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# Argument Structure and Morphology

**EDWIN WILLIAMS**

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## Argument Structure and Morphology\*

EDWIN WILLIAMS

That there is some regular relation between the argument structures of morphologically related words is clear and well-known, and there are several proposals about how such relations can be characterized. This paper presents another such proposal, one that differs from previous proposals mainly in that it represents an attempt to be highly restrictive, perhaps erring in that direction.

By *argument structure of a lexical item* I mean simply a labelled listing of the arguments that a lexical item can have. I will adopt the labelling proposed by Gruber (1976) (Actor, Theme, Goal, Source), though the actual labels themselves are not important. These are called *thematic relations*.

Now suppose that a lexical item has an argument structure, and we apply some morphological rule to that lexical item to derive a new lexical item, with a new argument structure. What we want to characterize in this paper is the function that will relate the old argument structure to the new argument structure. One way to do this would be to dive right in and write a notation for writing argument structure transformations in. This is essentially what past proposals have done. What I intend to do instead is to specify two functions ("internalize X" and "externalize X"), each parameterized by the thematic relations. Since there are finitely many thematic relations, there are finitely many functions, and the claim is that these exhaust the possibilities.

Before these functions can be specified, there are a number of topics that must be discussed which are independent of these functions. For example, we must have a theory of exactly how many argument types (thematic relations) there are. Furthermore, we must determine whether there is any further structure to the argument structure of a verb than

\* This paper is a revision of a paper with the same title written in February, 1980. The author wishes to thank the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics for the opportunity to complete the work on this paper as a member of its research staff in the summer of 1980.

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