Verb Control in Constructed Languages
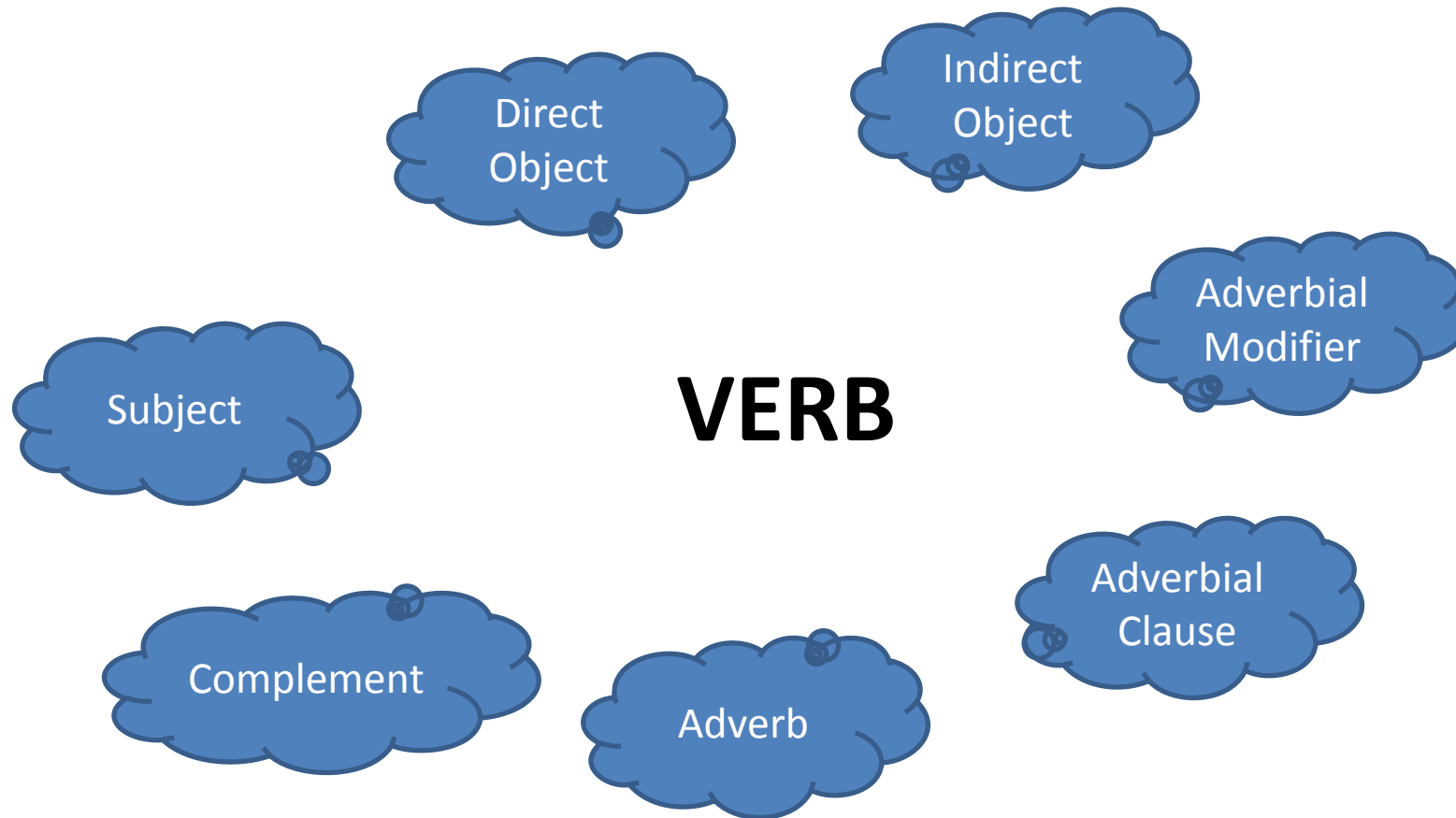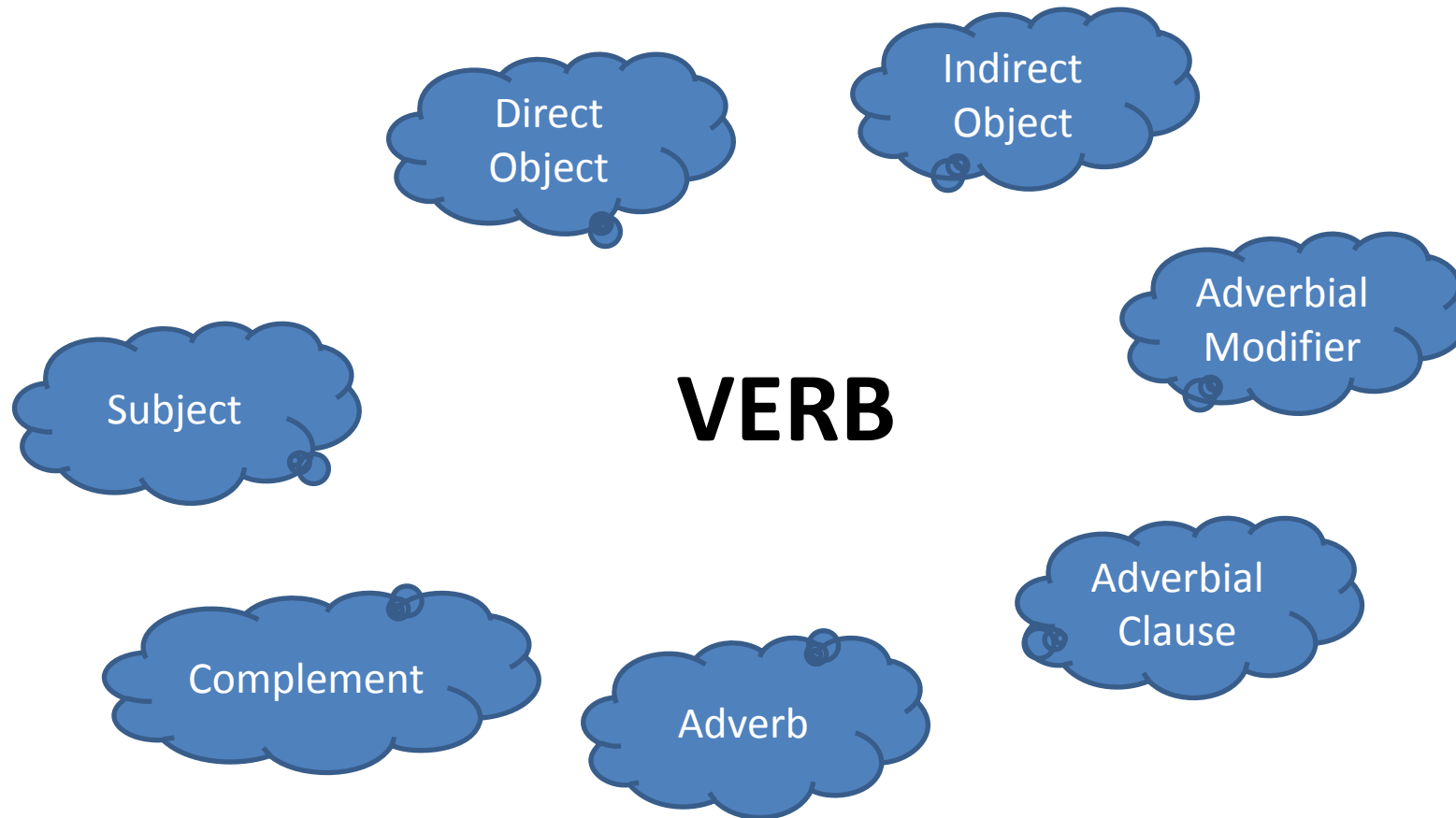
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LCC4

Subject and Object: Ergativity

Bill **cooks** the egg.

The egg **cooks** for 10 minutes.

The same thing is object in one case and subject in the other.

Mark them differently vs. Mark them the same?

No verbs are ergative vs. Some vs. All verbs are?

Verb Valency

In English:

✓ I put it on the table

✗ I put it

✗ I put

Some verbs may require a certain number of objects

Can use it as a word-building tool

Caveat: valency tends to get expanded/reduced

Direct Object vs. Indirect Object vs. Adverbial Modifier vs. Complement

Semantically it is not that easy to tell them apart!

- A direct object in one language may become indirect in another and a modifier in the third
- Verb with similar meaning may treat their objects differently

Direct Object vs. Indirect Object vs. Adverbial Modifier vs. Complement

Semantically it is not that easy to tell them apart!

Examples: (*a random sampling*)

- obey (direct or indirect object?)
- rely (direct or indirect object?)
- speak (a language – direct object?)
- remember (direct or indirect object?)

Direct Object vs. Indirect Object vs. Adverbial Modifier vs. Complement

Semantically it is not that easy to tell them apart!

Examples: (*continued*)

- chase a bus / run after a bus / behind a bus
- hit forcefully / with force / with a magic force
- punch someone in the nose
- and so on.

Avoid copying your natlang

- Natlang's use of cases / prepositions is often illogical
- A native speaker of another language may not understand you at all
- Be creative!

Dictionary Approach

Define what objects your verb takes it its dictionary entry

- It's pretty straightforward
- LogLan: each "predicate" defines it's arguments
- Downside: lots of work, lots of remembering (LogLan's "is ticket" has 9 arguments!)
- Languages tend to expand/ reduce verb valency
- Tip: you can base control on morphology

Case-Based Approach

Define lots of cases that cover most scenarios

- Usually there is a case (or two) that fits each object
- There are some difficult cases though (e.g. "trade him an apple for a pear", "elect him president", "travel first class")
- Borderline cases shift you back to the dictionary approach

Catch-All Prepositions

Have a case / preposition that works in "all other" cases

- Esperanto "je"
- Oblique case
- Latin's Ablative case used to be like that once
- Can use adverbs to clarify

All-Noun and Roles

Noun-based languages can avoid this problem altogether

- "I love you" --> "I: Romeo, you: Juliet"
- "I hunt for rabbit" --> "I: hunter, rabbit: pray"

➢ Roles for every action need to be memorized, but they are part of what defines the action

➢ Can use "catch-all" roles like "time", "location" etc.

Use Verb Combinations

Indirect objects are defined by what
they do

- "I give you a book" --> "I give a book, you take it"
- "I tell you a story" --> "I tell a story, you listen to it"
- "I hunt for rabbit" --> "I hunt, the rabbit gets caught"

Only passive objects are treated as direct

Indirect objects are defined by simultaneous action they perform

Subordinate Clauses

Semantically, take place of a term

- Object: "I know <u>that Bill is a good boy</u>"

- Modifier: "I see a boy <u>that is running away</u>"

- Adverbial Modifier: "The boy is running <u>because he is late for school</u>"

etc.

Subordinate and Main Clauses

- How well are subordinate clauses delimited in your language?
  - How often are they used?
  - Do you rely on them to carry any significant grammatical function?
- Modifier clauses need to reference the term they modify
  - "This is the boy I told you about" = "This is the boy *about which* I told you"
  - This is the house *in which* I live

Linking the Subordinate and Main Clauses

There is a variety of ways to introduce the reference between the subordinate and main clause

- with a special placeholder word, e.g. "*which*" (does it also serve as a delimiter?)
- using passive voice (special forms for passive w.r.t. indirect objects?)
- Repeating the referenced word, or using a pronoun
- Similarly to English (with a preposition "hanging" at the end)
- etc., etc.

Control and Raising

- In English, subordinate clauses can take a term from the main clause (control)

  - Subject: "I want to know" = "I want that I know"
  - Object: "I want you to know" = "I want that you know"

- They also can substitute a term in the main clause (raising)

  - "Bill seems to be sad" = "It seems that Bill is sad"

Control and Raising

- Object control and raising are frequent in English, no so much is many other languages
- Subject control is much more widespread, but it's possible to design a language without it
- In English, the controlled verb is not inflected. This does not need to be so.
  - "I am glad to see you" --> "I am glad because I <u>saw</u> you";
  - "I expect to be done soon" --> "I expect that I <u>will be</u> done soon"