

Circumstances in Transitivity

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Introduction :

Circumstances are external conditions, events, or situations that influence a phenomenon, whether personal or impersonal. The term comes from the **Latin *circumstare*** ('around' + 'stand'), highlighting that circumstances are factors surrounding a phenomenon. For humans, they refer mainly to factors outside the person's control. Circumstances **shape, modify, or emphasize** a fact or event, creating **the context** and **environment** in which it occurs."

What are Circumstances?

Circumstances are grammatical resources that encode contextual information in the clause, contributing to greater precision and specificity in meaning.

Based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), circumstances are classified into several types: **Extent, Location, Manner, Cause, Contingency, Accompaniment, Role, Matter, and Angle.**

Types of Circumstances :

1- Extent vs. Location :

Extent and Location form a contrasting relationship because “**Extent**” refers to the spatial distance or temporal duration through which a process occurs, answering questions such as “**how far?**” and “**for how long?**”.

For example :

- 1- They have been living in that small town for about a year. (Extent) indicates (Temporal duration)
- 2- The fence extends for two miles around the ranch. (Extent) indicates (Spatial distance)

In contrast, **Location** denotes the precise place or time where a process takes place, addressing questions such as “**where?**” and “**when?**”.

For instance :

- 1- She is studying art history in Paris. (Location)
- 2- They often go for a walk in the park in the evening. (Location).

Types of Circumstances :

2- Manner : Shows the way in which a process is carried out. It is divided into three sub-categories:

- Means** → with what?
- Quality** → in what way?
- Comparison** → like what?

For example :

1- He was trying to fix the bicycle with a spanner. The loose bolts needed tight tening. (Means)

2- The athlete cleared the hurdle easily, leaving his competitors behind. (Quality)

3- The child ran around the garden like a little rabbit, full of energy. (Comparison)

Types of Circumstances :

3- Cause : Explains why a process happens. It includes three sub-categories:

-**Reason** → why or as a result of what?

-**Purpose** → for what?

-**Behalf** → for whom?

For example:

1- He suffered a serious injury as a result of the car accident. (Reason)

2- She practices the piano every day for the upcoming competition. (Purpose)

3- She baked some cookies for the kids. (Behalf)

Types of Circumstances :

4-Contingency : Is the type of circumstance related to **Cause**. It has three sub-categories:

-**Condition** → the necessary situation for something to happen (under what condition?)

-**Concession** → frustrating situations or possible outcomes that didn't happen .

-**Default** → meaning in the absence of or without.

For example:

1- **In the event of a fire**, use the emergency exit. (Condition)

2- **In spite of this**, they came back after finishing the university. (Concession)

3- **In the absence of the teacher**, the students were a little noisy. (Default)

Types of Circumstances :

5- Accompaniment : Is the type of circumstance related to **togetherness**. It answers questions like '**with whom?**' or '**with what?**'."

For example :

1- Can you share some of your future plans **with us**?

2- He had dinner **with his family** last night.

Types of Circumstances :

6- Role : Shows the function or capacity of someone or something. It basically answers the question '**as what?**'.

For example:

-We started as an internship platform. (Role)

7- Matter : answers the question of "**about what?**"

-Parents often worry about their children's safety. (Matter)

8- Angle :Is examined by answering the question of "**from what point of view?**"

1- According to the experts, the climate is changing rapidly. (Angle)

2- The music is too loud to me. (Angle)

Why Circumstances matter in discourse analysis ?

- 1- shape contextual meaning .
- 2- Reflect speaker perspective .
- 3- Reveal ideological positioning .
- 4- They play a key role in discourse interpretation .

Further notes :

Transitivity looks at the **experiential function** of a clause – basically, who does what to whom.

It can be studied in two ways:

1. Transitive model – the action is done by someone to something.
Ex: **John broke the window.** → **John = doer, window = affected**

2. Ergative model – the action happens by itself or is caused by an external force.

Ex: **The window broke.** → **the window = affected, no clear doer**

Conclusion :

circumstances are external conditions, events, or situations that surround and influence a phenomenon, whether personal or impersonal. They set the context and environment, shaping, modifying, or emphasizing events. Originating from the Latin *circumstare* ('around' + 'stand'), they highlight the stable, essential features of a phenomenon and, in the case of humans, factors beyond personal control. Circumstances can include social, cultural, or environmental factors, past experiences, or even larger forces like fate or nature. Understanding circumstances allows us to see not only what happens but also the external and internal factors that frame and influence each action or event.

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Thank you ..

