

Verb phrases 1.

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Theoretical considerations

EVENT STRUCTURE: the action/state/etc. described by a verb is called an *event*. In some cases the event is simple; cannot be further divided:

- (1) a. The train arrived.
- b. The vase sat on the table.
- c. The ship sank.

Other verbs describe an event consisting of a number of sub-events:

- (2) a. Mary drew a picture.
- b. John gave everybody some cake.
- c. The pirates sank the ship.

THETA CRITERION: A Θ -role must be assigned to exactly one argument, and exactly an argument must bear exactly one Θ -role.

UNIFORM THETA-ROLE ASSIGNMENT HYPOTHESIS (UTAH): A Θ -role is assigned in the same structural configuration in every structure in which it is present.

LOCALITY RESTRICTION ON THETA-ROLE ASSIGNMENT: A predicate assigns a Θ -role either to its complement or to its specifier.

Verb types

Unaccusative verbs

The simplest type of verbs; their event structure has no sub events. They are verbs of movement or location (e.g. *arrive*, *spread*, *sit* etc.) They have one DP-argument which is a Theme and an optional PP argument (location/source/path).

Diagnostic tests for unaccusatives:

- (3) a. *there-construction*: There sat a vase on the table.
- b. *locative inversion*: From platform 9 departed a train.

Their analysis is quite straightforward: the DP-argument (Theme) is the specifier of the VP while the optional PP-argument (source, location, path etc.) is the complement.

Light verbs

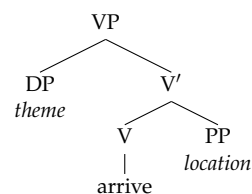
Consider the following:

Compositionality refers to the idea that the meaning of bits of structure combined by a syntactic process is the meaning of the constituents combined by a semantic process.

How many sub-events do these events have?

Think about what we are going to do with three-place predicates.

Keep in mind that *unaccusative* is not the same notion as *intransitive* as we will see later. Note that locative inversion is not the same as topicalising a PP as in *On the table, Sarah put her bag*.



- (4) a. *have* a shower
- b. *make* an observation
- c. *take* a look

It can be seen that these verbs contribute less to the meaning of the phrase than full lexical verbs usually do; hence the term *light verb*.

Light verbs can also take VP-complements:

- (5) a. He made [the window break].
- b. John got [the door closed].
- c. They let [the car depart].

In these cases the light verb is of category *v* (a non-thematic verb) that takes the thematic VP as its complement, and it assigns its own specifier an Agent Θ -role.

Ergative verbs

There are verbs that look like unaccusatives, but cannot appear in constructions normal unaccusatives can. (Also they are not verbs of movement or location.)

- (6) a. The door opened. (*There opened a door.)
- b. The glass shattered into pieces. (*Into pieces shattered the glass.)

Also, these verbs can be used transitively where the subject of the intransitive version becomes the object:

- (7) a. Someone opened the door.
- b. Bill shattered the glass into pieces.

Could we analyse these as in (8)?

- (8) [VP [DP someone] [v' open [DP the door]]]

That would violate the UTAH and associate too simple a representation with a complex event structure. Instead, we analyse it with an empty light verb. Support for that idea comes from Hungarian.

- (9) a. a labda elgur-ul-t
- b. elgur-ít-otta a labdát

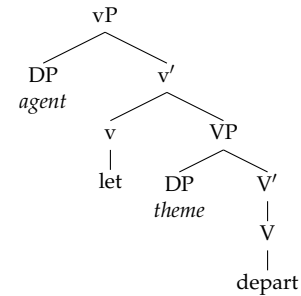
We assume that in English the thematic verb moves up to attach to the empty morpheme (via head-adjunction).

Reading

Newson et al. *BESE*. Ch. 5.1 - 5.2.3 (pp. 153-171)

To illustrate that point, compare *have a bath* with *have a baby*.

What could we say about the event-structure?



The event structure also becomes more complex here: 'Bill did something' → 'the glass shattered'.

