

THE PROBLEM OF THE SECONDARY PARTS OF A SENTENCE

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Abstract. The article investigates the theory of secondary parts in linguistics.

Key words. Parts of speech, grammar, syntax, phrase, sentence, objects, attributes, adverbial modifiers.

The theory of the secondary parts is one of the last developed sections of linguistics. The usual classification of these parts into objects, attributes, and adverbial modifiers is familiar to everyone, no matter what his mother tongue may be and what foreign language he may study. Yet it has many weak points. The characteristic features of each of the three types are not clearly defined, and describing a given word or phrase as an object or an attribute in some cases, or again describing it as an object or an adverbial modifier, in others, often proves to be a matter of personal opinion or predilection. Such statements then lack all scientific value. Indeed, with some scholars the theory of secondary parts of the sentence as usually given has been discredited to such an extent that they have attempted to discard it altogether. For instance, Prof. A. Peshkovsky, in his very valuable book on Russian syntax, does not use the notions of object, attribute, and adverbial modifier at all. Instead, he classifies the secondary parts of a sentence into those which are governed and those which are not [1,103].

The notion of government, however, properly belongs to the level of phrases, not to that of the sentence and its parts. So we will not follow Peshkovsky in this method of classification. But his decision to do without the traditional categories of secondary parts is very instructive as an attempt to do away with a method whose weaknesses he realised well enough.

We will now look at the three traditional secondary parts of a sentence (object, attribute, and adverbial modifier) and try to find out on what principles their distinction is based and what objective criteria can be found to identify them. Apart from that there will be a special problem concerning the attribute. The object is usually defined in such way as this is a secondary part of the sentence, referring to a part of the sentence expressed by a verb, a noun, a substantial pronoun, an adjective, a numeral, or an adverb, and denoting a thing to which the action passes on, which is a result of the action, in reference to which an action is committed or a property is manifested, or denoting an action as object of another action.

If we take a closer look at this definition, which is typical in its way, we shall find that it is based on two principles, namely (1) the relation of the object to a certain part of speech, (2) the meaning of the object, that is, the relation between the thing denoted

and the action or property with which it is connected. The first item of the definition practically means that an object can refer to any part of speech capable of being a part of the sentence. The second item enumerates certain semantic points in the relation between the thing denoted by the object and the action (or the property) with which it is connected [2,28].

We can at once note that the second item of the definition is incomplete, as it does not include a very important case, namely an object denoting the doer of the action with the predicate verb in the passive voice, as in the sentences

He (Rob) was asked by Chapman and Hall to write the letterpress for a series of sporting plates to be done by Robert Seymour who, however, died shortly after, and was succeeded by him (Phiz), who became the illustrator of most of Dickens's novels. If Charles had inherited any of the qualities of the stern, fearless, not-tempered soldier who had been his father, they had been obliterated in childhood by the ladylike atmosphere in which he had been reared [7,45].

This part of a sentence is usually called object and certainly is neither an attribute nor an adverbial modifier of any kind. And so, the list of meanings which the object may have should be enlarged by adding one more, which might be put like this — the thing (or person) which is the origin of the action (with the predicate verb in the passive voice).

However, this addition will not make the second item of the definition satisfactory. Formulated as it is, it shows that the object can mean one thing and another (the number of these meanings is 5 or 6), but the essential question remains unanswered: what is the meaning of an object, or, what is that which unites all those 5 or 6 meanings into one category, called the object? If the definition is to be satisfactory it is bound to formulate this invariable, as we may call it, which will appear in different shapes in each particular case where an object is found in a sentence. It is certainly far from easy to give a definition of this invariable, but probably it should run something like this — "a thing (or person) connected with a process or a property". Before, however, adopting any definition of this kind, we should carefully check it in as many sentences as possible. This difficulty will become clearer after we have considered the definitions of the other secondary parts — the attribute and the adverbial modifier [6,120].

We will now take up the definition of the attribute and consider it as we have considered that of the object. Besides, as we have already hinted, there is a special question concerning the status of the attribute in relation to other parts of a sentence. The usual kind of definition of the attribute is this: It is a secondary part of the sentence modifying a part of the sentence expressed by a noun, a substantial pronoun, a cardinal numeral, and any substantivized word, and characterizing the thing named by these words as to its quality or property. This definition, as well as that of the object, contains

two items: (1) its syntactical relations to other parts of the sentence expressed by certain parts of speech, (2) its meaning. As far as meaning is concerned, the definition of the attribute is stricter than that of the object, as it practically mentions one meaning only (the terms "quality" and "property" may well be said to denote closely connected varieties of one basic notion). As far as the first item is concerned, the definition also gives a narrower scope of syntactic connections

than was the case with the object: all parts of speech enumerated here are united by the notion of substantivity common to all of them.

If we now compare the definition of the attribute with that of the object we shall see at once that there are two main differences between them: (1) the attribute, as distinct from the object, cannot modify a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, and (2) the attribute expresses a property while the object expresses a thing. They also have something in common: they both can modify a noun, a pronoun, and a numeral. We shall see further on that the two definitions are not always a safe guide in distinguishing an attribute from an object. Now let us consider the definition of an adverbial modifier. It may sound like this: It is a secondary part of the sentence modifying a part of the sentence expressed by a verb, a verbal noun, an adjective, or an adverb, and serving to characterise an action or a property as to its quality or intensity, or to indicate the way an action is done, the time, place, cause, purpose, or condition, with which the action or the manifestation of the quality is connected. This definition is based on the same principles as two other definitions we have discussed: (1) the syntactical connection of an adverbial modifier with parts of the sentence expressed by certain parts of speech (and the list in this case is shorter than in either of the first two). (2) the meanings, which in this case are extremely varied, comprising no less than eight different items (and the list is not exhaustive at that). It appears to be particularly necessary here to look for an answer to the question: what does an adverbial modifier express, after all, so that the answer should not be a list, but just one notion — its invariable. It could probably be argued that all the meanings enumerated in the definition amount to one, viz. the characteristic feature of an action or property. If we choose to put it that way, there remains only one "or" (action or property), which we might perhaps try to get rid of by looking for a term which would cover both actions and properties. As to the first item of the definition, it has some peculiarities worth notice. In the list of parts of speech there is a point

unparalleled in the other definitions which we have discussed, namely not every kind of noun can have an adverbial modifier, but only a verbal noun, that is, a noun expressing an action presented as a thing. So the characteristic features of a noun as a part of speech are not sufficient to enable it to have an adverbial modifier: it must belong to a certain lexical class. Let us now proceed to compare the parts of speech enumerated in the definition of an adverbial modifier with those enumerated in the

definitions of the other secondary parts of a sentence, and let us first take the list given in the definition of the object. There all the parts of speech capable of being parts of the sentence were given. So the parts of speech which the two lists have in common are, a verb, a verbal noun, an adjective, and an adverb. If we now compare the list given for the adverbial modifier with that given for the attribute, we shall find that the only point which they have in common is the verbal noun: for the attribute it says "noun", which of course includes verbal nouns, and for the adverbial modifier it expressly says "verbal noun" [4,59]. Thus the sphere of overlapping between attributes and adverbial modifiers is very limited. Summing up these comparisons we find that the first item of the definitions leaves room for ambiguity in the following cases:

(1) if the part of the sentence which is modified is expressed by a noun, its modifier may be either an object or an attribute;

(2) if it is expressed by a verbal noun, the modifier may be either an object, or an attribute, or an adverbial modifier;

(3) if it is expressed by an adjective, the modifier may be either an object or an adverbial modifier;

(4) if it is expressed by a cardinal numeral, the modifier may be either an object or an attribute;

(5) if it is expressed by a verb,- the modifier may be either an object or an adverbial modifier;

(6) if it is expressed by an adverb the modifier may be either an object or an adverbial modifier, too.

The above classification does not take into account the stative. If we add it to our list we shall get one more point:

(7) if the part modified is expressed by a stative, the modifier may be either an object, or an adverbial modifier [2, 94].

Since in these cases the first item of the definition does not lead to unambiguous results, we shall have to apply its second item, namely, the meaning of the modifier: a property, a thing, or whatever it may happen to be. For instance, if there is in the sentence a secondary part modifying the subject which is expressed by a noun, this secondary part may be either an object or an attribute. (It cannot be an adverbial modifier, which cannot modify a part of the sentence expressed by a non-verbal noun.) Now, to find out whether the secondary part in question is an object or an attribute we shall have to apply the second test and see whether it expresses a thing or a property. This would seem to be simple enough, but is far from being always so. In a considerable number of cases, the answer to the question whether a secondary part expresses a thing or a property will, strangely enough, be arbitrary, that is, it will depend on the scholar's opinion, and not on any binding objective facts.

Take, for instance, the following sentence: The dim gloom of drawn blinds and

winter twilight closed about her. Here the phrase of drawn blinds and winter twilight modifies the noun gloom, which is the subject of the sentence. Since it modifies a noun it may be either an object or an attribute, and the choice between the two has to be made by deciding whether it denotes a thing (of whatever kind) or a property. How are we to decide that? On the one hand, it may be argued that it denotes a thing and its relation to the other thing, called gloom, is indicated. Then the phrase is an object. This view can hardly be disproved. On the other hand, however, it is also possible to regard the matter differently, and to assert that the phrase expresses a property of the gloom and is therefore an attribute. That view is quite plausible, too, and there is nothing in the facts of the language to show that it is wrong. So, we shall have to choose the answer that seems to us to be the "better" one, i. e. to apply personal taste and opinion [5,74]. The result thus gained will inevitably be subjective. The matter may also be settled by convention, that is, we may declare that we shall consider, say, every prepositional phrase modifying a noun to be an attribute (this is actually done in most English grammars).

From a theoretical point of view the distinction is of no particular interest, and a convention may be accepted without prejudice to the scientific level of our study. We might even say that in such circumstances the distinction between object and attribute is neutralized, and propose some new term, which would be more general than either "object" or "attribute". This indeed would probably be the best way of making syntactic theory agree with the actual facts. We may suppose that that is the case in other spheres of syntax, too: if two views conflict in defining the essence of a certain phenomenon, and appear to be both of them right in their way, it is very likely that the distinction has been neutralized. A similar situation is also possible with the object and the adverbial modifier [3,75]. This is the case, for instance, in a sentence like this:

In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father.

The question is, what part of the sentence is in her face. As it modifies a verb it can be either an object or an adverbial modifier. To decide between these, we apply the second item of the definitions, and find out whether the secondary part expresses a thing or characterizes the action. Now, obviously it is possible to take it in two ways; we might say that the secondary part of the sentence expresses an object affected by the action, or that it expresses a characteristic of the action itself.

Accordingly, whoever said that it was an object would have something on his side, and so would he who said that it was an adverbial modifier. In this case it seems rather more difficult than in the preceding case to settle the matter by convention. We could not possibly set down that any prepositional phrase modifying a verb is an object, since in many cases that would be clearly untrue. So, the choice between object and adverbial modifier is bound to be arbitrary and subjective. The right way out of this is to say that

in these positions the distinction between object and adverbial modifier is neutralized, and to propose some new term which would be more general than either "object" or "adverbial modifier". Since it is always difficult to invent a new term that will stand a reasonable chance of being generally accepted, it might perhaps be the best solution to use the term "secondary part" for all cases when the distinction between object and attribute, or that between object and adverbial modifier, is neutralized.

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