The Reversible Core of ObjExp, Location, and Govern-type Verbs

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NELS 49 @ Cornell, October 5th–7th, 2018

Linking Theories

The Uniformity of Theta-Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) [1]: thematic roles determine arguments’ positions.

Example: theme → Comp. VP

The Universal Alignment Hypothesis (UAH) [2]: thematic roles determine arguments’ relative positions.

Example: agent → theme

Linking Problems and Solutions

The Casuals/Inactivates Alternation:

1. a. The sun melted the ice.
   b. The ice melted.

Problem (for UTAH): theme occurs in two different positions.

Solution: More complex syntax → unaccusative hypothesis [3]:

(3a)’s goal = (locative) goal, (3b)’s goal = recursive

The Dative Alternation:

   b. John sent Mary a book.

Problem (for U(T)AH): goal occurs below and above theme.

Solution: More complex semantics → [6, 4, 5]:

(3a)’s goal = (locative) goal, (3b)’s goal = recursive

Another Linking Problem

The eventive/stative alternation [6, 7, 8, 9]:

(4) a. Object Experiencer Verbs:
   - John is (deliberately) amusing Bill. (Eventive)
   - John’s appearance amuses Bill. (Stative)

(5) Location Verbs:
   - a. John covered the screen. (Eventive)
   - b. The blanket covered the room. (Stative)

(6) Govern-type Verbs:
   - a. John protected the gem with a laser grid. (Eventive)
   - b. A laser grid protected the gem.

Problem (for UTAH): subjects bear different thematic relationships to the verb in (a) vs. (b), despite appearing in the same structural relationship to it.

Problem (for UAH): with-phrase referent is below object in (6a) but appears as subject above object in (6b), despite having the same thematic relationship to the verb and object:

(7) a. John protected every gem, with its laser grid.
   b. *John protected every gem, with the laser grid.

(8) Every laser grid protected its gem.

Solution: More complex syntax → reversible verbs

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Observation 1: Optional With-Phrases

ObjExp, location, and govern-type verbs may all occur in eventive uses with a with-phrase.

An eventive sentence with a with-phrase entails a stative sentence with the with-phrase as its subject.

(a) ObjExp: John amused Bill with his antics. → John’s antics amused Bill.

(b) Location: John covered the screen with the blanket. → The blanket covered the screen.

(c) Govern-type: John protected the gem with a laser grid. → A laser grid protected the gem.

Observation 2: Eventive → Stative

Eventives with a with-phrase entail statives with that with-phrase as subjects (see above).

Eventives without a with-phrase entail statives with existentially bound subjects.

(a) ObjExp: John was amusing Bill. →
   Something amused Bill.

(b) Location: John covered the screen. →
   Something covered the screen.

(c) Govern-type: John quickly protected the gem. →
   Something quickly protected the gem.

Key Idea: Stative C Eventive

P = Abstract locative P

Landau [9]: experiencers have locative syntax, are introduced with an (often null) preposition. Semantically, they can be thought of as abstract, mental locations.

- John caused the protection of a laser grid to be over the gem.

- The key opened the door. (Instrument, with an object)

- *John killed the men.

Two means withs cannot occur together, and nor can two end withs, but the combination is possible in (26a).

- a. John covered the hole [with the shovel]
   [with the dirt]

- b. *John covered the hole [with the shovel]
   [with the dirt]

Finally, means withs do not occur as subjects of reversible verbs.

- a. John covered the hole with the shovel.
   b. John covered the hole with the shovel.

- a. *John covered the hole with the shovel.
   b. *John covered the hole with the shovel.

Eventive/stative alternation = instrument/subj alternation

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Kyle Johnson and Seth Cable for detailed discussions about this project and everything related that I had to leave out of this poster, as well as to Jeremy Hartman for being my GP committee chair. Special thanks to Rong Yin for many discussions of this project, and for helping me puzzle out some details of the structures presented here. Thanks also to participants at the UMass seminars and workshops where I’ve presented this previously for feedback and comments. Any errors present are my own.

References