

Theta grids

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Introduction to Syntax

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2011 Nov 28

1 Parts of a theta grid

Lexical entries

think

Experiencer DP	Proposition CP
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be cool

theme DP

Theta grids: Indices in second row represent syntactically supplied arguments. First row represents lexically supplied roles.

$[_{DP} \text{ the boy}]_I$ **thinks** $[_{CP} \text{ that } [_{DP} \text{ Mary}]_K \text{ is cool}]_J$

think

Experiencer	Proposition
DP	C P
—	—
i	j

be cool

theme
DP
—
k

Worth noting

- The predicates in theta-grids have no tense. Predicates come out of the lexicon. Verbs don't have tense in the lexicon. As we now see, they get combine with tense in the syntax, either by $V \rightarrow T$ movement, or by affix-lowering.

2 Right Answers

1. $[_{DP} \text{ Adam}]_I$ **asked** $[_{CP} \text{ if } [_{DP} \text{ Hyacinth}]_J \text{ likes } [_{DP} \text{ pineapples}]_K]_L$.

ask

Experiencer	Proposition
DP	CP/DP
—	—
i	l

like

Experiencer	Theme
DP	DP
—	—
j	k

Worth noting

- You must recognize the embedded clause to get it right; two clauses means two predicates

2. [Michael]_I **asked** [_{DP} a question]

ask

Experiencer	Proposition
DP	CP/DP
i	j

Worth noting

- Using the same roles for this as for the previous. Seems plausible that there is one meaning of *ask* with two different realizations. Consider also *Michael asked the time*.
- Alternative idea: *a question* is a theme, and *if Hyacinth likes apples* is theme and a proposition. It's hard to notate but the idea is, internal theta role for *ask* is always a DP and, if it's a CP, then it's also a proposition. This is consistent with the idea that theta-roles are bundles of thematic relations.

3. [I]_I **feel** [_{CP} that [it] **is unfortunate** [_{CP} that [TV]_J **is so vulgar** these days]_K]_L.

feel

Experiencer	Proposition
DP	CP
i	l

be unfortunate

proposition
CP
k

be vulgar

theme
DP
j

Worth noting

- *these days*, an adjunct, is left out of the theta-grid of **be vulgar**.

- *it* is an expletive. By definition, an expletive gets no theta-role. And no theta-index.
- *Be* is never treated as a predicate.
- Three predicates means three theta-grids. Three clauses means three predicates.

4. [_{CP} that [Angus]_I **hates** [sushi]_J]_K **is mysterious**

be mysterious

Proposition
CP
—
k

hate

Experiencer	Theme
DP	DP
—	—
i	j

Worth noting

- You must recognize the embedded clause to get it right; two clauses means two predicates
- *Be* is never treated as a predicate.
- You must the right arguments with the right predicates. Treating *sushi* as an argument of **be mysterious** won't cut it.

5. [it] **is sunny** [in the living room]_I

be sunny

location
PP
i

Worth noting

- *It* is treated as an expletive here. By definition, an expletive gets no theta role.

6. [it] **is sunny** [in the living room] (alternative)

be sunny |

Worth noting

- *In the living room* is treated as an adjunct.

3 Wrong Answers

1. [Susan]_I ate [yesterday]_J [at the restaurant]

eat

Agent	theme
DP	DP
i	j

What's wrong:

- **yesterday** is treated as an argument. It's not. It's an adjunct expressing the time of the event. Temporals and locatives are (almost) always adjuncts. This actually expresses a grammatically possible reading on which yesterday was devoured, parallel to the much more probable *I loved yesterday!* (It was the best day of my week!)

4 Theta criterion

1. * [Susan]_I loved.

love

Agent	theme
DP	DP
<u>i</u>	<u> </u>

What's wrong:

- Too few arguments

2. * [Susan]_I fell [_{DP} the toy]_J

fall

Agent	
DP	
<u>i</u>	<u>j</u>

What's wrong:

- Too many arguments

3. * [Susan]_I put [_{DP} the toy]_J [_{DP} the table]_K

put

Agent	Theme	Location	
DP	DP	PP	
<u>i</u>	<u>j</u>	<u> </u>	<u>k</u>

What's wrong:

- Argument is wrong syntactic category.

4. * [Susan]_I put [_{DP} the dirt]_J [_{PP} with the shovel]_K

put

Agent	Theme	Location	
DP	DP	PP	
<u>i</u>	<u>j</u>	<u> </u>	<u>k</u>

What's wrong:

- Argument not appropriate for this theta role.

5 Expletives

1. [It]_i is disturbing [that [John]_j knew [his assailant.]_k]_L

know

Exp	Theme
DP	DP
i	k

disturbing

Theme
DP
l

It treated as an expletive. Use NP substitution test.

* Mary is disturbing that John knew his assailant.

2. [It]_i is angry [that [John]_j left]_k

leave

Agent
DP
j

angry

Exp	Proposition
DP	CP
i	k

It treated as an ordinary NP that receives a theta role. Use NP substitution test.

* Mary is angry that John knew his assailant.