

08 - Verbs in the driving seat

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08 - Verbs in the
driving seat

Nick Riches

Motivation for AS

5 min ex

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Thematic relations (roles)

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5 minute exercise

What is wrong with the following sentences?

1. Jack gave Mary
2. Petula put the beans
3. Julie laughed Peter

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1. Drive
2. Donate
3. Mix
4. Yawn
5. Slap
6. Rain

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A verb 'begs to be completed into a sentence' (Tomasello, 1992)

The verb implies a certain number of participants (Valence)

Valence can range from 0 to 3.

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Psycholinguistic studies demonstrate that even when we hear verbs in isolation we mentally represent the number of participants (e.g. Shapiro et al. 1987 lexical decision task, or Kim & Thomson, 2000)

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1. Jane fears Peter
2. Peter scares Jane
3. Paul liked the play
4. The play pleased Paul
5. Mary gave Pete a present
6. Pete received a present from Mary

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Argument Structure = a level of linguistic representation that comprises

1. the number of essential participants
2. their roles in the sentence
3. how those roles are ordered.

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Essential participants are known as 'arguments'

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Definition

Argument structure is partly semantic / partly syntactic:

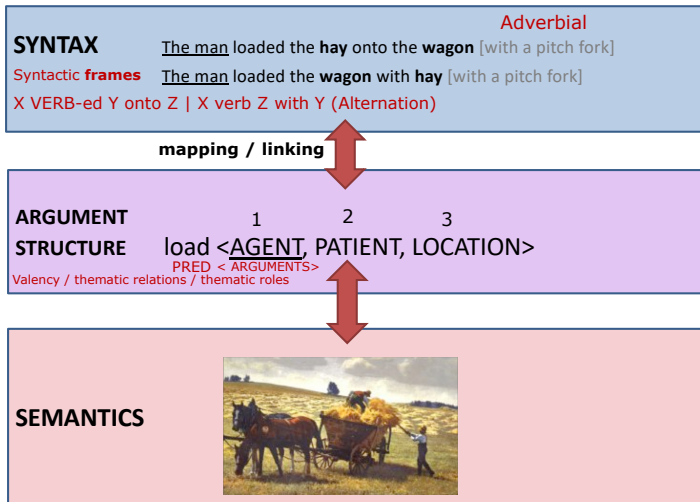
1. Semantic level: roles specified by the verb
2. Syntactic level: ordering of roles.

NB, role of subject, in particular is fixed, e.g.

(1) She gave Patrick a cake

(2) She gave a cake to Patrick

Definition



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Determining valence

How do we determine **essential** participants?

Those which are obligatory?

1. * She dropped ~~the pen~~
2. * She took ~~the jacket~~

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But most arguments can be rendered optional in certain contexts

1. She gives (money) to charity
2. They all gave presents to Mary. Paul gave a pen (to Mary), Jenny gave a book (to Mary), and Brad gave a watch (to Mary)
3. COOKING INSTRUCTIONS: Chop (the carrots) and stir (them) into the sauce

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In addition, some verbs seem to elicit a wide variety of arguments

1. [He] paints [walls]
2. [He] painted [the wall] [red]
3. [He] painted [the wall] [red] [with a paintbrush]
and [some paint]
4. [This brush] paints well

Determining valence

Extra-valent arguments which sound “added on”

1. She swam [ten lengths]
2. They laughed [the teacher] [out of the room]

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Determining valence

1. Method 1: Corpus
2. Method 2: Introspection

These two methods can occasionally give different results!

So there is no foolproof method

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The Projectionist Account

Why not just use the meaning of the verb to determine how it acts in a sentence?

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Problems with the Projectionist Account (1)

Jane fears Peter

Peter scare Jane

The two verbs arguably have the same meaning but differ in order of realisation of arguments.

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Problems with the Projectionist Account (2)

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Frame	Tell	Say
Verb + N	He told a story	She said her lines
Verb + N + N	She told him a story	*She said him a story
Verb + N + non-finite clause	He told her to go	* He said her to go
Verb + Clause	* She told she was leaving him	She said she was leaving him

The two verbs arguably have the same meaning but differ in terms of valence.

Problems with the Projectionist Account (3)

1. He gave a book to Mary
He gave her the book
2. He donated a book to the library
*He donated the library a book

The two verbs have closely related meanings but differ in terms of their *alternation* characteristics (ability to occur in multiple frames)

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Five min ex: 19 / 41

What is a proposition?

A *mental scene* involving at least one *entity* (or argument) participating in an event or situation



A tiger

ENTITY



A tiger creeping through
the jungle

ENTITY + SITUATION
= A PROPOSITION

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What is a proposition?

Contains those entities which make the most important contributions to the **truth conditions** of the sentence

1. The **dog chased** the cat →
The **robot washed** the cat
TRUTH CONDITIONS HAVE COMPLETELY
CHANGED
2. The dog chased **the** cat →
The dog **quickly** chased **a** cat
MINOR CHANGE TO TRUTH CONDITIONS

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What is a proposition?

1. Proposition

chase(dog, cat)

2. Sentence

2.1 The dog chased the cat

2.2 It chased the cat

2.3 The cat was chased by the dog

3. Utterance

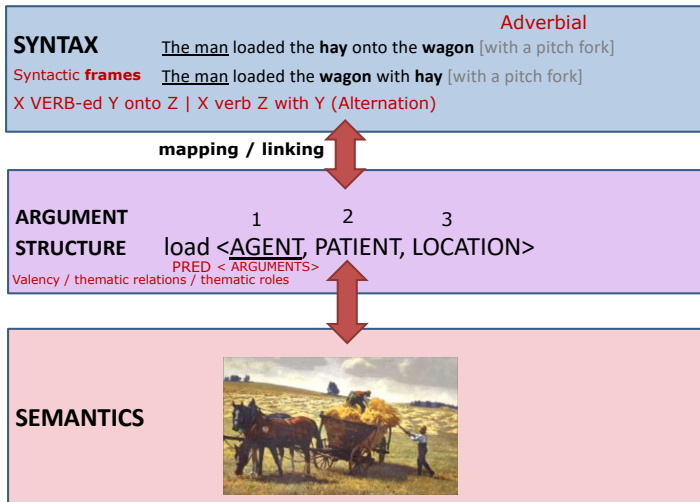
A: Is your dog energetic?

B: Well, it chases the neighbour's cat every day!

We need propositions to explain how different surface forms (e.g. 2) can have the same underlying meaning.

The proposition IS the underlying meaning.

What is a proposition?



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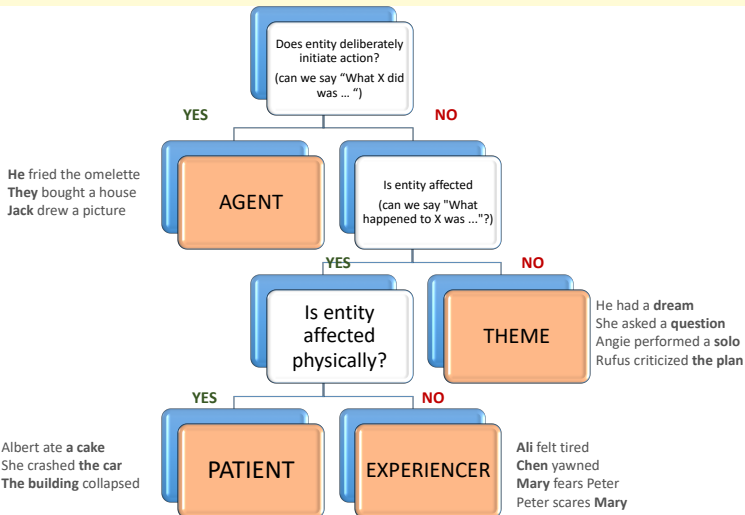
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Main roles for Noun Phrases



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1. Charles crashed the car
2. Mavis heard the noise
3. The noise startled Mavis
4. The tree fell down in the storm
5. Ali considered the exciting proposal
6. Fatimah hated the start of term
7. The swing broke under his weight
8. The doctor felt the patient's foot
9. I like having a bath with my clothes on
10. Jack liked Susan's holiday snaps on Facebook.

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1. Charles _{AG.} crashed the car _{PAT.}
2. Mavis _{EXP.} heard the noise _{TH.}
3. The noise _{TH.} startled Mavis _{EXP.}
4. The tree _{PAT.} fell down in the storm
5. Ali _{AG.} considered the exciting proposal _{TH.}
6. Fatimah _{EXP.} hated the start of term _{TH.}
7. The swing _{PAT.} broke under his weight
8. The doctor _{AG.} felt the patient's foot _{TH.}
9. I _{EXP.} like having a bath _{TH.} with my clothes on
10. Jack _{AG.} liked Susan's holiday snaps _{TH.} on Facebook.

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Benefactive is the role typically given to Indirect Object Noun Phrases, e.g.

1. She gave [him *BEN.*] [a book *PAT.*]
2. She bought [a book *PAT.*] [for him *BEN.*]

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Possessor is the owner of something

1. [Jack *POSS.*] has/owns a Ferrari
2. The house belongs to [Martha *POSS.*]

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Phrases which describe a property of something else are called ATTRIBUTIVES

ATTRIBUTIVES are mapped to Cs and Co.

1. Janice feels happy ATTR
2. Losing at bingo makes Martha sad ATTR
3. Jack is in a mood ATTR

Roles for other types of phrases

We can often make questions about attributives using the question word how, e.g.

1. Q: How does janice feel? A: Happy

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Phrases which describe locations are sometimes called LOCATIVES, e.g.

1. Jason is in the park LOC
2. Pat loaded the hay onto the wagon LOC

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A genuine argument?

1. The girls played baseball in the park

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Roles for other types of phrases

We can make questions about locatives using the question word where, e.g.

1. Q: Where is Jason? A: In the park.

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An instrument is an object used to perform an action, e.g.

1. Angela covered the food with a cloth *INSTR*

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A genuine thematic relation?

1. He **hammered** the nail (? with a hammer)
2. She **filed** her nails (with a nail file).
3. She scratched her back (with a loofah)

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After Eating Peas All Tiny Babies Avoid Laughing In Public

AGENT, EXPERIENCER, PATIENT, THEME,
BENEFACTIVE, ATTRIBUTIVE, LOCATIVE,
INSTRUMENT, POSSESSOR

Nick Riches

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1. Jack considers himself a real gigolo
2. Angie sent her father the bundle of letters last Tuesday
3. The steering wheel came off in his hands
4. Jance watched the hovering buzzard
5. Who does this pencil case belong to?
6. Jake painted the wall with red paint.
7. Alina smelt the beautiful flowers

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1. Jack EXP. considers himself TH. a real gigolo ATTR.
2. Angie AG. sent her father BEN. the bundle of letters PAT. last Tuesday
3. The steering wheel PAT. came off in his hands
4. Jance AG. watched the hovering buzzard TH.
5. Who POSS. does this pencil TH. case belong to?
6. Jake AG. painted the wall PAT. with red paint INS.
7. Alina AG. smelt the beautiful flowers TH.

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How many possible ways can you think of to complete the following sentence?

(NB think of how many different **syntactic structures** can be used after verb)

1. Doctor Who remembered . . .

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