

# Chapter 11

## Nominal Types: Dummies and Idioms

### 11.1 Lecture notes

#### Chapter 11

##### I. Existentials

- The analysis of existentials is designed to capture the relationship between examples like *A student is asleep* and *There is a student asleep*. [Slides:1]
- To do this, in the lexical entry for existential *be* [Slides:2], the second argument (the NP right after *be*) is identified with the specifier of the third argument (the thing after that NP). This is much like the identification of the subject of the ordinary *be* with the specifier of the complement.
- ? We call *there* a pronoun. Can anyone think of a reason for this classification? (Only pronouns show up in tags (*The dogs are barking, aren't they/\*those pests?*), and *there* occurs in tags (*There is a unicorn in the garden, isn't there?*)) [Slides:3]
- ? Why do we have a separate form of *be* for existentials. (Because it has two complements, unlike other versions of *be*.)
- What about examples like *Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus?* [Slides:4] Can they be handled with our special existential *be*?

(No, because there's only one complement, and we'd get incoherent semantics.) Can they be handled with our ordinary *be*? (No, because the semantics is different.) So we would need a special lexical entry for this construction.

## II. Extraposition

- There are four parts to the analysis of extraposition examples like (1). [Slides:5]:
  - (1) a. That Cleveland lost the series sucks.
    - b. It sucks that Cleveland lost the series.
      - A lexical entry for dummy *it*
      - A lexical entry for the complementizer *that*
      - Verbs that take clausal subjects (1a)
      - A lexical rule to convert them to the form in (1b)
- The fully specified lexical entry for *that* is given in [Slides:6].
- ? Why does *that* identify its INDEX and the INDEX of its complement? (Because the INDEX of its complement is a pointer to the proposition expressed by the complement. This is what verbs selecting *that* phrases want to take as an argument.)
- A correction: The specification [MODE prop] in this fully specified lexical entry is not in fact on any of the supertypes to this entry given in the book. It should be included in the lexical entry for *that*. [Slides:7]
- There is no separate type for verbs that take [HEAD *comp*] subjects. Those verbs that do simply state [HEAD *comp*] on their first argument, overriding the default specification that this argument be an NP. So the lexeme type for *suck* is (*iv-lxm*). [Slides:8]
- ? What is the  $\boxplus$  for in the Extraposition Lexical Rule? [Slides:9] (It unifies with the rest of the ARG-ST list of the input and makes sure that the extraposed *that* phrase appears at the very end to correctly account for data like (2). [Slides:10])
  - (2) a. That Chris knew the answer never occurred to Pat.
    - b. It never occurred to Pat that Chris knew the answer.

c.\*It never occurred that Chris knew the answer to Pat.

? Why does the input of the Extraposition Lexical Rule just specific *lxm* and not *verb-lxm*? (Because adjectives can also undergo extraposition [Slides:11]. However, using the same rule for both verbs and adjectives raises the issue of where the type *derived-lxm* fits in the type hierarchy. Perhaps there should be a high-level distinction (under *lexeme*) between *basic-lxm* and *derived-lxm*.)

- (3) a. That popcorn-flavored jelly beans are disgusting is obvious.  
 b. It is obvious that popcorn-flavored jelly beans are disgusting.

### III. Idioms

- The analysis of idioms like *keep tabs on* requires two kinds of special lexical entries:
  - Lexical entries for nouns with no semantic information and distinct FORM values
  - Lexical entries for verbs which select these nouns and give the idiomatic semantics.
- ? Why do the special entries for *tabs* and *advantage* [Slides:12] have AGR values? (Because of examples like (4) and (5), which also shows that *tabs* should take an optional specifier. [Slides:13–14])
 

(4) a. Tabs were/\*was kept on Sandy by the FBI.  
       b. Advantage was/\*were taken of the voters by the candidate.

(5) Tell me some more about these/\*this tabs the FBI is keeping on you.
- ? What keeps the idiomatic nouns from showing up without the verbs that select them (which would lead to semantically anomalous sentences)? (Most verbs require their arguments to have indices, and the idiomatic nouns are INDEX none. Verbs that do allow arguments with INDEX none specify a FORM value for those arguments.)