



## **Syntax and Semantics Interface**

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### **Abstract**

The words and phrases used by writers are the means to express their creativity. This study aims at analyzing a significant relationship that exists between semantics and syntax interface in a creative writing. The input ideas and its output representations are purely based on the lexical and grammatical categories. So, I have analyzed those categories to identify how writers present their ideas in a different dimensions in their sentence structures with the help of the semantic layers, lexicons, lexical phrases and syntax are vital.

### **Introduction**

Language is the best communicative tool through which writer's emotions, thoughts and creative ideas get expressed. A creativity process of any literary genre can be analyzed through lexicons, lexical phrases, semantics and syntax. So, if we analyze these components properly, we will get the creativity process of the writer. I will begin with the importance of 'input' lexicons which play a vital role in revealing creative ideas, and even subtle ideas with the aid of lexical categories which interface with one another to give 'output'. We will examine how lexicons arranged in a particular order to reveal the semantic interpretation of the writer in the sentence. But if there is any change in this particular order, then the sentence will be resulting in an ill-formed sentence.

We need to construct the sentence with an interface between semantics and syntax. It is clear that there is always a connection between semantics and syntax in the word recognition and framing arguments in sentences with the aid of lexical categories. The word recognition plays a vital role in the arguments in the form of an utterance which is a complex process. TonDijkstra states that:



First word identification must depend on the characteristics of the lexical item itself, for instance, on how often it has been encountered in the past (e.g. does it have a high or low frequency of usage?) and on whether it is ambiguous with respect to its syntactic category (is dance used as a noun or verb?) or semantics (e.g. does bank refer to the river side or the institution?). In addition a word's recognition process could be affected by the syntactic and semantic aspect of the preceding sentence context which may be more or less constraining or predictive. (Dijkstra 129)

The lexicons are arranged syntactically in a particular order that communicate the semantic interpretation which evolves out from the input (lexicons). The writer presents his creative ideas in different dimensions with in lexicons which are displayed in the form of an utterance, than when they are in isolation. So, it is clear that the lexicons and lexical items are impregnated with creative ideas that can be analyzed for different functions with the help of man's linguistic knowledge and Chomsky confirms that these functions are considered as tools that go into the creative process.

The lexical items are fully loaded with the ideas of the writer in a particular order which is presented out with the help of the writer's linguistic knowledge which we have to decode with our linguistic competency. We have to develop an ability to render the writer's creative ideas which Chomsky says that in the chapter of Meaning and Creativity that "In having a lexical item, a person has remarkably detailed and specific linguistic knowledge" (McGilvray 213) and he also further conveys that:

In effect, they represent (contain) detailed linguistic knowledge, "information" that appears at SEM. Chomsky mentions many examples without – understandably – being definite about how to represent lexical detail. (McGilvray 213)

In James McGilvry's *The Cambridge Companion to Chomsky*, Chomsky's SEM "which is the 'meaning' interface part of an expression (<PHON, SEM>pair)" (McGilvray 103) explicates that the lexicons arrange the speaker's intentions and also do the same with the



interpreter's assumptions, expectations, beliefs and presuppositions. (McGilvry 213, 214) So we can say that the lexical items are clearly bolstering the argument to form sentences with the help of semantic and syntax interface. We can also identify the semantic interpretation with the help of syntax which plays a vital role in finding the complete meaning of the sentence.

According to Candlin, there are four important layers for an utterance- "the notional, referential, socio-linguistic and the contextual" (Munby 42). "The socio-linguistic meaning of an utterance is its pragmatic value described by Austin as the illocutionary force of an utterance, which derives from the social context in which the utterance is placed". (Munby 43) Lexical items and the syntactic arrangements in which they occur radically underdetermines the rich interpretations regularly assigned to naturally occurring utterances and execute functions like the illocutionary acts which are defined by "social conventions, acts such as accosting, accusing, admitting, apologizing, challenging, complaining, condoling, congratulating, declining, deploring, giving permission, giving way, greeting, leavetaking, mocking, naming, offering, praising, promising, proposing marriage, protesting, recommending, surrendering, thanking, toasting". ( Hurford 273)

The notional layer exhibits basic grammatical meanings like quantity, time and case which Wilkins (1972) classifies as semantico-grammatical category. 'Raju walks to the college.' In this sentence 'walks' is doer verb which gives the semantic meaning with the special focus to grammatical aspects of that particular sentence. The contextual layer is that derived from a discourse noting what has been said before and what comes after. Look at the following examples.

1. Deeti was preoccupied with the lateness of her poppy crop.
2. Deeti was glad, for her daughter's sake.
3. Deeti gave her daughter the job of sweeping the poppy petals into a heap.
4. Deeti draped her spare sari over her shoulder and led her daughter towards the water, across the field.



The above examples give the four layers of meanings respectively. The first one gives the time of action (Simple Past), a basic grammatical information the second one gives the referential meaning highlighting the status of Deeti, the third example exhibits the expectation based on the activity of Deeti towards her daughter and final example necessitates a context for a proper interpretation. In the discourse might be the right time of arrival had already been rendered and in that context this example gains significance. If we concentrate on the semantic component, then a semantic analysis automatically switches to the categories where there is a syntax semantic interface.

Lexicons are arranged with the syntactic features which give out the semantic interpretation with the aid of phonological features. For example,

Deeti likes her daughter Kabutri.

Deeti beats her own daughter to death.

In the first sentence, the act of Deeti, who likes her daughter is natural and the word 'likes' and 'her' are enough to convey the message. But in the second sentence, the act of Deeti who beats her own daughter to death is unacceptable unless in unavoidable circumstances. It is against the normal behavior which needs the possessive reflexive becomes mandatory to exhibit special occasion may be the actor, Deeti is not conscious of what she is doing she beats her own daughter. The lexicon 'own' here provides a contextual interpretation. Consider the following sentences.

(1) Ameen likes his own beard.

(2) Ameen eats the supper.

The structural pattern of these two sentences is similar but the choice the verbs demarcates the role played by the NP. In sentence (1) the verb 'likes' make the agent an experiencer and therefore the role is that of an experiencer. In sentence (2) the NP indicates the role of an actor doing the action of eating the supper.



Preposition plays a significant role in the sentence to give a semantic interpretation and it also bolsters an argument with the help of other syntactic categories in the sentence. There are two types of prepositions, (i) Predicative prepositions and (ii) Non-predicative prepositions which “receive separate signs for their predicative and non predicative uses”(Androutsopoulos 133). In sentences like,

Ibrahim is at classroom 89.--->1

The Kingfisher is on runway 4.--->2

Ibrahim comes at classroom 89.--->3

The kingfisher landed on runway 4.--->4

Predicative prepositions and non-predicative prepositions function in a different way. The preposition in the first sentence ‘at’ functions as predicative preposition because it introduces the complements of to be, the preposition is said to predicative. For example, in the following sentence, ‘at’ functions as a predicative preposition because it introduces with the help of ‘to be’ complement ‘is’.

She said that man of mine is unwell at the factory; he has to be brought home. (Ghosh 29)

When they were back at home, Deeti lit a lamp before leading Kabutri into the shrine.  
 (Ghosh 5)

1. He is in the classroom.
2. The book is on the table.

In the first sentence, ‘in’ is a predicative preposition functioning as an adjunct contributing semantic information. In the second sentence ‘on’ renders semantic information but in a sentence like

He gave the book to her.

Deeti believed it to be bad luck to attempt overly realistic portraits of those who had yet to leave this earth. (Ghosh 5)



It acts as non-predicative where it doesn't contribute any semantic value because 'to' introduces the complement of other verbs 'gave', 'attempt' and 'leave'. So, these prepositions are non predicative. For example,

Now, on climbing into the back of the cart, the former sepoy sat facing to the rear, with his bundle balanced on his lap, to prevent its coming into direct contact with any of the driver's belongings. (Ghosh 3)

In the beginning of this sentence, preposition 'on' indicates predicative preposition and the second 'into' indicates the duration of the activity and its termination, the location (back of the cart) of the referent (place) and not the event. The third verb 'sat' complements 'to' which is non-predicative preposition, but before we analyse these prepositions, we should aware that there are two distinctions appear between semantically full and semantically empty prepositions. Semantically empty prepositions are prepositions which are strongly bound by a predicative head, like on, in the example:

3. Raju relies on his brother. (Correct)
4. Raju relies in his brother. (Wrong)
5. Raju relies over his brother. (Wrong)

We should not replace 'on' by a semantically close preposition like in or over. These prepositions are lexically predicted by the predicative head and, therefore, do not contribute to the semantics of the sentence. It is sure that lexical value is encoded as an attribute of the predicative head. This implies that they are not translated, are generated in the target language from the information encoded in the entry of the predicative head.

Full prepositions, on the contrary, are heads of prepositional phrases. For example,  
Raju is on the bike.

\*Raju is in the bike.

The book is on the table. (Location)

The boy is in the classroom. (Location)



The writer applies the concept of full preposition in this novel in a different way by starting sentences with ‘no’ as prepositional heads which are given in the following sentences:

On the adjacent field, her husband's younger brother, Chandan Singh, was already out with his eight-bladed nukha in hand. (Ghosh 3)

On the upper deck they came upon Raj Rattan, who was flying kites by moonlight.(Ghosh51)

They always subcategorize for one argument, which in most cases is an NP, but can also be a finite or no infinite clause, an adverb or prepositional phrases. These full prepositional phrases may function as: (i) Adjuncts and (ii) Modifiers.

Adjuncts which are weakly bound by a predicative governor like on, in:

The book is on the table.

where ‘on’ can be substituted by a semantically close preposition, because the predicate demands a locative complement and not a specific preposition.

\*The book is in the table.

Raju is in the car.

Raju will be in the classroom in ten minutes.

\*Raju is in ten minutes.

Zachary had spent eight years working in the Gardiner shipyard, at Fell's Point in Baltimore. (Ghosh 7)

So it is clear that we should not use ‘in’ in all circumstances, because it has a kind of different quality that, can be used in a special way. For example,

\*He is standing in Raju.

He is standing in for Raju.



The schooner sailed with Zachary standing in for the first mate: thus it happened that in the course of a single voyage. (Ghosh 8)

We have to find out modifier ‘for’ and its importance in framing arguments in sentences.

Modifiers like for,

\*John eats for his father.

\*John sleeps for his father.

\*John swims for his father.

John works for his father.

Prepositional phrases are not particularly predicted by verbs ‘swims’, ‘eats’ and ‘sleeps’, and the semantics it conveys may differ as we see the above examples:

Darkening as they toasted, the petals began to cling together so that in a minute or two they looked exactly like the round wheat-flour rotis Deeti had packed for her husband's midday meal.(Ghosh 4)

In the above sentence, prepositional phrase ‘for her husband's midday meal’(PP) is supported by the first theta role ‘subject’, ‘Deeti’ who packs for her husband but when we change the semantic role of the actor like, ‘fish’ then semantic meaning fail to contribute for the argument. For example,

Fish had packed for her husband’s midday meal.

Thus we can say that prepositional phrase is not predicted by verbs but with the noun phrase and its small constituents, for example,

Kesri Singh, was depicted by a few strokes that stood for his sepoy's rifle and his upturned moustache. (Ghosh 5)



The writer sometime fails to give the importance for the noun phrase which will not feature in the beginning of the argument, but he interfaces prepositional phrase with the next argument or he bolsters his arguments with the aid of auxiliaries. For example,

With scarcely a pause for a mouthful of roti, Deeti stepped outside, on to the flat threshold of beaten earth that divided the mud-walled dwelling from the poppy fields beyond. (Ghosh 3)

Most of the business of the ship fell to the two tindals, and little was seen of Serang Ali for the first two days. (Ghosh 9)

(Ushering the other lascars)<sup>1</sup> (out of the cabin)<sup>2</sup>, (the serang disappeared)<sup>3</sup> (for a good ten minutes)<sup>4</sup>. (Ghosh 10)

The last sentence is constructed with the interface between the prepositional phrase and the verb phrase which is in the beginning of the sentence ‘ushering’. But this verb is constructed with one more argument i.e. ‘lascars out of cabin’ which shows that verb is not constructed well as the UG. The verb interfaces his argument with the help of other constituents in the sentence. Thus we can say that there four different arguments interface together to form the single sentence.

When we try to alter the position of prepositional phrase in the above sentence, we fail in the semantic interpretation. Thus it is clear that there is an interface between syntax and semantics in positioning prepositions in sentences.

The passive voice and adverbs also need focus in this context. The movement of the noun phrase from the subject position to the object position and vice versa brings focus though there is no change in the basic semantics. Pragmatically the semantics is construed. Look at the following examples.

Deeti writes the book.



The book is written by Deeti.

where the focus is shifted from the actor to the object acted upon. In the case of adverbs there is such a shift in focus.

Raju calls Ram **loudly**.

\*The book calls Ram loudly.

Raju **loudly** calls.

**Loudly** Raju calls.

When we take the surface level of the above sentences, we should not concentrate on the change in the word order, but the position of the adverb sheds light on the focus point. In sentence 15.a. the act of calling ‘Ram loudly’ is focused whereas in the second sentence, the manner in which the act is carried out is being focused where ‘The Book’ cannot act as Raju. The lexicons can also bring in contrastive focus. For Examples,

He calls to his old number.

He wrote his assignments.

I saw only the final year students in the classroom.

Only the fifth standard students failed.

In the above sentences the words ‘elder’, ‘meant’ and only functions to give a restriction on the focus. The word ‘old’ insists the fact that the agent has called the old number and not the new number or any other number. The next sentence also restricts ‘writing assignments’ as the theme pointed by the agent among many other themes. In the other two examples the lexicon only signifies the contrastive focus. It is not any other students he saw other than the final year. In the next sentence, ‘fifth standard students’ who are singled out and not any other standards have failed.

It is clear that the lexicon has a capability of altering the focus in sentences; this is same for the noun phrase. For examples,

It is **the old student** who is at trouble.



The lexicon can also bring out contrastive focus in negative structures which function on a restrictive basis. For examples,

He **will not** finish on Monday.

She **didn't** return the original certificate.

She **didn't** do it inadvertently

In the above sentences the negative structure doesn't stop with the ordinary meaning but also focuses on the contradictory indication. The first sentence gives us that 'he will not finish' only on the particular day the agent is unwilling to the action but is ready to do it on any other day. The next sentence indicates that only the copy and not the original certificate are handed over. The third sentence reveals the deliberate intention of the doer of the action.

### Conclusion

The above empirical analysis on lexicons, lexical phrases, lexical categories and other grammatical features bring out the significant relationship that exist between semantics and syntax which interfaces in creating English language which is true to any other language also. The writer, who wants to present his ideas in different dimensions of his sentence structures with the help of the semantic layers, lexicons, lexical phrases and syntax are vital. The input ideas and its output representations are purely based on all the above lexical categories.

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