ENGLISH PREDICATION AND SEMANTIC ROLES

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Abstract: This paper aims at highlighting some aspects regarding the English predication and the semantic roles, seen from complexity perspective. In doing so, it starts from verbs and types of predicates and continues with the semantic roles involved in a verbal relation. A clear distinction between different roles is required as each type is worth not only mentioning, but also debating and describing.

Keywords: relations, semantics, predication, role

As in any other language, the English predicate is considered to be the main part of that says something about the subject, showing what, who or how the subject is.

Birds fly./ John is a doctor. John is happy.

According to its abilities and characteristics the predicate may be: verbal or nominal. In its turn, verbal predicate is of two kinds:

- simple verbal predicate, expressed by a verb or a phrasal verb in a personal mood:

  *The child **eats** an apple every day.*

  *They **were taken care of** by John.*

- compound modal verbal predicate, made of: a semiauxiliary modal verb (to express a modal action feature: necessity, possibility, desire, etc.) and a basic verb, usually an infinitive: *You **must see** a doctor.*

  *They **can give** the answer.*

  *We **could have come** if they had been invited.*

The most common semiauxiliary modal verbs are: can, could, may, might, must, to have to etc.

The nominal predicate consists of a copula/link verb and one or more subject complements/predicatives:

Mary is a doctor.

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The basic link verb is *to be*, there are some other verbs that can function as link verbs: *to become, to grow, to get, to turn, to stay, to remain, to look, to seem, to mean* etc.
The subject complement can be expressed by:

- ✓ a noun: *John is **a teacher**. John became **a grandfather**.*
- ✓ an adjective: *The car is **clean**.*
- ✓ pronouns: *Is this your notebook? - Yes, it's **mine**.*
- ✓ a numeral: *You are **the first**.*
- ✓ verb in infinitive: *Their hobby is **to play**.*

It is obvious that the subject complement shows a characteristic of the subject by means of a link verb.

In addition to the verbal and nominal predicates, we can distinguish the semantic predicate is the sentence component associating a property to an entity or establishes a determined relationship between two or three entities.

He is a doctor. He is Ion. He is smart. He runs. / swims.

Sometimes the predicates involve semantic arguments (subject, direct object, indirect object, prepositional object etc.) in different relations:

John's neighbour/ John's angry / jealous. John praise / helps George. John (he) speaks to George. It depends on John.

The semantic predicate can be: - verb: *Peter **runs**.*

- adjective -subject complement: *He's **smart**.*
- noun - subject complement / predicative adjunct / isolated apposition: *He is **a teacher**.He was elected **president**. His hobby, **a good book**, is expensive.*
- adverb: *The car comes **slowly**.*
- preposition: *He went **with** you.*

The syntactic predicate is the centre of a syntactic group placed in a semantically predicative position. Its role is to impose thematic and formal restrictions.

I was given a book by John. - the syntactic predicate gives a role of agent (John), object (book) and receiver (I) and restrict their casual form: accusative - agent-agent, non-prepositional accusative- object- direct object and nominative, recipient - subject.

Most of the semantic roles are relatively easy to distinguish, but sometimes they may be confusing. The semantic role is, in fact, the role a participant plays in a situation, real or imaginary, distinct from the linguistic encoding of the situation.

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The semantic role of a thing that participates in close association with an agent, causer or affected in an event is called Accompaniment:

*I played football **with** my brother.*

The basic semantic role is the Agent, which is usually the grammatical / logical subject, the doer of the action.

***John** gave me a book.* (grammatical subject)

*I was given a book by **John**.* (logical subject)

A counteragent shows a force or resistance against which an action is carried out.

The Instrument resembles the agent, but refers to the inanimate doer of the sction.

*John opened the door **with a key**.*

Causer as a semantic role, shows that the referent is not doing the action, but it investigates it. The causer may be identified as the surface subject.

***John** pushed him.*

Another surface subject is represented by the Pacient: ***The door** is open. / **John** became suspicious.*

Beneficiary is a semantic role which shows that the referent is advantaged or disadvantaged by an event:

*I have translated this text **for John**.*

Recipient as a semantic role, shows that a referent is conscious of being affected by the action: *I gave **him** another name.*(Givon, 1984:88)

The Experiencer shows that the referent receives, accepts,experiences the effect of an action:

***She** was affraid.* (Payne, 1997a:50)

Goal is the semantic role of the place towards which something moves:

He walked to the theatre.

Locative is the semantic role which shows the location or the spatial orientation:

*The book is **on the table.***

Manner, as a semantic role highlights how the action is fulfilled (Larson,1984: 203):

The car approaches slowly.

Measure shows the quantification of an event:

*The book costs **too much**.*

Another semantic role is Path, which describes the place transversed in motion:

*My brother was crawling **across the living-room**.*(Longacre, 1983: 164)

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Range is the semantic role that shows that an entity completes or specifies an event:

*She recites **a difficult poem**.*

The semantic role of Result refers to what is produced by an event:

*They built **a house.***

Source shows the origin: *She travels **from Cluj** to New York.*

Time, as a semantic role, shows the temporal placement of an action: ***Winter** is cold.*

Strictly connected to predication is the predicative adjunct, which is an optional component in a derived syntactical structure:

He comes smiling. - is derived from: *He comes* and *he is smiling* .

As the example shows, the predicative adjunct also expresses a characteristic of the subject, but this time, by means of a predicative verb.

Somehow similar to the predicative adjunct is the object complement, which is a mandatory component in a ternary structure, showing a characteristic of a direct object, by means of a predicative verb.

We elected him president of the company.

Main part of sentence, the predicate fixes its centre in the verbal group. Viewed from different perspectives, the predicate shows itself as a semantic and syntactic predicate, with limits, restrictions and imposings, sometimes rather difficult to identify or understand.

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