

# Preface

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**Events and Predication: A new approach to syntactic processing in English and Spanish**

**Montserrat Sanz**

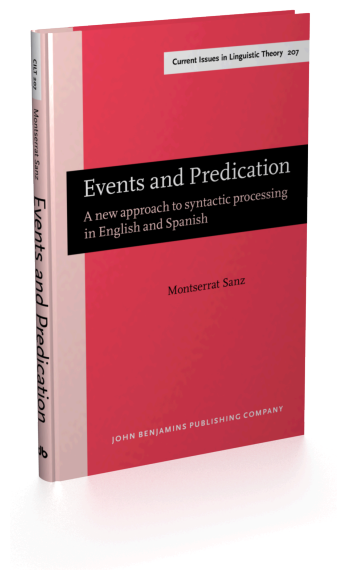
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## PREFACE

This book deals with a conception of the syntax/semantics interface that incorporates event type in the syntax of sentences. The goal is to capture the fact that different event types show different restrictions with regards to the number and type of arguments involved, and that some languages display certain morphological and syntactic operations depending on the event type the sentence expresses. Approaches of a similar sort have been recently proposed by Ramchand (1997), Borer (1998) and Travis (1991, in press), among others. In this book, I concentrate on data from Spanish and English transitive, detransitive and unaccusative constructions. It will be argued that there is an Event Phrase that is associated with both interpretable and uninterpretable features in Spanish, and therefore has consequences for the special overt morphology signaling event type in this language. In contrast, in English, Event Phrase is only endowed with interpretable features.

Objects contribute crucially to event type. Thus, the object position in both languages is also analyzed. I will mainly follow the work of Torrego (1998) for Spanish and Basilico (1998) for English. It will be concluded that the positions that they describe in their analyses are endowed with certain interpretable features that are consistent with their data on objects and with the data on event types that I present in this book. In particular, objects merge in the sister of verb position in Spanish and then move to a position outside the VP, where they are assigned either structural Case only or both structural and inherent Case. I will claim that when the position assigns inherent Case it is because of an interpretable feature that I will call [+measure]. The feature does not occur independently of the uninterpretable [+accusative] Case, which is why objects that are assigned inherent Case in this position are also assigned structural Case. In English, however, objects can merge in either of two positions available within the VP (Basilico 1998). One of them, the Transitive Phrase, contains the interpretable feature [+measure]. By merging in this position, an object automatically checks that interpretable feature, independently of its Case. VPs containing objects generated in this projection involve categorical predication.

In sum, in both languages, interpretable features of functional categories play a role in syntax because they are checked either by movement — due to the presence of uninterpretable features in the same functional projection — or by merging an argument directly in the functional projection at issue. The differences in feature composition of the two languages and the absence of a Transitive Phrase internal to the VP in Spanish explain the differing behavior of accomplishments, uncausatives and unaccusatives in English and Spanish, and the varying options to delimit events in both languages.

This proposal is embedded in a by now long tradition of studies on event types. It is a contribution to a conception of the syntax/semantics interface that opens new and interesting ways of abstracting from the data of particular languages into a description of the universal primitives of syntax and the ways that they can be parameterized.

This book started as my Ph.D. dissertation. The acknowledgment section on that dissertation was almost as long as the thesis itself. Since it would be impossible to reproduce it here, I merely commit myself again to the words that expressed my deep gratitude in that section, although I would like to stress my thanks to several special people here.

First, to my parents. My graduate career would have never happened without their wonderful personalities. They are responsible for my desire to reach the heights of education and self-enrichment. Without their constant encouragement for me to discover the world and others, without their fostering my inclinations to learn languages, without their tireless support during my undergraduate years, and without their open-mindedness, I would have never felt the need to cross the ocean and accept the challenge of graduate education in another culture. My deepest and most sincere thanks to them: to their incredible sense of the value of education when one has little else, to their ability to make me a person capable of adjusting to any place and circumstance, and to their endless confidence in me, bigger than my own at all times of my life.

In the shaping of my graduate career to be a pleasurable, fruitful and challenging one, my two advisors played the most crucial role. Thanks to Tom Bever, who always had an unexpected smile of understanding in the face of my mistakes. He advised me wisely at every step of the way, and trusted me to undertake experimental research when his little knowledge of who I was made it all an unsure bet. Thanks to him for his drive to make the Cognitive Science Program at the University of Rochester a reality. For having always found funding and a good excuse for my incessant trips, for caring about my personal needs and for generously giving me words of encourage-

ment. Thanks to him, above all, for the deep respect in the capacities of youth that only a great teacher is capable of.

Thanks to Itziar Laka, for the many hours of friendship and professionalism intelligently and skillfully combined. It could not be otherwise from a person of her human quality. Thanks to her for her strength of character, for her drive to do things well. For making syntax an enjoyable subject, and for teaching me that science is the pursuit of truth and that one should approach it with absolute honesty and open-mindedness, which she teaches from example.

Thanks also to my husband William, for his enormous help with formatting and technical details and for giving me the most timely love and tenderness of my life. I learned as much from his care when I was writing this work as from the work itself. Writing this book (and the previous version as my dissertation) was a chance to understand about generosity, selflessness and respect. The lesson came from him.

Eloise Jelinek has become a fundamental support in my life since my years in Arizona and especially now that I live in the Far East. She constantly encourages me, sends me papers promptly, gives me invaluable comments and acts as my bridge between the two research worlds to which I belong. I could not have written this book without her help in keeping me up-to-date with materials and encouragement. Furthermore, the last stages of this book were written under her roof, and she showed sympathy and patience towards me every single day.

My colleague Mark Campana has done a great job at correcting some parts of the manuscript, making it sound definitely more English and less Spanish. The reader will probably be able to distinguish the parts in which his expert editing capabilities have not been put to use.

I would also like to sincerely thank the three anonymous reviewers who have read the previous versions of the manuscript. Their comments have been invaluable in developing the theory as it is now. They have led me through my own reflections in order to clarify many of the issues discussed in the book by pointing out the weakness of my initial arguments.

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Montserrat Sanz  
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