

Linguistic Principles of English Grammar

Prototypes, Word Classes, Grammatical Relations, and Semantic Roles

Dr. Thomas Payne

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Quote of the Week

When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain,
and you Think of Things, you find sometimes
that a Thing which seemed very Thingish
inside you is quite different when it gets out
into the open and has other people looking at
it. -- *Winnie the Pooh*

BIG IDEAS

- Categorization in language is based on “family resemblance” rather than lists of criteria.
- Why? Because the potential content of linguistic messages is infinitely variable, while the human mind is finite.
- We have to impose categories on the world, because that’s the only way our minds can deal with it.

Prototype Theory

- What is a bird?
- A *prototype* is the best example of a category.
- Other items can be members of the same category because of perceived similarities



Classes in the Lexicon

- Biggest Division:
 - Full Lexical Words vs. Grammatical Morphemes (see separate handout)
 - Major word classes are groups of Full Lexical Words – Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs.
 - Minor word classes are groups of Grammatical Morphemes – pronouns, prepositions, articles, auxiliaries and particles.

Major Word Classes

- Like the concept of “bird,” the major word classes, Noun, Verb, Adjective, and Adverb are also defined in terms of prototypes.
- This is true of almost every definition of every grammatical notion. There are very clear examples, and there are less central, less obvious examples.

Word Classes – Nouns

What is a Noun?

Something seems much more "thingish" when you refer to it with a noun. Sincerity. Smoothness. Singing. Acceptance. But the concept itself, apart from its expression in a grammatical form, does not determine its word class.

Word Classes – Nouns

- What are the characteristics of prototypical nouns?

– Semantic properties:

Time stability – concepts referred to by nouns tend to persist over time.

Prototypical nouns refer to concrete, bounded, visible things.

Word Classes – Nouns

- What are the characteristics of prototypical nouns?

– Pragmatic properties:

Manipulability – concepts referred to by nouns tend to be mentioned over and over again in discourse.

Topicality – Nouns refer to the topics of sentences and discourses.

Word Classes – Nouns

- What are the characteristics of prototypical nouns?

– Morphosyntactic properties:

Take plural and genitive inflectional suffixes.

Function as subject and object in clauses.

May be preceded by determiners. . . .

Word Classes – Nouns

- Subclasses of nouns:

– Proper vs. common nouns

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| <i>Mt. Rushmore</i> | | <i>the mountain</i> |
| <i>Insun</i> | | <i>a girl in my class</i> |
| <i>Hanyang University</i> | | <i>the university</i> |

– Non-count vs. count nouns

| | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <i>sincerity</i> | | <i>a promise</i> |
| <i>cattle</i> | | <i>cows</i> |
| <i>water</i> | | <i>a cup (of water)</i> |

Word Classes – Verbs

- What are the characteristics of prototypical Verbs?

– Semantic properties:

Time instability – concepts referred to by verbs tend to involve motion and change.

Prototypical verbs refer to visible actions that affect the world.

Word Classes – Verbs

- What are the characteristics of prototypical Verbs?

– Pragmatic properties:

Foregrounding – concepts referred to by prototypical verbs tend to express foregrounded events in discourse.

Word Classes – Verbs

- What are the characteristics of prototypical Verbs?

– Morphosyntactic properties:

Take tense and aspect inflectional suffixes (-ed), (-ing), (-s)

Function as main predicators in clauses

May be preceded by auxiliaries . . .

Word Classes – Adjectives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical adjectives?

– Semantic properties:

Express “property concepts.”

Word Classes – Adjectives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical adjectives?

– Pragmatic properties:

Function to restrict the reference of a noun phrase.

Word Classes – Adjectives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical adjectives?

– Morphosyntactic properties:

Take comparative {-er} and superlative {-est} inflectional suffixes

Function as main predicators in clauses or modifiers in NPs.

Grammatical Relations

Distinguishing Grammatical Relations from Word Classes

Grammatical Relations are relational notions. Word classes are individual. Like other relational terms such as “brother” and “sister”, grammatical relations can only be defined in relation to something else.

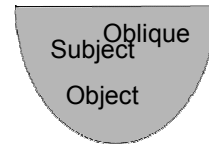
Grammatical Relations

Distinguishing Grammatical Relations from Semantic Roles

Like word classes, Grammatical Relations are elements of form. Semantic Roles, on the other hand, are elements of meaning. Grammatical Relations help express Semantic Roles, but the two are not the same thing.

Big Idea

Grammatical Relations are elements of form. They are defined structurally.



Big Idea

Semantic Roles are elements of meaning. They are defined in terms of scenes.



Big Idea

Expression of Semantic Roles is a very important task that all languages must perform. Grammatical Relations are tools languages provide to help speakers do this.

Grammatical Relations – Subject

- What are the characteristics of prototypical subjects?
 - Semantic properties:
If there is an AGENT expressed in a clause, the AGENT is the subject.
Prototypical subjects act with volition and control.
The most likely subjects are humans.

Grammatical Relations – Subject

- What are the characteristics of prototypical subjects?
 - Pragmatic properties:
Prototypical Subjects are the topics of the discourse.

Grammatical Relations – Subject

- What are the characteristics of prototypical subjects?

- Morphosyntactic properties:

Come right before the verb in unmarked declarative clauses.

Control verb agreement.

Take “subjective case” pronouns.

Grammatical Relations – Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical objects?

- Semantic properties:

If there is a PATIENT in a two participant situation, the PATIENT is likely to be expressed as the (direct) object.

Prototypical objects do not control the event.

The most likely objects are inanimate “objects.”

Grammatical Relations – Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical objects?

- Pragmatic properties:

Prototypical objects are asserted – they are part of the comment or “new” information expressed in a clause.

Grammatical Relations – Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical objects?

- Morphosyntactic properties:

Come right after the verb in unmarked declarative clauses.

Do not follow prepositions.

Can be “advanced” to the subject of a passive construction.

Grammatical Relations – Indirect Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical indirect objects?

- Semantic properties:

If there is a RECIPIENT in a three participant situation, the RECIPIENT is likely to be expressed as the indirect object.

Prototypical indirect objects are animate and usually human.

Grammatical Relations – Indirect Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical indirect objects?

- Pragmatic properties:

Prototypical indirect objects are part of the comment or “new” information expressed in a clause. They differ from direct objects in that they tend to be more “important” to the future of the discourse than direct objects. They are more “manipulable.”

Grammatical Relations – Indirect Object

- What are the characteristics of prototypical indirect objects?
 - Morphosyntactic properties:
Follow the prepositions “to” or “for.”
Can be “advanced” to the direct object position in a “dative shift” construction.

Grammatical Relations – Oblique

- What are the characteristics of prototypical obliques?
 - Semantic properties:
Express location, manner, time, and other “optional” information.

Grammatical Relations – Oblique

- What are the characteristics of prototypical obliques?
 - Pragmatic properties:
Are not “center stage” participants.

Grammatical Relations – Oblique

- What are the characteristics of prototypical obliques?
 - Morphosyntactic properties:
Follow any preposition.
Cannot be “advanced” to the direct object position in a “dative shift” construction.

Grammatical Relations – Genitives

- What is a “genitive” element?
A genitive expresses a relation between two participants, whereas the other grammatical relations express a relationship between a participant and an event or situation.

Grammatical Relations – Genitives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical genitives?
 - Semantic properties:
A prototypical genitive refers to a POSSESSOR.
Prototypical genitives are animate, and often human.

Grammatical Relations – Genitives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical genitives?

- Pragmatic properties:

Prototypical genitives restrict the reference of a non-identified item in terms of an already-identified item.

ex. "John's father" specifies which specific father is meant. John must be someone who is identifiable to the hearer.

Grammatical Relations – Genitives

- What are the characteristics of prototypical genitives?

- Morphosyntactic properties:

Occur in the "genitive case" (either with the suffix spelled "s" or one of the genitive pronouns).

Follow the preposition "of."

Grammatical Relations – Complements

- What is a complement?

A "complement" is a clause element that carries the main meaning of a phrase, but does not carry the main inflectional information of the phrase. It "Completes" a unit – normally a predicate.

Grammatical Relations – Complements

- Types of complements
 - Subject complements

Grammatical Relations – Complements

- Types of complements
 - Object complements