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REVISION 2

The language faculty: Universal Grammar, Principles and Parameters

Generative Grammar: a set of rules with the help of which you can generate all and only the well-formed expressions of (a) language.

What makes a good grammar?
1. **generality**: the range of sentences the grammar analyzes correctly.
2. **selectivity**: the range of non-sentences the grammar identifies as problematic.
3. **understandability**: the simplicity of the grammar itself.

Simple rules can produce complex phenomena if they interact in complex ways: e.g. chess.

X-bar theory: a module of GB (Government and Binding Theory) containing three very simple rules to describe the structure of the expressions of a language:

1. the specifier rule: $XP \rightarrow$ Specifier (YP) X'
2. the complement rule: $X' \rightarrow X$ Complement (ZP)
3. the adjunct rule (optional, recursive), general form: $X^n \rightarrow X^n$, Adjunct (WP or W)

the comma in the adjunct rule means that the order of X^n and the adjunct is not fixed, the adjunct can precede or follow the X^n constituent (whereas specifiers always precede X' and complements always follow X, the head)

Specifiers, Complements, Adjuncts: phrase-sized constituents.

the adjunct rule encodes the following rules: **XP-adjunction**: $XP \rightarrow XP$ Adjunct (=YP)
$XP \rightarrow$ Adjunct (=YP) XP

X'-adjunction: $X' \rightarrow X'$ Adjunct (=YP)
$X' \rightarrow$ Adjunct (=YP) X'

X-adjunction: $X \rightarrow X$ Adjunct (=Y)
(also called head-adjunction) $X \rightarrow$ Adjunct (=Y) X

head-adjunction: in head-movement

Other Modules discussed: Theta-Theory (the assignment of theta-roles), Case Theory (see below), the Lexicon (idiosyncratic information that cannot be described with the help of a rule)

Structure dependency
Language is **structure dependent**: all syntactic rules in all languages operate on structures rather than on unstructured strings of words. Humans are capable of identifying structure-independent patterns in the context of a puzzle, but not in the context of language learning. (No "move the third word from the left" rule)

He can play the cello.   *Can [he] play the cello?*
The man from the pub can play the cello.   *Can [the man from the pub] play the cello?*
                                                   *Man the from the pub can play the cello?
The man who is running can play the cello.   *Can [the man who is running] play the cello?*
                                                   *Is the man who running can play the cello?

Structure dependency seems to be a principle born with us, part of Universal Grammar in the language faculty, children never produce the ungrammatical sentences above.

We know much more about language than what could be expected based on the quantity and the quality of input we receive during the process of language acquisition (cf. *wanna*-contraction).

Who did the coach want to shoot at the end of the game?   ambiguous
Who did the coach wanna shoot at the end of the game?   only one meaning

*Who does Arnold wanna make breakfast?
Who does Arnold wanna make breakfast for?

<u>The structure of the Verb Phrase</u>

verb: central element in selecting arguments and assigning semantic roles to them
argument structure: subject + complement(s)
thematic structure (theta roles): assigned to all/only arguments
subcategorisation frame: only the complements, every clause must have a subject

Uniform Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH): a theta-role is assigned in the same structural position in all structures in which it is present.

The structure of the Verb Phrase reflects basic properties of the verbal head.

Seemingly similar structures turn out to have different syntactic properties.

THERE	COGNATE OBJECT	TRANSITIVE
A letter arrived. There arrived a letter.	**A letter arrived an arrival.*	**Someone arrived the letter.*
An actor died. **There died an actor.*	*An actor died a terrible death.*	**Someone died the actor.*
A door opened. **There opened a door.*	**A door opened an opening*	*Someone opened the door.*

Major subcategories of verbs:
  –unaccusative verbs
  –light verbs
  –ergative verbs
  –intransitive verbs
  –transitive verbs
  –multiple complement verbs (complex-transitive)

Multiple complement verbs
Peter put the book on the desk.
Main problem: three arguments, but only two positions within the VP.→ a vP (light verb) layer surrounding the lexical VP.
light verbs: assigners of theta-roles regulated by the thematic verb, extended projections of VP
verbs of placement: agent, theme, location: *Kate kept the hamster in a cage.*
the **dative construction**: goal/beneficiary PP: *I sent a letter to Peter.*
the **double object construction**: *I sent Peter a letter.* (indirect object > direct object)

Light verbs
make the door close = close the door
Structure: Light verb: vP taking a VP complement.
            agentive subject = specifier of vP
            theme object = specifier of VP
            verbs head their own projections

Unaccusative verbs
a letter arrived (from my friend), the table sat in the corner
typically verbs of movement or location with a DP argument having the theta role of theme (sometimes ambiguous between an agentive and unaccusative interpretation)
Diagnostic tests
  - they can appear in existential *there* sentences (with an indefinite theme argument)
  - locative inversion is well-formed: *from platform 9 (there) departed a train to Minsk, *on the table put he the book, *in the garden smiled a boy, *on the chair deliberately sat a man*
  - they do not take objects of any kind (intransitives are perfect with **cognate objects:** *he lived* (=unaccusative verb) *a happy life*)
Structure: theme argument = subject in specifier position within VP → theme position
            prepositional argument = complement

Ergative verbs
The vase broke./The ship sank./The tree grew.
Difference between unaccusative and ergative verbs:
- ergatives are not movement or locative verbs, they express a change of state.
- ergatives are ungrammatical in *there* sentences or locative inversion (*grow* is ambiguous between an unaccusative and an ergative interpretation! when OK with *there*, it has a locative meaning, !*there grew a tree bigger* vs. *there grew a tree in the garden*)
- ergatives have a transitive counterpart: *I broke the vase./They sank the ship...* with a causative meaning. unaccusatives cannot appear in causative constructions. *Andrew arrived the letter.*

Structure:
–one-argument version: same as the structure of unaccusatives: theme argument = subject in specifier position within VP → theme position
–transitive version: same as the structure with a light verb (same as causative meaning with *make*)
UTAH can also be maintained: themes in Spec, VP
                                     agents in Spec, vP

Transitive verbs
subject: agent/experiencer, object: patient/theme
Structure: subject: Spec, vP
                  object: Spec, VP
                  verb: head of VP, moving to v to adjoin to the bound empty light verb

Experiencer subjects: different theta-position? *Peter frightened me.*
         Spec, vP. ?agent subject, experiencer object: 2 vPs, V undergoes movement
Thematic hierarchy: agent > experiencer > theme
Experiencer role, if there is one, must be assigned to the specifier position of a light verb. If there is also an agent, you need a second vP, the agent will always be higher in the structure.

Intransitive verbs
Agent/experiencer argument, cognate object possible: *He smiled* (*a happy/devilish smile*).
Structure: vP taking VP,
                  subject in Spec, vP, V adjoins to v

CASE THEORY

accounts for some of the formal properties of overt DPs and integrates the traditional notion of Case into the grammar.

Morphological vs. abstract Case (in English abstract Case is often not morphologically realized; abstract Case is part of universal grammar)

English case system: overt distinction between NOMINATIVE and ACCUSATIVE can be found in the pronoun system (with several examples of Case syncretism, see *you, it*).

Distributional data:
NOMINATIVE: DP in the subject position of finite clauses
ACCUSATIVE:
> (1) object DP of a transitive verb
> (2) subject DP of infinitival subordinate clauses
> (3) DP complement of a preposition

→ prepositions assign ACCUSATIVE Case to the DP they govern, they Case-mark the DP.
→ACC Case is also assigned in transitive and intransitive (see cognate objects) constructions, but never in unaccusative structures. If there is no thematic light verb, there is no ACC Case. It is the head of the thematic vP that assigns ACC Case to the object. **Burzio's Generalisation** about passivisation (if a verbs fails to theta-mark an external argument it does not assign accusative Case to its object) also explained.

The structural condition for accusative Case assignment is government.

Government: a head governs its sisters and its sister's descendants up till a certain point (see ECM vs. finite embedding later: *I believe them to be intelligent/I believe that they are intelligent*).

NOMINATIVE SUBJECTS: subjects of finite clauses
NOMINATIVE case is assigned by virtue of the specifier-head agreement between the subject DP and finite INFL.

ACCUSATIVE SUBJECTS: subjects of infinitival clauses:
For him to attack John would be surprising.
Can infinitival *to* be a case-assigner? *Him to attack Bill would be illegal.*
> *I prefer very much him to go now.*
You either insert *for*, or omit the subject. *FOR*=prepositional complementiser, therefore accusative case-assigner.
For he to attack Bill was illegal.

CASE FILTER: Every DP must be assigned abstract Case.

Reading:
Newson: BESE, Chapters 3-5 (pp. 87-185), Chapter 6: pp 233-237.