Theta Checking

The paper puts forward a new account on argument linking and eventuality structure within the Minimalist framework: the theta features of the arguments are checked against the aspectual heads within a verb. Thereby the lexicon-syntax interface is captured in purely grammatical terms.

First, the event structure of an eventive verb is created out of the three aspectual heads **do**, **cause** and **become** (cf. Dowty (1979); also Hale and Keyser (1993) and followers). These three heads may be combined freely with the following restriction: if present, **do** must be the highest head; no head may occur more than once. This gives 9 possible verb structures, of which 8 are realized in natural language. All other verb types are stative. It is not possible to express other event structures within a verb. The combination **do-cause** (without **become**) is ruled out since **cause** requires two sub-eventualities; if the initiating one is eventive, the resulting one has to be as well (see Kaufmann (1995), Wunderlich (1997)).

Second, arguments carry the thematic features \([\pm c]\) (for "causer") and \([\pm m]\) (for "intentionality"), as argued for by Reinhart (2000). These features are checked against the aspectual heads. \([\pm c]\) is an uninterpretable feature that serves to distinguish the causer from the causee; it functions as an "ordering" feature. It must be checked against **do** (agents) or **cause** (instruments). \([\pm m]\), in contrast, is interpretable on the noun. Although it differentiates agents ([+c+m]) from instruments ([+c-m]) in the course of the derivation, it remains visible on the noun at LF.

Third, checking relations are as follows: both **do** and **cause** check the \([+c]\)-feature (agent or instrument). Only **do** but not **cause** is able to interpret the \([+m]\)-feature, therefore only **cause** may license sentential subjects (as they are never specified for \([\pm m]\)). So **do** (but not **cause**) must be the highest head and must interpret the \([+m]\)-feature of its argument. **Do** but not **cause**, therefore, necessarily indicates the end of the verb phase; all features must be interpretable at this point. \([-c]\) is checked against the basic predicate. This predicate introduces the situation argument and provides an interface to item-specific world knowledge (say, the difference between **shout** and **whisper**). **Become** does not check any features, it merely functions as a modifier introducing the change-of-state of a predicate.

The system proposed here provides a clear interface between event structure and argument realization. Different types of eventualities (created by at most three aspectual heads) are compatible with several types of thematic arguments. Therefore, the system is able to accommodate phenomena that are entirely in the domain of eventualities in terms of the aspectual calculus (e.g. stative readings of instrumental-alternation verbs; systematic stative/eventive ambiguities, etc.). Finally, this approach paves the way towards a system without a Davidsonian event argument occurring within syntactic representations: the aspectual heads suffice to create the event structure of a verb.
Examples

Realization patterns (eventive verbs):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>operator</th>
<th>example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DO - CAUSE - BECOME</td>
<td><em>decorate</em> (Mary decorated the room with flowers.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO - BECOME - CAUSE</td>
<td><em>hide, obstruct</em> (Mary is slowly hiding the stage with a curtain.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO - BECOME</td>
<td><em>eat</em> (Mary ate an apple.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUSE - BECOME</td>
<td><em>disgust</em> (The explosion frightened Mary.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECOME - CAUSE</td>
<td><em>hide</em> (non-agentive) (The curtain is slowly hiding the stage.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BECOME</td>
<td><em>arrive</em> (Mary is arriving.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAUSE</td>
<td><em>obstruct</em> (stative) (The tissue obstructed the blood vessel. (cf. Kratzer (2000)))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td><em>laugh, glow</em> (Mary laughed. The candle glowed.)</td>
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</table>

Sentential subjects:

| CAUSE  | Dass Maria im Lotto gewonnen hat, ärgert Hans. (German) |
|        | That Mary has won in the lottery annoys John.             |
| DO     | *Dass Maria kaut, aß einen Apfel. (German)               |
|        | *That she chews ate an apple.                            |

References


