
Basic Voice Patterns in Tarascan (P'orhepecha)

FERNANDO NAVA AND RICARDO MALDONADO

1 Introduction*

This paper has two goals: to provide a basic description of middle voice patterns in Tarascan, and to propose a nonderivative interpretation of middle constructions. The proposal will be restricted to a variety of languages that need not have the transitive two-participant construction as the only source for event construal. Based on Tarascan middles the paper will also question the general assumption that middles derive from reflexives. Tarascan or P'orepecha, as named by its native speakers, is a Mesoamerican isolated language spoken in the State of Michoacan, Mexico. Tarascan is well known for having an intricate locative system (Friedrich 1970, 1971; Le Cron Foster 1969). As we will show, the Tarascan middle voice system parallels in some respects the complexities of locatives since middles cover a wide variety of spatial situations and overlaps with locatives for an important subclass of the system.

Middle constructions depict actions, events, or states pertaining to the subject's own sphere. It contrasts with active-direct voice in that it

*We would like to thank Verónica Vázquez, Enrique Palancar and Margaret Lubbers for their comments in several steps of our analysis. Above all we want to thank Matt Shibatani for those great fights with beer and wine over middle voice matters.

designates a process remaining in the subject's realm instead of being projected to another participant. 'The middle voice shows that the action is performed with special reference to the subject' (Smyth 1956: 390); in Benveniste's words the subject 'is indeed inside the process of which he is the agent' (1950: 149). Voice patterns reflect situation types (Kemmer 1993, 1994). The transitive active corresponds to situations where two participants (most commonly agent and patient) interact. In contrast, middle voice marking corresponds to situation types implying only the subject. The middle construction focuses on the subject's dominion (Maldonado 1992, 1999).

Most current analyses of middle constructions tend to analyze middles as deriving from a transitive construction via a reflexive construction. The analysis is well motivated since there are clear cases in which the transitive is the unmarked construction. Grooming verbs tend to be seen as clear examples of middles deriving from transitive roots. Spanish is not exceptional in using a reflexive marker to depict the middle/reflexive construction:

- (1) a. *Gloria peinó a Adrián.*
'Gloria combed Adrián's hair.'
b. *Adrián se peinó*
Adrian MID combed
'Adrián combed himself.' (A. Combed his hair)

The relationship between middle and reflexive markers is evident: both construction types refer to the clausal subject. Yet there are important differences between them. Reflexives involve an action where agent and patient are coreferential. Middles refer to actions or states only involving the subject. The distinction can be observed in the well-known Russian contrast provided by Haiman (1983: 796). Example (2a) is reflexive while (2b) is middle:

- (2) a. *on utomil sebja* b. *on utomil-sja*
he exhausted RFLX he exhausted-MID
'He exhausted himself.' 'He grew weary.'

Kemmer (1993, 1994) analyzes the contrast in terms of degree of distinguishability. While in the reflexive construction agent and patient can be distinguished, in the middle there is no split representation of the subject. Kemmer has rightly suggested that the fact that the event remains in one participant determines a low degree of event elaboration. Since the subject's

- b. *Me imagino que no quieres ir a la fiesta*
 MID imagine that not want go to the party
 'I imagine you don't want to go to the party.'

In the reflexive (3a), my dancing takes place in an image located in the mental space of my imagination. In the middle (3b), there is only a mental experience occurring inside the subject with no additional mental space. The middle is obtained with no distinction among participants. In a similar fashion, Lehman (1995) conceives a long derivation path for the emergence of middles: object > reflexive > impersonal > middle. However, the necessary link between impersonal and middle markers is not commonly attested in languages with a middle voice system. In languages where middles and impersonals coexist it is not clear that the impersonal construction constitutes a precondition for middles. Moreover, as this paper provides evidence, the middle may be the base form for deriving other constructions, especially the reflexive.

In this paper we propose that there may be more than one rationale for the existence of the middle construction. While reflexives may be the source for middles in languages whose prototypical event is the transitive construction, for other languages events involving only one participant may be the starting point to derive other constructions. In this language type the middle may be more basic than the reflexive construction. In fact, the middle may be a basic construction in Klaiman's (1991) sense that needs not derive from other constructions and may be the source for the emergence of less prototypical constructions in that language. We will show that in Tarascan the middle voice construction is a basic construction; thus it does not derive from either the transitive or the reflexive construction. We will also show that middles are in equipollent contrast with transitive constructions and in an important number of classes it constitutes a precondition for reflexive constructions. The reflexive will thus be defined as a marked construction deriving either from the transitive or the middle construction.

The idea that middles may not derive from reflexives has already been pointed out by Manny (2000) for Modern Greek, and by Maldonado (1988, 1992) for Spanish. In some cases it may derive from intransitive verbs. It is well known that middles easily overlap with intransitives since both construction types involve one participant (Kemmer 1993). What in some languages is expressed with an intransitive verb, in others may take a middle marker. The contrast of English with other languages is well known. Middle markers are represented in bold face:

- (4) English *wash*
 Latin *lavo-r*
 Spanish *lavar-se*

Spanish illustrates this phenomenon in finer detail. A vast number of middle constructions, as in (5a), can only be derived from the intransitive verb, as in (5b). This can be observed from the ungrammaticality of (5c-d), where neither the transitive nor the reflexive counterpart exist:

- (5) a. *Juan se cayó al piso*
 Juan MID fell down to the floor
 'Juan fell down on the floor.'
 b. *Juan cayó al piso*
 'Juan fell on the floor.'
 (5) c. **Juan cayó a Pedro*
 'Juan fell Pedro down.'
 d. **Juan se cayó a sí mismo*
 Juan RFLX fell to his self.'
 'Juan fell himself down.'

The systematic contrast between middles and intransitives is quite productive in Spanish. *Voltear-se* 'turn'; *subir-se* 'get on'; *bajar-se* 'get down from'; *morir-se* 'die'; and so on, as well as many other middles have an intransitive counterpart. The middle construction in Spanish depicts dynamic readings of abruptness and counterexpectations that contrast with intransitives in an absolute construal (Langacker 1991b; Maldonado 1988, 1992, 1999).

Now the Tarascan data offers important evidence that the middle construction does not derive from either the transitive or the reflexive construction and that it constitutes a basic coding pattern. The paper is organized in the following manner: Section 2 offers basic Tarascan structural information, Section 3 provides the basic middle patterns of Tarascan, while the last section draws general conclusions about middle patterns and shows how those patterns are also attested in other unrelated languages.

2 Tarascan Structure

There are two types of verb stems in Tarascan: free and dependent. In free stems the infinitive and the inflection markers occur immediately after the verb stem as in (6a-b):

- (6) a. *jú-ni*
cough-INF
'cough'
- b. *Dora jú-s-Ø-ti*
Dora cough-PERF-PRES-IND-3
'Dora coughed.'

In contrast, dependent stems require a derivative morpheme preceding either the infinitive or the inflexion markers. Examples (7b-c) have the derivative morpheme *-ra*, thus avoiding the ungrammaticality of the infinitive directly adjoining to the verb as in (7a):

- (7) a. **wé-ni*
go out-INF
- b. *wé-ra-ni*
out-MID-INF
'go out'
- c. *wé-ra-s-Ø-ti*
go out-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
'He has gone out'

As we will show below, the derivative marker is in most cases a middle marker as is *-ra* in (7b-c).

In Tarascan there are clear contrasts between active, passive, and middle constructions. The passive marker *-nha* in (8b) contrasts with an unmarked transitive stem *patsa* 'put away' as in (8a):

- (8) a. *Dora patsa-s-Ø-ti* *Marcosì-ìri tekechu-ni*
Dora keep-PERF-PRES-IND.3 Marcos-GEN horse-OBJ
'Dora put away Marcos' horse'
- b. *Marcosì-ìri tekechu patsa-nha-s-Ø-ti* (**Dora-ni jimpo*)
Marcos-GEN horse keep-PASS-PERF-PRES-IND.3 Dora-OBJ by
'Marcos' horse has been put away (*by Dora)'

Transitive constructions involve either root transitive stems or neutral stems made transitive by a causative marker. Active-causatives and middles also show a clear contrast. The stem *tixa* 'light' shows that the contrast between an active-causative and a middle construction is determined by the use of either a causative marker as *-ta* in (9a) or by a middle suffix as *-ra* in (9b):

- (9) a. *tata Pánfilu chkári-ni tixa-ta-s-Ø-ti*
HON Pánfilo wood-OBJ light-ACT-PERF-PRES-IND. 3
'Don Pánfilo lit the wood.'
- b. *chkári tixa-ra-s-Ø-ti*
wood light-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
'The wood lit up.'

Finally, active-transitive and reflexive constructions also show a clear contrast. Reflexives are most commonly obtained by marking the stem with the suffix *-kurhi*, as shown in (10b):

- (10) a. *Marcosì* *Dora-ni* *exe-s-Ø-ti*
 Marcos Dora-obj see-perf-pres-ind.3
 ‘Marcos saw Dora’
- b. *Marcosì* *exe-kurhi-s-Ø-ti*
 Marcos see-rflx-perf-pres-ind.3
 ‘Marcos saw himself’

3 Middle Voice Classes

Middle voice in Tarascan is marked by a whole set of middle markers covering at least three semantic spaces: attributive predications, locative events, and what we call ‘basic events’ which, roughly speaking, involve some interaction between participants. To be emphasized is the fact that the middle marker depicts complex meanings. First, it designates that the event happens in the subject’s dominion. Second, it depicts a more specific meaning (location, position, attribute, and so on). In contrast with languages having a middle system Tarascan is atypical in having more than one middle marker. In principle these forms could simply be viewed as plain intransitive markers providing different types of semantic information. Yet there are two important reasons to consider them as middle markers: i) they all conform to situations naturally falling in the subjects dominion; ii) the type of meanings they mark correspond to the situation types normally marked by middle markers in the languages that have such a system. Thus in viewing these markers as middles, we provide a systematic representation of an apparently chaotic list of assorted meanings.² The three main middle classes for Tarascan are now shown. In (11) a dependent stem must take the middle marker *-pi* to designate a spontaneous change of state where *itsì* ‘water’ takes a new attribute:

- (11) *itsì* *ura-pi-s-Ø-ti*
 water white-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘The water became white’

²We thank Bernard Comrie, Orin Gensler, John Haiman, Martin Haspelmath, and John Hawkins at the Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig for a very fruitful discussion on this matter.

In the case of locative events, the middle marker depicts a location within the subject's dominion. The middle construction in (12b) contrasts with the intransitive independent verb in (12a):

- (12) a. *Dora incha-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora enter-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'Dora has entered (into some location).'
- b. *Dora incha-nharhi-s-Ø-ti* *chkúri*
 Dora enter-forehead-PERF-PRES-IND.3 leaf
 'A leaf went into Dora's eyes.'

As for basic events we provide an example of a dependent stem where the middle is in equipollent contrast with the active construction. As in (11), the middle in (13b) depicts a spontaneous change-of-state:

- (13) a. *Dora jeya-rhi-s-Ø-ti* *enanti-ni*
 Dora squeeze-ACT-PERF-PRES-IND.3 guayaba-OBJ
 'Dora squeezed the guayaba.'
- b. *enanti jeya-kurhi-s-Ø-ti*
 guayaba squeeze-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'The guayaba got squeezed.'

The contrast between middle and reflexive constructions is again attested by functions depicted by the suffix *-kurhi*: with a dependent stem it designates a middle construction as in (13b). Notice, however, that when *-kurhi* marks a free stem such as *kwakani* 'get wet' in (14b), a self-directed reflexive event is encoded:

- (14) a. *sapi kwaka-s-Ø-ti*
 boy get wet-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'The boy got wet (from the rain).'
- b. *sapi kwaka-kurhi-s-Ø-ti*
 boy getwet-REFL-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'The boy got himself wet'

4 The Basic Nature of Middle Markers

The three main classes of middle constructions and the derivative character of reflexives is now addressed. We will analyze the behavior of each middle class separately.

4.1 Predicative (PRED) Middles

Predicative middle markers such as *-pi*, *-mi*, *-xi*, and so on mostly take dependent stems. They designate attributes such as ‘smell’ *-mi*, texture, shape, consistency, or color as *-pi*-in (15):

- (15) *siranta ch'era-pi-s-Ø-ti*
 paper wrinkle-PRED.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘The paper got/is wrinkled.’

Now in order to have an active transitive-causative³ construction, the causative marker *-ra* must be added after the middle marker *-pi*, as in (16). The transitive construction is thus derived from the middle, not the middle from the transitive:

- 16) *itsi siranta-ni ch'era-pe-ra-s-Ø-ti*
 water paper-OBJ wrinkle-PRED.MID-CAUS-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘The water wrinkled the paper.’

Further evidence of the same situation is exemplified in (17). The middle suffix *-ki*, designates ‘good quality, matureness’ and other attributes. In the active transitive construction (17b) the middle marker must be preserved immediately after the stem for the causative marker *-ra* to apply. Failure of keeping the middle marker renders an illegal output as in (17c):

- (17) a. *pare ampa-ki-s-Ø-ti*
 nopal good-PRED.MID-PREF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘The nopal got/is good.’
 b. *Dora pare-ni ampa-ke-ra-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora nopal-OBJ good-PRED.MID-CAUS-PREF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora got the nopal good (clean).’
 c. * *Dora pare-ni ampa-ra-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora nopal-OBJ good-CAUS-PREF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora got the nopal good (clean).’

³For a description of transitive and causative constructions in Tarascan see Maldonado and Nava 2002.

4.2 Locative Middle Markers

Locative middle markers select free stems to specify the region where the event takes place. Locative middles come from a rich set of old body-part terms now grammaticized to designate geometrical schematic locations. As (18) shows, lacking further specification the locative marker designates the subject's sphere. Notice that the middle is derived from the intransitive stem in (18):

- (18) *Dora chkú-nharhi-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora sharp pain-forehead.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'Dora has had sharp pains in the face/eyes.'

As in the case of the attributive middle (17), the transitive locative construction is derived with the causative marker *-ta* following the middle marker. The middle is thus more basic than the transitive:

- (19) *kawikwa Marcosi-ni chkú-nharhi-ta-s-Ø-ti*
 drink Marcos-OBJ sharp pain-forehead.MID-CAUS-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'The drink gave Marcos a sharp pain in the face/eyes.'

To show that the phenomenon is quite productive we offer an additional example now with the middle marker *-ts'ĩ* 'head', which selects free stems:

- (20) a. *Dora í-ni k'umanchikwa-ni p'intē-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora DEM-OBJ house-OBJ used to-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'Dora has become used to this house.'
- b. *Dora káts'ikwa p'intē-ts'ĩ-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora hat used to-head.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 'Dora has become used to wearing the hat in her head.'
- c. *Marcos p'intē-ts'ĩ-ta-s-Ø-ti káts'ikwa-ni Dora-ni*
 Marcos used to-head.MID-CAUS-PERF-PRES-IND.3 hat-OBJ Dora-OBJ
 'Marcos got Dora used to wear a hat in her head.'

4.3 Middle 'Basic Events'

As for the class of what we call 'basic events' due to the fact that they involve some type of interaction among participants, middle and active constructions establish an equipollent contrast. Either the middle or the active causative marker must be used. While middle constructions tend to be intransitive, transitive middles are in fact well attested in the languages of the world. The most obvious cases are grooming events, i.e. middle situations

normally encoded transitively.⁴ In (21a) *-mi* marks liquid objects in transitive middle constructions, while *-ma* does the same job for transitive active ones, as in (21b):

- (21) a. *itsi arhu-mi-s-Ø-ti*
 water divide-LIQ.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘The water separated (the clean from the dirty water).’
 b. *Dora arhu-ma-s-Ø-ti itsi-ni*
 Dora divide-LIQ.ACT-PERF-PRES-IND.3 water-OBJ
 ‘Dora has put apart the water (from a pond to drink).’

Equipollent contrasts are quite productive in Tarascan and they take several contrastive duplets (*-ta* ACT/ *-ra* MID; *-rhi* ACT/ *-kurhi* MID). A further example is the opposition between *-ta* ACT, *-ku* MID now with locative middle markers:

- (22) a. *Dora ké-nti-ku-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora move-angle-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora cornered herself down.’
 b. *Marcosì Dora-ni ké-nti-ta-s-Ø-ti*
 Marcos Dora-OBJ move-angle-ACT-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Marcos has cornered Dora down.’

The systematic equipollent middle/active contrast constitutes strong evidence that transitive and middle constructions in Tarascan are equally basic in this class. Given the data so far provided, it would be wrong to assume that verbal basic stems in Tarascan are transitive. In fact, what we have is several sets of basic middle stems as well as a large set of neutral stems that may receive either transitive or middle marking. So far the idea that middles develop from another unmarked construction is not tenable.

Within the set of neutral stems there is a small group of stems that are subject to receiving a variety of markers depicting different construction types. In fact, a stem like *kwata* ‘soft’ can take several middle suffixes, as well as causative and reflexive markers. The attributive middle *-pi* in (23a) designates the bread as soft. The locative *-nharhi* ‘forehead’ softens, i.e. sags Dora’s cheeks to express her boredom in (23b):

- (23) a. *kurhinta kwata-pi-s-Ø-ti*
 bread soft-PRED.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘bread is/got soft’

⁴The term ‘indirect reflexive’ is commonly used in formal approaches to this problem.

- b. Dora *kwata-nharhi-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora soft-forehead.MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora shows a boring face (tired cheeks showing disapproval).’

The Russian middle/reflexive contrast established between the reflexive heavy form *-sebjā* and the light middle *-sja* has a pristine Tarascan equivalent. The middle marker *-ra* and the reflexive *-kurhi* encode the conceptual expected contrastive representation. In the middle (24a), fatigue comes to Dora as a spontaneous internal change, while the reflexive *-kurhi* signals in (24b) that Dora’s change-of-state comes as a consequence of her doing something excessively:

- (24) a. *Dora kwata-ra-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora soft-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora is/got tired.’
 b. *Dora kwata-kurhi-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora soft-RFLX-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora is fed up (tired herself of doing something).’

These data constitute strong evidence that the Tarascan middle establishes a variety of systematic contrasts with intransitive, causative-transitive, and reflexive constructions. While in the class of attributes we have evidence that the middle derives from a basic intransitive stem, in locative stems the middle constitutes the basic form, and in the basic event class transitives and middles are equally basic. Thus in no case does the middle derive from either transitive or reflexive constructions. In fact, for some classes the middle constitutes a more basic form for transitives and reflexives to be derived.

5 The Status of the Reflexive

We are now in the position to define the status of the reflexive construction in Tarascan. The contrast in (24a-b) shows an alternative conceptualization already grammaticized. We will now show that the reflexive is a marked construction in contrast with the more basic middle construal.

One important argument for the marked nature of the reflexive is that it occupies the position of the causative marker. As we have already pointed out, *-kurhi* functions either as middle with dependent stems or as a reflexive with most free stems. The verb *urhuni* ‘grind’ in (25a) is a transitive free stem with no derivative marking. In order to have a causative construction the causative *-ra* marker must be added as in (25b). Now the reflexive obtains as the reflexive marker *-kurhi* takes the position of the causative, *-ra*, as in (25c):

- (25) a. *Dora urhu-s-Ø-ti* *tsiri-ni*
 Dora grind-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ
 ‘Dora ground the corn.’
- b. *Dora urhu-ra-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni* *Minerva-ni*
 Dora grind-CAUS-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ Minerva-OBJ
 ‘Dora made Minerva grind the corn.’
- c. *Dora urhu-kurhi-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni*
 Dora grind-RFLX-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ
 ‘Dora ground the corn for herself (her corn).’

As we have shown, causative markers occur after the middle suffix. Since the reflexive occupies the position of the causative marker, it follows that the reflexive occurs after the middle marker.

Additional evidence of the marked status of the reflexive is that *-kurhi* may occur after the causative marker *-ra* (26a), an illegal position for a middle marker, as attested to by (26b):

- (26) a. *Dora urhu-r-kurhi-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni*
 Dora grind-CAUS-RFLX-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ
 ‘Dora had the corn ground for herself.’
- b. **Dora urhu-r-ku-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni*
 Dora grind-CAUS-MID-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ
 ‘Dora had the corn ground for herself.’

Moreover, in order to have a benefactive construction the beneficiary of the action would be encoded by the applicative marker *-ku* as in (27a). The applicative may occur after the causative marker *-ra* to have a causative-benefactive construction as in (27b):

- (27) a. *Dora urhu-ku-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni* *Minerva-ni*
 Dora grind-APL.3-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ Minerva-OBJ
 ‘Dora ground the corn for Minerva (Minerva’s corn).’
- b. *Dora urhu-ra-ku-s-Ø-ti* *tsíri-ni* *Minerva-ni*
 Dora grind-CAUS-APL.3-PERF-PRES-IND.3 corn-OBJ Minerva-OBJ
 ‘Dora made grind the corn for Minerva.’

Crucially, for the self-benefactive-causative construction in (26a) the reflexive marker *-kurhi* must take the position of the applicative form. The fact that the reflexive marker occupies an external position in the verbal complex form, i.e. the position of causatives and applicatives, argues for the marked status of the reflexive as opposed to the middle form. Now the crucial argu-

ment for this claim would be one in which the reflexive actually followed the middle marker. Since reflexives and middles respond to different conceptualizations it is not common for both markers to cooccur. However, the argument actually exists. For emphatic purposes the reflexive may appear after the middle as in (28b). This emphatic construction contrasts with the basic middle construal repeated here for convenience as (28a):

- (28) a. *Dora ké-nti-ku-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora move-angle-MID.angle-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora cornered herself down.’
 b. *Dora ké-nti-ku-kurhi-s-Ø-ti*
 Dora move-angle-MID-RFLX-PERF-PRES-IND.3
 ‘Dora cornered herself down by herself.’

The fact that the reflexive *-kurhi* consistently occupies a position external to the middle marker in self-benefactive, causative-reflexive, and emphatic-reflexive constructions, and in no case does *-kurhi* constitute the base form for deriving other constructions, attests to the marked character of the construction.

6 Conclusions

While the reflexive *-kurhi* is a marked construction contrasting with the middle and the transitive, the basic character of the middle construction is sound. For some part of the system the middle is even more basic than the transitive; for other parts of the language middles and transitives are equally basic. There is no case in which the reflexive form constitutes the basic form in Tarascan. We conclude that in Tarascan there are three basic event types: a) intransitive events, b) subject dominion events, i.e. actions remaining within the subject’s domain, and c) two-participant interactions construed in line with Langacker’s action-chain model (1991a, 1991b).⁵ We can represent this conceptual pattern as in Figure 5, where transitive, middle, and intransitive are basic forms according to different verbal classes and establish different types of contrast. As for the reflexive construction, it contrasts most commonly with causative and applicative constructions as it commonly derives from free transitive stems. Only for emphatic purposes may the reflexive derive from a middle construction, and in no case is the reflexive more basic than the middle.

⁵We suspect this is also true for Modern Greek, as suggested by Manny (2001, 2002) with the exception that in Tarascan the subject’s dominion events seem to be dominant.

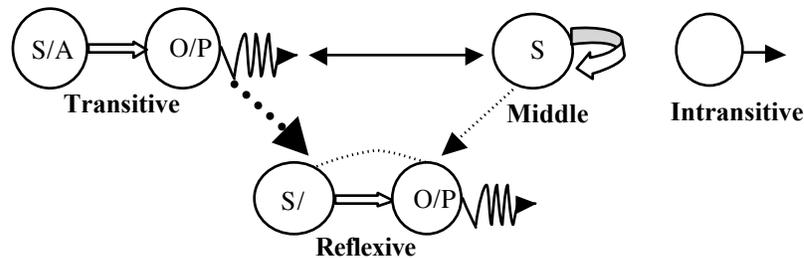


Figure 5. Nonderived middle

The Tarascan conceptual path is by no means exceptional. In languages for which the transitive event is not the default case, middles and intransitives may constitute the base form for construing alternative conceptualizations. Langacker's notion of 'starting point' (1991) may help to understand the phenomenon. The action-chain model—by which energy flows down from agent to patient—constitutes an idealized conceptualization of the event attested in a wide variety of languages of the world. Yet it is also the case that not all languages start construing the event from the same point. Nominative-accusative languages do follow the prototype and construe the agent as the most prominent participant. However, so-called ergative languages may start construing the event from the patient's (change of) state-out, i.e. from the core of the event to the initiative forces that may drive it. Thus the agent is marked for ergative while the thematic element tends to be the unmarked form. Tarascan represents an alternative conceptual strategy where there may be more than one starting point. While the prototypical two-participant interaction does exist for an important class of verbs, the language seems to favor a construal of events involving only the subject. This is encoded by intransitive verbs or by middle constructions designating that the event remains in the subject's sphere. Since basic events in Tarascan involve only the subject, causative constructions may derive from intransitives or middles. Reflexives align with causatives as derived forms.

The primacy of the agent/patient default organization in language has been questioned from a variety of viewpoints. Ninio (1999) has shown that children use alternative event-construction strategies before they start conceiving events as involving two asymmetric (agent-patient) participants. Moreover, the conceptual path described for Tarascan is also attested with specific properties in a wide variety of languages.

The marked status of the reflexive as opposed to the basic nature of the middle is attested in a variety of unrelated languages. One is Balinese (Austronesian) as described by Artawa (1994), where the *ma-* middle prefix is dominantly used (*ma-jalan* 'walk', *ma-laib* 'run'), while the reflexive *awak*

is apparently used for typical split-self reflexives (*Wayan nyagur awak-ne* ‘Wayan hit himself’). A similar situation takes place in Amharic (Shibatani 2001). According to Palancar (2002), Otomí (Mesoamerican) has middle stems (*m-pembo* ‘swing’, *m-pe-ts’i* ‘repent’, *m-pin-ts’I* ‘roll, like in bed’) yet there is no reflexive construction at all. To encode reflexive meanings, Otomi exploits the genitive construction. Finally, for Toba (Guaycurú) Messineo (2002) shows that the middle is not only a very productive form in verb formation but also constitutes the base form for reflexive constructions (*n-awote* ‘MID-he loves’ ⇨ *n-awoh-l’at* MID-he loves-RFLX ‘He loves himself’).

Given these data from unrelated languages, we may conclude that while the middle may evolve from the reflexive in some languages whose base form is the transitive construction, in languages taking the subject’s sphere as its starting point the middle is a category in its own right. It corresponds to a basic conceptualization of a vast variety of actions developing within the subject’s dominion and may in fact be the source not only for reflexive but also for transitive constructions.

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