

Semantic Roles and Syntactic Realization

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Although the ability to identify the set of possible theta-roles and their assigners is clearly presupposed, their characterization has not received much attention in the GB literature. The reliance on a predicate-argument representation in the GB framework makes it imperative that these other components of Theta-theory be developed. This will require looking beyond the process of theta-role assignment to the nature of the roles themselves. It is necessary to arrive at the inventory of theta-roles as well as criteria for determining the argument structure of verbs. In this talk, these issues were directly dealt with and the necessity to divide theta-roles into the following two classes was argued.

- (1) Thematic Roles: theme, source, goal, location
Actional Roles: agent, patient, instrument, experiencer

Our more limited purpose in this talk was to discuss the class of spray/load verbs which exhibits the so-called locative alternation. On the semantically motivated ground, each variant of the alternation should be assigned actional theta-roles illustrated below:

- (2) a. Bill loaded books on the truck.
AGENT PATIENT PATIENT
b. Bill loaded the truck with books.
AGENT PATIENT

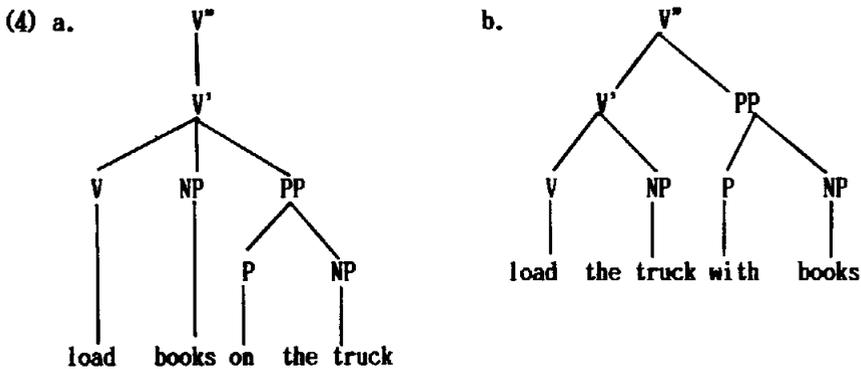
This proposal means that the alternation reflects a difference in the semantic roles of the arguments, which refutes the assumption in many works in lexical semantics that the verb in each variant takes the same argument structure and the alternation is regarded as a consequence of a difference in the expression of the arguments.

As for the syntactic realization of arguments, the following principle was proposed:

- (3) In action sentences, an AGENT argument realizes in the subject position

and a PATIENT argument, if any, realizes in the complement position sister to head V).

This principle accounts for the syntactic behavior of the relevant alternation as well as other sets of phenomena concerning the ways in which the arguments assigned the semantic roles in a verb's argument structure are syntactically realized. It was shown on the observation of various kinds of syntactic tests that each variant of the locative alternation in (2a,b) has the VP structure illustrated in (4a,b) respectively:



The structures above observe the proposed principle; in (4a), both of the two PATIENT arguments realize in the complement position of the verb, on the other hand, in (4b) the only PATIENT argument also realizes in the complement position.

Much of the information that traditionally came under the notion of subcategorization was found to be predictable from independent principles such as (3) given an appropriate representation of the predicate and its arguments. This suggests that the lexical competence of a speaker of a natural language includes knowledge of the organization of predicates and of predicate-argument relations into natural classes. Once the principles of lexical organization are recognized, many of the properties of lexical items may be shown to be derivative. As a consequence, a simpler, more economical representation is possible for lexical entries since the need to specify all properties of a lexical item in its entry is avoided.