

# Position of the Actants and the Circonstants

Narmin Aliyeva

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Theoretical Linguistics Department

**Abstract:** *The paper is devoted to the analysis of some positions of traditional and structural syntax, especially the attitudes between subject and predicate on the one hand, between verb node and actants on the other hand. Logical main point of traditional grammar and linguistical main point of hypothesis are investigated. The theory of actants is stated and substantiated in this paper. Analyzing the theory of actants in different languages we are trying to apply it to the Azerbaijani languages. Using the table, one can find the position of the actants and circonstants in the Turkic languages, especially in Azerbaijani language.*

**Keywords:** structure, actant, circonstant, predicate, subject, logics

## 1. Introduction

It is known that traditional grammar, explicitly or implicitly, relies on logical principles. It reveals logical oppositeness of the subject (logical subject) and the predicate (logical predicate) in a sentence: subject (practically, logical subject) is something that is informed; predicate (practically, logical predicate) is something that is informed about the subject (about the logical subject). Despite the fact that a sentence can grammatically have from one to five parts of a sentence,

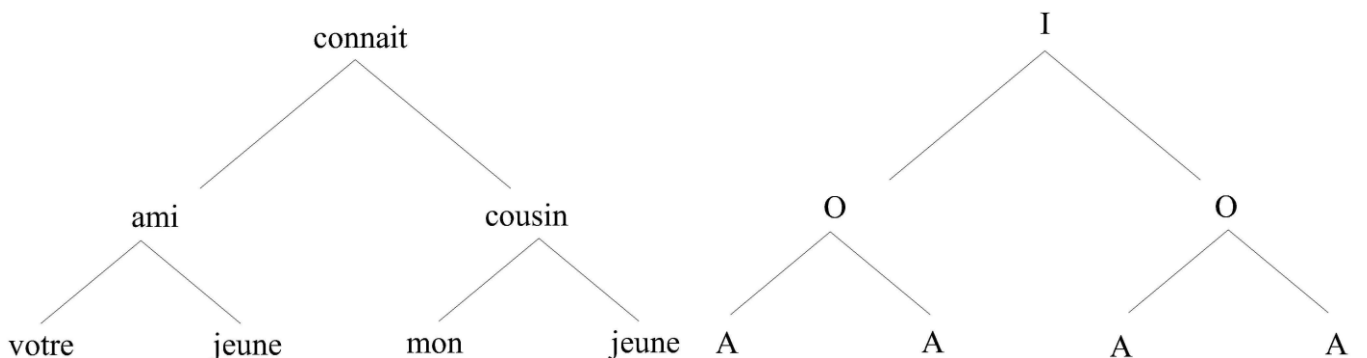
they logically correspond to two members of judgment: subject and predicate. According to traditional grammar words that correspond to the subject form the subject pole (in our example the words *молодая* and *красивая* refer to the word girl and together with it form the subject pole), and the words relating to the predicate form the predicate pole together with it (in our example these words are *хорошо*, *песни*, *старинные* and *народные*). Consequently the subject pole is opposed to the predicate pole.



In some languages of the world the elements of the subject and the predicate are so intertwined that it is not only difficult but also absolutely impossible to divide them between the subject and the predicate. Therefore in this case the oppositeness of these two concepts (the subject and the predicate) is out of the question. For example, in the Latin sentence *Filius amat patrem* "The son loves the father" the word *amat* consists of a predicate element (*ama-*) and a subject element (*-t*). Consequently, the split between the subject and the predicate does not result in a split in the

word and the following opposition is impossible: *filius...t* (subject elements) – *ama-....patrem* (predicate elements). If the hypothesis about the central position of the verb node is accepted, which we discussed in one of our papers, there will be no difficulties.

If on the basis of this hypothesis about the verb node as the central part in a sentence we make a diagram of this parallelism between two nominal nodes is restored.



We know that all nouns and adjectives are partly actants. The term actant is firstly introduced by French linguist L. Tesnière. The semantic and syntactical actants are distinguished and they are investigated by Moscow Semantical School. Later this problem were investigated by many scholars [Plank 1990; Lehmann 1991; Lazard 1995, 1998; Wechsler 1995; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 242; Davies and Dubinsky 2001]. In Russian linguistics it is thoroughly investigated by many scholars, especially by Melchuk I (1998). But in Azerbaijanian linguistics this problem has not been investigated, and there are even very few books devoted to structural linguistics. There are two authors that wrote books in this area [Racabli A, 2005; Veysalli F, 2008], but they did not touch this problem either.

## 2. Framework

In modern structural linguistics actants are considered to be persons or things that participate in a process. It was already noted that actants are expressed by nouns and are directly subordinate to a verb. "Actants differ by their nature that in its turn is related to their number in the verb node. The quality of actants is therefore essential in the whole structure of the verb node. In most languages the most general structural model of a simple sentence is the NV model, which is a structure consisting of nominal and verbal components [Y.D. Levitski, 1995, 91]. The verb is considered as the main component in this model. "The verb predetermines some meanings rather than lexical units in its surrounding" [S.B. Shustova, 2010, 56]. G. G. Posepsov notes that "important elements creating the structure of a sentence come through verbs to the sentence" [G. Posepsov, 1976, 66]. The verbs have different number of actants. Furthermore one and the same verb does not always have one and the same number of actants. There are verbs that have no actants, verbs that have one, two or three actants" [Tesnière L. 1988: 121].

Different actants fulfill different functions with regard to the verb they are subordinate to [Tashlikova, 2010, 123]. Assuming that we have a three actant verb we will distinguish the same number of types of actants – three types of actants. The actants will be referenced by ordinal numbers: the first, the second, the third ... actant. The ordinal number of an actant cannot exceed the number of actants of this verb: a verb without actants cannot manage actants, one actant verb cannot have the second actant, two actant verb cannot have the third actant, etc. The first actant can be found in sentences that include one, two and three actants, the second actant can be found in sentences having two and three actants, and the third actant can only be found in sentences with three actants. Semantically, the first actant is the one that performs an action. It is the subject in traditional grammar. We reserve this name to it. In the sentence *Назрин читает* the word *Назрин* is the first actant, it is also the subject. In this view the second actant is the one that experiences the action. In traditional grammar the second actant is called a direct object, recently it is called an object complement, and in structural syntax we call it an *object*. If semantically there is oppositeness between the subject and the object, then structurally there is difference between the first and the second actants. "...from a structural point of view irrespective of whether it is the first

or the second actant, the subordinate element is always a complement that supplements the subordinating word..., what is more, in any case the noun whether being a subject or an object manages all subordinate elements combined into a node in which it is the centre. Based on this point of view and using traditional terms it can be unhesitatingly stated that the subject is the complement just like all others. Though paradoxical at first sight, this statement can be easily proved if we specify that structural rather than semantic point of view is meant here" [Tesnière L. 1988: 124]. In the sentence *Ashraf beats Azad*, Azad is the second actant, but semantically it is the object of the verb beats.

In the Turkic (including Azerbaijani) languages the circumstants precede the verb. It should be noted that circumstants expressing the meaning of time not only precede the verb but can also take different positions in a sentence except for the position after the verb: *Sabah Mətin Bakıya gələcək* "Tomorrow Metin comes to Baku", *Mətin sabah Bakıya gələcək*, *Mətin Bakıya sabah gələcək* – in both the sentences the meaning is the same as in "Tomorrow Metin comes to Baku".

The circumstants are positioned in a particular order. This order differs depending on the type of the language. In European languages (English, German, French) this order is the following: circumstants of manner precede circumstants of general time, circumstants of general time precede circumstants of quantity, circumstants of quantity precede circumstants of place, circumstants of particular time.

Circumstants often follow actants. Therefore in schemes they are always placed on the right, i.e. following actants.

The order of sentence members in the Turkic languages is as follows: (attribute) + subject + (attribute) + object (or objects) + (different) adverbials + predicate. It means that in the Turkic languages (including Azerbaijani) adverbials called circumstants in this paper follow not only the subject called an actant here but the objects also called actants here. However it should be noted that in the Turkic languages (including Azerbaijani) the direct object can be of two types: 1) with the accusative affix, definite direct object, and 2) without the accusative affix, indefinite direct object. Because of its indefiniteness (formlessness) the indefinite direct object is closely related to its predicate expressed by a transitive verb and must directly precede the predicate, i.e. it must be located directly before the verb. In these cases, the adverbial (circumstant) precedes the indefinite direct object (actant).

It is specified that in Azerbaijani grammars the position of the adverbial in the sentence is free, and in actualization it is used at the end of a sentence [Kazimov Q. 2000: 135]. No tractate devoted to the syntax of the Azerbaijani language describes the order in which adverbials of time, place, manner, condition, reason, purpose, degree, quantity, etc. should be enumerated (located). Despite the variety of opinions one thing is well determined: adverbials (circumstants) of general meaning precede circumstants of specifying time, place, etc. For example, "tomorrow at 6 o'clock", "yesterday toward the evening", "in Baku at the Ataturk Street", etc. Besides, it can be mentioned that the

circonstants of time is used in an Azerbaijani sentence freely; it can even precede the actant which is called the subject in traditional grammar, e.g. "Tomorrow evening I won't be in Baku any more", "On the 5<sup>th</sup> at 11 o'clock the meeting will be held".

The actants and the circonstants are determined by the position of the verb in a sentence. The circonstants like the actants have certain positions in a sentence. The circonstants are classified into different types by the functions of adverbs: 1) circonstants of manner - C1, 2) circonstants of time - C2, 3) circonstants of quantity - C3, 4) circonstants of place - C4, 5) circonstants of particular time - C5.

	C <sub>1</sub>	C <sub>2</sub>	C <sub>3</sub>	C <sub>4</sub>	C <sub>5</sub>	A <sub>1</sub>	A <sub>2</sub>	A <sub>3</sub>
C <sub>1</sub>	1	1				1		
C <sub>2</sub>		1	1	1		1		
C <sub>3</sub>				1		1		
C <sub>4</sub>					1		1	1
C <sub>5</sub>					1		1	1
A <sub>1</sub>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
A <sub>2</sub>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
A <sub>3</sub>	1	1	0	1	1		1	1

This table shows connections between actants and circonstants: 1. C<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>1</sub>; 2. C<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>2</sub>; 3. C<sub>1</sub> – A<sub>1</sub>; 4. C<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>2</sub>; 5. C<sub>2</sub> – A<sub>1</sub>; 6. C<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>3</sub>; 7. C<sub>3</sub> – A<sub>1</sub>; 8. C<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>; 9. C<sub>4</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>; 10. C<sub>4</sub> – C<sub>5</sub>; 11. C<sub>4</sub> – A<sub>2</sub>; 12. C<sub>4</sub> – A<sub>3</sub>; 13. C<sub>5</sub> – C<sub>5</sub>; 14. C<sub>5</sub> – A<sub>2</sub>; 15. C<sub>5</sub> – A<sub>3</sub>; 16. A<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>1</sub>; 17. A<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>2</sub>; 18. A<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>3</sub>; 19. A<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>; 20. A<sub>1</sub> – C<sub>5</sub>; 21. A<sub>1</sub> – A<sub>1</sub>; 22. A<sub>1</sub> – A<sub>2</sub>; 23. A<sub>1</sub> – A<sub>3</sub>; 24. A<sub>2</sub> – A<sub>2</sub>; 25. A<sub>2</sub> – A<sub>3</sub>; 26. A<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>1</sub>; 27. A<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>2</sub>; 28. A<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>1</sub>; 29. A<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>2</sub>; 30. A<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>3</sub>; 31. A<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>; 32. A<sub>2</sub> – C<sub>5</sub>; 33. A<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>4</sub>; 34. A<sub>3</sub> – C<sub>5</sub>; 35. A<sub>3</sub> – A<sub>2</sub>; 36. A<sub>3</sub> – A<sub>3</sub>.

### 3. Results

Nowadays the circonstant concept is used in semantic terms, i.e. it is opposed to the syntactic actant. Connecting to predicate words circonstants interpret situations. In the theory of actants the main problem is the borderline between semantic actants and circonstants. Nevertheless we noted that the syntactic criterion helps limit the borderline between the actant and the circonstant, however this criterion is not always determined correctly.

It should be noted that the circonstants of manner are located after the first, second and third actants in a sentence. The circonstants of place and time are located after the second and third actants. The circonstants can be also found in the beginning of a sentence. Consequently, if there are actants and circonstants in a sentence, their positions can be determined using the table.

### 4. Summary

- 1) There are similarities and differences between traditional grammar and structural linguistics.
- 2) According to logical principles, traditional grammar strives to reveal the oppositeness between the subject and the predicate, while in structural syntax this oppositeness does not exist at all.
- 3) The theory of central verb node removes the inconveniences in analyzing a sentence.

- 4) The theory of actants is the main point in structural syntax.
- 5) The functions of circonstants are always fulfilled by adverbs or groups of words equivalent to adverbs.
- 6) The position of circonstants in centrifugal and centripetal languages differs. In centrifugal languages circonstants always precede a verb, while in centripetal languages they follow the verb.
- 7) In languages the circonstants have a certain order in which they follow one another. The order of circonstants depends on the type of the language.

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### Author Profile

PhD, Associate Professor **Narmin Aliyeva** is working as a leading researcher in the Linguistics Institute by named I.Nasimi of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. She works in the department of Theoretical Linguistics.