# ENGLISH GRAMMAR. Government & Binding Theory

The meaning of sentences: argument structure. Lecture 3.

## 10

## The components of the clause: thematic structure

- Verbs and their arguments.
- Composition of a sentence depends on a type of verb it contains:
- (1)a. Louise abandoned (Vtr.) the project (NP).
  - b. \*Louise abandoned.
  - c. \*Louise abandoned after the project (PP).
  - d. Louise abandoned the book.
  - e. \* Louise abandoned the project (NP) the book (NP).

- (2) a. Louise smiled.
  - b. \*Louise smiled (Vint.) her friend.

Other types of verbs must be followed by a complement, but the complement is a constituent other then a NP. A verb selects a complement of a specific type. *Abandon* selects a NP.

Cf. the verb to live:

- a. Thelma lives in an apartment.
- b. \*Thelma lives.
- c. \*Thelma lives an apartment.

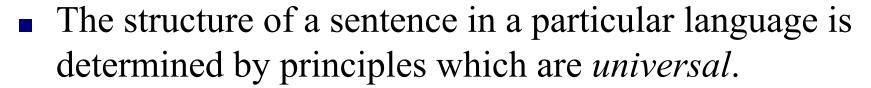
Other verbs select a sentence as their complement:

- (3) a. Mary wondered [whether Bill would leave].
  - b. \*Mary wondered [Bill's departure].
  - c. \* Mary wondered.
- In (3a) the verb *wonder* selects the complement *whether Bill* would leave, which is itself a sentence. A sentence which contains another sentence as one of its components is a complex sentence.

To differentiate between the clauses in a complex structure, we refer to a clause, which is a constituent of another sentence, such as *whether Bill would leave in* (3a) as an **embedded clause**, a **subordinate** or a **lower clause**.

Mary wondered is a matrix clause. The matrix verb wonder selects a clausal or **sentential complement**.

- Cf. also (3) d. Mary wondered [about Bill's departure].
  - e. Mary announced [Louise's departure].
  - f. Mary announced [ that Louise was leaving].



• It is a universal property of human language that the selectional properties of the verb determine the composition of the sentence.

#### The theta-criterion

- The selectional requirements of the verb are closely related to its meaning. The verb *abandon* refers to an activity involving two participants: the one who abandons and the person and thing that is abandoned.
- The verb has an argument structure. When a verb is introduced in a sentence its argument structure is activated.
  - (4) a. abandon 1:

2:

b. Thelma abandoned the project.

1

2



- <u>Argument 1</u> is the AGENT of the activity. It is realized by the NP which precedes the V and which will be labeled the subject of the sentence.
- <u>Argument 2</u> refers to the element which undergoes the activity; it is referred to as the PATIENT.
- The distinct participant roles attributed to the arguments of the clause are referred to as the thematic roles or theta-roles.

Cf. (5) a. *give*: 1: AGENT

2: BENEFICIARY

3: THEME

b. Thelma gave Louise the text.

1

2

3

c. Thelma gave the text to Louise.

1

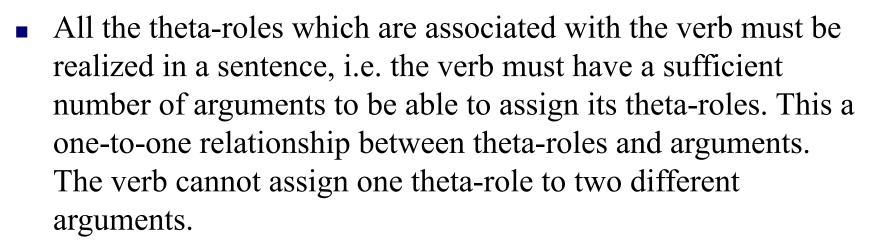
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#### List of the labels to refer to thematic roles or theta-roles

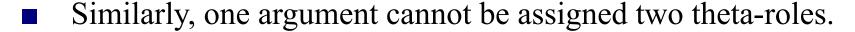
- (6) a. AGENT/ACTOR: the one who initiates the action.
  - b. PATIENT: the person or thing undergoing the action.
  - c. THEME (1): the person or thing moved by the action.
  - d. EXPERIENCER: the entity that experiences some (psychological state).
  - e. BENEFICIARY: the entity that benefits from the action.
  - f. GOAL: the entity towards which the activity is directed.
  - g. SOURCE: the entity from which smth. is moved as a result of the activity.
  - h. LOCATION: the place in which the action or state is situated.



(7) a. \*Thelma abandoned the project the book.

b. Thelma abandoned [the project and the book].

1



(8) a. Thelma invites Louise.

b. invite 1:

2:

c. \* Thelma invites.

1 + 2

In (8c) both theta-roles associated with the verb are assigned to the same argument, <u>Thelma</u>.

- The one-to-one relation between thematic roles and arguments is referred to as the theta-criterion.
  - (9) Theta-criterion
  - a. Each argument must be associated with one and only one theta-role.
  - b. Each theta-role must be associated with one and only one argument.

## Adjuncts

- The argument structure does not exhaustively determine the content of the sentence; a sentence may contain other material in addition to the arguments of the verb:
- (10) a. Louise abandoned the project on a Sunday.
  - b. Thelma quickly handed Louise the text.
  - c. Because it was too heavy, Louise put the parcel on the desk.
  - d. Thelma gave Louise the money in the living room.
  - e. Thelma probably put the parcel on the desk.
  - f. Because it was too heavy, Thelma probably put the parcel on the desk last night.

Sentences in (10) include components which provide information about time. Manner, reason, place modality, etc.

- **Adjuncts** are not arguments of a verb. They are not selected; their relation to the verb is less direct than that of the arguments which have a thematic link with the verb.
- The meaning of the verb determines the number and types of theta-roles it will assign and hence the number of arguments required in the sentence; the verb is thus the semantic nucleus of the sentence.