

“RRG Meets the WXDY Construction”



Ling 202
Dr. S. Svorou

Kelli Wiseth
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Construction

- Stored pairings of form and function
 - Morphemes, words, idioms
 - Partially and lexically filled and fully general linguistic patterns
- “Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form is not strictly predictable from its component parts...” [Goldberg]

Notable Constructions

- The *resultative*- construction (Goldberg)
 - Chris sneezed the napkin off the table.
- The *let alone*- construction (Fillmore, Kay)
 - She doesn't get up for lunch, let alone breakfast.
- The Mad Magazine Construction (Lambrecht)
 - Him, a doctor!?
- The WXDY Construction (Fillmore, Kay)

The WXDY Construction

1. What's that scratch doing on the table?
2. What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?
3. Waiter, what's this fly doing in my soup?
4. Just what is critical race theory and what is it doing in a nice field like education?
5. Say, what's this lock doing on the door?

Examples 1, 2, 3 from Kay, Fillmore (1988) Grammatical Constructions and Linguistic Generalizations: The *What's X doing Y?* Construction. Examples 4, 5 from COCA.

Characteristics

- Idiosyncratic
- Idiomatic
- Unexpectedness
- Incongruity judgments
- Non-compositional

But not all are...

1. What's the FBI doing now to find whoever is responsible for the bombing?
2. From a chief executive perspective, what is he doing right, and what might he do better?
3. How is this new environment affecting us? What is it doing to the flow of information?
4. For those who favor such a ban, there is one question: What is Gore doing about it now?
5. But what I want to know from the Mayor is: What is he doing to actually bring in jobs and housing?

Research Question

- If RRG is a “framework for the analysis of syntax from the communication-and-cognition perspective” (Van Valin 1997), how well does it explain idiomatic or idiosyncratic sentences?
- And at which point do different WXDY’s become literal or idiomatic?
 - Semantic; pragmatic? focus structure?
 - Investigate prosody projection

LS Mismatch

“Waiter, what’s this fly doing in my soup?”

be-LOC’(soup, fly)

“Sir, I believe that’s the backstroke.”

do’(x, [swim’(x)])



Co-compositional analysis

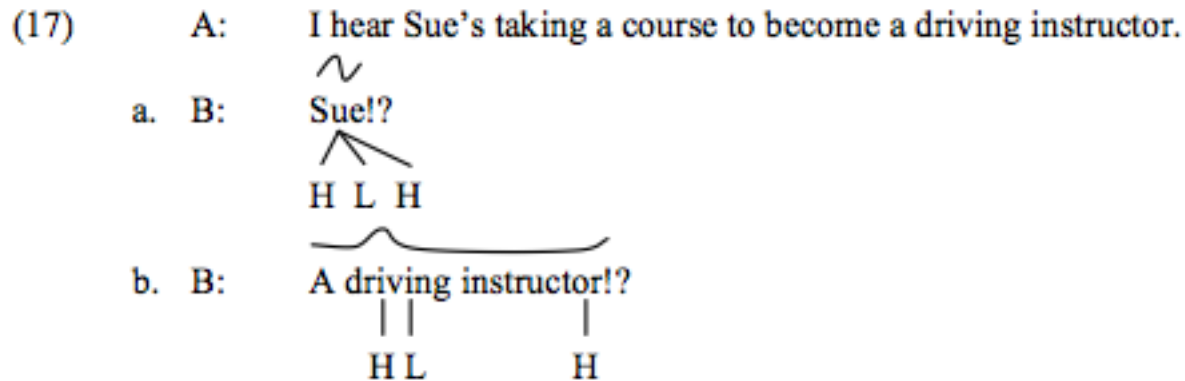
- Theories of syntax-semantics interface divided between two broad camps
 - Projectionist: Semantic representation projected from the lexical representation of the verb (which determines the syntactic structure of the clause)
 - Constructionist: Semantic representation constructed or composed based on NPs/PPs co-occurring with the verb (verb has very general or underspecified meaning)

Complementary Views

- “the two approaches represent different perspectives on the construction”
- Projectionist => speaker’s perspective
- Constructionist => hearer’s perspective

Prosody Projection

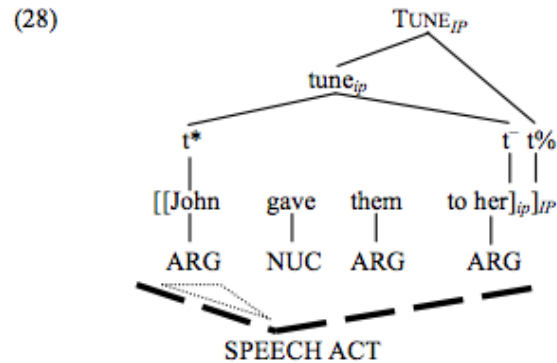
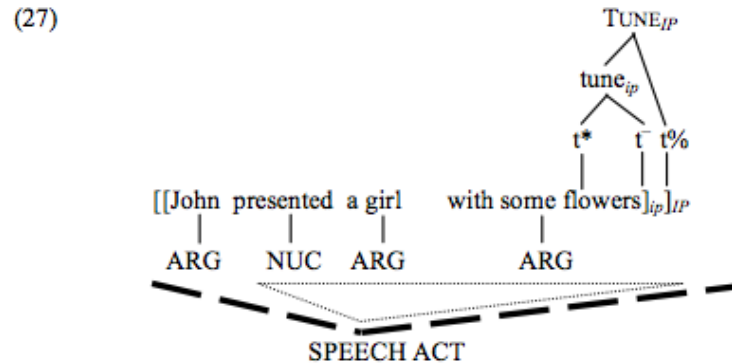
- To be “incorporated into the focus structure projection” (Van Valin, “Overview of RRG”)
- Based on the Autosegmental-Metrical/Tones and Breaks Indices (AM/ToBI)
- Example: MM Construction



(adapted from Ladd 1996: 44)

From “A Prosodic Project for Role and Reference Grammar.” O’Connor, Rob. 2008. Chapter from “Investigations of the Syntax-Semantics-Pragmatics Interface” Van Valin (Editor)

Focus Structure with Prosody



From "A Prosodic Project for Role and Reference Grammar." O'Connor, Rob. 2008. Chapter from "Investigations of the Syntax-Semantics-Pragmatics Interface" Van Valin (Editor)