

Chapter 3: Syntactic Forms, Grammatical Functions, and Semantic Roles

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Introduction

- two dimensions:
 - (1) a. Syntactic categories: N, A, V, P, NP, VP, AP, ...
 - b. Grammatical functions: SUBJ (Subject), OBJ (Object), MOD (Modifier), PRED (Predicate), ...
 - (2) The monkey kicked a boy on Monday.
 - (3) a. [_S [_{NP} The monkey] [_{VP} kicked [_{NP} a boy] [_{PP} on Monday]]].
 - b. [_S [_{SUBJ} The monkey] [_{PRED} kicked [_{OBJ} a boy] [_{MOD} on Monday]]].

Semantic roles

Semantic role: Constituents can be considered in terms of conceptual notions of semantic roles such as agent, patient, location, instrument, and the like. A semantic role denotes the underlying relationship that a participant has with the relation of the clause, expressed by the main verb.

- (4) a. John tagged the monkey in the forest.
 b. The monkey was tagged in the forest by John.
- (5) a. [[_{agt} John] [_{pred} tagged [_{pat} the monkey] [_{loc} in the forest]]].
 b. [_S [_{pat} The monkey] [_{pred} was tagged [_{loc} in the wood] [_{agt} by John]]].

subjects

- subject, predicate, predicator
 - (6) a. [The cat] [devoured [the rat]].
b. [The rat] [devoured [the cat]].
- semantic role
 - (7) a. My brother wears a green overcoat.
b. This car stinks.
c. It rains.
d. The committee disliked her proposal.

subjecthood tests: agreement

- (8) a. She never writes/*write home.
b. These books *saddens/sadden me.
c. Our neighbor takes/*take his children to school in his car.
- (9) a. The book, including all the chapters in the first section, is/*are very interesting.
b. The effectiveness of teaching and learning *depend/depends on several factors.
c. The tornadoes that tear through this county every spring *is/are more than just a nuisance.

subjecthood tests: tag question

The pronoun in the tag question agrees with the subject in person, number, and gender – it refers back to the subject, but not necessarily to the closest NP, nor to the most topical one.

- (10) a. The lady singing with a boy is a genius, isn't she/*isn't he?
b. With their teacher, the kids have arrived safely, haven't they/
*hasn't he?

subjecthood tests: Subject-auxiliary inversion:

- (11) a. This teacher is a genius.
b. The kids have arrived safely.
c. It could be more detrimental.
- (12) a. Is this teacher a genius?
b. Have the kids arrived safely?
c. Could it be more detrimental?
- (13) a. The kids in our class have arrived safely.
b. *Have in our class the kids arrived safely?

Direct objects

A direct object (DO) is canonically an NP, undergoing the process denoted by the verb:

- (14) a. His girlfriend bought this computer.
b. That silly fool broke the teapot.
- (15) a. Thunder frightens [the dog].
b. The dog fears [thunder].

DO: passivization

- (16) a. His girlfriend bought this computer for him.
b. The child broke the teapot by accident.
- (17) a. This computer was bought for him by his girlfriend.
b. The teapot was broken by the child by accident.
- (18) a. This item belongs to the student.
b. *The student is belonged to by this item.
- (19) a. He remained a good friend to me.
b. *A good friend is remained to me (by him).

Indirect objects

An indirect object (IO) is one which precedes a direct object (DO), as in (20); IOs are NPs and have the semantic roles of goal, recipient, or benefactive:

- (20) a. I threw [the puppy] [the ball]. (IO = goal)
b. John gave [the boys] [the CDs]. (IO = recipient)
c. My mother baked [me] [a birthday cake]. (IO = benefactive)

Indirect objects: a caution

- passivization

- (21) a. *The CDs were given the boys by John.
b. *A review copy of the book was sent her by the publisher.
- (22) a. The boys were given the CDs (by John).
b. She was sent a review copy of the book (by the publisher).

- dative alternation

- (23) a. John gave the CDs to the boys.
b. The publisher sent a review copy of the book to her.
c. My mother baked a cake for me.
- (24) a. The CDs were given to the boys by John.
b. A review copy of the book was sent to her by the publisher.
c. This nice cake was baked for me by my mother.

Predicative complements: basic

- basic data

(25) a. This is *my ultimate goal*.

b. Michelle became *an architect*.

(26) a. They elected Graham *chairman*.

b. I consider Andrew *the best writer*

- no passivization

(27) a. *Chairman was elected Graham.

b. *The best writer was considered Andrew.

Predicative complements vs. object

- (28) a. John made Kim *a great doll*.
 b. John made Kim *a great doctor*.
- (29) a. (28)a: Kim \neq a great doll
 b. (28)b: Kim = a great doctor
- (30) a. The situation became *terrible*.
 b. This map is *what he wants*.
 c. The message was *that you should come on time*.
- (31) a. I made Kim *angry*.
 b. I consider him *immoral*.
 c. I regard Andrew *as the best writer*.
 d. They spoil their kids *rotten*.

oblique complements

- (32) a. John put books *in the box*.
b. John talked *to Bill about the exam*.
c. She reminded him *of the last time they met*.
d. They would inform Mary *of any success they have made*.
- (33) a. John gave a book *to the student*.
b. John bought a book *for the student*.
c. John asked Bill *of a question*.

modifiers vs. complements

- Complements (DO, IO, predicative complement, and oblique complement) are obligatory whereas modifiers are optional

- (34) a. The bus stopped *suddenly*.
b. Shakespeare wrote his plays *a long time ago*.
c. They went to the theater *in London*.
d. He failed chemistry *because he can't understand it*.

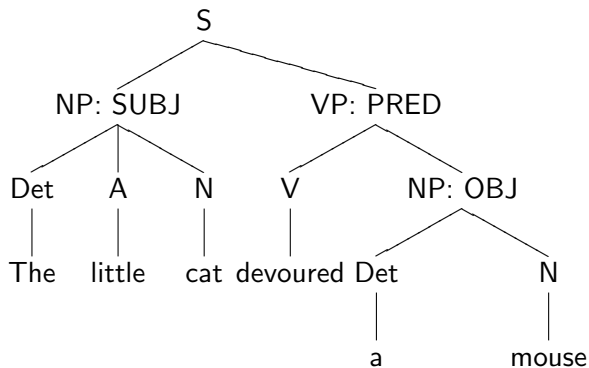
- stacking

- (35) a. *John gave Tom [a book] [a record].
b. I saw this film [several times] [last year] [during the summer].

- (36) a. My uncle visited today.
b. *Today was visited by my uncle.

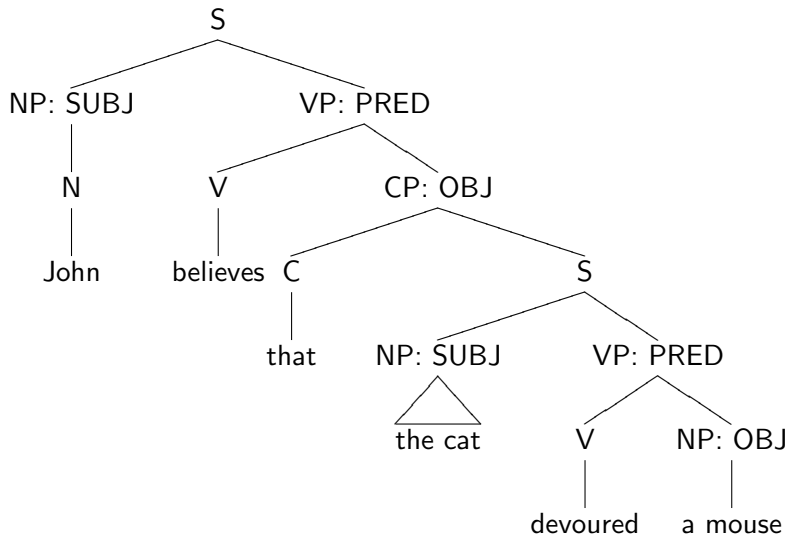
form and function together

(37)



form and function together

(38)



form or category of the subject

- (39) a. [_{NP} The termites] destroyed the sand castle.
 b. [_{VP} Being honest] is not an easy task.
 c. [_{CP} That John passed] surprised her.
 d. [_{VP} To finish this work on time] is almost unexpected.
 e. [_S What John said] is questionable.¹
 f. [_{PP} Under the bed] is a safe place to hide.

¹The subject clause is canonically categorized as CP. See Chapter 10 and 11 how this S is different from a canonical S too.

form or category of the object

- (40) a. I sent [_{NP} a surprise present] to John.
 b. They wondered [_S what she did yesterday].
 c. They believed [_{CP} that everybody would pass the test].
 d. Are you going on holiday before or after Easter? I prefer [_{PP} after Easter].

form of the subject

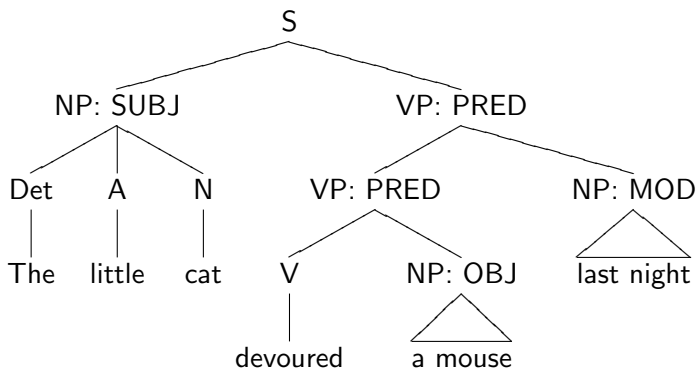
- (41) a. [That John passed] surprised her, didn't it?
 b. [[That the march should go ahead] and [that it should be cancelled]] have/*has been argued by different people at different times.
- (42) a. [To finish it on time] made quite a statement, didn't it?
 b. [[To delay the march] and [to go ahead with it]] have/*has been argued by different people at different times.

modifier

- (43) a. The little cat devoured a mouse [_{NP} last night].
b. John left [_{AdvP} very early].
c. John has been at Stanford [_{PP} for four years].
d. John studied hard [_{VP} to pass the exam].
e. She disappeared [_S when the main party arrived].

modifier

(44)



semantic roles

- Semantic roles were introduced as a way of classifying the arguments of predicators (mostly verbs and adjectives) into a closed set of participant types.
 - Agent: A participant which the meaning of the verb specifies as doing or causing something, possibly intentionally. Examples: subject of *eat*, *kick*, *hit*, *hammer*, etc.
- (45) a. *John* ate his noodle quietly.
b. *A boy* hit the ball.
c. *A smith* hammered the metal.

semantic roles

Patient: A participant which the verb characterizes as having something happen to it, and as being affected by what happens to it. Examples: object of *kick*, *hit*, *hammer*, etc.²

- (46) a. A boy hit *the ball*.
- b. A smith hammered *the metal*.

²Patient and theme are often unified into 'undergoer' in the sense that both the patient and theme individual undergo the action in question.

semantic roles

Experiencer: A participant who is characterized as aware of something.

Examples: subject of perception verbs like *feel*, *smell*, *hear*, *see*, etc.

- (47) a. *The students* felt comfortable in the class.
b. *The student* heard a strange sound.

semantic roles

Theme: A participant which is characterized as changing its position or condition, or as being in a state or position. Examples: direct object of *give*, *hand*, subject of *come*, *happen*, *die*, etc.

- (48) a. John gave *a book* to the students.
 b. *John* died last night.

Benefactive: The entity that benefits from the action or event denoted by the predicator. Examples: oblique complement of *make*, *buy*, etc.

- (49) a. John made a doll for *his son*.
 b. John bought a lot of books for *his sons*.

semantic roles

Source: The one from which motion proceeds. Examples: subject of *promise*, object of *deprive*, *free*, *cure*, etc.

- (50) a. *John* promised Bill to leave tomorrow morning.
 b. John deprived *his sons* of game cards.

Goal: The one to which motion proceeds. Examples: subject of *receive*, *buy*, indirect object of *tell*, *give*, etc.

- (51) a. *Mary* received an award from the department.
 b. John told the rumor to *his friend*.

semantic roles

Location: The thematic role associated with the NP expressing the location in a sentence with a verb of location. Examples: subject of *keep*, *own*, *retain*, locative PPs, etc.

- (52) a. John put his books *in the attic*.
 b. *The government* kept all the money.

Instrument: The medium by which the action or event denoted by the predicator is carried out. Examples: oblique complement of *hit*, *wipe*, *hammer*, etc.

- (53) a. John hit the ball with *a bat*.
 b. John wiped the window with *a towel*.

semantic roles: good cases

- (54) a. [agt The cat] chased [pat the mouse].
 b. [pat The mouse] was chased by [agt the cat].
- (55) a. There still remains an issue to be solved.
 b. There lived a man with his grandson.
 c. At the same time there arrived a lone guest, a tall, red-haired and incredibly well dressed man
- (56) a. *There sang a man with a pipe.
 b. *There ran a man with an umbrella.

semantic roles: bad cases

- (57) a. John resembles his mother.
b. A is similar to B.
- (58) a. John runs into the house.
b. Mary looked at the sky.