

# Fluid transitivity in Chintang

Robert Schikowski, Netra Paudyal, Balthasar Bickel

Universität Leipzig

Workshop on Valency Classes  
MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology Leipzig  
21 August 2010

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Overview

- 1 Overview
- 2 Introduction
  - The Chintang language
  - Overview of morphosyntax
  - Verb classes
- 3 S/A ambitransitivity
  - S/A ambitransitivity
  - Object fading
- 4 S/P ambitransitivity
  - S/P ambitransitivity
  - Agent fading
- 5 Fluid transitivity
  - Transitivity is syntactical
  - Valency is gradable
- 6 Summary

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References

# The Chintang language

## ■ location:

Eastern Nepal

> Kosi zone (कोशी अञ्चल)

> Dhankuta district (धनकुटा जिल्ला)

> Chhintang (छिन्ताङ) and Ahale (आहाले) VDC

## ■ genealogy:

Sino-Tibetan > ... > Kiranti > ... > Chintang

## ■ speakers:

4000 - 5000, majority at least bilingual  
(with Nepali as the second language)

- **endangerment:** still learned by many children but restricted to certain contexts

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Overview of morphosyntax

Overall **low degree of fusion, syntheticity higher:**

- 3 nominal categories: person/number of possessor, case, number
- 6 verbal categories: person/number S (or A and P with verbs with bipersonal agreement), tense, mood, aspect, polarity; long verb forms through use of 'vector verbs' (= dependent verb stems with grammatical function)
- rich deictic system with 3 categories: distance from speaker, location of object incl. altitude, location of reference point

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Overview of morphosyntax

Some prominent **argument selectors** (cf. Witzlack 2010 for the term, Bickel 2008b, Bickel et al. 2010 for content):

- **case marking and agreement** (relevant for this talk)
- agreement patterns of light verbs + infinitive
- reference in argument-nominalising forms (e.g. active and passive participle, infinitive)
- coreferentiality constraints with converbs and subordinating particles
- antecedence and binding with reflexives and reciprocals
- moving referent in vector verbs coding motion

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References

# Verb classes

- number of **verb classes** based on case and agreement presently 57 (39 single-membered, so 18 'real' classes).
- about 84% of the registered 647 verbs are covered by **two most frequent classes**:
  - intransitive verbs: only with S-ABS V-S (130 = 20%)
  - potentially transitive verbs: allowing A-ERG P-ABS V-A,P (413 = 64%)

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Examples

- Intransitive verb *hap-* 'cry':

(1) *Ama, nunu hap-no.*

mother baby cry-IND.NPST

'Mum, the baby is crying.' [CLDLCh3R01S02.293]

- Transitive verb *loĩs-* 'take out, bring out':

(2) *Dhami-ce-ŋa dokh-a*

shaman-ns-ERG illness-NTVZ

*u-loĩs-o-ko.*

3nsS/A-bring.out-3P-IND.NPST

'The shamans remove the illness.' [Jan-Gen.1142]

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Structure of the remainder of this talk

- class of potentially transitive verbs includes many **ambitransitives**
- in the following we will talk about two large classes of ambitransitives:
  - **S/A ambitransitives**: intransitive or transitive with coreferentiality of S and A
  - **S/P ambitransitives**: intransitive or transitive with coreferentiality of S and P
- we will show that these are not lexical classes (in the sense that their classification follows partially arbitrary criteria) but rather fully transparent **semantic classes** and reflect **productive syntactic alternations**

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References



# S/A ambitransitivity - a first glance

If one looks for typical S/A ambitransitives - verbs where the precise category of P is often irrelevant - one quickly finds them. Here is an example:

- (3) a. *Anci khon-ce o!*  
1di play-d okay  
'Let's play, okay?' [CLDLCh3R05S04.041]
- b. *Lo, ba-go khon-c-o.*  
okay PROX-NMLZ play.with-d-3P  
'Okay, let's play with this one.'  
[CLLDCh3R08S01.0159]

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Closer inspection

If one takes a closer look, however, one soon comes across less nice examples:

- (4) *Agga, hun-ce gucca u-khoŋ-ce-ke!*  
wow 3-ns marble 3nsS/A-play.with-d-IND.NPST  
'Wow, they're playing (with) marbles!'  
[CLLDCh1R09S07.0411]

Note that A is still marked as ABS (-Ø) and is the only argument cross-referenced on V.

What is different from textbook “ambitransitives” is that **P is overt**.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Ambitransitivity - or something else?

- What looks like S/A ambitransitives turns out to be a common phenomenon across Kiranti languages (Bickel et al. 2007) that comes under a variety of names (antipassive, detransitivisation, incorporation, ...). We call it **object fading**.
- Object fading is different from S/A ambitransitivity in two respects:
  - It allows P to be overt - in fact, faded P are mostly overt.
  - It is **possible with all transitive verbs**.
- The second characteristic is a decisive argument against considering verbs allowing for object fading a lexical class.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References

# Examples

- (5) *Huŋ-go jaile=yaŋ tara khaŋ-no.*  
MED-NMLZ always=ADD star watch-IND.NPST  
'He's always watching the stars.' [field notes 2010]
- (6) *Wa-ce wathĩ u-thin-no.*  
hen-ns egg 3nsS/A-lay-IND.NPST  
'Hens lay eggs.' [field notes 2010]

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Some more properties

- Semantics: object is **unbounded**, i.e. the speaker does not have a definite number (with countables) or a definite amount (with uncountables) in mind (cf. Bickel et al. 2007 on Puma)
- There is a continuum of verbs:
  - verbs prone to object fading, faded O often covert and highly unspecific, e.g. *khonʃ-* 'play', *rett-* 'laugh'
  - verbs not prone to object fading, faded O typically overt and simply non-cardinal, e.g. *khaŋ-* 'watch', *ten-* 'beat'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References

# Some more properties

- Fading is also possible with **ditransitives**: the faded argument is the one marked by absolutive (T, G, or both T and G, depending on the valency class) - hence general “**object** fading”:

- (7) a. *Huĩ-sa-ŋa*      *Joge citthi hakt-o-ko.*  
MED-OBL-ERG J.      letter send-3P-IND.NPST  
‘He sends the letter to Joge.’ [field notes 2008]
- b. *Huŋ-go*      *kam citthi hak-no.*  
MED-NMLZ friend letter send-IND.NPST  
‘He sends letters to friends.’ (in general) [field notes 2008]
- c. \* *Huŋ-go*      *Joge/u-kam citthi hak-no.*  
MED-NMLZ J./3sPOR-friend letter send-IND.NPST  
*Intended:* ‘He sends letters to Joge/his friend.’ (in general)  
[field notes 2008]

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# S/P ambitransitives - a large class

- 20% of all verbs are S/P ambitransitive
- this is about a third of all transitive verbs
- about as many S/P ambitransitives as intransitives
- Some examples:
  - *bhuŋs-* 'heap up'
  - *cems-* 'be spent; spend'
  - *hot-* 'break down'
  - *lokt-* 'boil'
  - *sand-* '(start to) play (music)'
  - *wa-pokt-* 'get soaked; soak'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Is this productive?

- Given the large number of S/P ambitransitives, how productive is this pattern?
- Common semantics: potential change of state, potentially telic; intransitive variant where A cannot/should not be identified
- Test: can verbs with these semantics swap frames even when A is hardly ever identifiable or nearly always identifiable?
- If yes, speakers can apply the pattern even where they are unlikely to have heard it before → pattern is productive

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

Summary

References



# Examples

Change of state verb with hardly identifiable A: *ghoŋs-* 'be/grow big':

- (8) a. *Saīli, kana-phak na ba-tta-kha ghoŋ*  
third.daughter 1pePOR-pig TOP PROX-EXT-NMLZ grow.big  
*haŋ na aŋ...*  
COND TOP QTAG

'Saīli, suppose our pig grew as big as this...'  
[CLLDCh1R06S03.0151]

- b. *Ba-go phak them-ma ba-tta*  
PROX-NMLZ pig what-ERG PROX-EXT  
*ghoŋs-o-ŋs-e?*  
let.grow.big-3P-PRF-IND.NPST

'What has let this pig grow this big?' [field notes 2010]

→ *ghoŋs-* is S/P ambitransitive, transitive meaning 'let grow big'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Examples

Change of state verb with hardly identifiable A: *cukt-* 'be/become short':

(9) a. *Ali cukt-ŋa-ʔã.*

a.bit be.short-1sS/P-IND.NPST

'I am a bit short.' [CLLDCh4R11S07.2821]

b. *Ba-go a-teiʔ waiʔ-ma-lanʔin*

PROX-NMLZ 1sPOR-clothes wear-INF-for

*cukt-u-ku-ŋ.*

shorten-3P-IND.NPST-1sA

'I shorten these clothes of mine so I can wear them.' [field notes 2010]

→ *cukt-* is S/P ambitransitive, transitive meaning 'shorten'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Examples

Change of state verb with nearly always identifiable A, e.g. *yapt-* 'serve (food)':

- (10) a. *Ba-tta*      *kok u-bhada-be?-ŋa*  
PROX-EXT rice 3sPOR-pot-LOC-ABL  
*yapt-o-loĩs-e.*  
serve-3P-bring.out-IND.PST  
'She dealt out a piece of rice as big as this.' [phengniba\_tale117]
- b. *Kok yapt-e?*  
rice be.served-IND.PST  
'Is the rice served?' [field notes 2010]

→ *yapt-* is S/P ambitransitive, intransitive meaning 'be served'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Examples

Change of state verb with nearly always identifiable A: *lett-* 'plant':

- (11) a. *Aseĩ kancha-ŋa lett-o-ŋs-o-kha.*  
last.time youngest.son-ERG plant-3P-PRF-3P-BGR  
'Last time our youngest had planted it.' [CLDLCh2R02S02.658]
- b. *Makkai-ce u-lett-a-ŋs-e.*  
maize-ns 3nsS/A-plant-PST-PRF-IND.PST  
'The maize plants have been planted.' [field notes 2010]

→ *lett-* is S/P ambitransitive, intransitive meaning 'be planted'

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# This is productive!

- S/P ambitransitivity is not lexical, but **semantically fully transparent**:
  - All S/P ambitransitives have the semantics lined out above
  - All verbs with this semantics lined out above are S/P ambitransitive
- Some rare exceptions where frame swapping is impossible:
  - lexical alternative exists, e.g. *chukt-* 'land' (itr.) cannot be transitivised because there is *thand-* 'bring down'
  - ambiguity of S, e.g. *cett-* 'feed' (frame A-ERG T-ABS G-ABS V-A,G) cannot be detransitivised because S could be both T or G
- Just like S/A ambitransitives, S/P ambitransitives are not a lexical class. Rather, switching between  $S_i$ -ABS V-S and A-ERG  $P_i$ -ABS V-A,P is a semantically transparent syntactic phenomenon, which may be called **agent fading**.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Transitivity is syntactical

- Transitivity in Chintang is more often than not in the syntax, not in the lexicon
- What might be called transitive verbs are those verbs that *can* have bipersonal inflection - there are none which *must* have it
- Borders blurred between (typologically) typical intransitive verbs “without” O and verbs with faded O

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

**Fluid  
transitivity**

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Valency is gradable

- Valency is gradable by counting how often a potentially transitive verb is used intransitively/transitively (cf. figure next slide).
- Intuitively some variants are more “basic” than others, especially the transitive variants in most instances of object fading - but is there an objective criterion justifying this intuition?

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

Overview

Introduction

S/A ambi-  
transitivity

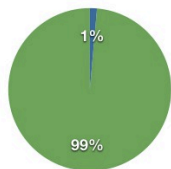
S/P ambi-  
transitivity

Fluid  
transitivity

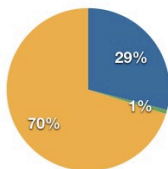
Summary

References

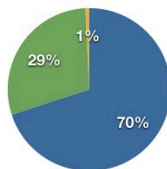
# Valency is gradable



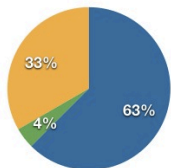
*hand-*  
'talk; talk about'



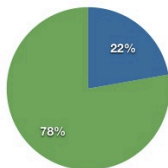
*ot-*  
'break'



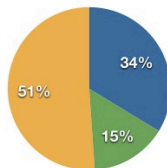
*hekt-*  
'be cut; cut'



*naŋs-*  
'shake'



*thuŋ-*  
'drink'



*las-*  
'return'

● A+P

● S=A

● S=P

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)



# Summary: Valency classes

- Chintang has **two major valency classes**, making up 84% of verbs:
  - strictly intransitive verbs (20%)
  - potentially transitive verbs (64%)
- Potentially transitive verbs have **gradual subclasses** depending on the proportions of each of the three possible frames.
- The rest are many classes with few members each, i.e. more like irregulars than like true classes. (Compare this to languages with conjugation classes vs. languages with irregulars.)
- → Languages differ in the extent to which valency classes play a role.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Summary: Detransitivisation

- Both S/A and S/P ambitransitivity are **semantically transparent** syntactic phenomena in Chintang. One does not need lexical classes to explain them.
- This means that the category “ambitransitivity” is not suitable for Chintang since it is associated with lexical classes. Better: “**object fading**” and “**agent fading**”
- Keep in mind that despite the commonalities there are also important differences (optionally overt object with object fading, conditions on verbal semantics with agent fading).
- But at any rate, both are subtypes of detransitivisation processes, not lexical classification.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# References I

- Bickel, Balthasar. 2008a. Aspects of Kiranti syntax: grammatical relations. Paper presented at the Central Department of Linguistics Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, August 14, 2008.
- Bickel, Balthasar. 2008b. Grammatical relations in Chintang. Paper presented at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, October 7, 2008, 10 2008.
- Bickel, Balthasar, Martin Gaenzle, Arjun Rai, Prem Dhoj Rai, Shree Kumar Rai, Vishnu S. Rai, and Narayan P. Sharma. 2007. Two ways of suspending object agreement in Puma: between incorporation, antipassivization, and optional agreement. *Himalayan Linguistics* 7:1–19.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# References II

- Bickel, Balthasar, Manoj Rai, Netra Paudyal, Goma Banjade, Toya Bhatta, Martin Gaenszle, Elena Lieven, Ichchha Rai, Novel Kishor Rai, and Sabine Stoll. 2010. The syntax of three-argument verbs in chintang and belhare (southeastern kiranti). In *Studies in ditransitive constructions*, ed. Andrej Malchukov, Martin Haspelmath, and Bernard Comrie. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Dowty, David. 1991. Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language* 67:547–619.
- Witzlack, Alena. 2010. Typological variation in grammatical relations. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Leipzig.

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Abbreviations

**1** first person

**2** second person

**3** third person

**A** agent

**ABL** ablative

**ABS** absolutive

**ADD** additive

**BGR** background

**COMPL** completive

**COND** conditional

**d** dual

**e** exclusive

**ERG** ergative

**EXT** extentional

**G** goal of ditransitive verb

**GEN** genitive

**i** inclusive

**IMP** imperative

**IND** indicative

**ITR** intransitive

**LAT** lative

**LOC** locative

**MED** medial; mediative

**ns** non-singular

**NMLZ** nominalizer

**NPST** non-past

**NTVZ** nativizer (attached to loan words)

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)

# Abbreviations

**O** object (here: P+T+G)

**P** patient

**POR** possessor

**PRF** perfect

**PROX** proximal

**PST** past

**QTAG** question tag

**s** singular

**S** subjective

**SAP** speech act participant

**T** theme of ditransitive verb

**TOP** topic

**V** verb

Fluid  
transitivity in  
Chintang

Robert  
Schikowski,  
Netra  
Paudyal,  
Balthasar  
Bickel

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[S/A ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[S/P ambi-  
transitivity](#)

[Fluid  
transitivity](#)

[Summary](#)

[References](#)