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The origin of agent markers – Metaphors underlying the extension of spatial prepositions in European languages

Abstract: Space provides the source domain for the conceptualization of more abstract domains. This can be shown in the extension of space prepositions to the encoding of non-spatial semantic roles. In the case of the domain of agency, the languages of Europe offer a wide variety of usages of space prepositions for the encoding of the semantic role agent with passive verbs. Metaphors discussed in the paper involve the spatial semantic roles of origin, source, path and various types of locations.

Keywords: semantic roles, agent, semantic extension, prepositions, metaphor

1 Introduction

The encoding of semantic roles is a fascinating issue that can shed light on the cognitive mechanisms through which we understand reality in terms of the metaphorical mapping between concrete and abstract domains. A well known example of metaphor that explains the extension of a specific encoding from a source to a target semantic role is the Companion Metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), extensively investigated by Thomas Stolz in a number of important publications (see e.g. Stolz 2001a, b and Stolz et al. 2006).

In my paper, I will explore some semantic extensions that take space as their source domain and, through metaphorical mapping, lead to the target domain of agency. To do so I will focus on space prepositions that occur in the expression of passive agent in some ancient and modern languages of Europe.¹ The idea that a semantic role such as agent can be expressed through a spatial metaphor is based on the assumption that human beings use more concrete categories to understand

¹ Agents are usually chosen as subjects in nominative-accusative languages, such as the languages analyzed in this paper. Thus, they are assigned the nominative case, that marks a grammatical relation, rather than a specific semantic role. However, passive constructions can provide evidence on the conceptualization of agents when agent phrases are not included in the verbal valency.

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less concrete, abstract ones; in particular that, as space is the first accessible experience for human beings, spatial concepts are often extended in order to conceptualize non-spatial relations.

The paper is organized as follows. After a short discussion of the agent role and its connection with syntactic and semantic transitivity in the languages inspected (Section 2), I will proceed to investigate metaphors based on the spatial relations of origin (Section 3), source (Section 4), path (Section 5) and location (Section 6). In Section 7 I summarize the findings. The languages from which I will draw my data comprise Ancient Greek, Latin, Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages, including some historical stages. I take as a starting point findings from Luraghi (2000, 2003 and 2014). Among the languages mentioned above, Ancient Greek is of special interest because, as remarked in Chantraine (1953: 180), the passive was not yet fully grammaticalized at its earliest stages, and constructions that include an agent phrase show a wide variety of spatial prepositions. For this reason, I will often focus on Ancient Greek in Sections 3–6.²

2 The semantic role agent

Agents are prototypically capable of acting intentionally: as a consequence, they are necessarily animate, or, more precisely, human. Agents control the event that they bring about, that is, they can not only initiate it but also bring it to its end. Hence, the agent role is assigned to the participant who bears primary responsibility for voluntarily initiating (intentionality) and actually performing (controlling) the action.

Prototypically, this role appears with events that denote a change of state in another entity, which is assigned the patient role. Such events conform to the basic form of the Conceptual Archetype described as *billiard ball model* by

² While this paper specifically concentrates on the role of metaphors in semantic extension, it must be pointed out that metaphors do not account for all cases of such process. Different types of metonymy also have a role: a likely instance is the extension of instrumental markers to the encoding of the agent. In Luraghi (2001b) it is suggested that this type of extension should be accounted for in terms of metonymy, as agent and instrument are contiguous concepts, and an instrument can be seen as a part of an agent. In addition, it is frequently the case that inanimate entities substitute for animate ones in cases of metonymy, precisely when a part substitutes the whole. The occurrence of a metonymic extension here would also explain why this is virtually the only frequent semantic extension that contradicts Heine' scale of increasing grammaticalization (see Heine et al. 1991: 159). Accordingly, I will not discuss the instrumental of agent, which is consistently used for passive agents in several European languages, such as most Slavic languages.

Langacker (1991: 283–286) in its variant called *canonical event model* represented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The canonical event model.

A prototypical agent and patient appear for example in (1a) and its passive variant (1b).

- (1) a. *John ate the apple.*
 b. *The apple has been eaten **by John**.*

The two sentences denote a change of state: the apple, which functions as patient, exists before the event denoted by the verb *eat* and does not exist after it, and eating is an act that one typically performs intentionally, hence John can be said to take the agent role.

English, as several other languages including those that I will discuss in this paper, shows transitivity prominence, that is, the tendency for the transitive construction to extend to verbs that do not indicate change of state, such as experiential verbs (see Haspelmath 2015). This often implies that, no matter their degree of semantic transitivity, such verbs can also passivize. Consider for example perception verbs, as in (2a) and (2b).

- (2) a. *Mary saw the apple.*
 b. *The apple has been seen **by Mary**.*

The sentences in (2) do not involve change of state: the apple exists before and after the event denoted by the verb *see*. The semantic role of Mary is actually experiencer; however, this participant is treated as an agent syntactically, and can be encoded as passive agent as well. From the point of view of verbal semantics, we can say that the sentence in (2a) is less transitive than of the sentence in (1a), precisely because the verb does not denote a change of state. As we will see, in Ancient Greek the degree of transitivity of the verb is relevant to the choice of the preposition with which the agent of the passive can be expressed.

Moreover, in English the subject of a transitive verb need not have the properties of a prototypical agent, and it can also be a noun denoting an inanimate

entity. Such an entity may also be encoded as an agent in the passive, as in (3a) and (3b).

- (3) a. *Fog prevented driving on the highway.*
 b. *Driving on the highway was prevented **by fog**.*

In some cases, whether or not we are in the presence of a prototypical agent also conditions the distribution of spatial metaphors in the languages that we are going to survey. The semantic role assigned to non-prototypical (i.e., more specifically inanimate) agents is called force. It must be emphasized that non-prototypical agents, although they cannot act intentionally, are equally presented as ultimately responsible for a given event: hence, the role of non-prototypical agent differs from the semantic role of cause, because a state of affairs involving a cause can nevertheless also involve an agent, as in (4a) and (4b).

- (4) a. *Because of the fog, the driver could not see the road.*
 b. *The road could not be seen (**by the driver**) because of the fog.*

Events that conform to the canonical event model can contain additional participants that facilitate the flow of energy from agent to patient. Such participants may have the semantic role instrument and intermediary, as in (5a) and (5b).

- (5) a. *I cut the apple **with a knife**.*
 b. *The two heads of state communicate **through an interpreter**.*

In (5a) we have an expression of instrument, which denotes the concrete instrument used by the agent to carry out the action of cutting. Notably, while the inanimate entity cannot itself initiate and carry out the action, it is nevertheless necessary for the agent, who otherwise could not carry out a particular action. For this reason, depending on the language, even the instrument can in some cases be presented as responsible for an action, and be encoded as an agent. The intermediary, exemplified in (5b), is a human being that performs an action on behalf of another human being. In the sentences in which intermediary expressions appear, prototypical features of the agent role are divided between a primary agent, who is presented as exerting intentionality and control, and an intermediary, who, while lacking these features, is the participant who actually carries out the action. The instrument and the intermediary have an effect on the unfolding of the action in its final segment: in the canonical event model shown in Figure 1 they are located at the end of the transfer of energy from the agent to the patient.

A more complex representation of semantic roles that also includes instrument and the spatial roles discussed in Sections 3–6 is shown in Figure 2 (based on Luraghi 2001a: 50 and Croft 2012: 280).

	ANTECEDENT	CONCOMITANT		SUBSEQUENT	
INTENTION	reason			purpose	
	ergative	comitative			
CAUSAL	cause	instrument			
	agent	means		recipient	beneficiary
		manner			
SPATIAL	ablative	path/locative		allative	

Figure 2: Semantic roles and the causal chain.

Figure 2 groups semantic roles into three groups, i.e. antecedent, concomitant and subsequent. It predicts that semantic roles in the antecedent and in the subsequent group cannot normally be encoded in the same way. In fact, there are complex relations between antecedent and subsequent roles, on which see Luraghi (2001a, 2014) and Croft (2012); for the purposes of this paper, however, it suffices noting that among spatial semantic roles only allative remains separated from the area in which the agent role is located. Other spatial roles, including source/origin, here tagged as “ablative”, location and path are located in the same area. Indeed, as I will show in Sections 3–6, these three roles provide the source domain for metaphors of agency in the languages reviewed, while no allative markers serve as source domain for the conceptualization of the agent role.

Figure 3 represents the prototypical motion event. The dashed figure represents the origin, which is focalized in cases of elative motion but often remains on the background; the gray areas represent the trajector (moving entity) and the landmark (reference entity).

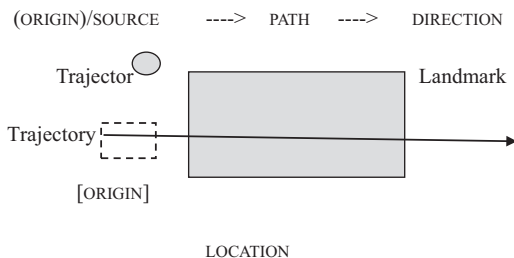


Figure 3: A prototypical motion event.

In the mapping of the space domain onto the domain of agency, the prototypical motion event, represented in Figure 3, provides the source for the canonical event schema, represented in Figure 1.

3 Agents as origins

The metaphor by which the agent is the origin of an action reflects the transfer of energy represented in Figure 1, in the meantime profiling the point of origin.

Origin expressions with the preposition *ek* ‘out of’ occur in Homeric Greek, and sporadically also in Classical Greek, only with prototypical agents and with verbs that do not indicate change of state. Elsewhere, this preposition indicates motion from the interior of a landmark (see Luraghi 2003, 2009), which is conceived as a container.

Metaphors based on containment are numerous. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 29) “each of us is a container, with a bounded surface and an in-out orientation”: the notion of containment is connected with the first perception of a human being as such. Furthermore, as Johnson (1987) remarks, in our daily experience we also constantly experience our bodies as things in containers: for examples, we are contained in buildings, or vehicles, and so on. For this reason, the Container Schema may apply to many different aspects of reality, including abstract ones such as states and activities. Structural elements of this schema are, as remarked in Lakoff (1987: 272), interior, boundary, exterior. The Origin Metaphor for agents, then, is based on two separate metaphors: (a) ORIGINS ARE CONTAINERS and (b) AGENTS ARE ORIGINS. Hence, the event is conceptualized as coming out of an enclosed space, the agent, as in Figure 4.

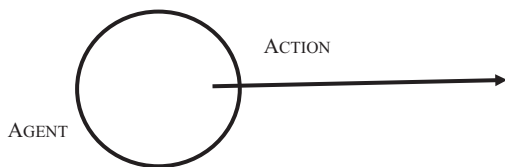


Figure 4: The Origin Metaphor.

Remarkably, in an origin relationship the landmark exerts some degree of control over the trajector. In fact, the notion of control is implied by the Container Schema. As Vandelois (1994) has shown in his study of prepositions equivalent to *in* in French, English and German, the fact that a landmark is conceived as a container

implies that it exerts “dynamic control” over the trajector; that is, it conditions its behavior to some extent (see further Tyler and Evans 2003: 181; Luraghi 2004).

In Ancient Greek, two origin prepositions can encode passive agents. The first one is the already mentioned *ek* ‘out of’, as shown in (6) and (7).

- (6) Ancient Greek (*Il.* 2.668–669)

ephilēthen *ek* *Diós*
 love.AOR.PASS.3PL out.of Z..GEN
 ‘They were loved by Zeus.’

- (7) Ancient Greek (*Il.* 18.74–75)

tà *mèn* *δέ* *toi* *tetélestai*
 DEM.NOM.PL PTC PTC 2SG.DAT accomplish.PRF.M/P.3SG
ek *Diós*
 out.of Z..GEN
 ‘Those things have been accomplished for you by Zeus.’

After Homer *ek* occurs in expressions of agent virtually only in Herodotus, and, as in Homer, remains limited to prototypical agents with verbs that have a generic meaning (‘do’, ‘accomplish’) or show a low degree of transitivity, as shown in (8).

- (8) Ancient Greek (*Hdt.* 3.404)

trópōi *tōi* *ex* *emeū*
 manner.DAT DEM.DAT out_of 1SG.GEN
hupokeiménō *akéo*
 establish.PTCP.PRS.M/P.DAT strive.PRS.IMP.2SG
 ‘Try to settle the matter as advised by me.’

An Origin Metaphor also underlies the use of the preposition *prós*+GEN, Homeric Greek *potí*+GEN. In Homeric Greek this preposition does not indicate a concrete motion with human landmarks, but rather the origin, and in some passages it may refer to the human being that, though not performing an action, controls it, as in (9).

- (9) Ancient Greek (*Il.* 6.456)

pròs *állēs* *històn* *huphaínois*
 toward other.GEN loom.ACC weave.OPT.PRS.2SG
 ‘You will ply the loom at the orders of somebody else.’

Consistent with the Container Schema, the landmark in (9) is conceived as exerting some control on the trajector which performs the action: it is conceptualized as the origin of control. The preposition may occur in agent expressions, as in (10). Again, here and in other occurrences of the Origin Metaphor, verbs involved show a low degree of transitivity and agents are always prototypical (see Luraghi 2000).

(10) Ancient Greek (*Il.* 11.831)

tá se protí phasin Akhillêos
 DEM.NOM.PL 2SG.ACC toward say.PRS.3PL A..GEN
dedidákthai
 teach.PRF.INF.M/P
 ‘The things that people say you have been taught by Achilles.’

In post-Homeric Greek, *prós*+GEN indicates the agent mostly limited to action nouns, as in (11).

(11) Ancient Greek (*Hdt.* 3.19)

Karkhēdōnioi mén nun doulosúnēn diéphugon
 Carchedonian.NOM.PL PTC PTC slavery.ACC escape.AOR.3PL
pròs Perséōn
 toward Persian.GEN.PL
 ‘Thus the Carchedonians escaped being enslaved by the Persians.’ (*Hdt.* 3.19)

An Origin Metaphor also occurs with the use of *fram* in Old English, as argued by Fraser (1987). An example is (12).

(12) Old English (*Or.* 95.17)

Hasterbal wearð ofslagen from his agnum
H.NOM AUX killed.PTCP from POSS.3SG OWN.DAT
folce
 people.DAT
 ‘Asterbale was killed by his own people.’

In Old English, the two most used prepositions in agent phrases were *fram*/*from* and *of* (Green 1914). Fraser (1987: 245) argues that the former profiles the starting point, while *of* rather profiles the trajectory. This is shown by the greater frequency of *fram* with the “dynamic” passive (auxiliary *weorðan*) and of *of* with the “static” passive (auxiliary *beon/wesan*), noted in some texts by Fraser, as I discuss in Section 4.

4 Agents as sources

The Source Metaphor is similar to the Origin Metaphor in that it conceptualizes agents as the starting point of the transfer of agency that brings about the event, but it does not rely on the Container Schema. It rather profiles the trajectory: in this case, the metaphor at work is the ontological metaphor EVENTS ARE MOVING ENTITIES.

The difference in profiling between an origin and a source preposition has been observed by Fraser (1987) for Old English *of*. Let us consider example (13).

- (13) Old English (Or. 84.2)

seo burg wæs getimbred of Læcedemonium
 DEM city AUX found.PTCP by Spartan.DAT.PL
 ‘The city had been founded by the Spartans.’

As highlighted by Fraser, we find the “static” passive with auxiliary *beon/wesan* ‘be’: the verb does not indicate a transfer, hence it is the ablative value of the preposition itself that supports the source meaning.

It needs to be remarked that cognates of Old English *fram* and *of* occur in agent phrases in other ancient Germanic languages as well (cf. Green 1914). In Gothic, for example, we find (14) with *fram* and (15) with *af*. As the former preposition occurs with the auxiliary *was* it is not clear that Fraser’s analysis of Old English can also extend to Gothic.

- (14) Gothic (Mark 1.9)

daupips was fram Iohanne in Iaurdane
 baptize.PTCP AUX by John in Jordan.DAT
 ‘He was baptized by John in the Jordan river.’ (Mk. 1.9)

- (15) Gothic (Rom. 12.21)

ni gajiukaizau af unþiupa
 not overwhelm.OPT.PASS.2SG by evil.DAT
 ‘Be not overwhelmed by evil.’

The Source Metaphor is widely attested in modern and ancient languages of Europe, and it is instantiated for example by German *von* and Italian *da*, both meaning ‘from’. It also occurs in Bulgarian, which, contrary to most Slavic languages, does not feature inflectional case. Notably, passive agent is generally encoded by the instrumental case in Slavic languages (see fn. 2), but in Bulgarian loss of inflectional case did not result in an instrumental expression being extended to agent. Rather, we find the preposition *ot* ‘from’, as in (16).

- (16) Bulgarian (personal knowledge)

Tazi kŭšta e postroena ot brat mi
 DEM house AUX built.PTCP from brother POSS.1SG
 ‘This house has been built by my brother.’

Interestingly, in Old Russian one finds the preposition *otŭ* with prototypical agents of passive verbs, as shown in (17).

- (17) Old Russian (from Schmalstieg 2002: 48)

Poskĕpani sabljami kalenymi šelomi
 cleave.PTCP.NOM.PL saber.INSTR.PL tempered.INSTR.PL helmet.NOM.PL
Ovarŭskii otŭ tebe, Jarŭ ture Vŭsevolode!
 Avar.NOM.PL from 2SG.GEN fierce.VOC bull.VOC V.VOC
 ‘Cleft with tempered sabers are [their] Avar helmets by you, Fierce Bull Vsevolod!’

In Old Church Slavonic prepositional phrases with *otŭ*+GEN are also frequent for passive agents (see Bräuer 1952), as in (18).

- (18) Old Church Slavonic (Luke 21.17)

bŕdete nenavidimi otŭ vcĕxŭ imene
 be.FUT.3PL hate.PTCP.PRS.PASS.NOM.PL from all.GEN.PL name.GEN
moego radi
 POSS.1SG.GEN for
 ‘You will be hated by all for my name.’

The Source Metaphor was common with prototypical agents in Latin, as shown in (19).

- (19) Latin (Caes. G. 7.72)

fit deinde senatus consultum ut ad
 happen.PRS.3SG then senate.GEN decision.NOM that to
bellum Parthicum legio una a Gn.
 war.ACC Parthian.ACC legion.NOM one.NOM by G.
Pompeio altera a G. Caesare
 Pompeius.ABL other.NOM by G. Caesar.ABL
mitteretur
 send.SUBJ.IMPF.PASS.3SG
 ‘Then there was a decision made by the senate, that one legion should be sent into the Parthian war by Pompeius, another one by Caesar.’

On the other hand, in Classical Greek the Source Metaphor is only sporadically attested, mostly with the preposition *pará*+GEN. This preposition indicated vicinity to a landmark and could occur with the dative, the genitive and the accusative, encoding different spatial relations. As it indicated vicinity, rather than containment, *pará* was especially suitable to indicate spatial relations relative to human landmarks. In Homer, other types of landmark occurred as well, with all three cases, while later on, in Attic-Ionic prose, the dative and the genitive virtually only occurred with human landmarks, and the accusative was also limited to human landmarks when denoting direction.

Agent expressions with *pará*+GEN occur in (20) and (21).

- (20) Ancient Greek (Pl. *Phaedr.* 245b)

ep' eutukhíai tēi megístēi parà theôn
 on happiness.DAT ART.DAT greatest.DAT from god.GEN.PL
hē toiaútē manía dídotai
 ART.NOM INDEF.NOM madness.NOM give:PRS.M/P.3SG
 'Such madness is given by the gods for our greatest happiness.'

- (21) Ancient Greek (Xen. *An.* 1.9.1)

hōs parà pántōn homologeítai
 as from all.GEN.PL agree:PRS.M/P.3SG
 'As everybody agrees.'

In addition, the preposition *apó*, which is the most frequent way of encoding source with concrete motion, also occurs in agent phrases, especially in Thucydides, as in (22).

- (22) Ancient Greek (Th. 1.17)

eprákhthē dè oudèn ap' autōn érgon
 do.AOR.PASS.3SG PTC INDEF.ACC from DEM.GEN action.NOM
axiólogon
 noteworthy.NOM
 'Nothing worth of being told was accomplished by them.'

Similar to origin prepositions analyzed thus far, both *pará*+GEN and *apó* are sporadically used for passive agents in Classical Greek and remain limited to generic or low transitivity verbs and prototypical agents (Luraghi 2000); however, post-Classical authors employ *apó* it with increasing frequency. In Modern Greek, *apó* is the preposition that routinely encodes the agent of passive verbs, with any degree of transitivity and both with prototypical and non-prototypical agents, as shown in (23) and (24).

- (23) Modern Greek (personal knowledge)
skotóthikan *apó* *átaktus* *stratiótes*
 killed.PASS.3PL from irregular.ACC.PL soldier.ACC.PL
 ‘They were killed by irregular soldiers.’
- (24) Modern Greek (personal knowledge)
ta *ðéntra* *kserizóthikan* *apó* *ton*
 ART.NOM.PL tree.NOM.PL uproot.PASS.3PL from ART.ACC
ánemo
 wind.ACC
 ‘The trees were uprooted by the wind.’

5 Agents as paths

In the mapping of the space domain onto the domain of agency, the path of motion can be understood as the channel through which energy is transferred from the agent to the patient. Notably, however, the channel for the transfer of agency is not by itself the entity that controls the energy: hence, the extension to agent needs to be mediated by some other semantic role. This semantic role, as I will show by reviewing diachronic developments in Greek and Latin, is the role of the intermediary. For this reason, we start by discussing a two-step metaphor: CHANNELS ARE PATHS and INTERMEDIARIES ARE CHANNELS.

In Classical Greek, the intermediary role is encoded by *diá*+GEN with human landmarks, as shown in (25).

- (25) Ancient Greek (Hdt. 1.113.3)
pémpsas *dè* *ho* *Hárpagos* *tôn*
 sent.PTCP.AOR.NOM PTC ART.NOM H..NOM ART.GEN.PL
heōutoû *doruphórōn* *toûs* *pistotátous*
 REFL.GEN bodyguard.GEN.PL ART.ACC.PL trusty.SUP.ACC.PL
eîdé *te* *dià* *toútōn* *kai* *éthapse*
 see.AOR.3SG and through DEM.GEN.PL and bury.AOR.3SG
toû *boukólou* *tò* *paidíon*
 ART.GEN cowherd.GEN ART.ACC son.ACC
 ‘Harpagus sent the most trusty of his bodyguard and he saw through them and buried the cowherd’s child.’

As has already been remarked in Section 2, the intermediary is a participant who acts at the instigation of an agent: it is to this second entity that not only intentionality, but also control are ascribed. The intermediary, similarly to an instrument, transfers the agent's energy to the patient. Crucially, the intermediary's role in this transfer is more active than that of an inanimate instrument, since in reality the intermediary acts, even if on behalf of the agent, using its own energies, which obviously an instrument cannot do.

In some cases in Classical Greek prose we find *diá*+GEN with human landmarks and passive verbs. These are contexts in which the authors want to indicate a reduced degree of agency, for various reasons. An example is (26).

(26) Ancient Greek (Pl. *Phlb.* 16c)

<i>theôn</i>	<i>mèn</i>	<i>eis</i>	<i>anthrôpous</i>	<i>dósis</i> , . . .	<i>pothèn</i>
god.GEN.PL	PTC	to	man.ACC.PL	gift.NOM	from_somewhere
<i>ek</i>	<i>theôn</i>	<i>errípē</i>	<i>diá</i>	<i>tinós</i>	
out_of	god.GEN.PL	grasp.AOR.PASS.3SG	through	INDEF.GEN	
<i>Promēthēōs</i>	<i>háma</i>	<i>phanotátōi</i>	<i>tinì</i>	<i>purì</i>	
P.GEN	together	bright.SUP.DAT	INDEF.DAT	fire.DAT	

'It is a gift of the gods for mankind, grasped from some place from the gods through some Prometheus together with a gleam of fire.'

As remarked in Luraghi (2003), the gods are presented as bearing the responsibility of a certain state of affairs, and *diá tinós Promēthēōs* denotes an indefinite entity, whose volitionality is certainly not an important feature (other occurrences of this type are discussed in Luraghi 2000 and 2003).

While in Ancient Greek intermediary expressions never extended further to passive agents, Latin offers a different picture. In Latin the intermediary was encoded by *per*, which, similar to Ancient Greek *diá*+GEN, means 'through', and indicates path in its spatial usage. An example is (27).

(27) Latin (Caes. G. 1.44.12)

<i>id</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>ab</i>	<i>ipsis</i>	<i>per</i>
DEM.ACC	3SG.ACC	from	DEM.ABL.PL	through
<i>eorum</i>	<i>nuntios</i>		<i>compertum</i>	<i>habere</i>
3PL.GEN	messenger.ACC.PL		learn.PTCP.PRF.ACC	AUX

'He had learned this from them through messengers.'

This type of prepositional phrase can also come close to encoding the passive agent in Classical Latin, albeit sporadically, as in (28), in which a primary agent is not specified, or does not exist.

- (28) Latin (Caes. G. 1.23.2)

ea res per fugitivos [. . .]
 DEM.NOM thing.NOM through fugitive.ACC.PL
hostibus nuntiatur
 enemy.DAT.PL report.PRS.PASS.3SG

‘This was reported to the enemies by some fugitives [coming from the decuria of Gallic knights under the command of L. Aemilius].’

In Vulgar Latin, the preposition *ab* ‘from’, which indicated the passive agent in Latin and relied on the Source Metaphor, was replaced with *de* ‘from’, which had a similar meaning. In the Romance languages, we also find *de* to indicate the agent of the passive; as mentioned in Section 4, this is the case with Modern Italian *da*.

In some Romance languages, notably Spanish and French, the Source Metaphor was replaced by the extension of intermediary encoding, using prepositions deriving from the Latin *per* for the passive Agent, such as French *par* and Spanish *por*. This change is not brought about by a metaphorical shift: rather, it results from differences in profiling. In this case, the focus is placed on the final segment of the energy transfer. During the early stages of the Romance languages the two ways of encoding the passive agent competed, resulting in different outcomes, but intermediary expressions also occur in Old Italian as in (29).

- (29) Old Italian (*Purg.* vii 6)

fur l' ossa mie per Ottavian
 be.PST.3PL ART bone.PL POSS.1SG.PL through O.
sepelte
 bury.PTCP.PL

‘My bones were buried by Octavian.’

Finally, we may note that in German, while the agent of the passive is routinely expressed with the preposition *von* ‘from’ as remarked in Section 4, in the case of action nouns we find the preposition *durch* ‘through’. Compare (30) and (31).

- (30) German (personal knowledge)

Der Dieb wurde von der Polizei verhaftet
 ART.NOM thief AUX from ART.DAT police capture.PTCP.PST

‘The thief was caught by the police’;

- (31) German (personal knowledge)

Die Verhaftung des Diebes durch
 ART.NOM capture ART.GEN thief.GEN through
die Polizei
 ART.ACC police
 ‘The capture of the thief by the police’.

6 Location Metaphors

The semantic role of location does not usually extend to agent in the languages under investigation here. Indeed, as shown in Figure 2, locative is a semantic role which is placed further toward the end of the causal chain than agent and related roles; in addition, not being dynamic, it does not easily lend itself to indicate a transfer of energy, as path does. The most clear example of a Location Metaphor occurring in the ancient and modern languages of Europe is based on the notion of superiority, and is instantiated by Ancient Greek *hupó*+GEN, as I discuss in Section 6.1. In Section 6.2, I briefly discuss the extension of English *by* to passive agent. As we will see, it is not clear whether this should be seen as based on the location meaning of the preposition or as based on its perlocative meaning, which also explains the extension to intermediary encoding.

6.1 Agents as superiorly located entities

The most frequent way to encode the passive agent in Classical Greek, already frequently employed in Homer, involves prepositional phrases with *hupó* ‘under’ and the genitive case, as in (32).

- (32) Ancient Greek (Hdt. 6.29.2)

hōs pheúgōn te katelambáneto hupò
 as flee.PTCP.PRS.NOM PTC overtake.IMP.F.M/p.3SG under
andròs Pérsēō
 man.GEN Persian.GEN
 ‘was overtaken in his flight by a Persian.’

The metaphor underlying this expression is related to the notion of physical superiority, and has its basis in the bodily experience of human beings. As Lakoff and

Johnson (1980: 34–35) note, “[h]aving control or strength is up, being subject to control or strength is down. . . Physical basis: physical size is generally correlated with physical strength, and the winner in the fight is generally above the vanquished.” The preposition *hupó* indicates a relationship of superiority of the landmark over the trajector: the latter, coming to be “under” the landmark, is subject to its control, being in a condition of physical inferiority.

The metaphor that accounts for this way to conceptualize the agent is PHYSICAL SUPERIORITY IS CONTROL. I will call this the Control Metaphor; it can be represented as in Figure 5.

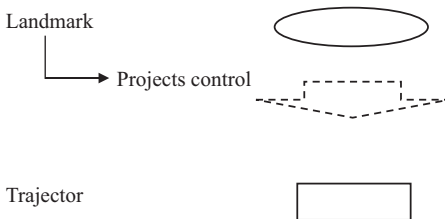


Figure 5: The Control Metaphor.

Since the metaphor is based primarily on the concept of control, and not intentionality, it lends itself to transferring to the landmark both the characteristics of the agent and those of any kind of cause, even inanimate and unintentional. Indeed, inanimate nouns can occur in passive agent phrases with *hupó*+GEN. Remarkably, this prepositional phrase lost its spatial meaning after Homer, hence remaining limited to encoding agent and cause in Classical Greek. This is the opposite of the developments shown by other prepositions, including origin, source and path ones that I have analyzed in the preceding sections. As I have remarked, such prepositions can encode the passive agent with generic and low transitivity verbs or with nominalizations, and require prototypical agents. On the other hand, *hupó*+GEN can occur with all types of verb, regardless of their degree of transitivity, and it is the only prepositional phrase that occurs with change of state verbs; in addition, it also allows non-prototypical agents (see further Luraghi 2000).³

³ In Homer passive agent can also be encoded by *hupó*+DAT. In addition, both with the dative and with the genitive *hupó* can occur in cause expressions and, only with the genitive and after Homer, even in intermediary expressions. See the extensive discussion in Luraghi (2000 and 2003).

6.2 Agents as places?

In standard English, the semantic role of agent with passives is routinely encoded by the preposition *by*. Sporadic examples already occur in Old English, as in (33).

(33) Old English (*Bl. H.* 163.27)

þæt be þære cennendra gewyrhtum þæs bearnes
 that by DEM merits parent DEM child
weorþe ongyten wære be <þyson> eallum
 value understood AUX by DEM all
oðrum mannum
 other man

‘So that, through the merits of the parents, the value of the child might be understood by all these other men.’

The Old English preposition *be/bi* encoded location, as Modern English *by*, and, remarkably, this was its etymological meaning. However, it had already also extended to various other semantic roles, including perlative, cause as in the first occurrence in (33), instrument and intermediary. For this reason, Fraser (1987: 247) assumes that the extension to agent was supported by what he calls “an operation of ‘translation’ or ‘transference’”, largely accounted for by the function of the verbal prefix *be-*, which had an applicative function in Old English.

According to Green (1914: 522), the preposition *be/bi* competed in Middle English not only with *of*, but also with *with* and *to*. Note that *with*, besides the current meaning, also indicated a location nearby someone, that is, it had a spatial meaning similar to *be/bi*. The possible occurrence of *to* in agent phrases can look surprising if one considers its allative meaning, but it must be noted that this preposition also indicated location, like Modern English *at*. In other words, all three prepositions that competed with *of* had a similar locative meaning. Green (1914: 529) assumes that the extension to the agent role was based on the locative meaning of *be/bi*, and highlights the fact that the agent can be conceived as the location at which an event takes place. The possible Location Metaphor, if this interpretation is correct, would then be AGENTS ARE PLACES WHERE EVENTS HAPPEN.

Put in this way, the idea that the extension of *be/bi* to the agent role is based on its locative meaning does not look so unlikely: ultimately, the Location Metaphor is similar to the Origin Metaphor, as the place where an event comes about is in fact its place of origin.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed ways to encode the agent with passive verbs in a number of ancient and modern languages of Europe, concentrating on prepositional phrases that feature prepositions whose basic meaning expresses various spatial semantic roles. I have shown that such prepositions extend to agent through metaphorical processes that map the domain of space onto the domain of agency. Both the Origin and the Source Metaphor are based on spatial relations that involve roles located at the onset of the causal chain as represented in Figure 2. Especially the Source Metaphor is widely attested in agent phrases in the languages discussed in the paper, such as in Latin, Old English, Gothic, Italian, German, Bulgarian, Modern Greek, Old Russian and Old Church Slavonic.

The Origin Metaphor occurs in Ancient Greek and Old English. Path prepositions extend to agent in a two-step process: in the first place, through the Channel Metaphor, they extend to the role of intermediary. Then they may extend to the agent through restriction of the focus on the final segment of the energy transfer. This metaphor is especially present in some Romance languages, such as French and Spanish. Metaphors based on different aspects of the location role are not frequent. I have then described the Control Metaphor, that accounts for the extension of *hupó*+GEN to agent in Ancient Greek, and the Location Metaphor, that likely accounts for the extension of *be/bi* to agent in historical stages of English.

Remarkably, among the languages from which I drew my examples, the ones that display the widest variety of agent expressions are Ancient Greek and Old/Middle English. In Ancient Greek, one can detect a difference that underlies the use of different encoding strategies: while source and origin prepositions can occur only with low transitivity verb, verb with generic meaning and prototypical agents, only *hupó*+GEN occurs with change of state verbs and with all types of agents, including non-prototypical ones. In Old English there may also be a difference between the preposition *fram* that profiles the origin and the preposition *of* that profiles the trajectory, in that the latter preferably occurs with the “static” passive with auxiliary *beon/wesan* ‘be’.

Another difference that has emerged is between agents of passive verbs and agents of action nouns. In Ancient Greek the latter are encoded by *prós*+GEN, an origin prepositional phrase that also encodes behalf beneficiary. In German, passive agent is most often encoded via the source preposition *von* ‘from’ and occasionally by the path preposition *durch* ‘through’ which also encodes intermediary. Only the latter preposition occurs with action nouns. It is worth mentioning that Italian, too, features a special way of encoding the agent of action nouns, with the complex preposition *da parte di*, literally ‘from the side of’, which, similar to Ancient Greek *prós*+GEN, occurs in behalf beneficiary expressions.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
AOR	aorist
ART	article
AUX	auxiliary
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfect
INDEF	indefinite
INF	infinitive
INSTR	instrumental
M/P	medio-passive
NOM	nominative
OPT	optative
PASS	passive
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRF	perfect
PRS	present
PST	past
PTC	particle
PTCP	participle
REFL	reflexive
SG	singular
SUBJ	subjunctive
SUP	superlative
VOC	vocative

Primary sources

Bl. H. = *Blickling Homilies*

Caes. G. = Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*

Hdt. = Herodotus, *Histories*

Il. = Homer, *Iliad*

Luke = *New Testament, Luke's Gospel*

Mark = *New Testament, Mark's Gospel*

Or. = Orosius

Pl. Phaedr. = Plato, *Phaedrus*

Pl. *Phlb.* = Plato, *Philebus*

Purg. = Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*

Rom. = *New Testament, Epistle to the Romans*

Th. = Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Xen. *An.* = Xenophon, *Anabasis*

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