Syntax – Valency

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Grammatical Roles

- **subject** (podmět)
- **object** (předmět)
- **complement** – various meanings
- **adjunct** (příslovečné určení)

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In some theories, these notions are primitive (undefined), in some theories they are defined in terms of other notions. For example, subject can be defined structurally as the NP in S $\rightarrow$ NP VP.

Subject (podmět)

- Roughly: The active participant in the active sentence.

  (1) a. **John** *writes a letter.*

      b. However: **John** *underwent torture (at the hands of the terrorists).*

Note: We are defining a syntactic notion using semantics. It works in most of the cases, however not always.

complement

- Various meanings:
    - object – the meaning used here
    - object or subject, i.e., non-adjunct
    - (doplněk) modifier of both the verb and an object/subject.

    (2) The task seems hard. – *hard* is subject complement

    (3) I consider the task hard. – *hard* is object complement

- **subcategorization**, **(surface-)valency (frame)** – list of complements of a word (usually a verb)

- **adjunct** (příslovečné určení)

  (4) a. John eats [often].

      b. John eats [loudly].

      c. John eats [in the morning].

      d. John eats [when he gets hungry].

      e. John eats [in a restaurant] [on Sunday].

Adjunct versus Complement

complements	adjuncts
combine with particular verbs	can combine with any verb (mostly)
cannot be repeated	can be repeated
their meaning is determined by the verb	have meaning on their own
usually NPs, PPs	usually AdvPs, PPs

Transitive and intransitive verbs

- **Intransitive** verb – a verb with a subject and no objects: *sleep*, *snore*

  (5) a. **John** *snores*.
       b. *****John** *snores* <u>*a book*</u>.

- **Transitive** verb – a verb with a subject and an object: *buy*, *brush*, *write*, *catch*

  (6) a. **John** *buys a candy*.
       b. *****John** *buys*.

Some verbs are both intransitive and transitive: *dance – John dances* × *John dances samba*.

- **Ditransitive** verbs – a subclass of transitive verbs, take two objects (direct & indirect).

(7) a. **John** *give* <u>a book</u> <u>to his friend</u>.
    b. **John** *gives* <u>his friend</u> <u>a nice book</u>.
    c. **A nice book** *is given* <u>to Mary</u> *by John*.
    d. **Mary** *is given* <u>a nice book</u> *by John*.

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Syntax vs. Semantics
The Mainstream U.S. view of Deep Valency

Deep Valency

The concepts of this section are on the interface of syntax and semantics.
Some theories are grounded more in syntax, some more in semantics.

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Syntax vs. Semantics

Compare:

(8) a. I ate a cake.

b. I entered a room.

The sentences have the same syntactic structure – both *a cake* and *a room* are (direct) objects, but the cake disappeared after I ate it, while the room did not after I entered it.

Compare:

(9) a. I took my friend to Brno.

b. I took D1 to Brno.

Both *my friend* and *D1* (the freeway) are direct objects, but . . .

Note: Below, we focus on verbs only.

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Sources: Charles Fillmore (1968, The Case for Case), David Dowty (1979, Word meaning and Montague grammar), Ray Jackendoff (1983, Semantics and cognition), etc.

(10) a. The janitor opens the door with a key.   (key – instrument)

b. The key opens the door.   (key – instrument)

Thematic role

Thematic role – semantic counterpart of grammatical function:

agent	one who deliberately does the action
cause	mindlessly performs the action
experiencer	has sensory or mental experience
patient	thing that the action happens to
theme	thing or being that is in a state/location
source	origin of a change in location/possesion
goal/recipient	endpoint of a change in location/possesion
instrument	the means of accomplishing the action
etc	

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The exact set is theory dependent. For example, some theories do not distinguish between patient and theme. Some theories allow a single constituent to have multiple roles, some don't.

(11) a.
   John   ate   the Cheerios   with a spoon.
   AGENT   PATIENT   INSTRUMENT

b.
   John   fell.
   THEME

c.
   John   is polite.
   THEME

d.
     John   heard the   explosion.
   EXPERIENCER   THEME

e.
      John   gave a   a book   Mary.
   AGENT/SOURCE   THEME   GOAL

f.
   John   cought   the flu.
   GOAL   THEME

Important: The roles reflect how the speaker structures the reality, not necesarrily the reality itself.

(12) a. John broke the window.
      (John – AGENT)

  b. The hammer broke the window.
      (the hammer – INSTRUMENT)

  c. The storm broke the window.
      (the storm – CAUSER)

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However, Agents and Causers sometimes behave grammatically differently:

(14) a. The pressure/explosion/Wills banging broke the window.
      b. John broke the window.
      c. The window broke from the pressure/explosion/Wills banging.
      d. *The window broke from John.