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LABILE ORDERS AND GRAMMATICAL FUNCTIONS
THE FUNCTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF ONE-ARGUMENT STRUCTURES

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0. *Introduction*

The general aim of this work is to reconsider the relationship between order and the representations of grammatical functions (henceforth GFs). It will be claimed that the traditional view which considers order merely as a dependent variable with respect to functional representations cannot be maintained. Order has traditionally been aprioristically and unproblematically conceived in linguistic theory as a means of coding GFs and/or pragmatic functions. It will be argued here that order can also be studied as an independent variable and that this can help to develop new models for the representation of functional structure. Considering order as an independent variable does not mean, of course, disregarding the role order plays in the grammar, but starting with a preliminary investigation of the properties of order per se and then trying to correlate them with functional representations.

This aim will be pursued through examination of the problems raised by what have been elsewhere defined 'one-argument' structures, that is structures with a verbal operator whose domain is a single argument at some level of representation.[1] Thus the structures that will be taken into account contain either verbs of movement, like It. *andare* "to go", *venire* "to come", or verbs of process, like

[1] Cf. Bernini (1995); Sornicola (1995). The problem of determining the level of representation is interesting. It concerns the difference between the set of properties of a given verbal item as they are represented in its lexico-functional grid and the actual selection of these properties in the syntactic environment in which the verballexeme occurs. In this model the properties of the virtual grid and those of the actual construction may be at variance. As is well known, however, this is not the only possible model for the description of verbal items. For example, one could conceive of as many distinct lexico-functional grids as there are properties of the actual constructions of a given verbal lexeme. This problem concerns us here insofar as the so-called 'pseudo-intransitive' verbs are involved. It should however be kept separate from the problem of the argument representation

suonare "to play (a musical instrument)", *echeggiare* "to echo", *fiorire* "to flower" as well as verbs of saying in the construction (or in the lexico-functional grid) with a single argument. These lexical classes share the property of being intransitive, but they can be divided into different subclasses, according to the syntactic properties expressed in the phrasal codification of the single argument (as in the distinction between ergative and unaccusative verbs in generative grammar) or according to the semantic properties of Animacy and Agentivity, as in current typological research. Other structures that can be considered 'mono-argumental' are those with reflexive-intransitive and passive verbs.

An interesting property shared by these verb classes is 'labile order',[2] meaning that the relative order of the verb and its single argument is highly unstable, oscillating according to a combination of factors (cf. Section 3.). This property is typologically conditioned with respect to basic word-order (cf. Section 3.). It will be argued that in languages with labile order of one-argument structures such a property poses a serious challenge to the determination of the underlying functional representation. It can be interpreted as an indication of either neutralization of the GFs Subject (S) and Object (O) or of an underlying distinct GF, which is neither S nor O.

1. *The problem of the representation of order*

Since the XIXth century order has been conceived of as a notion partly related to syntax and partly related to what would now be defined 'pragmatics'. Yet there has been no consensus as to how the relation between the two levels should be framed with respect to order. To the extent that formalist models have defined pragmatic factors in terms of syntactic structure, they have always emphasized the importance of the syntactic (structural) level. Functionalist models, on the other hand, have always underlined the need for an integrated representation or interplay of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels.

This notion of 'interplay' has been expressed variously. One of the ideas that has received wide consensus is that languages vary according to the different degrees of influence that syntactic and pragmatic factors exert; this has led to a distinction between languages with syntactic vs. pragmatic Word Order (WO).

The model proposing an interplay of syntax and pragmatics in patterns of order should not be taken for granted as an uncontroversial *a priori*, one reason being that the precise shape it must assume is a problem per se.

What most interests us here is the fact that in both formalist and functionalist

of verbs in structures like reflexives and passives.

[2] I use here Daneš' terminology (cf. Daneš 1967).

descriptions order is seen as the realization of a more abstract property. However, formalist models express such a property in terms of syntax, while functionalist models express it in terms of semantics. In both cases order is thought of as a dependent variable. But if we consider order as an independent variable at the outset, it soon emerges that the correlation of order and the more abstract functional representations (whatever they may be) is more difficult.

'Order' is not a unitary concept, but has multiple 'strata' which it would be appropriate to distinguish:

(a) Order as a non-linear relation between arguments of the verb: in this meaning one refers to 'first' or 'second' argument of the verb.
(b) Order as a combinatory relationship between at least two constituents. This is not necessarily a linear relationship as the notion of 'combination' implies only a constructional link. Obviously, this model is concerned with a level at which argument structure has been mapped onto constituent structure.
(c) Order as a set of positions, each characterized by a relational property defined in terms of the overall syntactic configuration. This notion implies linearity and concerns the realization of GFs.
(d) Order as an actual sequence of constituents. This notion also implies linearity, though it concerns the level of the utterance, whereas the notion in (c) concerns the structure of the sentence.

At the level of the sentence any given pattern of order involves the three notions (a)-(c), while at the level of the utterance it involves the four notions (a)-(d).

2. *Some methodological and theoretical assumptions*

Let us now make some of the assumptions of the present work more explicit. The first assumption is that in order to obtain plausible 'descriptions' the range of structures that are associated with a given order must be constrained. For example, here the concern is with 'order' in structures with a one-argument predicate.

A second assumption is that order has to be conceived of as a complex of notions which can be analysed along the lines of (a)-(d). Furthermore, there are regularities in order that may not emerge if the notion of order is considered merely a dependent variable, i. e. as a means of codifying GFs.

A third assumption is that the study of principles of order cannot only be tackled at level of abstraction related to the analysis of a given structure, but that it requires close scrutiny of data from corpora of real texts. For example, in recent generative models it has been claimed that structures with unergative or unaccusative verbs behave differently in terms of order, i.e. that the lexical properties of one-argument verbs determine the patterns of order in which such verbs may

appear. Yet the actual patterns of order which are found for one-argument structures diverge in an interesting way from what is expected at the level of the theoretical description of properties of order that realize the basic GFs. These divergences are consistent and merit proper description and account, they cannot be explained simply by pragmatic factors. The properties of order we will deal with are not the mere reflex of performance facts, but indicate more general relational properties.

3. *Constructions with one-argument verb and 'Labile Orders'*

In Romance and Slavonic languages, intransitives, reflexive-intransitives and reflexive verb constructions tend towards the labile VS order. Close investigation of Italian has drawn a clear division between two-argument (S, O) structures and one-argument structures (cf. Bernini 1995; Sornicola 1994; Sornicola 1995). The former have strong WO stability for different text types and moderate variability with respect to pragmatic function effect, while the latter as a whole show labile patterns with an almost equal probability of SV/VS which applies to spoken rather than written texts (cf. Sornicola 1995, for an examination of Italian and Spanish). Oscillations of the ideal balance of SV = 50%, VS = 50% depend on the type of one-argument construction, the type of text and pragmatic factors such as thematicisation vs focalisation, backgrounding and foregrounding. However, individual data show that certain semantic factors cause a considerable shift of the equiprobable distribution of SV and VS. These are the lexical class of the verb, its '*Aktionsart*' features and the value of the Animacy feature of S. Certain verbs which denote a change of state (for example, *apparire* "to appear", *crescere* "to grow", *aumentare* "to increase") are associated with the VS pattern at a much higher rate than 50%. Verbs with the feature [+Durative] tend to occur with the SV pattern, while verbs with the feature [+Punctual] are more frequently associated with a VS pattern (cf. Sornicola 1994:36-37). The Animacy value of S is very important: in both Italian and Spanish one-argument verbs constructed with an NP (S) [-Animate] occur with VS pattern in a high percentage of cases (cf. Sornicola 1995).

The factor of Inanimacy is strictly correlated with the 'eventive' value often associated with structures with VS order: the entire construction describes an event or process without an agent, with the constituent with the GF S having the semantic and syntactic properties typical of an O: this is semantically involved in the process as a Patient and the position to the right of V may be considered a sort of syntactic incorporation of N to V (cf. *brucia la casa* lit. "burns the house", i. e. "the house is burning", *maturano le mele* lit. "ripen the apples", "the apples are ripening", etc.

The asymmetry between two-argument and one-argument structures and 'labile orders' are typologically conditioned. SVO languages in fact show greater asymmetry than VSO and SOV languages suggesting that there are structural reasons which contribute significantly to determining the division (cf. Sornicola 1999).

4. *Stability, instability and argument structure*

Stability does not depend on transitivity or intransitivity of the verb, but on a property of argument structure, i. e. the occurrence of two arguments. A piece of evidence for this is the fact that both structures with a two-argument intransitive verb and structures with agentive passive are stable with respect to order (i. e. they show almost no oscillation in patterns of order), as are structures with two-argument transitive verbs.

It is possible that the presence of labile patterns SV, VS is related to a probabilistic rule: in a statistical examination of Czech texts Uhlířová (1969) has demonstrated that there is a correlation not only between the number of constituents in a sentence and the number of possible patterns of order it may have, but also between the number of constituents in a sentence and the degree of oscillation between one pattern and another. That is, increasing the number of constituents increases the rigidity of WO, while decreasing the number of constituents decreases the rigidity of WO.

This suggests that the 'lighter' a given structure is the more unstable it is and the heavier it is the more stable.

5. *The relationship between order and GFs*

But how is instability of order in one-argument structures to be accounted for? Several hypotheses can be made concerning the various notions of order listed under (a)-(d) above.

Oscillation of the single argument (let us call it 'x') between the two positions, one on the left and one on the right of V, suggests that there is a 'virtual space' in the sentence whose shape is determined by the typological properties of two-argument structures. The frame of the 'virtual space' must have at least two distinct virtual positions for 'x1' and 'x2', i. e. each position corresponds to a possible site for one of the arguments. One may suppose that what is constant within the variation of the sentence type is not the GFs but the structure of the virtual space of the sentence; in other words, topological or spatial properties remain unaltered, while relational or functional properties are variable, as we shall see shortly (cf. Section 7.).

However, instability poses the problem of the relationship between GFs and order as a means of codification. As two-argument sentences are characterized by

stable order and one-argument sentences by unstable order, can we argue that order functions in a different way in different sentence structures? Two possibilities may be considered:

a) The properties of order diverge in two-argument and one-argument structures, but this does not effect determination of the functional representations of the latter, i. e. GFs remain unaltered with respect to variation in argument structure and order. In this scenario we have three formal properties of order and two GFs. The three formal properties could be expressed by formulas (1)-(3) below:

(1) *x1* V

(2) V x2

(3) 

(1) and (2) are related to the complex property of stability, which can be defined in the following way: 'the canonical position of the argument x1 is before the verb; the canonical position of the argument x2 is after the verb'. (3) is related to the property of instability; it states that *x* may occur either before or after the verb, with no canonical position, at least in the sense of (1) and (2).

We then have to map the properties expressed in (1)-(3) onto the set of GFs. As is clear, (1) correlates with S, (2) with O. Consequently, the problem arises of how to determine the GF that corresponds to (3). It could be claimed that this is either S or O – the solution that has been proposed in generative treatments, in which S and O coexist at different levels of representation.

But on the basis of what criterion do we identify the single argument of the verb as S or O? In generative models some structural tests have been established to assign the single argument x the GF S or O (cf., for example, Burzio 1986). Neither of them, however, is conclusive and – above all – neither seems to be cross-linguistically valid (cf. Sornicola 1999).

It may be possible to resort to 'external' criteria, that is to other means of codification, like Agreement or – in languages provided with it – morphological Case. Yet the relationship of either Agreement or Case (or both) to functional representations is not unproblematic, in that the very nature of these 'phenomena' is far from clear (for a concise presentation of the problems involved in analysis of the two phenomena, cf. Anderson 1994; Corbett 1994). Another difficulty is the fact that the relationship itself should be expressed as a necessary rather than a sufficient condition. For example, – as far as Indo-European languages are concerned – in order to assign the GF S to a given constituent, it must necessarily trigger the Agreement feature of the verb, or, in languages like German and Russian, it must necessarily be case-marked Nominative. However, the claim that it is sufficient for such a constituent to have either or both of these properties in order to be identified as S seems to be too strong, in that in the languages in question Agreement and/or Case are morphological features that must always be assigned.

Whatever the solution to this problem, it seems clear that in this scenario order is 'deprived of its authority' as a means of determining the functional representations of one-argument structures.

b) The properties of order diverge in two-arguments and one-argument structures and the GFs diverge too. In this scenario three different formal properties correspond to three different functions, i. e. there is a one-to-one mapping of form into function. These functions, which for the time being are named S, O and X respectively can be correlated with properties of order in the following way:

(1') x1 V		S
(2')	V x2	O
(3')	V	X
	x	

This seems intuitively plausible – at least as far as the level of an abstract (i.e. oppositional or formal) representation of GFs is concerned. As a matter of fact, the function S as defined in transitive sentences, or – more generally – in two-argument sentences, is in syntagmatic opposition[3] to another function (i. e., O or, more generally, the second argument of the verb), while the function of the single argument of the verb in one-argument structures is not opposed to anything else in the sentence (cf. Section 7.).

The idea that GFs remain constant across sentence types has long been established in the Western grammatical tradition.[4] For example, the notion of 'Subject' has been used for both one of the two arguments of a transitive verb and the single argument of an intransitive verb. This view has been revised in the last decades with the increase in empirical/descriptive studies of so-called 'ergative-absolutive languages' and the development of a theoretical debate about 'grammatical function'. Neither of these threads of research, however, has been conclsive. For example, no consensus has been reached in typological studies on whether the function S corresponds to the constituent which is marked by Ergative (Erg) Case or to the constituent which is marked by Absolutive (Abs) Case. It has also been suggested

[3] For the notion of 'syntagmatic opposition' cf. De Groot (1939) and Kuryłowicz (1964:18ff.).

[4] A few notable deviations from the mainstream may be noted, as in theX1Xth century doctrine of 'thetic' and 'categorical' sentences. This, however, was a philosophical rather than a linguistic doctrine and although it has occasionally been adopted in linguistic circles, its reformulation in linguistic terms seems problematic.

that (S, O) and (Erg, Abs) are different subsets of GFs. The crux of these analyses seems to lie in the central role which has been assigned to case-marking.

Generative studies have approached the difficulty by adopting a universal inventory of GFs – like S and O – and the interaction of multiple layers of syntactic representations. Each of these determine different relational representations. Given that different positions determine different GFs, a given constituent may be positionally S at some level of representation and positionally O at another level of representation. However, the choice here is restricted to a constituent being either S or O or both. There seems to be a sort of circularity in the correlation of linear and functional properties. Other theories that have tried to investigate this correlation have postulated a set of universal GFs which are to a certain extent independent of sentence structure.

The problem discussed so far may prove to be a thorny one. Witness Hjelmslev's authoritative view that (Hjelmslev 1935-1937:48):

> les définitions présupposées par la théorie syntaxique peuvent être de deux espèces seulement. Ou bien les 'termes de la phrase' sont d'ordre extra-linguistique, étant définis sans égard à l'expression par la langue. Ou bien la théorie constitue un cercle vicieux, en définissant d'abord implicitement les termes de phrase par le cas qui les expriment, et ensuite explicitement les cas par les termes de phrase.

6. *Oppositional conceptions in syntax*

GFs are purely relational concepts. They must be defined independently from both Semantic Roles and the level of realization where phenomena like Agreement and morphological Case appear. The independent level at which GFs must be defined is properly relational in that it is differential and oppositional in the structuralist sense. This view differs from approaches which define GFs primarily according to their coding and behavioural properties (cf. Keenan 1976, some of the contributions in Plank 1984 or, in a different way, generative treatments) as well as from approaches which define them as primitives of linguistic theory (cf. Perlmutter 1983; Perlmutter & Rosen 1984). Closer to the structuralist tradition is the definition of theoretical units in terms of differential or oppositional relations. As is well known, this idea was used in both phonology and syntax in seminal works by De Groot (1939), Jakobson (1936), Kuryłowicz (1964). These scholars, however, preferred to explore the paradigmatic/syntagmatic dimension of Case rather than Grammatical Functions. This is a crucial choice, which may have been prompted by the desire to investigate language-specific properties and to avoid pseudo-universal linguistic notions.[5]

The view maintained here is that – regardless of whether in current empirical studies of individual languages one starts with the analysis of forms or functions and regardless of the direction of the correlation itself between form and function – there must be a level at which GFs are defined in terms of differential and oppositive notions. It is presumably at this level that a definition of GFs should be sought that is neither circular nor external to language-specific properties.

As at other levels of analysis, Bühler's distinction between '*Systembedingt*' and '*Feldbedingt*' oppositions is useful here, although it must be admitted that the nature of syntactic relations casts it into a particular mould. In fact, *Feldbedingt* have a logical priority over *Systembedingt* oppositions, i. e. the latter are derived from the former.

6.1 *Substantive vs. formal aspects in the definition of GFs*

GFs may be defined as a subset of the syntagmatic relations which are established between V and its arguments. A distinction between substantive and formal aspects of such relations should be made here. As to their substance, GFs may be defined in terms of determination. For example, the functions S and O can both be defined in terms of their relationship with V, with the constituents carrying the functions S and O the determining elements and V the determined element. O may be defined as the first determining argument and S the second determining argument This model is an attempt to represent the fact that the relationship between V and O is closer than that between V and S. As is well known, this relational asymmetry is reflected in a number of properties of realization in the languages of the world. On the other hand, the relationship between V and its arguments can be expressed in terms of 'linking'. No syntagmatic relationship can be established between x = S and x = O unless through V. Both S and O are thus relationships that V imposes on its two arguments at the level of syntagmatic representations. Note that while GFs imply morpho-syntactic coding, arguments do not.

The notion of determination pertains to both semantics and syntax. Though not in itself linear, it is inherently syntagmatic, i. e. it concerns the combinatory/associative dimension.[6] It also pertains to semantics in that it deals with the general meaning of syntagmatic relations. This is to be understood as the most general property fixing the conditions for syntactic/contextual modifications of the meanings of lexical items carrying a given function, as well as those of lexical items carrying the linking function.[7]

[5] This preoccupation was expressed, for example, by Hjelmslev (1935-1937:48-50).

[6] Linearity and syntagmatics can in fact be conceived of as different notions.

[7] Note that in traditional theories of syntagmatic relations determination has often been associated with 'abstract Case' (cf., for example, Hjelmslev 1935-1937). This depends on the choice of starting point for a model of syntagmatic relations.

As far as the formal dimension is concerned, GFs may be defined in terms of the set of differential (oppositional) relationships they establish with respect to other GFs. These are defined at a distinct level from that of the relationship between V and the arguments of V. In fact, while the latter are of first rank (let us call them 'primary syntagmatic relationships'), the relationships between GFs defined at the first rank are of second rank (let us call them 'secondary syntagmatic relationships'). Functional representations thus need to be defined at two levels: primary relationships are contextual, while secondary relationships are systemic. This seems to be an important property of functional representations and one that differentiates them from constituent representations. In fact, syntagmatic relationships between constituents are defined over sets of elements, while syntagmatic relationships between functions are defined over sets whose elements are themselves relationships.[8] At the formal (systemic) level each GF is differentially defined with respect to the others.

The above discussion implies that at the secondary (i. e. systemic) level GFs always need a syntagmatic environment to be differentially defined. This can be either 'intra-sentential' or 'cross-sentential'. An example of intra-sentential opposition is that between S and O, two functions which can be in opposition within one and the same sentence structure. Examples of cross-sentential oppositions are those between GFs that can never occur in the same environment, i. e. in the same sentence structure, such as O of a transitive sentence and S of a passive sentence. As is obvious, however, the environments of cross-sentential oppositions can be defined in terms of transformationally interrelated structures.[9]

Traditional generative models have used cross-sentential oppositions for representations of the same structure at different levels. This treatment is consistent with traditional models of American structuralism which describe phonemes as alternating sound patterns which correlate with morpho-phonological representations at different levels. In both phonemic and syntactic representations two crucial principles hold: (a) the principle of multi-layered representations of theoretical entities, be they units or relationships; (b) the principle of subjacent representations containing different structures or relationships that are transformationally interrelated to subsequent representations.

7. *What is the function of the single argument of one-argument structures?*

We should now try to define the function of the single argument of one-argument structures. Let us denote such a function 'X'. At least three alternative solutions may be envisaged in addition to that discussed in previous sections (i. e. X is a variant which is related to both S and O at different levels of representation):

(a) S and X are variants of the same function;

(b) O and X are variants of the same function;

(c) X is a function distinct from both S and O.

The problem of choosing between these alternative solutions is similar to the traditional phonological problem of assigning allophonic variants to a given phoneme (cf. the excellent historical overview of this problem in Anderson 1985). As is well known, the solution which was adopted by European structuralism is that two phones form a phonological opposition if and only if they have a differential functioning, i. e. if and only if the result of the commutation test in minimal pairs they set up is positive. But what kind of test can we conceive of to decide whether X is a variant of either S or O, or a separate function? Is a commutation test possible for GFs?

A few difficulties arise here. Although theoretically interesting, the parallels between phonology and syntax may not be that close. First of all, in phonology the opposed units are primarily constituents each forming a segment of one of the members of the commuting pair and only secondarily forming differential relationships at the systemic level, whereas in syntax the opposed units are themselves relationships, which then at the systemic level form second rank relationships. A second difficulty is the fact that in phonology the commutation test always works with units belonging to the same class or category.

Neither difficulty is unsolvable. As regards the first, we can accept the commutation test for functions with the proviso that:

(a) the commuting units are not 'constituents' but relationships which are defined in a given structural context;

(b) the structural context is either intra-sentential or cross-sentential.

As to the second difficulty, the condition of 'sameness' of class or category could be satisfied in terms of the class of syntagmatic relationships which are defined in specified syntactic structures.

However, what seems relevant to the parallel between phonological and syntactic oppositions is that in both cases a principle of 'maximal functional differentiation' of two units may be adopted. This principle is grounded in the relative value of the physical differences between units: there being no absolute criterion for the discrimination of units into classes, the maximal difference between two

[8] The primary relationships of GFs may be considered similar to the syntagmatic relationships between constituents. As a matter of fact, both cases concern relations between elements.

[9] This was also Kuryłowicz's proposal (cf. Kuryłowicz 1964, ch. 1).

actual units (i. e. the difference that is amenable to their assignment to different classes) is the one that has the functional power of discriminating the meanings of the broader contexts, namely words in phonology and sentences in syntax. This is what guarantees the perceptual discrimination of differences by listeners. Maximal differences are thus rooted in the functioning of units in context, as well as in the action of meaning and perceptual factors.

Though the application of the commutation test to the study of syntactic oppositions poses a few problems, the general principle of maximal differentiation is the same in phonology and syntax. All languages of the world seem to have realizational means (be they coding and/or behavioural means) of discriminating the first determinant of V from the second.[10]

The principle of maximal differentiation allows the distinction of a pair of sentences such as

(4) John loves Mary
S V O

(5) Mary loves John
S V O

To the extent that GFs are always relationally defined with respect to the context, the opposition of GFs requires that syntactic minimal pairs be always couples of sentences. In order to commute GFs, one must consider not only two positions, but two lexically-realized sentence structures.

The isomorphism of phonological and syntactic oppositions suggests that neutralization can be considered as a model for functional representation of the single argument. In fact, properties like Order, Case and Agreement can be conceived of as realization features of GFs, which parallel distinctive features of phonological theories. For example, the patterns of order __V/V__[11] can be considered the two variants of the feature 'Order', in the same way as the feature 'Voicing' can be specified as either [+Voiced] or [-Voiced] in phonology. In SVO languages, the two variants of the feature 'Order' are the distinctive markers of the functions S and O respectively. Labile orders can thus be conceived of as markers signalling that the opposition of S and O is neutralized in the context of one-argument structures. The following empirical facts, already mentioned in Section 3, are of particular interest:

(a) In one-argument structures either of the two patterns __V/V__ may occur.
(b) The occurrence of either pattern depends on textual features of the environment (for example, thematization vs. rhematization, lexical properties of the verb, lexical properties of the argument of the verb; cf. Sornicola 1995). This constitutes a close parallel with phonology, where allophonic variants are often determined by the phonological environment.
(c) The statistical equi-distribution of the two variants in spontaneous spoken language is further evidence that the choice of either pattern is random in those conditions in which textual features are balanced (i. e. there is no bias towards a particular textual or contextual feature).

An alternative but equivalent treatment would be to employ the model of 'under-representation' of features in a given environment, which is typical of American phonological theories. In the context of one-argument structures, the single argument presents an under-representation with respect to Order features, i. e. its functional representation is the sum of Order features of both S and O.

Whatever the model may be – neutralization or under-representation – context plays a fundamental role, to the extent that the opposition of GFs collapses in a given environment.[12]

This picture seems to fit one of the four cases of neutralization described by Trubetzkoy, i. e. the case in which both members of the opposition represent the archiphoneme.[13] In such a situation, in fact, one of the variants occurs in a given environment while the other occurs in a different environment.

The difficulty with the neutralization model is that the opposition of S and O would be neutralized only with respect to the feature Order, while features like Agreement and Case may – in some languages – keep their role of realization markers of the opposition. Thus S and O would not be fully neutralized. It may be decided that X is a variant of either S or O, a conclusion which seems unsatisfactory as far as the level of functional representation is concerned.

On the other hand, if one starts with the analysis of functional representations, the following network of differential features emerges:

S = the function which is syntactically opposed to O in transitive structures;
O = the function which is syntactically opposed to S in transitive structures;
X = the function which is not opposed to any other function in intransitive (or intransitive-like) structures.

As is clear, this approach is from function to form. The criterion according to which S and O are differentially defined in the same structural environment sup-

[10] I will not pursue this point here. For a discussion of typological properties of order related to S and O in the languages of Europe, cf. Sornicola (1999).
[11] This notation must be read as 'the position preceding V' vs. 'the position following V'.
[12] The European model employs the principle of maximal functional differentiation, while the American model makes use of the properties of the formal representation.
[13] Cf. Trubetzkoy ([1939:79-83] and especially 82).

ports the conclusion that X is a distinct function in cross-sentential opposition to both S and O. At the realization level, evidence of this is that X does not have the typical coding properties of asymmetry that S and O have. In this model labile orders are seen not as the bearers of a neutralization of the opposition between S and O, but as a structural consequence of the fact that the principle of maximal functional differentiation simply cannot apply in one argument structures.

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