Frame-based constructional approach to argument structure satisfaction via unselected adjuncts

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This paper presents cases in English and Japanese of unselected adjuncts satisfying argument structure, arguing for an approach that combines construction grammar and frame semantics. Traditional approaches to argument structure (AS) combine lexical or constructional specification with general principles on the role realization (Fillmore 1968, Goldberg 2005, Grimshaw 1990). We argue for another mechanism: unselected adjuncts may provide semantic content sufficient to satisfy AS requirements. The account continues the effort of Goldberg & Ackerman (2001) of recognizing disparate phenomena (focus, relevance, and presupposition) that contribute to argument structure well-formedness. We couch our account in frame semantics, in particular recognizing core and non-core roles. (Fillmore 1982, Matsumoto 1997, Fillmore & Baker 2009).

In case 1, extraposed temporal clauses satisfy a core role. FrameNet's Stimulus_focus frame (embarrassing, funny) allows an extraposed STIMULUS (1), but equivalent information can be realized as a (non-core) temporal modifier that mentions the emotion-causing event (2).

In case 2, we see the in-that-X construction, which provides specification/elaboration on a predicate (3). Consider the Similarity and Uniqueness frames: they have a core PARAMETER role, which if not overt is interpreted as indefinite (4). Including in-that satisfies this requirement (5). In-that-X contributes the same meaning in (3) and (5), while fulfilling a core semantic requirement in (5).

In case 3, Japanese adjunct node ('because') clauses are used with communication frames such as Telling and Warning. Examples in (6, 7) show the node clause conveying the reason for the speech act as well as its content, i.e., the core role MESSAGE, which is syntactically absent.

These patterns add a new category to the growing list of ways to create well-formed clauses. The range of lexical and syntactic patterns motivates combining language-specific constructions with general frame-semantic principles to understand how core AS requirements are satisfied. This supports viewing AS as integrating inferential processes against a rich background of lexical meaning.

(1) It was embarrassing [that he came into my room / for him to have come into my room].
(2) It was embarrassing [when he came into my room].
(3) The tree is tall [in that most other examples of its species are extremely short].
(4) Their proposals are similar/unique [in some indefinite/unspecified way].
(5) This proposal is similar/unique [in that it requires an unprecedented amount of money].
(6) X kyoozyu gosonpu Y ni okaremosite wa #-gatu #-niti ni goseikyo saremasita node lutusinde osirase itasimasu. [Lit. ‘Because Prof. X’s father Y passed away on [date], (we) inform/tell (you).’]
We respectfully inform you that Professor xxx’s father yyy passed away on [month/date].
(7) X-eki made tomarimasen node go-tyuu kudasai station till stop-POL-NEG because be.careful POL [Lit. ‘Because this train will not stop until X-station, be careful.’] Be warned that this train will not stop until it stops at X-station.

Selected References