

MSc Introduction to Syntax

Answers to lecture 3

Exercise 3.1

A. It can mean the same, if the constituency of (1) in Hsilgne is such that *Brian invited* (what is the Agent in English plus the verb) is a constituent excluding *David* (what is the Theme in English), since, as per what is given in the exercise, in Hsilgne the verb first combines with the Agent and only then with the Theme.

B. In English, in contrast to Hsilgne, verb + Theme argument form a constituent that excludes the Agent argument. Evidence comes from both the replacement and movement tests:

- (i) Chris invited Dave and Jane *did so*, too
- (ii) *Chris invited Dave and *did so* Mary, too
- (iii) Invite Dave, Chris never will
- (iv) *Chris invite, never will Dave

Exercise 3.6

(1) a. In the intended reading ('Greeks give a fine to hookers') this is a sentence with *Greeks* = Agent and *hookers* = Theme of verb *to fine*. In the unintended reading ('the fine hookers of Greece') this is an NP headed by *hookers* with *Greeks* as possessor and *fine* as adjective.

b. In the intended reading ('the barbecue guests of the lawmen from Mexico') this is an NP headed by the compound *barbecue guests* and containing a modifying NP *lawmen from Mexico*. In the unintended reading ('the lawmen from Mexico are barbecuing their guests') this is a sentence with the verb *to barbecue*, with *lawmen from Mexico* = Agent and *guests* = Theme.

c. In the intended reading ('Lawyers give free legal advice to the poor') *lawyers* = Agent, *poor* = Goal, and *free legal advice* = Theme. In the unintended reading ('the free legal advice that lawyers give is poor') *lawyers* = Agent, *poor free legal advice* = Theme (i.e. *poor* is an adjective here, not a noun), and the Goal is not expressed.

d. In the intended reading ('the rate of lung cancer in women is rapidly increasing') *lung cancer* = Agent and *women* = Theme of the verb *mushrooms*. In the unintended reading ('female mushrooms have lung cancer') this is a single NP, with *lung cancer* as head, and a modifying PP *in women mushrooms* (i.e. *mushrooms* is a noun here, not a verb).

In (2)-(4) the joke revolves around whether or not the Goal argument of the verb is expressed or not. For example, in (4) the waitress intends *colored people* to be taken as the Goal argument of *serve*, but Gregory takes it as the Theme argument.

Problem 3.1

A. One piece of evidence can be based on the observation that the antecedent for reflexives such as *herself* must be in the same sentence that the reflexive is in. Thus, if the reflexive is in a sentence that is embedded in a bigger sentence, the antecedent for the reflexive must be in the embedded sentence as well, and cannot be in the higher sentence. In (i), for example, *herself* can only refer to the subject of the embedded sentence (*Harriet*), not to the subject of the main sentence (*Mary*). If there is no possible antecedent for the reflexive in the embedded sentence, the construction is ungrammatical, as (ii) shows. A personal pronoun must be used, rather than a reflexive, if the antecedent is outside the clause.

- (i) Mary told Bill [that Harriet had seen herself on tv]
- (ii) Mary claimed [that the king had invited her/*herself for tea]

However, when the embedded sentence is nonfinite it suddenly seems possible for a reflexive embedded in it to take an antecedent that is outside the embedded sentence:

(iii) Mary promised [not to let herself down]

We can reconcile this fact with the observation that reflexives want their antecedents to be in the same clause that they are in by assuming that there is a silent subject pronoun (referring to *Mary* in (iii)) present in the nonfinite embedded clause. This silent subject then functions as the antecedent for *herself* in (iii).

B. No, this is not related to expletives being supposedly optional. In vernacular usage it is possible to omit any type of constituent that is in the first position of the main sentence, as long as its meaning content can be recovered from the immediate context of the sentence:

Speaker 1: *What's the matter with Mike?*

Speaker 2: *(He) has to go to the dentist today.*

Since expletives are meaningless, there is no semantic content to be recovered at all in their case, so they can always undergo this 'deletion in first position' rule. That they are not just optional is shown by the fact that they cannot be left out when they are in any other position than the first one (so in a position where this more general 'you can drop the first constituent of the main sentence if its content is known' rule cannot apply):

A year ago *(it) seemed like they were finally getting somewhere, but now we know better
He said that *(it) seems like they're finally getting somewhere