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A University Grammar of English

Lecture No. 7

Relationship Between Transitive Verbs and Intransitive Verbs or Adjectives

There is sometimes a regular relation, in terms of clause function, between transitive verbs expressing CAUSATIVE meaning and corresponding intransitive verbs or adjectives.

- (i) SVO SV
- Tom is cooking the dinner. The dinner is cooking.
- Geoffrey opened the door. The door opened.

Relationship Between Transitive Verbs and Intransitive Verbs or Adjectives

- (ii) SVO SV
- Someone raised an arm. An arm rose.
- The frost has killed the flowers. The flowers have died.

- (iii) SVO SVC
- They have dimmed the lights. The lights became dim.
- The sun (almost) blinded him. He (almost) went blind.
- His manner angered me. I got angry.

Semantic Roles of the Subject

The subject may have a RECIPIENT role with verbs such as have, own, possess, and benefit from), as is indicated by the following relation:

- Mr. Smith has given his son a radio. [So now, his son has a radio.]
- I bought my daughter a tablet computer. [So now, she has a tablet.]

Semantic Roles of the Subject

The perceptual verbs see and hear require an experienced subject, in contrast to look at and listen to, which are agentive. The other perceptual verbs taste, smell, and feel have both an agentive meaning corresponding to look at and an experienced meaning corresponding to see:

- I can taste the pepper in my soup.

Verbs indicating cognition or emotion may also require an experiencer:

- I thought you were mistaken. [It seemed to me you were mistaken.]
- I liked the play. [The play pleased me/gave me pleasure.]

Normally, recipient and experiencer subjects go with verbs used statively.

Semantic Roles of the Subject

The subject may have the LOCATIVE role of designating the place of the state or action, or the TEMPORAL role of designating its time:

- Los Angeles is foggy. ['It's foggy in Los Angeles.']
- Basrah is hot and humid. ['It's hot and humid in Basrah.']
- My tent sleeps four people. ['Four people can sleep in my tent.']
- Monday was a holiday. ['It was a holiday on Monday.']

Semantic Roles of the Subject

- Temporal subjects can usually be replaced by the empty *it*.

- The September of 2014 was exceptionally bloody in Iraq.

['It was exceptionally bloody in the September of 2014 in Iraq.']

- Verbs following locative subjects normally have no passive or progressive form:

- The bag holds seven pounds.
- -*Seven pounds are held by the bag.
- -*The bag is holding seven pounds.

Semantic Roles of the Subject

- An important role of the subject is EVENTIVE. The noun at the head of the noun phrase is commonly adverbial or a nominalization:
- The Norman invasion took place in 1066.
- The explosion caused many casualties.

Prop (empty) it subject

- There are clauses in which no participant is required. In such cases, the subject function may be assumed by the 'prop' word it, which has little or no semantic content.

- Prop it mainly occurs in clauses signifying (a) time, (b) atmospheric conditions, and (c) distance:

- (a) Time

- It's ten o'clock precisely. It's already midnight.

Prop (empty) it subject

- (b) Atmospheric conditions

- It's too windy in Chicago. It's getting dark.

- It's very hot in here. It was sunny yesterday.

- It's freezing outside.

- (c) Distance

- It's not very far to York. It's a long way to Denver.

- It's just one more stop to Toronto.

- It's only a hundred miles from here to Qurna.