

Verb phrases (VP-s)

- the structure of the phrase that is the **core of the clause**
- It is within the VP that theta-role assignment takes place and that other aspects of **semantic interpretation** are represented, such as **event structure**

1 Event Structure

- A verb describes in a sentence an **event**: an action or a state
- While theta-roles (semantic roles) tell about the type of meaning of arguments, event structure tells about the **meaning of the verb**, i.e., the structure of the event described by the verb
- This may be a **simple** or a **complex event**:

- 1) **Simple events**: a **single event** which either describes
- the **state** of some element (12):

(12) *The rock eroded.*

- or the **relationship between two elements** (13): in (13a), e.g., that *the plane* has achieved a state in which it is located *at Heathrow*:

(13) a. ***The plane arrived at Heathrow.***
 b. ***Lorraine lives in London.***

- We can represent simple events with an *e*, so the event structure of sentences (12)–(13) will be as simple as follows:

(14) *e*

- 2) Other verbs describe a more **complex event**:

(15) *The wind eroded the rock.*

- In (15) an event is described which includes
1. the event involving the wind, which does something to the rock (e.g., blows at it), which results in
 2. the event described in (12) (*The rock eroded*), i.e. the rock being in a state of erosion

- We might see this as a series of **connected ‘sub-events’**, which make up a complex event. The first event has a **causal relationship** with the second:

(16) $e = e1 \rightarrow e2$

- e here represents the complex event associated with the sentence *The wind eroded the rock*
- the equals sign indicates that this is constituted of a series of other events:
 - $e1$ (the event involving the wind's action) and
 - $e2$ (the rock being in the state of erosion)
- The arrow between the two indicates the causal relationship between the two sub-events in that $e1$ causes $e2$

The events described in (17a) and (17b) are even more complex:

- (17) a. *Peter put the eggs in a bowl.*
 b. *Gus gave Sam a sandwich.*

$$(18) e = e1 \rightarrow e2 \rightarrow e3$$

→ In (17a) (*Peter put the eggs in a bowl*) we have

1. Peter doing something to the eggs ($e1$), which causes
2. the eggs to undergo a process of movement ($e2$), which results
3. in them being situated in a location (in the bowl) ($e3$)

→ (17b) (*Gus gave Sam a sandwich*) has a similar event structure involving

1. Gus doing something ($e1$) that causes
2. the sandwich to undergo a process ($e2$)
3. the end result of which is that the sandwich ends up in Sam's possession ($e3$)

- Event structure also has an effect on the syntactic organisation of elements within the VP: the structure of the VP corresponds to the event structure:
 - a simple event structure is mirrored by a simple VP structure,
 - a **complex event** is mirrored by a complex VP structure (the **VP** structurally breaks up into '**sub-VPs**' in a one-to-one correspondence with the sub-events).
- Different subcategories of verbs based on the event structure they describe – and the associated structure of the VP:
 - unaccusative verbs
 - agentive intransitive verbs
 - light verbs
 - transitive verbs etc.

2 Verb Types

2.1 Unaccusative verbs

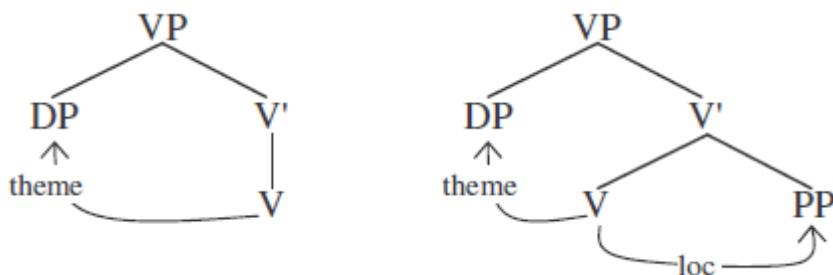
- The simplest verb type
- Unaccusative verbs describe a simple event (e)
- Typically verbs of movement or location
- A certain kind of **intransitive** verbs (a tárgyatlan igék egyik típusa) (intransitive = they do **not have any direct object or indirect object complement**)
- and their **subject** has the **theme** theta-role:

(18) *The boy disappeared.*

- Those intransitive verbs that take a subject with a different theta-role (e.g., agent) are thus not unaccusative verbs: *The boy talked* → *to talk* is not an unaccusative but a different type of intransitive verb (a so-called unergative)
- Unaccusatives may also, optionally in most cases, take a location or path complement expressed by a prepositional phrase (PP):

- (19)
- The plane *arrived* (at Heathrow).
 - Lorraine *lives* in London.
 - A letter *arrived* (in the mail box) (from the tax office).
 - The train *departed* (from the station) (to Helsinki).
 - The disease *spread* (to other towns).
 - The table *sat* in the corner.
 - The heater *stood* against the wall.
 - The gas *appeared* (from nowhere).
 - The snow *settled* (on the roof).
 - The Picts *lived* in Scotland.
 - The water *ran* (down the wall).

- Event structure: as in (14): a simple state or relationship between the theme argument and the location (*e*)
- **The simple event structure corresponds with a simple VP structure of the unaccusative.**



(More complex event structures will lead to more complex VPs, e.g., to transitive verbs.)

- **Some** of the unaccusative verbs are **ambiguous**, having an unaccusative sense and an agentive sense: e.g., the verb *sit* can simply mean
 - ‘to be situated in a particular location’ (perhaps with a particular orientation) (‘elhelyezkedik; van’), as in (20):

- (20) *The table sat in the corner.*
 → this is the unaccusative use of the verb

- or it can have an agentive (and thus, not unaccusative) use and mean ‘to adopt a posture in which most weight is supported by the rear end’ (‘leül’) as in (21):

- (21) *Sam sat on the sofa.*
 → In this latter usage, the verb is not unaccusative as it involves an agent argument: only something which is capable of volitional action can ‘sit’ in this sense.

- Unaccusative verbs have a certain range of syntactic **properties** by which we can identify them (= tests for unaccusativity):

1) **Ability to appear in *there*-sentences: *there + verb + theme argument***

The theme argument must be **indefinite** in such sentences:

- (22) a. There arrived a letter (*the letter).
 b. There departed a train (*the train).
 c. There spread a disease (*the disease).
 d. There sat a table (*the table) in the corner.

➔ Only unaccusatives can be used in this construction; other verb types cannot:

- *there*-constructions are ungrammatical with agentive intransitive verbs (23):

(23) **There talked a guy.*

- *there*-constructions are ungrammatical with transitive verbs (24):

(24) **There wrote a guy a poem.*

Construct a grammatical <i>there</i> -sentence
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2) **Ability to appear in the *locative inversion* construction**

PP + verb + theme argument (the theme argument must be **indefinite** in such sentences as well):

- (25) a. [From platform 9] departed a train to Minsk.
 b. [In the corner] sat a shadowy figure.
 c. [Down the walls] ran some muddy water.

➔ Locative inversion is available only for unaccusative verbs and cannot be used with agentive intransitive verbs (26a), other types of intransitive verbs (26b), or with transitive verbs (26c):

- (26) a. *[On the chair] deliberately sat a man.
 b. *[In the garden] smiled a boy.
 c. *[On the table] put he the book.

3) **Unaccusatives do not take *cognate objects***

Another type of intransitive verbs (the so-called cognate objects, i.e., cognate objects):

- (27) a. He **smiled** a rueful **smile**.
 b. He **laughed** an evil **laugh**.
 c. They **died** a mysterious **death**.

But unaccusative verbs do not:

- (28) a. *The letter arrived an arrival.
 b. *The magician appeared an appearance.
 c. *The kettle sat a sit on the stove.

Construct a grammatical <i>locative inversion</i> construction
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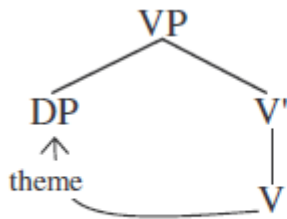
Can you tell some further examples of intransitive verbs with cognate objects?
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(+ Can you tell any example in Hungarian?)
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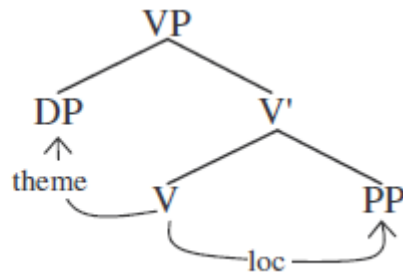
- The syntactic analysis of unaccusative verbs:

- the **theme argument is the subject** and it's in the **specifier position**
- if there is a **prepositional argument**, this always appears **behind the verb, in complement position**:

(29a)



(29b)



- What we are looking at here is the VP at D-structure, i.e. prior to any movement process and not the complete analysis of a full sentence.
- At S-structure, it is common for the subject of unaccusatives not to remain in the VP, but to **move out into a higher position** in the clause:

(30)

the letter₁ may not have [t₁ arrived]

- The position to which the subject moves is typically a **nominative position** and so we might assume that the movement has something to do with placing this argument in a Case position.
- The reason why these verbs are called 'unaccusative' is because unlike with transitive verbs, which share the possibility of having theme arguments, the theme of the unaccusative cannot normally remain inside the VP to receive accusative Case.