

10. Related Proposals

This is a good point at which to pause to acknowledge other proposals in the literature which are similar to the present one and at the same time point out differences.

The proto-role hypothesis agrees with Jackendoff (1976, 1987) and Foley and van Valin (1984) in claiming thematic roles are "not primitives", but by that phrase they mean that roles should be defined in terms of configurations of semantic representations (which are made up of other primitives), not that role-types are prototypical, "fuzzy" notions. The "parts" of their definitions are not entailments like volition, sentience, etc. but DO, CAUSE, STAY, etc. I prefer to remain open here on the question whether all lexical meanings can be broken down into semantic structures of these kinds, as the present proposal is to an extent compatible with each answer to that question (though for arguments that aspectual distinctions cannot all be represented in a decompositional system, see Dowty (1979: ch. 3)). Likewise, even if lexical meanings are finitely decomposable in this way, it is a separate question whether each of the proto-entailment properties in (29) and (30) would semantically correspond exactly to a configuration of structures involving CAUSE, STAY, etc.

Rather, this hypothesis is most like that of Rozwadowska (1988) and Zaenen (1988), who have argued for a description of role-types in terms of "semantic features". As mentioned, I avoid this phraseology because I believe some entailments may have unclear boundaries and others may need to be "weighted"; dividing up the "features" into two opposing proto-categories is also not found in these works.

Foley and van Valin (1984:28ff) however do group roles into two "macro-roles", *Actor* and *Undergoer*, which are like my P-Agent and P-Patient. But theirs are two discrete categories, to which each role-type (and therefore each argument) does or does not belong: I see virtue in saying there are DEGREES of membership in the two P-categories, and I omit the traditional role-types as intermediate categories of special status. Jackendoff adds Actor and Instigator to the traditional Agent as role types, and he assigns arguments to multiple role-types (e.g. simultaneously Agent and Experiencer), and in these ways parallels my recognition of various combinations of entailments defining kinds of subcategory (e.g. volition + causation + sentience); But I have different "subcategories" from his, at least in the patient domain, and as mentioned, arrive at, conceptualize, and use roles differently. Culicover and Wilkins (1986) partition role-types into two groups, the *action tier* (Agent, Patient) and a *motion tier* (roles involving movement--Theme, Source Goal); to these Jackendoff (1983) adds a *temporal tier* (aspect and other time adverbials), but these divisions are orthogonal to any of the classes of arguments shown relevant to argument selection here. As already mentioned, the lists of entailments I have used to characterize the two proto-roles turn out to be quite

similar to those proposed by Keenan to universally characterize "Subject" (Keenan 1976) and "Absolutive" (Keenan 1984) respectively, but I have also explained why it is crucially a part of my proposal that Proto-Roles cannot be collapsed with grammatical relations in that way.

I agree with both Lakoff (1977) and the work of Hopper and Thompson (1980) in emphasizing the *continuous* nature of the distinctions one wants to draw in this domain. Lakoff views agency as a prototype and a psychological "Gestalt" characterized by a great variety of properties, though he also adopts a prototype view of individual lexical meanings (which I do not), and seems to view Patienthood as simply the complement or absence of Agentivity (which I cannot do). As already noted, the latter authors view *transitivity* as a property a **clause** can possess to a greater or lesser degree, whereas I think the transitivity of a clause can be derived by summing the independently needed agentivity and patientivity counts of the arguments.

Finally, there are similarities to Fillmore's later writings on case grammar (Fillmore 1977), which gives a different and more complex account of argument selection than his earlier theory did. This account involves both a "hierarchy of deep cases", as in his earlier work, to determine subject versus object, and also a "saliency hierarchy" to separate primaries--- subjects and objects--from obliques, the latter hierarchy being partly similar to the proto-role account in that it gives preference to humanness, change of state or location, and "definiteness and totality", but differs in being viewed as "saliency", a matter of importance or perspective. While I have also suggested some cases where object vs. oblique argument selection reflects the relative "importance" of entailments, I doubt that this argument selection case can really be REDUCED to saliency (cf. §9.3), and I think subject-versus-object selection need not appeal to a fundamentally different kind of selection principle from that for obliques, but my proposal is like this one in recognizing that a collection of distinct semantic contrasts is involved in argument selection. This is not the place to attempt a complete and necessarily very complicated comparison of the two approaches.

Thus most of the ingredients of the present proposal can be found independently in one place or another (which I take to be an encouraging sign), though never put together in such a way as to give a proto-role theory of argument selection like that offered here.