

The Structural Properties of Implicit Arguments

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As their name suggests, Implicit Arguments are not overtly realized in the syntax. How then do we decide whether a predicate has an implicit argument? For example in English, it seems reasonable to assume that the intransitive *open* differs from the passive *be opened* in lacking an implicit agent. *The door opened* does not require the involvement of an agent while *The door was opened* on its eventive passive reading does. This difference in meaning finds correlates in other diagnostics such as the possibility of agentive adverbials and control infinitival adjuncts. Looking at a wider variety of language reveals that the semantic facts and the relevant diagnostics do not always go together. In Salishan languages and several Indo-Aryan languages, we find intransitive variants of predicates such as *cut*. Hindi-Urdu for example has an intransitive ‘cut’ as well as a passive ‘cut’. It is in principle conceivable that speakers of Hindi-Urdu have a different conception of cutting events, but such a difference is not easily demonstrable. In terms of their semantics, the intransitive ‘cut’ and the passive ‘cut’ seem to be quite close. Yet they pattern differently with respect to other diagnostics - the intransitive ‘cut’ fails the structural diagnostics while the passive ‘cut’ passes them. A reasonable conclusion that we can draw is that despite substantial semantic identity, only passive ‘cut’ has an implicit agent. A further conclusion is that our encyclopedic semantic knowledge about the real world nature of events does not completely determine whether a predicate has an implicit argument or not. Encyclopedic semantics can and must be separated from structurally/lexically represented aspects of meaning. This way of thinking has the possibility of providing answers to thorny questions concerning the presence of implicit agents in certain constructions, most notably middles.

A related question is what kind of structural representation if any implicit arguments should receive. Even setting aside the thornier cases involving potential locative, degree, temporal and situation implicit arguments and limiting ourselves to arguments corresponding to traditional theta-roles (agent, theme, goal), we find that different diagnostics seem to pull us in different directions. Arguing for structural representation are facts concerning binding theory: in certain domains, implicit arguments have the same binding properties that their overt counterparts would.

- (1) Condition A: Respect for oneself is important. (from Williams 1985)
- (2) Condition B: Admiration of him (admirer \diamond admiree) (from Williams 1985)
- (3) Condition C: The realization that John was unpopular (realizer \diamond John) (from Ross 1969 via Williams 1987)

Similarly implicit agents are able to control subjects of infinitival adjuncts. In other domains though, we find that implicit arguments diverge from their overt counterparts. Consider the case of variable binding. It seems that the implicit argument of *home* can be bound: *Every student went home*. But the implicit agent of a passive cannot be bound by a higher quantifier.

- (4)
 - a. *Every musician believes that Bjork is impressed by him.*
 - b. *Every musician believes that Bjork is impressed.*

Similarly while implicit agents can control a covert infinitival subject, whether they can be controlled or not depends upon the kind of implicit argument we are dealing with. In certain cases, we can control implicit arguments of nouns but it does not seem to be possible to control implicit agents of passives.

- (5)
 - a. *The wine was bought [PRO to drink].* (from Roeper 1987)
 - b. *John performed an operation / Mary underwent an operation.* (from Williams 1985)
 - c. *The wine was bought [PRO to be drunk].* (from Roeper 1987).

The contrasts in (4/5) will be shown to emerge from the existentially quantified nature of implicit agents of passives (cf. Lasnik 1993) and the lack of a similar existential quantification in nominals. More generally, I will argue that the range of variation found with implicit arguments mirrors the ways in which overt arguments differ in their syntactic and semantic properties (anaphor/pronoun/PRO, free variable/quantified variable) and that a case by case treatment of the structural properties of implicit arguments is necessary for their proper analysis.