

Syntax Seminar (BBN-ANG-252): Handout 5

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This is a summary of BESE: Ch. 5.2.

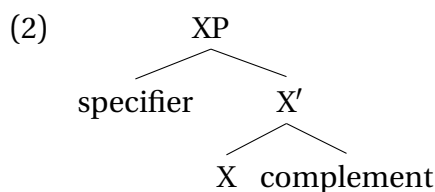
1 Recap

- **X-bar theory:**

- (1) a. $X' \rightarrow XYP$
- b. $XP \rightarrow YP X'$
- c. $X^n \rightarrow X^n, Y/YP$

complement rule
specifier rule
adjunction rule

- Based on (1a,b) we can update the minimal structure of each phrase as in (2):



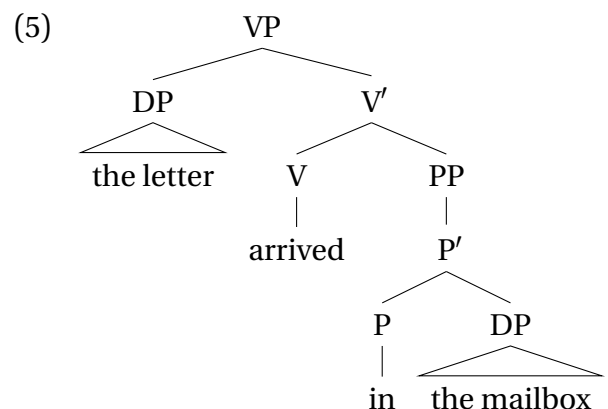
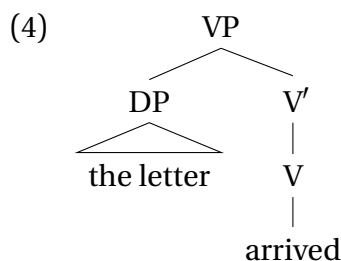
the head (X/X^0) projects its categorial status to the X' (pronounced: X-bar) and ultimately to the XP (the maximal projection).

- Linking theta-roles to structural positions:

- (3) **the Uniform Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH)**

a θ -role \bar{P} is assigned in the same structural configuration in all structures in which it is present

↪ the theme argument is assigned to the specifier of the verb phrase (Spec,VP)



Q but how about the agent argument?

2 Verb types and the extended verb phrase: vP

- The verbs illustrated in (4) and (5) are called **unaccusative** verbs. These are intransitive verbs with a theme argument. They may also, optionally in most cases, take a location or path argument expressed by a PP, in the complement position, as in (5).
- Unaccusative verbs can be identified by a number of properties, e.g., can appear in *there*-sentences (6); cannot have so-called cognate objects (7):

- (6) a. There arrived a letter.
b. There sat a man on the chair.

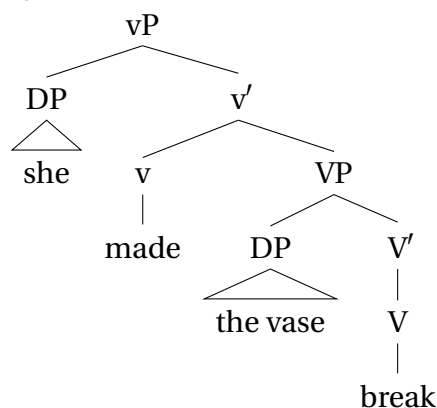
- (7) a. *The letter arrived an arrival.
b. *The kettle sat a sit on the stove.

- The structure assumed for unaccusative verbs:
theme argument in the specifier of the verb phrase (=Spec,VP)
PP in the complement position
cf. (4)–(5)
- But: we need an additional structural position for agent/experiencer arguments (cf. UTAH)
Recall that we cannot multiply complements/specifiers for one head.
This structural position will be a new specifier, this means that we need a new head (a functional one, not a lexical one).
- In order to understand what this functional head is, we need to look at **light verbs**: they can be used in combination with some other element, typically a noun or verb, where their contribution to the meaning of the whole construction is reduced in some way

- (8) a. We had a walk. = We walked.
b. They did a dance. = They danced.
c. I took a look. = I looked.
d. She made a comment. = She commented.

- Light verbs are heads of the **vP phrase** which is built on top of VP

(9) light verbs



↔ the thematic relationships follow from the structure in (9):

the theme argument is in Spec,VP

the agent is in Spec,vP

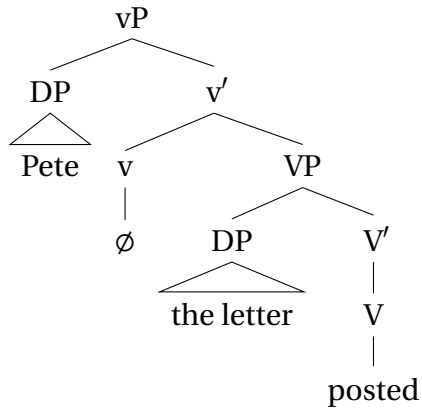
Note: vP = 'little vp', VP = 'big vp'

- The specifier of vP will be the structural position for agent/experiencer arguments of various types of verbs.

- **Transitive verbs:** <agent/experiencer, theme/patient>

In order to account for the structure and thematic relations, we will propose a structure that is similar to the one of light verbs. The only difference is that the v head is empty (10).

(10) Transitive Vs

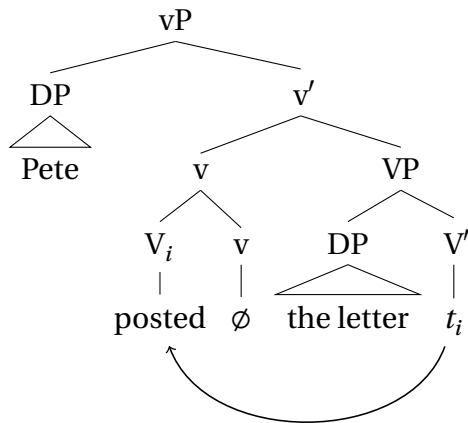


NB: so far we have been treating the theme/patient argument of transitive verbs as its complement. Now we have updated this in order to obey UTAH (recall that the path/location argument is in the complement position, (5))

- But: (10) does not derive the right word order

The correct order is achieved by moving the lexical verb to v.

(11) Transitive Vs: movement



The basic mechanics of movement (read more in BESE: Ch. 3.2)

Two positions: the **extraction site** and the **landing site** of a moved element

In the extraction site we find a copy of the moved element, the **trace** (or typically simply *t*); there is co-indexation b/w the moved element and the trace

Movement can be visualized with an arrow in the trees

The landing site in (11): V is adjoined to v (cf. the bar level is not raised up one notch); specifically, it is an adjunction to a head (V-to-v)

- (11) is the complete representation of extended verb phrases with transitive verbs

↳ Let's draw the tree for (12).

(see Section 3)

(12) The boy injured his knee.

- Transitive verbs are similar to light verbs as they feature a vP. The main semantic aspects of a light verb are determined by its thematic complement (V), so the vP is an **extended projection** of the VP.

→ it depends on the thematic verb how the argument of v is to be interpreted, as a causer, not directly seen as the agent of the thematic verb, as in (9), or as a direct agent of the thematic verb, as in (10)

→ the agent subject of the light verb involved with transitive verbs will receive its theta-role indirectly from the thematic verb, via the light verb, and hence will be interpreted as the argument of the thematic verb

- Not all intransitive verbs have a theme argument: the verbs in (13) have a agent/experiencer argument; they are referred to as **unergative verbs** (Note [E.G.]: this term is not introduced in the textbook).

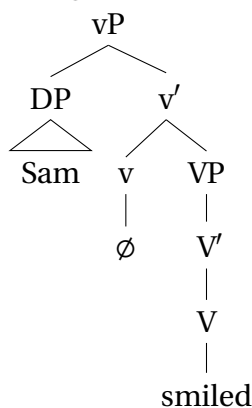
Observe that these verbs can have cognate objects (14), unlike unaccusatives (7).

- (13) a. Sam smiled.
b. Jerry danced.

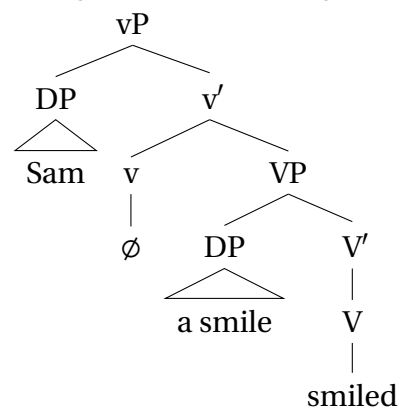
- (14) a. Sam smiled an evil smile.
b. Jerry danced a merry dance.

Since the agent and experience theta-roles are assigned to the specifier of v, we assume the structure in (15) for (13). For the cases with cognate objects, we will assume the structure in (16) (which is identical to what we proposed for transitives).

(15) Unergative Vs



(16) Unergative Vs with a cognate object



✎ Draw the tree of (15) and (16) with verb movement.

(see Section 3)

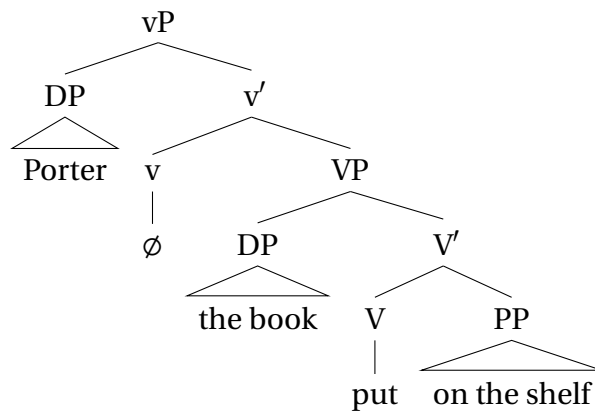
- Verbs like *break*, *open* show alternations as in (17):

- (17) a. The window broke. theme in Spec,VP
b. Mike broke the window. agent in Spec,vP, theme in Spec,VP

Note [E.G.]: the textbook explains that the intransitive verbs illustrated in (17a) (they are referred to as 'ergative verbs') are different from unaccusative verbs wrt to *there*-sentences, but this is not important for us here. The important point is that (17a) has a structure identical to the one of unaccusatives (=4), and (17b) – to the one of transitives (=11).

- The structures proposed so far can be easily extended to account for complex transitive verbs, as in (18). Again, verb movement is needed in order to derive the correct word order.

(18) Complex transitive Vs



✎ Draw the tree of (18) with verb movement.

(see Section 3)

- Note [E.G.]: Some additional assumptions need to be made in order to account for transitive verbs with theta-grid <Agent, Experiencer> (*Peter frightened me*), sentences with multiple light verbs (*I made him let her take a look*), ditransitives in a double object construction (*I gave him the book*), phrasal verbs and verbs with sentential complements. We will discuss those later.

- Unaccusative verbs: theme argument in Spec,VP, (location/goal argument in the complement of V)
NB: no vP is projected!!!
- Unergative verbs: agent/experiencer argument in Spec,vP
- Transitive verbs: agent/experiencer argument in Spec,vP, theme/patient argument in Spec,VP
- Light verbs: agent/experiencer argument in Spec,vP, theme/patient argument in Spec,VP
- Complex transitive verbs: agent/experiencer argument in Spec,vP, theme/patient argument in Spec,VP, location argument in the complement of V

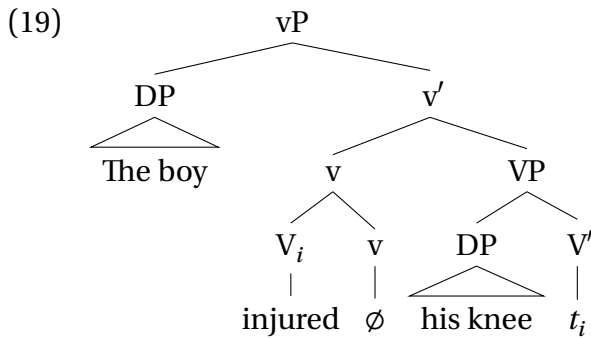
The vP projection

- vP hosts external arguments (active participants: Agent and Causer)
- the v head can be overt
- verb movement: V-to-v, i.e., the lexical V moves to the covert light verb
NB: this is the type of adjunction you need to be able to apply in the trees. (Note: in the textbook, V adjoins to the left of v, but it is also fine if you adjoin it to the right of v.)
- vP hosts Agent-oriented modifiers, e.g., *deliberately*, *intentionally*
NB: We will discuss adjuncts later

3 Key: trees

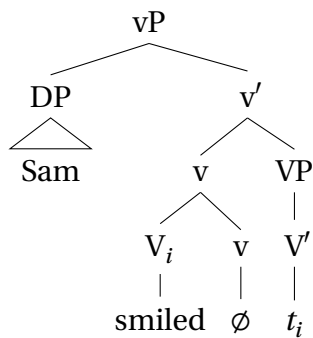
As said above, lexical Vs adjoin to the covert light verb *v*. This applies in the case of transitive, unergative and complex transitive verbs. The trees below are the complete structural representations of extended verb phrases with these verb types.

- Transitive verbs (= (11))

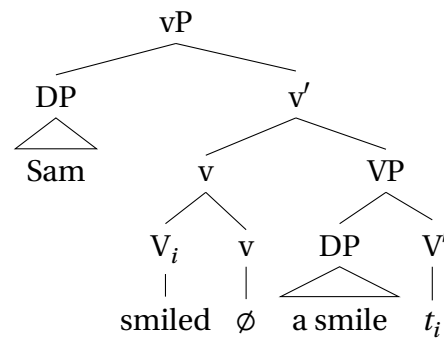


- Unergative verbs

(20) Unergative Vs



(21) Unergative Vs with a cognate object



- Complex transitive verbs

(22)

