

Valency theory in the description of English:

D. J. Allerton / R. Emons

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1 Introduction

In the field of valency grammar, which has received relatively little attention in English linguistics so far, two researchers have been particularly influential: Rudolf Emons and D. J. Allerton. Both with a background in inflecting languages, where valency grammar has been a well-accepted approach for decades, they were the first to apply this theory to extensive fragments of the English language. However, both the linguistic fragment treated in their respective works and the categories they arrive at differ greatly. This paper aims to highlight both theories' central points and put them in the context of other classic and contemporary grammatical systems. Sections 2 and 3 give an overview of each theory; a comparison is attempted in section 4.

1.1 Development of valency theory

The term *valency* originated in chemistry, where it denotes the ability of atoms to give off or take up a certain number of electrons when forming a chemical compound. The French linguist Lucien Tesnière was the first to use this term in the field of linguistics, in the context of his *Dependency Grammar* developed in *Éléments de syntaxe structurale* [Tes59]. Syntactic valency is seen as the ability of lexemes—the “atoms” of syntax—to *bind* a number of certain other elements in a

grammatical construction¹ This ability can generally be observed in verbs, nouns and adjectives alike, to a lesser degree even in other word classes. However, valency theories generally consider the *verb* the core of a sentence and other elements as dependents bound by the verb's valencies, because, as traditional grammarians recognized a long time ago, the (finite) verb is almost universally the only element of its kind in a clause and can thus be regarded as the "glue" holding all other constituents together.

While Tesnière's and other early works on valency stated a dependency of sentence elements on properties of the verb, they didn't raise the question of the exact nature of this dependency. In the mid-60s, two positions emerged among grammarians, one seeing valency as a formal, language-dependent phenomenon, the other as a largely universal semantic property. The first edition in 1968 of Helbig and Schenkel's "Wörterbuch zur Valenz und Distribution deutscher Verben" [HS73] pioneered several publications on the subject in the early seventies (cf. [Her99:#bib] for an extensive bibliography), which led to a fusion of the before seemingly incompatible positions. The result is in principle still considered valid by most scientists today. It proposes different *levels of valency*, logical, semantic and syntactic (with the former two being combined as one logical-semantic level in some theories), that together describe the combinatoric aspects of sentence elements [Hel92:6ff].

1.2 Levels of valency

Logical valency refers to the n -ary logical predicates that formalize a verb's semantic content. The meaning of "to swim" can be expressed by a one-place predicate $swim(x)$ with x denoting the person swimming; "to visit" is an example of a predicate taking two arguments, a visitor and a person or place visited: $visit(x, y)$. These predicates describe relations and interactions of concrete or abstract entities, English "to visit" thus has the same logical valency as German "besuchen"

¹The analogy is even valid for elements with valencies and ones acting as valency fillers, although in chemical terminology both are said to have a (positive vs. negative) valency. So when Allerton's [All82:2] definition of valency cites electropositive sodium and electropositive hydrogen as two elements that combined because of their both being monovalent, this is in fact an exception to the rule, comparable to nominal use of a verb.

or Hiligaynon “duaw”.

The concept of *semantic valency* is closely related to this (even considered another aspect of the same thing by some, as mentioned above [Hel92:10]), because it restricts a predicate’s arguments to elements with certain semantic properties or “components”. For example, in the predicate *admire*(x, y), the admirer x must be [+HUMAN]—a subject with [+ABSTRACT] or [-ANIMATE] cannot fill this predicate’s agent position. This is similar to what generative grammar subsumes under “selection restrictions”, but the latter term can also mean restrictions in the cooccurrence of elements that are not related in a valency sense².

The third level, *syntactic valency*, defines requirements for the morphosyntactic realization of arguments. Verbs with equal logical and semantic arguments, like German “helfen” and “unterstützen” [Hel92:9], may require a different case for their arguments: dative for the benefactive of “helfen” vs. accusative for “unterstützen”.

1.3 Valency and case grammar

As the terminology in the last paragraphs suggested, there is a close connection between valency and case grammar [Fil68]. Their different origins notwithstanding—valency as a syntactic theory in the dependency grammar framework, case as a derivative of Chomsky’s generative grammar—it is no coincidence that semantic valency as a separate level was introduced into the model around the time when case grammar was developed. While the concept of semantic restrictions on valency fillers was borrowed from case grammar, a feedback in the opposite direction took place later when the verb was assigned a more important role in more recent versions of Fillmore’s theory.

The notion of cases and the distinction of various “slots” in syntactic valency by the morphosyntactic properties of their potential fillers also hints at why valency theory is usually most popular for inflecting languages like French, German or Russian that show morphologically marked case corresponding to certain semantic roles of valency fillers.

²However, according to Helbig [Hel92:17f], some authors use the term “semantic valency” in a similarly broad sense.

2 R. Emons: “Valenzgrammatik für das Englische”

Rudolf Emons’ “Valenzgrammatik für das Englische” [Emo78] is a followup to the author’s 1974 doctoral thesis [Emo74] and designed as a university-level introduction to valency theory. It is explicitly not designed as an in-depth scientific treatment of its subject but as a workbook for practical use in seminars, thus sometimes trading accuracy for the brevity and ease of use of didactic material.

The first two chapters give a brief introduction to the term “valency” and other linguistic concepts and methods used later on. The observation about a number of examples that expressions only constitute valid sentences if the finite verb or predicate is complemented by a certain number of other elements leads to the notion of valency itself; that it is indeed the verb that determines the number of elements necessary for a complete sentence is motivated by the fact that exchanging only the verb can turn a well-formed sentence into a non-sentence and vice versa [Emo74:3]³. The same examples establish the difference between *complements* that are necessary for a well-formed sentence employing a certain verb and *adjuncts* as mere additions that may or may not occur, and consequently the notion of *n-ary predicates*.

This *quantitative valency* as another term for the predicate’s number of arguments is then refined by the distinction between different kinds of arguments that may act as a verb’s complements, its *qualitative valency*, exemplified by the necessity of one prepositional plus one non-prepositional complement for “to aim” and one complement in subjective case plus one in objective case for “to see”. The defining feature for such kinds of complements is that different kinds cannot be substituted for one another in a single sentence.

The third factor considered necessary for a complete valency description is the list of possible *subcategories* of each complement. A subcategory is defined, without any further explanation, as one of “nominal”, an “infinite construction” or “subclause”, i.e. a specification of the complement’s inner structure. A complement can be realized by an element of one or more of these subcategories; “to please” for example takes either a nominal or a subclause in first position while “to look [at]” only takes nominals.

³Chapter 2 elaborates on the predicate’s role as the central node in sentence structure

2.1 General features of the theory

In the second chapter, which introduces important linguistic concepts, some pre-suppositions for the following valency descriptions are set. A precise definition of a sentence is explicitly avoided in favor of an “explication” summarized as “The sentence is the smallest unit of communication”, which allows expressions like “Help!” or “No.” to be regarded as sentences⁴, because other than fragments like “To” they are by themselves comprehensible. Emons rejects other definitions on grounds of tautology, as for the definition by its parts (“A sentence consists of subject and predicate”) that are themselves only defined as parts of a sentence, or inadequacy, as for a list of properties a sentence must have. Likewise rejected is the notion of selection restrictions as a part of grammar, so an utterance such as “The tree drives his car” is considered a valid sentence even though in TG it would not, due to violation of the [+HUMAN] restriction for the actant of “drive”. For the levels of valency as described in section 1.2, this means a negation of semantic valency.

The mode of segmentation suggested for sentences might be called the base for the entire theory, as it will be used almost exclusively to determine verbs’ complement categories. Out of the possibilities discussed—linear segmentation, i.e. in one step from the whole sentence to morphemes as the smallest units of meaning⁵; repeated binary segmentation; repeated *n*-ary segmentation—the latter is the one recommended for an analysis that leads to a grouping of elements consistent with both intuition and the result of *commutation* and *exclusion tests*. Sentence elements that

- a) can be exchanged for one another in a sentence, and the result is still a well-formed sentence

A man who comes from London sees Mary.

He sees Mary.

⁴Even though these are not treated later on due to their being verbless and thus uninteresting for valency descriptions.

⁵Actually, a *segmentation* would have to be into *allomorphs* which could in turn be reduced to morphemes. The low level of allomorphy in English is a likely reason for not distinguishing between these.

b) cannot occur together in the same position in a sentence

*He a man who comes from London sees Mary

He came quickly.

He came home.

He came home quickly.

are called “commuting”. In the above examples, “he” commutes with “a man who comes from London”, while “home” and “quickly” are exchangeable but don’t exclude each other and thus don’t commute. A *commutation class* consists of all elements commuting with each other. Parts of a sentence are thus defined as commutation classes, the same goes for the classification of potential complements.

Emons’ classification distinguishes only between complements and adjuncts; the otherwise common distinction between obligatory and optional complements is considered a “plausible assumption” [Emo74:20] but not actually used (though sometimes mentioned as a possible classification) due to lack of precise criteria. The definition of a complement is that of a first-level sentence constituent *interdependent* with the predicate, i.e. neither can be omitted without rendering the sentence ungrammatical, while an adjunct is a *dependent* that can itself be omitted without any effect on the sentence’s well-formedness.

Cases where the meaning of the predicate depends on a complement (cf. look *at* vs. look *after* in section 2.2) are resolved by creating a separate lexicon entry with certain restrictions on possible complements for each variety.

2.2 Complement categories

In this theory, all english verbs fall either into the monovalent, divalent or trivalent category. The *avalent* (or *zero-valent* category proposed by other valency grammarians like Allerton for the so-called “weather verbs” (to rain, to snow etc.) is considered a special case of monovalent verbs that only take an “it” as a complement.

The possible complements for each valency are organized in an orthogonal system of 15 categories: 5 categories numbered E1-E5 ('E' for "Ergänzung") with 3 subcategories each. Categories E1 and E2 are established by examining a series of examples of the kind [Emo74:26]

- (1) A man sees a child.
- (2) A child sees a man.
- (3) *He sees he.
- (4) *Him sees him.

and defined as the set of complements commuting with "he", "she" etc. (E1) and "him", "her" etc. (E2). While a man and a child in (1) and (2) seem to commute with each other, (3) and (4) demonstrate that this is a misinterpretation caused by the lack of case marking in English common nouns, and that both belong to different commutation classes. The commutation with the respective case-marked pronouns is actually a reformulation of traditional grammar's definition of a subject and an object, i.e. case marking, subject becoming the object of a passive sentence and vice versa, etc.—criteria that happen to be satisfied if the commutation criterion for E1/E2 is as well.

Complement category E3 comprises various kinds of prepositional phrases [Emo74:28]:

- (5) John depends on his father.
- (6) He jumped on the table.
- (7) He jumped against the door.
- (8) Some doctors look at the patient.
- (9) Some doctors look after the patient.
- (10) The driver explained the accident to the policeman.

Some of these complements, like *to jump*, allow the preposition to commute with the rest of the E3, others like *to depend* don't. Where the meaning of the predicate depends on the kind of complement, as in (8) and (9), the different variants

are considered different lexemes with equal valency but different restrictions on the complements.

In category E4 there are prepositional and non-prepositional complements that commute in one sentence. Examples (11) to (14) [Emo74:30] could be analyzed using E1-E3 already, but the fact that (11)/(12) and (13)/(14) each mean the same thing prompts Emons to assume a separate category here, to avoid two different lexical entries with different valency but equal meaning.

(11) I give books to him.

(12) I give him books.

(13) My friend writes a letter to her.

(14) My friend writes her a letter.

Another reason for not analyzing the above examples as ‘E1 E2 E3’ and ‘E1 E2 E2’ respectively is that “*him* und *to him* bzw. *her* und *to her* in (69) bis (72) [sind] nicht so unabhängig voneinander, wie man es von Elementen verschiedener Kommutationsklassen erwarten würde” (“*him* and *to him* or *her* and *to her* in (11) to (14) are not as independent from each other as might be expected from members of different commutation classes”) [Emo74:30]:

(15) *I give him books to him.

(16) *I give John books to Mary.

It seems however that after stating that an English verb can have at most three complements, a test that would result in four of them isn’t likely to yield a well-formed sentence anyway, so this exclusion would say more about verbs in general than about the independence of complements involved.

The motivation for the last complement category E5 is partly a semantic and partly a grammatical one. The following complements of bi- and trivalent verbs are classified as E5:

(17) He is a man.

(18) He seems happy.

(19) He seems to be happy.

(20) They think him to be a coward.

(21) We regard him as a fool.

What these sentences have in common is that they assign some kind of property to either the subject/E1 or another E2 (in the case of trivalent verbs), so two of the complements denote the same entity. Happy in (18) is a special case of an adjective as a complement; E5 can often be replaced by these. A grammatical consequence of the above is that many sentences using E5 complements are not passivizable, because the semantic function of assigning properties is usually performed by “middle verbs”.

2.3 Subcategories

Each complement category, which is assigned according to functional criteria, gets subdivided into three subcategories according to the complement’s inner structure. The subcategories are called NOM, IK and ES (“Nominal”, “Infinitivkonstruktion” and “Ergänzungssatz” respectively), and a the description of their individual features and occurrence restrictions fills the rest of the workbook’s theoretical part (the last chapter deals with practical applications of the theory).

NOMs are the most loosely defined of the above subcategories. As the name says, they contain some kind of nominal, however, as nominals also occur as parts of other subcategories, a NOM can only be assumed “[...] es sei denn, die jeweilige E enthält noch andere Teile, die für andere Unterkategorien charakteristisch sind, also etwa *to* oder *that* in der Bedeutung von (69) bzw. (97)” (“unless other parts characteristic for other subcategories, like *to* or *that* in the sense of (96) or (97)⁶”) are present in the complement [Emo74:37]. Most notably, the NOM subcategory comprises not only what grammars such as CGEL [QGLS85] classify as noun phrases, but also prepositional phrases, as in the examples below [Emo74:38]:

⁶Example 96: I hope to see you; example 97: I hope that you are successful

- (22) The man gave his friend a book
 E1[NOM1] E4[NOM4] E2[NOM2]⁷
- (23) The man looked at his friend
 E1[NOM1] E3[NOM3]

NOMs filling valencies for E2, E4 and E5 have already been shown in (2), (11) and (17) respectively.

Subcategories IK and ES can occur for any of the five E categories as well. Instead of examples for their classification, only a few characteristics of both shall be given here; see section 4 for some problematic cases. The term “infinite construction” is well established in literature (cf. [HSW91:102]), and Emons’ classification follows this definition. IKs are characterized by infinite verb forms, often but not always marked by a *to* or *-ing*-suffix (mandatory for IK1).

An ES complement constitutes a subclause with a predicate and complements, often linked to the main clause with *that* or a “*wh*-word”; characteristic components are *who(ever)*, *what(ever)*, *where(ever)*, *when(ever)*, *why* and *as*). The *En* categories vary in the restrictions they pose on elements of the ES subcategory, particularly the characteristics from the list above that must or must not occur.

3 D. J. Allerton: “Valency and the English Verb”

D. J. Allerton’s 1982 book on valency in the English language is different in most aspects—audience, scope, method and aim—from Emons’. It is explicitly not meant for practical application in language teaching like the latter and most other contemporary treatments of the matter, but rather as a contribution to the scientific community giving a theoretical basis to the theory. Accordingly, it doesn’t aim for coverage as extensive as Emons’ “Valenzgrammatik” but rather a more detailed and in-depth analysis of a smaller fragment of English, namely simple sentences with only one lexical verb (i.e. without anything that would fall in Emons’ ES

⁷The notation ‘*En*[CAT*n*]’ means “This is an element of subcategory CAT of category *n* filling a valency for elements of category *En*”. The critique of tagmemist slot/filler redundancy in [All82:6] applies here as well.

subcategory) and with several other restrictions pertaining to complement types [All82:142f].

Although this theory is almost exclusively developed and shown to be applicable to English, Allerton make it clear that it is actually a universal one that should not be based on specific features of an SVO, or generally fixed-word-order, language.

3.1 General features of the theory

The system of segmentation and constituent classification used by Allerton borrows from several schools of grammar. It doesn't start on a level as basic as Emons', defining sentences etc., but accepts certain established terms such as "predicate", "phrase" or "object" as valid without further scrutiny⁸. He partly agrees with Chomsky's *Standard Theory* (ST) that an element's class can be derived configurationally, i.e. from the structures of its neighbors. Other than ST however he doesn't go as far as to claim that structure was the only defining factor and functions such as *subject-of* or *object-of* could be completely derived from it. On the other hand he also acknowledges, on grounds of differences between configurationally equal sentences like (1) and (2) [All82:6] below—sentences with an object are passivizable while sentences with a predicative (or "subject complement" in CGEL's [QGLS85] terminology, with "complement" obviously not in the same sense as in valency theory's complement/adjunct-distinction, and different again from Chomsky's use in the TG context!) can usually have the predicative part replaced by an adjective phrase—the position of Chomsky critics like Halliday and Dik who see subject and object as elements on the same segmentation level⁹ and stress the need for a functional classification.

(1) Oliver met an expert.

(2) Oliver became an expert.

From relational grammar comes the idea to see functional relations as a phenomenon of *deep structure* (see figure 2 on page 15), which may or may not be

⁸"Assuming that we can recognize noun phrases, adjective phrases and prepositional phrases as such, [...]" [All82:33]

⁹ST's $S \rightarrow NP, VP$; $VP \rightarrow V, NP$ rules result in a more prominent status of the subject.

reflected in the actual *surface structure*. In a typical active sentence they would be retained, while a transformation such as *subject promotion* would change some of them.

For the purpose of distinguishing between syntactic functions such as “subject” or “object” on different levels, Allerton introduces the terms *perject* and *objoid*, with the latter subdivided into *match*, *measure* and *possession objoids*. What appears as a subject in the surface structure corresponds either to a subject or a *valency gap* on the level of valency structure; in a sentence where constituents are reordered by a transformation between the valency and the surface level, such as one in passive voice, the valency subject appears as a perject—something that looks like an object but actually still has the semantic role of a subject—while the valency object turns into the surface subject. The latter is however only possible for a (large) subset of transitive verbs that take “real objects”. Out of examples (3) to (6) below [All82:81], only the first one allows passivization, the other sentences’ “pseudo-objects” are unable to become subjects and are thus called objoids.

- (3) Oliver damaged the key.
- (4) Oliver resembled Richard.
- (5) Oliver weighed twelve stone.
- (6) Oliver had the documents.

Finally, there is the influence of dependency grammarians like Helbig [HS73] and Hays, who refined the established *head/modifier* or *governor/dependant* schema by distinguishing between constructions like *ripe apples* with an unilateral dependency of *ripe* on *apples*, and ones like *(people) from Bavaria* where both elements are mutually dependent¹⁰.

3.1.1 Construction types

The synthesis of the the above positions leads to an extension of Bloomfield’s classification system for constructions which originally differentiated between *ex-*

¹⁰Though the Bloomfieldian classification mentioned below could be said to include this distinction already.

subordinative (endocentric)	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{very} \} \\ \{ \text{rather} \} \end{array} \right\} + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{many} \} \\ \{ \text{few} \} \end{array} \right\}$
	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{nearly} \} \\ \{ \text{over} \} \end{array} \right\} + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{sixty} \} \\ \{ \text{eight} \} \end{array} \right\}$
semi-subordinative	a + dog is + coughing
coordinative (endocentric)	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{sixty} \} \\ \{ \text{eight} \} \end{array} \right\} + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{twenty} \} \\ \{ \text{five} \} \end{array} \right\}$
exocentric	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{plenty} \} \\ \{ \text{lots} \} \end{array} \right\} + \text{of}$
irreducible	by + candlelight Mary + smokes

Figure 1: Construction types

ocentric constructions of *base* and *convertor*¹¹, and *endocentric* ones. The latter were further subdivided into *subordinative* (head + modifier) and *coordinative* (coordinate + coordinate) constructions. The extension comprises two new types of construction: *semi-subordinative*, with a *core* that is “essential, and which could, given the appropriate subclass, stand as the isolate representative of the construction”, and a *specifier* which “though not the principal element, is for the most part a required part of the construction” [All82:13], and *irreducible* constructions of two *cornerstones* that are both indispensable.

Figure 1 (mostly from [All82:11-16]) shows some examples for each type of construction.

This classification seems only applicable to two-element constructions; longer ones are discussed briefly, but later on the above forms are shown to accommodate more elements as well, as they are needed for verbs with several valency fillers. In graphical representations (cf. figure 4 on page 17 and [All82:34]), connecting lines can be made to join at different points to symbolize a kind of hierarchy in a multi-element construction—a not formally not very well-defined but intuitive way.

¹¹Neither in this construction nor any of the others have the elements to be in any particular order, although there will usually be specific restrictions on their order in a particular language.

3.1.2 Element classes

The elements of the above constructions can be subdivided into three groups:

- a) *Pure markers* such as the infinitival **to** in **I want to sneeze** or the **of** in **plenty of money** may serve as what Tesnière called a “translatif”, i.e. converters from one class to another, or may be required for other grammatical reasons. Generally, they don’t contrast with any other words in the same position and thus don’t contribute any lexical meaning to the construction. Their contribution lies in the fact that they have “the power to determine what kind of elements their neighbors shall be and what the higher unit shall be of which they form a part” [All82:16].
- b) *Contrastive grammatical items* can be replaced (“commute”) with a number of other elements from a closed word class. This includes most notably prepositions, but also subsets of conjunctions, articles and adverbs.
- c) *Lexical items*.

Not every construction can consist of all types of elements, so multiplying constructions by element classes only yields ten overall construction types¹² (Or eleven, counting one extra type added for the analysis of copular verbs, cf. section 3.2).

3.1.3 Semantic relations

Semantics doesn’t play an important role in the actual theory of valency. In fact, Allerton considers it “useful to keep our syntactic description relatively free of semantic information” [All82:31]. This is because even if in the majority of instances of a particular syntactic construction one can find this constant semantic relationship, there are always subtle gradients of meaning that make it difficult to set a point from which on meanings can be considered different. The reason for fairly big differences in meaning between syntactically equal constructions (compare: “tall friends” vs. “old friends” vs. “false friends”) is partly the so-called

¹²Instead of 20 were this not so—element order as a language specific phenomenon is ignored. For mostly obvious reasons, constructions such as “irreducible of two pure markers” don’t occur.

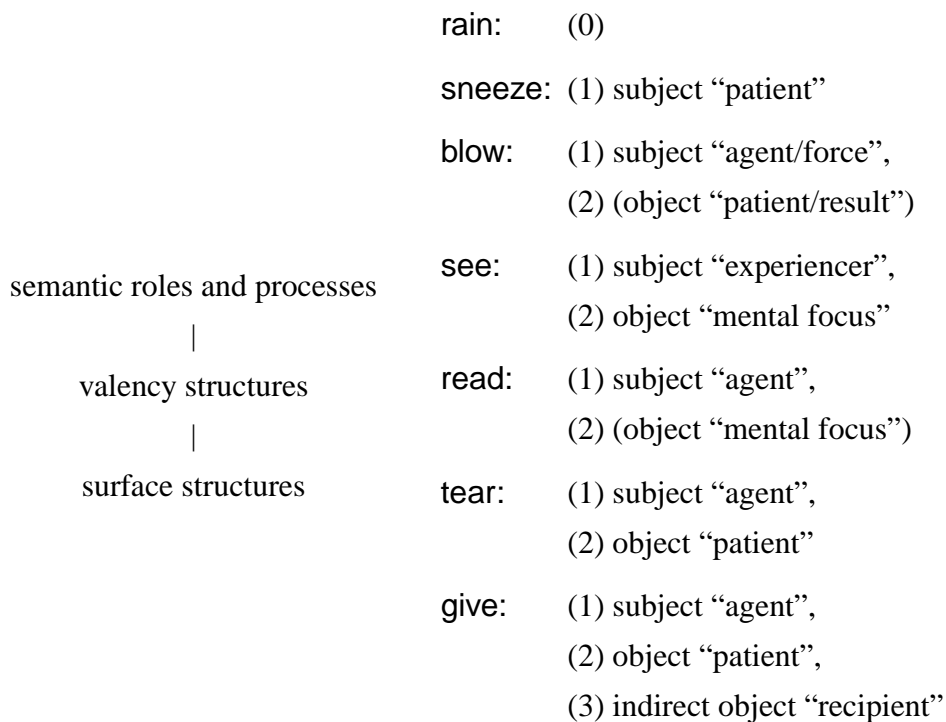


Figure 2: Semantic roles and their relation to surface structure [All82:52]

“semantic tailoring” that takes place in constructions and that adapts the meaning of one element to that of the other, so that a “tall friend” is actually a friend but a “false friend” is not a friend at all.

The part where semantic information is used, mostly in the form of constituent semantic roles as in case grammar, is in the development of appropriate structures for a valency construction and to motivate a *valency deep structure*. There, example lexical entries generally have their valency fillers labeled with their semantic role:

beat: (1) subject “agent”, (2) object “patient” [All82:48]

See figure 2 for the proposed three levels between semantic roles and surface structure and a list of possible semantic roles for several verbs’ valency fillers. The number behind each verb indicates the number of valencies, followed by possible fillers and their respective semantic role. Fillers in parentheses are optional.

3.2 Verb elaborator structures

To avoid confusion with the abovementioned different uses of “complement”, Allerton uses the term *verb elaborator* for elements occurring as valency fillers. In the context of the construction typology described in sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 verbs and their elaborators are considered to form a semi-subordinative construction with the verb as a lexical or grammatical core and the elaborator as a lexical specifier (the graphical representation chosen for such a construction is shown in figure 3). They exhibit the typical properties of semi-subordinative constructions in that the verb is clearly the central part of the construction, but the elaborators are optional only to a certain degree which depends on the verb itself but also on the context (cf. *contextual* vs. *indefinite deletion* in [All75]), so there is some mutual dependence between the elements.

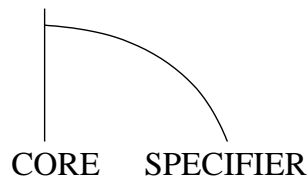


Figure 3: Semi-subordinative construction

As mentioned in section 3.1.1 already, the verb-plus-elaborator structures can be accommodated by the construction types listed there, but they get a little more complicated if one doesn't want to stick to the bi-partitioning scheme of ST, which doesn't fit well in this context, because it would require a separate two-element substructure to be made from the verb with one object or the other, or one out of both objects. For either there is not much evidence to be found.

Figure 4 on the next page [All82:34] shows the construction hierarchy of the sentence *Oliver gave Fagin the watch*. Allerton considers some evidence, such as the possibility of contextual or indefinite deletion, towards a “hierarchical” configuration that would make the direct object more closely related to the verb than the indirect object, but opts to keep both “separate, though not necessarily equal, elaborators of the verb [...]” [All82:34].

As shown in figure 4, the subject is assigned a special status in the sentence as one cornerstone of an irreducible construction, with the other being the verb and

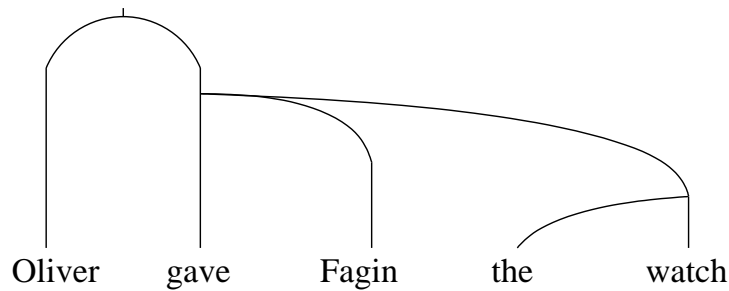


Figure 4: Irreducible + semi-subordinative constructions in $S + V + O_i + O_d$

all objects (cf. Chomsky’s $S \rightarrow NP, VP$ scheme). The main reason for this is that the subject can never be deleted from an English declarative sentence¹³, and in languages such as Spanish that allow subject deletion it must be contextually recoverable. Among the others is that the verb usually doesn’t assign any case to the subject as it does with objects, and on the other hand the subject is more likely to govern verb inflection than the objects.

The construction type “grammatical core + lexical specifier” (the additional type mentioned in section 3.1.2 occurs with copular verbs as in *Oliver was unhappy* or *He seems a coward*). The semantic value of the construction is almost completely carried by the elaborator, which has tempted grammarians like Tesnière to consider either the elaborator or the whole construction as the “actual verb”. However, the semi-subordinative construction type allows to integrate the verb as a grammatically—not always semantically, as can be seen in languages without auxiliaries—required core with the adjective phrase or other elaborator into the same configuration as for “regular” verbs.

4 Comparison

Given the big differences in intended audience and scope of the two works, it is not easy to make an overall comparison. What may justly be compared are single aspects like methodology or empirical foundation.

One obvious superficial difference is the sheer volume of both books. Aller-

¹³They can from imperatives and certain subclauses!

ton's is almost one and a half times the number of pages in a tighter print, so together with the fact that he only treats a relatively restricted fragment of English it is clear that "Valency and the English Verb" can go into far greater detail. Its highly compressed information and many references to various schools of linguistics make it probably too hard to digest in a first seminar after secondary school and a general preparatory course.

This is certainly not a shortcoming of the "Valenzgrammatik". The question whether ease of use should be taken as far as writing a university-level grammar of English in a language other than English aside, the first striking feature of Emons' classification is that it is very clean and orthogonal: a system of three by five categories, all of which actually occur and are defined by only two criteria, commutation classes and well-established constituent categories—Allerton's category overview in [All82:120] looks downright chaotic in comparison. There are some admittedly problematic cases and even a few constructions labeled "O" as in "open", but all in all his is a very small template indeed, considering the almost universal applicability it claims. But looking at some of the complicated and often contradictory theories developed in the last century, it is likely that Allerton is right when he states regarding dubious category boundaries and membership: "Like Matthews, we must see such problems of indeterminacy as stemming from the very nature of language, because, as a system, language is only 'partly codified'." [All82:143]. Allerton himself takes these uncertainties into account, and because he needs not be concerned with avoiding confusion in unprepared readers he can point to problem cases and aspects where further research is needed. Another point considered important in scientific work is that he exactly defines the subject of his studies—British English, in "a usage that is fairly restrictive" [All82:iii]—and points out that writers with different *ideolects* could give different ratings to dubious cases. Emons presents a supposedly complete and ready-to-use category system, which it may well be, but the resulting categories look suspiciously like the ones known from traditional grammar. In fact, the E1 and E2 commutation classes are congruent with "subject" and "direct object", E3 almost identical with "prepositional object", so the categories overall don't seem very innovative.

Both theories may be criticized for dubious foundation on empirical evidence

as well as within a theory of language as a whole. That both use contrived examples as their sole evidence could be criticized from a 21st-century perspective, but at their time of writing neither had much choice. Chomsky's and other "introspective" grammarians' allegation that corpora didn't constitute valid evidence because they were corrupted or as mere linguistic performance not relevant in the first place may have been unjustified; what certainly was not was that available corpora of the late seventies were far too small to yield reliable statistics. Around a million words—the size of the Brown Corpus—are fine for finding *positive* evidence for a construction, but the more frequent ones that can be identified this way are usually uncontroversial anyway. For strong negative clues about dubious examples like **to put a request** however it is not sufficient¹⁴.

While the main point of against "Valenzgrammatik" is its overly simplified approach that brings little innovation, Allerton's theory can be criticized along the same lines as Transformational Grammar, from which it borrows some basic assumptions. TG has come under attack as a theory of "armchair linguists" who neither search nor would be able to find empirical evidence for their results. As detailed and justified as his categorizations may be, the basic assumption of transformations between one or more sub-surface levels and the actual realization of a sentence is a convenient one to explain active/passive and similarly related constructions, but still an assumption that is not derived from empiric evidence. Actually, the probability that transformations as complex¹⁵ as the ones proposed by TG actually take place in the human mind is not very high. Integrating "transformed" structures directly into the theory would be required to make a verification using the extensive corpus evidence available today at least possible.

¹⁴This example could well be acceptable to speakers of a regional variety of English like Indian or Filipino. Especially the latter are notorious to prefer **to put over** other verbs if they have a choice, as in **switch off** vs. **put off**.

¹⁵Complex in the sense of "hard to perform" given a set of propositions and a target grammar, not necessarily as in "having complicated rules".

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