In this poster, I question lexical analyses of Implicit Objects (IO's) in English, and propose instead that IO's can be licensed by a pragmatic principle called Recoverability to a Relevant Degree of Precision (RRDP). In a broad sense, I suggest that it's our own goals, not syntactic specifications, that determine when we may leave an argument implicit.

IO's are cases when a verb that is usually transitive appears without an overt object ('I ate.'). I focus on *indefinite* IO's, which refer to an indefinite entity (cf. definite IO's such as 'I noticed').

(1)   Phil ate/*devoured.

Based on contrasts like (1), researchers have argued that a verb lexically specifies whether it will allow an IO or not; more recently, Rappaport Hovav & Levin 2010 have proposed that in particular, *result* verbs such as *kill* do not allow IO's. But IO's are far more flexible than these lexical accounts predict. In Web examples, *devour* and its kin do take IO's; and Goldberg 2001 shows that result verbs can take IO's in a number of contexts:

(2)   a.   Tigers kill at night. (Goldberg)
        b.   He burglarized, but she murdered. (Goldberg)

These data suggest that IO's are not lexically legislated, but rather interact with pragmatic factors. In this poster, I try to spell out these factors. Building on Goldberg's idea that objects may be implicit when they are 'low in discourse prominence,' I identify two factors that cause an object to be accorded this status. First, context may provide information that will allow the object to be recovered more or less precisely. Second, one may care more or less about how precisely one can recover the object, depending on one's goals. Synthesizing these ideas, I suggest that IO's are used when people can recover the object well enough to proceed with their goals. If speakers only need to know that an object exists, it can be implicit. And if speakers do need to know what it is but can easily recover it from the context, it can be implicit there as well, as long as it is not the topic/focus of the sentence. Formally, this idea may be stated as a condition that IO's must be RRDP:

(3)   Let V be a transitive verb and let S1 and S2 be sentences that are identical except for the
        argument structure of the verb.
        In S1, give V an implicit object and interpret $[[V]] = [\exists y \lambda x.xVy]$.
        In S2, give V an explicit object y so that $[[V]] = [\lambda y \lambda x.xVy]$.
        Let S2 (and therefore S1) be true.
        The implicit object of S1 is RRDP if interlocutors' purposes **are not thwarted** when S1 is
        uttered instead of S2.

This definition builds on the idea, from Graff-Fara 2000, that we use language to make goal-relevant distinctions while abstracting away from goal-irrelevant ones. For her, this notion is invoked to analyze vagueness, but it also applies here: an IO may be left somewhat underspecified if it is recoverable enough that we can proceed with our goals.

I also report a brief corpus study to test whether the *eat/devour* contrast is truly lexical. I find that *eat* appears overwhelmingly ($p < .0001$) with literal FOOD as its (implicit or explicit) object, whereas *devour*'s objects often denote non-physical entities (*the economy*) or non-prototypical food substances (humans), so that *devour*'s objects are much more varied than those of *eat*. Since the object of *eat* is far easier to recover than that of *devour*, then, perhaps people's goals are less impaired by omitting the object of *eat* than of *devour*. This finding is consistent with my proposal.

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