

## THE LOCATIVE INVERSION CONSTRUCTION AND THE CHARACTER OF THE PATH<sup>[\*]</sup>

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*Abstract.* According to the Unaccusative Hypothesis, intransitive verbs (including verbs of locomotion) fall into two categories, unergative verbs and unaccusative verbs, each associated with a different set of syntactic and semantic properties. The paper explains why prepositional phrases (PPs) taking the preposition *to* cannot occur in the locative inversion construction (reserved for unaccusative verbs), in spite of the fact that goal phrases are added as indicators of the verb's unaccusative status. In the directed motion domain, the locative inversion construction can be used to encode motion involving a strictly bipolar path in which the transitional phase is missing.

### Unaccusativity of telic motion predicates

According to the Unaccusative Hypothesis, first proposed by Perlmutter (1978) and elaborated on by a number of writers, intransitive verbs, including verbs of locomotion, fall into two categories, unergative verbs and unaccusative verbs, each associated with a different set of syntactic and semantic properties. The present paper will deal with verbs denoting directed, telic movement, which are – as opposed to those denoting non-directed, atelic movement – generally regarded as unaccusative. For example, Dowty (1991) and Tenny (1994) suggest that there is a close link between telicity and unaccusativity. The same position is adopted by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), who claim that verbs expressing directed movement are unaccusative and display a characteristic syntactic behaviour. They state that “verbs of motion are found in locative inversion constructions when they take directional phrase complements” (1995: 221) and that this fact is consistent with their unaccusative status. Rosen (1984) also takes a basically syntactic position claiming that unaccusative verbs can be identified on the basis of their syntactic behaviour.

The paper will focus on directed movement *to* a place and *into* a place, i.e. on verbs complemented by directional phrases employing the prepositions *to* and *into*. The analysis is based on the British National Corpus (the bracketed symbol after each example indicates the respective text sample from which the example is taken).

Although Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) claim that one of the signals of the verb's unaccusative status is its possibility of entering into the locative inversion construction,

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motion predicates with *to*- and *into*-directional phrases do not, in spite of their unaccusative status, behave uniformly in this respect. We shall try and show that the reason for the difference in the syntactic behaviour of the two types of motion events in question lies in a different construal of the path (and, consequently, in a different construal of the motion) as encoded in the directional phrases under consideration.

### **Bipolarity of the path and ‘appearance’ as a contrastive semantic concept**

Let us first concentrate on constructions with directional phrases employing the prepositions *into* and *out of*. Consider:

- (1) Into the shop came a young and very hot couple, leaving their bicycles outside. (H9Y)
- (2) Deep into the safety of the forest they ran, intent only on putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the death-dealing humans. (HJD)
- (3) Then, suddenly, out of the sky like a vast whirring hornet came a black helicopter. (CA0)
- (4) [...] when seemingly out of nowhere stepped a policeman, and they all came to a halt. (AT7)
- (5) Out of the wigwam crawled the boy who’d shot the arrow. (ABX)

It is evident that, in this type of motion event, semantic weight is placed on the two constitutive components of a motion situation (on the motion itself and the localization of the moving entity) is distributed unevenly in that the semantic focus lies on the localization that is profiled in the given situation (it may be the final or the starting position of the entity).

The factor that plays an important role in the foregrounding of the entity’s final (or, by the same token, its starting) position is the internal structure of the path. The path encoded by means of the preposition *into* (or its spatial opposite *out of*) has a simple bipolar structure, i.e. it lacks an intermediary phase. The bipolarity of the path as encoded in the *into*-directional phrase was proposed by Kaufmann (1989). A similar standpoint is taken by Beavers (2002), who sees motion along such a path as a transition from outside a location to inside a location. These conceptions of the *into*-path represent a revision of the view proposed by Jackendoff (1983, 1990), namely that the *into*-directional phrase encodes motion as encompassing motion *to* a certain spatial point *in* the given location (on this assumption, *John walked into the room* can be paraphrased as ‘John walked to a certain place inside the room’).

The strict bipolarity of the path has an important ramification: it enables us to lay semantic emphasis on one spatial point simply by placing it in a direct, sharp contrast to the other spatial point (as noted above, the point profiled in this way may not only be the one representing the goal of a motion, but also the one representing the starting point of a motion).

At this point, let me mention briefly that whenever a directed movement (a movement into a place or out of a place) is encoded by means of path verbs (*come, go, return, etc.*),

which lexicalize the mere fact of translocation, and not by means of manner verbs (*walk, run, crawl, march*, etc.), which lexicalize a concrete manner of motion (see, e.g. Levin 1993), the localization of the entity receives even greater semantic prominence. The reason is quite obvious: in such a case, attention is not allocated between description of manner of motion and description of directionality of motion. Or, to put this another way, the relative sparsity of semantic information in the depiction of the motion situation in question enables us to profile the localization with greater force. Consider:

- (6) Indeed, at one point, I believe I came into the smoking room and heard one of the gentlemen saying: “The fate of Europe [...]” (AR3)
- (7) [...] and watered her plants. She picked off the dead leaves one by one. She went into the kitchen, scrambled three eggs and returned to the living room to eat them. (A0R)

As stated above, the path encoded in the *into (out of)* directional phrase represents a spatial axis with a strictly bipolar structure: its two (and only two) constitutive parts are construed as extreme positions that are placed in a sharp (i.e. without an intermediary phase) spatial contrast. This strictly bipolar construal of the path whose outcome is the profiling of the entity’s localization, enables us to establish a semantic link between the entity’s localization in a place and the entity’s coming into a place, i.e. between ‘being somewhere’ and ‘appearing somewhere’. The latter case represents a dynamic and contrastive variant of the former. Put in simple words, ‘appearing in a place’ means that ‘being somewhere’ is presented as an immediate result of not being somewhere else. Appearance is thus a markedly contrastive semantic concept because its semantic value is constituted as a bipolar change (we may say ‘as a negation’) of its opposite. In this connection we can recall a well-known fact that locative inversion construction is open also for static localizations, i.e. those that do not represent results of a preceding motion, cf.:

- (8) To the side of the village square, is a small but fascinating folk museum [...] (AMD)

### **Suppressed directionality of the path and movement as a type of dynamic existence**

From here it is only a step to locative inversion constructions in which the movement is presented not as a directed sequence of spatial points, but as a type of dynamic existence of the entity – by this I mean a kinetic type of existence, i.e. such as takes the form of a continuous change of the entity’s spatial configuration. Consider:

- (9) The beautiful underfoot carpets of blue gentium delight the eye and, above fly buzzards, eagles, skylarks and wheatears. (A65)
- (10) [...] and Little Billy could see a vast lake of water, gloriously blue, and on the surface of the lake thousands of swans were swimming slowly about. (CH9)

- (11) A hundred yards away, at the bottom of the slope, ran the brook, no more than three feet wide [...] (EWC)
- (12) A sailing ship was passing, its mylar sails flapping in the gusty wind. Behind it crawled a hoverbus of MivvyCorp employees having a party. (CJA)
- (13) [...] and across the coloured surfaces people moved as though they were stitching and knitting at its texture [...] (A0N)

In this type of presentation of a motion event, the conception of the path as a directed axis is considerably weakened (needless to say, the path must still be present). Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) hold that in such constructions the verb is semantically light. At the same time, it cannot be overlooked that a considerably low semantic weight as placed on the verb must be ascribed to the fact that movement is construed as a specific type of the entity's dynamic existence, not as an activity whose primary aim is the change of the entity's location. In line with this, the path is presented as playing a secondary role because it is construed as a (necessary) product of the activity (the movement) itself. In other words, the directionality of the path is backgrounded, which means that the path is not construed as a *directed* sequence of spatial points. Seen in a slightly different perspective, the translational component of the movement is backgrounded in favour of the manner component of the movement, i.e. in favour of its concrete physical properties. This fact has an important ramification: due to the suppressed directionality of motion, the function of the path is re-evaluated in that it serves as a setting of the entity's dynamic existence (movement).

We thus have the following set of contrasts: 'the entity's dynamic existence in a place' (taking the form of the entity's movement) versus 'the entity's appearance in a place'. As we have seen, owing to the foregrounded semantic position of the localization of the entity (of its 'being' in a place), the entity's appearance somewhere represents a dynamic version of the entity's being in a place – or, vice versa, the entity's being in a place (albeit construed dynamically, as a motion in a place) represents the static variant of the motion into a place. These facts explain, I hope convincingly, why in locative inversion constructions, the initial sentence position is open both for paths construed as settings (localizations of movements) and for paths construed as bipolar changes of locations.

### **Heterogeneity of the path versus its homogeneity**

Coming back to the character of the *into*-path (construed as involving two locations: outside a place and inside a place), let me, in addition, stress one more point. If the path is to be construed as consisting of two parts only, it must be heterogeneous in the sense that each of the spatial segments must belong to a different spatial environment. That is, the entity moving must cross a boundary separating the two environments and only in this way is it possible to present a change of location as a sharp contrast between 'not be in a place' and 'be in a place'. This construal of the path is, certainly, a matter of the linguistic structuration of reality. More specifically, it is a matter of event structuration at an abstract level (as is well known, this type of structuration determines the aspectual classification of the motion event in question). The *into* (*out of*) motion events are achievements and as such

are combinable with punctual temporal specifications. Consider the following two examples:

- (14) [...] for just at that moment into the sales walked Mike Smith from the yarn store proudly sporting as ever his well known beard. (HS2)
- (15) McLeish was feeling justifiably pleased with himself as he walked into his office at eight o'clock on Monday morning. (AB9)

Certainly, from a purely physical point of view, motion into a place has duration and is composed of a series of spatial points – with one section of the path outside the given place and the other section of the path inside the place. Therefore motion events that are construed as achievements at an event level can combine with pace adverbs and, also, with such spatial characterizations as point to the extended length of the path. Cf.:

- (16) Slowly Violet walked into the room. (CA0)
- (17) Lucille, her face paled by fear, held d'Alembord's arm as he walked a few paces into the room and bowed primly to Christopher Manvell. (CMP)
- (18) They walked a little way into the Trees, where it would be more comfortable to sit on the thick, dry forest floor and eat their food and rest. (G1L)

Let us now have a look at motion events encoded by means of the *to*-directional phrase. As noted above, the *to*-phrase and the *into*-phrase cannot be put on a par, in spite of the fact that both directional phrases present the final point on the spatial axis as a goal of motion (*to* and *into* belong to the class of goal prepositions, cf. Jackendoff 1983). The path encoded by means of the *to*-directional phrase is construed as a sequence of more than just two spatial points (spatial segments), i.e. it has an intermediary phase. (On the presence of an intermediary phase in the *to*-path see also Beavers 2002). It must be realized, however, that the path can be construed in such a way only with a proviso that it retain its homogeneity. By this it is meant that all its constituent parts (all the spatial points on the axis) belong to one and the same spatial environment. In *He ran to the store*, for example, the resultant localization of the entity can be reworded in the form 'be *at* the store', not in the form 'be *in* the store' (meaning 'be *inside* the store'). That is, the motion whose path is encoded in the *to*-phrase is construed not as *penetration* into a place (not as crossing its boundaries) but as *reaching* a place.

By way of digression, let me mention that the requirement of the homogeneity of the path in directed movement encoded by means of the preposition *to* explains why it is not possible to express movement *to* a place and then *into* a place as parts of one and the same movement, as parts of one and the same path. In such a case, English has to present such a complex motion situation in the form of two separate motion events, each with its own path. Consider the following sentence:

- (19) She reached the house, ran into the front room and shoved the suitcase behind a big, glass case that had a capercailzie in it. (HH9)

First there is the event of reaching the house and then there is the subsequent event of running into the house, presented as a separate motion event.

In the following two sentences, the order of the events is reversed: the event of penetration into a place is followed by the event of reaching a place:

- (20) Rachaela walked into the corridor and along to the landing, and descending the stairs [...] (GUM)
- (21) [...] she walked into the dark cottage and up to bed. (H9V)

### **Non-binarity of the path and its manifestation at a syntactical level**

The non-binary internal structure of the path as encoded in the *to*-phrase has an interesting ramification: the last point on the path (representing the goal of motion), forming part of an ‘extended’ sequence of spatial points, is not placed in such a sharp contrast to the starting point of motion. The presence of a transitional phase thus considerably weakens the semantic burden as placed on the localization of the entity. From a more abstract perspective, the last point on the path does not represent the other extreme (“negative”, as it were) point in the set of contrasts taking the form ‘not be somewhere’ versus ‘be somewhere’. Therefore, motion *to* a place (as opposed to motion *into* a place) does not function as ‘appearance in a place’ as is the case in motion *into* a place. This seems to be the reason why motion verbs complemented by *to*-directional phrases do not enter into locative inversion constructions (*\*To the room walked a boy*). This is not to say, however, that such constructions are totally excluded. They are very rare and represent highly stylized (stylistically marked) presentations of reality, cf. Examples 22 and 23 (in Example 23 the *to*-directional phrase denotes a fictive, metaphorical path):

- (22) To the garage the beast and I unsafely struggled, a place straight out of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: Bad Karma Department. (K5C)
- (23) There is a sense of timelessness here – bathed in the dark but fragile blue of sorrow, from the cradle, to the convent school, to the galaxies Enya walks a starry path where few can follow. (ED7)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me state the following: motion events encoded by means of directional phrases taking the prepositions *to* and *into* cannot be put on a par. Both types of directional phrases offer largely different construals of the path and, hence, different construals of motion events. The differences pertain to a conceptual level and, therefore, manifest themselves at a syntactical level. As opposed to a motion event whose path is encoded by means of the *into*-directional phrase, a motion event encoded in the *to*-phrase cannot be taken as a contrastive variant of a motion event that is construed as the entity’s dynamic existence and, consequently, cannot be used in the locative inversion construction.

We have thus seen that predicates denoting telic, directed movement (and as such regarded as belonging to the class of unaccusative verbs, marked by a distinct syntactic behaviour) do not form a semantically (and, hence, also syntactically) coherent class. It is evident, in my view, that an inquiry into the unaccusativity/unergativity dichotomy should pay equal attention not only to the syntactic properties of verbs but also to the semantic properties that underlie them.

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