Classes of Gmtcl Functions, p. 1

Basic groups of grammatical functions

- argument functions: SUBJ, OBJ, various oblique functions, COMP, XCOMP
- adjunct functions: ADJ, XADJ
- grammaticized discourse functions: FOCUS, TOPIC

The adjunct functions share properties with both the argument functions and the grammaticized discourse functions. Like the argument functions, the adjunct functions relate only to the clause of which they are a part, while the grammaticized discourse functions relate the clause to the larger discourse. Like the grammaticized discourse functions, adjuncts are not arguments, elements selected by the head.

The list of argument functions above lists "obliques". Oblique arguments are arguments with an explicit indication of the thematic role. In English, this indication is by means of prepositions: oblique arguments are PPs, while objects are bare NPs/DPs. The oblique argument functions include such grammatical functions as GOAL (marked in English by the preposition *to*), BENEFACTIVE (*for*), SOURCE (*from*), INSTRUMENT (*with*), LOCATION (various prepositions), AGENT (*by*), etc. In the LFG literature, the notation that is usually used is OBL_{Goal}, OBL_{Ben}, $\text{OBL}_{\text{Source}}$, $\text{OBL}_{\text{Instr}}$, OBL_{Loc}, $\text{OBL}_{\text{Agent}}$, etc. This notation emphasizes the fact that these grammatical functions belong to the oblique family of functions. As a group, they are referred to as OBL_{θ}.

Classification of the argument functions 1: Core vs. non-core

So the argument functions are SUBJ, OBJ, the OBJ_{θ} family, the OBL_{θ} family, COMP, and XCOMP. COMP and XCOMP are distinct from the others, and we will not talk about them now. We will come back to the clausal/propositional COMP and XCOMP later in the course, and focus for now on the "nominal" argument functions SUBJ, OBJ, OBJ_{θ}, and OBL_{θ}.

There is an important distinction to be made among these grammatical functions, a distinction which is indirectly alluded to on p. 1 of this handout. In English, SUBJ, OBJ, and OBJ_{θ} are expressed as bare NPs/DPs, without explicit marking of the thematic role; the OBL_{θ} arguments are expressed as PPs, with the preposition marking the thematic role. In other languages, the realizations may be somewhat different. In some languages, there may be special prepositions for marking subjects or objects: for example, the Hebrew preposition את and the Spanish preposition *a* mark objects. But such a preposition is a purely grammatical marker; it does not

indicate thematic role. In other languages, obliques may be NPs in which the head nouns are morphologically marked with semantic Cases, such as instrumental, benefactive, etc. The crucial point is not the category, but rather the function of the marking.

The best characterization of the difference between SUBJ, OBJ, and OBJ_θ on the one hand and the OBL_θ functions on the other is that the former are more strictly *grammatical* functions than the latter. The oblique grammatical functions are little more than grammaticalizations of thematic roles, only barely syntactic elements. Some distinction of this kind is made by almost every syntactic theory, with varying terminology. For example, in GB theory a distinction is often made between direct and indirect arguments. In GF-based theories, there are two primary sets of terminology that are used

SUBJ, OBJ, OBJ_θ	**core**	**term**
OBL_θ	**non-core**	**non-term**

The "core" terminology is more typical of the LFG literature; "term" has its origins in RG (although it is sometimes used in LFG too). We will use the core/non-core terminology here.

There are other indications that the oblique functions are less strictly syntactic elements than the core argument functions. For example, there are languages in which the verb agrees with the SUBJ, or the SUBJ and OBJ, or the SUBJ, OBJ, and OBJ_θ, but the verb never agrees with OBL_θ arguments. Controllers in functional control constructions can be core elements, but not OBL_θ. In general, oblique elements are much less active syntactically than core elements.

Classification of the argument functions 2: Unrestricted vs. Restricted

We can take a related, but slightly different perspective on the classification of the nominal argument functions. SUBJs, as often noted, can have just about any thematic role, or even no thematic role at all.

The hamster read the book.	Agent
A book fell out of the window	Theme/Patient
The hammer broke the priceless antique vase.	Instrument
The student got a good grade.	Recipient
It seems that syntacticians have more fun.	no thematic role

The same is true of OBJs (except that they cannot be Agents).

The hammer broke the priceless antique vase.	Theme/Patient

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The hamster used a computer.	Instrument
I bought Pnina a stuffed troll.	Beneficiary/Recipient
I take it that syntacticians have more fun.	no thematic role

We can refer to SUBJ and OBJ as being thematically **unrestricted**. On the other hand, OBJ_θ and OBL_θ are **restricted**.

unrestricted: SUBJ, OBJ
restricted: OBJ_θ, OBL_θ

If we treat restrictedness as a binary feature, and add a feature distinguishing object functions from non-object functions, we have the following system:

	[−*r*]	[+*r*]
[−*o*]	SUBJ	OBL_θ
[+*o*]	OBJ	OBJ_θ

This classification of the nominal argument functions serves as the basis of the theory of argument mapping in LFG: Lexical Mapping Theory (LMT). Our next reading is about LMT.