

S-structure and Case Theory. Traces. Verb phrases: event structure

Exercise 5

Compare the grammatical functions and theta roles of the DPs in the pairs of sentences below. Comment on changes in either.

- (1) a Peter gave Mary flowers.
b Peter gave flowers to Mary.
- (2) a The postman delivered the letters.
b The letters were delivered.
- (4) a Peter noticed the scar on her ankle.
b The scar on her ankle appeared small.
- (5) a Mary is easy to please.
b Mary tries to please everybody.
- (6) a Who do you want to meet?
b Who do you want to help?

1 S-structure and Case Theory

- **Case assignment** happens at the level of the S-structure.
- There are two notions of case, which partly overlap: morphological case and abstract Case.

1) Morphological case:

- So far, we have been concerned with the concept of morphological case and have said that certain **personal pronouns have different case forms** in English:
 - **nominative** (alanyeset, *he, she, I, we*) is the case for subjects and
 - **accusative** (tárgyeset, *him, her, me and us*) is the case for direct and indirect objects and for pronouns after prepositions in English:

- (1) a. **He** has helped *her*
b. **I** consider *him* [to be unkind **to us**]

2) Abstract Case:

We extend the notion of case to any DP and we'll say that in syntax, at an abstract level of description, not only the above personal pronouns but **every DP has a Case (either nominative or accusative)**, even when the distinction is morphologically not visible (with nouns and proper nouns it's not visible in English, but it is visible in other

languages as, e.g., Latin, German, Russian or Hungarian etc. (*kalács – kalácsot; Szabolcs – Szabolcsot*). More formally, this requirement is described by a principle which is called the Case Filter:

(2) **The Case Filter: All DPs must be assigned Case.**

- Subjects of finite clauses will be in the **nominative Case** (3), while anywhere else a DP will be in the **accusative Case** (4), (5) even when the distinction is morphologically not visible in English (*Ken* or *my husband* have the same form but different Cases in these sentences):

(3) *He/Ken/my husband* was fired. → *He/Ken/my husband*: subject → nominative Case

(4) The boss fired *him/Ken/my husband* → *him/Ken/my husband*: direct object → accusative Case

(5) This letter is **for** *him/Ken/my husband* → *him/Ken/my husband*: complement of a preposition → accusative Case

- The Case Filter is a principle that operates at the S-structure level: it is the S-structure position, and not the D-structure position, that determines whether a pronoun/DP will be in the nominative or in the accusative. Here is why we assume that:

- Last week we saw that in passive sentences, the argument that sits in the subject position at S-structure occupies the object position at D-structure:

(6) a. D-structure: was fired **Ken** (**Ken** = direct object)

→ *Ken* moves to subject position, so we get (6b):

b. S-structure: **Ken** was fired (**Ken** = subject)

- However, subjects of passive sentences are in the nominative case (cf. (3), (7)) (and not in the accusative, even if they are direct objects in D-structure):

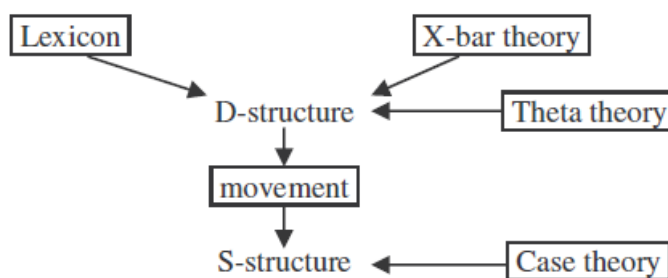
(7) *He* was fired

(**Him* was fired; **Was* fired *him*)

- ➔ **What counts for the purposes of Case assignment is not the position of the argument in the D-structure but its position in the S-structure: DP-s receive a case (nominative/accusative) at S-structure.**

(8) **The Case Filter: All DPs must be assigned Case.**

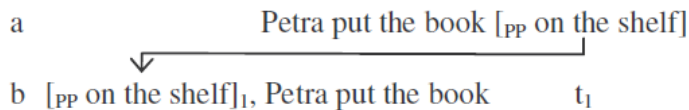
(9)



2 **Traces**

- The position in which elements originate at D-structure = **Extraction site**
- The positions they move to at S-structure = the **Landing site**
- When an element moves, it leaves behind a copy of itself in the extraction site → this copy is called a **trace** (t)
- The main way in which the trace differs from the moved element is that the trace has no phonological content and hence is unpronounced (it's a so-called silent element)
- Traces are typically represented by a t , which bears an **index** (marked by a 1 in subscript in sentences (10b) and (11a-b)) which it shares with the moved element. This indicates that the trace and the moved element have the same reference:

(10)



(11)

- a who₁ did Susan say [Fred helped t₁]
 b who₁ did Susan say [t₁ helped Fred]

<p>What's the difference between the meaning of (11a) and (11b), and how would you translate them to Hungarian?</p>

- (11): the movement of the interrogative pronoun (the *wh*-word) *who* from two different D-structure positions, marked by the trace:

Exercise 18

Identify the thematic roles assigned by each predicate and identify the Cases of the DPs as well.

- (1) a Who do you think Izzy will invite?
 b Terry thinks that the car has been stolen.
 c Frank will fly from New York to Amsterdam.
 d Sally seems to be selected by the committee.
 e I expect this girl to rewrite her essay.

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.