

November 1, 2005

CLASS 16: THETA THEORY

θ -ROLES

Thematic roles aka theta- or 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.

Types θ -roles:

Agent, Patient, Experiencer, Theme,
Goal, Source, Benefactive, Location...

0-place predicates:

weather-verbs — *rain, snow*

1-place predicates:

intransitive V — *walk, jump* (unergative) /
appear, arrive (unaccusative)

2-place predicates:

(mono)transitive V — *kiss, like*

3-place predicates:

ditransitive V — *give, donate*

(That's it — no more x-place predicates!)

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

- (1) Bob destroyed the statue.
- (2) Bob liked the statue.
- (3) a. What Bob did was destroy the statue.
b. * What Bob did was like the statue.

==> 'What X did was...':
X = Agent θ -role (not e.g. Experiencer)

- (4) a. What happened to the statue was
Bob destroyed it.
b. * What happened to the statue was
Bob liked it

==> 'What happened to X was...':
X = Patient θ -role (not e.g. Theme)

- (5) John is nice.
- (6) a. It seems that John is nice.
b. It appears that John is nice.
c. It is likely that John is nice.
- (7) * What seems / appears / is likely that John is nice? [Expected answer: It.]
- (8) * The behaviour seems that John is nice.

Compare with (maybe better *His behaviour*):

- (9) The behaviour suggests that John is nice.
- (10) **Theta-Criterion (θ -Criterion)**

All non-expletive DPs must be assigned a θ -role.

(11) There seems to be a man in the room.

(12) There seems to be a man here.

(13) There seems to be a man there.

What does the first *there* do in each case...?

(14) a. * John is likely that he is a spy.
b. It is likely that John is a spy.
c. There is likely to be a spy in the room.

(15) a. * Is likely that John is a spy.
b. * Is likely to be a spy in the room.

Expletives don't bear θ -roles and the subject position of *be likely* (and *seem*, *appear* etc.) is not a position in which a θ -role is assigned. So:

(16) The Extended Projection Principle (EPP)

All clauses must have a subject.

- (17) a. John hopes to meet Mary.
b. Mary wants to score a goal.
- (18) a. John hopes that Harry meets Sally.
b. Mary wants that John scores a goal.
- (19) a. Harry meets Sally.
b. * Meets Sally.
c. * Harry meets.

(20) **Theta-Criterion (REVISED)**

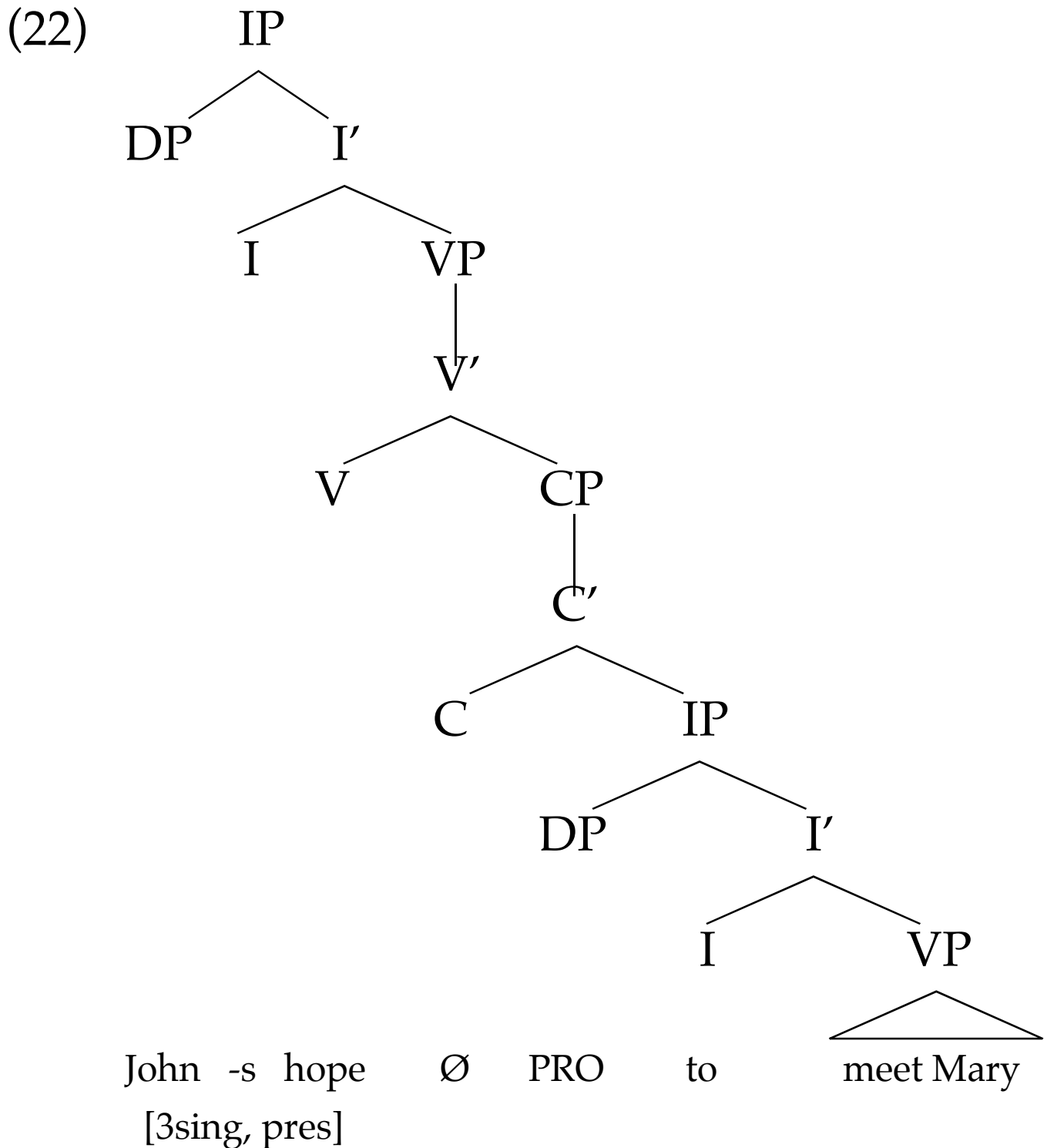
All non-expletive DPs must be assigned a θ -role and every θ -role must be assigned to a DP.

Now the sentences in (17) pose **two** problems:

1. *meet* has a θ -role which it doesn't assign
2. *to meet Mary* doesn't have a subject

The answer: a **controlled PRO** (...)

(21) John hopes [**PRO** to meet Mary].



C-SELECTION

C(ategorial)-selection expresses a predicate's subcategorization frame.

- (2) a. *destruction* [N]
b. *kiss* [V]
c. *fond* [A]
d. *of* [P]

S-SELECTION

S(emantic)-selection pertains to the type of argument required by a predicate.

- (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]