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)
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
Pattern level: necessary/discretionary

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

Valency level: not-argument, marginal
Pattern level: necessary

To speak (to someone) *loudly*
To buy (something) *on the internet*
To pay (for something) *in instalments*
References


