

Frames Predict Null-Complement Interpretations

When and why do speakers leave semantic roles unspoken? Since Fillmore's seminal 1986 work on lexically licensed null complements in English, scholars have mostly pursued single-factor explanations, in particular, recoverability of the unstated argument (Resnik 1993, Goldberg 2006) and Aktionsart of the licensing verb (Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998, Wright & Levin 2000). But these explanations are undermined by the idiosyncrasies that Fillmore emphasized: lexical differences (e.g. the near-synonyms *eat* and *devour* differentially allow omission of their theme), interpretive differences (e.g. *I know* \emptyset exhibits an anaphoric omission while *I was eating* \emptyset exhibits an existential one) and effects of constructional context (e.g. verbs disallowing null complements in episodic contexts allow them in generic/habitual ones: *She impresses* \emptyset *every time*). The nonuniformity of null complementation (NC) suggests that gaining predictive power in this domain requires narrow-scope generalizations. Using data from the British National Corpus (BNC), we suggest one such generalization: if two or more verbs belong to the same FrameNet frame (Johnson et al. 2002) and license the omission of a particular frame element (FE), the interpretation type of the omitted FE is the same for all such predicators. For example, in the Arriving frame (e.g., *approach*, *come*, *return*), some verbs allow omission of the Goal FE, under anaphoric interpretation (1), while others (e.g. *reach*, *get*) do not (2). However, none omits the FE under existential interpretation (3):

- (1) We arrived (in Sydney) at eight in the morning.
- (2) Our last stop before we reached *(Sydney) was Canberra.
- (3) #A: Bill just told me he arrived. B: Oh where? A: I don't know, somewhere.

We demonstrate the robustness of this implicational regularity and the motivated nature of exceptions. As for the latter, consider the Quitting (a job) frame, evoked by e.g. *resign* and *step down*. These verbs omit the Employer FE anaphorically (as in, e.g., *I quit!*) whereas *retire* omits it existentially, as in, e.g., *My dad will retire soon*. But note that *retire*, unlike other verbs in the frame, entails that the Employee has undergone a permanent status change: s/he is no longer in the labor market. Crucially, this focus on the current status of a participant (rather than on the precipitating event) also motivates omissions licensed by the existential perfect construction (Goldberg 2005). In *This lion has killed* \emptyset *before*, the focus is on the fact that by having killed the lion has acquired the status of being a dangerous animal. Thus, the resultant-state entailment, whether constructional or lexical, overrides the interpretive bias imposed by frame membership.

Our frame-level generalization is preferable to single-factor explanations based on lexical aspect or selectional restrictions, while capturing the regularities that motivate such analyses: lexical units that share a frame also tend to share selectional restrictions and Aktionsart class. At the same time, the frame-based generalization avoids the over- and undergeneralizations that result from tying the NC affordance to a single semantic/pragmatic feature. For example, as shown by Ruppenhofer (2004), the verb *devein* combines with just one second argument (*shrimp*), which, despite its manifest recoverability, is not omissible. Thus, one cannot equate an argument's predictability with omissibility, as per Resnik. We propose instead that the behavior of *devein* follows from its membership in the Emptying frame, which requires overt source arguments. In sum, just as Sullivan (2007) demonstrates that frames constrain the metaphorical interpretations of the lexical units in them, we suggest that a predicator's frame membership determines much of its combinatoric and interpretive behavior.