

Presetting of valences as a mechanism of deixis

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Fillmore's (1983) conception of deictic verbs is well-known nowadays. In this sketch I try to detail the term '*deictic*' and to describe how the valences of deictic verbs are filled. Valences can be classified according to their deictic properties.

The English terms whereto, wherefrom and pastwhat will be used to classify English and Russian verbs of movement, when used to describe physical motion.

Definition 1.

Verb valence is called **deictic** (abbr. d-valence) if it can imply the involvement of a speaker (observer).

(1) *He came from school.*

Sentence (1) infers that he came here, i.e. to a speaker. This way, whereto valence of the verb *come* is a d-valence.

Definition 2.

Verb valence is called **anti-deictic** (abbr. a-d-valence) if the speaker's location cannot serve as the point of reference.

(2) * *He came from here.*

The wherefrom valence of the verb *come* is an a-d-valence. It is confirmed by the fact that (2), in which the valence wherefrom (starting point) is filled with the word *here* (the speaker's location), does not make sense.

Definition 3.

The d-valence of a verb is called **optionally deictic** (abbr. o-d-valence) if there is a sentence where the valence is empty and is not required to be filled with something (including the speaker's location).

In Russian, whereto valence of the verb *idti* 'go' is an o-d-valence. Two next sentences confirm this.

(3) *Papa idet*
dad go(PRES)
'Here comes dad'.

It implies that father comes here. So, whereto is a d-valence. In this example we see that the whereto valence of the verb *idti* 'go' is not an a-d-valence.

(4) *Idem* *otsjuda*

go(IMP, 2-PL) away
 ‘Let’s go away’.

(4) does not define or require a whereto valence. Comparison of the English and Russian verbs of motion motivates the following hypothesis

Hypothesis 1.

A d-valence is also an o-d-valence if and only if the verb has another valence that is not an a-d-valence.

A notably tangled situation appears when a verb has two d-valences. Apparently each of them is an o-d-valence (approving Hypothesis 1).

(5) *John went past.*

It means that John went by the speaker’s site, and thus the pastwhat valence of the verb *go* is a d-valence.

Because for the verb *go* both pastwhat and wherefrom valences imply, on the one hand, the speaker’s (observer’s) location, and, on the other hand, different places, they get to compete for possession of deictic meaning.

The presence of two o-d-valences of the verb *go* explains its double interpretation: *go* as “move away” (Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976) and *go* as pure “move” (Wilkins & Hill, 1995).

The following diagram and table summarize these types of valences.



Diagram 1. Basic types of valences of the movement verbs.

	whereto	wherefrom	pastwhat
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<i>come</i>	d	a-d	
<i>go</i>		o-d	o-d
<i>prijti</i> 'come'	d	a-d	
<i>ujti</i> 'go away'	a-d	d	
<i>idti</i> 'go'	o-d	o-d	o-d

Table 1. Types of valences of the main English and Russian movement verbs.

Let's discuss the mechanisms of deictic valence filling. The next question is related with it: do the valences of a verb in isolation have some values?

The frame theory by Marvin Minsky (1974) implies frame slots (verb valence analogues) that are set to some prior values before a frame is placed in a context environment and its slots are filled with certain values (which may differ with the prior ones going to be changed). Let us call such prior values "**preset**".

For example, let us take the verb *go* with valences wherefrom and whereto. In a certain sentence these valences may be associated with the meaning of real points. But for verbs in isolation what do they have to point at?

Using Fillmore's terminology the verb *go* is source-oriented. And at the same time, in a number of papers the semantics of *go* was applied in different ways of comprehension. Referring to Wilkins & Hill (1995), *go* is considered a pure verb of motion (at a distance from the deictic center), and its "moving-away" semantics appears within a certain context only. But Miller & Johnson-Laird (1976) claim it is just like the verb of moving away.

The ambiguous semantics of *go* may be explained in terms of a valence presetting theory in the next way. The verb *go* has a wherefrom valence preset to the value here (i.e. herefrom) and a whereto valence with no preset state.

(6) *You can't go. I don't want you to go..*

In (6) *go* involves unambiguous movement away from the deictic center. Because wherefrom valence has no outward change, it keeps the prior state - here.

This suggests a new classification of valences: preset and not preset. How close the connection between a valence and its prior state?

A prior state may be changed either in case of direct standing of such value in a sentence, or under the influence of the context. E.g., in the sentence

(7) *Please, wait for me about 10 minutes at the bus-stop, and if I don't come, then just go*

the context fills the wherefrom valence of the verb *go* with the meaning "bus-stop".

The most sophisticated situation appears with the following statement:

(8) *A man was walking along the road.*

Neither the construction, nor the context seem to indicate where the man was going from. But at the same time there is no preset state here. In the above mentioned example a new valence trajectory was filled. The trajectory valence suppresses the wherefrom valence and impedes the effect of the wherefrom preset value.

1. Fillmore C. "How to know whether you're coming or going", Essays on deixis, Ed. Rauh G.- Tübingen: Narr, 1983.
2. Wilkins D.P., Hill D. "When 'go' means 'come': Questioning the basicness of basic motion verbs", Cognitive linguistics, 6.2/3, 1995, p.209-256.
3. Miller G.A., Johnson-Laird Ph.N. Language and perception, Cambridge, 1976.
4. Minsky M. A framework for representing knowledge, MIT, Cambridge, 1974.