

Theta theory

Partly based on Koenenman & Zeiljstra (2017)

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Syntax-Semantics

- ▶ **Argument** is a semantic notion.
- ▶ **Complement**, **direct object**, **adjunct** etc. are syntactic notions.
- ▶ The interface is regulated by Θ -theory (and Linking Theory).

Θ -criterion

- ▶ Verbs are lexically specified to assign certain Θ -roles to certain syntactic “slots”.
- ▶ Θ -roles and slots are in one-one correspondence.

(1) Mary killed Bill.

(2) John gave Mary the book.

(3) John gave the book to Mary.

Non- Θ -marked semantic information

- (4) John was reading the book.
- (5) John read the whole night.
- (6) John was reading.

Subjects and Agents

- (7)
 - a. John sleeps.
 - b. John snores.
 - c. John walks.
- (8)
 - a. Bill fell.
 - b. John died.
 - c. The glass broke.

Θ -hierarchy

- ▶ E.g. If a verb assigns AGENT and THEME (or PATIENT), it is the AGENT that appears as subject.

Θ-hierarchy

- ▶ E.g. If a verb assigns AGENT and THEME (or PATIENT), it is the AGENT that appears as subject.
- ▶ AGENT > RECIPIENT > THEME/PATIENT > GOAL

Can we predict the optionality of Θ -assignment?

- (9) a. John ate his dinner.
b. John ate.
- (10) a. John asked a question.
b. *John asked.

