

THE SYNTAX-SEMANTICS / PRAGMATICS INTERFACE:
ON THE ARBITRARINESS OF ARBITRARY *PRO*

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Rizzi (1986) proposes that sentences such as those in (1) below contain an empty category in object position, viz. *pro*_{arb}. Unlike definite *pro*, arbitrary *pro* is licensed by the theta role assigning verb, and identified by its [ARB] feature, which crucially entails the feature [HUMAN]. Rizzi also contrasts the sentences in (1) with those in (2), for which he assumes the traditional analysis in terms of “lexical saturation” of the object.

- (1) a. *La oscuridad asusta pro*_{arb}. / *The darkness frightens.* / “*The dark is frightening*”.
b. *El sonido del agua calma pro*_{arb}. / *The sound of water calms.*
“*The sound of water is soothing*”.
c. *Su conducta sorprende pro*_{arb}. / *His behavior surprises.*
“*His behavior is surprising.*”
(2) a. *Susan is reading/writing.*
b. *John does not smoke/drive.*

In this paper, however, I would like to propose a unified lexical saturation account for all the cases of implicit object discussed, arguing that the postulation of a *pro*_{arb} in (1) is unnecessary, as well as arbitrary. If we adopt a *pro*_{arb} analysis, we will be forced to distinguish the sentences in (1) from those in (3), which also involve “characteristic” object drop. Since the understood object need not be human in (3), we cannot postulate a *pro*_{arb}, but lexical saturation instead, thus rendering Rizzi’s analysis stipulative.

- (3) a. *Este cuchillo no corta.* / *This knife doesn’t cut* / “*This knife is blunt*”.
b. *El café mancha.* / *Coffee stains.*
c. *Estas hojas curan.* / *These leaves heal.*
d. *La nieve purifica.* / *Snow purifies.*

Instead, we propose here that there is no category at all in overt syntax in any of the cases under consideration, the understood object being assigned an interpretation at LF and the C-I interface (Chomsky 1995) on the basis of the selectional properties of the verb, in conjunction with other relevant elements in the sentence. Moreover, as is clearly shown in (4), the value of the feature [HUMAN] on the understood object is independently determined by the s-selection of the verb, as well as our knowledge of the world.

- (4) a. *El café mancha.* / *Coffee stains.* ([−HUMAN])
b. *El café excita/estimula.* / *Coffee excites/stimulates.* ([+ HUMAN])

We also examine the notion of lexical saturation critically, arguing that in most cases, what has been dubbed lexical saturation actually involves LF interpretation of a selectional feature on a predicate which has not been checked via Merge (Chomsky, 1995).