6.6: Adjuncts

Prepositional and Postpositional Phrases

Exercise \(\PageIndex{1}\)

How are the instrument and the beneficiary marked in the following sentences?

- Lois did a favor for Clark.
- Clark figured out the math for Perry with his new computer.
- Jimmy managed to unlock his car with a piece of wire.

As we saw in the section on semantic schemas, an instance of the be or happen schemas can have more than the single core participant, and an instance of the do_to schema can have more than the two core participants. There are additional, peripheral participants that are not central to the particular category of state or event but may be worth noticing or mentioning nonetheless. The semantic roles for these participants include instrument, beneficiary, sufferer, location, time, and manner.

For a given event, a relatively wide range of these roles is possible. For example, a transfer event can have any of the above roles. For this reason, when the Grammies realized they would want to talk about these participants, they decided that they would need more different ways of marking the roles than they had for the subject and direct object. They created a new category of words whose function was to specify the semantic role for these peripheral participants. In English we use such a set of words; we call them **prepositions** because they appear before (pre-) the NP referring to the participant. Here are some examples.

1. *The soup was cooking on the stove.*
2. Lois tickled Clark with a feather.
3. Clark cooked some soup for Lois.
4. Lois sang until dawn.

In sentence 1 the preposition on begins the phrase referring to the location of the cooking. In sentence 2 the preposition with begins the phrase referring to the instrument of the tickling. In sentence 3 the preposition for begins the phrase referring to the beneficiary of the cooking. And in sentence 4 the preposition until begins the phrase referring to the time of the singing. Semantically, we can see that the function of a preposition is to specify some relation between a state or event and a thing (the thing that fills the peripheral semantic role). A preposition may also function to specify the relation between two things, as it does for the relation between a cat and a table in the following sentence.

5. The cat is under the table.

Syntactically a preposition combines with an NP to form a larger phrase, called a prepositional phrase. In the last five examples, the prepositional phrases are on the stove, with a feather, for Lois, until dawn, and under the table.

Some Languages Have Prepositions; Others Have Postpositions. (A Few Have Both.)

Many other languages, including Spanish, Lingala, and American Sign Language, also have prepositions. But in other languages there are words with a similar function that follow the NPs that they are relating to the rest of the sentence. Japanese and Hindi are such languages. These words are called postpositions, and when we want to group prepositions and postpositions together, we call them adpositions. Here is the Japanese sentence corresponding to sentence 4. Note that the postposition made corresponds to the English preposition until.

Lois wa yoake made utatta

6 Lois topic dawn until sang

'Lois sang until dawn.'

Prepositional or postpositional phrases within a sentence are called adjuncts to distinguish them from subjects and direct objects. We’ll meet some other kinds of adjuncts later in this section. In the rest of this section, we'll look at how adjuncts are used to refer to particular peripheral roles and how these peripheral roles can also be realized in other ways. In the process we'll discover some interesting ways in which languages can differ from one another. One kind of difference involves a distinction that is made in one language but not in another. In other words, two different sentences in one language correspond to one ambiguous sentence in the other language. Another kind of difference involves alternate ways of conveying the same information. One language may express in adjuncts what another language expresses within the verb itself.

Talking About Move Events

Exercise 5

What words refer to the path in the following sentences?
• Lois took the dog out.
• Clark pulled the lid of the bottle off with pliers.
• The log floated down the river.

Remember that move events have a source, a goal, and path, any of which might be worthy of attention and mention. English typically uses the preposition from for the source and the preposition to for the goal. There are a number of other possibilities for the goal, however. Here is an example with under.

7. The ball rolled under the table.

**English Sometimes Fails to Distinguish a Location from a Goal**

But this sentence is in fact ambiguous, and it’s an ambiguity we can express in terms of semantic roles. We could use the same sentence if the rolling took place under the table, that is, if the area under the table was the location rather than the goal of the rolling. (The location interpretation probably seems odd because it is hard to visualize what caused the rolling in this case.)

Often when a language exhibits ambiguity in a sentence, that sentence corresponds to different sentences in some other languages. In this case, for example, Japanese would convey sentence 7 differently, depending on whether the area under the table is the goal. Here are the two Japanese sentences corresponding to sentence 7, the first with the goal interpretation, the second with the location interpretation.

8. booru wa teeburu no shita e korogatta

   ball topic table of bottom to rolled

   'The ball rolled under the table (goal).'

9. booru wa teeburu no shita de korogatta

   ball topic table of bottom at rolled

   'The ball rolled under the table (location).'

The path in English is often expressed by one of a small set of words that behave somewhat like prepositions, except that they occur freely without a following noun phrase. These include up, down, out, and off, as well as some words that can also function as prepositions such as in and around. I will refer to these words as **directional adverbs**. Here are some examples.

10. The ball rolled down the stairs.
11. The ball rolled down.
12. The balloon floated up the chimney.
13. Clark strutted around the room.

In languages such as Spanish, on the other hand, it is more common to express the path as a part of the verb. That is,
Spanish verbs for move events often include a specification of the direction of the movement. Here are some examples.

14 the ball went:down
   'The ball went down.'

15 the balloon went:up
   'The balloon went up.'

Languages Differ in Terms of Which Elements of Sentences Represent Which Information

The verbs in these sentences include the notions of falling or rising, so we can say that Spanish tends to lexicalize aspects of the path in verbs for move. Of course English has verbs such as descend and rise too, but these are not nearly as common as alternatives like go up and go down and are not normally learned by young children. The point is that the basic verbs used for motion in Spanish tend to express path, whereas the basic verbs for motion in English do not.

Instead English has a tendency to lexicalize manner in its verbs for move events. Examples in the above sentences include roll and float. Note that neither of these verbs specifies the path; the rolling or floating could be in any direction.

So what does Spanish do with manner in sentences corresponding to 10-13 above? It appears that Spanish speakers are less likely to refer to manner in sentences like this than English speakers are. When they do refer to manner, it tends to appear in an adjunct of a kind we have not seen yet, one that is a form of a separate verb expressing manner. Here is a Spanish translation of sentence 12. The adjunct flotando expresses the manner of the movement.

16 the balloon went:down by the chimney floating
   'The balloon floated down the chimney.'

For more on how languages can be grouped on the basis of what aspects of situations are lexicalized, see the work of Leonard Talmy, the linguist who pioneered work of this type.

Talking About Transfer Events, Indirect Objects

Exercise \( \PageIndex{3} \)

What two ways does English have to refer to the recipient?
Clark sold Mary his house.
Clark sold his house to Mary.

Recall that transfer and information transfer events are like move events in having a source and a goal, that is, the receiver. For the subcategory of events where the source of the transfer is also the agent, for example, in giving and telling, English has two common patterns. One uses the preposition to to mark the recipient. Here are two examples.

17. Clark lent his laptop to Lois.
18. Lois told her story to her officemates.

Verbs for Transfer Events Can Have Three Associated Core Syntactic Roles

The other possibility is to refer to the recipient in an NP that has no preposition indicating its role and appears right after the verb. This syntactic role is called the **indirect object**. It represents a third core syntactic role, along with the subject and direct object, in English and many other languages. Notice that when there is an indirect object in an English sentence, it appears before the direct object. Here are sentences 17 and 18 reformulated using indirect objects.

19. Clark lent Lois his laptop.
20. Lois told her officemates her story.

Since sentences 17 and 19 and sentences 18 and 20 have different forms, however, we would expect their meanings to differ in some way. But the difference is very subtle and not well understood. And the choice of one pattern over the other depends on other factors not directly related to the meaning of the sentence, such as the length of the NP referring to the recipient. That is, sentence 19 would be much less acceptable if Lois were replaced by the woman he met on the train to work last Friday. In this case English speakers would prefer the pattern with the NP referring to the recipient after the direct object and preceded by to.

Note that English makes no distinction between the form of the indirect and direct objects; that is, the same set of personal pronouns, the objective forms, is used for both. Spanish does make such a distinction, however, though only for the third person, where accusative case is distinguished from **dative case**, the form used for the indirect object. Thus there are two Spanish words corresponding to him: lo, the accusative form, and le, the dative form.

In English, the indirect object is also used for beneficiaries with some verbs. Here is an example.

20. Lois knit Billy a sweater.

Note that for beneficiaries the alternate form with a prepositional phrase adjunct instead of the indirect object uses the preposition for rather than to.

21. Lois knit a sweater for Billy.

In Chapter 8 we'll see how Lingala provides an elegant way to create new forms of verbs that take indirect objects for a wider variety of roles than is possible in English.
Talking About Experience

Exercise \(\PageIndex{4}\)

In what ways is an experiencer like an agent? In what ways is an experiencer like a patient?

Modern languages tend to be fairly consistent in the syntax-semantics mappings for the do_to schema, with the agent represented by the subject and the patient represented by the direct object. What happens with other schemas with two or more core participants?

Let's try to get some insight into this by continuing our fictitious history of how language started. The Grammies first started using transitive sentences to refer to do_to events, events that are easy to observe and whose participants' roles are easy to understand. When they first felt the need to refer to human mental experience, it was not so clear how to proceed.

As we saw in the section on situation schemas, these states or events have two core participants, just as do_to does, but the roles they play are quite different. Rather than creating completely new syntactic roles for the experiencer and the experience theme, the Grammies realized that they could make do with the two core syntactic roles they already had, subject and direct object. Since the verb of a sentence could make it clear that the sentence was about an instance of experience rather than an instance of do_to, all that was needed was conventions for how the two semantic roles were to be referred to by the NPs in the two syntactic roles.

Languages Make Different Generalizations by Mapping Different Sets of Semantic Roles onto the Subject and the Direct Object

But the sensible thing would be to use the subject and direct object in a way that resembled their use in the familiar do_to sentences. That way each syntactic role would tend to have a consistent semantic interpretation. There seem to be two ways to go, however. In one way, the experiencer is like an agent; it is typically animate and intimately involved with the event or state. That is, when you see, believe, or hate something, you seem to have much more to do with what is going on that the thing that you see, believe, or hate does. On the other hand, the experiencer is like a patient in the sense that is affected by the state or event in a relatively passive way. Seeing or believing are processes that happen to you, not processes that you are in control of.

Since both of these associations make some sense, it is not surprising that the Grammies failed to agree on a single way to map the experiencer roles onto their syntactic roles. Some of them decided to use subjects for experiencers (as well as agents), while others decided to use other syntactic roles for experiencers. Still others treated some kinds of experience one way and other kinds another way. Modern languages also exhibit this sort of disagreement. Let's look at a few examples.

For the most part, English went with the option by which experiencer is like agent and theme is like patient. That is, it is the subject that typically refers to the experiencer and the direct object to the theme. Here are two examples.

22. Lois sees Clark.
23. Lois likes Clark.
Spanish agrees with English for sensory experiences like seeing and hearing: the Spanish subject refers to the experiencer, and the Spanish direct object refers to the theme. But look at a natural translation of sentence 23 into Spanish.

\[ A \quad \text{Lois} \quad le \quad gusta \quad \text{Clark} \]

24 To Lois her(dat) is:pleasing Clark

'Lois likes Clark.'

In this sentence Lois is referred to both by the NP Lois and the dative (indirect object) pronoun le. Though Lois is the first NP in the sentence, it is not the subject. In sentences like this, Spanish treats the experiencer like it treats a recipient. The subject of the sentence is Clark, referring to the theme.

Japanese differs even more from English. For sensory experiences, as in sentence 22 above, Japanese tends to put the experiencer in an NP marked with the postposition ni, roughly 'to'. A natural Japanese translation for sentence 22 is the following.

\[ Lois \quad ni \quad Clark \quad ga \quad mieru \]

25 Lois to Clark nom is:visible

'Lois sees Clark.'

The theme, Clark, is referred to by the subject, and the experiencer, Lois, appears in a phrase marked just as Japanese marks the recipient of a transfer. Japanese sentences for liking and hating states are more complicated, so I won't include them here.

Syntax-semantics Mapping Revisited

In this section we've seen that for some categories of situations, the syntax-semantics mapping is reasonably predictable. That is, for events with clear agents and patients, there is a strong tendency within and across languages to map the subject onto the agent and the direct object onto the patient. For some of the peripheral semantic roles, it is also possible to make generalizations about their syntactic realization that apply to sentences with many different verbs. For example, the English prepositions that are used for source, goal, location, and time can be used in almost any sentence where it is appropriate to mention these semantic roles. And the instrument can almost always be conveyed in English with the preposition with.

The Same Semantic Role Can be Realized as a Prepositional Phrase in One Sentence and the Subject in Another

However, even for these semantic roles, things are not always so simple. Some verbs even permit them to appear in one of the core syntactic roles. Here are some English examples.

26. The stone broke the window.
27. *The 1990s saw the end of the Cold War.*
28. *Perry splattered the floor with paint.*

In sentence 26, the subject, *the stone*, refers to the instrument apparently used by some unspecified agent. In sentence 27, the subject, *the 1990s*, refers to the time of the event that is realized as the direct object, *the end of the Cold War*. In sentence 28, the direct object, *the floor*, refers to the goal, whereas the object of the preposition with refers not to the instrument of the splattering but rather the patient.

We have also seen that the syntax-semantics mappings are less predictable for some classes of situations. Within languages, experience states and events may be treated differently for different verbs, for example. In general, as noted in the last section, it's safest to assume that each verb is associated in the lexicon with its own syntax-semantics mapping(s).

Let's look at some more examples of these mappings. First, given the realization of the instrument in a sentence like 26, we see that there is a third mapping for verbs like *break*, in addition to the two discussed at the end of the last section. Here is a more complete set of mappings for *break* than appeared there. The optional instrument phrase is included in the last mapping to show how it differs from the realization of the instrument in the second mapping.

Here are the two possible mappings for *give*, one of the verbs that can take indirect objects referring to recipients.

Finally, here are syntax-semantics mappings for English and Spanish verbs of liking.