aspectual structures and provide an “analysis of lexical aspect that integrates the many lexical aspectual distinctions with grammatical consequences into a single model” (p. 173). Chapters 5 to 9 focus on argument structures. One of the main purposes of this book is, indeed, to integrate a fine-grained aspectual analysis with the analysis of the causal interactions between participants in events (Croft 1991, 1998).

Chapter 2 offers a rich discussion of the lexical aspectual types identified in the literature, starting with Vendler (1967), as well as of the prior proposals for their decomposition and formal representation, and present a new theoretical model in which aspect is geometrically represented in two dimensions: the temporal dimension (time: t) and the change dimension (qualitative state: q), which allows one to represent the complexity of the lexical root (or Logical Structure: Levin & Rappaport 2005, Dowty 1979) of predicates as a sequence of phases in a single dimension (q). As regards the distinction made by Sasse (2002) between the unidimensional approach to aspect (the idea that lexical aspect and grammatical aspect share the same type of semantic structure) and the bidimensional approach to aspect (the idea of a clear semantic separation between lexical aspect, i.e., actionality, and grammatical aspect, i.e., viewpoint), Croft’s approach can be said to be unidimensional, but is in a sense consistent with the basic assumption of Construction Grammar, that is, the idea of a continuum between formal and functional dimensions of language. Therefore, the term “aspect” is used in this book, with no further specifications, to refer to the non-separability of these two dimensions. The unidimensionality of Croft’s approach to aspect,

indeed, is not aimed at maintaining the identity of the semantic structures of lexical and grammatical aspect: rather, his “primary interest is with the semantic structures of predicates. However [. . .] predicates always occur in a tense-aspect construction, so the aspectual structures of events has to be inferred from the interpretations of predicates in different tense-aspect constructions” (p. 32).

The two-dimensional model, in which the two conceptual structures of time and qualitative state are represented geometrically, can better capture the variety of the semantic patterns which are linguistically relevant by accounting for the profiling of different constructions (e.g., the achievement vs. the “transitory-state” construal of *to know*). Moreover, it provides a consistent analysis of fine-grained aspectual distinctions, including all possible aspectual subtypes of construals, which represent an accurate extension of Vendler’s classification (see (40) on p. 44). This model, as shown in detail in Chapter 3, also appears to be particularly useful to address notoriously complex questions, such as aspect in Russian and other Slavic languages, which involves the interaction of morphological aspectual distinctions with the semantic construal of predicates.

The interaction between grammatical aspect and lexical aspect is the central issue in Chapter 4, where a need for the combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses of the relationship between grammatical constructions and predicate semantics is argued for. In this chapter, Croft introduces the multidimensional scaling technique to analyze linguistic variation (Croft & Poole 2008). “Multidimensional scaling is a technique for statistical analysis that constructs a geometric model of the conceptual structure of a particular domain of study” (p. 128), and specifically captures differences and similarities among individual units of a dataset, by visualizing the between-unit distances. Multidimensional scaling provides an extension of the semantic map model (Haspelmath 2003), and “allows one to construct conceptual spaces automatically, without the problems of the semantic map model” (p. 132). The application of multidimensional scaling to linguistic data either within or across languages (e.g., tense-aspect data from Dahl 1985; see also Croft & Poole 2008), and both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective (Bybee et al. 1994), shows that this analysis is a powerful tool to detect broad patterns of the relationship between grammatical and lexical aspect in complex data. In fact, it allows one to account for the most frequent associations of certain lexical aspectual construals with certain grammatical aspectual categories (significantly confirming the results of previous studies, which used different research techniques; see Bybee et al. 1994, among others). Nevertheless, the results of the analysis of English and Japanese aspectual constructions reported here demonstrate that it may require a very large dataset to provide consistent insights in the analysis of the variation in the complex mapping relationship between morphosyntax and semantics.

The main question addressed in the remaining Chapters 5 to 9 is how participants in events are linguistically encoded, that is, how verb arguments are expressed grammatically. Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of the theories of argument realization and shows up the limits of prior approaches, either syntax- or semantics-based, in which several phenomena (like, for instance, voice alternations and the grammatical behavior of obliques) still have to be explained in a consistent model.

Croft proposes an event-based model of argument realization which relies on the causal (Talmy's "force-dynamic") structure of events. The model is presented here in a more refined version relative to Croft's earlier versions of it (Croft 1991, 1998), and integrates causal and aspectual representations of event structures. This model is able to pick out the properties of event structure underlying argument realization across languages, without adding independent layers of semantic or syntactic representation. "The two properties of event structure that motivate argument realization are the asymmetric force-dynamic relationships among participants in an event, and the profiling of part of the causal chain as the denotation of the verb or main predicate of the clause" (p. 209). The asymmetric force-dynamic relationships correspond to the causal structure of events, that is, the transmission of force relationships between participants in events (see (35) on p. 198); whereas the verb profile is semantically motivated by aspectual properties. Causal relationships among participants in events and aspectual construals are both captured in a three-dimensional geometric representation, in which event structure is decomposed in subevents, such that each subevent involves only one participant with its own aspectual contour, and the subevents are related to each other causally. Each subevent is represented by the two-dimensional template, i.e., the $t + q$ model of Chapter 2 and the causal chain linking the individual subevents is represented in a third dimension (see, for instance, (50) on page 214). This model has several advantages: it clearly distinguishes between aspectual and causal structures of events and, consequently, allows one to integrate a fine-grained aspectual analysis (see the $t + q$ model) with the causal structure analysis. Moreover, it is able to represent complex patterns of event structure, like both interpretations of causation, in terms of the transmission of force relationships between participants in a single event and in terms of events causing other events.

The guiding question for Chapters 6 to 9 is the semantic structure of predicates, from simple verbs to morphosyntactically complex verbal constructions, which includes argument coding and verbal profile.

The huge amount of typological data analyzed in Chapter 6, within the three-dimensional model described in Chapter 5, shows that causal structure plays a crucial role to argument realization and prototypical simple verbs profile

volitional causation. Significantly, the tension between the force-dynamic relationships among participants in events and the constraints on argument structure constructions may give rise to crosslinguistic variation and processes of diachronic change, in which it is still possible to identify systematic patterns (see Lazzeroni 2012). “The patterns of variation reflect the difference between our experience of the event type and the causal chain construal found in argument structure constructions” (p. 282).

Interestingly, Section 6.3 analyzes two grammatical structures traditionally considered to be problematic for theories of argument realization: passive and ergative. Croft here provides a holistic representation of the two phenomena, which includes both verb features (i.e., voice) and argument features (i.e., alignment: the morphosyntactic coding of participants in events). In the passive, the subject has an atypical semantic role (patient or theme) and the agent is not in the subject position: therefore, the thematic-role rule for argument realization fails. In addition, the boundary between situation types that may be expressed by a passive construction (e.g., *The window was broken (by vandals)*) and situation types that may be expressed by an intransitive/anticausative construction (e.g., *The window broke*) is blurred both across and (even) within languages: in some languages there is no grammatical motivation to treat passive differently from anticausative. In this book, Haspelmath’s hypothesis of an anticausative source for passive constructions (Haspelmath 1987) or, alternatively, of an original “inactivizing” periphrastic construction combining a verb such as ‘to be’ or ‘to become’ with a resultative participle (Haspelmath 1990) is maintained and a three-dimensional representation of passive is provided ((72) on p. 255): in this model, passive is interpreted as a result of a change process in the verbal profile of the causal chain for active sentences.

On the other hand, a possible origin of ergative from passive constructions is proposed (see (73) on p. 256; cf. Croft 1998). This diachronic template might support the distinction between internal and external arguments of predicates (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995). The argument which takes the ergative case corresponds to the external argument: in the passive constructions, it is realized as an Antecedent Oblique (the agent which is antecedent to the patient subject in the causal chain) and, thus, becomes the ergative argument in the ergative pattern, as opposed to the patient subject of the passive, the internal argument, which takes the absolutive case. Significantly, the evolution of passive to ergative also supports the idea that passive corresponds to the reverse of prototypical transitive constructions (Hopper & Thompson 1980; Fici Giusti 1994: 27, 43; Tomasello & Bates (eds.) 2001; Romagno 2006). The passive voice, indeed, can be semantically characterized by “the deprofiling of the causal segment from agent (initiator) to patient (endpoint). The grammaticalization process Passive > Ergative > Nomina-

tive can be interpreted as a gradual restoration of the causal chain from agent to patient” (p. 256). However, as the author remarks, the question remains of why passive would arise and then grammaticalize into an ergative (and eventually, nominative) construction. The possible role of topicality is discussed here: passive is employed when the patient/endpoint is more topical in discourse than the agent/initiator (Givón 1983); and it is shown that the reality of voice systems is complex: between the “extreme cases” of active transitive constructions and passive intransitive constructions with an antecedent oblique initiator, there is a continuum of morphosyntactic types, with varying and mixed coding of initiator and endpoint (see also Croft 2001: 283–319 for crosslinguistic variation in voice systems).

Section 6.4 provides a typological investigation of morphosyntactically complex verb constructions, such as causative and applicative. A particularly interesting observation regards certain constructions including an instrumental, where, in some languages, the instrumental applicative affix is identical to the causative affix (see (102) on p. 272 and (95) on p. 268). Applicative and causative often have the same linguistic expression (Peterson 2007). There is a close relationship between applicative and causative, also confirmed by data from different languages, including Classical Indo-European languages such as Greek and Latin. Romagno (2008) showed that the conversion of an intransitive construction into an applicative construction and the conversion of a transitive construction into an anticausative construction are largely antisymmetric and governed by different degrees of the same parameters. Typically, in the “causative alternation” (Haspelmath 1993), the A argument becomes \emptyset , a telic two-argument verb turns into an unaccusative, and the O argument becomes S. On the contrary, in the applicative alternation, an unergative verb turns into a two-argument one, the S argument becomes A and the Oblique becomes O. As regards the idea that the passivization of applicative constructions may be an instance of the general “Base Object Inertia” principle (p. 273), it is worth wondering whether this also applies to Latin constructions such as *docere aliquem grammaticam* vs. *doctus grammaticā*.

Chapter 7 investigates the role of aspectual structure in determining verbal profiles. It is shown that a fine-grained aspectual analysis is fundamental to the representation of event types, consistently with the three-dimensional model proposed in Chapter 5. The basic division of aspectual types appears to be between event construals with a directed change and undirected event construals: significantly, the analysis proposed here confirms that the notion of change and whether the change is accomplished or not plays a crucial role to object coding and contributes to the hierarchy of affectedness that constraints the realization of an endpoint participant as object or oblique. It is well known that the lower

the object is in affectedness the more likely it is expressed by an oblique case (Tsunoda 1981, 1985). The data discussed here also supports the idea of a hierarchical order of the transitivity/intransitivity parameters (Hopper & Thompson 1980): object properties and lexical aspectual properties (primarily, telicity) have a dominant role in determining the transitive/intransitive behavior of a clause (Romagno 2006, 2003: 167). Event structure, which appears to be “the primary semantic determinant of argument realization” (p. 3), may also interact with properties of the participants in events such as animacy and definiteness. This is the case, for instance, for certain strategies of non-canonical marking of objects (p. 27; Aikhenvald et al. (eds.) 2001; Romagno 2005, 2006).

The boundary between event structures lexicalized as simple verbs and structures expressed as some types of morphosyntactic complex construction, ranging from derived verb forms (e.g., causative and applicative) to verbs with resultative or depictive secondary predicates, from serial verbs to constructions with converbs, is not clear-cut. In order to investigate the relationship between event types and the variation in how they are encoded as simple verbs or complex predicate constructions, the author examines several complex predicate constructions (i.e., resultative, depictive, serial verb, and converb constructions) in a typological perspective, and provides a map of their semantic range (Chapter 8): this may reflect an image of what type of event structure is or is not lexicalized as a simple verb. “How speakers form more schematic representations of verbs and constructions is a problem that requires psycholinguistic experimentation to fully resolve” (p. 28). Recent studies suggest that event types may have a neural correlate and that patients with semantic dementia, who are severely impaired in accessing the referential meaning of words, may be sensitive to the morphosyntactically relevant components of word meaning (Romagno et al. 2013, 2012; Romagno 2012).

The guiding idea in this and the following Chapter 9 is that forms are language-specific, but the underlying meanings are universal. In this, Croft’s view differs from that of other typologists, in particular Gilbert Lazard, who is much more cautious in using the presumed universal organization of concepts as *tertium comparationis* for crosslinguistic investigations. Language-specific categories are considered, in Croft’s view, to be directly connected to the universals which have been discovered crosslinguistically. These correspond to principles of mapping morphosyntax into the conceptual space: “the conceptual space is the geography of the human mind, which can be read in the facts of the world’s languages in a way that the most advanced brain scanning techniques cannot even offer us” (Croft 2001: 364). Significantly, recent functional neuroimaging studies that investigated the representation and organization of object and event con-

cepts in the human brain provided results which largely parallel data from linguistic categorization (Fairhall & Caramazza 2013; Romagno et al. 2012, 2013).

The analysis provided in the present book confirms the causal and aspectual properties of the transitive prototype (Hopper & Thompson 1980; see (74) on p. 354). However, a question remains: Why is this event type the prototype? And, consequently: Is this event type the most frequent type? Croft remarks that, although there are no frequency studies of verbal semantic classes in language use, Bowerman (1990) indicates that, in language production, non-prototypical event types are at least as numerous as prototypical events of transitive constructions in first language acquisition. One could again ask what principles motivate the semantic categorization of event types, and whether they have a cognitive base in how human beings recognize events. The individuation of events “appears to be a far more challenging conceptual process than the individuation of most objects” (p. 356). Events, indeed, are prototypically transitory in space and time (Givón 1984), as opposed to “first-order entities” (Lyons 1977), which are highly individuated and manipulable; moreover, events entail a relationship among participants, whereas objects do not. In fact, while consistent findings on how the human brain represents and organizes object concepts have been provided by neuropsychological and brain functional studies (Mahon & Caramazza 2011, Ricciardi & Pietrini 2011), the neural underpinning of event concepts has yet to be clarified (Crepaldi et al. 2011, Peelen et al. 2012). Significantly, the results of a recent functional neuroimaging study (Romagno et al. 2012) support Croft’s hypothesis that the prototypical event type “is the event type that is most easily individuated in the causal network” (p. 356), i.e., clearly delimited by a highly agentive initiator and a highly affected endpoint. Romagno et al. (2012) showed that verbs denoting inherently telic events (which necessarily entail a specified and affected endpoint) elicit greater neural activity in verb-selective areas than non-telic events. Those verbs, in turn, correspond to the prototype of verb category as defined crosslinguistically by a multidimensional cluster of features (cf. Ross 1972; Givón 1984; Hopper & Thompson 1984; Croft 2000b, 2001; Sasse 2001; Simone 2008; among many others).

In the model elaborated in the present book, the non-separability/interaction between formal and functional dimensions of language and, specifically, between morphosyntax and semantics, provides the key to accounting for the “exceptions” in other models (including functionalist models), to getting right the variability in grammars, both within and across languages, and to identifying constraints on the morphosyntax/semantics interface based on a consistent analysis of the linguistically relevant semantic patterns. In addition, Croft’s model goes beyond the synchronic level, showing that “language continually evolves through usage; in other words, all of language is diachronic” (p. 30).

Errata, almost exclusively found in diagrams, are provided at William Croft's website (<http://www.unm.edu/~wcroft>).

The few comments in this review were intended to show how large and deep the perspectives of Croft's fundamental book are. It provides new insights for linguistics, where inter-disciplinary research is becoming increasingly important.

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