Something that is not a grammatical relation

On page 66-68, Comrie discusses a common confusion of grammatical relations with semantic roles. Traditional grammar uses the grammatical relation *indirect object* for *Sam* in the sentences below. However, this use of the term indirect object corresponds to our use of the semantic role *recipient* (or *goal* in the semantic domain of change of possession). What all of the sentences have in common is that Sam is the recipient of goods or information.

The sentences illustrate a construction called *dative shift* (because the English preposition *to* corresponds to dative case in many other languages) in which a recipient appears as a direct object.

(1) a. I gave Sam the book.

b. I gave the book to Sam.

c. I told Sam the story.

d. I told the story to Sam.

Two Hypotheses about Indirect Objects

Hypothesis 1: There is a grammatical relation called indirect object. The grammatical relation indirect object can occur in two positions in English: either before the direct object without a preposition (*I gave Sam the book*) or after the direct object with the preposition, *to* (*I gave the book to Sam*).

Hypothesis 2: There is a semantic role called *recipient* (which can be a special case of the semantic role *goal* in the semantic domain of change of possession or change of information. The semantic role recipient can appear with different grammatical relations in English: either direct object (*I gave Sam the book*) or oblique with the preposition *to* (*I gave the book to Sam*).

Data for Comparison of the two Hypotheses

Under Hypothesis 1, how would we have to formulate the rule for making passive sentences out of active sentencs.

(2) a. I gave Sam the book.

b. I gave the book to Sam.

c. The book was given to Sam.

d. Sam was given the book.

The dative shift construction is based on semantic roles, not on grammatical relations like the passive.

(3) a. I drove the car to New York.

b.*I drove New York the car.

c. I attribute our failure to his malevolence.

d.*I attribute his malevolence our failure.

Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics

- syntax — form
- sematics — meaning
- pragmatics — use

Meaning is not always the same as use:

Can you pass the salt.
Gee, it's noisy in here.

Pragmatic Roles: "the flow of given and new information"

Pragmatic roles deal with the roles that phrases play in a discourse or text, not the relationship of arguments to predicates.

After someone says the sentence *Who saw Bill?*, the *given* information is that someone saw Bill. The question is asking for a *new* piece of information, *who?*

Focus

The term *focus* refers to the new information in a sentence. In the examples below, the focus is in small caps.

In English, focus is indicated by intonation. If you say the following question-answer pairs with the wrong intonation, they will sound strange.

Focus

English, (Comrie, page 56)

(4) A. Who saw Bill?

B. JOHN saw Bill/him.

(5) A. Who did John see?

B. John/he saw BILL.

(6) A. Who did Bill see?

B. Bill/he saw JOHN.

(7) A. Who saw John?

B. BILL saw John.

(8) A. What did Bill do?

B. Bill/he WENT STRAIGHT HOME.

(9) A. What happened?

B. BILL WENT STRAIGHT HOME.

Another Way to Indicate Focus in English

English can express *contrastive focus*, picking one focus from a delimited set, with a cleft sentence: *It's* X *that* Y.

(10) It's JOHN that saw Bill.

Grammatical Correlates of Focus

In other languages, there may be a grammatical correlate of focus. In Hungarian, the focused noun phrase immediately precedes the finite verb. Since question words are asking for new information, they also immediately precede the finite verb.

Hungarian, (Comrie, page 57)

(11) a. Ki látta Zoli-t?
who saw Zoli
Who saw Zoli?

b. Zoli-t ki látta?
Zoli who saw
Who saw Zoli?

c. Vili látta Zoli-t.
Vili saw Zoli
Vili saw Zoli

d. Zoli-t Vili látta.
Zoli Vili saw
Vili saw Zoli.

(12) a. Ki-t látta Zoli?
who saw Zoli
Who did Zoli see?

b. Zoli ki-t látta?
Zoli who saw
Who did Zoli see?

c. Zoli Vili-t látta.
Zoli Vili saw
Zoli saw Vili.

d. Vili-t látta. Zoli
Vili saw Zoli
Zoli saw Vili.

Topic

"What the sentence is about." (Comrie, page 64).

(13) A. What about Bill?

B. Bill was hit by a car.

(14) A. What about Bill?

B. Bill, I like.

es

Topic Oriented Languages

"Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language," Li and Thompson, 1976.

Chinese: (Tone marks omitted. Sorry!)

(15) a.

Nei-chang	huo	xingkui	xiaofang-dui	lai	de	kuai
that-CLASS	fire	fortunate	fire-brigade	come	PRT	quick

That fire, fortunately the fire brigade came quickly

b.

Nei-xie	shumu	shu-shen	da
those	tree	tree-trunk	big

Those trees, the trunks are big

Properties of Topic-Oriented Languages

- Surface coding for topic, but not necessarily for subject. The surface coding can be word order or a morpheme.
- Passive sentences may be marginal or non-existent.
- No *dummy* subjects (e.g., *It is raining*, *There is a cat in the garden.*)
- Double subject construction:

(16)

sakana	wa	tai	ga	oisii
fish	TOP	red snapper	SUBJ	delicious

Fish, red snapper is delicious

- Topic, not subject, controls coreference.

(17) a. Nei kuai tian daozi zhangde hen da, suoyi hen zhiqian.
that piece land rice grow very big so very valuable
That piece of land, rice grows very big, so it (the land) is very valuable

b.* Nei chang huo xioaofangdui laide zao, suoyi hen lei.
that CLASS fire fire brigade came early so very tired
That fire, the fire brigade came early, so very tired

- Tend to be verb-final.
- Have fewer constraints on what can be a topic.