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## Syncretism and the classification of semantic roles\*

### Abstract

The paper is devoted to the relations among semantic roles. As a tool to understand which roles are cognitively close to each other instances of syncretism are described from languages belonging to different families. Special attention is paid to unattested or infrequent types of syncretism. It is suggested that semantic factors inherent in the prototypes of each semantic role interact with syntactic factors and with lexical features. As a conclusion a mental map that relates semantic functions with each other is tentatively drawn.

### 1. Introduction

Case syncretism has been the topic of a wide number of traditional studies in Indo-European linguistics: later, both the diachronic merging of cases and the synchronic use of the same case for different functions have arisen the interest of European structuralists.<sup>1</sup> In recent times linguistic typology has renewed interest for case syncretism. Besides, research on semantic roles in the framework of cognitive grammar has added a new perspective on case syncretism, which is now studied as the output of the process of categorization, based on metaphors that make it possible to understand a certain semantic role in terms of another. So for example syncretism of local and non-local roles is based on a common metaphorical process, by which abstract relations are understood in terms of concrete ones.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, case syncretism can be studied only in languages in which nouns inflect for case.<sup>3</sup> However, it is equally obvious that semantic roles are also expressed in languages that lack cases. This mostly happens through the use of adpositions.<sup>4</sup> Adpositions, too, can express

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<sup>1</sup> See DELBRÜCK (1907) among the former; among the latter the well known studies by HJELMSLEV (1935) and JAKOBSON (1936), although not devoted to syncretism, discuss the compatibility of different meanings expressed by the same case.

<sup>2</sup> In the present paper, "syncretism" is understood both as the diachronic process by which different cases merge, and as the synchronic phenomenon of polysemy of case endings (and adpositions, see below), as it is in LURAGHI (1991), but contrary to LURAGHI (2000a). For a further discussion of syncretism, see MEISER (1992).

<sup>3</sup> This clearly depends on one's definition of "case": A possible solution would be to use a definition that also includes adpositions. However, I prefer to define case as a morphological concept, distinct from adpositions, among other reasons because many languages have both (morphological) cases and adpositions and it is often useful to be able to make a distinction among the two (see further § 3.1).

<sup>4</sup> Apparently, word order has a role in expressing syntactic and pragmatic functions, but not in expressing semantic roles, see LURAGHI (1991).



several semantic roles, their number and meaning is subject to diachronic change, and, at least in the languages that do not have cases, they express the whole range of semantic relations expressed by cases elsewhere. So in a typological study of syncretism it would be misleading to limit one's investigation to languages with cases, leaving out all other languages.

In my paper I would like to study syncretism as a key to understand the affinities among semantic roles. Research on this topic suggests that, while there are syncretisms that are cross-linguistically very frequent, it is difficult to single out absolutely unattested instances of syncretism. One of the most interesting contributions to the topic at hand is CROFT's insightful study of syncretic patterns from the point of view of semantics (CROFT 1991). Many of his ideas are indeed a valuable starting point for investigations to come. I also agree with his basic construct of a causal chain. However, I disagree on a number of crucial issues. In the present paper I intend to show that besides semantics there is also a syntactic motivation of case mergers.

The starting point for my discussion (§ 2) is constituted by the survey of attested and (almost) unattested syncretisms in CROFT (1991). CROFT explains the tendency for certain semantic roles to merge, while others usually do not, by dividing semantic roles into two groups, antecedent and subsequent. In § 2.2. I try to refine this classification by adding a third group, that of concomitant roles. Then (§ 3) I discuss some general issues concerning case syncretism, connected with the existence of adpositions in languages with cases, the use of cases for expressing syntactic relations rather than semantic roles, and the interaction of lexical features with the organization of case systems. Next (§ 4) I examine syncretism among antecedent roles and show that they are attested to a varying extent, which demands explanation. Finally (§ 5) I pass to some instances of syncretism that should be ruled out according to CROFT (1991), and I try to work out an explanation for them. Most of my data are taken from Indo-European languages; in § 5 I restrict my analysis to the Italian prepositions *per* and *da* and some Romance cognates. Section 6 contains the conclusions.

## 2. Attested and unattested instances of case syncretism

### 2.1. Antecedent and subsequent roles

CROFT (1991) has worked out a model for explaining which semantic roles can be expressed by the same case form. He distinguishes between antecedent and subsequent roles, defined with respect to what he calls the causal chain. He illustrates his argument using the following table:

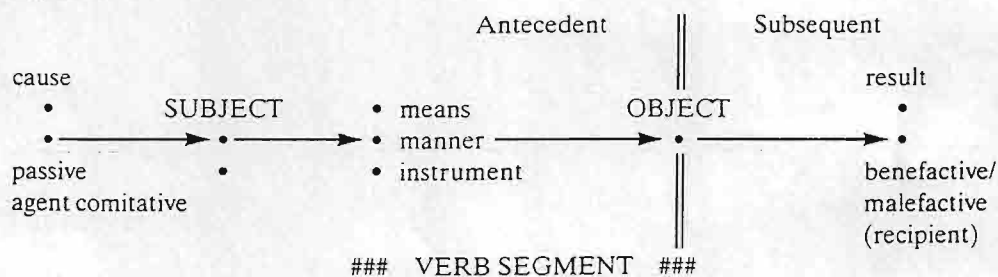


Table 1: (from CROFT 1991: 185)

Adding spatial roles to the ones mentioned in Table 1, based on the discussion in the relevant parts of the book, one can establish the following grouping of semantic roles:

ANTECEDENT ROLES	SUBSEQUENT ROLES
Cause	Result
Agent	Benefactive
Comitative	Recipient
Means	Purpose
Manner	Locative
Instrument	Direction
Source	Goal

Table 2

CROFT's claim is that syncretism can only obtain either among antecedent or among subsequent roles, but not across the two groups: based on data from forty languages, only two "illegal" cases of syncretism are attested, against sixty-nine "legal" ones (1991: 188).

In fact, "illegal" syncretism is much more frequent, if one interprets the above groups in a strict manner. Most problematic cases concern Locative, which displays a considerable tendency towards merging with Instrument. Syncretism of Locative and Instrument is found in several Australian languages (BLAKE 1977: 44; see further STOLZ 1996); besides, in the Semitic languages (except for Eastern Semitic) there is usually a preposition which encodes both Instrument and Locative, as e.g. Hebrew *b* (ex. (1) and (2)) or Accadian *ina*.<sup>5</sup>

- (1) *Dawid maslip 'et-suso ba-ssot*  
 David whip:3SG his-horse:ACC with whip  
 'David whips his horse with a whip.'
- (2) *'Ayil 'ehad ne'ehaz ba-ssəbak be-qarnaw*  
 A. ram one entangled in-bush with-its-horn  
 'A. ram entangled in the bush by its horns.'

Besides, syncretism of Locative and Instrument is also attested in Finnish, where the adessive case, that expresses location on top of or near something, is the standard expression of Instrument, too.<sup>6</sup>

- (3) *Kupit ovat pöydällä*  
 cup:NOM-PL be:3PL table:ADESS  
 'The cups are on the table.'

<sup>5</sup> This is not noted in CROFT (1991: 238), although Gulf Arabic is included in the sample, which displays this syncretism. In Indo-European, syncretism of Locative and Instrument is also attested, see below, § 3.3.

<sup>6</sup> As irregular instance of syncretism in Finnish, CROFT (1991: 196) only mentions Allative and Manner: in the table that summarizes syncretism (1991: 237) instrumental is not mentioned as such, but "means" is listed together with adessive. In the light of the Finnish data I do not think that the difference between means and instrumental, as used by CROFT, is clear enough.



- (4) *Hän kirjoittaa kynällä*  
 he write:3SG pen:ADESS  
 'He writes with a pen.'

CROFT (1991: 194ff) shows how causal relations of Table 1 correspond to local relations, and describes the "object location metaphor", using Table 3:

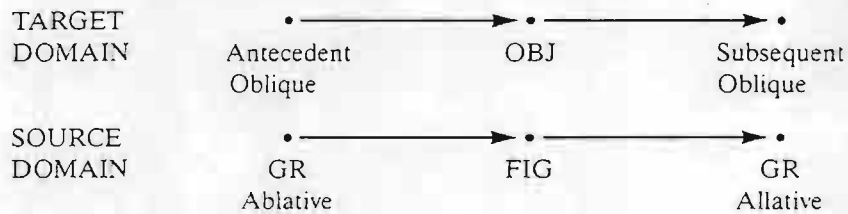


Table 3

Locative does not appear in the schema, but in the discussion of unexpected syncretisms it is treated as subsequent. Merging of Locative and Instrument is thus explained: "This metaphor resembles the object-location metaphor quite closely except that location is mapped onto the verbal segment as a whole (and thus all the roles included in it) instead of onto just the object" (1991: 196). While I find this explanation correct, I am not sure that Locative has to be primarily mapped onto just the object: In my opinion, Locative is always concomitant to the verbal segment, much in the same way as Instrument in Table 1, because it does not imply directionality.

## 2.2. Concomitant roles

More in general, I think that the classification of semantic roles would profit from an additional sub-grouping, that establishes separate groups for non-directional local roles and concomitant causal roles. I would suggest the following grouping:<sup>7</sup>

ANTECEDENT	CONCOMITANT (CAUSAL CONCOMITANT)	NON-DIRECTIONAL (LOCAL CONCOMITANT)	SUBSEQUENT
Cause	Instrument	Locative	Direction
Agent	Comitative	Perlative	Benefactive
Source	Manner		Recipient

Table 4

Besides, I think that one should allow for the existence of radial categories<sup>8</sup> to explain syncretisms, such as the one attested in several Australian languages, of Allative, Locative,

<sup>7</sup> Syncretism of Instrument and Perlative is rather frequent, at least in Indo-European, and is based on a metaphor according to which an instrument is the channel for accomplishing an action. see LURAGHI (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Radial categories are defined in LAKOFF (1987). They are categories in which two members may not share any common features with each other, provided they both share some features with a third member of the same category.

Instrument, and Ergative (Agent, see BLAKE 1977: 44): Rather than look for an unexpected affinity between Allative and Agent, one should resort to the affinity between Allative and Locative, Agent and Instrument, and Locative and Instrument, the last syncretism functioning as the trait-d'union of the other two.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Syntactic and lexical factors in the use of cases and adpositions

#### 3.1. Plain cases and cases with adposition

Most languages that rely on case systems also have adpositions. This must be kept in mind in a study of case syncretism. If a semantic role which was formerly expressed by a certain case later, after the specific case disappeared, is expressed by another case always accompanied by an adposition it appears at least doubtful that one should speak of syncretism. So for instance in German a number of local roles are expressed by the dative with various prepositions; the plain dative, however, does not express the same semantic roles, being limited to Benefactive and Recipient.<sup>10</sup> This means that one has to be careful when describing syncretism in languages one does not control completely.

Another problem, typical of Indo-European, is the possible occurrence of the same adposition with different cases, which apparently can distinguish different meanings within the adpositional phrase, but often cannot express the same meanings as plain cases. Again, this common phenomenon can be exemplified with German:

- (5) *Ich fahre in der Stadt.*  
'I drive inside the town. (DAT)'
- (6) *Ich fahre in die Stadt.*  
'I drive into town. (ACC)'

In other languages the situation is even more complicated, and cases have a whole range of concrete meanings without adpositions, which do not correspond to the concrete meanings they have with adpositions.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.2. Syntactic syncretism

As I have shown in LURAGHI (1987) syncretism can result from syntactic, rather than from semantic overlap. I have used as an example the Latin "ablative", the merger of Indo-European ablative, locative and instrumental. In LURAGHI (1987) I suggested that the type of synonymy that enhanced merging of the three cases is syntactic, rather than semantic: Ablative, locative and instrumental were the cases of circumstantial, rather than core, relations in

<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner, STOLZ (1996), in his account of syncretistic patterns involving Instrumental and Comitative, shows how their different affinities to other semantic roles can cause some patterns of syncretism to hold, while others are not attested.

<sup>10</sup> CROFT (1991: 237-238) lists some prepositions along with cases in his summary of syncretism in forty languages, but not for all languages included in the sample.

<sup>11</sup> See LURAGHI (1996, chapter 2).



Indo-European.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in Latin the ablative did not express Source, Location, and Instrument without any further specification: Rather, its function as a plain case was that of an instrumental case, while its locative and ablatival functions were limited to specific nouns (e.g. toponyms) or connected with specific verbs, or they were taken over by the prepositional ablative.

Another instance where syntactic, rather than semantic, factors seem at work is the French preposition *à* and its cognates in several Romance languages, where it is used to express Recipient/Benefactive and Causee. Note that this exception is discussed in CROFT (1991), although it does not count in the summary of syncretisms (no Romance languages were included in the sample). CROFT remarks that "it appears that, in these languages, the dative-causee construction is allowed only if the causee is a mental-level participant ... French appears to place any mental-level participant causally following the initiator in the dative case" (1991: 245). He supports his argument by using the following examples:

- (7) *La statue a cassé le vase.*  
'The statue broke the vase.'
- (8) *J'ai fait casser le vase à Charles.*  
'I made Charles break the vase.'
- (9) *\*J'ai fait casser le vase à la statue.*  
'\*I made the statue break the vase.'  
[not acceptable as an alternative for 'I broke the vase with the statue.']

However, it is not clear why the meaning of (9) should be 'I broke the vase with the statue', since the meaning of (8) is not 'I broke the vase **with** (i.e. "using") Charles'. If one looks for some more appropriate contexts, one finds that inanimate causees can occur in the same construction as animate ones, as the following Italian examples show:<sup>13</sup>

- (10) *La chiave ha fatto un giro nella serratura.*  
'The key turned in the locker.'
- (11) *Ho fatto fare un giro nella serratura alla chiave.*  
'I made the key turn in the locker.'
- (12) *Ho fatto girare la chiave.*  
'I made the key turn.'

<sup>12</sup> A similar argument is found in SERBAT (1989: 281): "... I[nstrumental], L[ocatif], Ab[latif] occupent dans la construction de la phrase une position identique. Cette position s'annonce d'emblée comme opposée à celle du N[ominatif] du sujet et de l'Ac[cusatif] object. On l'appellera pour cette raison, si l'on veut, «position périphérique»(circonstancielle) ... Rétrospectivement, on pourrait donc dire que la confusion en latin des 3 cas résulte de leur fonction syntaxique commune dans l'état de langue reconstruit (position circonstancielle)." On syntactic vs. semantic syncretism see further LURAGHI (2000a).

<sup>13</sup> I am using Italian examples, but things function in exactly the same way in French.



- (13) *Giovanni ha dato uno spintone al tavolino e ha fatto fare un volo alle tazze.*  
'John hit the table and made the cups fall.'

Note further that, while (11) and (13) are perfectly acceptable, they do not mean 'I made a turn with (i.e. using) the key' or 'John fell with (i.e. using) the cups'.

I think that, in order to explain this instance of syncretism, one should look at the specific syntactic construction in which causatives occur. Causativization increases the valence of a verb by one: Intransitive verbs become transitive, and transitive verbs become ditransitive. In particular in the Romance languages periphrastic causatives with the verb "to make" are constructed with the causee as direct object, if the basic verb is intransitive, or if it is transitive, but with no direct object expressed. In the case that a causative construction is made of a transitive verb which also has a direct object, the causee is the indirect object, and consequently occurs with the appropriate preposition, as the following examples show (cf. also ex. 11 and 12):

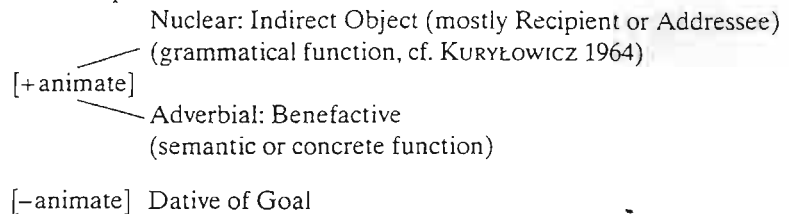
- (14) *J'ai fait écrire les enfants.*  
'I made the children write.'
- (15) *J'ai fait écrire la dictée aux enfants.*  
'I made the children write the dictation.'

### 3.3. Lexical features

Another important factor that should be considered when judging whether a certain syncretism obtains or not is constituted by lexical features of the nouns which inflect in a specific case or take a specific adposition. The importance of lexical features can be shown with the example of the dative in Classical Greek. In this language, the dative is the merger of the Indo-European dative, locative, and instrumental. Historically, the dative and the locative merged first, as shown by the Mycenaean tablets, in which a separate instrumental occurs. As I have mentioned above, syncretism of locative and instrumental is found in several genetically unrelated languages; syncretism of instrumental and dative, on the other hand, appears to be much less frequent.<sup>14</sup> However, the specific lexemes that occur in the plain dative in Classical Greek can be unambiguously interpreted as expressing either Recipient/Benefactive or Instrument on the basis of animacy: With inanimate nouns (apart from toponyms) the dative functions as an instrumental, while with animate nouns it has the typical functions of a "real" dative. In Table 5 and 6 I compare the Indo-European with the Greek dative, summarizing syncretism:

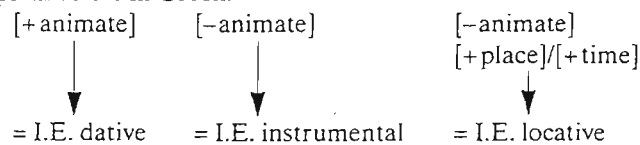
<sup>14</sup> An argument could perhaps be made for the semantic role Manner functioning as a channel for syncretism of dative and instrumental. That the instrumental case or equivalent adpositions express Manner is quite frequent, and can easily be explained by the position of Manner and Instrument in the causal chain (Table 1). CROFT (1991: 237–238) reports syncretism of Manner and Recipient/Benefactive in Finnish and Kanuri (Nilo-Saharan); besides, it is attested in the Romance languages. Since in all these languages, apparently, the same marker that can express both Manner and Benefactive can also express some locative relation, it seems more plausible to see such instances of syncretism as based on separate syncretisms of Manner with the locative relations and of the latter with Benefactive/Recipient, as I am going to argue below for Greek.

The Indo-European dative:



**Table 5**

The plain dative in Greek:



**Table 6**

This subdivision based on animacy has the effect that no ambiguity arises from the use of the plain dative as instrumental or as dative proper, as shown by the following examples:

- (16) *Ēgrapsa*                      *tēn*                      *epistolēn*                      *tō:i*  
 write:1SG-IND-AOR      the:ACC-SG-F                      letter:ACC-SG-F                      the:DAT-SG-M  
*stīlōi*  
 pen:DAT-SG-M  
 'I wrote the letter with the pen.'
- (17) *Ēgrapsa*                      *tēn*                      *epistolēn*                      *tōi*  
 write:1SG-IND-AOR      the:ACC-SG-F                      letter:ACC-SG-F                      the:DAT-SG-M  
*phīlōi*  
 friend:DAT-SG-M  
 'I wrote the letter to my friend.'

In the exceptional case that an animate entity is used as an instrument, a special construction appears, involving the use of the preposition *diá* 'through':<sup>15</sup>

- (18) *Ouk*    *àn*    *oûn*    *dexaimēn*    *di'*                      *emoû*    *homologoûntos*  
 NEG    PTC    PTC    let:1SG-FUT    through    1SG-GEN    agree:PART-SG-GEN  
*elégkhesthai*                      *Prōtagóran*  
 refute:INF-PASS                      P.:ACC  
 'I will not allow that Protagoras be refuted through my agreement [lit.: through me, agreeing].'  
[Pl. *Theaet.* 162a]

<sup>15</sup> In this case, the animate entity takes the role of Intermediary, see LURAGHI (1989) and (1995).



Note that the plain dative functions as a locative only in a very restricted measure, since even toponyms mostly take an adposition.<sup>16</sup>

The example treated here, as well as those of the preceding section, are important, because they show that it is wrong to look for a semantic connection in all possible cases of syncretism: Lexical or syntactic factors can be at work too, in which case a specific syncretism need not be accounted for semantically.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Attested and unattested syncretism among antecedent roles

Apart from instances of "illegal" syncretism, another problem is not solved by the classification of semantic roles in § 2 and § 3, that is, the infrequency of some syncretisms among antecedent roles, which would be perfectly legal. Here I would like to focus on Instrument and Agent in Indo-European. It emerges from the data that, although these two roles can be expressed by the same case, they tend to merge independently of each other with other roles, and that the roles that are compatible with Agent are hardly compatible with Instrument and vice versa. Let's first examine how Instrument and Agent are expressed, through cases, cases with adpositions, or adpositions in a number of Indo-European languages:

AGENT	INSTRUMENT
Latin	
<i>ab</i> + ablative (also Source)	plain ablative (mostly Instrument)
Romance	
various Source or Perlocative expressions	Comitative expressions
Greek	
<i>hupó</i> + genitive (also Cause)	plain dative (mostly Instrument) <i>diá</i> + genitive (also Perlocative) if animate
Sanskrit	
instrumental	instrumental
Slavic	
instrumental	instrumental
Baltic	
genitive	instrumental
Germanic	
various Source expressions: Engl. <i>by</i> also Locative	cognates of Engl. <i>with</i> (also Comitative)
Classical Armenian	
<i>i</i> + ablative (also Source)	instrumental

**Table 7:** Agent and instrument in Indo-European

<sup>16</sup> The plain dative used for Location occurs in the Homeric poems, where the prepositional dative is also attested in the same contexts. Time expressions, mostly involving nouns that denote time units, often do not take adpositions; see LURAGHI (1996). However, semantic affinity between Locative and Instrument is visible in Greek also outside inflection, in the derivational suffix *-tro/a-*, that can derive both instrument (e.g. *pharétro*) and location (e.g. *palaistra* 'gymnasium') nouns, see LURAGHI (2000b).

<sup>17</sup> Another example of the interaction of lexical features with the distribution of semantic roles is illustrated below, § 5.1.



The above data suggest that, while syncretism of Agent and Source, Agent and Instrument, and Instrument and Comitative is quite common in Indo-European, syncretism of Source and Instrument and of Agent and Comitative is strikingly infrequent. Syncretism of instrumental and ablative is attested in the Latin ablative, of course, but, as I have mentioned above, the plain ablative can function as Source expression only under lexical constraints. The infrequency of this specific syncretisms may be a peculiarity of Indo-European: in fact, it appears from CROFT's sample that at least syncretism of Instrument and Source is widely attested outside Indo-European (four instances mentioned from languages belonging to different families).

Syncretism of Agent and Comitative, along with Instrument, is sporadically attested in Sanskrit:

- (19) *Devó devébhír ā gamat*  
 god:NOM.SG god:INSTR.PL PREV go:SUBJ.AOR.3SG  
 'May the god go with the gods.' [Rv: i 1]<sup>2</sup>

However even in Sanskrit this type of syncretism is infrequent and mostly limited to plural referents: normally, Comitative with animate nouns is expressed with the instrumental and the preposition *sam*.

STOLZ (1996) and (2000) provide data on syncretism of Agent and Instrument, on the one side, and Instrument and Comitative, on the other, from a wide number of languages belonging to various unrelated families. The data show that syncretism of Agent and Comitative is usually avoided, not only in the Indo-European languages, but in most languages of the world. In fact there appears to be a semantic reason behind the apparent incompatibility of Agent and Comitative. Comitative is a role often taken by animate entities that perform an action together with an agent, which is focused by being assigned the function of subject, as in example (19) above. In the case of passive verbs, the entity that has the function Comitative undergoes the effects of an action together with another patient, which functions as subject:

- (20) *John was seen at the tennis club with Mary.*

Synonymy of Agent and Comitative would make it virtually impossible to disambiguate the two roles in such an occurrence.

## 5. Syncretism between antecedent and subsequent roles

### 5.1. Ablative, Agent, and Allative

In the present section I would like to examine the use of the Italian preposition *da*. As a local preposition, *da* expresses Source, whereas with passive verbs it expresses Agent:

- (21) *Vengo da Roma.*  
 'I come from Rome.'



- (22) *Questo libro è stato comprato da Giovanni.*  
'This book was bought by John.'

Syncretism of these two roles is attested in many languages, and it is based on the metaphor that the agent, being the initiator of a state of affairs, is the location from which the state of affairs originates.<sup>18</sup>

However, with nouns having human referents we find:

- (23) *Vengo da te.*  
'I come to you.'
- (24) *Sono da Giovanni.*  
'I am at John's place.'

Syncretism of local semantic roles here can be explained based on the action of lexical features (see § 3.3): With animacy the preposition *da* undergoes a kind of "inversion" of directionality, and takes over the function that is normally performed by the preposition *a*. So syncretism among antecedent and subsequent roles has no semantic explanation in this case,<sup>19</sup> and it would accordingly be useless to try to find one.<sup>20</sup>

## 5.2. Cause and Purpose

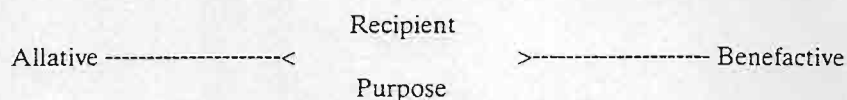
CROFT (1991: 190) mentions as "rather infrequent" syncretism of Cause with Recipient, Benefactive, Allative, and Purposive, which, in his sample, is attested in Konda. Here an antecedent role merges with four subsequent roles. Syncretism of the latter is not exceptional. Historically, Allative markers spread to Recipient and/or to Benefactive; very often Allative markers also express Purpose. The latter syncretism is based on a metaphor that maps a concrete relation (physical directionality) onto an abstract one (mental, or intentional directionality). As for the former syncretism, Recipient is conceived as the endpoint of a certain transaction (typically denoted by verbs such as "give"). Benefactive is expressed as Recipient in many languages (cf. those in CROFT's sample), the difference between the two being mostly syntactic: Recipient is a semantic role typically taken by third arguments of three-place predicates, while Benefactive is taken by adverbial NP's. Conceptually, Benefactive is also close to Purpose: An action performed to the benefit of somebody is an action performed with the purpose of benefiting somebody. So the relations among the four semantic roles can be represented as in Table 8:

<sup>18</sup> On this metaphor see LURAGHI (2000b).

<sup>19</sup> Case systems where the same local case can express Source, Locative, and Allative in fact do exist, for example in some Australian languages (see DIXON 1980: 312). In such cases, specification of the semantic relation is borne out by the verb.

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, it is true that, since Agents are mostly human, the situation described can cause ambiguity. In the case that the preposition expresses Allative, ambiguity with Agent is virtually non-existent, given the fact that Allative usually occurs with motion verbs. On the other hand, the occurrence of a passive verb usually favors the agentive interpretation of *da*, as in (22) above. However, consider the following: *questa carne è stata comprata dal macellaio sotto casa*, which can mean both 'this meat was bought at the butcher's close to home', or '... by the butcher ...'.



**Table 8**

At first sight, it is very hard to find any semantic affinity among any of the four subsequent roles mentioned and the antecedent role Cause. However, syncretism of Cause and Purpose is not so infrequent, and should be viewed as the channel through which Cause can also merge with some other subsequent roles, most notably Benefactive and Allative. CROFT (1991: 293) offers the following explanation for the syncretism of these two roles:

“...it may be that subsequent forms can spread to the cause by means of expressions of reason. Expressions of reason, which is a category of intention, not of causation, can represent events that causally follow the verb segment (a goal or purpose) or precede (a source or motivation). The hypothesis is that normal subsequent expressions spread to purpose, then to reason (which is nondirectional), and thence to true cause.”

CROFT does not mention the English preposition *for*, which partly fits the development outlined in the paragraph quoted, because it can express both Reason and Purpose and because, in the case of *for*, Purpose historically precedes Reason.<sup>21</sup> However, although Reason is certainly the link between Cause and Purpose, this explanation is not completely satisfactory, when matched against other historical data. In particular, there seems to exist evidence that the spread does not necessarily proceed from Purpose to Cause, but that the contrary direction (from Cause to Purpose) is also possible. In order to make my point, I would like to survey the meaning of the Italian preposition *per*, of the Latin prepositions from which it originated, and of some of its cognate in the Romance languages.

Italian *per* is an extremely common prepositions, and can express the following functions:

- (25) *Ho portato un regalo per Giovanni.*  
'I brought a present for John.' (Benefactive)
- (26) *Il ponte è crollato per la pioggia.*  
'The bridge collapsed because of the rain.' (Cause)
- (27) *È scappato per paura.*  
'He ran away out of fear.' (Reason)
- (28) *Combattere per la libertà.*  
'To fight for freedom.' (Purpose)
- (29) *Camminare per la strada.*  
'To walk along the road.' (Perlative)

<sup>21</sup> See the account of English *for* in RADDEN (1998).



- (30) *Partire per Roma.*  
'To leave for Rome.' (Allative)
- (31) *Comunichiamo solo per telefono.*  
'We communicate only by telephone.' (Instrument)
- (32) *Procedere per gradi.*  
'To proceed gradually.' (Manner)
- (33) *Fur l'ossa mia per Ottavian sepolte.*  
'My bones were buried by Octavian.' (Agent)<sup>22</sup> [DANTE, *Purg.* 7.6]

Italian *per* derives from the conflation of two Latin prepositions, *per* and *pro*. Of these, the former could express Perlocative, Intermediary, Instrument, Manner, Cause, and sporadically Agent, while the latter expressed Locative (in front of something), Benefactive, Purpose, and Cause. The typical uses of *per* and *pro* in Latin outside local expressions are demonstrated below:<sup>23</sup>

- (34) *Conditio fertur per me interpretem*  
condition:NOM establish:3SG-PRES-IND-PASS through ISG-ACC interpreter:ACC  
'Conditions are established through my mediation.' [Pl. *Mil.* 952]
- (35) *Patriam et signa cetera neque*  
country:ACC CONJ clue:ACC-PL other:ACC-PL NEG  
*sciebat neque per aetatem etiam potis*  
know:3SG-IMPERF NEG through age:ACC also able:NOM-SG  
*erat*  
be:3SG-IMPERF  
'Her country and other clues that might have led to her identification she did not know, in fact, given her age, she could not know.' [Ter. *Eun.* 113.]
- (36) *Nos pro vobis bellum suscepimus adversus Philippum*  
we:NOM for you:ABL war:ACC start:1PL-PERF against P:ACC  
'We started a war against Philip in your favor.' [Livy 31.31.18]
- (37) *Patres pro amissis honoribus fremere*  
senator:NOM-PL for lost:ABL-PL honor:ABL-PL rage:3PL-IMPERF  
'The senators were outraged because they had lost their honors (because of the lost honors).' [Livy 4.54.7.]

<sup>22</sup> Note that, while Allative, Instrument, and Manner are only secondarily expressed by *per*, for Benefactive, Cause, Purpose, and Perlocative *per* is the standard expression. With verbal infinitives, this preposition is also the common means of constructing Purpose clauses: *Sono andato dal panettiere per comprare del pane* 'I went to the baker's to buy some bread'.

<sup>23</sup> On the semantics of *pro* see DE LA VILLA (1995). On the proximity of Cause and Purpose and their expression in Latin, see TORREGO (forthcoming).



Note that the spatial meaning of *pro* 'in front of, before', does not imply that the obvious direction for meaning extension is towards subsequent roles: In fact, Latin has another preposition, *prae*, which also indicates location in front of a referent, and can express Cause, but not Purpose:

- (38) *Nec loqui prae maerore potuit*  
 not speak:INF for grief:ABL can:3SG.PERF  
 'He could not even speak from grief.' [Cic. *Planc.* 99.]

In the Romance languages, Latin *pro* and *per* have merged to various extents, the most notable exception being French, where two different prepositions, that correspond to Modern French *par* and *pour*, are attested throughout its history.<sup>24</sup> However, the spatial meaning of the prepositions suggests that some merging has occurred in French as well, as we will see below.

In Spanish (and a similar development also occurred in Portuguese) the early merger was later replaced by two distinct prepositions, *por*, usually described in reference books as expressing Perlocative, Intermediary, Instrument, Reason, Cause, and Agent, and *para*, which expresses Benefactive, Purpose, and Allative. Historically, *para* derives from *por* with the addition of the allative preposition *a*.<sup>25</sup> Apparently Spanish has restored a situation where there is no merging of antecedent with subsequent roles. But note that Reason remains primarily with Cause, rather than with Purpose. This explains the occurrence of examples such as (39), where *por* is used for Benefactive:

- (39) *Su ofrecimiento de orar por mí y de encomendarme a Dios.*  
 'His/her offer to pray for me and recommend me to God.' [B. Perez Galdós, *Nazarin*]

So in Spanish the semantic extension proceeds from Cause to Purpose and Benefactive, rather than the other way around.

Indeed Purpose seems to be so close to Cause that it can be conceived of as a type of Cause, as argued by Aristotle in his definition of the "final cause":

*Tà d'aítia légetai tetrakôs, ... trítēn dè hóthen hē arkhē tēs kinēseōs, tetártēn dè tēn antikeiménēn aítian taútēi, tò hoû hēneka ... télos gàr genéseōs kai kinēseōs pásēs toút' estín.*

'We mean "cause" in four different ways ... the third meaning is the origin of movement; the fourth, the cause opposite to the latter, that is the goal ... for this is the purpose of any generation and any motion.' [Arist. *Meth.* 983a 25–30]

It would be interesting to inquire whether the frequent merger of Cause and Purpose markers in language can ultimately be reconnected to a teleological folk model of causation.

Recently the semantics of *por* and *para* has been studied by DELBECQUE (1996), who demonstrates, among other things, that *para* occurs more frequently than *por* with ani-

<sup>24</sup> See WARTBURG (1958–1959) for details on French. The Italian situation is found in most other Romance varieties, except for the Iberic ones, treated below. I am leaving out of account Rumanian, where the preposition *pe* has become the marker of the direct object.

<sup>25</sup> See COROMINAS (1954: 655, 849).



mate nouns, while *por* is on the whole twice as frequent as *para*. A reason for this distribution can be that *para* was primarily created to express Benefactive unambiguously. But, what exactly caused this ambiguity, if Benefactive, Cause, and Purpose appear to merge without difficulties in Latin *pro* and Italian *per*, as well as in a number of other Romance prepositions?

I think that the reason lies in the increasing use of Spanish *por* for Agent, a function that Italian *per* only marginally developed, possibly under the influence of French, and later lost completely. In Italian, Agent is expressed by *da* 'from'. Its Spanish cognate, *de*, was also used for Agent in early Spanish, but currently this function is commonly fulfilled by *por*. Note that French has kept distinct Benefactive and Agent, in spite of the fact that the semantic roles expressed by Latin *pro* and *per* have been partly redistributed, as shown by the fact that *pour* can express temporal duration, which was a function of *per*, but not of *pro*.

Thus there appears to be a tendency to keep some antecedent and subsequent roles distinct from each other, but this tendency is heavily conditioned by lexical factors: Agent and Benefactive, both roles typically assigned to animate entities, are best kept distinct, while Benefactive and Cause appear to merge more freely. Further evidence for the relevance of animacy is provided by Italian, where causal *per* is limited to inanimate causes: animate nouns are found with *per* in Cause expressions only in poetry and in a rather archaizing style, where they should better be regarded as Latinisms. Again, as in the case of Comitative and Agent, animacy appears to put particularly strict constraints on syncretism.

## 6. Conclusions

In the above discussion I have shown that one must consider a wide number of factors when working out a semantic model for explaining syncretism. In the first place, a number of semantic roles expressed by the same marker may be arranged as to build a radial category, so it is possible that two of them share no semantic features at all, but that their relation is mediated by another semantic role, that shares features with both. Second, one must consider that the complex constituted by a case ending and an adposition in languages that have both cannot be regarded as equivalent of the plain case without adpositions. In the third place, I have argued that lexical and syntactic factors often play a role in the distribution of semantic roles among case markers. Disregarding this last point may lead to the frustrating impression that anything can happen in case syncretism.

I think that the distinction between Antecedent and Subsequent semantic roles as introduced by CROFT (1991) is a good starting point for understanding the semantic channels through which cases and adpositions become polysemous; however, exceptional instances of syncretism must be taken seriously. Ultimately, finding a channel for an unexpected syncretism can lead to a re-evaluation of the way in which semantic roles are mapped against an event scheme, as shown by the example of Cause and Purpose.

Tentatively I suggest that a mental map of the semantic roles discussed in the present paper can be drawn as follows:<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> I leave open the problem of the relation between Locative and some other roles, notably Recipient (and Benefactive) and Agent. Syncretisms of these roles with Locative are attested, but further research is needed in order to understand whether they always obtain through the mediation of other roles (Allative and Instrument respectively) or not.



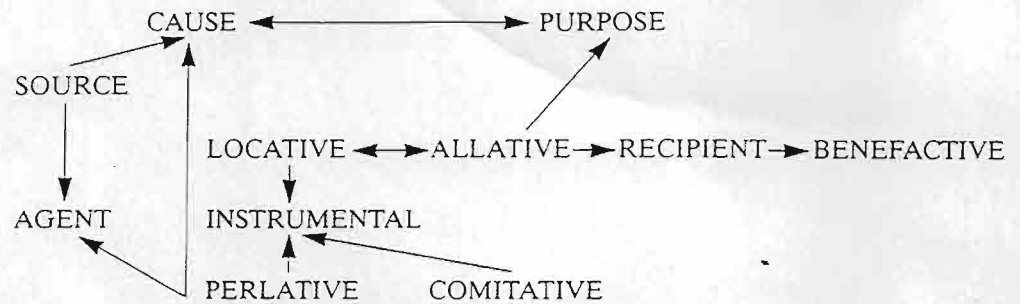


Table 10

## Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	INSTR	instrumental
ADESS	adessive	M	masculine
AOR	aoriste	NEG	negation
CONJ	conjunction	NOM	nominative
DAT	dative	OBJ	object
F	feminine	PASS	passive
FIG	figure	PART	participle
FUT	future	PERF	perfect
GEN	genitive	PL	plural
GR	ground	PREV	preverb
IND	indicative	PTC	particle
INF	infinitive	SG	singular
IMPERF	imperfect	SUBJ	subject

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