

**Omissions of obligatory arguments:
Interaction between structure, meaning, and discourse**

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1. Introduction

How participants of an event are syntactically realized in the surface form has been a widely attended issue in syntax and semantics since it involves syntax-semantics interface. Take English cases in (1) for example. Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2001: 779) propose Argument Realization Principle (ARP) and Argument-per-Subevent Condition to explain the difference in argument realization of bare XP pattern as in (1a) and reflexive pattern as in (1b) in English resultatives. The idea is that there must be one argument XP in the syntax to identify each subevent in the event structure template (cf. Grimshaw and Vikner 1993; van Hout 1996; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998; Kaufmann and Wunderlich 1998; Wright and Levin 2000).

- (1) a. The pond froze solid.
b. He ran himself tired.

They claim that the difference in the constructional form reflects the difference in event structure. "The bare XP pattern, then, lacks a consistent association of notions of cause and result with verb and XP. In contrast, in the reflexive pattern, the verb consistently represents the cause and the XP the result" (Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2001: 781). Therefore, ARP correctly predicts the distribution of English bare XP and reflexive resultative patterns since (1a) contains only a simple event, while (1b) contains a complex event composed of two sub-events. Moreover, Subevent Identification Condition also correctly predicts that each subevent in an event structure template is identified by a lexical predicate (e.g., a verb, an adjective or a preposition) in the syntax (cf. Rappaport Hovav & Levin 1998:112).

Building from Talmy's (1988) work on dynamics of force, Croft (1991) is the main proponent of the causal approach to event structure. For Croft, then, the lexical semantics

of verbs reflect causal structure. The main assumptions of his causal approach are the following:

- (2) a. A simple event is a (not necessarily atomic) segment of the causal network;
- b. simple events are nonbranching causal chains;
- c. a simple event involves transmission of force;
- d. transmission of force is asymmetric, with distinct participants as initiator and endpoint . . . (Croft 1991: 173)

The event type that fits this model best is the prototypical transitive verb in which unmediated volitional causation brings about a change in the entity acted upon. A sentence like the following exemplifies this prototype:

- (3) Sally broke the window.

It involves a three part causal chain, with Sandy exerting force on the window, the window changing state, and ending up in a resulting state (i.e. broken). There is an asymmetric transmission of force from Sandy to the window, with Sandy as the initiator and the window as the endpoint. In turn, the initiator of the causal chain appears as the subject whereas the endpoint appears as the object.

Both approaches can mostly account for the mapping between participants and arguments. However, two potential problems are found by Goldberg (2005). First, Goldberg claims that the ARP must be relativized to English, since many languages allow any argument to be unexpressed as long as it represents given and non-focal information. This is true for example in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Hungarian and Laos. Second, open-ended classes of counterexamples that violate the principles even occur in English. Goldberg hence argues that other factors concerning the construction, the lexical semantics, and the discourse should be considered to deal with the issues of argument realization. In what follows, English cases discussed in Goldberg (2005: 20ff) regarding the implicit theme construction and the deprofiled object construction will be presented in

section 2. Then Hakka implicit object constructions will be illustrated in section 3. It will be shown that while similar principles proposed by Goldberg are observed, Hakka cases differ from English ones both structurally and semantically. Accounts will then be proposed to explicate the intricate syntactic and semantic peculiarities of Hakka cases in section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. English cases

Goldberg (2005), noticing the implicit theme construction and the deprofiled object construction, holds that these cases provide exceptions on the generalizations stated by ARP and SIC. Goldberg observes that the implicit theme construction in English conventionally appears with only two classes of verbs: verbs of bodily emission as in example (4) and verbs of contribution as in example (5):

(4) Chris blew (air) into the paper bag.

(5) Pat contributed (\$1000) to the United Way.

She then represents such a construction as follows:

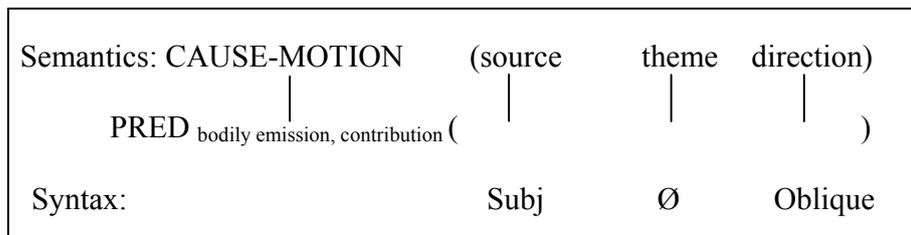


Figure 1 The representation of the implicit theme construction

(Goldberg 2005: 23)

Figure 1 demonstrates the form-function pairings of the implicit theme construction. The top line of Figure 1 represents the semantics of the construction: the caused motion of a theme from a source in a particular direction. Figure 1 also specifies how the semantic arguments are realized overtly in the syntactic structure: the source argument is linked with the subject, the location/direction argument is linked with an oblique argument, and the theme argument is unexpressed. "PRED" stands for a variable over verb meaning, and

the subscription beside indicates the particular verb classes that can appear in this construction. The construction conventionally appears only with certain classes of verbs: verbs of bodily emission and verbs of contribution. Consider the following two sets of examples:

- (5) Verbs of emission
- a. Pat sneezed onto the computer screen.
 - b. Don't spit into the wind.
 - c. Sam pissed into the gym bag.
 - d. Pat vomited into the sink.

(Goldberg 2005: 20-21, (3)-(8))

- (6) Verbs of contribution
- a. Pat donated to the United Way.
 - b. She gave to the United Way.

(Goldberg 2005: 23, (10), (12))

Furthermore, in Figure 1, two types of lines are present between argument roles of the construction and participant roles of the verb: solid lines indicate that the construction's argument role *must* be fused with a participant role of the verb; dashed lines indicate that the argument role may be fused with a participant role of the verb but may alternatively be contributed solely by the construction.

According to Goldberg (2005), two factors may be involved in motivating the Implicit Theme Construction. The first necessary condition on argument omission is semantic recoverability (cf. Rice 1988; Fellbaum and Kegl 1989; Resnik 1993; Cote 1996; Lambrecht and Lemoine 1998; Goldberg 2000). Speakers will simply not be understood if they refer to unexpressed arguments that are not recoverable in context. Next, the second motivating factor has to do with politeness. The more explicit the description, the less polite it is, as advocated by politeness principle. While a verb involved often names the same process, the nominal counterpart is even more taboo because nouns are more "imagable" than verbs (Gentner 1978). Consider the following instances:

- (7) a. He spit into the wind.

- b. His spit flew into the wind.
- (8) a. He pissed into the gym bag.
- b. His piss went into the gym bag.

As shown in these two examples, the (b) sentences with theme manifested as nouns depict the situation (spit, piss) much more vividly. Based on this observation, a pragmatic motivation is needed to leave the theme argument unspecified. Goldberg (2000, 2005) proposes the following principle:

(9) Principle of Omission under Low Discourse Prominence:

Omission of the patient argument is possible when the patient argument is construed to be deemphasized in the discourse vis à vis the action. That is, omission is possible when the patient argument is not *topical* (or *focal*) in the discourse, and the action is particularly emphasized (via repetition, strong affective stance, contrastive focus, etc.). Goldberg (2005:29)

This principle well captures the following examples in English illustrated by Goldberg (2005, 30, (22)-(26)):

- (10) Pat gave and gave but Chris just took and took.
<Repeated Action>
- (91) Owls only kill at night.
<Generic action>
- (12) She picked up her carving knife and began to chop.
<Narrow focus>
- (13) Why would they give this creep a light prison term!? He murdered!
<Strong Affective Stance>
- (104) "She stole but she could not rob."
<Contrastive Focus>

Goldberg (2005) further claims that languages differ in their grammatical possibilities for argument omission. What should be noted is that no languages allow focal elements to be omitted. In many languages including Chinese, Japanese, Korean,

Hindi and Hungarian, non-focal argument can be omitted. On the contrary, in English, with a few lexical exceptions (cf. Fillmore 1986), all topical arguments must be expressed. Generally speaking, if the action is particularly emphasized (by repetition, contrast, etc.), it is possible to omit arguments that are both predictable (non-focal) and non-relevant (non-topical) in English. This combination of discourse and syntactic characteristics can be demonstrated by the following figure:

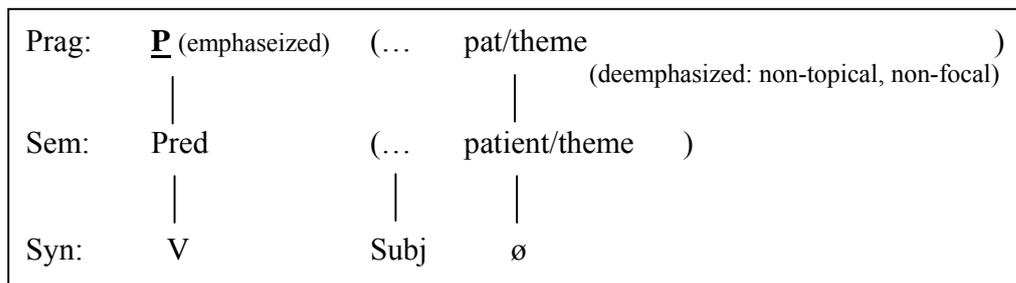


Figure 2 The representation of the Deprofiled Object Construction
(Goldberg 2005: 31)

The top line in Figure 2 illustrates the pragmatic constraints on the Deprofiled Object Construction. Specifically speaking, the predicate is emphasized (indicated by the underlined and boldface **P**), and the patient or theme participant role is deemphasized in being both non-topical and non-focal. The fact that the theme or patient argument is omitted syntactically is captured by its linking to the symbol "∅" in the syntactic structure.

According to Goldberg (2005), motivation for this specific construction comes from the fact that it is not necessary to mention non-focal, non-topical arguments since they are predictable and non-relevant in the discourse. This motivation is in accordance with Grice's maxim of Quantity (second half)—"say no more than is necessary."

3. Hakka cases

With the discussion illustrated by English cases, we will now examine Hakka cases. We will demonstrate that while particular constructions in Hakka are motivated by similar principles, they nevertheless differ both structurally and semantically from those in English. Three types of implicit object constructions in Hakka will be illustrated in

turn: substantive constructions, partially-filled idiomatic constructions, and unexpressed objects in larger discourse. Before we delve into the discussion, an operating definition of implicit object constructions is given in (15):

(15) The implicit object construction in Hakka

An implicit object construction in Hakka is characterized as a syntactic configuration, where the obligatory theme argument remains underspecified or appears elsewhere. Two sub-constructions are encompassed: the implicit theme construction and the deprofiled object construction.

3.1 Substantive constructions

With the definition given in (15), we can see that in Hakka many substantive constructions with idiomatic meanings often exhibit the omission of obligatory theme arguments. Consider following example:

- (16) 送 \emptyset 上山頭
Sung3 \emptyset *song3* *san1-teu5*
 send up mountain-top
 'to escort (one's body) uphill in order to bury him'

As shown in example (16), the object position following the verb *sung3* (送) 'to send' is left unspecified, indicated by the symbol " \emptyset ". *Sung3* (送), a verb of sending, usually involves three participant roles: an agent (i.e., the sender), a theme (i.e., the thing to be sent), and a goal (i.e., the receiver). While various verbs of sending can profile different participant roles, the theme argument should be explicitly expressed presumably because verbs of sending denote a transfer of possession of certain entities that are usually the topical or the focal elements in a discourse and hence need to be expressed. The following example without a theme argument is therefore unacceptable in a normal context:

- (17) 送*(信仔)
sung3 *(*sin3-e2*)
 Send letter-SF
 'to send *(letters)'

Now back to the implicit object construction presented in example (16), what licenses the omission of an obligatory theme here then? In such a construction, all the elements are fixed formulating a frozen chunk carrying fixed meaning. The expression is used to denote a death event, which is considered a taboo topic among Hakka people. To show politeness in avoiding talking about death, the obligatory theme, in this case, the body, is hence left unexpressed.

The following example in (18) illustrates another situation:

(18) 客家心舅盡會做 \emptyset

Hag4-ga1 xim5-kiu1 qin3 voi3 zo3 \emptyset

Hakka daughter-in-law very can do

'Hakka daughter-in-laws are famed for their capability of doing many things (cultivating, culinary, needlework).'

The argument structure of the verb *zo3* (做), a verb of creation, typically involves an agent and an incremental theme. The incremental theme, presumably indicating an end product of a creation process, should be realized in the object position following the verb *zo3* (做). Examine the following example:

(19) 做*(衫褲)

*zo3 *(sam1-fu3)*

make clothes

'to make *(clothes)'

The implicit object construction presented in example (18) describes a situation whereby Hakka daughters-in-law are praised by their feminine virtues. The daughters-in-law are famed for being capable of doing housework such as cultivating, culinary, and needlework. In Hakka culture, these tasks describe stereotypical good characters of Hakka daughters-in-law. The theme arguments are underspecified due to one factor: the verb *zo3* 'do' denoting generic meaning of creation and hence leaving the theme argument less important to be explicitly expressed. Common knowledge of Hakka culture salvages possible communication failures since the unexpressed object noun phrase in this case is semantically predictable.

Next, consider the third instance below:

- (20) 去到奈，食 \emptyset 到奈
hi3 do3 nai3 siid8 \emptyset do3 nai3
 go to where eat to where
 'Wherever he goes, he eats.'

The symbol " \emptyset " marks the unexpressed object of the verb *siid8* (食), a verb of ingesting involving an agent the eater and a theme the edible. The theme role usually needs to be realized as demonstrated below:

- (21) 食* (兩碗飯)
*siid8 *(liong2 von1 fan3)*
 eat two bowl rice
 'to eat *(two bowls of rice)'

Example (21) shows that the non-realization of the object in this case is not acceptable. However, the implicit object in example (20) is not only plausible but also obligatory due to emphasis brought about by the repeated directional phrase *do3 nai3* (到奈). The idiomatic meaning of this construction *hi3 do3 nai3 siid8 do3 nai3* (去到奈食到奈) implies two possible conditions. First, it implies that the subject has good appetite since he keeps on eating at any place. Second, through ACTION-FOR-CHARACTER metonymy, it can also imply that the subject is not a picky person. To put it more specifically, this phrase carries an idiomatic meaning denoting a personality that is not picky and accommodative presumably because when one person accepts to eat whatever food at any place, it is reasonable to make a judgment concerning the personality of this person. Similar constructions can also be found as the following one:

- (22) 識聽 \emptyset 唔識講 \emptyset
Siid4 tang1 \emptyset m5 siid4 gong2 \emptyset
 able listen NEG able speak
 'One can understand a language, but cannot speak (it).'

The verbs *tang1* (聽) 'to listen' and *gong2* (講) 'to speak' in example (22) belong to verbs of perception/communication involving an experiencer and a stimulus to be perceived. The required realization of the stimulus role in the object position is illustrated by example (23):

(23) 聽*(阿爸个話)

tang1 *(*a1-bal ge3 fa3*)
listen.to father POSS word
'to listen to *(Father's words)'

The object noun phrase *a1-bal ge3 fa3* (阿爸个話) 'Father's words' in this example should be obligatorily realized since the non-presence of this object is unacceptable. However, the object can be unexpressed in example (22) because of the contrastive focus between "able to listen" and "able to speak." The construction carries an idiomatic meaning of being able to understand a language but not being able to speak it.

3.2 Partially-filled schematic constructions

In this section, three types of partially-filled schematic constructions will be discussed. The first type can be illustrated by the following example:

(24) 緊搗Ø緊攪Ø

gin2 lui5 Ø *gin2 giau1* Ø
GIN pestle Ø GIN stir Ø

'To repeatedly pestle (the green tea, sesame, and peanuts) and stir (its powder) at the same time'

This example illustrates a construction in which two intrinsic transitive verbs juxtapositioned and marked by the aspectual durative marker *gin2*. In this case, the actions of pestling and stirring are profiled while the objects to be pestled (i.e., the green tea, sesame, and peanuts) and stirred (i.e., the powder) are endowed with the non-focal status. The schematic form of this type of construction can be represented by [*gin2* V₁ Ø *gin2* V₂ Ø] that marks out the prominence of the action while at the same time de-emphasizes the non-focal object. Generally speaking, the construction carries the meaning of "performing the two actions repetitively and concurrently." Example (25) below is another instance of this [*gin2* V₁ Ø *gin2* V₂ Ø] construction.

(25) 緊食Ø緊講Ø

gin2 siid8 Ø *gin2 gong2* Ø
GIN eat Ø GIN speak Ø

'keep on eating and speaking at the same time'

Similar to example (24), this sentence denotes the situation that the two actions of eating and speaking are performed repetitively and concurrently. Moreover, these actions are emphasized while the objects of the actions are de-emphasized.

Next, the following examples illustrate the second instance of partially-filled schematic construction.

(26) 現買Ø現賣Ø

<i>hien3</i>	<i>mai1</i>	Ø	<i>hien3</i>	<i>mai3</i>	Ø
now	buy	Ø	now	sell	Ø

'To buy (one thing) and sell (it) right away'

(27) 現教Ø現學Ø

<i>hien3</i>	<i>gao1</i>	Ø	<i>hien3</i>	<i>hog8</i>	Ø
now	teach	Ø	now	learn	Ø

'To learn (sth) that is to be taught immediately'

(28) 現學 Ø 現教 Ø

<i>hien3</i>	<i>hog8</i>	Ø	<i>hien3</i>	<i>gao1</i>	Ø
now	learn	Ø	now	teach	Ø

'to learn (sth) and then to teach (it) right away'

These examples can be generalized by the schematic constructional form [*hien3* V₁ Ø *hien3* V₂ Ø] in which two intrinsic ditransitive verbs with opposite meanings juxtapositioned and modified by the adverb *hien3* (現) 'immediately'. Like the previous case of [*gin2* V₁ Ø *gin2* V₂ Ø] construction, this partially schematic construction marks out the prominence of the action while the non-focal object is de-emphasized. Notice that the parallel juxtaposition of two parallel phrases imposes a semantic constraint on the constructional meaning. The first phrase has to produce an output as the input of the second phrase—the completion of the first action but the inchoation of the second action. Hence shifting the same phrases will cause different meanings as shown by examples (27) and (28). While the former indicates a situation whereby a teacher is teaching something for the student(s) to learn immediately, the latter indicates a situation whereby someone is learning something and is teaching what is learned right away to someone else. Notice also that transitive verbs can also occur in this construction. But the semantic constraint remains—the first action has to create an output as the input for the second action. In the following example (29), what is cooked is eaten right away. Since eating won't produce any end product, shifting the two phrases is unacceptable, as shown by (30). Inherent

intransitive verbs denoting actions only are not compatible with this construction presumably because no end products are created. Example (31) can illustrate.

(29) 現煮 Ø 現食 Ø

hien3 zu1 Ø hien3 siid4 Ø
 now cook Ø now eat Ø
 'to cook (something) and to eat (it) right away'

(30) ??現食 Ø 現煮 Ø

??*hien3 siid4 Ø hien3 zu1 Ø*
 now eat Ø now cook Ø
 '(intended meaning) ??to eat (sth) and to cook (it) right away'

(31) *現走現行

??*hien3 zeu1 hien3 hang3*
 now run now walk
 '(intended meaning) *to run and to walk right away'

The third type of the partially-schematic construction can be demonstrated by the following two examples:

(32) 扞Ø上扞Ø下

led8 Ø song1 led8 Ø ha1
 hold Ø up hold Ø down
 'To hold (sth) close with arms while walking up and down'

(33) 搬Ø上搬Ø下

ban1 Ø song1 ban1 Ø ha1
 move Ø up move Ø down
 'to move (stuff) up and down'

The schematic form for these cases can be represented by $[V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{song1} \text{ } V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{ha1}]$ which includes one intrinsic transitive verb reduplicated and two directional complements *song1* (上) 'up' and *ha1* (下) 'down' denoting opposite directions. Like the previous two cases, this construction focuses its attention on the actions while the objects of the actions are de-emphasized. The constructional meaning of this case is "performing the action repetitively". Similar constructional forms $[V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{hi3} \text{ } V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{zon2}]$ and $[V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{ngib8} \text{ } V_1 \text{ } \emptyset \text{ } \textit{cud4}]$ with another two pairs of directional complements also denote similar meanings.

The first pair consists of *hi3* ‘forward’ and *zon2* ‘backward’; the second pair consists of *ngib8* ‘inward’ and *cud4* ‘outward.’ Consider the following examples:

(34) 搬∅去搬∅轉

ban1 ∅ *hi3* *ban1* ∅ *zon2*
 move ∅ forward move ∅ backward
 'to move (stuff) forward and backward'

(35) 搬∅入搬∅出

ban1 ∅ *ngib8* *ban1* ∅ *cud4*
 move ∅ inward move ∅ outward
 'to move (stuff) inward and outward'

Notice that all the directional complements in the constructions do not necessarily indicate their original particular directions; nor do they necessarily indicate opposite directions. Occurring in these constructions, their meanings are generalized to simply indicate movements in different directions (cf. Bybee et al.1994).

Before we move on to the next section, the form-meaning pairings displayed by the above-mentioned types of partially-filled idiomatic constructions can be depicted in the following three figures:

Constructional form:	[<i>gin2</i> V ₁ ∅ <i>gin2</i> V ₂ ∅]
Constructional meaning:	[PERFORMING V ₁ and V ₂ REPETITIVELY AND CONCURRENTLY]

Constructional form:	[<i>hien3</i> V ₁ ∅ <i>hien3</i> V ₂ ∅]
Constructional meaning:	[PERFORMING V ₂ IMMEDIATELY AFTER V ₁]

Constructional form:	{	<p>[V₁ Ø <i>song1</i> V₁ Ø <i>ha1</i>]</p> <p>[V₁ Ø <i>hi3</i> V₁ Ø <i>zon2</i>]</p> <p>[V₁ Ø <i>ngib8</i> V₁ Ø <i>cud4</i>]</p>	}
Constructional meaning:		[PERFORMING V ₁ REPETITIVELY IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS]	

3.3 Frozen objects omitted

In addition to the substantive and the partially-filled constructions, productive cases can sometimes allow object omissions to occur in larger discourse. In the following discourse, an omission of a frozen object is demonstrated:

(36)A: 遷愛來去看目珠....

Ngai5 oi3 loi3 hi3 kon3 Mug4-zu1
 I want come go see eye-ball
 'I am going to have my eyes examined by a doctor.'

B: 你去奈位看 ψ...就這麥當勞隔壁 ha...異會看 ψne...佢異會看 ψ。

Ng5 hi3 nai3-vi3 kon3 ψ... qiu3 ia2 mag8dong3lo5 gag4biag4 ha1...
 you go where-place see ψ just this McDonald's next.door PART
i3 voi3 kon3 ψ ne5... gi5 i3 voi3 kon3 ψ
 very can see ψ PART He very can see ψ
 'So which clinic do you want to have (your eyes) examined? It is the one just next to McDonald's; (the eye-doctor there) is reputed for his being good at (eye examination)....'

In this dialogue, we have seen three omissions of the object *mug4-zu1*(目珠) 'eyes'. In Speaker A's turn, the VO construction *kon3 mug4-zu1* (看目珠) means "to have one's eyes medically examined". In this case, the object noun *mug4-zu1* (目珠) is explicitly expressed. However, looking at Speaker B's turn, we can find three omissions of the form *mug4-zu1* (目珠) 'eyes'. The first omission asks the hearer where to go to have one's eyes examined, while the second and the third omissions are used to recommend a doctor who

is reputed for his being good at (eye examination). It can be noted that the [*kon3* (看) + body part] constructions are ambiguous in that they can occur both in unaccusative and in unergative constructions. Examine the following contrasts in (36) and (37):

(36) 你去奈位看目珠？

Ng5 hi3 nai3-vi3 kon3 mug4-zu1

You go where see eyes

‘Where are you going to have your eyes examined?’

(37) 佢異會看目珠

Gi5 i3 voi3 kon3 mug4-zu1

He very can see eyes

‘He is really good at eye examination.’

In (36), it is the patient that is realized as the subject of the construction *kon3 mug4-zu1*, and *mug4-zu1* ‘eyes’ are an inalienable body part of the subject; *kon3 mug4-zu1* in this case denotes “to have (one’s) eyes medically examined (by a doctor). In contrast, in (37), it is the agent that is realized as the subject of the construction *kon3 mug4-zu1*, and *mug4-zu1* ‘eyes’ are not a body part of the subject; *kon3 mug4-zu1* in this case denotes “to medically examine the eyes (of a patient).” Hence, in the dialogue (35), possible obscurities of meanings due to omissions of the objects are cleared out after the discourse context is processed. In fact, a much smoother flow is maintained in the conversation with the three obligatory objects omitted by B since they can be easily inferred from the context.

4. Concluding remarks

Based on the discussions presented above, the following three generalizations concerning the unexpressed object can be proposed. First, some objects, although required by ARP and SIC, can be unexpressed. Second, form and meaning interact with one another to generate a range of constructional meanings—constructions from substantive to partially schematic ones carry their constructional meanings while at the same time interact with the lexical semantics of their components. Finally, unexpressed objects in a larger discourse can still be interpreted within the information structure

packaged from the grammatical components in the discourse. Unresolved issues remain. In particular a formal description of the constructions in terms of argument structure and information structure needs to be depicted to capture a better generalization of object omissions in various constructions.

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