



A University Grammar of English

Lecture No. 5

Semantic Roles of the Direct Object

- The most typical function of the direct object is that of the **AFFECTED** participant; i.e. a participant (animate or inanimate) which does not cause the happening denoted by the verb, but is directly involved in some other way:
- He sold *his digital camera*.

- The direct object may have a **LOCATIVE** role with such verbs as *walk, swim, pass, jump, turn, leave, reach, surround, cross, climb*:
- We walked *the streets*. ['We walked *through* the streets.']
- She swam *the river*. ['She swam *across* the river.']
- He passed *a cyclist*. ['He passed *by* a cyclist.']
- The horse jumped *the fence*. ['The horse jumped *over* the fence.']

Superficially, these objects may seem to be adverbials with an omitted preposition. In most cases their status as objects is clear, however, from their ability to assume subject role in a corresponding passive clause, *e.g.: The fence was jumped by the horse.*

Semantic Roles of the Direct Object

A RESULTANT/EFFECTED object is an object whose referent exists only by virtue of the activity indicated by the verb:

- Baird invented *television*.
- They are designing *a new car*.
- John has painted *a new picture*.
- She made *a fire*.
- I'm writing *a letter*.
- I baked *a cake*.

Affected VS Effected Objects

With an agentive subject and an affected object, one may always capture part of the meaning of a clause (*e.g.: X destroyed Y*) by saying 'X did something to Y'; but this does not apply to a resultant/effected object: *Baird invented television* does not imply 'Baird did something to television'. *The affected object simply refers to something that already exists whereas the resultant /effected object refers to something that comes to existence by virtue of the activity indicated by the verb.* Contrast the affected object in *I'm digging the ground* with the resultant object in *I'm digging a hole.*

Cognate object

A *COGNATE* object is similar to a resultant object in that it refers to an event indicated by the verb; in other words it repeats, partially or wholly, the meaning of the verb:

- Chris will sing *a song* for us.
- She lived *a good life*.
- They fought *a clean fight*.
- He breathed *his last breath*.
- He died a *miserable death*.

Phrases of Extent or Measure as Objects

When used as objects, phrases of extent or measure result in a kind of difficulty in analyzing them. As the examples given below do not generally permit the passive transformation there is a reason to analyze them as SVA rather than SVO. However, the final element behaves at least marginally like a direct object, as is shown by the question forms *What* alongside *How much*:

- He ran a mile.
- It costs ten dollars. How much does it cost?
- It weighs almost a ton. What does it weigh?

Eventive Object

An **EVENTIVE** object takes the form of a deverbal noun, that is, a noun that is derived from a verb or verb phrase, but that behaves grammatically purely as a noun, not as a verb, preceded by a common verb of general meaning, such as *do, give, make, have and take*. This **EVENTIVE** object is semantically an extension of the verb and bears the major part of the meaning. Compare:

- They are arguing. [V Only]
- They *are having an argument*. [V + Eventive O]
- They progressed well. - They *made good progress*.

Semantic Roles of the Indirect Object

The most typical role of the indirect object is that of the **RECEPIENT**; i.e. an animate participant being passively implicated by the happening or state:

- I found *you* a place.
- She sent *me* a bouquet of flowers.
- The indirect object occasionally takes an **AFFECTED** role with a few of the verbs that combine with an eventive object. The most common verb in the latter construction is *give*:

Semantic Roles of the Indirect Object

- She gave *me* a push. ['She pushed me.']
- I gave *Helen* a nudge. ['I nudged Helen.']
- We gave *the baby* a bath. ['We bathed the baby.']
- I should give *the car* a wash. ['I should wash the car.']
- Give *the car* a push. ['Push the car.']
- Judith paid *me* a visit. ['Judith visited me.']
- Derek owes *us* a treat. ['It's Derek's turn to treat us.']

The indirect object has the same role as the affected direct object in the paraphrases.