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Prototype Effects in Transitivity*

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***Abstract*—Cognitive linguistics strongly opposes the classical view and alternatively claims that categories center round a prototype and the membership of a category depends not on the binary features but on the family resemblance with the prototype. This paper attempts to make a study of a common grammatical category—transitivity, with the aim to find the proof for our hypothesis that transitivity, as a prototype category like any natural category, shows prototype effects with asymmetries among members.**

***Index Terms*—transitivity, prototype effects, semantic properties, syntactic properties**

I. Introduction

Transitivity is an important linguistic category and has been a heated topic for decades. Like any natural category, transitivity is also a category showing prototype effects. As Hopper and Thompson (1980) put that transitivity is a matter of degree. That is to say, there are good examples and bad examples in the category. To be more specific, the levels of transitivity shown from the transitive clause are different, ranging from high to low. The prototypical transitive clauses show the highest degree of transitivity, and the non-prototypical clauses show different deviated degrees of transitivity, depending on the degree of deviation from the prototype. This paper aims to explore the prototype effects of transitivity from cognitive approach.

II. The Prototype of Transitivity

A. Semantic Properties of the Prototype

1. Experiential basis for semantic properties

In accordance with the above assumption that transitivity is a prototype-based category, this category is thus not determined by necessary and sufficient features but centered round a prototype which can be assumed to be understood in terms of a cluster of interactional properties. It is interactional in that these properties are not objective but rather have to do with the world with which we interact in the way of perceiving, imagining, affecting with our body and gaining knowledge. They are the result of our interaction as part of our physical and cultural environments with our bodies and cognitive apparatus. As Rosch (1978) puts it "it should be emphasized that we are talking about a perceived world and not a metaphysical world without a knower"(p29). Then, what is the clustering of properties that determine the prototypical member in transitivity? Looking back for a moment at Hopper and Thompson's typological research on the clusters of attributes associated with transitivity, we can see that verbs are not the sole factor influencing transitivity in a transitive clause; there are many other determinant facets. More significantly, they also point out that the transitive constructions have semantic values which can be seen as prototypical. This proposition is in consistent with the main claim in Langacker's cognitive grammar. He firmly believes that the parameters of linguistic form in grammatical constructions are not independent of meaning, rather on the basis of meaning. "Cognitive grammar makes specific claims about semantic structure and the notional basis of fundamental grammatical categories" (Languacker, 2004, p183). Semantics therefore serves as the basis for the syntax. Granted that semantics is essential to, or more explicitly, inherent in grammatical construction, then where do the semantic values of prototype come from? According to Langacker, semantics means the conceptualization of human beings and the reflection of people's understanding of things and world experience, corresponding to the ways in which human beings conceive things. Therefore, semantic structures function as the reflection of the conceptual structures. In cognitive grammar, semantic units are claimed to be characterized relative to cognitive domain, a coherent area of conceptualization, with three-dimensional space, smell, color, touch sensation, etc. basic domains and other higher level domains even including the knowledge system. Cognitive domain also consists of a concept or conceptual complex of any degree of complexity with the inclusion of highly abstract image schemas. "Meanings are characterized relative to cognitive domains many of which are idealized cognitive models in the sense of Lakoff" (Langacker, 2004, p282). Lakoff (1987) points out that linguistic expressions derive their meaning from being associated with cognitive models. Cognitive models are meaningful in that they put us in touch with preconceptual structures in our bodily experience of functioning as a being of a certain sort in an environment of a certain sort. By these models we organize our knowledge and in the process of organizing category structure, prototype effects come to exist as by-products. Cognitive models characterize not only conceptual structure but also syntactic structure. "These cognitive models fundamental to our experience and our conception of the world are

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claimed to underlie the prototypical value of certain grammatical constructs pertaining to clause structure" (Langacker, 2004). We hold the central idea in cognitive grammar that grammatical construction is not autonomous but dependent on semantic structure. The meaning comes from our bodily interactions with the world, or rather, the cognitive models with which we perceive the world and organize our knowledge. This is consistent with the fact that the cluster of properties of prototype is not something objectively in the world independent of any being, but is the result of our interactions as part of our physical and cultural environment. Actually, we experience the properties characterizing the prototype of transitivity as a *gestalt*; that is, the complex of properties occurring together is more basic to our experience than their separate occurrence. Such a gestalt is often representable by the cognitive model which is understood as being psychologically simpler than its parts. As Lakoff (1987) puts it "in the case of experiential gestalts, however, the reverse may hold: a complex description may correspond to a cognitively simple concept, while a relatively simple description of one of the parts of the concept may be cognitively more complex" (p491). Due to their experiential nature, we are in a position to assume that the cluster of semantic properties of prototype transitivity come from cognitive models. Additionally, the clusters of attributes done by Hopper and Thompson and other linguists offer us a hint that transitivity approximates the notion of EVENT rather than STATE. That is to say the category of transitivity is based on a cognitive model describing not a state but an event. So we make a further assumption that Langacker's canonical event model seems to provide the basis for the organization of a prototype transitive clause. Now we can go on to discuss the semantic defining features of the prototype transitive clause on the basis of canonical event model.

2. Semantic properties

In cognitive grammar, the role of archetypes is employed to describe the features of prototype in grammatical constructions. "These archetypes reflect our experience as mobile and sentient creatures and as manipulators of physical objects." (Langacker, 2004, p285). In line with the canonical event model, we would tend to anticipate that the subject in the prototypical transitive clause plays the role of archetypal agent which refers to a person who is a volitional human actor, acting in the most specifically human possible way to cause some perceptible change of state in a perceptible object. That is, subject is the source of energy transmission to an external object. On the polar opposite, the object is expected to play the role of archetypal patient which is an inanimate object that stands at the end of energy flow, absorbing external transmitted energy and as a result undergoing an internal change of state. The event is coded by the prototypical verbs which definitely describe an activity which causes a change in the patient. In English, they are verbs such as *kill, break, hurt, make, create, improve, clean, increase, decrease, stop, move, sadden, melt, heat, warm, hide, cover, give,* and *send.* They all describe a change of one kind or another. According to Tsunoda, other transitive verbs such as *hit* are often used in examples of transitive clauses, but they are not prototype transitive verbs because though the activities they describe impinge on the patient, they do not necessarily imply a change in it. In contrast, killing, for instance, necessarily implies such a change. That is the death of the victim. These semantic properties deriving from the canonical cognitive model correspond to the work of Hopper and Thompson (1980) and Lakoff (1977), including the following semantic properties which typical transitive sentences have in common:

(1) The two participants are highly individuated, ie. They are discrete, specific entities (from this it follows that both the NPs in the construction have specific reference), distinct both from each other, and from the background environment.

(2) The event is initiated by the referent for the subject NP, i.e. by the agent. Responsibility for the event thus lies exclusively with the agent.

(3) The agent acts consciously and volitionally, and thus controls the event. Since consciousness and volition are typical human attributes, it follows that the agent is typically a human being.

(4) As a consequence of the agent's action, something happens to the patient, i.e. the referent of the object NP. The effect on the patient is intended by the agent. Often, though by no means necessarily, the patient is inanimate.

(5) After the occurrence of the event, the patient is in a different state from before the event. Usually, the difference is one which would highly perceptible to an overlooking observer.

(6) The event is construed as punctual. Even though the event necessarily has temporal extension, the internal structure of the event, and the intermediate states between its inception and termination, are not in focus.

(7) The agent's action on the patient usually involves direct physical contact, and the effect on the patient is immediate.

(8) The event has a causative component—the agent's action causes the patient to undergo a change.

(9) Typically, agent and patient are not only clearly differentiated entities; often they also stand in an adversative relationship.

(10) Finally, the events reported by the construction are real, not imaginary, hypothetical, or counterfactual. Hence, central instantiations of the construction are realis.

(Taylor, 2001, p207)

B. Syntactic Properties of the Prototype

A grammatical structure is claimed to be characteristically symbolic in cognitive grammar. A symbolic structure is bipolar, consisting of a semantic pole and a phonological pole (Langacker, 2004, p76). If the semantic pole is suppressed, then the symbolic relationships cease to exist, and what remains is nothing but undifferentiated

phonological structure. Thus grammatical constructions are not autonomous from semantics but based on it. Then how do they get meaning? Cognitive grammar makes it clear that grammar is a radical category of grammatical constructions, where each construction pairs a cognitive model (which characterizes meaning) with corresponding aspects of linguistic form (Lakoff, 1987, p463). Given such a view of the nature of syntactic structures, we can expect that every grammatical construction has its meaning derived from cognitive models or schemas. Based on the cognitive model of prototypical transitivity, we list some syntactic properties pertaining to the prototype transitive clauses.

1. Linguistic expressions of two participants

According to Lyons (1968), clauses may be classified in terms of the number of the participants. He employs such convenient terms as one-place, two-place, etc. In line with the terminology, transitive clauses are at least two-place. Anyhow, there are certain three-place transitive clauses. Most instances of intransitive clauses are one-place, for example, *John sat down*. Semantically speaking, the canonical event model clearly shows that a prototype transitive clause contains two participants. First and foremost, syntactically, the prototypical transitive clause necessarily includes the linguistic expressions of the agent and the patient. However, there are clauses which contain two participants semantically only linguistically expressing either of them. Take the following examples as an illustration.

(1) He drinks wine.
(2) He drinks between meals.
(3) He always aims to please.
(4) He pleased his parents.
(5) Peter washed the dishes and Marsha dried.
(6) He helped his mother dry the dishes.

Drink is used transitively with an object in (1), which is obviously two-place. In terms of semantics, (1) has two participants. Syntactically speaking, both of them are linguistically coded by the pronoun *he* and the noun *wine*. However, in (2), *drink* is used intransitively without an object. It also semantically contains two participants, for drinking necessarily requires an energy initiator, the drinker and the energy receiver, a drink, but in terms of linguistic expressions, it only expresses the drinker with the pronoun *he*, leaving the drink unmentioned. This is the similar case in sentences (3) and (4). In (3) the agent is linguistically expressed while the patient is indicated by the verb *please* rather than coded by nouns or pronouns. However, (4) is a two-place, with the two participants syntactically realized by the pronoun *he* and the noun *parents*. The last two examples bear the similarity as well. Though the verb *dry* in (5) semantically demands an object, the object is not expressed linguistically. But in (6) the two participants are realized by *he* and *dish*. The above examples show that the linguistic expressions of the two participants are primarily coded by means of words, such as nouns and pronouns. Since the cognitive model contains two or more than two participants, the prototype transitive clauses must show the linguistic expression of them.

2. Passivizability

Passivization is a manipulation which makes active sentences such as *Tom killed him* into passive sentence *He was killed by Tom*. In this process, the object of the active sentence is turned into the subject of the passive sentence. The two sentences are different in their respective viewpoints. Take the above sentence as an example, in the active one, its viewpoint is neutral. On the other hand, in the passive sentence, the speaker describes the event only from the Patient's point of view. However, not all the events or states expressed in transitive sentences can be described from the Patient's point of view. Bolinger (1977) gives the following sentences.

(7) Private Smith deserted the army.
(8) ? The army was deserted by Private Smith.
(9) All the generals deserted the army.
(10) The army was deserted by all its generals.

How does it occur that there is the difference in acceptability of the above passive sentences? Considering the verb itself seems impossible to answer this question. According to cognitive grammar's view, the meaning of the whole active sentence may well seem to be correlated with their passivizability. Besides, Bolinger also believes that passivization cannot be defined on a particular set of verbs. He proposes "the hypothesis for the passive in English that the subject in a passive construction is conceived to be a true Patient, i.e. to be genuinely affected by the action of the verb" (Bolinger, 1975, p67). Apart from that, Rice (1987) investigates the strong correlation between passivizability and especially the parameters of transitivity proposed by Hopper and Thompson, which we have taken as the semantic properties of the prototype transitive clauses. According to him, the degree to which sentences are removed from or approximate transitive prototypes has to do with their passivizability. The above studies made by different linguists make it clear that passivizability cannot be explained by verbs, but closely relates with transitivity or rather semantic features of transitivity. How does passivizability correlate with the semantic properties? Semantically speaking, the prototype transitive clauses describe the event in which the discrete physical entities, usually animate, driven by flowing energy, cause the affected object to move or change and possibly to interact with other entities. Obviously, the objects in such clauses are really affected by the action of the verbs. Consistent with Bolinger's proposition, the object is a true Patient, capable of acting as the Subject in the passive sentence. In this way, the correlation between passivizability and transitivity is realized by the semantic property—the affectedness of objects. No doubt, the prototype transitive clause can definitely be paraphrased into passives and passivizability should be one of the syntactic properties of prototypical

transitive clauses.

III. The Deviation of Transitivity

A. Subject Deviation

The prototype clause is associated with a conceptual archetype that constitutes its prototypical value. In a prototype transitive clause, the subject and object approximate the archetypal role of Agent and Patient. However, not all participants in such a clause closely match the archetypes in the canonical event model. Owing to this fact, there are non-central transitive clauses, deviating from the more central members to varying extent. The degree of transitivity is in a negative relationship with the extent to which the clause deviates from the prototype. In other words, corresponding to the above discussion, the more determinant properties a transitive clause lacks, the less typical it is. We will in this section mainly discuss those non-central transitive clauses in which the subjects apart from their typical role as Agent while the objects still play the archetypal role of Patient. The following groups of sentences may explicitly illustrate this point.

(11) The lightening destroyed the building.
(12) The floods damaged several houses.
(13) The electric shock killed him.
(14) The sun burned her skin.
(15) The computer has solved the problem.
(16) The key opened the door.

Sentences (11) to (15) are similar cases due to the fact that the "subject plays the role of external causer; that is, it expresses the unwitting (generally inanimate) cause of an event" (Quirk, 1985, p743). In (11), the subject *the lightening* does not play the archetype role of Agent in that the inanimate force does not act on the object consciously or purposely. In spite of this, it is still highly transitive. It reports on events rather than states because "only sentences which report on events can be inserted into the clefting expression *What happened was that S*" (Taylor, 2001, p209). Thus it is acceptable to say that *What happened was that the lightening destroyed the building*. Similarly, it makes sense to insert this expression into (12) to (14). In them, the subjects *floods*, *electric shock*, *sun* are also inanimate, so they act in an unconscious way to cause a change in the state of the objects. Though the subjects lose a certain semantic property, the objects are in the Patient position and the syntactic properties are all reserved. For instance, all of them have their corresponding passives. The degree of transitivity in this group of sentences is rather high.

The tendency to have a metaphorical perception of agentiveness is conspicuous in (15) to (16) whose subjects are non-agentive, but "have the role of instrument; that is, the entity (generally inanimate) which an agent uses to perform an action or instigate a process" (ibid.). Metaphorical extension is thus not restricted to the meanings of lexical items only; it also motivates the semantic extension of a syntactic construction. As regards to these untypical transitive clauses, "a relation of metonymy between an agent and the instrument he uses to affect the patient similarly sanctions the use of an instrument in subject position" (Taylor, 2001, p214). The subjects *computer, key* are able to affect the objects in part because they are related with the animate agents who actually carry out the action of *solving* and *opening*. On the other hand, the success of the action, to some extent, depends on the properties of the instrument. Obviously, the successful solving of the problem cannot be realized without the efficiency of the computer. For this reason, the transitive clause with the instrument in the subject position is restricted to only limited productivity. Schlesinger (1981) also makes arguments in connection with this low productivity. In this respect, this type of transitive clauses is further removed from the prototype.

Now we turn to discuss the untypical clauses encoded by mental verbs. They also contain two participants, but the subject in Langacker's term is the experiencer who is responsible for the intellectual, perceptual or emotive mental activity. Take the following sentences as an example.

(17) She likes the gifts.
(18) They admired his life story.
(19) We've forgotten your address.
(20) I regret the incident.
(21) We noticed the warning on the door.
(22) I heard a quarrel next door.
(23) We all respect our president.

Sentences (17) to (23) involve mental activities realized by the mental verbs *like*, *admire*, *forget*, *regret*, *notice*, *hear*, and *respect*. The subjects are usually human beings, but they arguably do not play the archetypical role of Agent because they make no direct physical contact and impose no immediate change on the object. Since there is not any perceptible affection on the object, we may well to expect that they may not possess the syntactic property of passivisability. Contrary to our expectation, clauses encoded by many of the mental verbs can be passivized. For example, (17) can be passivized as *The gifts are liked by him.* The reason why this happens is that in metaphorical sense, the experiencer may bring effects on the object. Due to his fondness for the gift, he may possibly grasp the gift closely, hold it tightly into his arms and consequently results in the change in the state of the gift. Though sentence (17) possesses the syntactic property of passivizability, the degree of transitivity is comparatively low, because they lose so

many semantic properties, such as punctuality, and direct physical contact. Even further removed from the prototype are transitive clauses which describe a relation between entities, not some action performed by one entity with respect to another. These sentences are coded by verbs such as *have, own,* and *possess.* For example:

(24) Peter owns a piano.
(25) They have a beautiful house.
(26) He possesses an immense treasure.
(27) The jar contains coffee.
(28) My tent sleeps four people.
(29) The bag holds six pounds.
(30) The house resembles a castle.
(31) The computer cost $400.

The subjects go with the verbs used statively. That is, the transitive clause is so deviated from the prototype that they describe states or rather relations between entities. According to Quirk, in (24) to (26), the subjects have a recipient role while (27) to (29) have the locative role designating the place of the state. Since they all indicate the relation, we include them together in this group. According to Taylor's way of identifying more marginal transitive sentences, instances in this group cannot be inserted into *What happened was that S* and do not allow clefting with *do*. Transitive clauses containing the locative subjects normally have no passive counterparts either. For instance, it is infelicitous to say *Four people are slept by my tent. Six pounds are held by the bag*. As to the last two sentences, they also designate relations. The two entities in (30) do not have the role of Agent and the Patient because the subject *the house* does not obviously act upon the object *a castle*. Since the object is not affected by any physical force, it is unlikely to stand as the subject of a passive sentence. *A castle is resembled by the house* is ungrammatical. The last sentence is in the similar case, it does not make any sense to say *$400 have been cost by the book*. In addition, the subject can have the temporal role of designating its time in even more marginal transitive clauses. For instance, *1980s saw great changes in China. Tuesday witnessed another slaying. "The fifth day saw our departure"* (Taylor, 2001, p214). The clauses in this group deviate further from the prototype, describing state, showing less causation and some of them having no passives. The productivity of them is rather low because the acceptability of the marginal clauses may be affected by certain factors such as tense and aspect. Now we will in the next part deal with deviation due to the very unpatient-like entities functioning as the direct object of a transitive sentence.

B. Object Deviation

In some cases, the direct object NP does not refer to the archetypal Patient, affected by the action of the Agent, but quite possibly has the role of recipient, result, location, etc. In line with Quirk's system, we firstly discuss the locative role of the direct object. Instantiations are as follows:

(32) We passed a big bridge.
(33) He crossed the street.
(34) She swam the river.
(35) We have climbed the mountain.
(36) They walked the financial district of a city.
(37) The dog jumped the gate.
(38) The enemies have surrounded the village.
(39) We occupy a nice house.
(40) We had inhabited the city for several years.

In (32), passing is an activity involving only one participant, the subject *we*. Thus, superficially, the object *bridge* may seem to be adverbials with an omitted preposition *by*. Sentence (32) can also be encoded by an intransitive clause *We passed by the big bridge*. However, that the *bridge* is not adverbial but the direct object of *pass* is confirmed by the existence of its passive counterpart—*the big bridge was passed by us*, in which the *bridge* assumes the role of the subject. Although the NP designates place, it is able to stand in the position of the direct object. Other verbs in the above sentences such as *cross, swim, climb, walk,* and *jump* behave in a similar way. Meanwhile, we also include those transitive clauses with locative objects after such verbs as *occupy* and *inhabit*, where no preposition can be inserted. In this group, the transitive clauses deviate from the prototype and lose some prototypical properties in that the direct objects are more like setting or path, etc. than the archetypal Patient. The ability of the NPs to take the role of subjects in the passives confirms their status as direct objects. However, the production of this type is restricted in some way. For example, though we have *The child crawled across the floor, The child crawled the floor* is not appropriate. This limit in productivity suggests that they are non-central transitive clauses. We now turn to another kind of object deviation. That is, the resultant object, which, according to Quirk, refers to an object whose referent exists only by virtue of the activity indicated by the verb. For example:

(41) He is digging a hole.
(42) Mother cooked a dinner for the entire family.
(43) She is writing a letter.
(44) He made a cake for me.
(45) John has drawn a new picture.

In prototypical transitive clause the Agent does something to affect the Patient, but this does not apply to the untypical clause with a resultant object. Take sentence (41) to illustrate the point. *He is digging a hole* is different from *He is digging the ground*. The former does not imply he is doing something to a hole while the latter does. He makes physical contact with the ground and transfers energy to it, which results in the making of a hole. Therefore, *ground* is the affected object, but *hole* is the resultant object. By the same token, *dinner* in (42) is resultant while *potatoes* in *Mother has cooked potatoes* is the affected object. The thing which *my mother* directly contacts is a variety of vegetables or meat, etc. rather than the *dinner*. Dinner is the consequence of her washing, cutting and cooking the vegetables or meat. *Letter, cake* and *picture* are respectively the result of the action of writing, making and drawing carried out by the agentive subjects.

We feel the necessity to talk about the recipient role of the direct object here. Though the direct objects are usually inanimate, some personal pronouns or animate nouns are likely to be the objects. These objects more often than not have the recipient role. For example:

(46) We paid the taxi driver.

(47) The waiter wined the guests.

(48) He served us all.

In the above examples, *the taxi driver, the guests, us* are respectively the direct objects, but they are not prototypical in that they do not undergo any direct physical contact done by the subject but play the role of recipient or receiver. This construction is neither fully productive. On this point, Talyor (2001: 213) makes it clear that though (47) is acceptable, such sentences as *He hampagne the guests*, *He beered the guests* and *He coffeed the guests* are not idiomatic.

C. Subject and Object Deviation

We have so far respectively discussed the subject deviation and object deviation. It contributes to the untypicality of those transitive clauses. The fact that there are clauses in which both subjects and objects are not prototypical Agent and Patient necessitates our devotion to this section. We intend to instantiate the point from the following untypical transitive clauses.

(49) I had a wonderful dream.

(50) His teaching benefits us all.

(51) John took a fall.

In (49), the object *dream* is eventive in that we have *I dreamed*. The subject *I* in this case is not agentive as usual, it takes the role of xperience. The subject *his teaching* is the inanimate entity and closely related with an agent. Metaphorical extension allows the possibility of the instrument as an agent standing in the subject position. On the other hand, the object *us* is more like recipient. Lastly, since *John*, the animate subject, is used in nonvolitional sense, it is the affected subject. The object *fall* is also eventive as the word *fall* functions as verb in *John fell*. In general, the transitive clauses are non-central due to the fact that either their subjects or objects, even both of them, deviate to a varying extent from the archetypal Agent and Patient. During this process, the subjects and the objects lose one or another semantic property, so some syntactic properties are lost as well. The more properties the clause loses the lower level of transitivity in the clause and the further it deviates from the prototype.

D. Explanation of the Deviation

According to Langacker (2004), "the canonical event model represents the normal observation of a prototypical action" (p286). The central transitive clause describes canonical actions in which the subject and direct object conform quite well to the agent and patient archetypes. But in actuality, matters are far more complex in coding an event, because coding involves two sides—conceptualization and linguistic structure, which deals with the relationship between a conceptualization one wishes to express and the activated linguistic structures. On the one hand, the ways of construing a given event are countless and there is possibility that a particular event conception deviates from the prototype in any manner or to any degree. As we have discussed above, the object has the extension from patient to locative, temporal, eventive, and cognate role. By the same token, the subject can be extended from the agent to the instrumental role, external causer, experiencer, recipient in some extended clauses. Take the experiencer role as an example, the transitive clause coded by mental verbs like *see, love, fear, like* describes the relationship between an experiencer and some notion with which that experiencer establishes mental contact without any transmission of energy from the subject to the object. Metaphor plays an important role in the process of extension. For instance, it enables the agentive subject in a prototypical transitive clause extends to the experiencer. "This extension is grounded metaphorically, either through specific metaphors such as SEEING IS TOUCHING, or more generally, through the shared path-like nature attributed to such phenomena as energy flow, gaze and directed attention (Langacker, 2004, p304). On the other hand, various alternate grammatical devices are commonly available to code the same situation alternatively. How the untypical event perception is construed by speakers determines the way in which the clause is linguistically coded. That is to say, a conception that does not closely match any of the archetypes may be susceptible to alternate codings, each reflecting a different construal. For instance, in the sentence *He carpeted the room*, the observer takes *the room* as something he acted upon and affected while in *He laid a carpet in the room*, *the room* is obviously considered as the place in which the subject carrying out action. Consequently, these two ways of coding the same situation represent different construal of the NP the *room*. Apart from that, we have the transitive clause *We had a swim*

or *He had a talk*. This scene can also be coded intransitively: *We swam* or *He talked*. Finally, when it comes to construe the untypical event, we tend to structure the unfamiliar conception with reference to familiar ones and connect the abstract conception with more concrete ones. This cognitive tendency accounts in part for the abundance of non-central transitive clauses.

In sum, a prototype transitive clause is a basic clause type associating with the conceptual archetypal Agent and Patient and representing the most natural construal of events. As it is the obvious way of coding an event linguistically, it possibly forecloses other options. But there are great chances that the notions of an event are not archetypal but deviate from the prototype to a varying degree. When these notions are encountered, the event is possibly to be coded differently depending on specific circumstance or the speaker's wish. As metaphor is an important way responsible for the lexical extension, many of the transitive clause extensions are realized through the metaphorical way as well.

IV. Conclusion

In cognitive linguistics, word and syntax form a continuum. Therefore, like a word, transitivity as a category, has its prototypical meaning and non-prototypical meaning, showing high transitivity and low transitivity. The conceptual meaning of transitivity relies on the canonical event cognitive model. The corresponding syntactic pattern is the SVO construction. The prototypical SVO construction shows the prototypical transitivity and the non-prototypical construction shows the non-prototypical transitivity. The degree of transitivity is in a negative relationship with the extent to which the clause deviates from the prototype. Since the situations are in one way or another different from the prototypical transitive event, the meaning of transitivity will extend to different degrees.

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