

TUTORIAL
8.9

Propositional structure 2

This tutorial builds upon the material contained in Tutorial 8.8 (*Propositional Structure I*), giving further instruction on the structure of semantic propositions.

We Learned in the Previous Tutorial that:¹

- A proposition is the smallest unit of communication.²
- There are two kinds of Semantic PROPOSITIONS
 - EVENT propositions
 - STATE propositions
- Every proposition is made up of two or more concepts and one of the semantic concepts is the central concept of the proposition.
- **Event** propositions have an event as the central concept.
 - There must be at least one thing concept associated with the event.
 - There can be other thing concepts and/or attribute concepts.
- **State** propositions have a Semantic thing as the central concept.
 - There must be at least one other attribute or thing concept associated with the central thing concept.

State propositions³

State Propositions have two main parts:

- The **Topic** – the central thing concept that is being talked about.
- The **Comment** – what is said about the topic.

¹ Mildred L. Larson, *Meaning Based Translation: a guide to cross-language equivalence*, revised edition, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), pp. 30-31, 207-17.

² Ibid., p. 211.

³ Ibid., pp. 213-14.

For Example:

- The man is a chief
- She is pregnant
- This is a bowl of rice
- Jesus was at home (Mk 2:1)

When we analyze **state** propositions, as with event propositions, the semantic structure (i.e., the *meaning*) remains the same no matter what language we are working in. It is the grammar (i.e., the *form*) that changes. The grammatical forms used to communicate the state propositions are language-specific.

Remember: Every **state** proposition is made up of a **topic** and a **comment**—with some sort of semantic **relation** between them. Here are some examples of state propositions:

	Topic ... relation ... Comment
Proposition	CAR ... ownership ... ME
English	This car is mine.
Otomi	This is my car.
Gahuku	My-car exists.
Lamogai	Car here mine it.
Tok Pisin	This car it [possession word] me.

	Topic ... relation ... Comment
Proposition	DOG ... naming ... FIDO
English	The dog's name is Fido.
Otomi	Dog he-is-named the Fido.
Gahuku	Dog name - (phrase-closure-marker) Fido-is.
Lamogai	Dog name-its Fido.
Tok Pisin	Dog name [possession word] it Fido.

	Topic ... relation ... Comment
Proposition	JOHN ... location ... HOUSE
English	John is in the house.
Otomi	John lives there in the house.
Gahuku	John - (phrase-closure-marker) house-in is-he.
Lamogai	John exists at house inside.
Tok Pisin	John he [predicate marker] exists in house.

	Topic ... relation ... Comment
Proposition	FRED ... description ... BIG
English	Fred is big.
Otomi	Is big the Fred.
Gahuku	Fred - (phrase-closure-marker) man big is-he.
Lamogai	Fred big he.
Tok Pisin	Fred he [predicate marker] big.

Situational Meanings of Propositions⁴

The situational meaning of a proposition reflects the purpose of the author by answering these questions:

- Is he making a **statement**?
(To give information to the hearer)
- Is he asking a **question**?
(To gain information from the hearer)
- Is he giving a **command**?
(to prescribe a course of action)

In the baseball example we looked at earlier, the **situational meaning** could be one of these three possibilities:

JOHN ... HIT ... BALL	
Statement:	John hit the ball.
Question:	Did John hit the ball?
Command:	John, hit the ball!

All three examples in the above chart represent the same semantic proposition. The **situational** meaning is superimposed over the proposition by the context.

Event and **state** Propositions may occur with all three of these situational meanings. Every proposition expresses a command, a question, or a statement. This is called the **illocutionary force** of the proposition.

Form & Function of Situational Meaning⁵

The semantic term for situational meaning is **illocutionary force**. The corresponding grammatical term is **mood**. If there is no Skewing:

- A Semantic **statement** would be reflected grammatically in the **declarative mood**

⁴ Ibid., pp. 214-17.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 215-16.

- A Semantic **question** would be reflected in the **interrogative mood**.
- A Semantic **command** would be reflected in the **imperative mood**.

Implications for translation:

Each language has its own grammatical forms for indicating illocutionary force. We cannot assume that the surface level features we are familiar with in our own language will carry across into other languages.

In English, two common surface level devices used to indicate illocutionary force are **word order** and **intonation**.

Word Order Marking Illocutionary Force

In the following English example, the two sentences have the *same three words* and the *same intonation*, but *different word order*. The change in word order indicates a change in illocutionary force. (The curved line over the last word of each sentence indicates a falling intonation at the end of the sentence.)

- John is going (declarative)
- Is John going (interrogative)

Notice that I did not include punctuation in these two sentences. Punctuation generally marks intonation. In this case, the two sentences can be said with identical intonation. The different word order is all that is necessary to make the distinction between a **statement** and a **question**.

Intonation Marking Illocutionary Force

In the following English example, the two sentences have the *same three words* and the *same word order*, but *different intonation*. We noted above that intonation in written speech is often marked by punctuation. In this example the change in intonation is all that is necessary to mark word order indicates a change in illocutionary force. (The upward and downward curved lines over the last word of each sentence indicate a rising or falling intonation.)

- John is going. (declarative)
- John is going? (interrogative)

Language-specific Forms

Every language has its own way of differentiating between a statement, a question, and a command. We have seen that English often uses word order and intonation. English also uses **interrogative adverbs** (also called “question words”) such as Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, How Much, etc.

Marking Illocutionary Force in LAMOGAI

The Lamogai language of PNG has question words that correspond to the interrogative adverbs in English. However, when dealing with questions in Lamogai that do *not* have an interrogative adverb, it can be tricky.

When we first started learning the Lamogai language, we quickly realized that it is often a challenge to tell the difference between statements and questions. In Lamogai questions, there is no change of word order. They use intonation only to differentiate between questions and statements in sentences that do not have an interrogative adverb.

The problem for us as we were trying to learn the Lamogai language is that the intonation pattern for questions sounds quite similar to the intonation for statements. As in English, we use punctuation to mark Lamogai Intonation. Here is an Example:

- Jon la konong? (Did John go already?)
- Jon la konong. (John went already.)

With the question above, the intonation only falls part of the way down; but with the statement, it falls all the way down. Listen to the difference on the recorded tutorial lesson.

Below are a couple more examples:

- Ti vasek ovul? (Did they plant bananas?)
- Ti vasek ovul. (They planted bananas.)

The words used and the word order are identical; the only change is a slightly different intonation pattern.

- Jisas ma me? (Will Jesus come?)
- Jisas ma me. (Jesus will come.)

Skewing and Illocutionary Force⁶

⁶ Ibid., pp. 257-69.

As we noted above, when there is no skewing of the Illocutionary Force:

- A semantic **statement** would be a **declarative** construction grammatically.
- A semantic **question** would be an **interrogative** construction grammatically.
- A semantic **command** would be an **imperative** construction grammatically.

With illocutionary force, as with most semantic features, there can often be skewing. A declarative clause could represent a semantic command as in this example:

- *You didn't make your bed yet.*

Or an interrogative clause could represent a semantic statement or command. That would be a rhetorical question.

Rhetorical Questions

When you encounter a **question** within a text the first thing you need to determine is whether or not it is a true question semantically—in other words, was the question asked in order to gain information? If not that means it is a rhetorical question.

When we determine that a particular question is a “rhetorical question,” that means it uses the grammatical form of a question (interrogative), but it is not really a question semantically.

When we consider the Illocutionary Force of a proposition, there are only three possibilities: It must be a statement, question, or command. If it is not asking a question to elicit information, then it must be one of the other two.

Anytime you recognize that a particular question is actually a rhetorical question, the first thing you need to do is determine whether it is semantically a statement or a command. Here are some examples:

- In John 18:25 Pilate asked Jesus, “*Am I a Jew?*”
 - Clearly, Pilate was not trying to figure out whether or not he was a Jew.
 - He used this rhetorical question to make an emphatic statement:
 - “*I am NOT a Jew!*”
- In Mark 2:6-7 the scribes thought to themselves, “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*”

- Were they trying to figure out who besides God can forgive sins?
- No. They, too, were making an emphatic statement:
 - *“No one can forgive sins but God alone!”*
- In Mark 4:40 Jesus said, *“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*
 - There are two rhetorical questions here, both apparently emphatic commands.
 - *“Don’t be afraid!”*
 - *“You need to have faith!”*

Translation of Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions cannot always be transferred literally from one language to another. In order to understand how to translate a rhetorical question, we need to determine its purpose in the source language. In the three examples of rhetorical questions mentioned above, the purpose seems to be emphasis. Putting those semantic statements and commands into the form of a grammatical question makes them more emphatic.

When we translate the rhetorical questions in these verses into any other language, we need to make sure we adequately relay the *emphasis* indicated by the rhetorical question, even if it is not possible to retain the form of the rhetorical question in a particular target language.



ACTIVITIES

Propositional structure 2

1. Read Rewrite the semantic propositions (event and state) in Mark 2:1-2, removing the skewing
 - Put each proposition on a separate line
 - Use active, finite verbs for event propositions
 - In other words, do not use passive constructions or infinitive verbs
 - Include all participants explicitly even if you don’t know who they are

- Use nonspecific terms like “someone” or “people” if necessary
- Leave the relations between the propositions for later
- See sample below

Jesus came back to Capernaum several days afterward

People heard

Jesus was at home

Many people gathered together