

# Roles and the compositional semantics of role-denoting relational adjectives

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## 0. Introduction

### 0.1 The project

- Some nominals such as *president* show an ambiguity between readings related to an official role, and to readings on a personal level.

The president visited his mother. (personal visit preferred)

The president visited Netanyahu. (official visit preferred)

- These readings are driven in large part by our understanding of social roles in the world: heads of state are visited in the course of official duties of leading a country, while parents are not.

- Puzzle:** these same nominals admit for **only** a role-related reading when used as adjectives.

The president visited his mother.

Does not entail: There was a presidential visit to the president's mother.

- Find that distinction arises not just with verbal predication, but possessives as well.

the president's desk      the president's advisor      (personal or official)

the presidential desk      a presidential advisor      (only official)

### 0.1 The project

- Presidential* (in this example) is a relational adjective (RAs). Other examples:  
Ukrainian crisis, technical architect, nuclear war, dental care, semantics conference
- In this talk, we call *presidential* (and other like adjectives) role-denoting relational adjectives. Examples:  
president :: presidential    mayor :: mayoral    senator :: senatorial    pope :: papal
- These role-denoting relational adjectives form a (semi-)productive subclass of RAs in English.
- Often derived from a noun, but in some cases this is only apparent diachronically (e.g., *royal* from Lat. *rex* 'king')

### 0.1 The project

#### Questions addressed today

- How are relational adjectives, especially those of the *presidential*-type, represented?
- How are roles semantically represented and distinguished from ordinary individuals?

0.1 The project

Our answer

- Enrich ontology with **levels of action** (official and personal).
- Lexically decompose role-denoting nouns. They encode an event at an official level of action.
- Role-denoting RAs relate meaning of modified nominal to the official actions encoded in the adjective.
- Roles are derived from thematic roles of events at an official level of action.

Big picture

- How adjectives compose with the nouns that they modify
- How world knowledge and context interact with lexical meaning
- How our natural language ontology is organized, and what kinds of things we find in it (e.g. the project of natural language metaphysics)

0.2 Roadmap for this talk

- Section 1: Basic data on relational adjectives
- Section 2: Previous accounts of RAs and some critiques
- Section 3: Ontological background for roles
- Section 4: Analysis of *presidency, president, presidential*
- Section 5: Expanding on the analysis
- Section 6: Discussion and conclusion

Note:

- We focus on *presidential* as the best and clearest example case in our analysis.
- But the basic analysis can be extended to other examples of these role-denoting RAs.

1. Relational adjectives

1.1 Variants of adnominal non-property adjective use

Classificatory use

Semantics of A+N: Modifying a noun with a classificatory adjective yields an expression for a subclass of the class denoted by the modified noun alone.

- Examples *nuclear war musical instrument dental care pediatric conference public university*
- Most classificatory adjectives are denominal, or there is a semantically related noun  
*musical – music pediatric – pediatrics public – public dental – teeth*
- Classificatory adjectives are not gradable.
- Property adjectives can usually not be used predicatively, but exceptions are possible  
*#the care was dental*  
*#this instrument is musical*  
*??this conference is pediatric*  
*this university is public*
- Out of context, classificatory adjectives do not define a class in their own right.

1.1 Variants of adnominal adjective use

Thematic use

The adjective is denominal or otherwise lexically corresponding to a noun N<sub>A</sub>.

Semantics of A+N: Modifying a noun with a thematic adjective amounts to the characterization of an event argument of the head noun as a case of N<sub>A</sub>.

- Examples *presidential visit French policy semantics workshop*
- Thematic adjectives are not gradable.
- Thematic adjectives can usually not be used predicatively  
*#this visit is presidential*  
*#this policy is French*  
*??this workshop is semantics*
- Out of context, thematic adjectives do not define a class in their own right.

1.2 Relational adjectives proper

Relational A+N compositionally result in a sense that relates the sense of N to N<sub>A</sub>.

There are three near-equivalent ways of semantically joining two N senses:

	English	German	Russian
deNA + N	<i>presidential visit</i>	–	<i>prezident<sub>N</sub>-skij<sub>A</sub> visit</i>
NN compound	–	<i>Präsidentenbesuch</i>	–
possessive N N	<i>president’s visit</i>	<i>Besuch des Präsidenten</i>	<i>visit prezident<sub>N</sub>-a<sub>GEN</sub></i>
deNA + N	<i>Ukrainian crisis</i>	–	–
NN compound	–	<i>Ukraine<sub>N</sub>krise</i>	–
possessive N N	–	–	–

2. Previous accounts

2.1 Previous accounts I: Recoverable predicates, thematic and classificatory adjectives

- Levi (1978) analyses compounds and RAs as being transformationally derived from predications that make use of a set of abstract “Recoverably Deletable Predicates.”

CAUSE, HAVE, MAKE, USE, BE, IN, FOR, FROM, ABOUT

stress caused by heat -> heat stress -> thermal stress

- Raises questions of where these predicates come from, and why only these predicates.
- Previous syntactic accounts (Bosque and Picallo 1996, Alexiadou and Stavrou 2011, a.o.) assume a distinction between **thematic** and **classificatory** uses of RAs.
- In these accounts, thematic RAs **syntactically** saturate an argument position. Classificatory RAs are true adjectives (in many accounts) and not argument-saturating.
- Arsenijevic et al. (2014) provide arguments against this view and for a view that RAs are always true adjectives without syntactic argument-saturating behavior.
- Argument-saturating behavior is only apparent. Product of semantics.

2.2 Previous accounts II

McNally and Boleda (2004) argue that relational adjectives are properties of kinds and not individuals.

- Propose an intersective analysis of RAs, adapting Larson’s (1998) analysis of certain event-related adjectives (e.g. *beautiful dancer*, *skillful surgeon*)
- Assume that common nouns have an argument for a Carlsonian kind  $x_k$  in addition to an argument for an ordinary individual  $y_o$ . Ordinary individual and kind related via Carlson’s  $R(ealization)$  relation.

$$[[architect]] = \lambda x_k \lambda y_o [R(x_k, y_o) \wedge \mathbf{architect}(x_k)]$$

- RAs are properties of kinds.

$$[[technical]] = \lambda x_k [\mathbf{technical}(x_k)]$$

- Intersective modification via the kind argument.

$$[[technical\ architect]] = \lambda y_o \exists x_k [R(x_k, y_o) \wedge \mathbf{architect}(x_k) \wedge \mathbf{technical}(x_k)]$$

2.3 Objection: Paraphrases with kind

- Given a kind-based analyses, we might expect **paraphrases with kind** to be possible with role adjectives (e.g. *an A kind of N*).
- Generally, paraphrases of this sort are **not possible** with role adjectives or **don’t capture the role-related meaning**.

<i>presidential election</i>	election of the president (THEME)	<i>#presidential kind of election</i>
<i>presidential office</i>	office [position] of being president	<i>#presidential kind of office</i>
<i>presidential office</i>	office [room] used by the president	<i>#presidential kind of office</i>
<i>presidential desk</i>	desk used by the president	<i>#presidential kind of desk</i>
<i>presidential advisor</i>	advisor of the president (GOAL)	<i>#presidential kind of advisor</i>
<i>presidential visit (1)</i>	visit by the president	<i>#presidential kind of visit</i>
<i>presidential visit (2)</i>	visit to the president	<i>#presidential kind of visit</i>
<i>presidential order</i>	order issued by the president (AGENT)	<i>#presidential kind of order</i>
<i>presidential motorcade</i>	motorcade escorting the president	<i>#presidential kind of motorcade</i>

- This suggests that kinds are not the ontological sort relevant for an analysis of adjectives like *presidential*.

2.4 Objection: Relations encoded in the adjective

- Arsenijević et al. (2014) propose that certain adjectives (*French, Danish*) do more than simple intersective modification, but also encode an **Origin** relation, relating a kind and a location. There are, however, many possible relations involved with *presidential*.  

<i>presidential election</i>	election <b>with the aim of determining the next</b> president <sub>incumbent</sub>	("thematic")
<i>presidential office</i> (1)	the office <b>of</b> president <sub>role</sub>	
<i>presidential office</i> (2)	office <b>for certain types of official action by</b> the president	
<i>presidential advisor</i>	advisor <b>to the president for official action</b>	
<i>presidential visit</i> (1)	visit <b>by</b> the president as the president	("thematic")
<i>presidential visit</i> (2)	visit <b>to</b> the president as the president	("thematic")
<i>presidential order</i>	order <b>by</b> the president as part of executing presidential rights	("thematic")
<i>presidential motorcade</i>	motorcade <b>[for] escorting</b> the president on official travel	
- Encoding the relation within the adjective is too strong. Not a general strategy for role-denoting RAs.
- The relation must come from the modified noun and/or a bridging relation provided by context.

3. Ontological background

3.1 Social ontology

- A social ontology provides for social entities such as persons and institutions, roles, offices, functions, and actions by social agents (e.g. voters, politicians, police, parents, spouses, teachers, etc.).
- Essential to the social ontology are social acts performed by social agents that produce social facts by acting, implement social roles etc.
- Entities in the social ontology are (ultimately) implemented by entities in a physical ontology: persons are implemented by human animals, and social acts are implemented by doings that under appropriate circumstances **count as** particular social acts (Searle 1995).
- The social ontology of our world is in itself multi-level. For example, persons are social entities that may take in social roles (a higher level).
- The social ontology is grounded by and dependent on the physical ontology.

2.5 Objection: Predications with relational adjectives

- The account of relational adjectives as properties of kinds predicts that they should be able to take kind-denoting DPs as arguments (such as BPs or kind-denoting indefinites) when used predicatively. This is possible, though not always so.  
*For women concerned about their future fertility for reasons that are medical, social or financial...*  
*\*Doctors/\*A doctor can be medical.*
- Additionally, RAs used predicatively can sometimes predicate of non-kind-denoting DPs, which should result in a type mismatch.  
*This university is public, but private universities and colleges are also on the island.*  
*An early goal of diagnosis is to determine whether the condition is viral or bacterial.*
- This distribution isn't straightforwardly predicted by RAs as predicates of kinds; other pragmatic and semantic properties must be involved.

3.2 Office and person levels of action

- A social office, like 'president of the US', is defined at a non-basic, abstract level of social ontology. There is an incumbent of the office, a person.
- Certain types of acts are considered acts by the office (rather than the individual).
- Being an abstract institution, the office cannot execute the act.
- Official acts have to be implemented by the person in office.
- What office-holders do when they *implement* an official act is *not* the official act because the official act is an act by the office, not by its incumbent.

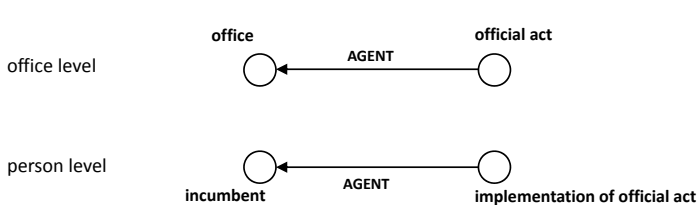


Figure 1: Office and role level

### 3.3 Connections between levels

- There is a function **INC** that returns the incumbent for the office.
- There is a function **IMPL** that returns the implementing act  $A\bar{I}$  for the official act  $A$ .  $A$  and  $A\bar{I}$  have the same temporal extension  $\tau$ .
- There is a (partial function) **CONST** that returns the implemented act  $A\hat{I}$  for the implementary act. This relation is Goldman's (1970) "level-generation".

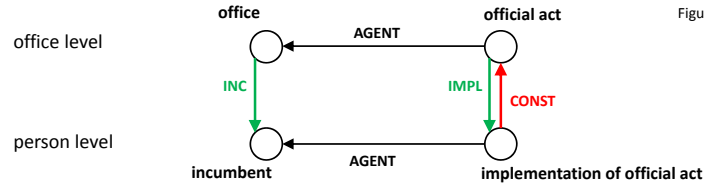
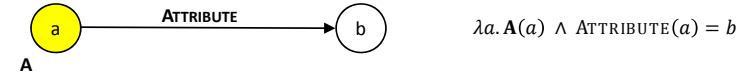


Figure 2: Office and role level relations

### 3.3 A note on notation

- Analysis uses a version of frame semantics formalized by Petersen (2007) and Löbner (2014).
- Frame is a recursive attribute–value structure.
- Model lexical and world-knowledge within the same representation.
- Attributes in this theory are functions.
- We move back and forth between using first-order formalizations of frames and graph-theoretic frame diagrams. But, nothing crucial is gained or lost with either formalization.
- Arcs represent attributes, nodes represent values.
- Distinguished node (in yellow) represents the referential argument of the frame.



## 4. Presidency – president – presidential

### 4.1 \*Preside and presidency

- The notions of 'president' and 'presidency' are defined (by social regulation) at the office level.
- We assume that the basic notion is the one of 'presidency'.
- A presidency is an event with two arguments, an ORG[ANIZATION] and a HEAD. We introduce a hypothetical verb *\*preside* for this type of event.
- Like for any event, there is a temporal extension  $\tau$  for every presidency. We assume that presidencies are temporally uninterrupted.

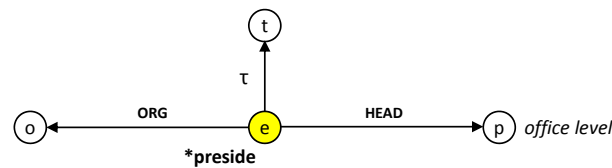


Figure 3: presidency and \*preside

$$\lambda e (*preside(e) \wedge HEAD(e)=p \wedge ORG(e)=o \wedge \tau(e)=t)$$

### 4.1 \*Preside and presidency

- Evidence for an event **\*preside** from derivational morphology.
- *president* → *presidency*. Shift from president individual at the office or personal level to the **\*preside** event at the office level.  
Barack Obama's presidency lasted eight years.  
Because his presidency occurred between those of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt, McKinley's accomplishments have often been overlooked.
- Note: Not crucial for our analysis that *presidency* itself denote an event.
- But, we do need an event incorporated into the meaning of *president*.
- Similar move is made by Larson (1998) for nouns like *king* that also do not obviously have an event.

4.2 President

- The noun *president* is indiscriminately used at the office and the person level.
- We derive its meaning from the **\*preside** frame, as the head or incumbent.
- Assumption: For every time t, every organization o, there is at most one presidency obtaining.

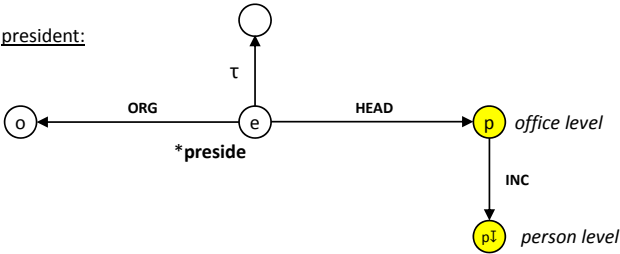


Figure 4: president

$$\text{president}_{\text{office}}(t, o) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \text{HEAD} ( \text{le } (*\text{preside}(e) \wedge t \text{ in } \tau(e) \wedge \text{ORG}(e)=o) )$$
  
$$\text{president}_{\text{person}}(t, o) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \text{INC} ( \text{HEAD} ( \text{le } (*\text{preside}(e) \wedge t \text{ in } \tau(e) \wedge \text{ORG}(e)=o) ) )$$

4.3 Presidential

- The adjective *presidential*, in the meaning underlying its RA use, relates to the office level.
- It is also based on the concept **\*preside**.
- It appears to lack the ORG and the τ arguments.

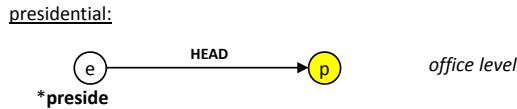


Figure 5: presidential

5. Compositional analysis

5.1 Reminder: Possible readings for visiting-president constructions

	official reading	personal reading
(1) <i>The US president visits the Russian president.</i>	available*	available
(2) <i>Trump visits Putin.</i>	world knowledge: available	available
(3) <i>Trump visits his son.</i>	world knowledge: not available	available
(4) <i>presidential visit</i>	available	not available
(5) <i>the president's visit</i>	available	available

**Note**  
The “official” reading is also possible with arbitrary denotations of the office-holders *if supported by world knowledge* (cf. (2) and (3)).

5.1 Possible readings for vising-presidents constructions

Note

- Only the N<sub>poss</sub> N variant allows for both the person reading and the office reading.
- The N<sub>poss</sub> N variant is the only one where the first N refers.
- N roots of denominal words do not refer.

Compare <i>presidential advisor</i> vs. <i>president's advisor</i>	regular advisor for official presidential matters  advisor of the president in arbitrary matters, including such unrelated to president's office
<i>presidential desk</i> vs. <i>president's desk</i>	desk for the president for his official use  desk used by the president for any purpose, possibly unrelated to president's office

5.2 General assumptions on composition

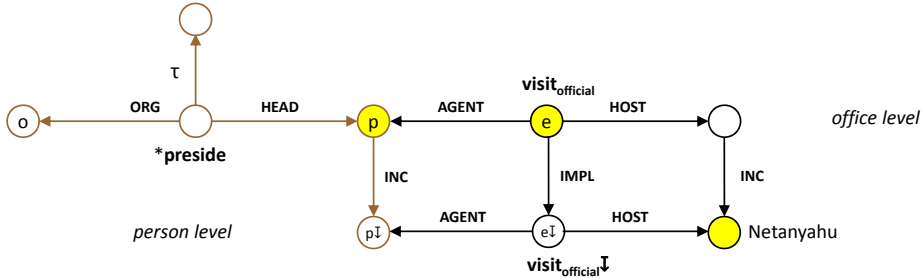
We assume that...

- The basic mechanism of composition is **unification**, rather than function application.
- When two meanings are unified, there may be more than on possibility for unification.  
*Composition is not necessarily deterministic.*
- Expressions with multi-level denotation lend themselves for unification at all levels involved.
- Semantic concepts are based on, and embedded in, our general ontology and knowledge of the world.
- Contextual knowledge may enable or prevent particular choices for unification.

5.3 Official visit

The president visited Netanyahu.

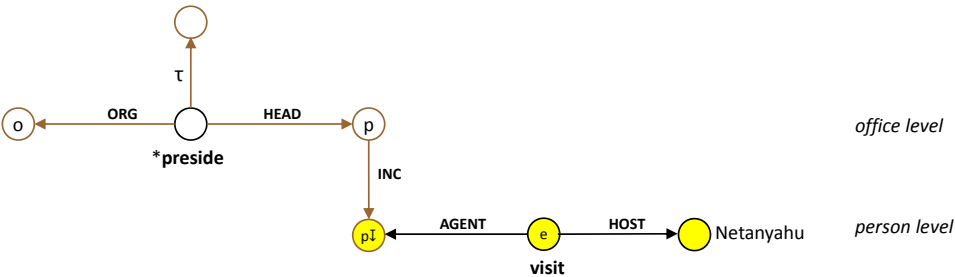
- Reading 1: Official visit<sub>official</sub> by visitor in office to host in some office.
- **visit<sub>official</sub>** requires agent and host at the office level
  - **The agent node unifies with the office-level node of the ‘president’ frame.**
  - The office of corresponding to Netanyahu comes from world knowledge.
  - Reference to the person of Netanyahu necessitates elaboration of the personal level.



5.4 Personal visit

The president visits Netanyahu.

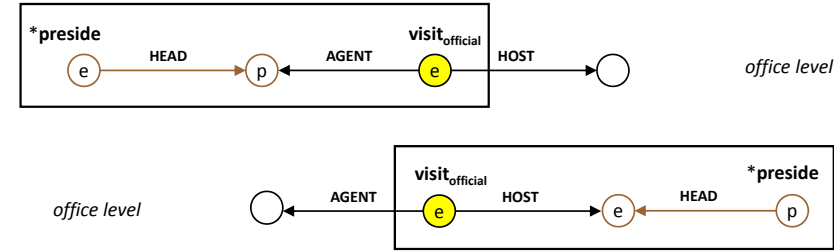
- Reading 2: Personal visit.
- **visit** as a verb of non-institutional personal action requires agent and host at the personal level
  - The **agent** node unifies with the **incumbent** node of the *president* frame.



5.5 Presidential visit

presidential visit

- The frame for *presidential* does not provide nodes at the person level.
  - The only target for unification is the **office-level** president node.
- Possible unifications: The ‘president’ node can unify with **either** the agent or the host node of ‘visit’.



6. Conclusions

6.1 Social ontology

- The analysis of role-denoting adnominal adjectives requires a **rich ontology** that includes a social ontology and is able to distinguish between levels that constitute, or implement each others.
- Roles, at least some, can be derived from **events of role-incumbency** at an appropriate level in the social ontology. They are thematic roles in this type of event.
- Roles as abstract entities in the social ontology are linked by the **incumbent** relation to entities at the level of persons in the social ontology.
- The ontology level of roles and offices provides for role and **office acts** by agents at this level. These acts are level-generated (Goldman 1970) by doings of agents at lower levels.
- Reference to acts at office level necessarily requires lower level **implementary action** by the incumbent of the office.
- There is no commitment to ‘kinds’ or ‘roles’ as primitive ontological types. Kinds are not involved. Roles are thematic roles of incumbency events.

6.2 Compositional analysis

- A frame-based lexical semantics allows the application of **unification** as the basic mechanism of composition.
- Composition allows for **multiple readings** from the same lexical input, if unification is possible in more than one way. Thus composition is not necessarily deterministic.
- The ontology connects lexical concepts to world knowledge.
- Some lexical concepts involve more than one ontological level.
- Composition requires **level-selection** for unification.

Thank you!

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