Three-participant events project – Encoding Strategies

(Version February 2019)

Anna Margetts, Katharina Haude, Nikolaus Himmelmann, Dagmar Jung, Frank Seifart, Sonja Riesberg, Stefan Schnell, Claudia Wegener

The table below presents the inventory of encoding strategies applied in the current project and constitutes a modified version of the strategies described in Margetts and Austin (2007).

Encoding Strategies

1. **Three-place predicate strategy**
   All three participants are expressed as syntactic core arguments of the verb.

   (a) **Direct argument strategy**   **1a**

   All three arguments are expressed as direct arguments of the verb (which does not carry valence increasing morphology).

   (b) **Causative strategy**   **1b**

   The verb stem is restricted to two arguments, with a third argument added by a causative affix.

   (c) **Applicative strategy**   **1c**

   The verb stem is restricted to two arguments, with a third argument added by an applicative affix.

2. **Oblique and adjunct strategies**
   The verb takes two arguments, a third participant is expressed as an oblique argument or an adjunct.

   (a) **R-type obliques and adjuncts**   **2a**

   The verb takes two arguments and a third, R-type participant is expressed as an oblique argument or an adjunct.
   - "Oblique Applicative": The verb includes an applicative-like marker: **2a-APPL**
   - "Oblique Causative": The verb includes a causative-like marker: **2a-CAUS**

   (b) **T-type obliques and adjuncts**   **2b**

   The verb takes two arguments and a third, T-type participant (incudes instruments) is expressed as an oblique argument or an adjunct.
   - "Oblique Applicative" : The verb includes an applicative-like marker: **2b-APPL**
   - "Oblique Causative": The verb includes a causative-like marker: **2b-CAUS**

3. **Serial verb strategy**
   Two (or more) verbs combine in a complex construction and share the three participants as arguments (or adjuncts) between them.

   (a) **R-type serialized Participant**

   The serialized verb introduces a R-type participant.   **3a**

   (b) **T-type serialized Participant**

   The serialized verb introduces a T-type participant. **3b**

4. **Incorporation strategy**
   One participant is expressed by an incorporated nominal.

   (a) **R-type incorporated nouns**   **4a**
   (b) **T-type incorporated noun**   **4b**
   - Argument status of the incorporated noun can be marked as a sub-annotation E.g. 4c-1.

5. **Adnominal strategy**
    The verb takes two arguments, a third participant is expressed as an adnominal dependent of one arguments.

(a) **Possessive strategy[1] (R-type)**   **5a**
    The R-type participant is expressed as the possessor of the theme.

(b) **Proprietive strategy (T-type)**   **5b**
    The T-type participant is expressed as the dependent of the agent.

6. **Directional strategy**   **6**
    An adverbial directional marker or serialized verb indicates transactional orientation.

7. **Absorption strategy** -- see section 2 below for notes on this strategy
    The verb stem (typically the verbal lexeme) includes information about one of the participants.

(a) **Direct lexicalization**   **7a**
    The verb is formally distinct from any noun denoting the event participants, but its semantics include reference to one of the participants.

(b) **Zero derivation**   **7b**
    The verb derives by zero-conversion from a noun denoting one of the participants.

(c) **Denominal derivation**   **7c**
    The verb derives by overt derivation from a noun denoting one of the participants.

(d) **Absorbed classifiers or object markers**   **7d**
    The verb takes two arguments but the verb stem has absorbed what used to be a classifier, or object marker which conveys information about a further participant.

(e) **Participant-based event classification**   **7e**
    The verb stem carries information about one of the participants and characterises the event with respect to one of the participants.

(f) **Affix-based classification**   **7f**
    A participant is evoked by a non-pronominal, non-valence-increasing affix (e.g. instrument or manner of causation affixes).

    - Alternatively such cases could be described together with the incorporation strategy as they share that a participant is evoked by bound morphemes in the verb.

---

[1] For quick reference, note that the possessive strategy can in principle occur with different event types: Type F: Bake my cousin's cake (for him to have); Type E: Steal my cousin's pig (from him).

1   Notes on the updated inventory and definitions of strategies

The strategies listed in Margetts and Austin (2007) were intended as a description of crosslinguistic patterns of participant encoding which go beyond the morphosyntactic means of argument encoding in order to account for alternative means of indicting participants. The original lead questions underlying the investigation in Margetts & Austin included 'how can a third participant, which is not an argument of the verb, be expressed?'. The basic assumption was therefore that there are two event participants which are encoded as syntactic arguments of the verb.[2] The strategies are defined and named by how 'the third' participant is encoded and this means they are skewed towards transitive and ditransitive expression. The strategies do not designed to reflect how each of the three participants is encoded. In the process of classifying corpus data from the languages represented in the current project we found this problematic in several respects. Some of issues we have addressed by modifying the definitions of certain strategies and substrategies to better describe the language data analysed in the project. Other issues are engrained in the overall conceptualisation of the strategies in a way that cannot easily be addressed. Firstly, there may be events where only one participant is expressed as an argument and two participants are encoded by other (non-argument) strategies. The current definitions of strategies do not satisfyingly account for this. The scenario can in principle be described by a combination of two strategies but for this the criterion that the verb has two arguments stated in Margetts and Austin as part of most strategy descriptions has to be dropped.

Secondly, the notion of 'the third' participant is problematic in that it assumes a clear chronology in the application of derivational morphemes and other participant expressions, however, in some cases such a chronology cannot straightforwardly be established. E.g. if a ditransitive verb features both causative and applicative morphology, this could in principle be classified as the causative (1b) or the applicative (1c) substrategy, depending on which derivation is considered to have applied last. Similar problems arise with cases where a participant which is expressed as an oblique seems to be licensed by derivational morphology (which we now describe as 'oblique causatives' and 'oblique applicatives').

A modification included in the current list of strategies relates to the directional strategy which now includes directional serial verbs as a substrategy in order to deal with cases of vagueness in the status of a directional morpheme as adverbial or verbal. As a consequence, the distinction of the serial verb strategy proper (strategy 3) and serial verbs as a representation of the directional strategy (strategy 6) can in some cases be less than straight forward. However, overall this change has made the classification of our data clearer and more consistent.

Further problems in our attempt to classify a broad range of three-participant events in our corpus data arise from the notions of the macro labels R-type and T-type participants. Margetts & Austin (2007:369) note that "a participant that we will label R on the basis of its most common role as recipient (but that may also be a beneficiary, goal, addressee, location, or source)" and that T-type roles typically constitute "some thing or information conveyed by A to R". This system of three macro-roles A, R and T captures some of the cross-linguistic patterns observed in Margetts & Austin but is not well equipped to encode some event types we encountered, e.g. those that feature roles like

---

[2] This question and the original description of strategies was initially informed by data from Oceanic languages which commonly show the directional strategy in combination with transitive verbs and for which the adnominal possessive strategy (again with transitive verbs) is also attested.

instrument or causer. For the purpose of classifying events in corpus data more fine-tuned distinctions in the categorisation of participants may be necessary. These labels are useful in the discussion in Margetts & Austin in that they allowed one to identify and categorise broader crosslinguistic patterns in the data. However, since these macro label subsume several semantic roles, problems arise when several participants which are covered by the same macro category are encoded in an event. Some of these cases can be captured by describing them as a combination of events (e.g. caused motion to a goal plus caused motion from a source) where the notion of R-type participant is disambiguated as the goal or the source by the event type. However, in some cases the co-occurrence of semantic roles causes problems for the description, e.g. since at this point there is no event type included in the list which easily captures events where both a recipient and a beneficiary are encoded (and where the beneficiary is not the recipient).

2 Notes on strategy 7 'absorption strategy'

Strategy 7 was included in Margetts & Austin 2007 as a way to capture verbs which evoke an event participant by their lexical semantics or morphological components. Examples are verbs which entail a particular type of goal participant (*to shelf, to bottle, to bin,* …) or verbs which include explicit information about the instrument involved (*to kick, to punch, to bite,* …), as well as a range of other types. The identification of absorption as a strategy in the expression of three-participant events is important as a reminder that the encoding of participants goes beyond argument structure and syntactic expressions. It can be assumed that most if not all languages feature examples of this strategy but so far we have not come across languages where it constitutes a dominant strategy in the encoding of three-participant events.

There are a range of problem with applying and defining this strategy and its subtypes. To include this strategy in a rigorous, consistent, and potentially quantifiable analysis of the expression of three-participant events (as opposed to ad hoc classification of individual verbs) will require fine-tuning, clearer definitions and identification of further subtypes within this strategies. For example, the substrategies of the absorption strategy are less consistent and less worked out than any of the other strategies. E.g. in contrast to most of the other strategies there are no substrategies which distinguish between different types of absorbed participant (R-type and T-type).

As discussed in Margetts & Austin, a major problem with the absorption strategy is the question of where to draw the line in determining what counts as participant information ''included'' in the verb. For example, should only entailed information qualify or also information implicated by the verb? Distinguishing between information entailed vs. implied in the verb requires detailed knowledge and analysis of the lexical semantics of each verb and this is commonly not feasible for all relevant verbs, especially in the case of underdescribed languages.

A further issue in the description of this strategy provided in Margetts & Austin (2007) is that there is a substrategy (7d) dedicated to absorbed classifiers or object markers (which involves erstwhile verbal morphology that has become unproductive and was reanalyzed as part of the verbal lexeme). However, there is no clear way in the overall set of strategies which classification of constructions with such morphemes when they are not reanalyzed and absorbed into the verb but are morphologically productive. We have tentatively addressed this issue by adding substrategy of affix-based classification (7f) which means a broadening of the strategy beyond actual lexical absorption.

Alternatively such cases could be described together with the incorporation strategy as they share that a participant is evoked by bound morphemes in the verb.

An additional problem with the absorption strategy lies in the fact that it assumes that the information included in the verb evokes a third participant which is *not an argument* of the verb. This definition excludes and neglects case where the verb provides information about a participant which is simultaneously expressed as an argument or adjunct. These cases would therefore be counted as instances of other strategies, such as the direct argument or the oblique strategy. This results in preferential coding of these strategies over the absorption strategy in the classification of events and therefore skewing the strategy tally in favour of the crosslinguistically better researched morphosyntactic means of participant encoding. To do justice to the encoding of three-participant events crosslinguistically, double coding of participants (e.g. as an argument plus the absorption strategy) w also evoked by the lexical semantics of the verb) should be noted and researched.