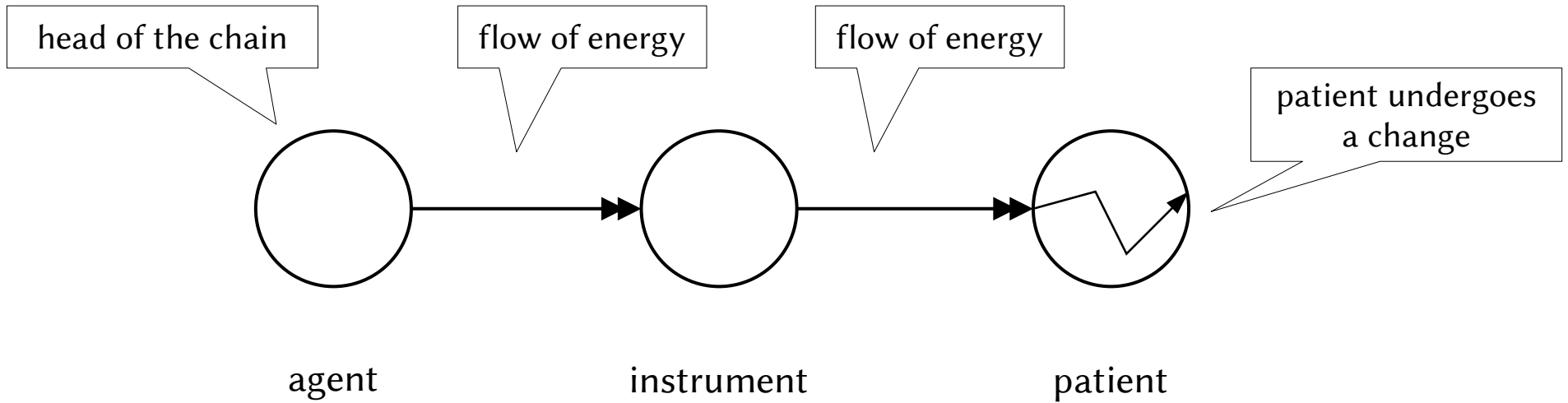


# Morphosyntax & semantics – lecture 11

## The structure of events

# Action chain



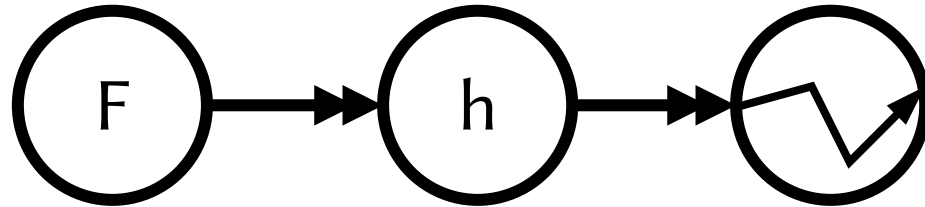
# Agent vs. theme orientation

- Sentences can be oriented in two ways as far as the choice of the subject (i.e. the trajector of the process) is concerned.
  - **Agent-oriented construals** focus on more active participants, usually the initiator of the flow of energy.
  - **Theme-oriented construals** focus on more passive participants, usually the recipient of the energy.
    - The construal may also involve a **zero**, i.e. a participant that does not take part in the energy flow and is not affected by the process.
- These two orientations form a spectrum; there are many in-between variants.

# Agent-oriented (transitive sentence)

(1)(a) *Floyd broke the glass with a hammer.*

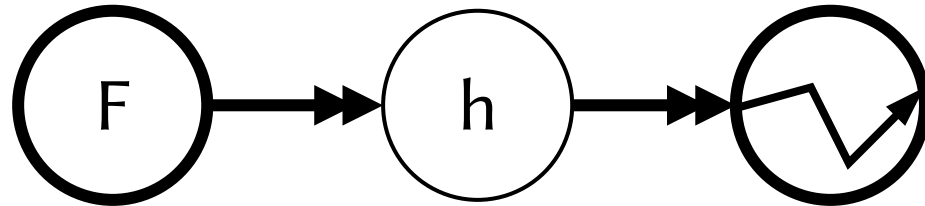
- All elements of the action chain are profiled.



# Agent-oriented (transitive sentence)

(1)(b) *Floyd broke the glass.*

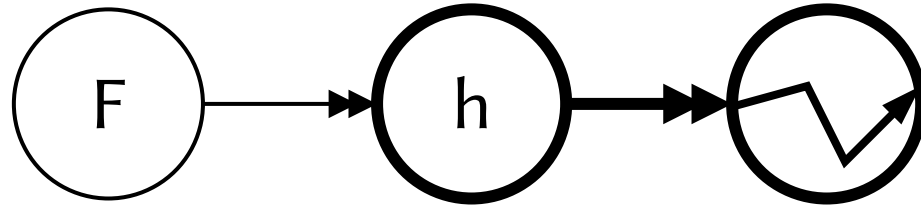
- The agent and the patient are profiled.



# Agent-oriented? (transitive sentence)

(1)(c) *A hammer broke the glass.*

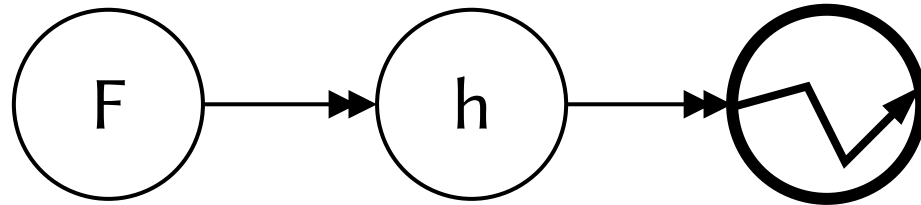
- The instrument and the patient are profiled.
- The construal is between agent and theme orientation.



# Theme-oriented (intransitive sentence)

(1)(d) *The glass broke.*

- Only the patient is profiled.



# Trajectors in theme-oriented construals

## **Mover**

- (2)(a) *The boat sank.*  
(b) *The door opened.*

## **Patient**

- (3)(a) *The ice melted.*  
(b) *The glass broke.*

## **Experiencer**

- (4)(a) *I itch all over.*  
(b) *He was sad.*

## **Zero**

- (5)(a) *The pole is long.*  
(b) *She's over there.*

# Setting-subject constructions

- In **setting-subject constructions** the place or the time of an event or another thing may be the trajector and function as the grammatical subject.

## Place

(6)(a) *The garden is swarming with bees.*

(b) *The sidewalk is bustling with shoppers.*

## Time

(7) *Thursday saw another startling development.*

## Thing

(8)(a) *My cat is crawling with fleas.*

(b) *The film stars Arnold Schwarzenegger.*

# Passivization

- Passivization (making a passive sentence from an active sentence) consists in promoting final elements of the action chain to the status of the trajector in a construal. This results in a more theme-oriented construal.

(1') *The glass was broken (by Floyd).*

- Passive sentences suggest that there is an energy flow from the agent to the patient, but since the patient is chosen as the trajector, the attention shifts away from the agent.

(2')(a) *The boat sank.* (no action implied)

(b) *The boat was sunk.* (someone's action implied)

# Resistance to passivization

- The action chain and energy flow explain why some active sentences resist passivization. This happens when a construal does not involve energy flow.

(9)(a) *I saw a snake.*

(b) ??? *A snake was seen by me.*

- Since settings do not take part in energy flow, the setting-subject sentences cannot be passivized.

(7') \* *Another startling development was seen by Thursday.*

# Resistance to passivization in Polish

(10)(a) *Ujrzałem słońce.*

(a') <sup>???</sup> *Słońce zostało ujrzone przeze mnie.*

(b) *Nasz projekt ujrzał światło dzienne.*

(b') \* *Światło dzienne zostało ujrzone przez nasz projekt.*

(c) *Ważę 90 kilogramów.*

(c') \* *90 kilogramów jest ważonych przeze mnie.*

(d) *Sześciopak zawiera 6 puszek.*

(d') \* *6 puszek jest zawieranych przez sześciopak.*

# Abstract settings

- *There-be* and *it-be* constructions can be viewed as a type of a setting-subject constructions with abstract or schematic settings.
- *There* sets up an abstract mental space that other words and phrases in the sentence furnish with participants and relations.
  - (11) *There is a chair in the room.*
- *It* often profiles general circumstances of events, e.g. weather conditions.
  - (12) *It is raining.*

# Setting-subject constructions in Polish

- (13) (a) *Warszawa* gości wielu turystów. (spatial setting)  
(b) *Rok 2020* przyniósł wiele zmian. (temporal setting)  
(c) *Cały stadion* wstał. (metonymy SETTING FOR PARTICIPANTS)
- (14) *W lesie* jest wilk.
- *Wilk* is the subject (nominative case!), but placing *w lesie* at the beginning increases the prominence and foregrounds the setting.
  - However, this is not a typical setting-subject construction, because (strictly speaking) the setting is not the subject.

# Agent-oriented sentence

	<i>Floyd broke the glass.</i>	
Noun phrase	<i>Floyd</i>	<i>the glass</i>
Grammatical function	subject	object
Prominence in construal	trajector	landmark
Role in the event	agent	patient

# Agent-oriented(?) sentence

	<i>A hammer broke the glass.</i>	
Noun phrase	<i>a hammer</i>	<i>the glass</i>
Grammatical function	subject	object
Prominence in construal	trajector	landmark
Role in the event	instrument	patient

# Theme-oriented sentence

	<i>The glass was broken by Floyd.</i>	
Noun phrase	<i>the glass</i>	<i>Floyd</i>
Grammatical function	subject	(prepositional) modifier
Prominence in construal	trajector	landmark
Role in the event	patient	agent

# Theme-oriented sentence

	<i>The <b>glass</b> broke.</i>
Noun phrase	<i>the glass</i>
Grammatical function	subject
Prominence in construal	trajector
Role in the event	patient

# Setting-subject sentence

	<i>The garden is swarming with bees.</i>	
Noun phrase	<i>the garden</i>	<i>bees</i>
Grammatical function	subject	(prepositional) complement
Prominence in construal	trajector	landmark
Role in the event	setting	agent

# References

- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
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