

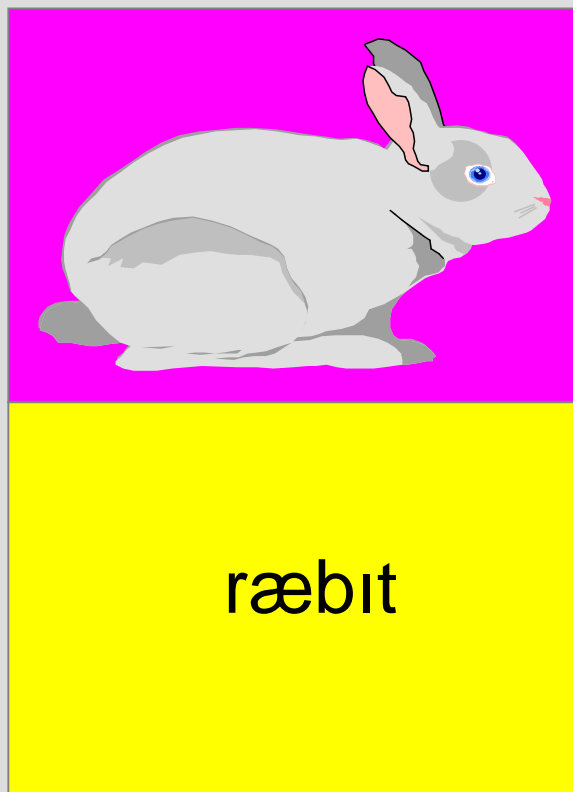
Construction grammar: A new theoretical approach

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Definition of constructions

A construction is a complex linguistic sign that combines a specific form with a particular meaning.

Constructions



Constructions

Constructions are ,big words'. (Dąbrowska 2000)

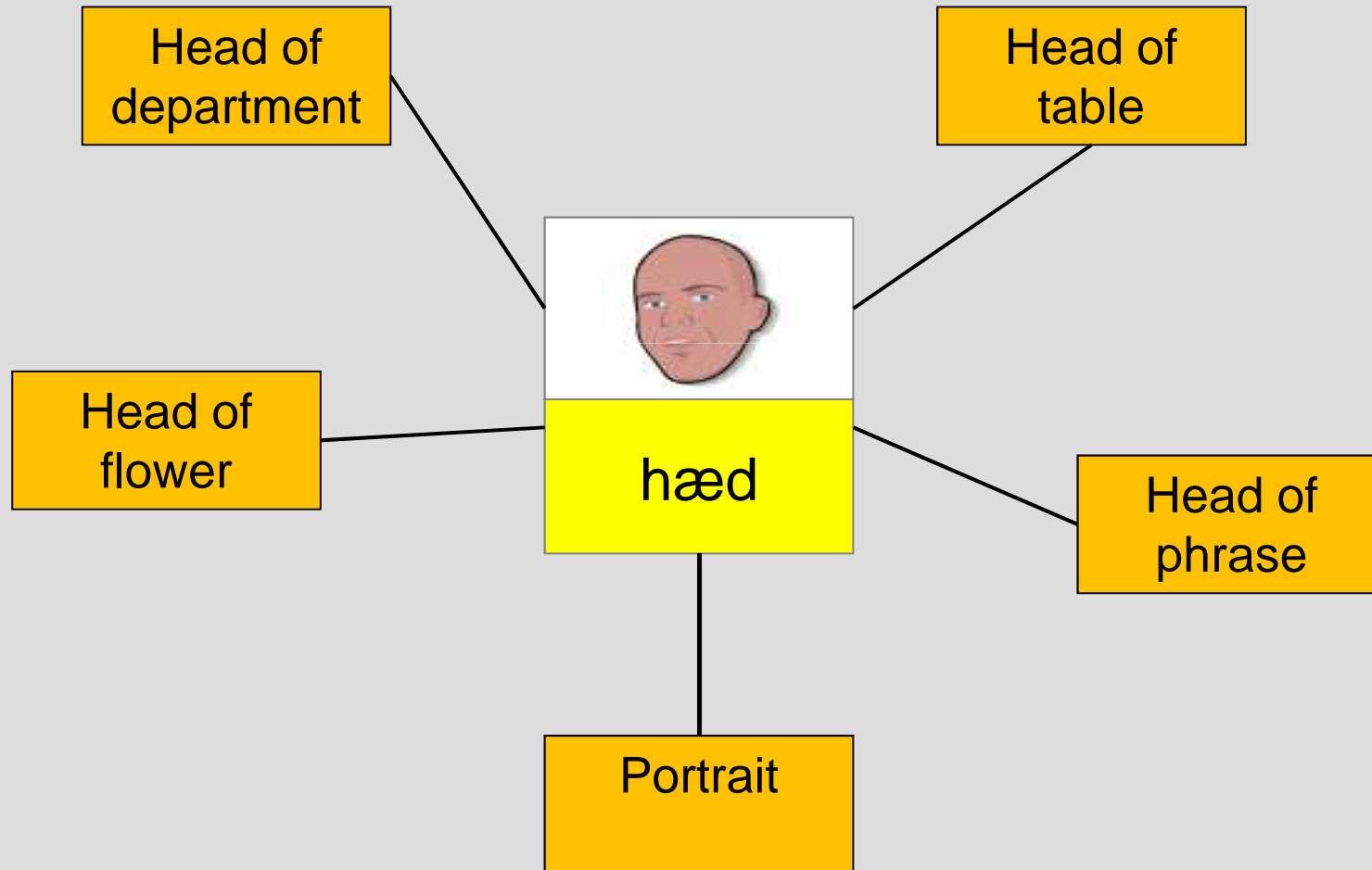
Constructions

- (1) The house was built by my father.
- (2) The picture was painted.
- (3) Peter got hit by a car.
- (4) The door was opened.

X is affected by Y

SUBJ be V-ed by PP

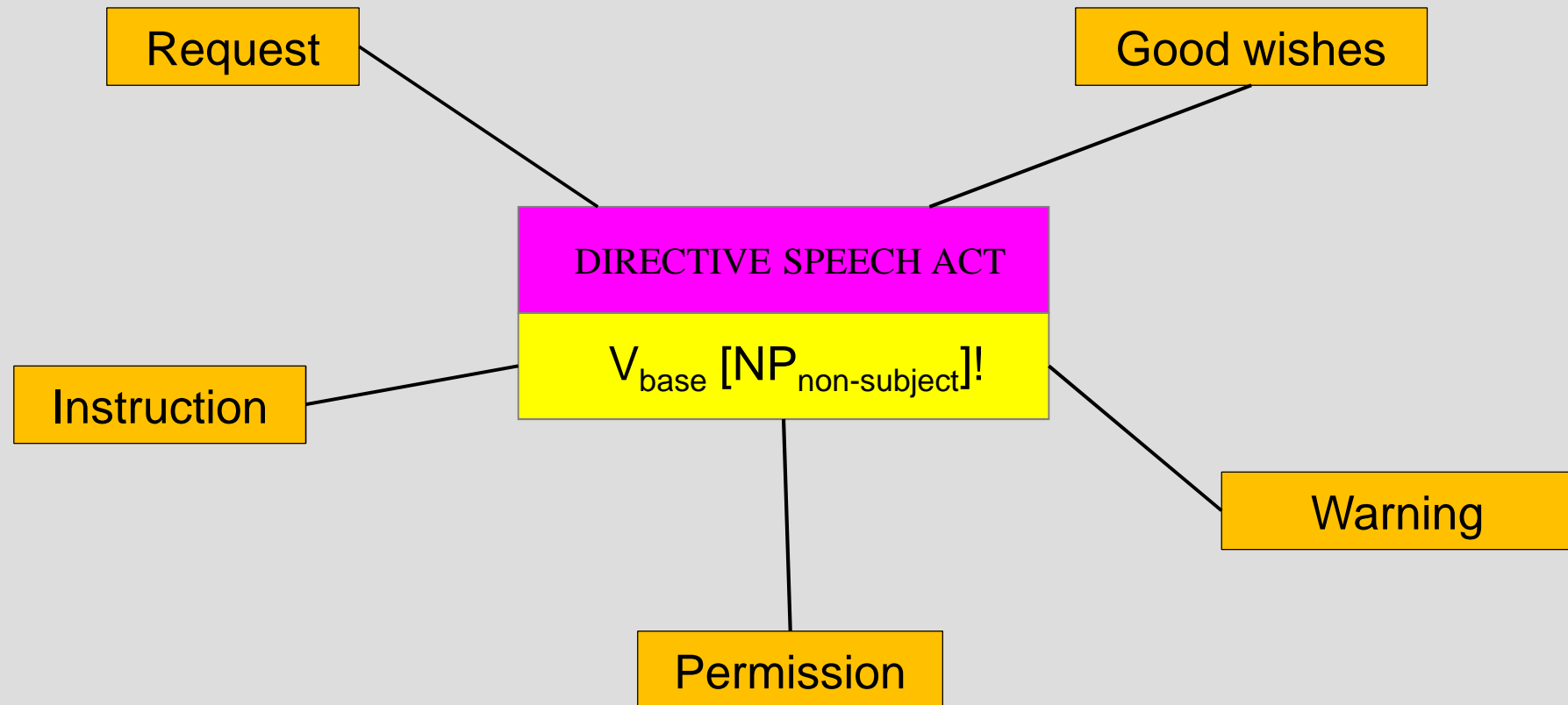
Constructions



The imperative constructions

(1)	Open the door!	Command
(2)	Please pass me the salt.	Request
(3)	Melt the butter in the saucepan.	Instruction
(4)	Uh yeah go on there.	Permission
(5)	Just be careful!	Warning
(6)	Have a great birthday!	Good wishes

The imperative constructions



What's left?

Basic declarative sentences

Are basic (in)transitive sentences constructions [i.e. grammatical signs]?

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) | John was sleeping. | Intransitive |
| (2) | John kicked the ball. | Transitive |
| (3) | John gave me a ball. | Ditransitive |
| (4) | John sent a letter to his sister. | <i>to</i> -dative |
| (5) | John pushed the door open. | Resultative |
| (6) | John put the cup on to table. | Caused-motion |
| (7) | John found his way to New York. | <i>way</i> -construction |

Basic declarative sentences

- (1) He sliced the bread.
- (2) Pat sliced the carrots into the salad.
- (3) Pat sliced Chris a piece of pie.
- (4) John sliced and diced his way to stardom.
- (5) Pat sliced the box open.

Is the word *slice* ploysemous?

Goldberg: No, the different interpretations of ‚slice‘ are inferred from the grammatical context, i.e. from the construction?

The caused motion construction

- (1) She dragged the child into the car.
- (2) He wiped the mud off his shoes.
- (3) She forced the ball into the jar.
- (4) He pushed the book down the chute.
- (5) She sneezed the napkin off the table.

NP V NP PP

X CAUSES Y TO MOVE *to* Z

The resultative construction

- (1) She pushed the door open.
- (2) He wiped the table clean.
- (3) They painted the door red.
- (4) She drove me crazy.

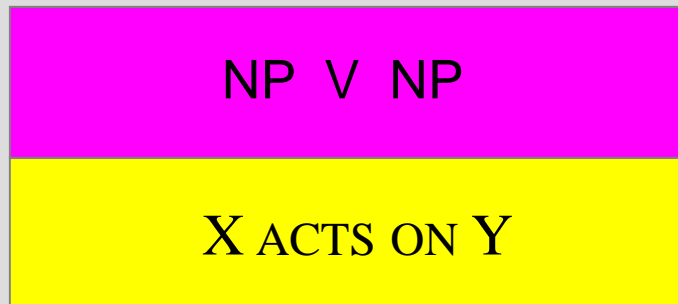
NP V NP A

X CAUSES Y TO BE Z

- (5) Peter meek-ed the bleek tock-y.

The transitive construction

- (1) John kicked the ball.
- (2) She opened the door.
- (3) They build a house.



- (4) John was seen by Mary.
- (5) Mary was kissed by John.
- (6) a. TEST ITEM: This is the girl [who the boy teased at school].
b. Child: This is the girl [who teased the boy at school].

Conclusion

- Grammar consists of complex linguistic signs, i.e. constructions, combining a particular form with a particular function/meaning.
- Constructions are holistic grammatical patterns whose form and meaning is not entirely predictable from their components.
- Constructions are similar to idioms: both involve regular and irregular (i.e. idiosyncratic) properties.
- There is no principal difference between lexicon (words/dioms) and grammar (phrases/clauses/sentences).
- Constructions can be analyzed along several dimensions (cf. Croft and Cruise 2004).

Scales of variation

- Scale of idiomaticity (meaning)

Kick the ball ←————→ Kick the bucket

- Scale of schematicity (form 1)

AG verb PA ←————→ by the way

- Scale of complexity (form 2)

A NP ←————→ It is amazing NP RC