1 Review

- Just as grammatical categories \{D, P, V, A,...\} are substitution classes of words, so too are phrases substitution classes of word sequences.

- Phrases can occur in distinguishable positions \{before the verb, complement of \textit{to},...\} or with special morphemes \{-ga, -o,...\}, indicating subjecthood, (in-)direct objecthood et cetera.

- There are general patterns to the assignment of \textbf{theta} (\(\theta\))-roles to argument phrases.

1.1 Intransitive \textit{melt} vs. intransitive \textit{rule}

Some of these patterns are true of interesting subclasses of verbs. Take ‘melt’, for example:

(1) The sun melted the ice cream
    \textit{melted} assigns THEME to object \([\text{DP} \text{ the ice cream}]\)

(2) The ice cream melted.
    \textit{melted} assigns THEME to subject \([\text{DP} \text{ the ice cream}]\)

The real-world relationship between the scoop of Breyer’s and the physical process by which solids become liquids is the same in (1) and (2), so we say the same theta role is assigned despite “the ice cream” occupying different syntactic positions. This subclass of verbs, the \textbf{unaccusatives}, is vulnerable to a syntactic rule not unlike the dative shift rule we saw with ‘passed.’ Unaccusatives are a subclass of the verbs that have both transitive and intransitive forms,

(3) Iron Maiden rules the airwaves.
    \textit{rules} assigns AGENT to subject \([\text{DP} \text{ Iron Maiden}]\)

(4) Iron Maiden rules.
    \textit{rules} still assigns AGENT to subject \([\text{DP} \text{ Iron Maiden}]\)

intransitive ‘melt’ assigns just THEME and intransitive ‘rule’ assigns just AGENT.
2 The $\theta$-Criterion

One effect theta roles have on the set of acceptable sentences in a language was famously articulated in Noam Chomsky’s ‘Lectures on Government and Binding’ (1981).

(5) $\theta$-Criterion
   a. Each obligatory $\theta$-role selected by a predicate must be assigned to a referential expression (e.g. DP)
   b. Each referential expression must be assigned a $\theta$-role.

The unacceptability of (6) is then attributable to a violation of the $\theta$-Criterion.

(6) *Judy handed the mic

What theta roles are assigned in the (a) examples and what’s the problem with the corresponding (b)’s?

(7) a. The dean’s cronies implemented cutbacks.
    b. *The dean’s cronies implemented cutbacks to the chair.

(8) a. Julie telephoned the donors.
    b. *Telephoned the donors.

The Italian verb ‘telephonare’ assigns the same theta roles and yet seems to be counterevidence to the theta criterion.

(9) Ho telefonato
    has.1sg telephoned
    “I have telephoned”

(10) Gianni dice che ha telefonato.
    G. says that has.3sg telephoned
    “Gianni says that he has telephoned.”

the morphology on the auxiliary verb suggests that it is agreeing with a pronoun that does not actually appear in the sentence – a zero morpheme PRO. We can preserve the universality of Chomsky’s $\theta$-Criterion by postulating a Null Subject parameter which is set to YES e.g. Italian, Spanish, Chinese,... and set to NO e.g. English, German, French,...

This is a parsimonious explanation in the sense that it can be re-used elsewhere; in the analysis of infinitival clauses.

(11) a. W. tried [ PRO to behave in a presidential manner ].
    b. Karl told Dick [ PRO to behave himself ].
    c. Colin is reluctant [ PRO to make a deal with North Korea ].
    d. Hans abandoned the search for WMD [ PRO to avoid further hassle ].

the explanation is that English infinitival clauses have the same parameter-setting as Italian finite clauses. Analogy: even though German matrix clause are S(V2)OV, German embedded clauses are SVO – just like English.
3 Selection

3.1 S-selection

The $\theta$-Criterion paints a picture of verbs as “needing” argument phrases in sufficient quantity for each theta role. In fact, both quantity and quality matter:

(12)  
   a. Ben Gunn was marooned on the island.  
   b. ? The treasure was marooned on the island.  
   c. R2-D2 and C-3PO were marooned on planet Tatooine.  
   d. ? Sand was marooned on planet Tatooine.

The PATIENT of marooned must be sentient; an aspect of s- (for semantic) selection. The ultimate in s-selection is idioms; in order to have their special, fixed meaning the exact words of the idiom must be used.

(13)  
   a. make headway = progress  
   b. keep tabs on = watch over  
   c. kick the bucket = die

(14)  
   a. * The headway that we created was satisfactory.  
   b. The headway that we made was satisfactory.

3.2 C-selection

Verbs sometimes also impose constraints on their arguments to be of a certain phrasal category, this is c- (for category) selection.

(15)  
   a. * W. thinks [DP missile defense system]  
   b. * W. thinks [AP safe from atomic weapons]  
   c. * W. thinks [VP protects the nation]  
   d. W. thinks [CP that a missile defense system protects the nation from atomic weapons]

the same theta role could be required to take on different category arguments by different verbs:

(16)  
   a. The vice-president inhabits [DP a secure location]  
   b. * The vice-president inhabits [PP in a secure location]  
   c. The vice-president resides [PP in a secure location]  
   d. * The vice-president resides [DP a secure location]