
Theta Role Identity as a Condition on Ellipsis

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According to standard views (e.g. Bayer et al. 2001, Steinbach 2007, Haider 2010) topic drop can only affect structurally cased arguments:

- (1) A: Wo ist Max?
Where is Max?
- a. B: Habe ich soeben zu dir geschickt.
[Acc] Have I just to you sent
- b. B: * Habe ich soeben den Weg gezeigt
[Dat] Have I just the way shown (Haider 2010:269, fn 22)

However, Trutkowski (2016) shows that dative (and even genitive) marked arguments can be omitted when certain requirements at the syntax-semantics interface are met. Notably, for obliquely cased arguments to be dropped (micro) theta roles of antecedent and gap must be identical, cf. (i) A: Ich schämte mich seiner Komplimente. B: [GEN] Konnte ich mich dennoch nicht erwehren. (A: ‘Due to his compliments I felt ashamed’ B: ‘Nonetheless, I could not rebuff [his compliments]’). Looking mainly at two-place predicates (and the case features of the direct object), I propose that predicates that assign structural case mostly denote a simplex event (with no subevent involved) whereas predicates assigning oblique case denote a complex event (involving a main event plus one subevent, see Blume 1998). In particular, I claim that oblique case must be spelled out at PF because it constitutes the (overt) marker of a complex event – however, as topic drop makes overt spell-out impossible, the meaningful content represented by oblique case must be ascertained via micro theta role identity. In my talk I will present independent evidence for this claim and show how this “double” theta role assignment to obliquely cased arguments might look in the syntax.

References: • Blume, K. (1998): A contrastive analysis of interaction verbs with dative complements, *Linguistics* 36, 253–280. • Haider, H. (2010): *The Syntax of German*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. • Trutkowski, E. (2016): *Topic Drop and Null Subjects in German*, Berlin: De Gruyter.