

Deconstructing agency: volitionality alternations in cognitive perception verbs

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Certain C(ognitive) P(erception) V(erb)s like *feel* are obligatorily agentive (and eventive) when merging with a directional PP/particle (*feel into the crevice*) (1). Furnishing Voice with different flavours depending on the interpretation of the verb simply does not capture the inescapable fact that it is the embedment of directional PP material that somehow induces agency (2). The background ideas are 1) that agency requires eventivity and a mental state, and 2) that the interpretation of *v* and, indirectly, of Voice, depends on the structure that *v* embeds (Hale & Keyser 1993, 2002; Author 2010, 2016; Wood & Marantz 2017). For the case at hand, I propose that *v* is interpreted as eventive by virtue of its embedding a directional expression (i.e., *into the crevice*); as regards the mental state component, it is a property of the perception root (FEEL), merged as adjunct to *v* (Embick 2004, Author 2010, 2016) (3).

1. It is well known (Rogers 1971, Dowty 1979, Rothmayr 2009) that CPVs like *see* or *hear* differ thematically from their corresponding A(ctive) P(erception) V(erb)s *look* and *listen*: the former do not obligatorily license an agentive interpretation of their E(xternal) A(rgument). For instance, the German APV *betrachten* 'look at' is incompatible with the agentive adverb *unabsichtlich* 'undeliberately', unlike its CPV counterparts *sehen* 'see'; the same can be said of the English renditions:

- (1) Die Irmi sieht / #betrachtet unabsichtlich das Bild.
the Irmi sees / looks undeliberately the picture
'Irmi undeliberately {sees/#looks at} the picture.'

This thematic difference goes hand in hand with an event-structure difference, to wit, that CPVs usually behave as states (*Kimian states*, Maienborn 2007), while APVs have an activity—a Davidsonian state—interpretation. Thus, Rothmayr (2009) shows how only APVs like *betrachten*, qua event-denoting verbs, admit a time-span reading of the adverb *ein bisschen* 'a bit' 'for a little while'. CPVs like *sehen* on the other hand, do not license that reading; in the following example, *ein bisschen* may denote, with *sehen*, that the perception of the picture was not complete, e.g., only a corner was to be seen:

- (2) Die Irmi betrachtet / sieht das Bild ein bisschen. (Rothmayr 2009:104)
the Irmi looks / sees the picture a bit

What seems to have gone largely unnoticed in the literature is that certain CPVs systematically behave as APVs when they are combined with a directional PP or particle. The verb *feel*, for instance, behaves as either agentive or not in its more frequent transitive use (Dowty 1979), but becomes obligatorily agentive when heading a predicate involving a directional PP:

- (3) a. While in the cave, Ann (deliberately/undeliberately) felt a crevice in the rock.
b. While in the cave, Ann (deliberately/#undeliberately) felt into a crevice in the rock.

As regards Aktionsart, *feel into* can be diagnosed as non-stative. Thus, taking into account that only stative predicates may occur in the simple present with no habitual or frequentative reading (Dowty 1979, Katz 1995, Jackson 2005), *Ann feels into the crevice* requires such a habitual or frequentative interpretation, while *Ann feels the crevice* does not. On the other hand, particles like *around* seem to possess the same eventivizing and agentivizing effect:

- (4) Feel around in there, Larry, and see if you can find anything. (Google Books)

Similar effects, and with even a larger set of CPVs are found in German:

- (5) a. Ursula (absichtlich/unabsichtlich) roch das Herringsfass.
 Ursula deliberately/undeliberately smelled the herring-barrel
 b. Ursula (absichtlich/#unabsichtlich) roch ins Herringsfass (hin-ein).
 Ursula deliberately/undeliberately smelled in.the.ACC herring-barrel LOC-in
 ‘Ursula deliberately/#undeliberately smelled into the herring barrel.’

Other languages in which a similar phenomenon has been reported include Latin. Thus, the addition of the preverb *in-* ‘in’ to the stative *video* ‘see’ yields agentive *in-video* ‘look maliciously or spitefully at’ (Romagno 2003). All in all, we are not dealing with quirks of particular lexical items of particular lexicons.

2. Dowty (1979:114) proposes that the difference between CPVs and APVs (including the agentive use of verbs like *feel*) lies in the absence vs presence of an abstract agentive predicate DO: APVs correspond to a structure in which a basic predicate is the complement of DO (following Ross’s 1972 analysis of verbs of action), where CPVs have a simple DO-less structure. An updated version of this analysis is proposed by Rothmayr (2009) —I use example (1):

- (6) a. CPV: [_{VP} [_{DP} Die Irmi] [_V [_{DP} das Bild] sieht]]
 b. APV: [_{VP} [_{DP} Die Irmi] [_V v (DO) [_{VP} [_{DP} Die Irmi] [_V [_{DP} das Bild] betrachtet]]]]]

This analysis, or any other one in which agentivity is encoded explicitly in some high functional element like Voice, misses the fact that APVs and the APV-like use of CPVs reported here (see (3)) are overtly distinguished from CPVs not by material merged high in the tree, but by some adpositional material embedded in the predicate: cf., for instance the prefix *be-* in *betrachten* (1) and the PPs in (3-b) and (5-b).

3. In my approach, Voice has an inherent originator semantics, with both events and states. EAs are, thus, always originators. The difference between Agents and Experiencers depends on the type of structure embedded in the vP (see also Wood & Marantz 2017). If v is merged with a configuration encoding pure location/state, then it is interpreted as stative (a Kimian state), and the EA is interpreted as an Experiencer. If v is merged with a configuration involving creation or change (of location/state), then it is interpreted as eventive, and the EA cannot be interpreted as an Experiencer. For transitive non-agentive CPVs (3-a) I adapt Hale & Keyser’s (2002) analysis of stative psych verbs. v takes a *locative* PP structure headed by an abstract preposition of central coincidence, which takes the verbal root as complement (7-a). The locative structure induces a stative reading in v and the EA has to be interpreted as a static originator. A paraphrase would then be something like ‘Ann has the crevice in her feeling’. For cases like (3-b), v takes a directional PP (PathP) as complement, while the root is merged as an adjunct to v (Embick 2004, Author 2010) —see (7-b). v is interpreted as eventive, due to its being combined with a structure encoding change, and the EA is a dynamic originator:

- (7) a. [_{VoiceP} Ann [_{Voice}’ Voice [_{VP} v [_{PP} [_{DP} the crevice] [_P’ P FEEL]]]]]
 b. [_{VoiceP} Ann [_{Voice}’ Voice [_{VP} [_V v FEEL] [_{PP} [_{PathP} Path (= to) [_P’ P (= in) [_{DP} the crevice]]]]]]]

What Agents and Experiencers have in common (unlike Causes) is the presence of a mental state (Reinhart 2000/2016). I take this component not to be a structural property, but a conceptual one encoded in the root; this is intuitive enough: roots like FEEL or SEE seem to undefeasibly encode a mental state.

Selected references: DOWTY, D. R. 1979. *Word meaning and Montague grammar*. Springer. HALE, K. & S. J. KEYSER. 2002. *Prolegomenon to a Theory of Argument Structure*. MIT. ROTHMAYR, A. 2009. The Structure of Stative Verbs. *John Benjamins*.