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

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two dimensions:

    b. Grammatical functions: SUBJ (Subject), OBJ (Object),  
       MOD (Modifier), PRED (Predicate), . . .

(2) The monkey kicked a boy on Monday.

(3) a. \[ S [NP \text{ The monkey}] [VP \text{ kicked} [NP \text{ a boy}] [PP \text{ on Monday}]]] \].
    b. \[ S [\text{SUBJ The monkey}] [\text{PRED kicked} [\text{OBJ a boy}] [\text{MOD on Monday}]]] \].
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 ≠ 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) 

\[ S \]

\[ \text{NP: SUBJ} \]

\[ \text{Det} \quad \text{A} \quad \text{N} \]

\[ \text{The} \quad \text{little} \quad \text{cat} \]

\[ \text{VP: PRED} \]

\[ \text{V} \quad \text{NP: OBJ} \]

\[ \text{devoured} \quad \text{Det} \quad \text{N} \]

\[ \text{a} \quad \text{mouse} \]
John believes that the cat devoured a mouse.
form or category of the subject

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

\(^1\)The 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 \([\text{NP} \ a \text{ surprise present}]\) to John.
b. They wondered \([\text{S} \ what \ she \ did \ yesterday]\).
c. They believed \([\text{CP} \ that \ everybody \ would \ pass \ the \ test]\).
d. Are you going on holiday before or after Easter? I prefer \([\text{PP after Easter}]\).
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.
(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].
The little cat VNP: OBJ last night devoured a mouse VP: PRED NP: MOD

NP: SUBJ VP: PRED

Det A N VP: PRED

The little cat V NP: OBJ a mouse

(44)
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.
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*.

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²Patient and theme are often unified into ‘undergoer’ in the sense that both the patient and theme individual undergo the action in question.
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.
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. \([_{\text{agt}} \text{The cat}] \text{ chased } [_{\text{pat}} \text{ the mouse}].\]
    b. \([_{\text{pat}} \text{The mouse}] \text{ was chased by } [_{\text{agt}} \text{ 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.