

STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES OF TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE VERBS*Scientific adviser: Shakhlo Khalilova**Student: Rushana Kadirova*

Abstract: The two types of nominalizations differ in various ways. One important distinction can be made by noting the type of verb found in the two nominalizations. The verb in a subject nominalization is intransitive while object nominalizations generally take transitive verbs.

Key words: nominalizations, transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, requirement, information, object

Polzella and Rohrman (1970) and Rohrman (1970) have shown that transitive verbs are more difficult to recall than intransitive verbs. Rohrman (1970) suggests that the recall of nominalizations is influenced by verb transitivity. Specifically, he hypothesizes that the underlying structure of transitive verbs requires that the verb take an object. When transitive verbs are stored in memory, Ss may make covert object responses to meet this structural requirement. Intransitive verbs do not take an object. Therefore, intransitive verbs are seen as psychologically simpler units than transitive verbs since less information needs to be retained when intransitive verbs are stored in memory.

An interesting feature of this hypothesis is that recall differences which are solely a function of verb transitivity should be eliminated when the verbs are paired with object words. If intransitive verbs are psychologically simpler than transitive verbs because the underlying structural properties of the latter require an object response, then forcing Ss to make object responses to both types of verbs should eliminate the intransitive verb recall advantage. Pairing these verbs with words that do not function as objects should have no effect on the intransitive verb recall advantage since the underlying properties of the two verb types do not restrict their relationship to other grammatical classes of words. Notice that these predictions are based on an analysis of the underlying structural properties of transitive and intransitive verbs.

When these verbs are used in nominalizations, the effects of the underlying structural properties may interact with surface structure cues and semantic features of the nominalizations (Rohrman, 1970). However, it should be possible to demonstrate the effects of the underlying structure in the absence of these other factors. Polzella and Rohrman (1970) have already shown that effects of transitive and intransitive verbs in isolation do not depend on the syntactic cues provided by the "ing" endings of the verbs in their gerundive form. The present experiment was designed to investigate the effects of the underlying structural properties of transitive and intransitive verbs, in the absence of semantic and surface structure cues, on recall of structurally organized units. If Rohrman's hypothesis is correct, verb transitivity should interact with the structure of the units to be recalled. The Ss in the present experiment were asked to memorize pairs of items consisting of either a transitive or an intransitive verb paired with a CVC trigram. The trigram either preceded or followed the verb. In order to eliminate surface structure cues, the verbs were in the Infinitive form and the trigrams were not marked plural. To reduce or eliminate semantic features of the pairs of items, CVC trigrams were used in place of real words. It was hypothesized that trigram position would interact with verb transitivity. To the extent that the pairs of items are processed as linguistic units, trigram placement should create different linguistic structures. When trigrams follow the verbs, the objective organization

resembles the underlying structural organization of subject and object nominalizations. When the trigrams precede the verbs, the objective structure resembles a number of different underlying structures, none of which is restricted by verb transitivity. If trigram placement does affect linguistic processing of the items, then recall of intransitive verb items should be superior to recall of transitive verb items when the trigrams precede the verbs. When the trigrams follow the verbs, recall differences between transitive and intransitive verb items should be eliminated. Trigram meaningfulness was orthogonally varied along with the other factors in this experiment. It was hypothesized that the high meaningful trigrams might be more likely to serve as grammatical terms than low meaningful trigrams. If there is an interaction between verb type or trigram placement and meaningfulness, it would suggest that linguistic structure is not independent of semantic features of the items.

METHOD. Ninety-four general psychology subjects fulfilling a course requirement served as Ss. They were tested in eight groups with 11 to 13 Ss each. One S was discarded for failure to follow instructions. Five Ss were selected at random and discarded to achieve an equal number of Ss in each group. The remaining 88 Ss were distributed equally among the four between-group treatment conditions. The mean length and mean frequency of the two lists of verbs were closely matched. The mean association values for the verbs in the two lists did not differ significantly from each other (Polzella & Rohrman, 1970). The 14 trigrams were obtained from Archer (1960). Half of the trigrams were high association value CVCs and half were low association value CVCs. The trigram-verb pairs were typed on 2×2 in slides. On half of the slides, the trigrams preceded the verbs (Pre condition). Trigrams followed the verbs on the remaining slides (Post condition). The stimulus pairs were presented on a screen with a Kodak Carousel slide projector.

Design and Procedure. There were four between-group treatment conditions in this experiment. Subjects saw either transitive or intransitive verbs paired with trigrams which either preceded or followed the verbs. The same trigrams were used in both positions and with both verb types. Meaningfulness of the trigrams was a within-Ss factor. The Ss were given five study-test trials with written free recall on each trial. There was a 4-sec presentation duration and a .45-sec inter-item interval. There was a 2-min recall period. The Ss wrote their responses in a five-page answer booklet. The instructions read to the Ss emphasized that they were to learn the trigrams-verb pairs.

In order to evaluate the possible relationship of response term integration to the treatment conditions, partial responses were examined. A partial response was defined as recall of an incomplete pair or a pair in which one of the members was incorrect. When a verb response was made without the appropriate trigram, meaningfulness was scored with reference to the correct trigram. Table 1 shows mean partial response scores for Verb Type, Trigrams Position, Meaningfulness, and Trials. Partial responding was apparently unrelated to performance on this task. Inspection of Figure 1 shows that over trials transitive verbs were more difficult to recall than intransitive verbs when the verbs were paired with trigrams in the Pre position.

DISCUSSION. The results of the present experiment clearly support the hypothesis that the underlying structure of transitive and intransitive verbs affects recall. The results of previous research designed to investigate the nature of verb transitivity provided only indirect support. What was missing in the earlier research was a convincing demonstration of the effects of the structural features of transitive and intransitive verbs (Rohrman, 1970; Polzella & Rohrman, 1970). These effects have been demonstrated in the present experiment. Rohrman

(1970) and Polzella and Rohrman (1970) have hypothesized that certain lexical features of the base structure of transitive and intransitive verbs have psychological implications. These implications are related to differences in the lexical entries for the two verb types. The lexical entry for transitive verbs generally includes specification of a noun phrase following the verb. The lexical entry for intransitive verbs does not include specification of a noun phrase. This distinction is thought to be psychologically compelling. When Ss see transitive verbs presented in isolation, the Ss make implicit noun responses to satisfy the lexical requirements of the verbs. Since the lexical entry for intransitive verbs does not include a noun phrase, implicit noun responses to these verbs are not required.

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