

Topic, Subject, and Possessor

- A. Affinity
- B. Reference Point Phenomena
- C. Subject and Object
- D. Topic and Subject

A. Affinity

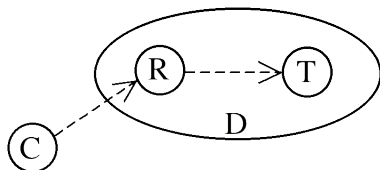
- (1) "...it seems clear that subject and topic are not unrelated notions. Subjects are essentially grammaticalized topics; in the process of being integrated into the case frame of the verb (at which point we call them subjects), topics become somewhat impure, and certain of their topic properties are weakened, but their topic-ness is still recognizable...That is why many of the topic properties are shared by subjects in a number of languages. For example, some [subject-prominent] languages do not allow indefinite subjects" (Li and Thompson 1976: 484).
- (2) **Pivot:** the entity associated with a proposition that is identified with a topic and thus enables the proposition to function as a comment with respect to it.
- (3)(a) *Your nephew, he will never amount to anything.*
 (b) *Your nephew, I really like him.*
 (c) *Bill, his friend just died.*
 (d) *Bill, I really liked his friend.*
- (4) *Booth's assassination [of Lincoln]; Lincoln's assassination [by Booth]*
- (5)(a) *Il lève la main.* 'He raises his hand.' [French]
 (b) *J'ouvre la bouche.* 'I open my mouth.'
 (c) *Nous fermons les yeux.* 'We close our eyes.'
- (6)(a) *Nicole, Pierre, elle ne l'aime pas.* 'Nicole, Peter, she doesn't like him.' [French]
 (b) *Pierre, sa soeur, je la déteste.* 'Peter, his sister, I hate her.'
- (7) *Ibu anak itu membeli sepatu.* 'That child's mother bought shoes.' [Indonesian]
 mother child that buy shoe
- (8) *Ibu anak itu, dia membeli sepatu.* 'That child's mother, she bought shoes.'
 mother child that she buy shoe
- (9) *Anak itu, ibu-nja membeli sepatu.* 'That child, his mother bought shoes.'
 child that mother-his buy shoe
- (10) **Sepatu itu, ibu anak itu membeli.* 'Those shoes, that child's mother bought them.'
 shoe that mother child that buy

- (11) *Chelswu-ka Swuni-lul casin-uy chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.* [Korean]
 Chelswu-SUBJ Swuni-OBJ self-POSS office-LOC meet-PAST-ASSR
 ‘Chelswu met Suni in self’s [Chelswu’s] office.’
- (12) *Inho-uy Seoul saynghwal-un ton-i casin-uy checi-eyse kacang kun eleywem-i-ess-ta.*
 Inho-POSS Seoul living-TOP money-SUBJ self-POSS situation-LOC most big
 difficulty-be-PAST-ASSR
 ‘In Inho’s life in Seoul, money was the greatest difficulty in self’s [Inho’s] situation.’
- (13) *Noo=n no-puush konoknish.* ‘I have green eyes.’ [Luiseño]
 I=1s:PRES my-eye green
- (14) *Xwaan=up po-toonav qala.* ‘Juan has a basket.’
 Juan=3s:PRES his-basket sits
- (15) *Noo=up no-te’ tiiwu-q.* ‘I have a stomach ache.’
 I=3s:PRES my-stomach hurt-PRES
- (16) [*noo=up* [*no-te’ tiiwu-q*]]
 outer inner
 subject subject
 inner clause
 full clause

B. Reference Point Phenomena

- (17) Conceptualization is inherently **dynamic**: it occurs through **processing time**, the specific nature of its temporal development being essential to its value.
- (18)(a) *Do you see that boat out there in the lake? There’s a bird in the water right next to it.*
 (b) *Do you remember the surgeon we met at your sister’s party? His wife just had twins.*
- (19) A **conceptualizer** (C) has the ability to invoke one conceived entity as a **reference point** (R) for purposes of establishing “mental contact” with another, the **target** (T). The set of entities accessible via a given reference point constitute its **dominion** (D).
- (20)

(a) Reference Point Relationship



(b) Abbreviation



(21)(a) *My car* is no longer dependable. *The motor* is just about shot.

(b) *I* would never buy *this house*. *The roof* leaks badly.

(22)(a) *Chicago* is all excited about the Bulls.

(b) *Chicago* has just won another championship.

(c) *Chicago* was late in sending in its application.

(d) *Chicago* is right here in the stack between Dallas and Memphis.

(23) In pronominal anaphora, the antecedent nominal functions as a reference point for purposes of interpreting a pronoun. A nominal's dominion is the stretch of discourse for which it functions as a reference point.

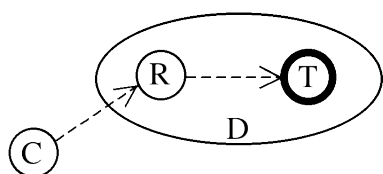
(24) A **possessive** construction can be characterized schematically as a **reference point** construction: the possessor is a reference point, and the possessed, a target found in its dominion.

(25)(a) *the boy's shoe*; *Jeff's uncle*; *the cat's paw*; *their lice*; *the baby's diaper*; *my train*; *Sally's job*; *our problem*; *her enthusiasm*; *its location*; *your candidate*; *the city's destruction*

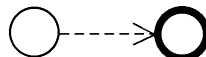
(b) **the shoe's boy*; **the paw's cat*; **the diaper's baby*; **the destruction's city*

(26)

(a) Possessive Construction



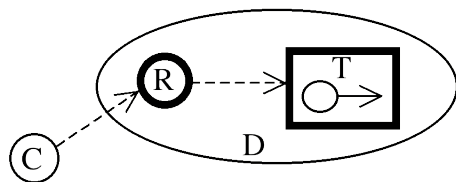
(b) Abbreviation



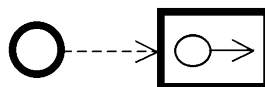
(27) *The lottery*, *I* never have any luck.

(28)

(a) Topic Construction



(b) Abbreviation



(29)(a) *My car*, *the motor* is just about shot.

(b) *My car*, *its motor* is just about shot.

(c) *My car*, *it's* just about shot.

C. Subject and Object

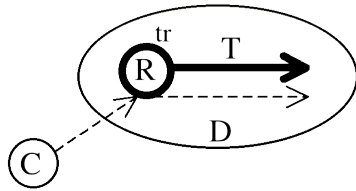
- (30) In a profiled relationship, some entity—termed the **trajector** (*tr*)—stands out as the one the expression is concerned with locating, characterizing, or assessing in relation to others. A salient entity with respect to which the trajector is located or evaluated is called a **landmark** (*lm*). The trajector and landmark of a profiled relation can be characterized as its **primary and secondary focal participants**.
- (31) At a given level of organization, a **subject** is a nominal whose profile corresponds to the **trajector** of a profiled relationship, and an **object**, one whose profile corresponds to the **landmark**.
- (32)(a) The trajector and landmark of a profiled relationship are distinguished from other relational elements by the **focal prominence** conferred on them.
 (b) Their prominence is **asymmetrical**, trajector and landmark being describable as **primary** and **secondary** focal elements.
 (c) This prominence asymmetry has a **temporal** dimension; the trajector's **primary** focal prominence resides at least partially in its role as **initial** point of access.
 (d) As successive foci, trajector and landmark are properly described as **reference point** and **target**, or equivalently, as **first** and **second** elements in a reference point **chain**.
- (33)(a) *Alexander broke the vase.* [subject and object]
 (b) *The vase broke.* [subject only]
 (c) **Broke the vase.* [object only]
- (34) At the time of utterance formulation, the speaker codes the referent currently in **focal attention** as the **syntactic subject** of the utterance. (Tomlin 1995; 1997; Forrest 1996)
- (35)(a) *My wife is the mayor.*
 (b) *The mayor is my wife.*
- (36)(a) *A tiger is a feline.*
 (b) **A feline is a tiger.*
- (37)(a) *my mother's cousin's friend's sister's lawyer*
 (b) *In the kitchen, on the counter, next to the toaster sat the missing kitten.*
- (38)(a) ***My sister** lost **her** keys.*
 (b) ****She** lost **my sister's** keys.*
 (c) *I observed **the baboons** in **their** natural habitat.*
 (d) **I observed **them** in **the baboons'** natural habitat.*
- (39) *the army's destruction [of the city]; the city's destruction [by the army]*

(40) A relationship is **conceptually dependent**, in the sense that its own conception presupposes and incorporates the conception of its participants. By virtue of providing mental access to a relational conception, participants are reference points with respect to it.

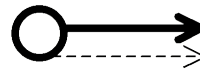
(41) A trajector is the initial reference point for the conception of a profiled relationship. Its dominion is the set of relationships it potentially “anchors”, and the relationship actually conceived and profiled is the target.

(42)

(a) Relational Trajector

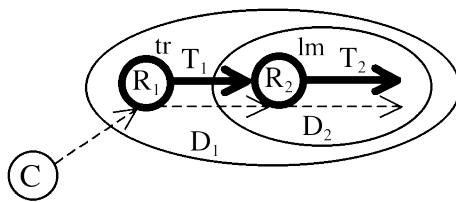


(b) Abbreviation



(43)

(a) Trajector and Landmark

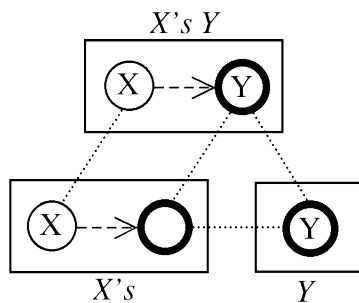


(b) Abbreviation

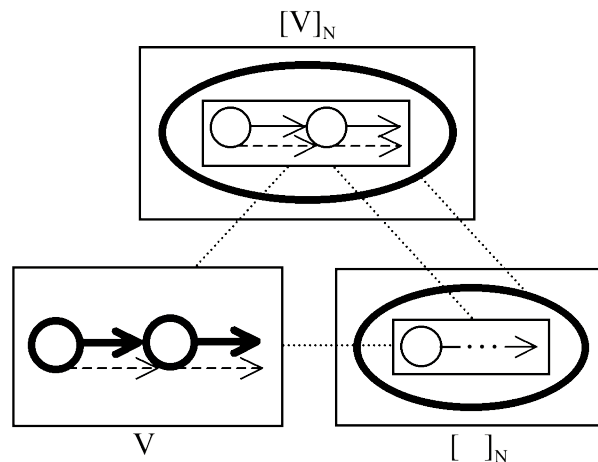


(44)

(a) Possessive Construction

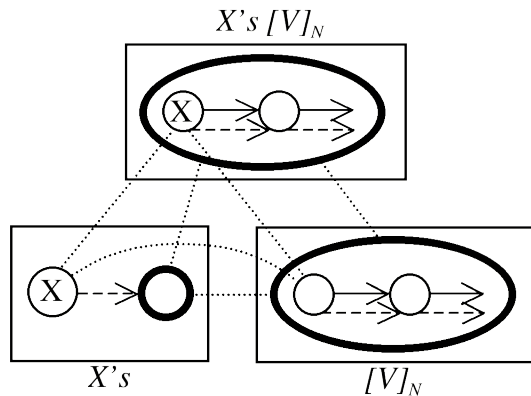


(b) Nominalization

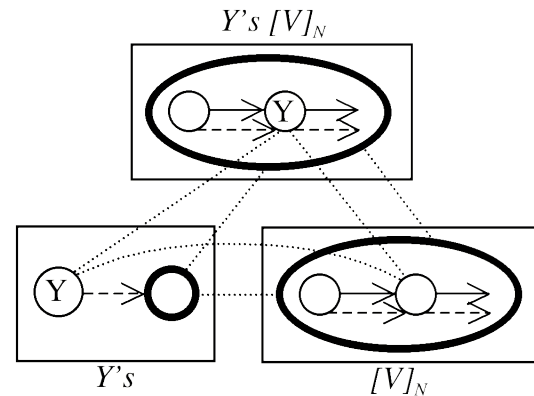


(45)

(a) Subject Periphrasis



(b) Object Periphrasis



D. Topic and Subject

(46) *It's really hard to write **a dissertation**. You have to find a subject. Then you have to come up with some ideas and do lots of preliminary analyses. When you do the background reading, you find that most of those ideas have already been proposed and rejected. So you have to work for a number of years before anything viable starts to take shape. You have to worry about continued financial support. Then you have to satisfy five committee members with mutually incompatible notions about what you should be doing. You have to go through about seven drafts. Then ...*

(47)(a) **Jack**, when I go to see him, he's never home, and he's always complaining that his friends ignore him.

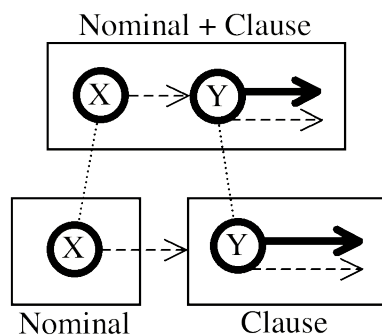
(b) **Jack**, he's always complaining.

(48) **The lottery**, I'm always unlucky.

(49) **La mer**, tu vois de l'eau. 'The ocean, you see water.'

[French]

(50)



(51)(a) **Bill** Alice admires.

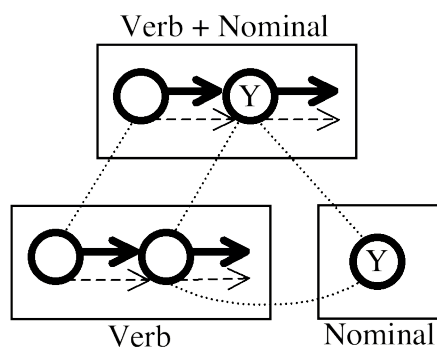
(b) **Alice** admires Bill.

(52)(a) **BILL** Alice admires, **JACK** she doesn't.

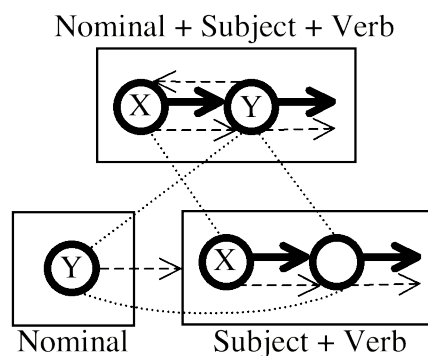
(b) **ALICE** admires Bill, **JANET** doesn't.

(53)

(a) Object Construction

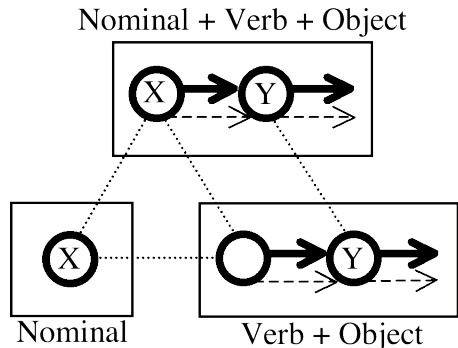


(b) Object-Topic Construction

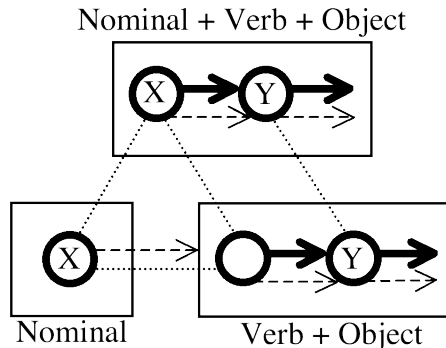


(54)

(a) Subject Construction



(b) Subject-Topic Construction



(55)(a) *What's wrong? My neck hurts.*

[thetic; sentence focus]

(b) *What's wrong with **your neck**? My neck hurts.*

[categorical; predicate focus]

(56)(a) A **discourse topic** is commonly extrinsic and structurally external to a comment clause, whose integration in its dominion depends on contingencies of the current discourse.

(b) A **subject** or **object** is an inherent part of a clause's internal structure, serving as reference point with respect to the very act of conceptualizing the profiled relationship.

(c) Subject and object specify the trajector and landmark of a profiled process, which may or may not be the one profiled by the lexical verb. The **trajector** and **landmark** of a verb are its own, internal reference points, hence intrinsic to the verb itself.

- (57)(a) ***Jack** came home late in the afternoon. There was **Jill**, working at her computer. He walked over and hugged her.*
 (b) ***Henri, ma cousine**, il ne l'aime pas.* 'Henry, my cousin, he doesn't like her.' [French]
 (c) ***Jack** admires **Jill**.*
 (d) *admire*
- (58) Trajector/landmark alignment is inherent in the meanings of relational expressions at any level of organization. At the lexical level, it is a facet of how we categorize the world in terms of conventionally recognized relation types. The default alignment imposed by lexical categorization can be overridden at higher levels of grammatical organization, primarily for discourse considerations.
- (59) Discourse continuity is generally enhanced when the participant chosen as clausal subject is also the pivot corresponding to a salient topic. A pivot is the point of connection between a topic and a comment clause in its dominion, and a clause's subject is the point of access for conceptualizing the process it profiles.
- (60) *You really should think about buying **my car**. It was just repainted, and it drives very smoothly.*
- (61) The clause level is where the discourse and categorization functions meet. A clause is the smallest unit of discourse over which a topic holds dominion as the active reference point. It is also the largest unit for which we can posit a single overall trajector, either inherited by default from the lexical verb or imposed by a special construction.

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