TOPIC 4:
Semantic representation of clauses

1 The semantic representation of clauses.

The previous module has described the syntactic structure of clauses: how a clause is made up of phrases, which are in turn made up of words.

In this section, we look briefly at the semantic structure of the clause. There are different models of clause semantics. In this class, we will use the system from Sydney Functional Linguistics, which analyses the clause in terms of participants (Actor, Goal, Sensor, Sayer, etc.), processes (material, mental, verbal, etc.) and circumstances of the processes (location, manner, means, etc.)

A clause represents a pattern of experience, conceptualised as a semantic configuration. A semantic configuration consists of: processes, participants and circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>participant</th>
<th>process</th>
<th>participant</th>
<th>circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dog</td>
<td>bit</td>
<td>the postman</td>
<td>yesterday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Processes (actions, events, states, types of behaviour): types.
- **material**: processes of ‘doing’ (kick, run, paint, construct, dig, write, repair, send, give)
- **mental**: processes of ‘experiencing’ or ‘sensing’ (*see, hear, know, feel, believe, think, like*)
- **relational**: processes of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ in which a participant is characterised, or identified, or situated circumstantially (*be, seem, stand, lie, become, turn, get*)
- **verbal** (*say, tell*), existential (*there is a problem*), behavioural (*laugh, cry*).

Participants (entities such as persons, objects or abstractions): the types depend on the type of process.

Circumstances: are not “participants” in the process (not Subject, Object Complement) but rather define how, when, where, why, what with, etc. the process occurs.

*Do it gently. He watered the garden with a hose.*

2 Material Processes

**Actor**: the Actor of a process can be either:
- the **Agent** of the process (must be an animate entity capable of conscious action):
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor: agent</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Prime Minister</td>
<td>resigned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Inanimate Agent** or **Force** (where the Actor is not animate):
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor: force</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lightning</td>
<td>struck</td>
<td>the oak tree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal: The goal can be either:

- **Affected** (if the Goal exists before the process but is affected by it):
  
  \[ \text{The avalanche buried the climbers} \]
  
  Actor: force  
  Process: material  
  Goal: affected

- **Effected** (if the Goal is created by the process):
  
  \[ \text{Mary made an omelette} \]
  
  Actor: agent  
  Process: material  
  Goal: effected

Recipient and Beneficiary:

- **Recipient**: participant to whom the action is directed and who receives the goods:
  
  \[ \text{I gave the kids some money} \]
  
  Actor: agent  
  Process: material  
  Recipient  
  Goal: affected

- **Beneficiary**: participant for whom some service is done: *I'll make you an omelette.*
  
  \[ \text{I will make you an omelette} \]
  
  Actor: agent  
  Process: material  
  Beneficiary  
  Goal: effected

Actor and Goal with Ergative verbs: the Subject of an intransitive clause with an ergative should be seen as the Goal, not the Actor:

\[ \text{The glass broke} \]

Actor: agent  
Process: material  
Goal: affected

\[ \text{I broke the glass} \]

Actor: agent  
Process: material  
Goal: affected

Actor and Goal in passive sentences: in a passive sentence, what was Object in the active sentence becomes the Subject, and keeps the same semantic role:

\[ \text{You will be made an omelette} \]

Beneficiary  
Process: material  
Goal: effected

3 Mental Processes

**Senser**: the one who sees, feels, likes, etc.

**Phenomenon**: the participant which is perceived, known, liked, etc.

\[ \text{The rider heard a noise} \]

Senser  
Process: mental  
Phenomenon

\[ \text{I thought that she was coming} \]

Senser  
Process: mental  
Phenomenon

\[ \text{That you like ice-cream pleases me} \]

Phenomenon  
Process: mental  
Senser
4 Verbal Processes

Sayer: the one who speaks the message.
Verbiage: what is said.
Addressee (if present): the one who is spoken to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John</th>
<th>said</th>
<th>something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sayer</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Verbiage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John</th>
<th>told</th>
<th>me</th>
<th>to go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sayer</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Addressee</td>
<td>Verbiage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Get out of here!” she screamed

| Verbiage | Sayer   | Process: verbal |

5 Relational Processes

These processes are mostly those with ‘be’ and ‘have’ as the main verb (also ‘seem’, ‘appear’, and also words of sensing when the Complement is an adjectival phrase (I felt sad). These verbs do not in general passivise. We will identify 2 main types here:

• Possession: some Possessor has possession of some Possession.
  | John     | has   | my cat. |
  | Possessor | Process: relational | Possession |

• Attribution: one entity (the Carrier) is assigned some attribute.
  | John     | is    | very sick. |
  | Carrier   | Process: relational | Attribute |
  | John     | is    | the president |
  | Carrier   | Process: relational | Attribute |
  | That book | is    | mine |
  | Carrier   | Process: relational | Attribute |

6 RECOMMENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY


7 Exercise

1. Specify the type of process involved in the following examples;
   We carried our luggage.
   The spectators cheered enthusiastically.
   The gardener dug a hole in the garden.
   She gave me a bracelet for my daughter.
   A stone broke the window.
   The water boiled.
   The window broke.
   The dog died.
   I can smell the gas.
   He slipped on the ice.
   I can't understand their objections.
   We believe that he is right.
   Phil knows the answer.
   Tom is generous.
   That car is mine.
   He remained the leader.
   The water feels cold

2. What are the semantic roles/functions involved in each of the examples above?

3. For each of the following clauses say whether a participant or a circumstance has been chosen as Theme:
   1. Main Street is usually crowded on late shopping nights.
   2. The girls armed with hockey-sticks chased the burglar.
   3. Quite by accident I came across a very rare postage-stamp.
   4. Away in the distance you can see Mount Kilimanjaro.
   5. What I am going to tell you must not be repeated.