



Mapping Grammatical Relations of English Verbs

Putu Owen Purusa Arta, I Nyoman Sedeng, Putu Lirishati Soethama

Udayana University Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

Correspondence email: owenpurusaarta@gmail.com , nyoman_sedeng@hotmail.com ,
lirishatinya@yahoo.com

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Corresponding Author:

Putu Owen Purusa Arta, email: owenpurusaarta@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study entitled Mapping Grammatical Relations of English Verbs, concerned on numbers of arguments that a verb could assign and how an argument is syntactically motivated in clauses of which the mood is declarative. This study is a library research study. The method of analysis that was applied in this study was descriptive method which describes linguistics phenomena like what it actually is. The data of this study were taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) by inputting verbs those have been determined to the website <http://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>. The verbs eat, write, and give are the determined verbs which belong to intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive verbs in sequence. The main theory applied in this study was Kroeger's (2005) regarding to transitivity and grammatical relation. Based on the analysis, verbs in English require argument(s), terms or obliques. An intransitive verb assigns a term that stands as subject, a transitive verb assigns two terms those stand as subject and primary object. On the other hand, a ditransitive verb assigns three terms those stand as subject, primary object and secondary object. In addition, there is an argument that stands as oblique.

INTRODUCTION

Language as a mean of communication requires a complete thought to express. Its properties can be divided into some level, starting from phoneme into meaningful sentence. A meaningful sentence in English at least consists of a clause to establish. In other word, a sentence must possess at least a subject and a verb or predicate in order to express a complete thought. For instance in this sentence, *John slept*, it involves a proper noun as subject or participant who does the process of slept. Kroeger (2005: 53) therefore defined that the individuals (or participants) of whom the property or relationship is claimed to be true are called arguments.

The arguments that accompany the predicate have different semantic functions, or roles, in the proposition. In accordance with it, Kreidler (2002: 66) defined that what roles they (arguments) have depends partly on the nature of the predicate and partly on their own meanings. Regarding to the role of argument, Kroeger (2005: 53) stated that the element of meaning which identifies the property or relationship is called the predicate. Different predicate may require different number of arguments. This sentence, *Mary slapped John*, involves predicate *slapped*. It requires one who slapped and one who is slapped; in other word, it requires two arguments. Different from sentence, *John slept*, its predicate only

requires one participant or argument, one who slept.

Regarding to semantic role of argument, people might find it confusing to distinguish a grammatical relation of an argument. These examples will provide descriptions of how grammatical relation is determined by grammatical properties not by its semantic or meaning.

(a) A dog bit John.

(b) John was bitten by a dog.

There are still those who define a subject as the doer of an action, while the object is the person or thing affected by the doer. However, both examples have shown that a subject is not always an agent, and an object is not always a patient. *A dog* in (a) is the subject of the sentence and also the agent or one who initiates to do the action of biting; in contrast, *a dog* in (b) is not the subject of the sentence, it is considered as object of the preposition or oblique argument although the role it plays is still the same. Miller (2002: 105) stated that there are assumptions that consider term like a dog in (b) as logical subject since it denotes agent.

Although a grammatical sentence might not have meaningful sense and a meaningful sentence might be ungrammatical, the semantic role of an argument does not determine the grammatical relation of a sentence. The grammatical relation must deal with the grammatical properties, while what argument(s) is assigned is semantically bounded by a certain predicate. People might recognize *a dog* is subject in both *a dog bit John* and *John was bitten by a dog* for the reason that *a dog* in both sentences stands for the role of agent, one who or which initiates the action. This study tried to examine how arguments were structured with grammatical relations.

METHOD AND THEORY

The method that was applied in this study was descriptive method. According to Zaim (2014: 22), this method describes linguistics phenomena like what it actually is. The data of this study were taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

The method applied in collecting the data was documentary method by reading

through the source and finding clauses of which the mood are declarative. In this study the data were collected by using a website tool, <http://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>. The steps of data collection were divided as follows; inputting keywords regarding to the construction of the sentence having notion of verb valence. The verbs were taken from data found in Kroeger (2004) Based on that, the data were be classified based on its valence and transitivity. The verb *eat* belong to intransitive verb, while the verb *write* is involved to transitive verb. On the other hand, the verb *give* is involved to ditransitive verbs. After inputting a key word in this case those verbs, they were listed in different sentences, and a number of sentences or clauses were sorted and noted based on clauses and sentences of which the moods are declarative.

The analysis was conducted by using descriptive qualitative method, in this case the data were analyzed based on how the language or linguistics properties work in the language. It works on the relation within the language units or linguistics properties. Based on arguments the verb assigns and what the filler of each argument, the arguments were mapped to its grammatical relation. In addition, the mapped grammatical relations were descriptively explained.

Review of Literature

Yuniartati (2017) in an article, *Syntactic Functions of Deverbal Nouns Found in Huffington Post Website: Morphosyntactic Approach*, analyzed the nominal suffixes that certainly form noun and their syntactic function. The theory of suffixes by Quirk that form nouns was applied in recognizing the first problem, finding out the suffixes. The following theory, lexical functional grammar by Falk will be relevant with this study since similar understanding of syntactic function, another term of grammatical relation, is used to map the deverbal noun; in this study, the understanding of syntactic function is used to map the arguments, those are also nouns/noun phrases. In addition, Dewi (2018) in an article entitled the *Morphosyntax of English Deverbal Noun in the Straits Times Website* also tried to recognize the suffixes those

form noun and their syntactic function. These two studies are relevant in terms of theory they use to analyze the syntactic function, that divides the syntactic function, another term of grammatical relation, into four functions – subject, object, complement, and adverbial. However, the two of those syntactic functions can be subcategorized, they are object, direct object and indirect object, and complement, subject and object complement. Accordingly, Darlina (2016) also used the same terms of grammatical relation, subject, object, complement, and adverbial. The same theory and understanding was also presented by Aryani (2019) who framed the theory of Quirk to refer the concept of grammatical function. However, this study tried to analyze the ellipsis of the function in coordinative structure.

Deborah (2018) in the study entitled *the Syntactic Function of Relative Clauses in A Game of Thrones Novel*, analyzed the syntactic function of nouns that modified by adjective or relative clause within that relative clause. It is relevant in term of understanding how to identify the function in either main or sub-ordinative clause. Marantz (2012) also presented relevance to this study in terms of arguments assigned by a verb. However, it focused on how the verb semantically requires participants. Furthermore, Nikolaeva (1999) also proved that grammatical relation is determined by grammatical properties; however, in Northern Ostyak Language was also found having optional object agreement.

An article entitled *Argument Structure at Syntax-Discourse Interface* is also relevant to this study. This study was proposed Udayana (2016) on his article in the proceeding of the Third International Conference on English across Culture. The researcher tried to discover that argument is not only motivated by the lexico-semantics of a verb but it can be also the interface of syntax and discourse. Three constructions have the notion of information structure phenomena – dummy it, passive, and antipassive. In dummy it, it plays important role in preserving syntactic function or grammatical relation although it does not possess any semantic content. He therefore

concluded that it is the role of discourse, information structure or syntax. On the other hand, Bickel and Yadava (2000) presented verb agreements in Hindi. It is relevant in term of argument understanding although different terms used to refer the functions. In addition Branigan et al. (2008) presented relevant understanding. It is presented that subject and direct object functions are associated in active construction, while subject and oblique functions are associated in passive construction. However, that study focused on how animacy contributes to word order. Wong and Hancox (1998) also presented relevance in term of arguments understanding; however, it deals with semantic roles and how it is applied in translation. On another work, Taule et al. (2005) also presented mapping syntactic function into semantic roles. It is relevant in term of how the argument is determined and the functions used although oblique is not involved to the consideration.

Artawa (2010) showed grammatical relation within some constructions in Balinese Language, zero and nasal, *ka-*, and *ma-* construction. The grammatical subject is only clearly stated in nasal construction. On the other hand, the other constructions consist of agent argument. It is relevant that a grammatical subject can be determined by its grammatical properties and also its order syntactically. Accordingly, Arka and Wechsler (1998) also presented the same phenomena in Balinese Language, objective voice (OV) that has similar construction with zero construction in Artawa (2010). However, it is clear that the grammatical subject is determined by the words order since a patient argument in OV is considered as surface or grammatical subject. Yani (2018) also has relevant idea to this study regarding to direct and indirect object. It is proved that ditransitive verb is benefactively marked in the verb to refer a following benefactive argument as a direct object. It is clear that grammatical relation is determined by the grammatical properties.

Grammatical Relation

In this study the data were analyzed by using the theory in term of grammatical relation proposed by Kroeger (2005).

According to Kroger (2005: 62), in order to express grammaticality, arguments must be assigned a grammatical relation within the clause. In addition, it is determined by the syntactic and morphological properties. The elements of grammatical relation will be mapped in to subject and object, and terms and oblique.

Subject and Object

According to Kroger (2005: 56), here are the following properties of subject and object in English:

- a. Word order: In a basic English sentence, subject normally comes before the verb, and object and other elements come after the verb.
- b. Pronoun forms: Pronouns have special form when they appear in certain position that indicates whether they are subject or object pronouns.
- c. Agreement with verb: In the simple present tense, a morphological marking, a suffix *-s*, is added to the verb when a third person subject is singular. However, the number and person of the object or any other element in the sentence does not give any effect to the form of the verb.
- d. Content questions: If the subject is replaced by a question word (who or what), the rest of the sentence remains unchanged. However, if the object is replaced by a question word, there must be an auxiliary before the subject.
- e. Tag questions: A tag question is used to seek confirmation of a statement. It always contains a pronoun which refers back to the subject, and never to any other element in the sentence.

Supporting these criteria, Miller (2002: 93) explained some properties that become the criteria of grammatical subject.

- a. Syntactic properties including control of reflexives control of all and both floating and functioning as pivot in infinitives and coordinate constructions
- b. Morpho-syntactic properties which includes argument being involved in person and number links with the finite verb and being in the nominative case.

Subject and object in a English sentence can be identified based on its grammatical properties.

Terms and Oblique Arguments

According to Kroger (2005: 57), subjects and objects are often referred to as terms, or direct arguments, while arguments which are not subjects or objects are called indirect or oblique arguments. Based on that understanding, we may conclude that subject and object have closer relationship comparing to oblique. In addition, oblique is marked or preceded by a preposition, while subject and object appear in bare noun phrase without being preceded by a preposition.

Adjunct and Oblique

Kroeger (2005: 60) stated that time and manner phrases are adjuncts, rather than arguments. speakers might also put elements which are not really required by the predicate to make the flow of the story understood by the hearer(s) including time and place the event takes and the way of an action is done. In other word, Kroger (2005: 58) defined that elements which are not closely related to the meaning of the predicate but which are important to help the hearer understand the flow of the story are called adjunct.

As described not really required by the predicate, an adjunct is not obligatory or always optional, while argument is obligatory. Besides that, an argument is bounded by the semantic role that is assigned by its predicate; therefore, certain predicate requires certain argument(s). In contrast, adjunct is semantically independent, and this is the reason why an adjunct may be freely added while argument is depended on the verb, and in addition, oblique is also obligatory as we can find also in PP that consists obligatory oblique argument.

Primary and Secondary Object

Finding a verb consisting of two NPs object or ditransitive carries two terms of object, primary or direct object (OBJ), the first object appears after the verb, and secondary or indirect object (OBJ2) that appears after the primary object. However, people might be confused in determining OBJ2 or OBL since in traditional grammar, the grammatical relation of both might be the same. As described, the difference is that an OBL is marked by a preposition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Intransitive

On Thanksgiving and Easter, the whole congregation would eat together at the church.

Eat <the whole congregation, the church>
 ↓ ↓
 Subject Oblique

The verb in this sentence is *eat* which is also preceded by an auxiliary verb *would*. Based on the term it assigns, the verb *eat* is involved to intransitive since it only has one term *the whole congregation*. This term is considered as subject as it stands before the verb and its auxiliary *would eat*. Although it does not perform any pronoun form, the order or its position has shown its function syntactically. In addition, content question *who would eat together at the church?* also shows that the replacement of the argument does not change the order of the phrases in the sentence. The inexistence of an argument before auxiliary proves that the only argument is the subject as well. On the other hand, the other argument, *the church*, is regarded as oblique since it appears after a preposition *at*. In regard with oblique, as one of arguments, *the church* refers to a location where the action takes place. The prepositional phrase *on Thanksgiving and Easter* seems similar to the oblique *the church* that comes after preposition *at*. However, it is not considered as oblique since it refers to time that is not regarded semantically required by the verb. As consequence, it is an adjunct of time.

Transitive

You wrote it

Wrote < you , it >
 ↓ ↓
 Subject Object1

The form of verb *write* can appears as transitive verb. The verb *wrote* which is the past form assigns two terms, *you* and *it*. This study does not consider on the focus or the topic within both sentences of which the verb can assign one or two arguments. However, this study focuses on how many arguments a verb can syntactically assign. In this case, the verb *wrote* can be involved to transitive verb. The first term *you* is considered as subject

since it performs a pronoun form of subject. Although both its forms in subject and object are the same, its position has shown in function, that it comes before the verb. On the other hand, the term *it* comes after the verb and also performs an object pronoun form. Although it is similar with pronoun *you* in the way of having the same form in both subject and object, the position is again the answer. The following instrument is content question. *Who wrote it?* and *what did you write?* are the question which consists of question word *who* and *what*. The first question word replaces the term *you*, and the rest remain the same, while there is a slight change in the second question, the existence of auxiliary *did*. Therefore, the term *you* is regarded as subject, and the term *it* is regarded as object.

Ditransitive

My mom would always give me paper

Give < my mom , me , paper >
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Subject Object1 Object2

The verb *give* is considered as ditransitive since there are three term arguments, *my mom*, *me*, and *paper*, required by the verb. In other word, the predicate is involved to ditransitive verb since it takes two objects, *me* and *paper*. These two term arguments are regarded as objects, primary and secondary object, since they come after the verb *give*. Besides their position, the primary object performs an object pronoun *me* that has different form with its subject. Although the secondary object *paper* does not perform any pronoun form, its grammatical relation has been described by its position. The objects arrangement also determines whether it is primary or not; therefore, *me* and *paper* are regarded as primary and secondary object in sequence. On the other hand, the rest argument, *my mom*, is regarded as subject, for it stands before the verb.

The word order and pronoun form have become the instruments to identify the grammatical relation. The following

instrument is content question, question word that is able to replace the argument. The first question word that replaces the subject of the sentence is *who* in *who would always give me paper?*. Comparing to the declarative sentence, the difference is only found in the question word. The process only replaces the subject with a question word *who* without any changes of word order in the rest of the sentence. The following content questions will be *who(m) would mom always give the paper?* and *what would mom always give me?*. Both questions perform changes of word order, the auxiliary *would* move after the question word. Therefore, based on those three content questions, *my mom*, *me*, and *paper* are considered as subject and objects in sequence.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the discussion regarding arguments of English verbs, it is clear that an intransitive verb assigns a term that stands as subject, a transitive verb assigns two terms those stand as subject and primary object. On the other hand, a ditransitive verb assigns three terms those stand as subject, primary object, and secondary object. In addition, there is an argument that stands as oblique, an argument that appears after a preposition. In contrast, there is language unit that perform similar form to oblique, adjunct. It performs to refer time and manner and is always optional in the sentence.

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