Syntax – Valency

Jirka Hana
Grammatical Roles

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

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

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 $S \rightarrow \text{NP VP}$. 
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complements</th>
<th>Adjuncts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>combine with particular verbs</td>
<td>can combine with any verb (mostly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cannot be repeated</td>
<td>can be repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their meaning is determined by the verb</td>
<td>have meaning on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usually NPs, PPs</td>
<td>usually AdvPs, PPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Complements combine with particular verbs and cannot be repeated. Their meaning is determined by the verb and are usually NPs or PPs.
- Adjuncts can combine with any verb (mostly) and can be repeated. They have meaning on their own and are usually AdvPs or PPs.
Transitive and intransitive verbs

- **Intransitive** verb – a verb with a subject and no objects: *sleep, snore*
  
  (5) a. **John snores**.
  
  b. *John snores **a book**.

- **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 a book to his friend.
    b. John gives his friend a nice book.
    c. A nice book is given to Mary by John.
    d. Mary is given a nice book by John.
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.
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.
The Mainstream U.S. view of Deep Valency

(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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agent</td>
<td>one who deliberately does the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cause</td>
<td>mindlessly performs the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiencer</td>
<td>has sensory or mental experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patient</td>
<td>thing that the action happens to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theme</td>
<td>thing or being that is in a state/location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>source</td>
<td>origin of a change in location/possesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal/recipient</td>
<td>endpoint of a change in location/possesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instrument</td>
<td>the means of accomplishing the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
   EXPERIENER THEME

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

f. John caught the flu.
   GOAL THEME
Important: The roles reflect how the speaker structures the reality, not necessarily 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)
Going too far? Is it still linguistics? What if John was coerced/hypnotised?
Going too far? Is it still linguistics? What if John was coerced/hypnotised?

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.