

The syntax of valency changes has been widely investigated over the past years. The morphology of valency changes instead is still underinvestigated. Little attention has been paid, for instance, to their status in relation to lexeme formation. This issue is crucial when exploring the lexical (and lexicographical) status of verbs undergoing processes of valency changes. More specifically, it is unclear how verbal forms resulting from valency changes are to be represented

in our lexical inventory, whether within the same lexical entry, or rather in a separate entry. Clearly, the latter solution implicitly or explicitly has to refer to a process of lexeme formation, i.e., of derivation from a basic lexical entry.

In this paper we intend to explore this issue, relying on the empirical evidence offered by a number of European languages. Two main problems are crucially involved: a) the domain of valency changes, i.e., whether they should be attributed to morphology or rather to syntax, b) if they are to be regarded as part of morphology, whether they fall within inflection or derivation.

In this light, Haspelmath (2002: 218) distinguishes between function-change operations like voice and eventchange operations like causative formation, arguing that the former are “primarily inflectional” whereas the latter are “primary derivational”. A couple of identificational criteria can be suggested: (i) the respective order of application of the single operations in as much as in general derivational operations precede (or are internal with regard to) inflectional operations and (ii) the degree of lexical restrictions undergone by the single operations provided they are related to the semantic properties of the lexical bases. Accordingly, operations severely restricted by the semantic properties of the base lexemes are likely to be assigned to derivation, because inflectional operations are usually much

more general.

In the domain of derivational morphology valency changes are likely to be treated as conversions, if the latter is understood in a broad sense as a process of lexeme formation involving any change in the word properties of the lexical base in the absence of an overt marker, as suggested by Rainer (1993: 78). In this respect, one necessary property is the clear directionality in the process of lexeme formation (cf. Siller-Runggaldier 2004: 549 for Italian). Two further criteria may be suggested in order to assess the derivational status of a valency changing operation; (i) the occurrence of other derivational operations fulfilling the same function, (ii) the presence of changes in the properties of

of the word similar to what is normally observed in clear conversion processes.

In this paper, the above criteria are applied to a number of case-studies drawn from Italian and other European languages, in relation to the status of the intransitive form in transitive/intransitive alternations where no change in verb morphology occurs (e.g., It. *Gianni ha aperto la porta* ‘Gianni has opened the door’ / *Gianni ha aperto*

*alle nove* ‘Gianni has opened at nine’). Evidence will be provided for regarding at least some instantiations of such valency changes as possible examples of conversions.