

Transitive and Intransitive Sentences

Look at these two sentences and think about how they are different.

1. The bird ate the worm.
2. The bird is flying.

We can see in the first sentence there are two nouns: the first noun (bird) is doing something to the second noun (worm).

In the second sentence, there is only one noun. The bird is doing something, but not to anything or anybody else.

The first sentence is called a transitive sentence: the **doer-to** is doing something to the **done-to**.

The second sentence is called an intransitive sentence: a sentence with one noun doing something (the **doer**), but not to another noun.

It's not about how many nouns are in the sentence, it's about whether the noun (or nouns) are doing something to another noun (or nouns). So, we can have more than one thing doing the action and it is still an intransitive sentence. For example:

The dog and the cat are sleeping.

We can also have transitive sentences with more than one **doer-to** and more than one **done-to**. For example:

Jack and Jill drink water and juice.
Birds eat worms.

Now that we know the difference between transitive and intransitive, let's take a closer look at our first sentence:

The bird ate the worm.

We already know that there are two nouns in this sentence, "bird" and "worm". We also know that one of these nouns is doing something to the other. But how can we tell? How do we know that the bird is eating and the worm is being eaten?

Let's see what happens when we change the word order:

The worm ate the bird.

When we switch the nouns around, we find that the worm is doing the eating and the bird is being eaten. So, in English, word order tells us who is the **doer-to** and who is having something **done to** them. In the examples above, when we changed which noun came first in the sentence, it changed the meaning.

In Murrawarri word order does not matter so much because **suffixes** give us this information.

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