



# SYNTAX – SEMANTICS INTERFACE: A PLEA FOR A DEEP DEPENDENCY SENTENCE STRUCTURE

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Eva Hajičová

Charles University

Prague, Czech Republic

## IN COLLABORATION WITH

Václava Kettnerová, Veronika Kolářová, Markéta  
Lopatková, Jarmila Panevová, Dan Zeman and Jan Hajič  
(and with technical support of Jiří Mírovský)

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# MOTIVATION

two central objectives: arguments for **Deep** and **Dependency**

(a) the argumentation will be based on **linguistic** considerations

(b) the linguistic background – **Praguan:**

the structuralist tradition of the Prague School

the formal framework: **Functional Generative Description**

the experience with the building of the **Prague Dependency Treebank**

(c) **collective work** - the arguments are not novel but based on collected experience with the study and application of the deep syntactic dependency relations in the description of language;  
basic material: Czech, but comparative aspects taken into account as well

# OUTLINE

1. **Motivating** considerations
2. **Deep** (underlying, tectogrammatical, ...)
  - 2.1 Linguistic meaning vs. cognitive content
  - 2.2 Synonymy and Ambiguity
  - 2.3 Multilevel treatment of syntax: The case of PDT
3. **Dependency and valency**
  - 3.1 Historical excursion
  - 3.2 Arguments and adjuncts
4. **Grammar and lexicon**
5. **Challenges**
  - 5.1 Non-projectivity
  - 5.2 Coordination and apposition
  - 5.3 Reconstruction of surface deletions



- loví “catch” he/she/it/they -catch
- tlouště “chub” Gen/Acc sg,  
Nom/Acc pl
- na “on”
- višni Dat/Loc sg of “višeň”  
= “morello” / “morello-tree”
- structural interpretations:  
Subj – Verb – Object – Loc  
Is Subject or Object on  
the tree?  
Subj – Verb – Object – Instrument  
(?Manner)  
= morello as a bait put on  
a hook to catch fish

## 2. DEEP (UNDERLYING, TECTOGRAMMATICAL, SEMANTIC ...)

“To understand the ability of natural languages to serve as instrument to the **communication** of thoughts and ideas we must understand what it is that permits those who speak them consistently to connect the right **sounds** with the right **meanings**” (Katz 1966, p. 100)

“meanings”?

**Task of linguistics:** to specify the relation between the **outer shape** of sentences and their **semantic representations** (meanings) => how “**deep**”?

## 2.1 (COGNITIVE) CONTENT AND (LINGUISTIC) MEANING

the **borderlines** between **linguistic meaning** and **cognitive content**:

Illustration: semantic relationships between a **verb and its complementations**:

Tesnière (1959)    Fillmore (1968)

*The smoke* rose.

*John* likes fish.

*A hammer* broke the window.

*The tree* was struck by lightning.

1<sup>st</sup> actant

Objective

Dative

Instrument

Locative

Sgall & Hajičová (1970), A Functional Generative Description;

Tesnière (1959), Éléments de syntaxe structurale;

Fillmore (1968), The Case for Case; Halliday (1967), Notes on Transitivity



## 2.2 SYNONYMY AND AMBIGUITY

Two relations important with regard to the specification of the level of meaning;

- (a) synonymy
- (b) ambiguity
- **Synonymous** sentences: the same representation on the level of meaning, different forms
- **Ambiguous** sentences: different representations, same form

# THE RELATION OF SYNONYMY

Synonymy:

two sentences differing in the given semantic opposition  
have **the same truth conditions**

= there does not exist a situation when one sentence  
would be true while the other sentence would not

a proof of non-existence is not possible

→ always has a nature of a **hypothesis**  
but a useful **criterion for interchangeability**

## INTERCHANGEABILITY AS A CRITERION FOR SYNONYMY

*Pavel sold Jirka a car.*

$\leftrightarrow$  *Jirka bought a car from Pavel.*

*... with enthusiasm: not synonymous*

*He cut salami into five pieces.*

$\leftrightarrow$  *He cut five pieces from salami.*

*... and some salami was still left: not synonymous*

*synonymous:*

*I promised I will do it in time.  $\leftrightarrow$  I promised to do it in time.*

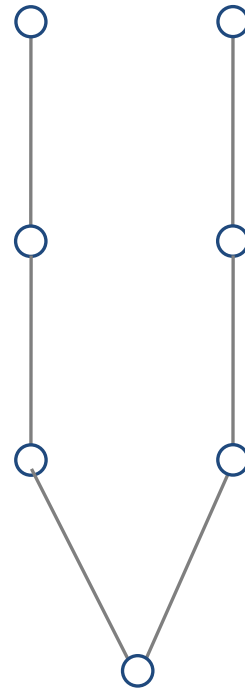
## HOMONYMY (AMBIGUITY)

tectogrammatical

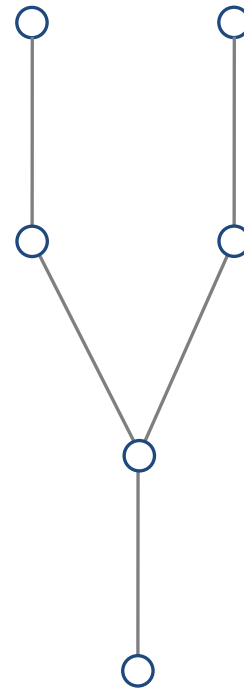
surface syntax

morphological

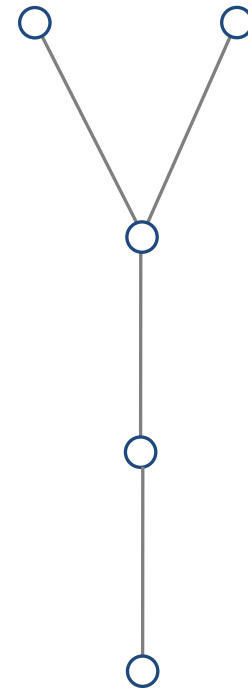
phonological



slepice  
[hen/s]

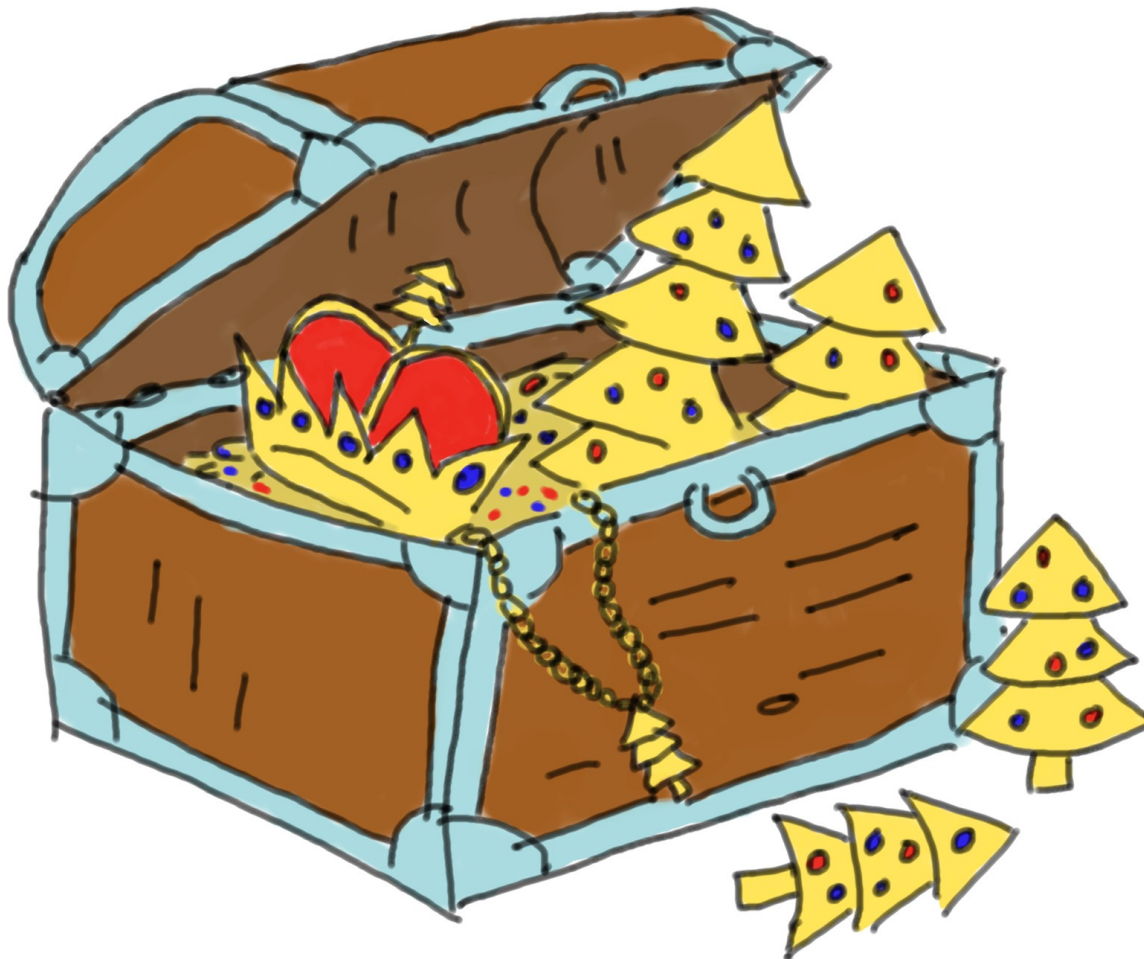


He saw a man  
with a  
telescope



criticism of  
the delegate

## 2.3. MULTILEVEL DESCRIPTION: THE CASE OF PDT



# MULTILAYER ANNOTATION SCHEME OF PDT (1)

The inclusion of an underlying (deep) level into the theoretical description of a language → postulation of a **multilayer scheme**

- The Prague Dependency treebank (PDT), v 3.0, Czech
- The Prague **Czech – English** Dependency Treebank, v 2.0, WSJ from Penn Treebank
- The Prague Dependency Treebank of **Spoken Czech**, v 1.0, conversations, interviews
- The "Faust" project treebank (Czech), small, user-generated content
- The Prague **Arabic** Dependency Treebank, sample annotated on TR

all (manually) annotated on the **deep (tectogrammatical) layer** and available from the LINDAT/CLARIN repository at <http://lindat.cz>

## MULTILAYER ANNOTATION SCHEME OF PDT (2)

based on the **theory** of [Functional Generative Description](#) (formulated in the 1960s)

the “[deep](#)” syntactic “**tectogrammatical**” level: dependency

conceptually **separated** from the [surface dependency structure](#) and its annotation  
[full alignment](#) between the elements (tree nodes) of both annotation layers  
[continuous](#) Czech texts  
[manual](#) annotation

**Size:** total number of documents annotated on all levels: 3,168,  
= 49,442 sentences, 833,357 tokens

PDT versions 1.0 and 2.0 available from the [Linguistic Data Consortium](#)

Other additions (such as discourse annotation) in PDT 2.5 and in **PDT 3.0**, both  
available from the [LINDAT/CLARIN repository](#) (Bejček et al. 2013)

# LAYERS OF PDT ANNOTATION

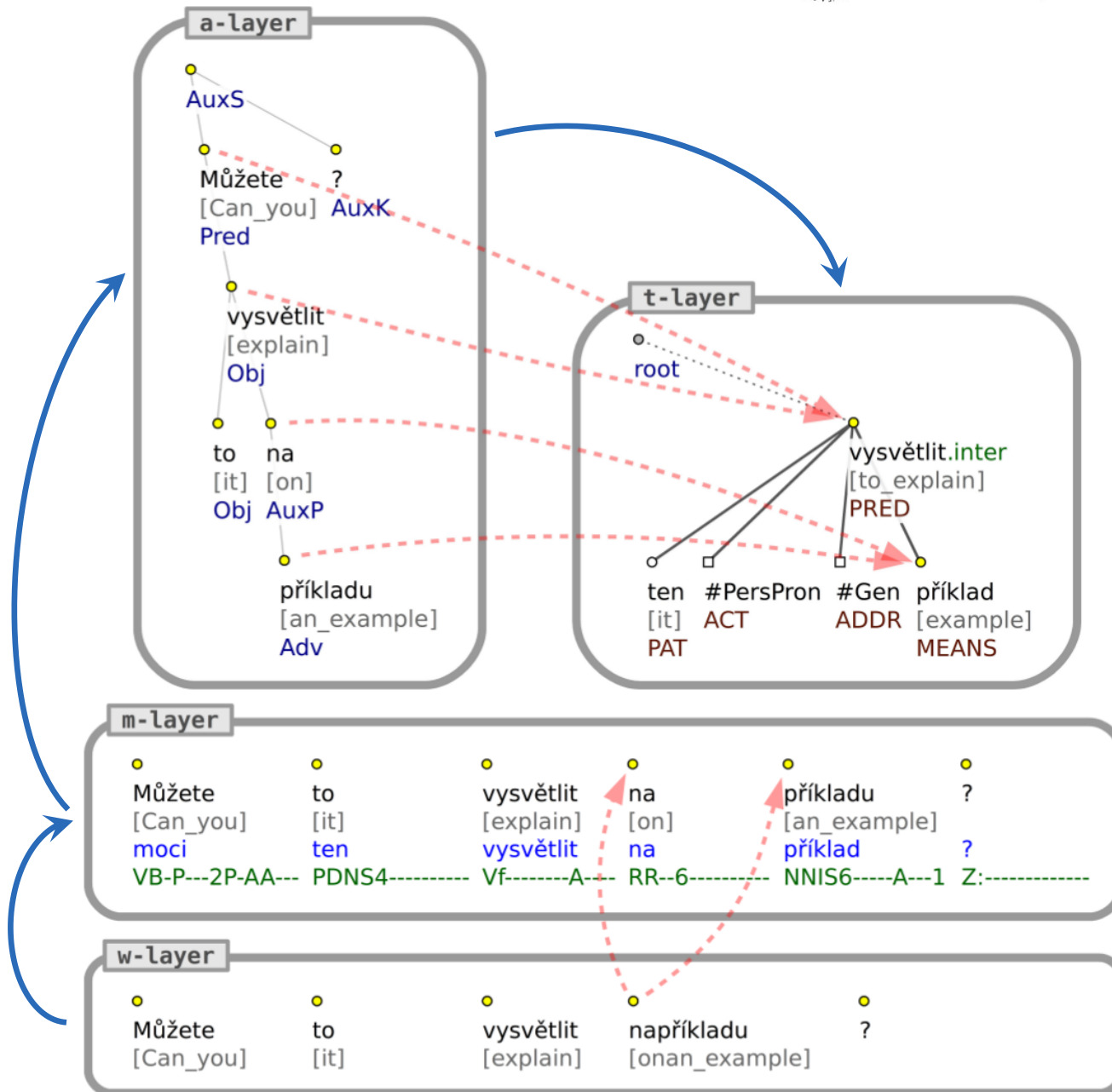
- (a) **morphological** layer: all elements (tokens) of the sentence get a lemma and a (disambiguated) morphological tag (= combination of morph. features)
- (b) **analytical** layer:
  - a **dependency tree**, with dep. relations such as subject, object, adverbial nodes for **all and only** lexically realized elements in the surface
- (c) **textogrammatical** layer: **deep dependency** syntactic relations
  - nodes **only** for autonomous meaningful units ( “**content**” words )
  - **function words** (prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs etc.) not as separate nodes – “converted” to labels at the autonomous units
  - WHY?** parallel with **inflectional endings, affixes ...**
  - (deep) **dependency relations** such as Actor, Patient, Addressee, and different kinds of circumstantial relations
  - (deep) **multiword expressions**: subtrees (*higher education institution*)
  - **topic-focus articulation**: contextual boundness
  - **coreference**: grammatical, textual, bridging
  - **discourse relations**: on top of the previous annotation



## COMPLEX LABELS OF NODES

Every node of the tectogrammatical representation is assigned a **complex label**:

- (i) **lexical** value of the word
- (ii) the “morphological” grammemes (values of **morphological categories**): Feminine, Plural with nouns, Preterite etc. with verbs etc.
- (iii) the ‘**functor**’: Actor, Patient,..., kinds of Adjuncts; plus ‘subfunctors’ for a more detailed classification of functors
- (iv) the **topic-focus articulation** attribute (TFA), three values for contextual boundness (contrastive and non-contrastive cb, nb)



# ANNOTATION OF INFORMATION STRUCTURE (TOPIC-FOCUS ARTICULATION)

WHY?

Semantic relevance:

*John only introduced Mary to SUE*

- (a) ... only to SUE (i.e. to nobody else),
- (b) only Mary to SUE (i.e. nobody else to nobody else),
- (c) only introduced Mary to SUE (he did not do anything else)

*Everyone in this room knows at least two languages.*

*At least two languages are known by everyone in this room.*

*Dogs must be CARRIED.*

*DOGS must be carried. = Carry DOGS.*

→ common denominator: position in deep order: **TOPIC – FOCUS**





Zpráva velmi příznivá – Češi udělali revoluci.

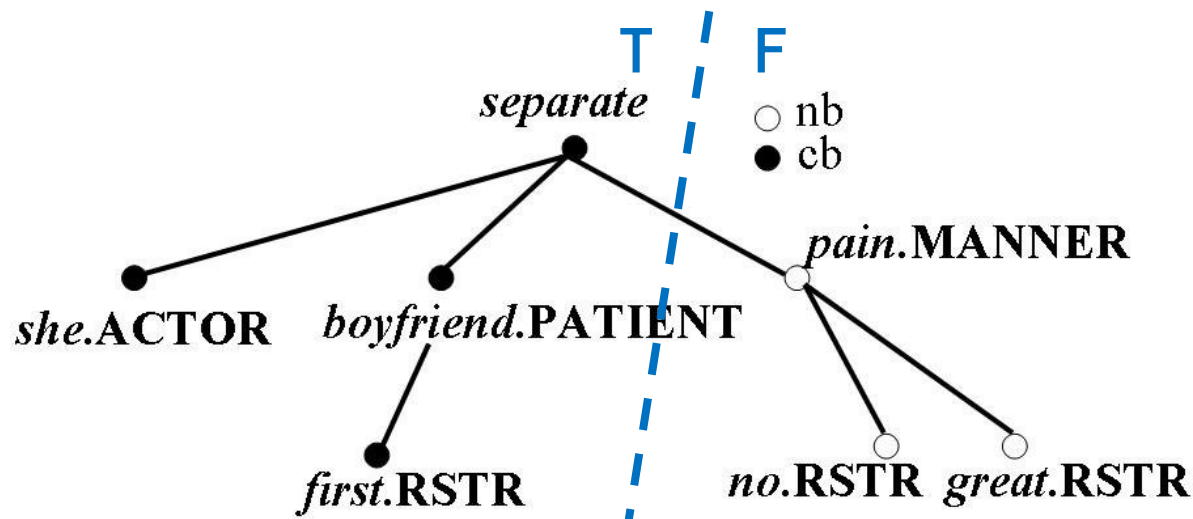
A méně příznivá – revoluci udělali Češi.

Excellent news: The Czechs made a revolution.

And the bad news: The revolution-Acc. made the Czechs-Nom

# TOPIC AND FOCUS IN PDT

In FGD: **boundary between Topic and Focus** – algorithm, based on the TFA values *cb* and *nb*



(PRECEDING CONTEXT: *IRENA HAD TWO BOYFRIENDS AND SEPARATED FROM BOTH OF THEM.*)  
*SHE HAD SEPARATED FROM HER FIRST BOYFRIEND / WITH NO GREAT PAIN.*



# ANNOTATION OF COREFERENCE

- In the **theoretical** approach – textual coreference and discourse relations go **beyond** the tectogrammatical level (level of linguistic meaning)  
... but:
- In **PDT**: both relations are annotated on the tectogrammatical trees → the information in the tree helps
- **Grammatical** coreference: reflexive pronouns, relative pronouns, subjects of verbs of control, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. pronouns
- **Textual** coreference : specific vs. generic
- Associative links: **bridging anaphora**:
  - Whole x part
  - Set x element(s) of a set
  - Object x function (*team* – *coach*)
  - Pragmatic contrast (*this year* – *last year*)
  - Specific relations: e.g. author – piece of work

# ANNOTATION OF DISCOURSE RELATIONS

Annotation of discourse relations – based on the **PDTB approach**

**discourse connective**: a predicate of a **binary** relation – it takes two **text spans** (mainly clauses or sentences) as its **arguments** and signals a semantic relation between them

- (i) **Explicit** connectives
- (ii) **AltLex** (alternative lexicalization)
- (iii) Annotation of **genres**
- (iv) Work in progress: **implicit** relations and so-called No-rel: No signal can be found



## 3. DEPENDENCY

### 3.1 RETROSPECTIVE

- **continental syntactic theories** versus the mainstream syntactic approaches on the other side of the Atlantic
- **Bloomfield** (1933): names of the main constituents of the sentence, NP and VP
- **Chomskyan** approach: originally: exclusively based on the concept of immediate constituents, later: the notion of head in the **X-bar theory**

N, V, Adj and P(rep) as possible heads → may be interesting unless the set of basic categories grows beyond some reasonable limit

**BUT: gradual development** of the X-bar theory → practically any constituent may act as the head

## TRADITIONAL CONSTITUENTS NOT SUITABLE: SPECIFICATION OF INFORMATION STRUCTURE (TFA)

*John spent two weeks in Mallorca.*

Test for T/F: [questions](#)

How did John spend his holidays last year? *Last year John spent / two weeks in Mallorca.*

What did John do last year? *Last year John / spent two weeks in Mallorca.*

[Combinatorial Categorical Grammar](#) (Mark Steedman) “floating constituents” or “non-standard” constituents

*John / ate the beans*

*John ate / the beans*

*John / ate \ the beans*

## 3.2 THE REPERTOIRE OF DEPENDENCY RELATIONS

- **operational criteria** – rather than intuitions
- **economy** - as **small number** of elementary units as possible
- **valency structure** : the core of predication that is more straightforwardly represented in a dependency rather than in a phrase-structure (constituency) approach
- closer to the **logical representation** (predication: **n-ary logical predicate**)

### Arguments vs. Adjuncts:

Several **tests** proposed: omission, reformulation with a relative clause “which happened”, substitution by “do so”

### In Functional Generative Description:

Two “axis”: (a) **arguments vs. adjuncts**

(b) semantically **obligatory vs. optional**

# (I) ARGUMENTS VS. ADJUNCTS

## (i) Arguments - Adjuncts

Criteria:

- (a) can the given modification depend on **every verb**?
- (b) can the given modification be **repeated** with a single governor?

modifications that satisfy neither (a) nor (b) = **arguments** (inner participants): Actor, Patient, Addressee, Origin, Effect  
(special position of Actor)

modifications that satisfy both = **adjuncts**

some **ontological blocking** – e.g. “purpose” with verbs of the change of state:

(?) John fell ill in order to be punished for his sins.

# SURFACE REALIZATION

**arguments** usually take a certain form in the surface form of the sentence influenced by the verb, the **morphemic form** is governed by the requirements of the verb (the so-called *rection* or *government*)

**adjuncts**: their form is usually **not governed** by the governing verb –

*Děti přišly domů ... do školy ... na hřiště*

*the children came home ... to school ... at the  
playground*

## (II) (SEMANTICALLY) OBLIGATORY VS. OPTIONAL

### (ii) Semantically obligatory vs. optional:

“**Dialogue test**”: absence in the surface is not decisive:  
present in the deep structure and (maybe) deleted on the way  
to the surface (Fillmore (1977) “complete scene”)

*John has already arrived.*

Where to? \*I do not know. – WHERE-to is **obligatory**

From where? I do not know. – WHERE-from is optional

*Mother is knitting a sweater.*

From what? I do not know. – ORIG is optional

# VALENCY FRAME

	obligatory	optional
Arguments	+	+
Adjuncts	+	-

**Valency frame:** a set of modifications classified as valency slots of the lexical item

- (a) **Every** modification classified as an **argument**: enters the frame, either obligatory or optional (with a special mark):  
 obligatory: *to require* smth.PAT, *to believe* sbd.ADDR, *to remember* sbd.PAT  
 optional: *to buy* smth: PAT.obl (to sbd.ADDR.opt);
- (b) **Obligatory adjuncts** in the frame:  
 the operational test is applied  
 the sentence is often grammatically incorrect without them: *\*John aimed*

## ISSUE AT STAKE: GENERALIZED OBLIGATORY VALENCY MEMBERS

“Generalizations”: the argument is **obligatory** but its **lexical setting** is generalized

= a group of persons/objects/circumstances typical/usual for the given position

*This dog does not bite good people. – This dog does not bite*  
(= anybody). ->  $PAT_{Gen}$

*Jane sells (sg-PRS-IPFV ) in the Bata store*

Sell ACT  $PAT_{Gen}$   $ADDR_{Gen}$

What does she sell? - goods typical for Bata store

To whom does she sell? - to typical customers of the store

→ Patient and Addressee: **obligatory arguments**



## 4. GRAMMAR AND LEXICON

The **connection** of grammar and lexicon:

- quite apparent already in the earlier works of C. Fillmore (1966; 1968): **case grammar**,  
explicitly follows up Tesnière's notion of valency
- the concept of **valency**: crucial, reflects the fundamental aspect of **grammatical information in the lexicon**:  
the valency **frame** = a part of the lexical entry,  
in which the obligatory and optional arguments  
and obligatory adjuncts of the given head word are  
registered

# VALENCY DICTIONARY - VALLEX

VALLEX 3.0 (2016, first edition 2008):

4586 Czech verbs corresponding to 2722 lexemes (= 6711 lexical units)

aspect counterparts: if counted separately = 10 821 lexical units

Two components:

- (i) **data** component – the **valency** behaviour of individual verbal lexemes
- (ii) grammatical component: **grammatical rules** for possible changes in valency structure:  
to derive a marked usage of the given unit = passive, reflexive, reciprocal, and  
to determine which valency slots correspond to the **same situational participant**

Apart from the valency frame: **other syntactic and syntactico-semantic information**: e.g. control, grammaticalized alternations (diathesis, reflexivity, reciprocity),

With every lexical unit: a special attribute indicating the possibility of **application of an alternation**

With selected lexical items: **lexicalized alternations** (e.g. conversion)

## VALLEX (CONT.): EXAMPLE

přidělovat <sup>impf</sup> , přidělit <sup>pf</sup> [allot]	
<b>1</b>	<b>ACT</b> <sub>1</sub> <b>ADDR</b> <sub>3</sub> <b>PAT</b> <sub>4</sub> <b>AIM</b> <sub>k+3, na+4</sub> <sup>typ</sup> reflex: coref3 recip: ACT-ADDR class: exchange ♦ dat: pass deagent poss recipient examples: ...
<b>2</b>	<b>ACT</b> <sub>1</sub> <b>PAT</b> <sub>4</sub> <b>EFF</b> <sub>jako+4, za+4</sub> <sup>opt</sup> <b>AIM</b> <sub>k+3, na+4</sub> <sup>typ</sup> ♦ dat: pass deagent examples: ...

- *přidělit* [allot]
- *Obecní úřad přidělil rodině byt*  
[The town council allotted a flat to the family]
- *Rodina-ADDR dostala od obecního úřadu-ACT přidělen byt-PAT*  
[Family-ADDR got from the town council-ACT allotted flat-PAT]

# PDT-VALLEX

**PDT-VALLEX**: an **on-line tool** → to check the existing valency frames and to add the new ones, for verbs, but also some adjectives and nouns

- originated “on the road”- **during the annotation process**, but systematically checked: “**bottom-up, data-driven approach**”
- linking of **each verb occurrence** in the **PDT** to the lexicon -> to verify the the valency lexicon entry against the corpus

7,127 verbs (11,933 valency frames), <http://lindat.mff.cuni.cz/services/PDT-Vallex/>

- **headword**

(zřeknout se = abandon)

- **valency frame**

**zřeknout se**

**zřeknout se**<sub>7x, 7x</sub> **ACT**<sub>(1)</sub> **PAT**<sub>(2)</sub>

(zřící se, odmítnout, vzdát se) • *zřeknout se sestavení vlády*

members & their labels (ACT, PAT), their obligatoriness feature and the surface form (1-nom., 2-gen.)

- an **example**: a fragment of a Czech sentence taken from the PDT
- **Notes**: used to delimit the meaning of the individual valency frames within the entry, also synonyms, antonyms and aspectual counterparts

# ENGVALLEX AND CZENGVALLEX

**EngVallex:** largely manual adaptation of the PropBank Lexicon, relabeling of the arguments, obligatoriness added, frames; links to PropBank lexicon wherever possible

size: 7,148 valency frames for 4,337 verbs

**CzEngVallex:**

- alignments between Czech and English valency frames, in a stand-off mode
- 20835 aligned valency frame pairs (verb senses) which are translations of each other, alignment of their arguments as well
- annotation done on bilingual data from the **parallel PCEDT corpus**.

Urešová, Fučíková, Šindlerová (2016), CzEngVallex: A Bilingual Czech-English Valency Lexicon, Cinková (2006), From PropBank to EngVallex: Adapting the PropBank Lexicon to the Valency Theory of the Functional Generative Description..

# VALENCY OF NOUNS

\* PLÁN ‘PLAN’

: id: blu-n-plán-1

+ ACT(gen,poss;obl) PAT(gen,na+acc,o+loc,pro+acc,inf,aby,že,dcc; obl)

-derived: blu-v-plánovat-1

-gloss: *záměr, úmysl* ‘intention, aim’

-example: *plány vystavět.PAT podnik* ‘plans to construct a processing plant’

-control: ACT, ex

-class: mental action

-type: **abstract result**

: id: blu-n-plán-2

+ AUTH(gen,poss;typ) PAT(gen,poss; obl)

-derived: blu-v-plánovat-1

-gloss: *mapa, náskres* ‘map, layout’

-example: *plán města.PAT* ‘city plan’

-class: mental action

-type: **concrete**

## 5. CHALLENGES

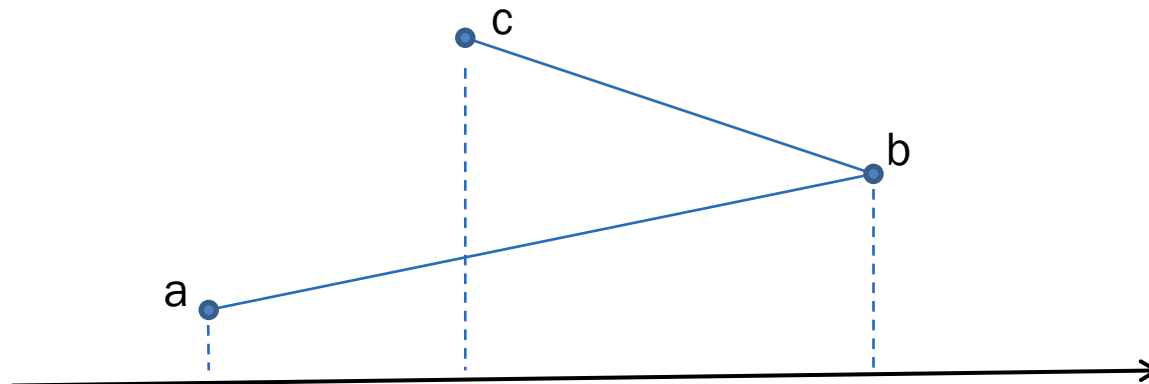
### 5.1 NON-PROJECTIVITY

the relation between **syntactic structure and word order**  
(the discontinuity of constituents) – a matter of  
discussions within all syntactic theories

*unbounded dependencies*

*long-distance dependencies*

**Non-projective construction:**



## CONDITION OF PROJECTIVITY (CONT.)

- The **more restricted** the formal syntactic description is, the **more valuable** are the observations based on it
- BUT: there are **many non-projective constructions in the surface** shapes of the sentences

one possibility in a **multilevel framework**:

projectivities **preserved on the surface** level but a **strong projectivity condition on the deep level**

→ to formulate “**movement rules**” specified as a transition from projective underlying trees to the surface representations in which the condition of projectivity cannot be applied

= a rather **strong hypothesis** that has to be verified and made more precise on the basis of a systematic empirical research



# NON-PROJECTIVITIES IN THE PDT: SOME STATISTICS

On the **analytical (surface)** level:

**73.088 sentences** (with 1.255.590 occurrences of words incl. punctuation marks)

The condition of projectivity not met with 23.691 pairs of words (1,9 %)  
at least one non-projective edge: in **16.920 sentences** (23,2 % of all sentences)

**three groups:**

- A. types of structures that can be specified on TR on the basis of **specific grammatical properties**, or limited lexical groups (37%)
- B. **divided syntagms**, mostly due to the **position of contrastive topic** (6%)
- C. auxiliary structures, mostly **predicates with function words forms** (57%) – not relevant for the tectogrammatical level

## 5.2 COORDINATION AND APPPOSITION

High frequency of parsing errors : e.g. their impact on quality of dependency-based MT is substantial → *number of solutions in treebanks designs*

Modifiers *shared* by all conjuncts

*Mary came and cried*

*Nested* coordination :

*John and Mary or Sam and Lisa*

*Shared* modifiers can be *coordinated*:

*(big and cheap) (apples and oranges)* – ambiguity!!! ((big and cheap) apples) and (oranges)

Intricate structures when *combined with ellipsis*

Careful semantic analysis necessary:

*red and white wine* x *red and white flag of Poland*

*five dogs and cats* x *five dogs and five cats*

# COORDINATION (CONTD.)

Different models proposed:

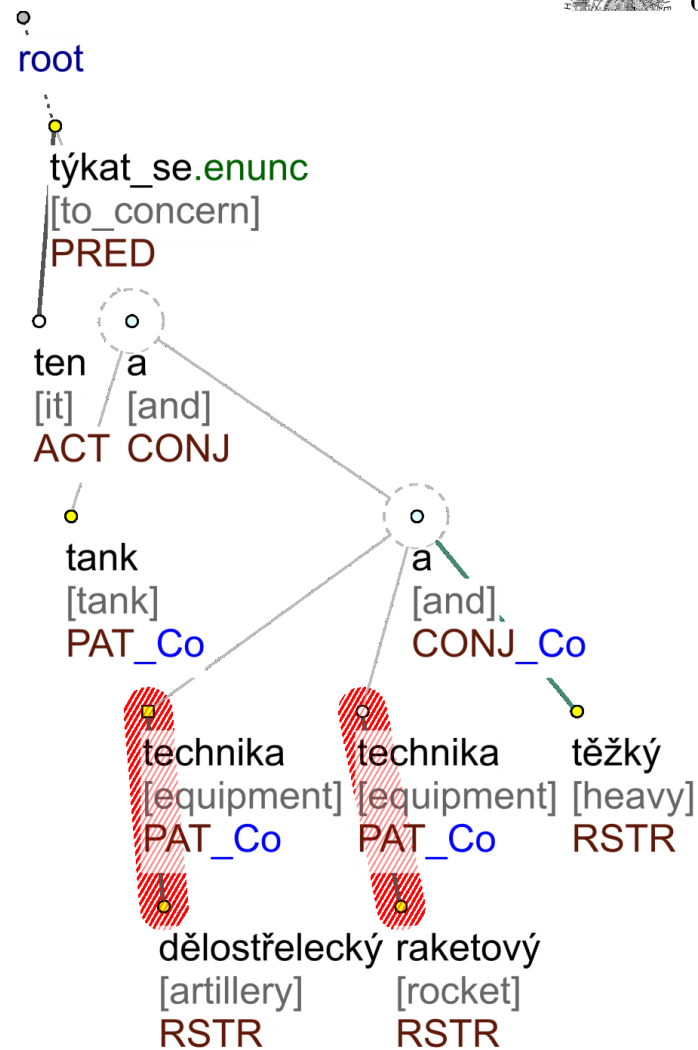
*MTT (Mel'chuk)* – the **first conjunct** is the **head** of the CS, the second attached as a dependent of the first one etc., coordinating conjunction attached under the penultimate conjunct, and the last conjunct is attached under the conjunction

*FGD (Prague, Sgall)* – coordination and apposition is **not** considered to be a **dependency** relation as they cannot be captured by the usual binary directional dependency relation =>

*non-dependency*, "horizontal" structure, possibly n-ary and/or nested, but still unidirectional

- all elements have (in the standard dependency sense) a common governor (the only exception: coordinated predicates which naturally have no common governor)
- the coordinated elements can also have common dependent(s)

In **PDT**: all conjuncts attached under the coordinating conjunction – along with shared modifiers which are distinguished by special attributes



Týkalo se to tanků a těžké dělostřelecké a raketové techniky.  
[It concerned tanks and heavy artillery and rocket equipment.]

## 5.3 RECONSTRUCTION OF SURFACE DELETIONS

**Ellipsis:** an **omission** of a unit at the surface shape of the sentence but necessary for the semantic interpretation =>  
= ellipsis as an **empty place** in a sentence that has not been occupied by a lexical unit

**Fillmore** (2000) “understood but **missing**”

**Kayne** (2005) **silent elements**, “elements that despite their lack of phonetic realization seem to have an important role in the syntax of all languages”

➔ a **mismatch between syntax and semantics:**

most explicitly reflected in **multilevel frameworks**, e.g.

Meaning-Text Theory (MTT), I. Mel’chuk

Functional Generative Description (FGD), P. Sgall

## EXAMPLES: “KROMĚ”(BESIDES)

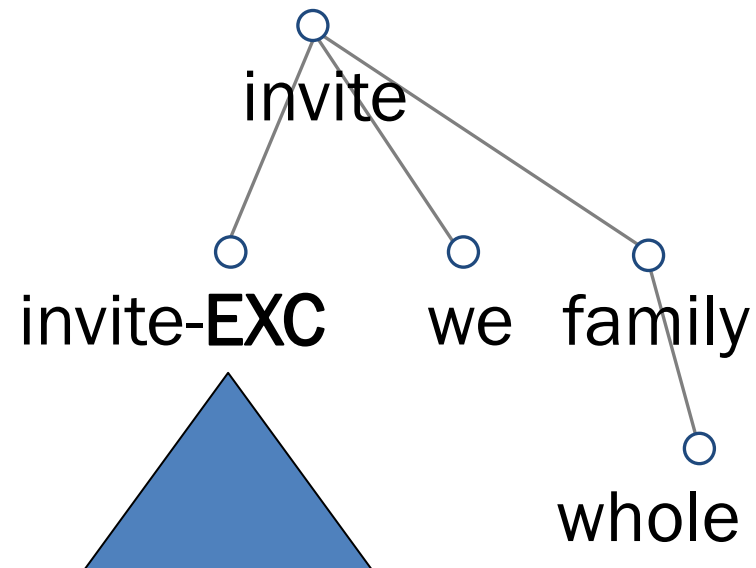
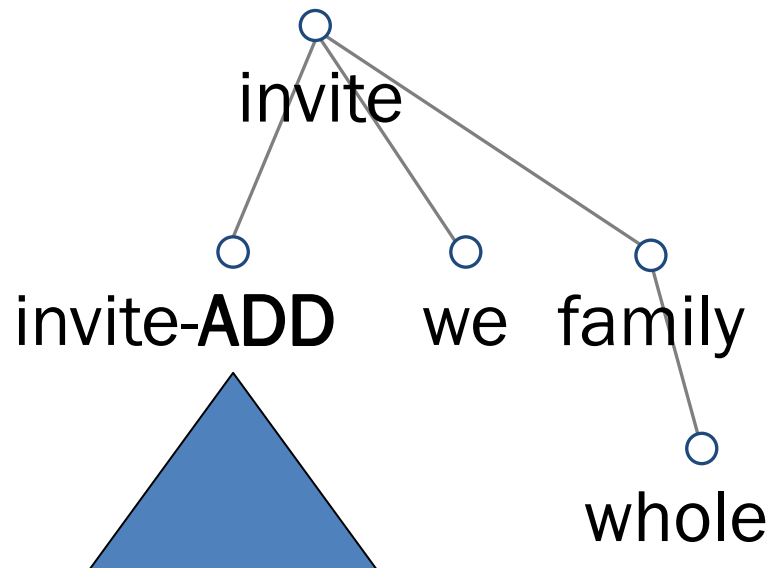
Czech: *kromě* [besides]

*Kromě Jany pozveme celou rodinu.*

Besides Jane we will invite the whole family.

(i) Jane will be invited (too) (Addition)

(ii) Jane will not be invited (Exclusion)

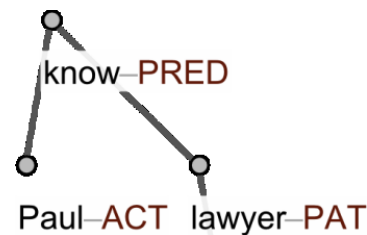
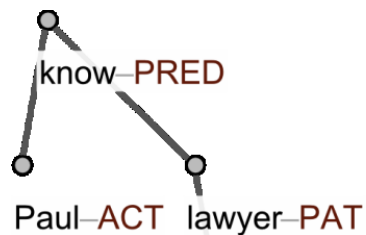


## EXAMPLES: COMPARISON

*Paul knows a better lawyer than John.*

(a)... a better lawyer than John (*is* a lawyer)

(b)... than John *knows* (a lawyer)



## ELLIPSIS IN PDT

on the analytical (**surface**) level: missing **governor**:

ExD (extra-dependency) to the node for which the governor is missing -> challenge for the study of deletions

on the **tectogrammatical** level: missing **dependents**

nodes are **added** to the tree, with special labels according to the type of ellipsis

Special technical solution for **coordination** structures



# SUMMARY (1)

- Theoretical description of language: both “deep” and “dependency” are crucial
  - Deep:
    - Remove ambiguity
    - Deletions, information structure
    - multi-layered system of representation
  - Dependency:
    - “Economy”
    - Information structure
    - Non-standard constituents

## SUMMARY (2)

- From the point of **NLP**: despite undisputable recent progress in NLP which relies more on computational methods than linguistic representations or features, we believe that for true understanding having an adequate theory is **worth the effort**

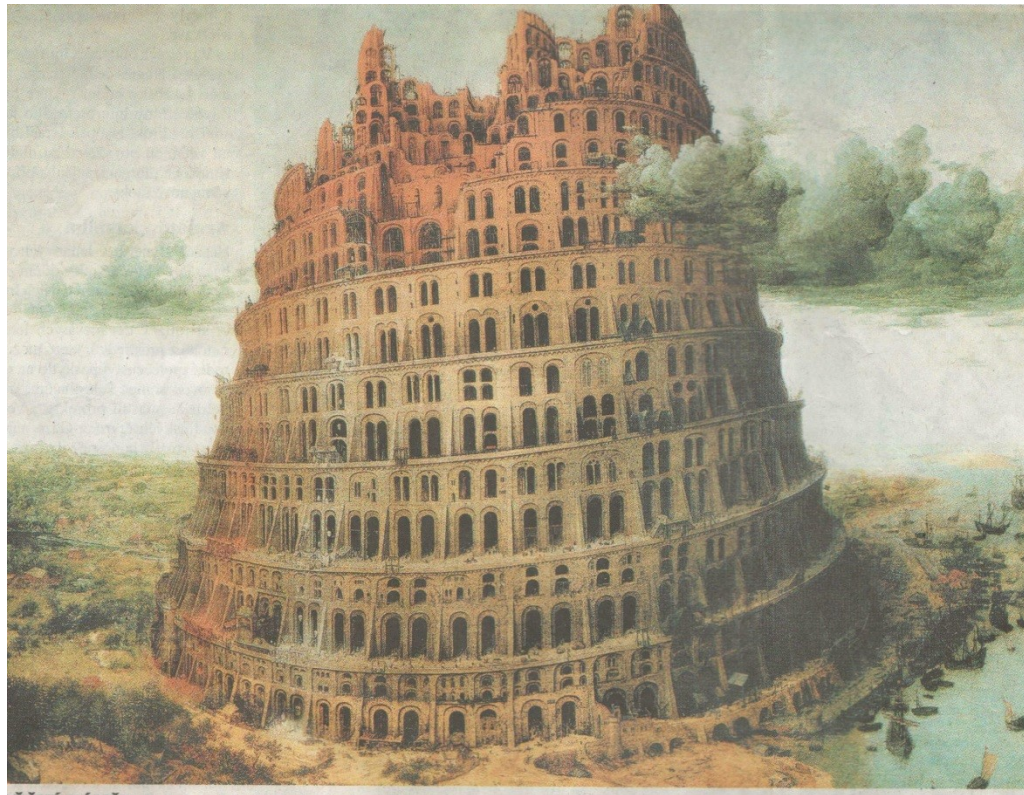
## SUMMARY

- Ars longa, vita brevis
- ... occasio praeceps, experimentum periculosum, iudicium difficile
- „... art is long, life is short, opportunity fleeting, experiment dangerous, judgement difficult“



Hippocratés

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



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- Abbreviations:
- PBML: The Prague Bulletin of Mathematical Linguistics
- UFAL MFF UK: The Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University, Prague