

October 8, 2004

CLASS 8: THETA-ROLES & SELECTION

θ-ROLES

Thematic or theta-/θ-roles express the role that an argument plays with respect to its predicate — each 1-, 2-, or 3-place predicate assigns a unique θ-role to each of its arguments.

- 0-place: weather-verbs — *rain, snow*
1-place: intransitive V — *walk, jump* (unergative) / *appear, arrive* (unaccusative)
2-place: (mono)transitive V — *kiss, like*
3-place: ditransitive V — *give, donate*

Remember that not only verbs are predicates (adjectives can be, nouns to a lesser extent).

θ-roles: Agent, Theme, Goal, Experiencer, Source...

(1) Unique θ-Generalization

Each θ-role must be assigned but a constituent cannot be assigned more than one θ-role.

C-SELECTION

C(ategorical)-selection features express a predicate's subcategorization frame. Uninterpretable c-selectional features on a predicate thus determine the category that its argument must have (note that categorial features expressing an expression's category are always interpretable).

C-features: N, V, A, P (and later on we'll encounter more: *any* grammatical category)

- (2) a. *destruction* [N] *kiss* [V] *fond* [A] *of* [P]
 b. *destruction* [N, uP] *kiss* [V, uN] *fond* [A, uP] *of* [P, uN]

(3) Full Interpretation

The structure to which the semantic interface rules apply contains no uninterpretable features.

Hence: In the course of the derivation, all uninterpretable features must be deleted.

(4) Checking Requirement

Uninterpretable c-selectional features must be checked and can then be deleted.

(5) Checking under Sisterhood

An uninterpretable c-selectional feature F on a syntactic object X is checked when X is sister to another syntactic object Y which bears a matching feature F.

S-SELECTION

S(ematic)-selection features pertain to the type of argument required by a predicate.

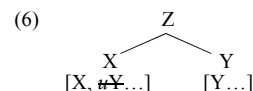
- S-features:
- (i) proposition [describes a state of affairs that holds in the world]
 - (ii) entity [some kind of object or thing]
 - (iii) property [some kind of attribute of an entity]

Merge (as a structure-building operation within a “dumb” system) cannot see s-selectional properties — s-selectional features are semantic in nature and do not drive the syntactic derivation. Violations of s-selection only will result in a syntactically well-formed linguistic expression that simply doesn't make sense (cf. *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*).

DERIVATIONS

Constituency

Binary Merge interacting with the checking requirement of c-selectional features.



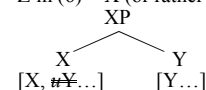
Headedness

Unchecked features of the selector project to the mother node.

(7) Headedness

The item that projects is the item that selects.

- (8) Z in (6) = X (or rather “XP” where P stands for phrase/projection — next class!):



Predicate

θ-roles are associated with the selectional features via the θ-grid.

<i>give</i> : V	c-selectional F	θ-grid	s-selectional F	θ-roles
	N	x	entity	Agent
	N	y	entity	Theme
	P	z	entity	Goal

Selection

C-selectional (= uninterpretable categorial) features have to be checked under sisterhood.

(9) Extension Condition

A syntactic derivation can only be continued by applying operations to the root projection of the tree (i.e. by extending the existing tree structure).