

Null Objects and Their Interpretations

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In this talk, I discussed the semantic and the syntactic nature of null objects (NOs), which are phonetically unrealized but have interpretations, as in (1).

- (1) a. Mary's baking ϕ . [*'cookies'*]
- b. John is a bad boy and steals cars, but Jack is good and wouldn't steal ϕ . [*'anything'*]
- c. I went to see the cricket. George was watching ϕ already. [*'it'*]

As for their semantic nature, I argued that NOs fall into two major classes: those which have an indefinite interpretation (INO) (1a,b), and those which have a definite one (DNO) (1c). The INO must be disjoint in reference with any (possible) antecedents in the context: contextual recovery of its interpretation is disallowed. The DNO is obligatorily linked in reference with something in the context: its interpretation is served through obligatory contextual recovery.

As a diagnosis of definiteness, I adopted the 'but not NP' test (cf. Thomas (1979)). The test distinguishes indefinite NPs (acceptable) from definite ones (unacceptable), irrespective of whether the NPs are overt (2) or not (3).

- (2) A: Have you been reading *'Ulysses'*?
- B: a. I've been reading a book, but not *'Ulysses'*. [indefinite NP]
- b. #I've been reading it, but not *'Ulysses'*. [definite NP]
- (3)a. A. Have you been reading *'Ulysses'*?
- B. I've been reading ϕ , but not *'Ulysses'*. [indefinite NO]
- b. A. Have you been watching the soccer game?
- B. #I've been watching ϕ , but not the soccer game. [definite NO]

Interpretations of INOs further vary in specification. INOs which serve a highly specific reading include resultant objects (cognate objects included), experiencer objects. I argued that their interpretations are strict-

ly specified by their verbs: resulting verbs premise resultant entities; psych verbs premise experiencers. As the selectional restriction of a verb relaxes, its INO subdivides its interpretation (e.g., *act* and *borrow*). If little restriction is imposed, the interpretation is broad, i.e., unspecified at all ('something') (e.g., *steal*, *sell*).

As for the DNO, instead of the selectional restriction of a verb, possible (and impossible) classes of object are determined: Those which allow the DNO include Locative and Reflexive objects (4); those which disallow the option are affected objects (Patient) and metaphorical objects (5).

- (4) a. Yesterday, Mary arrived at Riverside. But she would have to leave ϕ in a week or two. [Location]
 (Cf. Susan gave me an umbrella. *Unfortunately, I left ϕ on the train. [Patient])
- b. John shaves (himself) at 7 o'clock. [Reflexive]
 (Cf. A: I heard that Samson had decided to have his hair cut.
 B: Yeah. And look, the barber's now shaving *(him).
 [Non-reflexive])
- (5) a. He won *(the first prize). [Patient]
 (Cf. He won (the competition). [Place])
- b. A young mathematician arrived *(at the answer). [Metaphorical]
 (Cf. A young knight arrived (at the castle). [Original (Place)])

As for the syntactic nature, by making use of Rizzi's (1986) diagnoses (control and binding constructions), I argued that neither INOs nor DNOs have syntactic positions except for DNCs in Recipe Contexts.

Because of the uniformity in syntax, I did not posit any syntactic deletion rules as in Lehrer (1970), Allerton (1975). To account for the mismatch between the syntax and the semantics, I proposed that a verb is lexically specified for the definiteness of its object (but not for the omissibility of it) (cf. Rizzi). Specifically, in the case of the INO, the semantic grid of the object should be saturated by an abstract indefinite element; in the case of the DNO, it should be saturated with a variable x , which will be bound by a referent salient in the context. Further specification of the interpretation of a NO is due to the selectional restriction of the verb (INO), or the restrictions on object classes (DNO).