

# PhrasaLex II – 22 July 2021

## *Valency and Patterns*

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# 1 Approaches to valency

## 1.1 The standard approach

Valency : the semantic core of the sentence projecting participants (arguments, actants) (cf. Tesnière 1988 [1959])

Requirement : for a given meaning of a predicative verb, the number of its arguments *can* be determined.

Problems : (1) Is there a sharp line between arguments and not-arguments?  
(2) What if a predicative verb has many valency schemes?  
(cf. Mereu 2020:77)

# 1 Approaches to valency

Examples of problem (1) of the standard approach

(1a) *He lives on the hill*

(1b) *I discuss with Marianne*

(1c) *I make a quiche with Marianne*

(1d) *Marianne behaves properly*

# 1 Approaches to valency

Examples of problem (2) of the standard approach

(2a) She sold her apartment to a family vs. She sold her apartment

(2b) She writes French correctly vs. She writes correctly

(2c) She cooked pancakes vs. She cooked pancakes to her children

# 1 Approaches to valency

## 1.2 A corpus-driven approach to valency

Assumption: the more frequent a phenomenon is, the more this phenomenon is relevant as a linguistic datum (cf. Tognini-Bonelli 2001:98, Hanks 2013:5, Perek 2015:28-29)

Prototypical valency: the most frequent valency pattern

valency is empirical *a posteriori* notion, extracted *from* corpora

# 1 Approaches to valency

## Difficulties of a corpus-driven approach to valency

- (1) No need for the notion of “argument”; but valency *is defined* in terms of arguments
- (2) Prototypical valency *describes* corpus; but valency *is the keystone* as regard to which corpus should be *explained*  
If patterns *are* valency, as regards to what can patterns be explained?

Suggestion:     *patterns* are not *valency*  
                  valency is an eidetic, *a priori* notion projected *on* corpora.

# 1 Approaches to valency

## 1.3 An eidetic approach to valency

For a specific meaning of a predicative verb:

- i) explore corpus in order to extract the longest sequence of argument candidates
- ii) evaluate the argument status of each candidate *in vitro* – on the base of corpus independent criteria – in order to suggest an alleged eidetic valency
- iii) come back to corpus and explore the empirical manifestations (patterns) of this eidetic valency
- iv) justify the differences between patterns and the eidetic valency

(cf. Orlandi&Fasciolo 2021, Prandi forthcoming)

# 1 Approaches to valency

## Some remarks on the eidetic approach to valency

Point (ii) is crucial!

A “datum” is not a *pattern*, but a *pattern* questioned on the presupposition of *valency*. For example:

- Given that the eidetic valency of *to sell* is AGENT, PATIENT, ADDRESSEE, PRICE, why is that in *this* corpus – the most frequent pattern is AGENT, PATIENT?
- What does the fact that ADDRESSEE and PRICE are less frequently specified reveal about *this* corpus?
- Are other patterns more frequent in other kinds of corpora?

Patterns are logically independent from valency. Valency and patterns are ruled by different parameters.



# 2 Criteria for eidetic valency

- Prerequisites and Tests
- Not a *passe-partout*, but a *tool-box*

# 2 Criteria for eidetic valency

## 2.1 Prerequisites

### 2.1.1 Prerequisites: splitting polysemy

Question about valency: *which are the arguments ?*

Question about patterns: *what arguments are expressed?*

(3a) *He prays*

(3b) *He prays his boss for a pay rise*

(4a) *This blade cuts*

(4b) *I cut Marianne's steak*

(5a) *A lightning struck the Church*

(5b) *This boxer strikes hard*

Question about valency must be raised for a specific meaning

Question about attested patterns must be raised as regards the valency of each specific meaning

# 2 Criteria for eidetic valency

## 2.1.2 Prerequisites: saturation

Arguments are participants

Participants are saturated expressions, and not unsaturated expressions

(6a) *He behaves well*

(6b) *He hit him mortally*

(6c) *He went out drunk*

Arguments neither project roles, nor convey selection restrictions

# 2 Criteria for eidetic valency

## 2.2 Tests

### 2.2.2 Tests: extraction (cf. Prandi 2007, 2013)

*doing it* → verbal phrase expansions (VP-Exp)

*this happens* → sentence expansions (S-Exp)

(7) *He jumped into the water*

*\*He jumped. He did it into the water*

Arg.

(8) *They kissed each other on the top of the hill*

*They kissed each other. This happened on the top of the hill*

S-Exp

(9) *I informed the president of your decision*

*\*I informed the president. I did it of your decision*

Arg.

(10) *Grandpa repaired the chair with some glue.*

*Grandpa repaired the chair. He did it with some glue*

VP-Exp

# Criteria for eidetic valency

## 2.2.2 Tests: role controlling

Arguments roles are verbally controlled A verbally-controlled role depends on the meaning of a specific verb

A not-verbally-controlled role does not depend on the meaning of a specific verb; hence, it can be introduced, basically, in any process.

(11a) *This young man bought a bunch of flowers for his mum* benefactive

(11b) *The stranger hit the janitor with a bottle* instrument

(12a) *I am discussing with Marianne* co-agent / co-participant

(12b) *Marianne and I are discussing* co-agent / co-participant

(13a) *I have prepared this conference with Marianne* [Marianne is 6 years old] comitative

(13b) *?Marianne and I have prepared this conference*

# Criteria for arguments

## 2.3 Some applications of valency criteria

- Valency vs. Predicative frame (predicative complements, cf. Strik-Lievers 2012)
- Different kinds of shadowed material (cf. Pustejovsky 2000, Jezek 2012)
- Valency modifications and constructions (cf. Hilpert 2014)

# 3 Two parameters

## 3 Valency, patterns and their alignments

*Valency* has to be distinguished from *patterns*

*Valency* is an *a priori*, eidetic notion, belonging to the level of *langue* or sentence

VS.

*Pattern* is an *a posteriori*, empirical notion, belonging to the level of *parole* or utterance

*Valency* is not a something we make experience of, but rather a model on which we interpret experience.

VS.

*Patterns* are genuine linguistic experiences, which must be interpreted on the model of an *a priori* valency.

# Two parameters

## Conceptual integrity vs. Communicative necessity: two virtually independent parameters

Some examples.

Valency level: argument

Conceptual integrity

Pattern level: necessary/discretionary

Communicative dynamism

*To meet someone vs. To sell something to someone*

Valency level: not-argument, marginal

Conceptual integrity

Pattern level: necessary

Communicative dynamism

*To speak (to someone) loudly*

*To buy (something) on the internet*

*To pay (for something) in instalments*



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