

Lecture 19: Unaccusatives and Unergatives. Small Clauses.

Andrei Antonenko

LIN 311: Syntax

October 30, 2018

Outline

- ① Unaccusative and Unergative Verbs
- ② Small Clauses

Unaccusative and Unergative Verbs

Unaccusative vs. Unergative verbs

- (1) a. The navy **sank** the submarine.
b. The submarine **sank**.
- (2) a. We **closed** the door.
b. The door **closed**.
- (3) a. The waiter **dropped** a glass.
b. A glass **dropped**.

Unaccusative verbs

Verbs like these can be both transitive or intransitive:

- The object of the transitive version can become the subject of the intransitive version of the verb.

Such verbs are called **unaccusative verbs**.

Unaccusative vs. Unergative verbs

Unergative verbs

This is different from the other class of intransitive verbs, where it is impossible:

- (4)
- a. John **ran**.
 - b. Sue **talked**.
 - c. Sally **danced**.

Such verbs are called **unergative verbs**.

Unaccusative verbs

- (5) a. Sally **froze** the ice-cream.
b. The ice-cream **froze**.

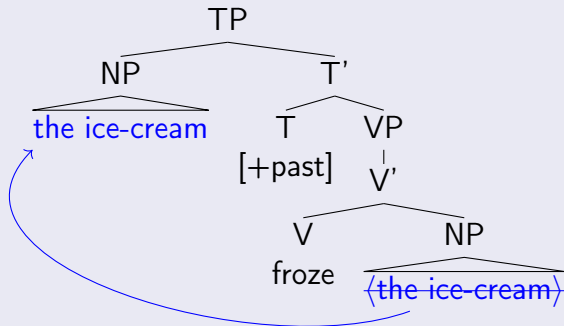
Consider the θ -roles:

- In the **transitive** version (5-a):
 - **ice-cream**: THEME and **Object**;
 - **Sally**: AGENT and **Subject**.
- In the **intransitive** version (5-b):
 - **ice-cream**: THEME and **Subject**.
- **AGENT θ -role is optional**.
 - We saw verbs with optional THEMES before: **eat**, **dance**, etc.

Unaccusative verbs

- (6) a. Sally **froze** the ice-cream.
 b. The ice-cream **froze**.

There is **a lot of evidence** that **THEME** starts as the complement of the verb, and moves to the subject position:



Burzio's generalization

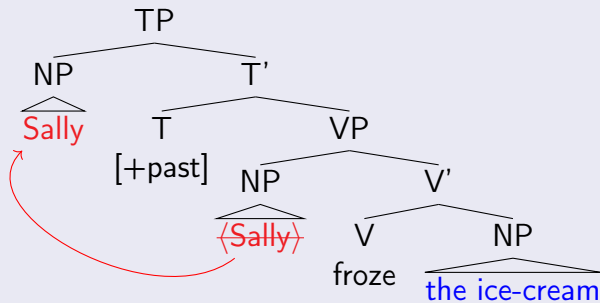
Such sentences is another evidence for **Burzio's Generalization**: If a predicate has no external θ -role (AGENT), it cannot assign accusative case:

No AGENT \Rightarrow No Accusative case

Unaccusative verbs

- (7) a. Sally **froze** the ice-cream.
 b. The ice-cream **froze**.

Transitive versions are derived in a standard fashion:



Two types of unaccusative verbs

Alternating and Non-alternating unaccusatives

- Not all unaccusative verbs allow the alternation between transitive and intransitive sentences as in (8):

- (8) a. Sue **broke** the vase.
 b. The vase **broke**.

- **Alternating** unaccusative verbs are:
 - **burn, decrease, increase, melt, grow, freeze, spread, fall**, etc.
- **Non-alternating** unaccusative verbs are:
 - **appear, arrive, come, emerge, occur, remain**, etc.

Evidence for the initial position of the subject

- ① Resultatives (English)
- ② Auxiliary selection (Dutch, German, Italian, French)
- ③ Noun incorporation (Onondaga)
- ④ *ne* particle (Italian)
- ⑤ Adjectival participles (English, Italian)
- ⑥ Imperatives (English)
- ⑦ *-er* suffix (English)
- ⑧ Extra THEMES (English)
- ⑨ Post-verbal subjects (Italian, Greek, Hebrew)

Resultatives

Some evidence comes from **resultatives**. We already saw this type of evidence when we talked about passives.

- Resultatives only modify **objects**, and not **subjects**:

- (9) a. John hammered the **metal flat**.
 (*metal is flat*)
 b. ***John** hammered the metal **sweaty**.
 (*John is sweaty*)

- With **unaccusatives**, resultatives **can modify subjects**;
- With **unergatives**, resultatives **cannot modify subjects**.

- (10) a. **The ice-cream** froze **solid**.
 b. ***John** ate **sick**.

Auxiliary selection

Have vs Be

- In some languages (German, Italian, French, Dutch):
 - **Unaccusatives** are used with the auxiliary **be**;
 - **Unergatives** are used with the auxiliary **have**;

(11) Italian

- a. Maria è arrivata.
 Maria **is** arrived_{FEM.SG}
 'Maria has arrived.'
- b. Maria **ha** telefonato.
 Maria **has** telephoned
 'Maria has telephoned.'

(12) German

- a. Die Maria **ist** angekommen.
 the Maria **is** arrived
 'Maria has arrived.'
- b. Die Maria **hat** telefoniert.
 the Maria **has** telephoned
 'Maria has telephoned.'

Noun incorporation

Unaccusative subjects can incorporate

- In such languages, subjects of **unaccusatives** also **incorporate**, but subjects of **unergatives cannot incorporate**.

(15) Onondaga

- a. * \emptyset -**khwien**-teurawe-we. (Unergative)
 A-**dog**-run-PRES
 'The dog is running.'
- b. Ka-**hsahe?**t-ahi-hw-i. (Unaccusative)
 3N-**bean**-spill-CAUS-ASP
 'The beans spilled.'

Italian *ne*

- In Italian, particle *ne* occurs with **objects of transitive** verbs, as well as with **subjects of unaccusatives**, but never with **subjects of unergatives**:

- (16) a. Giovanni *ne* ha insultati due. (Transitive)
 G. of.them has insulted two
 'Giovanni has insulted two of them.'
- b. **Ne* telefonano molti. (Unergative)
 of.them telephone many
 'Many of them call.'
- c. *Ne* arrivano molti. (Unaccusative)
 of.them arrive many
 'Many of them arrive.'

Participles

Adjectival participles

- **Adjectival participles** are possible with **objects of transitive** verbs and **subjects of unaccusatives**, but are impossible with **subjects of unergatives**:

- (17) a. employed man, eaten food (Transitive)
 b. fallen leaves, sunken ship, recently arrived bus (Unaccusative)
 c. *worked man, *run jogger, *laughed children (Unergative)

Participles

Italian participles

- **Postnomial participles** in Italian are possible with **subjects of unaccusatives**, but are impossible with **subjects of unergatives**:

- (18) a. l'uomo [arrivato a Milano] (Unaccusative)
 the.man arrived in Milan
 'the man who arrived at Milan'
- b. *l'uomo [telefonato a suo nonno] (Unergative)
 the.man called to his grandpa
 'the man who called his grandpa'

-er suffix

-er doesn't attach to unaccusatives

- -er suffix usually does not attach to **unaccusatives**, and is usually **ok** with **unergatives**:
 - Not the best test though...

- (20)
- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|----------------|
| a. | work-er, swimm-er, sneez-er | (Unergative) |
| b. | *arriv-er, *com-er, *melt-er | (Unaccusative) |

Postverbal subjects

Postverbal subjects are ok with unaccusatives

- In Hebrew (and Italian, Greek), subjects of **unaccusatives** may appear **after verbs**, and subjects of **unergatives** cannot:
 - This is because unaccusative subjects originate after verbs!

- (23) a. *Radku shlosa yeladim ba-mesiba. (Unergative)
 danced three boys in-the.party
 'Three boys danced at the party.'
- b. Hit'alfu shlosa xayalim ba-hafgana. (Unaccusative)
 fainted three soldiers in-the.demonstration
 'Three soldiers fainted at the demonstration.'

Unaccusative and Unergative verbs: Summary

- There is a lot of evidence from many unrelated languages that subjects of unaccusative verbs, such as **arrive**, **break**, **fall** start as verb **complements** and often behave similar to the objects of transitive verbs.
- In the absence of AGENT, the verb cannot assign accusative case (**Burzio's Generalization**).
- The complement of the unaccusative verb **raises to the subject position** for **Case/EPP**.

Small Clauses

Clauses without tense

- (24)
- a. Mary prefers her ice-cream in a cone.
 - b. Henry found Bill sad.
 - c. They saw Bill leave.

These examples are similar to the examples with embedded clauses:

- (25)
- a. Mary prefers [**that** her ice-cream **is** in a cone].
 - b. Henry found [**that** Bill **is** sad].
 - c. They saw [**that** Bill **left**].

Let's use the constituency tests!

Clauses without tense

Coordination:

- (26) a. Mary prefers [her ice-cream in a cone] and [her steak rare].
 b. Henry found [Bill sad] and [Sally happy].
 c. They saw [Bill leave] and [Sally come].

Stand alone:

- (27) a. What does Mary prefer? [Her ice-cream in a cone].
 b. What did Henry find? ??[Bill sad].
 c. What did they see? ??[Bill leave].

Movement:

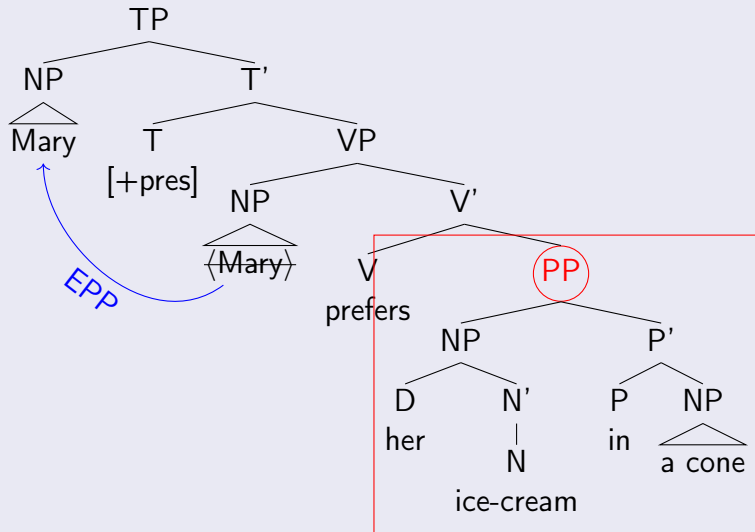
- (28) a. [Her ice-cream in a cone] is what Mary prefers.
 b. *[Bill sad] is what Henry found.
 c. *[Bill leave] is what they saw.

Clauses without tense

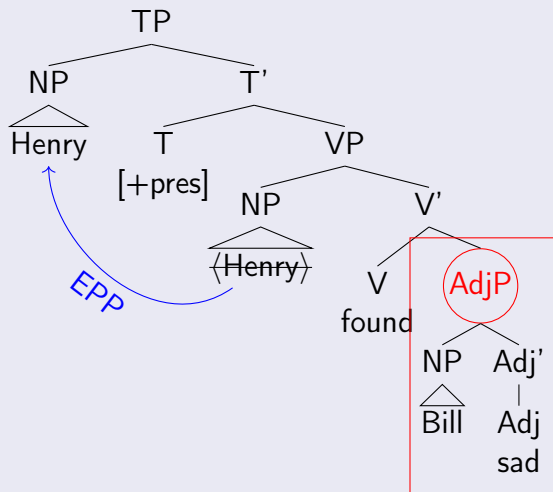
- (29)
- Mary prefers [her ice-cream in a cone].
 - Henry found [Bill sad].
 - They saw [Bill leave].

- The highlighted parts are constituents.
- Have a subject and a predicate, possibly not verbal.
- They are PP, AP, and VP with a subject.
- No TP: no agreement/tense possible.
- No CP: complementizer is impossible.

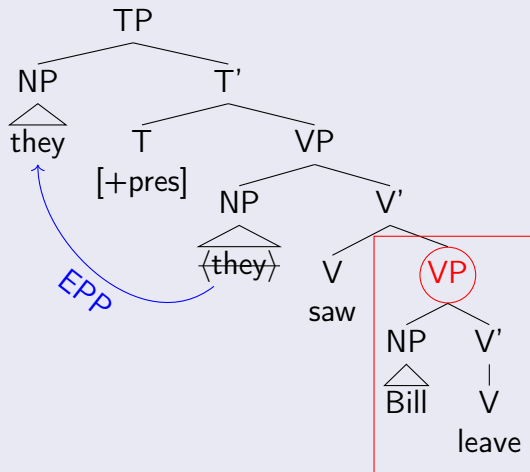
Mary prefers [her ice-cream in a cone].



Henry found [Bill sad].

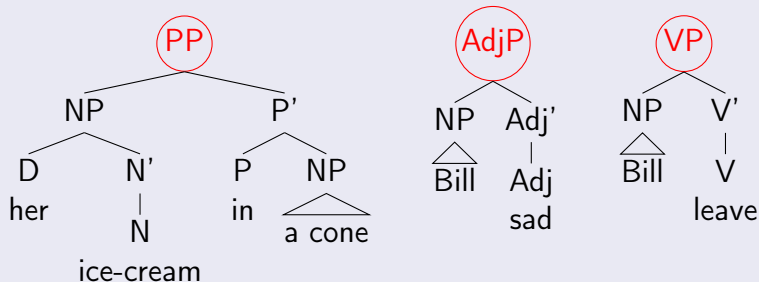


They saw [Bill leave].



Small clauses

- Such mini-clauses are called **Small clauses**.



- We already saw **Spec,VP** — now we also have **Spec,PP** and **Spec,AP** reserved for the same type of an argument.
- Specifier position is for subjects!**
 - Maybe we should reconsider what's happening inside the NP? OK, let's do it in the next lecture.

Small clauses and ECM

- **consider** and **want** are **ECM verbs**:
 - accusative case is assigned to the embedded subject;
 - as a result, the subject stays inside the embedded clause:

- (30) a. Sue considers [_{TP} **the dog** to be hungry].
 b. Sue wants [_{TP} **him** to be on trial].

- Small clauses can also be embedded under the ECM verbs:

- (31) a. Sue considers [_{AP} **the dog** hungry].
 b. Sue wants [_{PP} **him** on trial].

Small clauses and raising

- **seem** and **is likely** are **raising predicates**:
 - the subject of the infinitival embedded clause raises to the matrix clause to get Case.

- (32) a. **The dog_i** seems [TP ____i to be hungry].
 b. **John_i** is likely [TP ____i to be in France].

- Small clauses can also be embedded under the raising verbs:

- (33) a. **The dog_i** seems [AP ____i hungry].
 b. **John_i** is likely [PP ____i in France].

Locality of selection

Analysis of this sort allows us to formulate an important principle of the grammar:

Locality of selection: If a head α selects β , β appears as the complement, subject (specifier), or adjunct of α .