ON THE VALENCE OF VERBS OF APPEARANCE AND DISAPPEARANCE

Maria Poponeț
PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: This paper addresses the valence of verbs of appearance and disappearance in English and Romanian. There are two types of verbs of appearance and disappearance in these languages: verbs that are marked with reflexive morphology and verbs that lack reflexive morphology. We argue that the morphological marking on these verbs indicates the original valence of the verbs. Moreover, we argue that the lack of transitives for the intransitive verbs that are not marked with reflexive morphology cannot be explained by semantic concepts like process initiation (cf. Ramchand 2008).

Keywords: verbs of appearance, verbs of disappearance, valence, English, Romanian

Verbs of appearance and disappearance describe the appearance or disappearance of an entity. These verbshave been claimed to be unaccusative, i.e. to project their unique argument in object position (cf. Burzio 1986, among others). For instance, Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) argue that verbs of appearance and disappearance are unaccusative because appearance and disappearance can be interpreted as directed change falling under the Directed Change Linking Rule: "The argument of a verb that corresponds to the entity undergoing the directed change described by that verb is its direct internal argument" (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 146). It is worth mentioning that in Levin and Rappaport Hovav's (1995) theory, which advances multiple levels of representation, the arguments of a verb are projected from the lexical semantic representation into argument structure via a set of linking rule. The Directed Change Linking Rule is among the linking rules assumed in this theory. The arguments of the verb are then mapped from argument structure into syntax.
Verbs of appearance and disappearance pass unaccusativity tests like the ability to form adjectival participles in English, e.g. *a recently appeared book, a newly emerged scandal* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 150). Moreover, Italian verbs of appearance and disappearance take auxiliary *essere* "to be" (cf. (1)), typical of unaccusative verbs.

(1) *Gianni è apparso/ sparito.*
Gianni be.AUX.3SG appear.PTCP disappear.PTCP
"Gianni appeared/disappeared."

Such verbs do not take part in the causative alternation (cf. (2a,b), (3a,b)), i.e. they lack a transitive with the meaning "cause to V-intransitive" (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 79). The causative alternation is typically exhibited by verbs of change of state (cf. Haspelmath 1993, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, among others).

(2) a. *A star appeared in the sky.*
b. **The darkness appeared a star in the sky.* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 122, (99a))

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

(3) a. *The bicycle disappeared (from the garage).*
b. **The thief disappeared the bicycle (from the garage).* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 121, (98))

Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) argue that the lack of participation in the causative alternation of verbs of appearance and disappearance is characteristic of a set of languages, e.g. English, Modern Hebrew, Italian or Russian. In this paper, we take a look at verbs of appearance and disappearance in English and Romanian with a view to establishing the relationship between their morphological, syntactic and semantic features.
The English verbs of appearance and disappearance identified by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), which show the features mentioned above, are listed in (4).

(4) **English verbs of appearance and disappearance:**
a. **Verbs of appearance:** *appear, arise, awake, awaken, break, burst, come, dawn, derive, develop, emanate, emerge, erupt, evolve, exude, flow, grow, gush, issue, materialize, open, plop, result, rise, spill, spread, steal, stem, stream, supervene, surge, wax;*
b. **Verbs of occurrence:** *ensue, eventuate, happen, occur, recur, transpire;*
c. **Verbs of disappearance:** *die, disappear, expire, lapse, perish, vanish.* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 282)

Verbs of occurrence describe the occurrence of an event and are sometimes included in the class of verbs of appearance. These verbs do not have a transitive use with a causative interpretation, and do not take part in the causative alternation (cf. (5a,b)).

(5) a. *The accident happened.*
b. * *The motorist happened the accident.* (Levin 1993: 261, (964))

As far as Romanian is concerned, Dragomirescu (2010) identified the following verbs of appearance and disappearance, classified on the criteria of morphological marking and the availability of a transitive:

(6) **Romanian verbs of appearance and disappearance:**
***Se*-marked without a transitive:** *a se ivi* "to appear", *a se rătăci* "to get lost";
***Se*-marked with a transitive:** *a se absorbi* "to become absorbed", *a se arăta*"to show up", *a se ascunde* "to hide", *a se contura*"to take shape", *a se filtra* "(about light) to filter", *a se naşte* "to be born", *a se pierde* "to fade", *a se prăpădi* "to perish", *a se rarefia* "to rarefy", *a se rări* "to get thin", *a se regenera* "to regenerate", *a se stinge* "to become extinct";
Non-*se*-marked without a transitive:*a apărea* "to appear", *a deceda* "to die", *a dispărea* "to disappear", *a muri* "to die", *a pieri* "to perish", *a reapărea* "to reappear", *a recidiva* "to recur", *a răposa* "to die", *a renaşte* "to revive", *a sucomba* "to die". (Dragomirescu 2010: 119)

This author holds that, unlike English, many verbs in this class, i.e. the *se*-marked ones (or "derived" according to Dragomirescu 2010), take part in the causative alternation.

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

First, while we agree with this author, we argue that this is generally the case of intransitives with non-animate subjects. For instance, while (7a) with an inanimate entity in object position allows a transitive (cf. (7b)), (8a) with an animate entity does not (cf. (8b)).

(7) a. *Fotografia Dianei s- a rătăcit printre hârtii.*
photo.DET Diana.GEN SE AUX.3SG lose.PTCP among paper.PL
"Diana's photo got lost among the papers."

b. *Ion a rătăcit fotografia Dianei.*
Ion AUX.3SG lose.PTCP photo.DET Diana.GEN
"Ion lost Diana's photo."

(8) a. *Andrei s- a rătăcit.*
Andrei SE AUX.3SG lose.PTCP
"Andrei got lost."

b. **Mama l- a rătăcit pe Andrei.*
mother.DET CL.3SG.ACC AUX.3SG lose.PTCP PE Andrei
"Mother lost Andrei."

Second, note that the transitive in (7b) is possible although Dragomirescu (2010) classified the verb *a se rătăci* "to get lost" as exclusively intransitive. Moreover, *Dicţionarul limbii române literare contemporane* (1955-1957) (http://dexonline.ro/) lists an old transitive use for the verb *a se ivi* "to appear".
On the other hand, the Romanian verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology do not alternate (cf. (9a,b), (10a,b)), just like their English counterparts (cf. (2a,b), (3a,b)).

(9) a. *O stea a apărut pe cer.*
a star AUX.3SG appear.PTCP on sky
"A star appeared in the sky."

b. **Întunericul a apărut o stea pe cer.*
darkness.DET AUX.3SG appear.PTCP a star on sky
"The darkness appeared a star in the sky."

(10) a. *Bicicleta a dispărut (din garaj).*
bicycle.DET AUX.3SG disappear.PTCP from garage
"The bicycle disappeared (from the garage)."

b. **Hoţul a dispărut bicicleta (din garaj).*
thief.DET AUX.3SG disappear.PTCP bicycle.DET from garage
"The thief disappeared the bicycle from the garage."

Apparently, the verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology in Romanian do not alternate, while the verbs that are reflexively marked alternate.

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

Thus, we have reasons to believe that *se*-marked verbs of appearance and disappearance are basically transitive, and morphological marking is a sign of valence reduction from the transitive base as argued for verbs of change of state in Haspelmath (1993), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), etc.
However, this hypothesis is not supported by the Romanian verbs of occurrence *a se întâmpla* "to happen" and *a se petrece* "to happen", which lack a transitive use (cf. (12b), (13b)) although they are marked with reflexive morphology in intransitive use.

(11) **Romanian verbs of occurrence:**
***Se*-marked without a transitive:** *a se întâmpla* "to happen", *a se petrece* "to happen";
***Se*-marked with a transitive:** *a se produce* "to happen";
Non-*se*-marked without a transitive: *a surveni* "to occur".

(12) a. *S- a întâmplat o nenorocire.*
SE AUX.3SG happen.PTCP a misfortune
"A misfortune happened."

b. **Neglijenţa a întâmplat o nenorocire.*
negligence.DET AUX.3SG happen.PTCP a misfortune
"Negligence happened a misfortune."

(13) a. *Accidentul s- a petrecut săptămâna trecută.*
accident.DET SE AUX.3SG happen.PTCP week.DET last
"The accident happened last week."

b. **Un şofer neatent a petrecut accidentul.*
a driver careless AUX.3SG happen.PTCP accident.DET
"A careless driver happened the accident."

The verb *a se produce* "to happen" behaves as predicted by its morphological make-up, i.e. the verb is marked with reflexive morphology in its intransitive variant (cf. (14a)) and has a transitive variant (cf. (14b)).

(14) a. *În acest loc, se produc frecvent accidente rutiere.*
in this place SE produce.PRS.3PL frequently accident.PL road
"In this place, road accidents happen frequently."

b. *Tinerii produc adesea accidente rutiere.*
young.PL.DET produce.PRS.3PL often accident.PL road
"The young often produce road accidents."

Likewise, the verb *a surveni* "to occur" is a prototypical example of the other morphological class, i.e. the verb is not marked with reflexive morphology (cf. (15a)), and, consequently, does not have a transitive variant (cf. (15b)).

(15) a. *Eroarea a survenit din cauza neglijenţei.*

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

error.DET AUX.3SG occur.PTCP from cause.DET negligence.GEN
"The error occurred because of negligence."

b. **Neglijenţa a survenit eroarea.*
negligence.DET AUX.3SG occur.PTCP error.DET
"Negligence occurred the error."

Despite the drawbacks represented by the verbs *a se întâmpla* "to happen" and *a se petrece* "to happen", which lack transitive uses although they are *se*-marked, the bulk of evidence is, undoubtedly, in favour of the hypothesis that reflexive morphology indicates the original valence of verbs. For instance, Haspelmath (1993) argued that the verbs of change of state that are marked with detransitivizing morphology express costly events of change which necessitate the presence of a causer, while unmarked verbs of change of state express naturally occurring events of change. The basic transitivity of the verbs in the first category is motivated by the contemplation of a costly event in the moment of verb dubbing, while the basic intransitivity of the verbs in the second category is motivated by the contemplation of a spontaneous event.
In what follows, we will show that the valence of verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology in English and Romanian is rigid and does not change with the type of argument selected.
Ramchand (2008) explained the lack of transitives for verbs of appearance and disappearance by attributing the initiation of the event to the argument that undergoes the change. In her view, the verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology and lack transitive variants are hidden reflexives.
While Ramchand's (2008) theory can account for the ban on the alternation in (16a,b) and (18a,b), since the object argument is animate and can be attributed the initiation of the process, it fails to explain why (17a) and (19a) showing inanimate arguments do not allow transitives (cf. (17b), (19b)).

(16) a. *A apărut Petru.*
AUX.3SG appear.PTCP Petru
"Petru appeared."

b. **Ioana l- a apărut pe Petru.*
Ioana CL.3SG.ACC AUX.3SG appear.PTCP PE Petru
"Ioana appeared Petru."

(17) a. *A apărut cartea rătăcită.*
AUX.3SG appear.PTCP book.DET lost
"The lost book appeared."

b. **Ioana a apărut cartea rătăcită.*
Ioana AUX.3SG appear.PTCP book.DET lost
"Ioana appeared the lost book."

(18) a. *Peter appeared.*
b. **Jane appeared Peter.*

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

(19) a. *The lost book appeared.*
b. **Jane appeared the lost book.*

Thus, while the valence of some verbs of appearance and disappearance that are marked with reflexive morphology is sensitive to the animacy of the argument they take, the valence of the verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology is rigid irrespective of the animacy of their argument.
The reflexive morphology on verbs of change is also encountered in English, which registers reflexively marked verbs of appearance as noted by Levin (1993), who provided the list in (20) below.

(20) **English reflexive verbs of appearance:**
assert, declare, define, express, form, intrude, manifest, offer, pose, present, proffer, recommend, shape, show, suggest. (Levin 1993: 259)

These verbs are obligatorily marked with a reflexive pronoun and have a transitive use. According to Levin (1993), reflexively marked verbs of appearance take part in the reflexive of appearance alternation (except for *intrude*) as illustrated in (21a,b). This author holds that when used as verbs of appearance, the subject "bears the same semantic relation to the verb as the object does in the ordinary transitive use" (Levin 1993: 259).

(21) a. *I presented a solution yesterday.*
b. *A solution presented itself yesterday.* (Levin 1993: 259, (955))

Not only verbs of appearance and disappearance are marked with reflexive morphology in English. Ellison (2005) discusses examples of inchoatives (i.e. intransitive verbs of change of state) marked with the reflexive pronoun *self* in this language, arguing that they are derived from a transitive causative base. Ellison (2005) quotes Geniušienė (1987) who holds that the presence of the pronoun *self* is stylistic. The expressions in (22a) and (22b) are synonymous, *his income* bearing the patient role. Ellison (2005) argues that existence of the transitive causative *double* along with the reflexive marking on the *self*-marked inchoative motivates the derivation of the inchoatives from the transitive base.

(22) a. *His income doubled in no time.*
b. *His income doubled itself in no time.*
(Geniušienė 1987: 205, quoted in Ellison 2005: 190, (55a,b))

Thus, English registers reflexively marked verbs of change of state and verbs of appearance that show transitive variants. Such data adds to the crosslinguistic evidence in favour of the view that reflexively marked verbs of change are verbs with reduced valence.
In conclusion, reflexively marked verbs of appearance and disappearance in English and Romanian provide morphological and syntactic evidence for detransitivization or valence reduction, i.e. they are marked with a reflexive pronoun and have a transitive use. This hypothesis was previously advanced for verbs of change of state (cf. Haspelmath 1993, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995).

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)

On the other hand, the valence of the verbs of appearance and disappearance that are not marked with reflexive morphology in English and Romanian is rigid; the verbs do not show transitive variants irrespective of the animacy of their object argument. By contrast, intransitive verbs of change of state that are not marked with reflexive morphology may, nonetheless, show transitive variants both in English and Romanian (cf. Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, McKoon and Macfarland 2000 for English, Dragomirescu 2010 for Romanian).

In this paper, we also briefly presented: (i) Haspelmath's (1993) theory which advances a hypothesis for the morphological marking on verbs, and hence it successfully tackles the original valence of verbs, and (ii) Ramchand's (2008) theory which attempts to provide an explanation for the (lack of) participation in the causative alternation of verbs, and thus focuses on the valence of verbs on every use. While pragmatic in nature, her theory fails to explain the lack of participation in the alternation of non-reflexively marked verbs of appearance and disappearance in the context of inanimate arguments, i.e. the assignment of process initiation to inanimate arguments is flawed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burzio, Luigi (1986). *Italian syntax. A government and binding approach*, Dordrecht: Reidel.

Dicţionar Explicativ Român: http://dexonline.ro/.

Dragomirescu, Adina (2010). *Ergativitatea. Tipologie, sintaxă, semantică,* Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

Ellison, Gregory Campbell (2005). "Establishing the derivation of the English inchoative alternant: The null reflexive morpheme", *Generative Grammar in Geneva* 1:159-194.

Haspelmath, Martin (1993). "More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations", in Bernard Comrie and Maria Polinsky (eds.), *Causatives and transitivity*, 87-120, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Levin, Beth (1993). *English verb classes and alternations: A preliminary investigation*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Levin, Beth and Malka Rappaport Hovav (1995). *Unaccusativity: At the syntax-lexicalsemantics interface*, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

McKoon, Gail and Talke Macfarland (2000). "Externally and internally caused change of state verbs", *Language*, 76(4), 833-858.

Ramchand, Gillian (2008). *Verb meaning and the lexicon: A first phase syntax*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BDD-V4583 © 2017 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.75 (2026-11-06 13:21:42 UTC)