Little v

* Upon further scrutinization of argument structure, one finds that theta role assignment requires a bit of fine tuning.
* Recall that there are two kinds of arguments: *internal* and *external*.
* Internal arguments can be thought of an argument that is assigned a theta role directly by the verbal predicate.
* External arguments can be thought of as those elements which receive a theta role, but not by the verbal argument *per se*.
* The external argument is most often associated with the *clausal subject*. This means that the main verb of a clause is not actually what assigns the AGENT theta role to the subject.
* This means that the subject must be assigned this theta role from another head.
* If one were to consider the case of passives in English, one finds that there is a bit of a conundrum with respect to theta role assignment. Consider the following:

1. The ball was kicked.

* This example poses a few issues, but for now, focus on what it means.
* Think about the argument structure for the verb *kick*. One would expect the following: *kick* [DP\_\_\_DP].
* Is this an argument structure that can be observed in (1)? No.
* In addition to this, one can clearly see that *the ball* is the sentential subject, but is it the understood AGENT of this clause? Also no. The ball is not kicking itself. It is the THEME of this clause.
* This means that the sentence in (1) has no AGENT theta role, which means that the AGENT theta role cannot come from the main verb.
* This forces one to have to reconsider what exactly assigns AGENT in active voice clauses.
* Since it clearly cannot come from the main verb, it has to come from somewhere else.
* This is one of the bases for *little v*.
* The little v layer provides one with a convenient location for the assignment of the AGENT theta role.
* The little v layer will appear between T and V.



* Little v provides one with a location to assign the AGENT theta role, as well as to satisfy the Verb-Internal Subject Hypothesis (VISH).
* VISH stipulates that the subject of an active voice clause must be generated in the verbal domain.
* This makes intuitive sense because one wants the subject as close to the verb as possible in order to create a semantic relation between the two.
* With all of this in mind, one can now posit that the subject of a clause is base-generated in the specifier of vP (spec, vP).
* Little v is thus responsible for assigning the AGENT theta role to the subject. The main verb does NOT do this.
* From spec, vP, the subject is then moved into spec, TP in order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) which says that spec, TP must always be filled.
* In clauses where there is no agent, then there is no little v layer. So, for example, in (1) little v is not present because there is no need for it to be there.
* However, in a clause like *John kicked the ball* little v will be present in order to assign the AGENT theta role to John. The verbal predicate *kick* will then only assign the THEME theta role to *the ball*.