

Foreword, by Tim Stowell

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Individuals in Time: Tense, aspect and the individual/stage distinction

María J. Arche

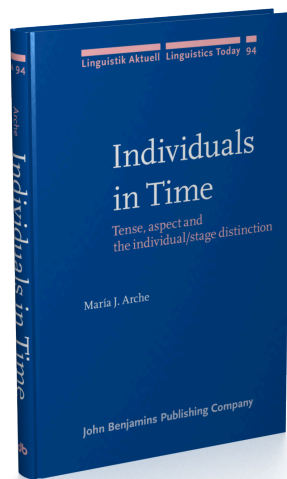
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Foreword

This book provides a compelling account of the distinction between stage-level (SL) and individual-level (IL) predicates, with an empirical focus on the correlation between the SL/IL distinction and the alternation between the two copular verbs *ser* and *estar* in Spanish. It also provides a comprehensive critical survey of the major theoretical and descriptive accounts in the literature of the SL/IL distinction and the *ser/estar* alternation.

The SL/IL distinction is grounded in a core semantic intuition that IL predicates involve essential, permanent, or even immutable properties, whereas SL predicates involve inessential or transient properties. This intuition is often associated with a related intuition about the discourse function of sentences whose main predicates belong to either type. Sentences containing IL predicates have been described as categorical; the subject of the IL predicate is the topic of the sentence, and the sentence serves to provide information about its referent(s). Sentences containing SL predicates, on the other hand, have been described asthetic; they serve to report an event or situation, and the status of the subject is confined to that of a participant in the reported event or situation. The SL/IL distinction has been the focus of an important body of work in the literature on formal semantic and syntactic theory over the past 30 years, but no clear consensus has emerged on how it should be formalized.

Adjectival predicates have constituted the central domain of study in the literature, because they alone among syntactic categories exhibit a robust internal division defined by the SL/IL divide. Noun phrases are (almost) always IL, whereas verb phrases and prepositional phrases are (almost) always SL. In contrast, adjectives are a diverse crowd; some are (usually) SL, others are (usually) IL, and a third type (possibly the most numerous of the three) can have either type of interpretation, depending on the surrounding context, with greater or lesser degrees of naturalness.

In this study, Maria Arche provides an overview of the literature on this issue and proposes a bold hypothesis that all adjectives are fundamentally IL in their lexical core, with SL interpretations arising in specific cases through the successive application of syntactic and semantic merger, combining adjectives with various complements and superordinate aspectual and adverbial categories. The picture that emerges is that every adjective begins its life as an IL predicate and has the potential to become (part of) an SL predicate. At first glance, this claim is contradicted by many direct empirical observations, but Arche systematically examines the evidence that seems to argue in favor of a lexical distinction between IL and SL adjectives, and shows that it is ultimately

untenable. She guides the reader on a fascinating tour through a treacherous terrain of complex interactions among several semantic and syntactic phenomena, leading inevitably to this conclusion.

Her approach is grounded on a key empirical insight that she adopts from prior accounts of the *ser/estar* distinction—namely, that the choice between *ser* and *estar* reflects a true correlation with the SL/IL distinction: predicates are always SL when they occur with *estar*. She uses this as a potent analytical tool, and in the process provides an entirely novel syntactic account of how IL predicates are sometimes converted into SL predicates by combining with other syntactic elements, including *estar* and its counterparts in other languages, as well as various other aspectual formatives and certain types of PP complements.

The evidence that she uses to motivate this conclusion is diverse. Systematically, chapter by chapter, she scrutinizes many of the phenomena that have been associated with the SL/IL distinction in the literature, especially those that have been cited in support of the widely (though not universally) accepted idea that IL predicates are necessarily permanent or immutable. Most of these involve interactions with various aspects of the aspectual and temporal properties of sentences in which SL and IL adjectival predicates occur. She focuses on several key empirical puzzles, reviewing prior accounts of these in the literature, and zeroing in on the essential strengths and weaknesses of opposing theories. In each case, she brings to light important new data that bear on the theoretical debates, either providing key evidence in favor (or against) specific existing theories or leading her to develop novel theoretical accounts of her own. Step by step, a comprehensive big picture emerges.

Adjectival predicates are often assumed to be exclusively stative, but Arche shows that many adjectives that alternate between stative IL usages and SL usages behave like activity predicates in their SL usages; however, she traces the source of the nonstative aktionsart to the intrinsic semantics of the PP complement of the adjective rather than to an inherent lexical ambiguity residing within the adjective (and its argument structure) itself.

It has been claimed in the literature that only SL predicates (or SL usages of predicates) may occur with adjuncts of time or place; Arche shows that this too is wrong, and provides a satisfying explanation of the circumstances under which temporal modification of IL predicates is allowed.

Nonverbal SL and IL predicates appear to differ from each other with respect to their compatibility with progressive and perfect aspect on the copular verb selecting them, and sometimes also with respect to the perfective versus imperfective form of the copula in certain languages. Arche shows that most of the prior empirical generalizations in this domain are wrong, having been based on an insufficiently narrow range of data.

In certain types of contexts, the occurrence of the past tense on the copula triggers so-called lifetime effects associated with the referent(s) of the subject of an IL predicate. Arche shows how these effects arise and, equally importantly, explains why they often fail to arise, providing further support for her account of the SL/IL distinction in the process.

Arche brings to light an enormous body of new data, involving paradigms of a sort that have been largely overlooked in previous accounts. Her account of the interaction between discourse structure and the interpretative properties of quantifiers, tense, outer aspect, and inner aspect really feels like it is on the right track. The account of the SL/IL distinction that emerges is striking and compelling in its simplicity, even if the overall picture that emerges of the interaction between this and other syntactic and semantic phenomena proves to be more complex than what previous researchers had envisaged.

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