

Classification of Non-Core Transitive Verbs

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Languages are usually classified as to how they mark their subjects vs. objects, e.g., nominative-accusative (English, Turkish, etc.) vs. ergative-absolutive (e.g., Dyirbal, West Greenlandic) languages (Dixon 1994). Data from South Asia (here particularly Urdu/Hindi and Nepali) suggest that this is too simplistic. In particular, data from non-canonical “object” marking (i.e., ablative, locative, comitative rather than accusative) suggest that a fine-grained lexical classification into at least 6 different (two argument) verb classes is necessary.

In canonical transitive clauses a volitional agent acts on an involitional patient that is affected. Following Thomson and Hopper (1980), Levin (1999) and others, we propose that arguments of Non Core Transitive Verbs (NCTV) differ from this pattern. We propose five classes of NCTV based on case marking and lexical semantic features.

| Class | Subject Marking | 2nd Argument Marking | Examples |
|--------------|------------------------|--|-----------------|
| I | canonical, dative | ablative | fear |
| II | canonical | locative, (canonical) | attack, govern |
| III | canonical, dative | locative, (canonical) | trust, suspect |
| IV | canonical | comitative | fight, marry |
| V | canonical, dative | comitative | love, hate |

In addition to having canonical subjects, classes I, III and V allow for experiencer subjects. In Urdu/Hindi, this does not affect the “object” marking, but in Nepali canonical/locative alternation in class II and III depends on agentivity of the subject and animacy of the “object”. The non-canonical second argument is either a stimulus (class I); an entity that is logically impinged/touched (but not affected, cf. Beaver 2006) (class III and IV); or an entity that is attached/accompanied (IV, V). These core semantic properties are expressed by the ablative, locative and comitative respectively.

The paper focuses on presenting systematic, semantically motivated features for classifying verbs and shows that where differences in case marking do arise, these can also be explained in a systematic, semantically motivated manner.