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Predicting Argument Realization from Oblique Marker Semantics

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This chapter discusses the role of adpositions and oblique cases (which I group under a single category P, excluding structural cases and their adpositional equivalents) in determining argument realization patterns across languages. Consider the Japanese data in (1) and their English translations, where English clear and Japanese katazukeru, “clear,” both take agent, theme, and source arguments, yet differ in how these arguments may be realized. In (1a) the theme is the object and the source is an oblique marked by from in English and –kara, “from,” in Japanese. In (1b) the source is the object, but only in English can the theme be realized as an oblique, marked by of.

(1) a. Ueetaa-wa syokutaku-kara syokki-o katazuketa.
    waiter-TOP table-from dishes-ACC cleared
    “The waiter cleared the dishes from the table.”

b. Ueetaa-wa syokutaku-o (*syokki-de/kara/ni) katazuketa.
    waiter-TOP table-ACC (*dishes-INST/from/DAT) cleared
    “The waiter cleared the table (of the dishes).” (Japanese; Kageyama 1980, 38)

Why should English and Japanese differ in this way? The simplest answer is to blame it on verbal polysemy: clear and katazukeru both have a variant subcategorized for a theme object and an oblique source, but only clear has a variant selecting for a location object and a theme oblique [even though (1b) entails the existence of a theme]. However, this misses significant generalizations about why languages differ in terms of verbal argument structure. A common alternative is to assume that both Vs and Ps can determine clause structure but in different contexts, yielding different realization patterns (following in the tradition of Hale and Keyser 1993). For example, Folli and Harley (2004) propose that change-of-state predicates decompose into a light verb v and a small clause headed by whatever head (V or P) describes the result. On this approach we might analyze (1b) and its translation as in (2) (following Harley’s [2005], 62, analysis of smear-type locative verbs), where dyadic of predicates a separation relation between the theme and the source, while monadic
katazukeru predicates a “cleared” state of the source (where the English manner root clear is independently incorporated onto v via manner incorporation, represented by parentheses).

(2) a. $[v_P [DP \text{the waiter }] [v' v_0+ (\text{clear})] [PP [DP \text{the table }][P' \text{ of } [DP \text{the dishes }]]]]$

b. $[v_P [DP \text{Ueetaa-wa}] [v'_P [DP \text{syokutaku-o} ] \text{katazukeru} ] \text{katazukeru+}v_0]$ 

While this approach admits a role for P semantics, it has the counterintuitive side effect that Vs with similar meanings across languages have radically different functions in the clause. Indeed, Harley (2005, 54) analyzes the translation of (1b) more along the lines of (2b) (modulo word order) with the of-PP as a complement to the clear root, meaning different locative verbs have different analyses even in English. I advocate a more symmetric approach wherein all clauses always have a V-head and all obliques have a P-head. However, following Beavers (2006a), Gawron (1986), and Wechsler (1995), I argue that V and P are subject to an implicational compatibility relationship, where the role assigned to the argument by V is a strictly more specific version of the role assigned by P, which I refer to as the Oblique Selection Principle (see Beavers 2006a, 129–32):

(3) **Oblique Selection Principle (OSP):** The role $\theta_V$ assigned by V to oblique argument x in event e must imply the role $\theta_P$ assigned by P to x in e, that is, $\forall x \forall e[\theta_V(e, x) \rightarrow \theta_P(e, x)]$.

A quick look at the data shows that both V and P contribute semantic components to any clause, consistent with the OSP. First, certain aspects of the role of any oblique argument are determined solely by V, as the “same” obliques have different roles with different Vs, as in (4).

(4) a. Sandy loaded the wagon with the hay. (Theme; loaded)
b. Sandy cut the bread with the knife. (Instrument; inserted)
c. Sandy chipped the rock with the chisel. (Instrument; hit bluntly)

Clearly each with-oblique has a role determined by V. In (4a) it is a theme, in (4b) it is an instrument that moves toward the patient like a theme and then penetrates it, and in (4c) it is an instrument that moves into blunt contact with the patient. These differ from instrument adjuncts (e.g., Sandy ate the grits with a fork) in that they are entailed to exist by the V. Nonetheless, there is commonality across all of these with-obliques: they are all “causally intermediate” between the agent and the patient in the force-dynamic structure of the event (following Croft 1991, 178). This suggests a unified semantics for (at least one use of) with that subsumes themes and instruments, including all of those given in (4). Crucially, the V semantics is always more specific than the P semantics (if Sandy loads the wagon with hay she first acts on the hay and then on the wagon, etc.), supporting the OSP as a general constraint on V + P combinations.

This makes two predictions. First, unsurprisingly, only semantically compatible V + P combinations are possible; for example, I loaded the wagon above hay is infelicitous because about does not encode causal intermediacy and does encode things
not entailed by *load. However, the OSP is not a sufficiency condition: Some putatively synonymous Ps may not occur marking the same oblique arguments, for example, *Sandy loaded the wagon with/*by/*via hay (assuming with, by, and via mark causal intermediacy). This suggests that in addition to the OSP there may still be c-selectional requirements for specific V + P combinations.

The second, more interesting prediction, which I explore in depth, is that the presence/absence of certain Ps in a language determines the possibility of oblique realization of certain arguments of certain verbs. Thus the contrast between (1b) and its translation may simply reflect the independent presence of a class of of-obliges in English that Japanese systematically lacks. This will involve demonstrating that English of is semantically contentful and that Japanese has no corresponding postposition. There is in fact evidence for this, as English of is historically derived from Old English ablative æf (cf. off). Hook (1983) calls its use with clear the “abstrument”: an instrument in an ablative context, that is, a theme that is moved away from something. In fact, of is even more general than this. While from marks only sources, of can mark both abstruments as in (5) and sources as in (6), that is, either side of a separation relation.

(5) a. The government robbed/deprived them of/*from their jobs.
   b. The doctor cured him of/*from his nail biting. (Marking abstruments)

(6) a. He partook of/*from the salad.
   b. We desired it of/*from him. (Marking sources)

The difference between English and Japanese is that Japanese lacks an abstrument marker: -de marks instruments and -kara marks sources, but neither marks an abstrument. In particular, translations of (5a) follow the pattern in (1), while translations of (5b) involve a possessive similar to cure his disease (Mika Hama, p.c.):

(7) Isha-ga kare-no byoki-o naoshita.
    doctor-NOM he-GEN disease-ACC cured
    “The doctor cured his disease.” (= cured him of his disease) (Japanese)

Thus we can assume that the Japanese and English sentences in (1b) have the same clause structure (modulo word order), but English allows a PP theme because it has the P of, while Japanese does not because it does not have an equivalent P. Unfortunately, I have no deeper explanation for the absence of an abstrument P in Japanese except that its presence in English is a historical oddity. However, in the next two sections I turn to two cases of systematic variation in argument realization across languages and show that in each case the variation is correlated with the independent presence/absence of certain Ps in the relevant languages. Moreover, I show that this can often be reduced to independent typological variation across these languages, suggesting that these differences are systemic rather than arbitrary. I also show how in many cases other properties of the languages may provide alternative means consistent with the OSP for capturing some of the functionality of the missing argument realization pattern, thus further validating this hypothesis.
Encoding of Goals—Possibilities and Impossibilities

A classic case study of cross-linguistic variation in argument marking is the typology of Talmy (2000) for how languages encode directed motion, based on how the notions path of motion and manner of motion are encoded in a single clause. The crucial distinction is between S(atelitte)-framed languages (e.g., English, Russian), in which manner is characteristically encoded in the V and path in some satellite to V, and V(verb)-framed languages (e.g., French, Japanese), where path is characteristically encoded in the V, and manner in some satellite, illustrated in (8).

(8) a. John limped into the house. (English; S-framed)
   b. Je suis entré dans la maison (en boitant).
      I am entered in the house in limping
      “I entered (into) the house (limping).” (French; V-framed)
      (cf. J’ai boité dans la maison.)

Traditionally, this distinction has been analyzed in terms of Vs (Talmy 1975, 1985): In V-framed languages manner Vs are not compatible with path obliques, while in S-framed languages they are. However, an alternative view is that this contrast instead reflects cross-linguistic, motion-independent variation of (among other things) inventories of Ps (Beavers, Levin, and Wei 2008; Folli and Ramchand 2002; Talmy 2000; Son 2007). For example, in S-framed languages, path/goal Ps (e.g., [in]to) often have very general uses, even occurring with Vs that do not inherently select for them:

(9) a. John crossed to the other side of the river. (V implies motion to a goal)
   b. John walked/ran/promenaded (in)to the store. (V implies motion but no goal)
   c. Ted scrubbed/polished his shoes to a healthy shine. (V implies process to a result)
   d. James rubbed the finish to a dull luster. (V implies process but no result)

Thus these Ps are more like semantic allative Ps. If the V does not entail a goal/result as in (9b) and (9d) the oblique adjunctively contributes this semantics, while if the V does entail a goal/result as in (9a) and (9c) the oblique further specifies it. Conversely, in V-framed languages, goals/results are marked by dative/localive Ps [dans, “in” in (8b)], but only when the V selects for a goal/result. They may not occur adjunctively on these readings. This is illustrated in (10) for Japanese -ni, which has a range of uses marking arguments of Vs (e.g., causees in derived causatives, logical subjects of passives, recipients of ditransitives; Kuno 1973; Sadakane and Koizumi 1995) but not adjuncts:

          John-TOP station-to went/went-up/ran/walked
      “John went (up)/walked/ran to the station.” (Entailed vs. nonentailed goal)
   b. Mary-ga doresu-o pinku-ni someta.
       Mary-NOM dress-ACC pink-DAT dyed
      “Mary dyed the dress pink.” [Entailed result; Washio 1997, 5, (13b)]
Thus distributionally \(-ni\) is not comparable to \(to\), and this is so for other putative goal/path Ps in V-framed languages (Beavers, Levin, and Tham 2008). Instead, \(-ni\) is more akin to a dative than an allative, marking nonnominative, nonaccusative verbal arguments, that is, something entailed to exist and possibly directly subcategorized for by the V. So the V/S-framed distinction may derive not from differences in V inventories but differences in P inventories: S-framed languages have allative Ps, and V-framed languages do not. The lack of allative Ps in turn follows from the more general lack of secondary predication in most V-framed languages, whereas V-framed languages tend to lack productive resultative constructions altogether, including adjectival or adpositional resultatives (see Aske 1989, on Spanish; and Washio 1997, on Japanese; although see Son 2007). Thus while the absence of an abstractive P in Japanese may be just a lexical quirk, the absence of the class of allative Ps in V-framed languages ties in to a much broader typological parameter, with the result that certain ways of realizing an entire class of arguments is disallowed.

However, there is a curious and very telling exception to the generalization that V-framed languages disallow S-framed encoding, but one that conforms to and supports the OSP. It is seldom noted that V-framed languages often do have one P that can realize goals with manner Vs, namely the P meaning “until.” This is shown in (11) for the Japanese P \(-made\) (similar data is attested in other V-framed languages, including Spanish, French, and Turkish; Beavers 2008).

\[
\text{John-wa kishi-made/*ni oyoida/tadayotta.} \\
\text{John-TOP shore-until/to swam/drifted} \\
\text{“John swam/drifted to the shore.” [Japanese; Beavers 2008, 284, (1b)]}
\]

\(Until\)-markers are of course not unique to motion constructions but have a range of uses for marking temporal and numerical boundaries:

\[
\text{(12) a. Ohiru-made kore-o shite-kudasai.} \\
\text{noon-until this-ACC do-please} \\
\text{“Please do this until noon.”} \\
\text{b. Yuka-kara yane-made nan-meetoru arimasu ka?} \\
\text{floor-from roof-until how-many-meters are QUES} \\
\text{“How many meters from the floor to the roof?”} \\
\text{[Kuno 1973, 108–10, (1a), (6)]}
\]

Beavers (2008) analyzes such markers as delimiter, adjunctively predicating an endpoint on some participant in the event/state. A goal of motion, however, is crucially just the endpoint of a path of motion. Thus what \(-made\) is doing in (11) is predicating the endpoint of the path, which has the indirect effect of specifying what the goal of motion is. More crucially, \(until\)-markers also show up with path verbs, which select for a goal argument, exactly as expected by the OSP:
(13) John-wa eki-made/ni itta/modotta.
John-TOP station-until/to went/went-up
“John went/went up to the station.” [Beavers, 2008, 284, (1a)]

Note that until in English is rarely acceptable as a goal marker (cf. #John walked until the store). This is not a counterexample to the OSP, as it is not a sufficiency condition. But in this case there is a simple explanation: English, an S-framed language, has a host of specific goal-marking Ps that presumably block the use of the far more general until. Thus what we see is that the independent presence of a compatible P in V-framed languages opens up the possibility of otherwise disallowed realization options, something such languages can exploit to get around the absence of allative Ps in a way consistent with the OSP.

**Dative Alternations**

Following on the goal-marking use of to, English allows a dative alternation in which a recipient may be realized either as the first object of a ditransitive V or as a to-oblique:

(14) a. Kim gave/sent/tossed Sandy the ball.
b. Kim gave/sent/tossed the ball to Sandy.

As has long been noted, there are often information structural constraints on the alternation, where the element that comes first tends to be more topical (Wasow 2002). There is also an interesting semantic effect in this alternation. The first object must be capable of possession, whereas the corresponding to-oblique may be interpreted as a (purely locational) goal. This is demonstrated in (15), where inanimate London cannot be a first object unless it is interpreted as capable of possession, for example, “the London Office” (Beavers 2006a, 188; Green 1974, 103–4).

(15) a. #John sent London a letter. (OK on “London Office” reading)
b. John sent a letter to London. (OK on “London Office” or goal reading)

Note that the relevant notion is the capability of possession, not actual possession, which is often (though not always) an implicature, for example, *John sent Mary a letter, but it never arrived*. Other languages have similar alternations. In German the contrast is between a dative DP and a DP marked by some allative P such as zu or nach, “to,” whereas in Greek the relevant contrast is between agenitive (or accusative) DP and an oblique marked by a goal-marking P se (Anagnostopoulou 2003). The general shape of the alternation is always between direct and oblique realization, however manifested in a given language. However, not all languages allow both variants. For example, in Finnish the typical way to realize a goal/recipient argument of a ditransitive V is with the allative case; there is no dative in Finnish, nor is there genitive object or double object constructions (Kaiser 2002):

(16) Minä annoin miehelle kirjan.
I.NOM gave man.ALL book.ACC
“I gave the man a book.” [Finnish; Kaiser 2002, (4b)]
Conversely, in Japanese the goal/recipient must be realized by dative -ni; as noted earlier there is no allative in Japanese, following from the more general lack of secondary predication:

(17) Masao-ga Akira/Tokyo-ni syasin-o okutta.
    Masao-NOM Akira/Tokyo-DAT picture-ACC sent
    “Masao sent a picture to Akira/Tokyo.” [Japanese; cf. Beavers 2006a, 189, (11)]

In each case the lack of a variant corresponds to the independent absence of some class of Ps in the language. Interestingly, the information structural and semantic functionality of dative alternations is accomplished through other means in these languages. For example, in both languages the relatively free word order encodes the relative topicality of the theme and goal/recipient arguments rather than a morphological alternation (see Kaiser 2002, on Finnish; and Miyagawa and Tsujioka 2004, on Japanese). For the semantic contrast the data are more complicated but very telling. Both Finnish and Japanese in fact do have alternations of sorts, of a different form than English or German, yet consistent with the P and structural case inventories of each language. In Finnish a goal can also be realized in the illative “into” case:

(18) Minä lähetin kirjan Suomeen.
    I-NOM sent book-ACC Finland.ILLAT
    “I sent a/the book to Finland.” [Finnish; Kaiser 2002, (a), fn.2]

In general the allative encodes capability of possession while the illative is appropriate for locations, mirroring the first object/oblique contrast in English (Paul Kiparsky, Elsi Kaiser, p.c.). However, the allative/illative contrast differs from the English contrast in that it is an oblique/oblique contrast, though one that is consistent with the presence in Finnish of a great number of locational semantic cases, some of which are compatible with the semantics selected for by ditransitive verbs.

In Japanese a similar effect can be observed through an interesting contrast in the relative obliqueness of -ni in different contexts. The contrast between structural and oblique Ps in Japanese can be probed through a variety of means (see Sadakane and Koizumi 1995), including their variable behavior under the topic-marking P -wa. When a nonoblique argument is -wa marked, the corresponding structural case (i.e., nominative -ga or accusative -o) is deleted and replaced by -wa as in (19a). But when an oblique is -wa marked, the P may not be dropped (Beavers 2006a, 190–91, and 2008, 304–5). Interestingly, if we -wa mark the -ni marked recipients in (17) as in (19b), dropping -ni is optional, but when it is dropped the “London Office” effect obtains as in the following:

    John-TOP station-to went
    “As for John, he went to the station.” (-ga deleted under topic-marking -wa)

b. Tokyo-ni-wa/#Tokyo-wa Masao-ga syasin-o okutta.
    Tokyo-DAT-TOP/Tokyo-TOP Masao-NOM picture-ACC send

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“As for Tokyo, Masao sent a picture to it/#sent it a picture.” (OK on “Tokyo Office” reading)

This suggests that -ni can be more or less oblique in this construction, forming an alternation quite similar to the dative alternation (see also Miyagawa and Tsujioka 2004; and Sadakane and Koizumi 1995), though whether this corresponds to two different -ni morphemes or one polysemous morpheme is a murkier question.

However, there is one potential problem. So far I have claimed that recipients are a more specific type of goal (and thus may be realized by goal-marking Ps), and goals are a more specific type of limit (and thus may be realized by limit marking until-markers). Thus by the OSP we should expect that recipients can be realized by until-markers. As far as I am aware no language marks recipients with an until-marker, contrary to this prediction. This is not a counterexample to the OSP per se, as again the OSP is not a sufficiency condition. It could simply be that no language has taken up this option. However, I suggest that this is ruled out on more principled grounds. As discussed in Beavers (2008), until-markers mostly occur with durative predicates, while Beavers (2006a, 2006b) note that nearly all ditransitives (in English at any rate) allow only punctual readings. If this is the case, the absence of ditransitive + until combinations may be due to independent semantic incompatibility. Tellingly, however, Danish til, “to,” historically connected to until, is used in both allative/dative and until contexts (Allan, Holmes, and Lundskær-Nielsen 1995, 420–25), with both punctual and durative readings, suggesting the validity of the correlation between until-markers and allative Ps.

The Case of Default Ps
Another potential problem involves so-called default Ps that mark arguments of heads that are unable to check/assign Case (Chomsky 1981, 49ff). The most common candidate is English of, which marks complements of nouns (e.g., the founding of Rome) and adjectives (e.g., fond of Kim), traditionally thought of as unable to assign Case, as well as complements of certain Ps (e.g., off of the rock) and Vs (e.g., spoke of him). Default Ps are presumably meaningless (because in principle they can mark any Caseless argument), and thus any argument of any V could be realized by this P according to the OSP. This predicts that we might expect a wide range of direct argument/default P alternations, as well as arguments in canonical Caseless positions (e.g., internal arguments of unaccusatives and passivized verbs) being realized via default Ps. For example, in addition to The vase broke, where the vase merges first as a sister to V and then raises to [Spec,TP] to check Case and the EPP feature on tense (T), we might expect to find something like *It was broken of the vase, where of is inserted to check Case for the vase and an expletive is inserted to check the extended projection principle (EPP) feature of T. However, we do not find such examples, and they are conspicuous in their absence.

I suggest here a simple explanation for this: Default Ps do not exist, at least not in the verbal domain (following Beavers 2005 on argument/oblique alternations). Crucially, all uses of of in the verbal domain correspond to a very limited set of thematic roles (as a glance through the Oxford English Dictionary suggests), including abstru-
ments and sources [as shown in (5) and (6)], material/topic of discussion (e.g., I wrote of/about him, I was notified of/about his plans), and basis of comparison (e.g., This soup tastes of/like mutton, He reminds me of a peacock). This suggests that while of is a few ways polysemous in the verbal domain, it is not semantically vacuous (and therefore *It was broken of the vase, even if grammatical, could not mean The vase was broken). As much as it is a default in the (ad)nominal domain, it is essentially a direct argument marker (nonverbal objective case) and thus is not subject to the OSP. The use of of to mark complements of Ps seems primarily restricted to a small class of spatial Ps [e.g., off (of) the table, out (of) the house] and might best be viewed as a remnant of a re-analysis of such Ps from earlier status as adverbs/particles (which do not assign/check case). Thus there does not appear to be any evidence for a truly default P in English in the verbal domain, and I am not aware of any such evidence in other languages.

Conclusion

Both V and P assign thematic roles to oblique arguments, but they are constrained by the OSP, which enforces semantic compatibility between them. This predicts not just which V + P combinations will surface in a language but also that certain combinations possible in one language will be impossible in another due to the absence of the appropriate P, a factor that may in turn be reducible to independent typological properties of a given language. What is crucial, therefore, is that the relevant P or class of Ps has a semantics that can be independently identified across a range of constructions. Of course, the evidence presented here is tentative; future work will involve a more systematic view of a range of oblique realization options/inventories across languages.

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