**TUTORIAL**
**8.8** Propositional structure 1

In this tutorial, the learners will understand and describe the basic structure of semantic propositions, with special focus on EVENT propositions.

## Structural Hierarchy (Grammatical & Semantic)[1]

We have talked about the fact that there is a structural hierarchy both in the *Grammar* (or "form") of language and also in the *Semantics* (or "meaning") of language. First, the Grammatical Hierarchy:

- Morphemes are grouped into words
- Words are grouped into phrases
- Phrases are grouped into clauses and sentences
- Sentences are grouped into paragraphs
- Paragraphs are grouped into higher discourse units

Just as there is a structured *grammatical* hierarchy, there is a parallel *semantic* hierarchy:

- Meaning components are grouped into concepts
- Concepts are grouped into propositions
- Propositions are grouped into propositional clusters
- Prepositional clusters are grouped into semantic paragraphs
- Semantic paragraphs are grouped into higher semantic units, such as episodes, episode clusters and discourse

## Beyond the Concept Level

So far in our discussion of semantic structure, we have focused on Semantic *concepts*. As we noted, there are four kinds of semantic concepts: Things, Events, Attributes, & Relations. Now we are going to move above the Concept Level and talk about semantic *propositions*.

---

[1] Mildred L. Larson, *Meaning Based Translation: a guide to cross-language equivalence*, revised edition, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), pp. 33-34.

# Semantic Propositions[2]

The *proposition* in semantics generally corresponds un-skewed with the grammatical clause or simple sentence. The proposition is a key pivotal element in the semantic hierarchy, because the proposition is the *smallest unit of communication*.[3] It is not the smallest unit of meaning. For Example, I can say, "*apple*." That has meaning. But no real communication has taken place. You would likely say to me, "What do you mean 'apple'? Apple what?"

Apple is a semantic concept—a *thing* concept. As a concept, it clearly has meaning, but when we say "apple" in isolation, totally outside of any kind of context, there is no real communication. However, if we say, "*He is eating an apple*," that is a proposition—which constitutes more than just meaning, it produces genuine communication. That is why the proposition is said to be the *smallest unit of communication*.

# One Semantic Proposition—Many Grammatical Forms[4]

Often, a simple semantic proposition can be represented by several different forms, depending on the context. The following forms all express the same semantic proposition:

- John hit the ball.
- The ball was hit by John.
- The hitting of the ball by John…
- The ball, having been hit by John…

These utterances illustrate four possible ways that this single semantic proposition could be represented in English. The context would determine which one is applicable. The meaning is the picture we have in our mind of John hitting the ball.

**Analyzing the Proposition: "John hit the ball."**

The central concept in this proposition is an **event**—the word "hit." And there are two **thing** concepts clustering around this single **event**: "John" and "ball." This particular proposition is made up of three semantic concepts.

# Propositional Structure[5]

Here are a few key principles about semantic propositions:

---

[2] Ibid., pp. 30-31, 207-17.
[3] Ibid., p. 211.
[4] Ibid., p. 209.
[5] Ibid., pp. 212-13.

- Every semantic proposition is composed of **at least two concepts**: Things, Events, and/or Attributes.
  - These concepts will be linked by some kind of definable semantic Relation.
- In every proposition, **one of the concepts is central**.
  - The other concept(s) cluster around the central concept and are linked to it by semantic relations. More concepts can cluster around those concepts.
- There are two kinds of propositions: **Event** propositions and **State** propositions.

**Event Propositions**

- An event proposition is one in which the central concept is an **event**.
- Every event proposition has one **event** plus at least one **thing**.
- There can be more thing and attribute concepts clustering around the central event.

**State propositions**

- State propositions are composed of a central **thing** concept with at least one **attribute** or one other **thing** concept attached to it.

# Start with Event Propositions

When doing a semantic structural analysis of any given text, it is usually best to start by analyzing the event propositions. The first step in identifying event propositions is to identify and mark the event concepts in the text.

Every event concept is central to an event proposition. (Some may be embedded event propositions.) An event proposition is made up of an event concept along with at least one thing concept. Remember: events may be:

- Actions (run, hit, kill)
- Experiences (see, think, smell)
- Processes (die, rot, freeze)

**Let's Look at Some Examples**

What are the events in the following sentences?

- Like a lamb that is led to slaughter (Is. 53:7).
  - The semantic events are "led" and "slaughter"
  - That means this sentence is made up of TWO Event Propositions
- They all condemned him to be deserving of death.
  - "condemned," "deserving," and "death"

- Her singing is too loud.
  - "singing"

- The man knifed him to death.
  - "knifed" (or stabbed with a knife), "death"
- Prayer comes first each day.
  - "prayer"

# Next, Identify the Participants

Once you have identified the event concepts, the next step is to identify the participants (thing concepts) associated with each event. The participants are the persons or objects that do the action or to which the action is done. Every event proposition has one or more participant, but they may be implicit.

- *"Like a lamb that is led to slaughter"*
  - The first event is "led."
    - It has two associated thing concepts: "lamb" and "someone."
    - This first event proposition is "*Someone led the lamb*"
  - The next event is "slaughter."
    - It also has two associated things: "lamb" and "someone"
    - This second event proposition is "*Someone slaughtered the lamb*"

The passive construction in this example points to the fact that *someone* did these two actions (leading and slaughtering), but it doesn't tell us who it was. In order to re-write these propositions in an un-skewed way, there needs to be an explicit reference to the participant who did the actions—even if we don't know who that was ("someone").

The Passive construction is a form of skewing. That is why we always eliminate passives when we rewrite the propositions of a text in their un-skewed form.

- *"They all condemned him to be deserving of death"*
  - The first event is "condemned"
    - It has two associated thing concepts: "they (all)" and "him"
    - The proposition is, "They all condemned Him"
  - The next event is "deserving"
    - Its associated thing is "He"
    - The un-skewed proposition is "He deserves"
  - The next event is "death"

4

- ▪ The associated thing is "He"
- ▪ The un-skewed proposition is "He dies"

The sentence in the example above has three event propositions. When we do a semantic structural analysis, we write each proposition on a separate line. This English sentence rewritten to express its basic, un-skewed semantic propositions, would be:

- – *They condemned him*
- – *He deserves*
- – *He dies*

At this point, these three propositions sound disconnected from each other— as if they were totally unrelated. Of course, we know that these propositions are related to each other; but we will leave the relations undefined for now and come back to handle them later.

- – *Her singing is too loud.*
  - o The event is "singing"
    - ▪ The associated thing concept is "her" (she)
    - ▪ The basic un-skewed event proposition is "She sings"
  - o But there's more here:
    - ▪ The phrase "too loud" is an attribute concept modifying "sings"
      - • The word "too" is an attribute concept modifying "loudly"
    - ▪ So the complete proposition is "She sings too loudly"

Do you see how "*Her singing is too loud*" is skewed and "*She sings too loudly*" removes the skewing? The word "her" is a possessive pronoun, but in order to remove the skewing, we recast the word "her" as "she," a subject pronoun, since "she" is the one who did the event.

- – *The man knifed him to death*.
  - o The first event is "knifed" (or stabbed with a knife)
    - ▪ The associated thing concept is "the man"
    - ▪ The un-skewed proposition is "The man knifed him"
  - o The second event is "death"
    - ▪ The associated thing concept is "him" (he)
    - ▪ The un-skewed proposition is "he died"

- – Prayer comes first each day.
  - o The event is "prayer"

- Grammatically, "Prayer" is a noun; but semantically, it is an event
- "Comes" is the only verb in the sentence, but in this case, it is not a semantic event.
  o The associated thing concept is unspecified so we would use a general term:
    - Depending on the context, it could be:
      • "(Someone) prays"
      • OR: "(People) pray"
      • OR: "(We) pray"
      • OR: "(I) pray"
  o The phrase "each day" is a semantic attribute attached to the event "pray"
    - "First" is another attribute attached to "pray"
  o So the proposition here is "someone prays first each day" (or "we" or "I").

The reason we don't know the "who" of this proposition is that this example is taken out of context. That is a weakness of this kind of illustrative example. When you analyze an entire text, most of the participants will be clear from the context.

# Let's look at Mark chapter 1

We already identified the event concepts in verse 4. Now let's determine the thing concepts associated with each event.

- Appeared: "John the Baptist"
- Preaching: "John"
- Baptism: "John"
- Repentance: "people"
- Forgiveness: "God"
  o In Lamogai, "forgive" must be a **verb**.
  o And you must state **who** is forgiving **whom** of **what**.
- Sins: "people"

# These Examples illustrate important principles:

- Every **event** proposition has an **event** concept
  o It doesn't necessarily have any **verbs**
- Every event proposition has one or more **participants** (semantic thing concepts)
  o It doesn't necessarily have any **nouns**

**Consider this Example:**
- "Did you eat an apple?"
- "Yes."

In this context, the little word "yes" represents the event proposition "*Yes, I ate an apple*." The semantic event is "ate," and the associated thing concepts are "I" and "an apple." These elements are not explicitly represented by any form on the surface, but semantically, they are part of the meaning.

# Re-writing Event Propositions[6]

After identifying the Semantic events along with their associated thing and attribute concepts, we rewrite the Propositions in a basic, un-skewed form. Here are the guidelines for rewriting propositions:
- Use Active, Finite verbs
    - Passive voice is a form of skewing because often the participants (particularly the agent who does the action) are not explicitly mentioned.
    - Infinitives are also considered to be skewed for the same reason—because infinitives often do not explicitly mention the participants.
- Make all **participants** (semantic *thing* concepts) explicit
    - Even if it's not clear who or what the participants are.
    - In those cases use a non-specific term like "someone" or "something"
- Leave the **relations** for later

**"The destruction of the city was planned well"**
- The semantic event concepts in this sentence are:
    - "destruction"
    - "planned"
- The event propositions are:
    - (Someone) destroyed the city.
    - (Someone) planned well.

However, there is one more element of skewing here. The propositions are not in their true sequential order. The real order of these events is:
- (Someone) planned well.
- (Someone) destroyed the city.

**"John rejected Peter's offer"**
- The semantic event concepts are:
    - "rejected"

---
[6] Ibid., p. 210.

- o "offer"
- – The event propositions are:
    - o Peter John rejected (what Peter offered).
    - o Peter offered (something).

Again, the propositions are out of chronological order. The order should be:
- – Peter offered (something)
- – John rejected (what Peter offered)

**"His graduation depended on her help"**
This one is a little bit trickier than some of the other examples.
- – What are the EVENTS?
    - o "graduation"
    - o "help"
- – Who are the PARTICIPANTS?
    - o "He"
    - o "Her"
- – What are the propositions?
    - o He graduated
    - o She helped him

Again we need to adjust the chronological sequence, because she helped him first, then he graduated afterwards. In this example, both semantic events are grammatical nouns. The only verb in this sentence is the word "depended," which represents the semantic *cause-and-effect* relation between the events.

**"Disobedience brings much suffering"**
- – What are the semantic events?
    - o "disobedience"
    - o "suffering"
- – What are the semantic propositions?
    - o (Someone) disobeys
    - o (Someone) suffers much
        - ▪ "much" is an attribute describing the event "suffering"

This time the propositions are already in their correct sequential order. As with the previous example, the only verb in this sentence ("brings") does not represent a semantic event. It communicates the semantic relation between the two event propositions.

**"The compliment was well received by Mary"**
- – What are the EVENTS?
    - o "compliment"
    - o "received"

– What are the propositions?
  o (Someone) complimented Mary
  o Mary received the compliment

**➡ ACTIVITIES**
*Propositional structure 1*

1. This tutorial (*8.8 – Propositional Structure I*) is directly related to the next tutorial (*8.9 – Propositional Structure II*).
2. Now watch and read Tutorial 8.9. The assignment at the end of that tutorial covers the material from tutorials 8.8 and 8.9 together.