

CHAPTER 4

SEMANTIC ROLES

4.1 Sentence and Proposition

- ▣ Sentence= “something that expresses a complete thought”?
- ▣ Proposition: -the semantic content/ message
 - something abstract but meaningful

Examples

a. Sentence Vs Proposition

3a Richard wrote the report.

3b Richard is the one who wrote the report.

3c The report was written by Richard.

3d The report is what Richard wrote.

These are 4 different English sentences but they convey the same message – they express the same **proposition**.

b. Inflection + Proposition (+Focus)

We	walk	in the park
	walked	
	are walking	
	have walked	
	may walk	
	would have walked	
	could be walking	

c. Syntactic Analysis

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Predicate</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Adverbial</i>
A window	broke.		
Tom	broke	a window.	
Our dog	is		under the house.
Denise	put	marmalade	on her toast.
Albert	sends	e-mail	to his friends.
I	am	thirsty.	
Hector	is	afraid	of the dark.
Mr Whipple	is	a banker.	

d. Semantic Analysis

- ▣ {break, a window}
- ▣ {break, Tom, a window}
- ▣ {under, our dog, the house}
- ▣ {put-on, Denise, marmalade, Denise's toast}
- ▣ {send, Albert, e-mail, Albert's friends}
- ▣ {thirsty, I}
- ▣ {afraid-of, Hector, the dark}
- ▣ {a banker, Mr Whipple}.

- ▣ In semantic analysis every proposition contains one predicate and a varying number of referring expressions (noun phrases) called *arguments*.
- ▣ While the predicate may be in the form of *a verb, an adjective, a preposition, or a noun phrase*.

4.2 Semantic Roles

- ▣ *Every simple sentence – every proposition – has one predicate and a varying number of expressions, or arguments.*
- ▣ *An account of the number of arguments that a predicate has is called the **valency** of that predicate.*
- ▣ Valency theory is a description of the semantic potential of predicates in terms of the number and types of arguments which may co-occur with them.

4.2.1 Valency Zero

- ▣ 11 It's raining.
- ▣ 12 It sleeted (yesterday).
- ▣ 13 It has been thundering (in the west).

English requires the presence of *it with weather verbs like rain, snow, sleet, thunder*, but it does not refer to anything.

4.2.2 Valency One

- ▣ Each of these arguments names an **actor that carries out the action.**

16 The dog is sleeping.

17 Larry laughed.

18 The earth rotates (on its axis).

- ▣ The predicates *die, erupt, fall* tell an **event, a change in the condition of the entity named by the argument, and the entity named in the argument undergoes this change, is affected by it.**

19 Grandfather died (last week).

20 A volcano erupted.

21 The cake fell.

Give argument and subject roles in the sentences. Some of them are used in the sentences that follow.

a) *theme*- description (22-25)

- ▣ 22 This soup is cold.
- ▣ 23 Terry is impatient.
- ▣ 24 Henrietta was rather reckless.
- ▣ 25 The bottle is empty.

b) *theme* – *identity* (26-29)

- ▣ 26 This man is a carpenter.
- ▣ 27 Dextrose and fructose are sugars.
- ▣ 28 Eddy Eckstein is the village idiot.
- ▣ 29 Cora and Willis are the class leaders

Table of Semantic Roles

- ▣ **Actor** : performs some action without affecting any other entity. (e.g. She left.)
- ▣ **Affected**: undergoes a change due to some event or is affected by some other entity. (e.g. A window broke).
- ▣ **Affecting**: without any action, affects another entity. (e.g. Betty likes opera.)
- ▣ **Agent** : by its action affects some other entity. (e.g. Tom broke a window.)
- ▣ **Associate**: tells the status or identity of another argument, the theme. (e.g. Tom is a student.)

- ▣ Effect: comes into existence through the action of the predicate. (e.g. Lili baked a pie.)
- ▣ Place: names the location in which the action of the predicate occurs. (e.g. The fireman climbed a ladder.)
- ▣ Theme: the topic of a predicate that does not express action – a stative predicate. (e.g. Audrey is a computer expert.)

This package weighs five kilos.

Theme

Link?P associate

4.2.3 Valency Two

- ▣ Most verbs take a subject and an object; they are two-argument predicates. One of them is *make*, illustrated in sentence 9. Other examples are *need* and *use*.

9 Chris is making an omelet.

- ▣ The following are examples of two argument predicates.

Argument –predicate -argument

- ▣ Agent – action – affected (31-33)
- ▣ Agent – action- effect (34-36)
- ▣ Actor – action – place (37-39)
- ▣ Affecting – affect –affected (40-42)
- ▣ Affected – affect – affecting (43-48)
- ▣ Theme-link – associate (49-52)

- ▣ 31 The cat killed a rat.
- ▣ 32 I broke the window.
- ▣ 33 Bert hit Harry.
- ▣ 34 The cat dug a hole.
- ▣ 35 Chris is making an omelet.
- ▣ 36 Picasso created a masterpiece.
- ▣ 37 Jennie crossed the street.
- ▣ 38 Fiona entered the room.
- ▣ 39 Simon climbed a tree.
- ▣ 40 The decision surprised us all.
- ▣ 41 You're disturbing everybody.
- ▣ 42 The comedian didn't impress the audience.

- ▣ 43 Oliver was envious of his brother.
- ▣ 44 Oliver envied his brother.
- ▣ 45 Angie was angry with Algernon
- ▣ 46 I'm afraid of that dog.
- ▣ 47 We were not aware of the accident.
- ▣ 48 Aren't you curious about...?
- ▣ 49 Sheila is like her mother.
- ▣ 50 This present is for you.
- ▣ 51 Tom is with Ann.
- ▣ 52 The book is about fossils.