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Idioms and Unspecified NP Deletion

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junctively ordered rules permits (9) and (10) to be collapsed:

$$(11) \left[ \begin{array}{c} \alpha \text{ voc} \\ -\alpha \text{ cons} \end{array} \right] \rightarrow \phi / \text{---} \# \alpha \left[ \begin{array}{c} -\text{cons} \\ +\text{voc} \\ +\text{foreign} \end{array} \right].$$

Is this formal ingenuity misplaced? In particular, to what extent do adequate phonological descriptions of natural languages refer to complements of classes?

#### IDIOMS AND UNSPECIFIED NP DELETION

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There are at least three apparently distinct processes by which NP's which are present in underlying structures may be removed. These are exemplified in the conversions of the *a* sentences to the *b* sentences below.

- (1) a. Max drank (smoked, ate, read, wrote, etc.) something.
- b. Max drank (smoked, ate, read, wrote, etc.).
- (2) a. Cecil rapes (murders, etc.) people; Max steals (sells, etc.) things.
- b. Cecil rapes (murders, etc.); Max steals (sells, etc.).
- (3) a. I approve of it (began it, insisted on it, etc.).
- b. I approve (began, insisted, etc.).

In (1b), progressives are possible (*Max is reading*), and simple past and present forms do not necessarily imply habitual activity. In (2b), on the other hand, progressives are impossible (*\*Cecil was raping*), and simple pasts and presents have a habitual interpretation. Sentences like (3b), by contrast, have only anaphoric interpretations: thus *I approved* means neither that I habitually approved, nor that I approved (at some specific time) of some unspecified NP. Rather, *I approved* functions as an anaphoric—the sentence is understood as if it were a form of (3a), where the anaphoric pronominal object has been deleted.

We have no idea whether these processes can be collapsed in some way or not—we wish only to point out the mysterious fact, illustrated in (4), that idioms may not undergo the process in (1).

- (4) a. Bill thought (\*up).
- b. John drank (\*down).
- c. Fred wrote (\*off).
- d. \*Max cut in two.
- e. \*The FBI got wind.
- f. \*Selma set fire.
- g. \*Moishe took advantage.

Apparent counterexamples, such as those in (5), seem to us not to be cases of the rule which is operative in (1), but rather of the rule in (3).

- (5) a. Drink up! (but \**Jack is drinking up*).
- b. Selma let go.
- c. Louis Nizer took objection (\**is taking objection*).

The correlation of idioms and the ability of a lexical item to undergo *Unspecified NP Deletion* we find baffling, and we would welcome hypotheses as to its cause.

A DERIVED NOMINAL  
REQUIRING A SENTENTIAL  
SOURCE

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Chomsky has proposed (to appear) that derived nominals such as (1) should not have a sentential source, but should be directly generated as noun phrases.

- (1) the availability of fresh bagels

(1) is open to a variety of interpretations, depending on the context in which it occurs. For example, in (2), it may have either of the interpretations of (3), while in (4), it may have either of the interpretations of (5).

- (2) Our survival depends on the availability of fresh bagels.
- (3) a. Our survival depends on whether fresh bagels are available.
- b. Our survival depends on the extent to which fresh bagels are available.
- (4) The availability of fresh bagels surprised us.
- (5) a. The fact that fresh bagels were available surprised us.
- b. The extent to which fresh bagels were available surprised us.

Although (1) can be interpreted as the indirect question *whether fresh bagels are available* in (2), it cannot be so interpreted in (4), since indirect questions are not permitted in such constructions.

- (6) \*Whether fresh bagels were available surprised us.

It was observed by Katz and Postal (1964, 96) that the reduced disjunction *or not* can occur in disjunctions with *either*, indirect questions with *whether*, or direct questions.

- (7) Either fresh bagels are available or not.
- (8) Our survival depends on whether fresh bagels are available or not.
- (9) Are fresh bagels available or not?