

SYNTAX–SEMANTICS INTERFACE

EVA HAJIČOVÁ

KAROLINUM

Syntax-Semantics Interface

Eva Hajičová

Reviewed by Prof. Libuše Duškova, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Department of English Language and ELT Methodology, and Prof. František Čermak, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Institute of the Czech National Corpus.

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*To my teachers, who have shaped my way to understanding language structure.
And to my past and present colleagues from ÚFAL, who have friendly accompanied
me and supported me on this way.*

FOREWORD

The present volume is a selected collection of papers published during my professional career. The theoretical framework I subscribe to is the Functional Generative Description (FGD) as proposed by Petr Sgall in the early sixties and developed further by him and his pupils since then. This framework was conceived of as an alternative to the original Chomskyan transformational generative grammar and in a way can be characterized as an predecessor of those alternative frameworks that take into account semantics and start the generative process from that level. The FGD is deeply rooted in the structural and functional tenets of the Prague School Linguistics in its conception of language description proceeding from function to form, which is reflected in a multilevel design of the framework, in a duly respect paid to the communicative function of language and in the recognition of the distinction between (linguistic) meaning and (extralinguistic) content.

Thematically, the present volume covers issues ranging from the verb-argument structure of the sentence and its information structure through the capturing of the underlying structure in an annotated corpus to issue going beyond the sentence structure, adding finally some contributions comparing the point of departure of the treatment proposed in our papers with other approaches. In a way, the structure of the volume (except for the last Part) follows the development of my research interests in time: starting, in the late sixties and early seventies, with the core of the underlying sentence structure (Part 1 of this volume) my attention was then focused on those aspects of language that are not covered by the underlying predicate-argument core but still belong to it as they are semantically relevant, namely the topic-focus articulation (information structure of the sentence) and related issues such as negation and presupposition (Part 2). The possibility to validate the consistence of the theoretical findings on large language material offered by the technical availability of large electronic (computerized) corpora of texts have quite naturally led to my participation at the process of the design of a scheme of corpus annotation which would cover the issues studied and thus serve as a good test-bed for the formulated theory (Part 3). The transition from these aspects to phenomena beyond the sentence boundary was then quite natural (Part 4). Papers included in Part 5 compare our approach to the information

structure of the sentence with the treatments within some other linguistic theories such as Chomskyan transformational grammar, the so-called optimality theory and Mel'chuk's Meaning-Text model.

Each Part of the volume is accompanied by a Foreword briefly outlining the main issues under discussion and putting them into the overall context of investigations.

In the present volume, only papers where I was the only author are included, with the exception of two papers in the Appendix. One of them, co-authored by Jarmila Panevová, documents the very start of the use of "machines" in linguistic analysis, the core of the other one, co-authored by Petr Sgall, lies in the formulation of the formal background of the theoretical framework of FGD.

In order to make each selected paper a self-contained whole and to make it possible for the reader to follow the original argumentation, I could not avoid a reduplication of the general introductions or summarizations of the starting points in two or more papers. If I have decided to leave out a part of the text, I mark the deletions by brackets [...] and in some cases, I add a note indicating what is left out. In principle, however, the texts are left as they were in their original form, only evident misprints have been corrected.

A major adaptation concerns bibliographical references. In the original versions of the papers included in this volume, different ways of bibliographical reference were used: some were included in the texts themselves, some in the footnotes, in some of them there were separate lists of references at the end of the paper. I have decided to collect the references in a single list of Bibliography, which has allowed me to unify the references throughout the volume in the way described in the introductory note attached to the Bibliography.

My most sincere thanks go to Anna Kotěšovcová for her devoted and time-consuming technical work connected with the preparation of the electronic versions of the papers, which in case of earlier contributions involved laborious scanning and transmission to an electronic form. I am also most grateful to Barbora Hladká, who has helped me by the formatting of the Bibliography, by carrying out the visualizations in Part 4 of the volume and also by commenting upon the Introductory sections.

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1. UNDERLYING SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

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 —. (1983). "Remarks on the Meaning of Cases." *Prague Studies in Mathematical Linguistics* 8: 149–157.

2. TOPIC-FOCUS ARTICULATION AND RELATED ISSUES

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3. THEORETICAL DESCRIPTION REFLECTED IN CORPUS ANNOTATION

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APPENDIX: A GLIMPSE BACK AT HISTORICAL SOURCES

- Eva Hajičová, and Jarmila Panevová (1968). "Some Experience with the Use of Punched-Card Machines for Linguistic Analysis." In *Les machines dans la linguistique. Colloque international sur la mécanisation et l'automatisation des recherches linguistiques (Prague, June 7–10, 1966)*, 109–115. Prague: Academia.
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1. UNDERLYING SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

FOREWORD

The theoretical framework of the Functional Generative Description (FGD) we subscribe to is based on dependency syntax both at the deep, underlying layer (called tectogrammatical) and on the surface syntactic layer. Thus the issues of valency are of crucial importance for the formulation of this framework and the introduction of “case grammar” by Charles Fillmore was a stimulus for a detailed comparison of the tenets of the FGD with Fillmorean approach. Within FGD, the attention to the issues of valency, esp. with regard to Czech syntax, was paid especially by Jarmila Panevová (see her papers 1974, 1978 quoted in Bibliography and the monograph by the same author from 1980, her 1976 joint paper with Petr Sgall and our joint paper from 1984 comparing valency frames as postulated by the FGD theory of a selected set of Czech and English verbs). J. Panevová also studied in detail the distinction between actants (arguments) and free modifications (adjuncts) and formulated a so-called dialogue test for the determination of semantic obligatoriness of the given type of valency slot. Our own concerns were some specific aspects of Fillmorean approach, namely his specification of the first argument discussed in our 1979 study *Agentive or Actor-Bearer?*; this issue is closely related to the necessity or redundancy of the introduction of a specific formal device of “crossed brackets” (see Hajičová 1981, not included in this volume). In a more general vein, we examined the issue of the status of Fillmorean cases in the overall description of language: distinguishing the layer of linguistic meaning and a layer of cognitive content, and in line with Petr Sgall’s (1980) paper, we argue in *Remarks on the Meaning of Cases* (1983) that a distinction is to be made between the formal means such as morphological case and prepositions in prepositional groups, the valency slots in terms of linguistic meaning and the ontological categories. We come back to the study of valency slots with regard to their ordering in the underlying structure in the study of information structure, included in Part 2 of this volume.

AGENTIVE OR ACTOR/BEARER?

The plausibility of the hypotheses is examined whether a single tectogrammatical (deep structure) participant can be postulated, which would be regarded as the primary meaning of the surface subject. If operational criteria concerning possible combinations of syntactic units are used and the tectogrammatical representation is conceived of as differing from the surface structure only in case of clearly substantiated distinctions, then the hypothesis obtains strong support. It appears useful to assign all verbs having a single participant slot in their case frame only a single type of participant (cf. Tesnière's "first actant") on the level of language meaning. The difference between such units as Agentive, Experiencer Theme, Locative (if rendered by surface subject) belongs then to a layer of organization of factual knowledge ("scenarios") rather than to the language structure. Such a treatment allows for a more simple and economic formal description, avoiding the necessity of such devices as crossed and embedded brackets.

1. One of the most important issues in the description of the semantic structure of the sentence is that of the "frames" of the verb, i.e. the classification of the types of participants of the verbs and criteria of such a classification. In the framework of generative description, the pioneering investigations of Fillmore are based on and develop the European theories of the functions of cases and sentence parts (subject, direct and indirect object, adverbials). In his latest paper on this topic, Fillmore (1977) clearly distinguishes between the deep structure level and that of cognitive content and makes a distinction between units belonging to the former and those belonging to the latter level (cf. the discussion of this distinction in Sgall, *in press*, who in this connection proposes to use the terms "participant" for the level of deep structure, tectogrammatical or linguistic meaning, and "role" for the domain of cognitive content or factual knowledge).

In the framework of functional generative description¹, to which we subscribe, the problems of deep structure (tectogrammatical representation) as belonging to the do-

1 For the first formulations of the functional generative description, see Sgall (1964); the latest version (the mathematical formulation of which can be found in Hajičová, Koubek and Sgall, 1977) is applied for Czech (with respect to topic/focus articulation) in Sgall, Hajičová and Buráňová (in print).

main of linguistic meaning were discussed in Sgall, Procházka and Hajičová (1977); in that framework, the “case” frames were analyzed in detail by Panevová (1977a; 1977b; Panevová and Sgall, 1976) who has formulated also an operational criterion distinguishing between semantically obligatory and optional participants.

If we understand well, both approaches coincide in the point that deep subject (actor, the “first actant of Tesnière) may be considered to underlie the syntactic subject in the primary case – with some secondary deviations that should be specified. Our objective in the present paper will be to examine on a sample of English verbs the plausibility of a hypothesis that a single (deep structure, tectogrammatical) participant “actor/bearer” can be postulated, rendering the primary function of the syntactic subject; in the sequel, we do not use this well established term actor/bearer only because it is a two-word combination and we use instead the term “Actor” even though we are aware of the possible misunderstanding following from the fact that the term itself may imply a much narrower case relation. The distinction between the functions of participants identified by the actor/bearer is considered here not to belong to the linguistically structured meaning; it can be often regarded as determined by the specific (lexical) meanings of the given verb form.² These distinctions belong to a layer of organization of factual knowledge (“scenarios”) rather than to the language structure. Our arguments corroborate the view that such a treatment leads to a more simple and economic description, avoiding the necessity of such notational devices as crossed and embedded brackets of Fillmore’s case grammar.

2. Semantic considerations such as that concerning the identification of the case markers of the subject phrase in (2) with the object phrase in (1) (in both sentences “there is a semantically relevant relation between the door and open that is the same in the two sentences,” Fillmore, 1966, p. 363) led Fillmore to distinguish different case relations of the subject NP’s in such examples as the following:

- (1) The janitor will open the door. (Agentive)
- (2) The door will open. (Objective)
- (3) The key will open the door. (Instrument)
- (4) The smoke rose. (Objective)
- (5) The mist ascends from the valley. (Objective)
- (6) I know him. (Dative)
- (7) Howard died. (Dative)
- (8) Fire killed the rats. (Instrument)
- (9) The wind broke the window. (Instrument)
- (10) John broke the window. (Agentive)
- (11) The window broke. (Objective)

2 As for a similar hypothesis stated for the NP’s in the object position (with such examples as *build a table*, *ruin a table*, *see a table*, *sing a song*) see Sgall (1972a), esp. p. 204, our use of “NP” in the sequel covers also the prepositional phrases (the preposition being considered a mere surface phenomenon).

However sound a base of such a differentiation may be, the specification of the cases as found in Fillmore's studies differs from one writing to another and does not offer more than rather vague characterizations in terms of semantic (cognitive) notions. In addition, to be able to provide for a (single) case frame of such verbs as *break*, *crack*, *fold*, *bend*, Fillmore has to propose a feature of "conditional obligatoriness" (represented in his notation by "embedded brackets"): the case frame postulated for this group of verbs is O (I(A)), which means that if Agentive is present in the deep structure of the given sentence, Instrument must be present, too. In (10) above, it is understood that John broke the window with something (even if with his own body, when he butted into it), while in (9) no Agentive is present at all. A still different device is necessary to account for such verbs as *kill* with the case frame O(I\A), where the crossed brackets indicate that at least one of the two adjacent cases must be chosen to provide for the possibility of (8) as well as of *Mother killed the rats with fire* and for the impossibility of **The rats killed* (as contrasted with the verb *wake up*, where besides *My daughter woke me up with an explosion* one can say both *An explosion woke me up* and *I woke up*; the suggested case frame for *wake up* is O(I)(A), with both Instrument and Agentive being optional). However elegant this proposal may seem, one is faced with serious obstacles when formulating explicit rules for the inclusion of such a treatment into some sort of generative grammar.³

Considerations of a similar kind underlie another, more or less simultaneously formulated treatment of semantic relations of the verbs and their participants, the system of the so-called thematic relations as proposed by Gruber (1965, 1967). Among several thematic relations, there is one that is present in every sentence, namely the Theme; again, no explicit criteria or definitions are given for the individual relations, which are specified by means of vague characterizations and often in different terms for different classes of verbs: thus Theme is specified as the NP understood as undergoing the motion with the verbs of motion, and as the NP whose location is being asserted with the verbs of location. The relation Agent is specified as attributing to the NP a will or volition toward the action expressed by the sentence (hence the Agent is always animate, as with Fillmore). Agent - if present - is generally the subject, but the subject can bear simultaneously also other thematic relations. (The thematic relations given in the brackets are those assigned to the subject NP's in the given sentences).

- (12) The rock rolled down the hill. (Theme)
- (13) John rolled down the hill. (Agent + Theme)
- (14) Max owns the book. (Location)
- (15) Max knows the answer. (Location)
- (16) Bill inherited a million. (Goal)
- (17) Charlie bought the lamp from Mary. (Agent + Goal)
- (18) Harry gave the book away. (Agent + Source)

3 For a discussion of these difficulties and of a possibility of a different approach, see Panevová (1977 b).

- (19) The rock stood in the corner. (Location)
- (20) The book belongs to Herman. (Location)
- (21) The dot is contained in the circle. (Theme)

Once again, as with Fillmore's case frames, several questions suggest themselves: if the difference in the assignment of thematic relations to the subject NP's in (12) and (13) is given only by the fact that John is animate while the rock is not, why to postulate a different thematic relation assignment rather than to capture this fact by a difference in the semantic features of the NP? Is there any reason other than the cognitive distinction between rolling down under one's own volition and rolling down not being aware of one's motion (e.g. when asleep) to distinguish these two "meanings" of (13) by means of assignment of both the Agent and the Theme relation to John for the former and only the relation of Theme for the latter reading (as done by Jackendoff, 1972, p. 34 following Gruber)?⁴ If one is to assume that in every sentence there is one NP which bears the relation of Theme to the verb, which NP's bear this relation in (19) and (20)? If one assigns the NP *in the circle* the relation of Location (saying that the preposition *in* is an unmistakable mark of a Location phrase) in (21) – and, by way of analogy, also the NP *circle* in *The circle contains the dot* is considered to be a Location – are there two Locations in (19)? And compare *It was raining in Prague* (Location without Theme, or Theme and Location both represented by the *in*-phrase?) with *There was a thunderstorm in Prague* (where the *in*-phrase scarcely could be assigned another relation), and *Last Sunday it rained* (with Time and Theme combined?) with *Last Sunday it rained in Prague* (Time and Location, of course – but what criterion tells us which of them is combined with Theme?).

The list of such Objections probably would increase if further verbs were taken into consideration; there seems to be no reason to doubt that many of the distinctions regarded as different thematic relations are due to the specific lexical content of the given verbs not directly grammatically relevant, while others can be treated as well by means of a reference to the semantic features of the respective NP's.

Fillmore and Gruber meet in several respects with Halliday's treatment of participant roles. Halliday's (1967–8) distinction between three participant roles (actor, initiator and goal) and three functions of subject (labelled ergative, nominative, accusative) determined by the transitivity systems can be illustrated on the following examples:

- (22) She washed the clothes. (actor + initiator; ergative)
- (23) He marched the prisoners. (initiator; ergative)
- (24) The prisoners marched. (initiator + actor; nominative)

4 And what about a situation, when a speaker comments upon a state of affairs looking at a child rolling down a hill, saying "He is rolling down the hill"? Does the speaker know, which type of participant he used in the sentence he uttered? Cf. also the objection Poldauf (1970, p. 120) has against distinguishing *John (intentionally) broke the window* and *John (falling from the roof) broke the window*.

- (25) The prisoners were marched. (actor; accusative)
 (26) She washed herself. (actor + goal + initiator; nominative)
 (27) (a) The clothes were washed. (goal; accusative)
 (b) The clothes washed (easily).

As Poldauf (1970, p. 123) duly remarks, some of Halliday's distinctions are due to a certain "over-semanticization" (e.g. the introduction of two participants – actor and initiator – in place of one in (22) and (24)), or based on the interpretation of the verbal idea (*he* in (23) is regarded as an initiator, because it was the prisoners who were the actors of marching, while in (24) *the prisoners* is both the actor and the initiator).

A "more abstract" view of cases is also the starting point of Anderson's (1971) compact study of the grammar of case in English. He opposes strongly against the attempts to characterize the subject – verb relation in terms like "actor action" and offers a great variety of case functions to be assigned to the subject NP's, according to the nature of their participation "in the "process" or "state" represented in the sentence" (p. 10):

- (28) The rose smells nice. (Ablative)
 (29) He smells the rose. (Locative)
 (30) Egbert left. (Nominative + Ablative)
 (31) The statue stood on the square. (Nominative)
 (32) Mary obtained the book from John. (Locative + Ergative)
 (33) John moved. (Nominative + Ergative)
 (34) John moved the couch. (Ergative)
 (35) John is cold. (Nominative + Locative)

When two functions are assigned to a single NP, one of them is called "case", the other "a feature on a case," the reasons for such a differentiation remaining unclear. The unclear status of the assignment of different cases to the NP's is illustrated by several apparent hesitations of the author himself: thus *Egbert* in (30) is assigned Nominative + Ablative in one place, but Nominative + Ergative in another (along with the subjects of such verbs as *work*, *remain*, *reach*, *walk*). Anderson's analysis is evidently influenced by the object language studied⁵ – this may be the explanation why the morphemic sameness of the verb *smell* in English leads to the recognition of a single meaning unit both in (28) and (29) assigning the case Ablative to the NP *rose* in both of them – even though the function of the adverb makes it clear that the semantic relation between *smell* and *rose* is different (*This rose smells nicely* – *He smells the rose nicely*); in this respect, this verb differs from the famous Fillmorean example with the verb *open*. Let us note that in Czech, similarly as in many other languages, there are two lexical units correspondings to the single English form *smell*, one for its meaning as exemplified by (28): *vonět*, and one for (29): *čichat*.

5 The specificity of some of Anderson's observations for English as well as some other inappropriate conclusions arrived at Anderson's study has also been noted by Bauer and Boagey (1977).

3. After this short survey of some treatments of the differentiation of the “first actant”, let us now test on a sample of English verbs⁶ the plausibility of the idea of identification of the typical functions of the subject as a single deep structure participant called here “Actor”.

The sample falls into the following groups:

3.1 Intransitive verbs without any morphemically identical transitive counterparts:

Even though the only participant of these verbs is classified under different headings, there is no reason why to differentiate between the various functions ascribed to this single surface sentence part in terms of deep structure participants. The difference of syntactic properties (unacceptability of imperatives or the impossibility of formation of the progressive forms with some of these verbs) can be easily provided for by means of subclassification of the verbs themselves and has no closer connection with the participant functions.⁷

3.2 Transitive verbs without any morphemically identical intransitive counterpart:

Semantic considerations based on examination of the degree of active participation, volition or will on the side of the “first actant” result in an assignment of different cases or “thematic” relations to the subject NP in (6) with the verb *know* (Dative with Fillmore, Location with Gruber) as well as in (14) with the verb *own* (Location), in (16) Goal with the verb *inherit*, in (17) Agent and Goal in Gruber’s account of the verb *buy* and in (18) Agent and Source with the verb *give*. The double assignment of “thematic” relations in the last two examples might be compared with the above mentioned distinction (well known from European structural linguistics) between semantic patterning inside the language system and the language independent domain of cognitive content or factual knowledge (in connection with the structure of human memory); it would then be possible to distinguish the deep structure participant of “Actor” or “first actant” (as a matter of linguistically structured meaning) and the “role” of Source or Goal belonging to the layer of organization of factual knowledge (scenario structures with Kay, 1975, roles with Fillmore 1971, 1977) rather than to the language structure itself.

3.3 Verbs with which the subject position can be occupied by an NP that with the same form of the verb may occupy also a position of some other syntactic function (the semantic relation, as understood by Fillmore, being the same):

3.3.1 “Direct object” shifted into the position of subject:

6 The data used in our analysis were gathered by M. Turbová. For the purpose of the present paper we have analyzed the first 200 verbs out of her excerption of more than 1,000 verbs based on Hornby (1963) and comprising (i) intransitive and transitive verbs with inanimate subjects and (ii) such verb forms that may be used both transitively and intransitively, to which we added (iii) verbs quoted in linguistic writings as examples of different case frames.

7 We assume that such distinctions as that between Agentive, Experiencer, Theme or Dative etc. (in a position primarily corresponding to that of surface subject) belong to the domain of cognitive content (scenarios); the criteria concerning the existence of progressive forms with the given verb, of the difference between *do* and *happen* in a corresponding question, etc. appear not to characterize the class of consciously active Agentives; such a series as *Jim goes*, *Jim sits*, *Jim lies*, *the book lies*, corroborates the view that the linguistic patterning is the same.