

Title: Complementation in English and its formalization

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ABSTRACT:

As the title indicates, I shall talk about complementation in English and how it might be formalized. The emphasis will be on laying out the facts as clearly as possible, though I shall indicate briefly how the facts described can be formalized, and without either movement or phonetically null elements.

The description reveals five problems which any adequate formalization of complementation must account for. Two are the well known problems of subcategorization and projection. A single solution for this pair of problems was set out by HPSG. The three additional problems are the polyvalence problem, the polyadicity problem and the permutation problem.

Let me explain what these last three problems are. Complement polyvalence is where the very same word admits complements of different syntactic categories, though the word's meaning is invariant under such changes. A well-known example of such a word in English is the copula *to be*, whose complements include adjective phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases and adverbial phrases. Complement polyadicity occurs when words have optional complements. Correlated with their omission is a systematic shift in sense. Here are some examples from English: *to eat* vs. *to devour*, *to arrive* vs. *to reach*, *to dress* vs. *to clothe* and *to meet* vs. *to encounter*. Complement permutation is where a single word permits its complements to permute though preserving its sense. These words include, but are not limited to, verbs with indirect objects: *to give* (*Alice gave a ball to Bill*; *Alice gave Bill a ball*).

Time permitting, I shall sketch the formalization.

My recent research has been to modify the formalization used for English complementation for application to Classical Sanskrit, a reputedly word order free language. Recently, I have turned my attention to Mandarin.