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# Linear Order and the Construction of Meaning: Is Syntax Deceptive?

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## **Linear order and the construction of meaning Is syntax deceptive?**

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### Abstract

It is commonly assumed that the syntax of a sentence and its semantic interpretation cannot differ radically, if some kind of coherence is to be maintained. We analyse here some examples that tend to show that syntax sometimes imposes its own rules, regardless of the semantic data, and that the interpretation is then saved because of our general cognitive knowledge about the world. Conversely semantics sometimes "twists" the grammatical rules so as to enrich the linguistic tools the speaker requires for a better encoding of his/her communicative desires.

Il est communément admis que la syntaxe d'une phrase et sa sémantique fonctionnent de manière harmonieuse, pour que la langue soit cohérente. Nous analysons ici quelques exemples où la syntaxe impose ses propres règles, en dépit des données sémantiques, et où ce sont nos connaissances cognitives générales qui nous permettent de construire convenablement le sens. A l'inverse, la sémantique peut "tordre" certaines règles syntaxiques pour permettre à l'énonciateur une meilleure stratégie communicative.

The question that will be addressed here concerns the link that exists between syntax and semantics. This is not in itself an original topic, but we intend to discuss this phenomenon in relation to the theme of the Conference organised by the LERMA, namely: What relationship exists between form and meaning? And could syntax be deceptive, misleading?

Syntax and semantics co-participate in the construction of meaning in various ways, but they often oppose each other, because of their own way of functioning: syntax is rather simple, and consists of a small number of rules, compared to the intricacies of

the lexicon and its network of semantic features. Syntax is dependent on the human characteristics of sound production, which require that words be pronounced one after the other, hence the linear order of the sentences, regardless of their semantic complexities.

The question which immediately arises is the following: could syntax be deceptive, misleading? The answer we want to argue here is that syntax is often misleading. Syntax is misleading, because of its own constraints, and in particular owing to the fact, mentioned above, that the words must follow one another, and this constraint forbids the components of the lexicon to relate freely. Our vocal organs function like a violin, and not like a piano, which can play ten notes at a time, just like the lexicon which articulate various shades of meaning and varied combinations of data.

In our first part, we shall discuss how syntax tackles the problem of the linear order, and why it cannot always mirror semantics. The consequence is that it is misleading in some cases. The examples are taken from English and from French.

In our second part, we shall see how some semantic data tend to reorganize syntax, making use of patterns not directly ready for them.

If there seems to exist a kind of war between these two domains, each one prevailing over the other at times, other domains interfere, such as phonetics, pragmatics, the rules of discourse, but we will not have time to take them into consideration here.

### 1. Linear order : syntactic constraints

We generally tend to consider that syntax and semantics are working hand in hand, and that the syntactic rules of a language do not contradict themselves in order for the right interpretation to be always construed. But this is only partly true in a simple sentence, and often totally false in a complex one.

This can be easily exemplified by the interpretation of the negation in the following example:

(1) I didn't say that to hurt your feelings

In (1) we need to attach the negation to "did", in accordance with negation rules, but the negation does not actually bear on the structure [I-said that]. It bears on the infinitive. In other words, by uttering: *I didn't say that*, the speaker is not denying that he said something, but he means, because of the infinitive: *I said that, but I didn't mean to hurt your feelings*. In syntax, the negation appears in the main clause, but in semantics the interpretation of the negation is on the subordinate clause. This is a very simple example of a deceptive structure, but, as the whole structure is understood globally, and not word after word, nobody even notices the incoherence.

Yet the linear order is important in a language like English or French where declensions have disappeared, except for personal pronouns<sup>1</sup>, and where the syntactic function of a Noun Phrase is given by its position before or after the verb. The following sentences are understood differently because of the SVO word order:

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<sup>1</sup> English and French differ on this point: in English the word order remains the same for the direct object: *I saw John/I saw him*, whereas in French the personal pronoun appears as a clitic: *Je vois Jean/Je le vois*.

- (2) John criticized Mary
- (3) Mary criticized John

John is the subject in (2) and the object in (3).

The SVO word order gradually became the rule in the Middle English period, and in France the rationalist grammarians of the seventeenth century with Port-Royal insisted on what they considered the natural order of the words: the cause must appear before the effect, hence the subject before the predicate.<sup>2</sup> This word-order is the basis of the syntactic rules, and for instance the link between the subject and the verb is marked by the agreement on the verb.

This brief introduction only recalls well-known facts, but we feel that they are too often disregarded, and this leads to interrogations that might not be entirely relevant.

### 1.1. Simple sentences in English, and the Subject-Verb Phrase relation

Let us compare :

- (4) This book is heavy, and
- (5) This book is difficult

In each case we think that a quality of the book is being predicated by the speaker. But are these two qualities understood similarly? They are not. In (5) we are giving our viewpoint on the content of the book, and we mean that it is difficult to read/to understand the book. The quality *difficult* is predicated of a process: *to read this book is difficult*, not of the book itself, even if the third person singular agreement suggests that *difficult* should be semantically linked to the subject.

Why is it then possible to understand a sentence that is, syntactically speaking, misleading, or at least incomplete?

It is the semantic features of the adjective *difficult* and our general cognitive knowledge which tell us that a difficulty can only be the difficulty of a process, because a process requires an Agent acting on an entity, and the difficulty is the difficulty felt by the Agent during the process.

With modals in their epistemic reading, there is no semantic linking between the subject and the modal, despite the word order. In:

- (6) John must have missed the train

the speaker assesses the chances that the relation [John – missed the train] might be an accurate description of what happened. The scope of the modal is the predicative relation and not "John", because only a process can be considered sure, likely, uncertain... The same remark can be made about the French equivalent, which is even more deceptive: *Jean a dû rater le train*, where the verb *devoir* is conjugated in the passé composé<sup>3</sup>, but does not mean that the hypothesis was made in the past. It was made at

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<sup>2</sup> See Roberto Pellerey for a complete analysis of this evolution.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike English, the French "passé composé" is used to refer to past events, with a definite date: *Jean a vu ce film il y a deux ans. John saw this film two years ago.*

Speech Time<sup>4</sup>, but it is the event/eventuality *rater le train* which belongs to the past, if it did take place.

## 1.2. Complex sentences in English, and the Subject-Verb Phrase relation

The discussion of the modal *must* suggests that languages need to distinguish between what can be said of individuals/entities, and what can be said of events/processes. Not all nouns can be associated with any verb. It would be odd to say: *My brother took place yesterday*, whereas *the negotiation took place yesterday* is perfectly fine. Yet *my brother* can appear as the Noun Phrase before a verb denoting the existence of an event:

(7) My brother happened to meet Mary on the market yesterday

What "happened" here is the meeting of my brother with Mary: *my brother met Mary yesterday*. The verb *happen* encodes the speaker's assessment of this event, which he had not expected. By using *happen*, he expresses his surprise, but no semantic link exists between "my brother" and "happened"<sup>5</sup>.

A clearer illustration can be given by another well-known "deceptive" structure, the one found with *sure*<sup>6</sup>:

(8) John is sure to win his match

(9) The boat is sure to sink

do not mean, despite the word order and the third-person agreement, that John or the boat are sure of anything. What is sure, according to the speaker is that John will win his match, and that the boat will sink: [John -win his match] is sure/ [the boat-sink]is sure.

To encode John's certainty, we must use another structure:

(10) John is sure of winning his match

This means that it is the type of complement structure (To+V / V-ing) that enables us to build the right interpretation.

We have so far discussed the link between the subject and the verb Phrase, and the distinction that must be made between the syntactic subject, which is responsible for the agreement with the verb, and the semantic/notional subject, the entity about which something is said. Nothing very original was presented<sup>7</sup> here. But the link between the verb and its complement is worth considering in detail, in particular when this complement receives the Accusative Case.

## 1.3. Complex sentences in English and the Verb-Object relation.

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<sup>4</sup> This epistemic utterance could be replaced by: *il doit avoir raté son train*, which is similar to the English construction.

<sup>5</sup> *John happened* makes sense in the following co-text: *her life was very sad until John happened*, which can be paraphrased by: *until John became her boyfriend*, which is the expression of an event.

<sup>6</sup> See Gérard Mélis et Paul Larreya, *inter alia*, for analyses of this phenomenon

<sup>7</sup> We do not have time here to discuss unaccusative verbs, and their lack of subject.

As far as the linear order is concerned, a sentence encoding someone's point of view with the verb *believe* will receive the following pattern, if the infinitive is chosen: [X believes Y to V], and will yield :

- (11) John believes Peter to be a doctor
- (12) John believes him to be a doctor

How are we to understand the Accusative Case on *him*?

If we compare the sentences with the simple sentences: *John believes Peter/John believes him*, the interpretation is straightforward and can be paraphrased by: *John trusts Peter/him*, with the Accusative Case clearly designating Peter as the object of the verb. The interpretation follows from the syntactic rule positing that the subject is before the verb and the object after.

But can we draw the same conclusion about (12)? In other words, is there a semantic link between the verb and *him*, namely Peter? Our answer is NO, no matter what the Accusative suggests. The verb *believe* is a two-place predicate: the subject has a certain belief about the object, but the object of a certain belief can only be a proposition and not an entity. By saying *John believes him*, the speaker means in fact: *John believes that what Peter said is true*. Resorting to the simple sentence is a kind of summary, a "shortcut", whose interpretation can be retrieved from the co-text. What about: *John believes him to be a doctor*? Is there a notional link between *believe* and *him*? If there was one, the structure would be:

John believes him [him to be a doctor], and the verb *believe* would be considered as a three-place predicate. which does not really make sense. The structure is then:

John believes [him to be a doctor]

with *him* belonging to the subordinate clause, and not to the main clause, contrary to: John asked Mary[for PRO to lock the door], where *Mary* is at the same time the complement of *ask* (a three-place predicate) and the subject, via PRO, of *lock the door*. This structure is derived from the lexicon, from the semantic features of the verb *ask*.

This structure raised a problem for the Case theory, as only verbs and prepositions could assign Cases, and ECM (Exceptional Case Marking operation) was then imagined to account for the Accusative Case.

The hypothesis we propose here is based on the idea that syntax and semantics are not always working hand in hand. Syntax follows its own constraints, and is particularly sensitive to dependency data. In a SVO language, like English<sup>8</sup>, with a fixed word order, the first Noun Phrase (the first argument) receives the Nominative Case and the second (the second argument) the Accusative Case. The Accusative Case is thus always a dependent Case and it is no wonder that it appears with infinitive clauses, which are dependent clauses<sup>9</sup>. As the dependency of the clause cannot be ascribed to the clause itself –only Noun Phrases receive Cases- we suggest that it is the first Noun Phrase in the dependent clause that receives a dependent Case, hence the Accusative. But this Case is a syntactic marking, not a semantic one.

The lack of semantic/notional link between the so-called object of *believe* and *believe* can be shown by the following occurrence:

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<sup>8</sup> We shall see that French word order is less fixed.

<sup>9</sup> They are also dependent for their temporal interpretation. See Girard-Gillet, 2001

(13) John believes Peter/him to be a liar.

If there was some kind of link between the subject and the verb, the sentence would imply: *John believes him*, and we would get a contradictory reading, namely: John believes him -> John believes that what Peter said is true, and John believes that Peter is a liar, hence that what he said is not true...

The following arguments demonstrate that it is the whole infinitive that is the object of *believe*:

(14) \*John believed Mary himself to be English  
is not felicitous, and must be replaced by (15)

(15) John believed himself Mary to be English

where Mary is the subject of the infinitive and the first element of the subordinate clause.

But the (14) pattern is possible with *persuade*:

(16) John persuaded Mary himself to change jobs

since Mary is the complement of *persuade* and thus belongs to the matrix clause. Its Accusative Case is assigned by the verb *persuade*.

In Generative Grammar, the verbs *persuade* and *promise* were used to show that two kinds of subject interpretation existed in English for infinitive clauses:

(17) John persuaded Mary to come back home early

(18) John promised Mary to come back home early

Despite the same word order, it is *Mary* that is understood as the subject of *come back* in (17) but it is *John* in (18); hence the idea that there are object-control verbs and subject-control verbs. The problem is that, apart from *promise*, there does not seem to exist another three-place predicate belonging to the subject-control class of verbs. Does this mean that Semantics (the lexicon) forced its own rules on Syntax, imposing that, for convenience sake, the entity having a notional link with the second verb be closer to this verb than to the matrix verb? This would explain why there are so many three-place predicates functioning as object-control verbs: *ask, tell, force, compel, advise, help*<sup>10</sup>, *urge*, etc. We shall see in our second part how Semantics forces its way into Syntax in resultative constructions.

#### 1.4. Complex sentences in French

It is worth having a look at French data now, and a discuss of the causation pattern with *faire* will show the same discrepancy between syntax and semantics. Here are two occurrences, one with full Noun Phrases, and one with pronouns:

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<sup>10</sup> For an interesting discussion of the two constructions of *help*, see Mathilde Pinson's Ph.D Dissertation.

(19) Jean a fait lire le livre à Marie  
Jean has made read the book to Marie (word for word translation)  
John made Mary read the book

(20) Jean le lui a fait lire  
Jean it her has made read (word for word translation)  
John made her read it

In (19) the sentence is necessarily interpreted as meaning that Marie read the book, despite the fact that *Marie* is understood syntactically as the indirect object of *lire*. The pattern is in fact the pattern of any sentence with a three-place predicate, such as:

(21) Jean a donné un livre à Marie (John gave a book to Mary)  
(22) Jean a reçu une lettre de Marie (John received a letter from Mary)  
(23) Jean partage ses revenus avec son fils (John shares his income with his son)

In each case the third argument is introduced by a preposition, and is analysed as an indirect object. In the causative pattern, there are three Noun phrases: Jean, le livre, and Marie. The first receives the Nominative Case –only visible with a pronoun- the second the Accusative Case and the third appears as the complement of the preposition.

The use of personal pronouns yields sentence (20), but *le* is an Accusative and *lui* a dative<sup>11</sup>. The same contradiction between the syntactic data and the semantic interpretation exists.

In English, the SVO order is always maintained: *John gave a book to Mary/John gave it to Mary*, except for: *John gave her the book*<sup>12</sup>.

In French, the right interpretation is then derived from the lexical features, the theta-roles, and not from the syntactic ones: Marie is a human being, and only Marie can be the semantic/notional subject of *read*.

The sentences so far analysed had three Noun Phrases. What happens when only two Noun Phrases are used, as in:

(24) Jean a fait rentrer la poubelle (John had the bin brought back in)  
(25) Jean a fait rentrer son fils (John had/made his son come back home)

We understand from our general knowledge that someone brought the bin in in (24), but that the son came back home by himself in (25). Syntax does not help us here at all; on the contrary, it considers that *la poubelle* and *le fils* are direct objects, misleading us completely if syntax was our only clue to the interpretation.

Here are two other examples:

(26) Jean a fait lire Marie  
(27) Jean la fait lire

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<sup>11</sup>The word order is different for the first and the second person: Jean me le fait lire/Jean te le fait lire; with the following order : dative/accusative, whereas for the third person, we have the accusative, then the dative: Jean le lui fait lire. We do not have time to discuss this point.

<sup>12</sup> See Girard-Gillet 2006



They show that when only two Noun Phrases are present, only the Nominative and the Accusative are invited to play a role, which is economical to a certain extent, even if it is rather disturbing for too-logically-minded linguists. And yet, the Agentivity of Marie can be said to be the same in (19) and in (26), with the interpretation that the process took place, with Marie as its Agent. This is another piece of evidence that relying on syntactic Cases can be misleading. Fortunately we know how to resort to syntax when it is necessary, but we also know that we must prefer the semantic data when syntax leads us astray.

Interestingly, the structure can even be made more complex when the indirect object introduced by *à/au* is no longer available because of the constraints on the lexical verb, as in:

(28) Jean a lu le conte aux enfants (John read the tale to the children)

The causative structure needs then to resort to another preposition, namely *par*:

(29) Jean a fait lire le conte aux enfants par Marie (John had Mary read the tale to the children.

The "par-complement" can be considered as the equivalent of the Agent in a passive construction, but no passive is present in sentence (29). We could suggest then that it is the semantic use of "par" that syntax adopts to give us a clue about how to construe the whole meaning. And here semantics prevails over syntax, which seems not to have the necessary resources to offer a different type of indirect complement.

Without "par" the sentence is ambiguous, and can either mean that the children read the tale themselves, or that someone read the tale to them.

We take these facts to corroborate the view that semantics has to adapt to the possibilities syntax offers, however reduced they may be.

## 2. Linear order: the role of semantics

### 2.1. The constructions of *give*, *say* and *tell* in English

We shall not discuss the dative-shift alternation vs the prepositional construction<sup>13</sup> when both are possible, and when the choice depends mainly on information packaging data. We shall only analyse the construction that is favoured when *give* does not involve the transfer of an entity from one individual to another, but when it is close to *create*, *give rise to*, *bring about*.

In the following example there is no transfer, but something new happens, is created, because of someone else's activity<sup>14</sup>:

(30) His music gave Mary a headache

The headache felt by Mary is the consequence of the music, and *give* only means that the music is responsible for it, in a cause-consequence relation.

The same can be said about the next examples, taken from *Google*:

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<sup>13</sup> See Pinker, 1989, and Goldberg, 1995, for discussions on ditransitive syntax.

<sup>14</sup> See Oehrle (1976) for the first discussion of this meaning, with the sentence: Nixon gave Mailer a book.

(31) Whispered conversations about money worries, which break off as soon as children come near, may give them the idea that a terrible disaster is about to strike.

(32) The water is so hard that it will give the kettle an internal fur coat in no time.

(33) The fact that Anne now relied on her gave Joan a curious but nonetheless pleasurable sense of power.

(34) a report by the National Council of Public Morals on the Cinema had scrutinized some evidence from children themselves on whether the moving pictures gave them bad dreams.

Heidi Harley (2003), who worked on the two constructions of *give*, proposes a locative interpretation for the structure under discussion:

(35) Sandy gave Terry a copy of the new grammar (ex 54):

[VP Agent [V' CAUSE [ PP Goal [P' HAVE [DP Theme ]]]]] -> Cause Terry to have<sup>15</sup>

We suggest that the dative-shift structure is favoured because there is a closer link between "Terry" and "the copy" in the linear order, and this contributes to our treating together [Terry-the copy], both depending on *gave*. Semantics seems to be using a device already present in English grammar, namely the dative-shift construction to reach its proper aim: the right interpretation of *give*, as a causative verb, and it does so by taking advantage of a syntactic choice, and by more or less "twisting" its standard meaning.

Is it syntax that solves the problem of ambiguity? To a certain extent, it is, but if a verb, like the verb *give*, had not developed a broad range of meaning, syntax would not have any role to play. Likewise, the verbs *say* and *tell* exhibit two different structures, and we can wonder whether they are not relying on syntactic possibilities too, in order to differentiate their own meanings. We know that *say* focuses on the message and *tell* on the addressee, and interestingly *say* cannot be constructed as its French equivalent *dire* with a dative<sup>16</sup>:

(36) Je lui ai dit qu'il était en retard

(37) \*I said him that he was late

The use of the preposition *to*,

(38) I said to him that he was late

could be a sign of a looser link between the verb and the indirect object. In his analysis of *say*, Goosens (1982:115) found only 5,5% of cases where *say* was used with *to*, and the mention of the co-speaker. With *say* the addressee is superfluous, in a sense, because by reading:

(39) They say they have wiped smallpox off the face of the earth (*Google*)

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<sup>15</sup> For the prepositional construction, Harley opts for:

[VP Agent [V' CAUSE [PP Theme [P'Loc [PP to Goal]]]]]

<sup>16</sup> The same impossibility exists with *introduce*, *suggest*, *explain*, which all stress the message.

we receive the information mentioned in the subordinate clause, even if we were not the direct addressee of the message.

When the addressee is present, it is *tell* that is favoured, and the dative is the case assigned to him/her. With *tell* the addressee is supposed to know more at the end of the utterance, because the message was meant for him/her:

(40) I was remembering what my father had told me about other conquering heroes who had tried to attack the great bear. (BNC)

(41) She told him he was lucky to be married to a "beautiful, intelligent artist". (BNC)

This explains the difference between:

(42) Mary said "hello",

where *say* is used to report someone's words, and:

(43) My neighbour told me his name / he told me what his name was,

which does not repeat the neighbour's words, but which encodes that the speaker now knows what his name is. In sentence (43) the name itself is not given, and anyone reading the sentence is at a loss to guess it. But as the recipient of the message, the speaker is now aware of it. The transfer of the information took place prior to (43), but in sentence (43) the speaker is only giving the result of the transfer. We suggest then that with *tell*, there is an interpretation of the words pronounced by the first speaker, and a reformulation of them. That is why we can say: *he told me the time*, and not: \*he said the time to me. Other terms, like "story", can be also be a complement to *tell*:

(44) I find it a completely achieved poem; probably Coleridge was lying when he told the story of the person from Porlock, nearly twenty years later. (BNC)

This does not, of course, disallow an entire message, as in:

(45) Mr Ward told The Independent: 'Mr Rowland himself telephoned me the next day, said he was appalled at what had happened to my daughter, and gave me his direct line telephone number, saying he would be there every day from 9 to 6. (BNC)

Note in passing that *give* requires the Goal, but *say* does not, as it is retrieved from the co-text.

Drawing from H.Harley, and her structures for *give*, we suggest the following structures for *say* and *tell*, in at least one of its uses:

SAY : localisation of the message in the addressee, if any:

[VP Agent [V' CAUSE [PP Theme [P' Loc [PP to recipient]]]]]

TELL : interpretation/reformulation of the message:

[VP Agent [V' CAUSE [PP Recipient [P' KNOW [DP Theme ]]]]]

The different interpretations of the passive: *John was said to be rich / John was told to be quieter* can be derived from these structures, but a discussion of their characteristics would take us too far from our topic.

## 2.2. Semantic classes of verbs and potential interpretations

Beth Levin, 1993, 2009, and B. Levin/Malka Rappaport-Hovav, 2001, have been working for many years on the semantic classes of verbs and have shown that the richer a verb is semantically speaking, the more syntactic structures it will develop. They have then proved that sometimes syntax is determined by semantics, which is not what we have seen so far in our first part. But as syntax and semantics must necessarily be related, we can hardly wonder why this should not be so.

Manner of motion verbs offer an interesting domain of investigation, and the comparison they made between the verbs *run* and *go* prove that *run* which contains more semantic features than *go* can appear in many different structures. They compare sentences (46-51) with (52-57) which are deviant, except when *go* has its basic meaning of a directed movement.

(46) Pat ran (activity)

(47) Pat ran to the beach (directed motion)

(48) Pat ran herself ragged (change of state)

(49) Pat ran her shoes to shreds (change of state)

(50) Pat ran clear of the falling rocks (directed motion)

(51) The coach ran the athletes around the track (causation)

(52) The students went (activity)

(53) The students went to the beach (directed motion)

(54) \* the jetsetters went themselves ragged (change of state)

(55) \* The runner went his shoes to shreds (change of state)

(56) \* The pedestrians went clear of the oncoming car (directed motion)

(57) \* The coach went the athletes around the track (causation)

For Levin and Rappaport-Hovav it seems to be impossible to turn *go* into a change of state verb or into a causation verb, since its semantic features only enable it to express movement, and to behave as an intransitive verb. To develop the semantic features of *run*, syntax offers its transitive and resultative patterns, yielding the sentences mentioned above.

Things are in fact more complex and the semantic features of these two verbs do require more work. An interesting discussion is offered by Kudrnacova (2008), who shows that not all manner of motion verbs behave like *run*:

(58) \*John strutted/staggered/limped himself to the park

(59) \* John jogged Michael to the park.

Her explanation is that these verbs encode movements that are not subject to the executor's control in their entirety (2008:11).

We do not have time to discuss here the differences between a change of state and a change of location<sup>17</sup>, but we wish to suggest other semantic characteristics that might account for the syntactic constructions these verbs allow. The verb *go* seems more abstract and can denote the passage from an absence of movement to the beginning of a movement (inchoation), regardless of the means used, as in:

(60) *Ready, Steady, Go!*

No movement in space is implied in:

(61) *My alarm clock went off at seven*

(62) *The bomb went off,*

but there is nonetheless an abstract passage from a lack of activity to the activity inherent to the object concerned: an alarm clock is supposed to ring at a certain time, and a bomb is meant to explode.<sup>18</sup>

The verb *go* can also refer to a change of state for an object on sale in: *going, going, gone*, meaning *sold* in an auction. An anonymous referee mentioned the following sentence: *to go red in the face*, which is another type of change of state. *Google* gives occurrences of *go ragged*, such as:

(63) *My breath went ragged in the cold.*

Unlike example (54) where the jetsetters would be understood as the agent of the change of state on themselves, the sentence *my breath went ragged* suggests that the subject is affected by the process, without any agentivity on its part. The ungrammaticality of (54) can then be accounted for by the thematic role of the subject. And interestingly, Kudrnacova distinguishes between verbs encoding the executor's control on the activity and those which do not.

Unlike *go*, which has an unaccusative interpretation, *run* can function as a causative verb with a transitive use:

(64) *She ran him a bath* (an Agent initiates the movement of the water).

It can also denote a change of state:

(65) *The Worst Case: What If the Water Ran Dry in the Japanese Reactors?*  
(*Google*)

These examples show very clearly how semantic features can determine what syntax can do. A lot of research is currently going on to define what parameters are most relevant. Among them we can note the opposition between internal and external causation.

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<sup>17</sup> Kudrnacova disagrees with Huddleston & Pullum, and mentions that for them "assigning a location to something is comparable to assigning it a property" (2002:257).

<sup>18</sup> A comprehensive study of path verbs or manner of motion verbs needs to consider the semantic roles of the particles that can accompany them in a satellite-framed language. (See Talmy's work)

### 3.3. Semantics coerces syntax into new patterns.

Sentence:

(66) John talked Mary into resigning

is a standard construction of a resultative structure, but it is syntactically speaking something of a linguistic monster. Why? Because *talk* is an intransitive verb, whose complement is introduced by *to*: *John talked to Mary*. \**John talked Mary* is unfelicitous. How can we then account for (66) without endangering the rules of syntax?

Other verbs appear in this pattern, and among them we find: *blackmail, brainwash, threaten, lure, coax, trick*, which encode the manner/means resorted to by an individual to get the expected result.

(67) But that's no reason to brainwash them into staying at home. (BNC)

(68) The warmth that had come with his laughter faded, and she felt he had tricked her into saying more than she intended. (BNC)

But these verbs, unlike *talk*, are transitive verbs, and they can even be turned into the passive:

(69) He was blackmailed into supporting Castro (*Google*)

(70) Nine women were tricked into thinking they were reality TV show contestants (*Google*)

(71) Sirhan now says he was brainwashed into assassinating Robert Kennedy (*Google*)

We can posit that *talk*, which involves the oral use of language, shares these features with the verbs mentioned above, which all involve that something was said<sup>19</sup>. The syntactic structure in which these verbs appear is then adopted by the verb *talk* because it belongs to the same semantic field: it can then introduce its object directly, and, still more important, it expresses, thanks to the preposition *into*, the process that is brought about by the words pronounced. The whole structure is borrowed, and it is what makes the enrichment of the verb viable.<sup>20</sup>

Here we have a case of semantic data imposing their contents and their expressions on syntax.

### Conclusion

To understand the link between form and meaning is what linguistics is about. Syntax cannot alone construe meaning, mainly because of the constraint of the word

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<sup>19</sup> An anonymous reviewer wondered whether *lure, trick* and *coax* necessarily involve something being said. We think that the means used to get a certain result are indeed different, but they all involve some kind of message, whether it be oral, written, signed. For *coax*, the Collins Cobuild definition is *if you coax someone to do something, you try to persuade them to do it by speaking in a gentle and pleasant way*. A different way of influencing people is the use of violence and you can indeed bully someone into doing something, but here again the bully boy needs to say what he wants. Here are other occurrences: *Julia sometimes called him 'Daddy', especially when she was trying to cajole him into a pleasanter mood; she couldn't believe he could be duped into thinking that Jackson actually worked* (K. Atkinson, *Case Histories*)

<sup>20</sup> Construction Grammars posit that it is the structure itself – a ternary structure here – that is responsible for the new meaning. See Goldberg, 1992, and the discussion of: *She baked him a cake*.

order, the surface structure, to use a term coined fifty years ago by Chomsky. But traditional grammars had already noticed the absence of a direct link between a syntactic function and a semantic interpretation. It is through the complex interactions between what the words co-occurring in the sentence conjure up and the position they appear in that language enables us to communicate our thoughts. This explains the discussions still taking place between the hypotheses developed by Pustejovsky, Fodor, Lepore, Wechsler among others, about what is syntactically relevant and what is semantically fundamental, as the parts played by the two domains are often difficult to differentiate.

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