

Split intransitivity, thematic roles and functional heads

James Baker, University of Cambridge

Manchester Forum in Linguistics,

6th November 2015

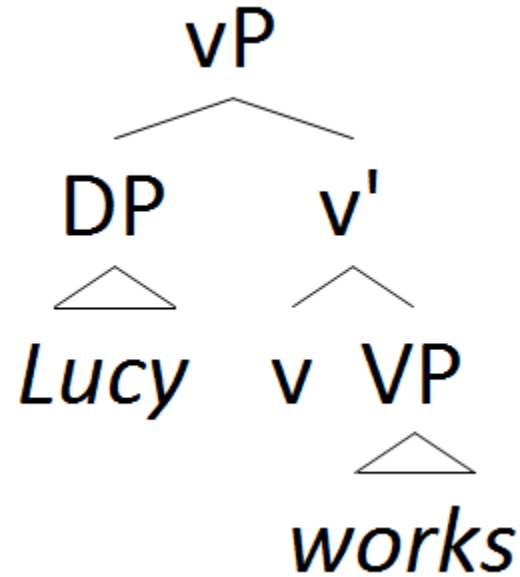
1. Introduction

Split intransitivity

- ❖ **Split intransitivity**: phenomena whereby intransitive verbs divide into different classes which behave differently in regard to different constructions.
 - Most famously Perlmutter's (1978) **Unaccusative Hypothesis**: two classes of intransitives.

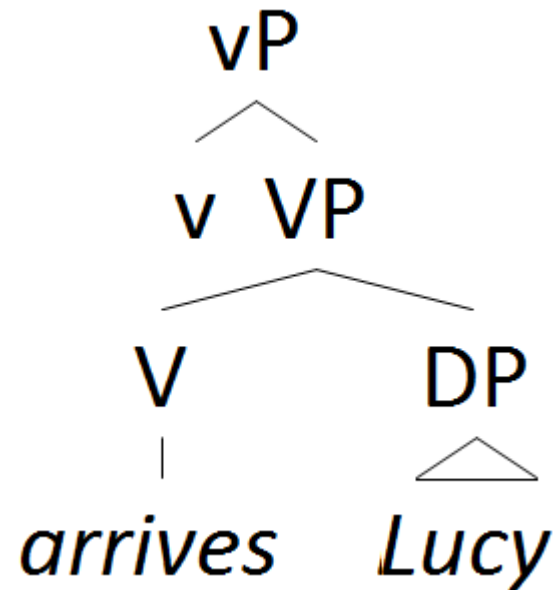
Split intransitivity

❖ Unergatives:



Split intransitivity

❖ Unaccusatives:



Split intransitivity

- ❖ Various **unaccusativity diagnostics** in the literature purport to show whether an intransitive verb belongs to one class or the other.
- ❖ Here I argue these diagnostics actually pick out *multiple* classes (section 2).
- ❖ I relate this to a theory of thematic roles and functional heads (section 3).

Split intransitivity

- ❖ More details can be found in: Baker, J. (forthcoming). Split intransitivity in English. To appear in *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, vol. 9.
- ❖ Online at www.seven-fifty.net/linguistics.

2. Unaccusativity diagnostics in English

Unaccusativity diagnostics in English

- ❖ Around a dozen unaccusativity diagnostics in the literature for English:
 - ❑ Locative inversion, *there*-insertion
 - ❑ *V one's way into*, *V away*, cognate objects, *-er*, *out-*
 - ❑ resultatives, causatives, prenominal past participles, *for hours*

Two illusory “diagnostics”

- ❖ Locative inversion: *Into the room arrived a man.*
- ❖ *there*-insertion: *There arrived a man.*
 - ❑ But as likely to be accepted with prototypical unergatives: *In the room worked a man; There worked a man*
 - ❑ No consistent semantic basis
 - ❑ Cf. Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995: ch. 9)

Process diagnostics

- ❖ *V one's way into* (Marantz 1992)
- ❖ *V away* (Keyser and Roeper 1984)
- ❖ cognate objects (Massam 1990)
- ❖ agentive suffix *-er* (Burzio 1981)
- ❖ *out*-prefixation (Keyser and Roeper 1984)

Process diagnostics

- ❖ *V one's way into, V away*, cognate objects, *-er, out-*
- ❖ Identify primarily verbs from Sorace's (2000) “**process**” class:
 - ❑ *talk, play, work*
 - ❑ *swim, run, walk*
 - ❑ *tremble, cough, skid?*

for hours

- ❖ Restricted to *atelic* verbs
- ❖ Some *inherently telic* verbs however very restricted in allowing it
- ❖ Telicity has often been connected to unaccusativity (e.g. Zaenen 1988)
 - *for hours* ∴ proposed as a diagnostic by Schloorlemmer (2004)

for hours

- ❖ OK with most intransitives:
 - ❑ *Lucy worked/ran/coughed/stayed for hours*
 - ❑ *The chocolate melted for hours*
- ❖ Not OK with a subset of change of state/change of location verbs:
 - ❑ **Lucy arrived/died/came for hours*
 - ❑ *?Lucy fell for hours*
 - ❑ **The window broke for hours*

Resultatives and the causative alternation

- ❖ **Resultative construction** another purported diagnostic (see Levin & Rappaport Hovav, ch. 2)
- ❖ Possible with most but not all change of state verbs:
 - ❑ *The lake froze solid, The kettle boiled dry*
 - ❑ **Lucy died dead*
- ❖ Doesn't occur with other intransitive verbs

Resultatives and the causative alternation

- ❖ Another diagnostic: the **causative alternation** (Perlmutter 1978)
- ❖ Occurs with a very similar set of intransitives to those which allow resultatives
 - ❑ *Lucy froze the lollipops / The lollipops froze*
 - ❑ *Lucy boiled the water / The water boiled*
- ❖ Out with other intransitives

Resultatives and the causative alternation

- ❖ Following Levin & Rappaport Hovav (1995) and Ramchand (2008) these verbs can be characterised as:
 - ❑ expressing a **change of state** (not a process, state, or change of location); and
 - ❑ lacking an **initiator**.

Prenominal past participles

- ❖ Levin and Rappaport (1986)
- ❖ OK with a subset of change of state/change of location verbs:
 - ❑ *the melted chocolate, the broken window*
 - ❑ *fallen leaves, the recently arrived recruits*
- ❖ Not OK with most other verbs:
 - ❑ **the played man, *the swam man, *the coughed man, *the stayed man*
 - ❑ **the died man, *the come man*

Summary

- ❖ *V away* etc.: process verbs (especially controlled processes)
- ❖ *for hours*: all except inherently telic change verbs
- ❖ Resultatives/causatives: non-initiated change of state verbs
- ❖ Prenominal past participles: a (different) subset of change of state/location verbs

Unaccusativity diagnostics in English

- ❖ Intransitives do *not* fall neatly into just two categories!
- ❖ “Unaccusatives” particularly fall into various groups – traditional analysis does not capture this
- ❖ Diagnostics pick out distinct but (more-or-less) semantically well-defined groups
 - ❑ Traditional analysis makes no strong semantic predictions

Unaccusativity diagnostics in English

- ❖ What about stative verbs?
 - ❑ *be, sit, persist, remain ...*
 - ❑ Diagnostics don't clearly place them in either of the traditional categories
- ❖ All this suggests a need for a more fine-grained analysis ...

Cross-linguistic parallels

- ❖ A similar set of features ([±control], [±state] [±change], ([±process]), [±telic]) also play a role in auxiliary selection in Western European languages (Sorace 2000).

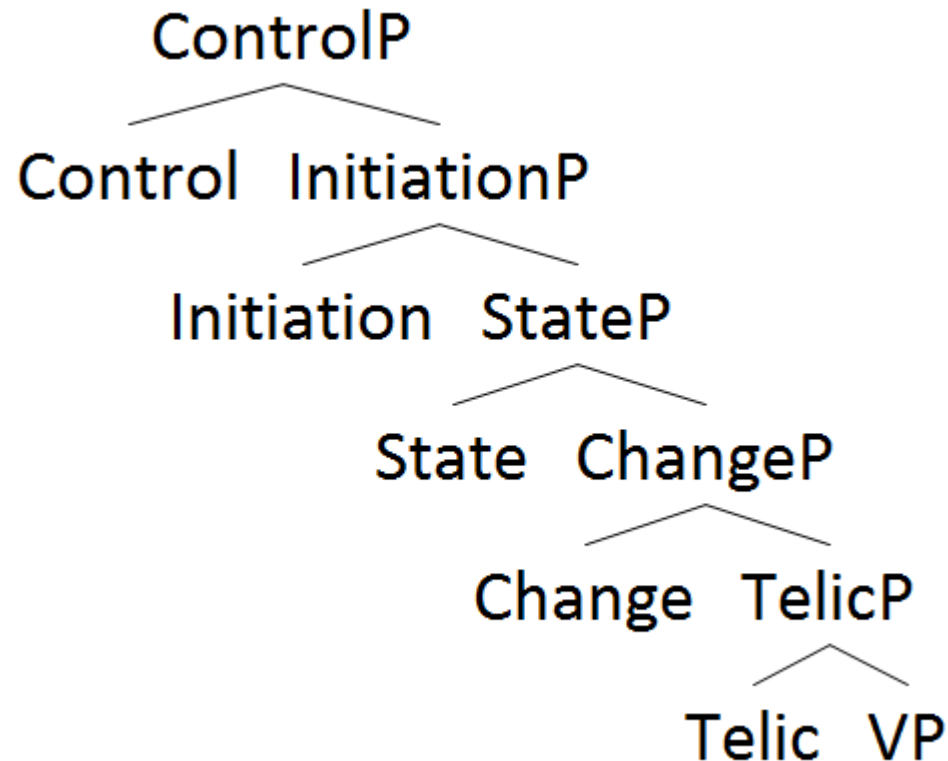
Cross-linguistic parallels

- ❖ Some languages have a *case split* in intransitives (split-S languages)
- ❖ Similar set of features at play, e.g.:
 - ❑ [\pm control]: Eastern Pomo, Tibetan ...
 - ❑ [\pm initiation]: Lakhota ...
 - ❑ [\pm state]: Guaraní ...
 - ❑ [\pm state], [\pm change]: Chol, (Basque)
 - ❑ [\pm telic] + others: Nepali, Georgian

(references available on request)

3. Split intransitivity and the thematic functional hierarchy

The thematic functional hierarchy



Cf. Ramchand (2008)

The thematic functional hierarchy

- ❖ Split intransitive behaviours arise through sensitivity of different constructions to different heads, e.g.
 - ❑ Prenominal past participle suffix *-en/-ed* selects [+change] ChangeP
 - ❑ *-er, out-* select [+control, –state, –change] ControlP
 - ❑ Causative alternation operates on [–initiation, +change] verbs

The thematic functional hierarchy

- ❖ These heads are also *thematic role assigners* (after Ramchand 2008)
- ❖ Roles assigned to arguments merged in their specifiers
- ❖ E.g. DP in [+control] Spec,ControlP bears Θ -CONTROL
DP in [+state] Spec,StateP bears Θ -STATE
etc.

The thematic functional hierarchy

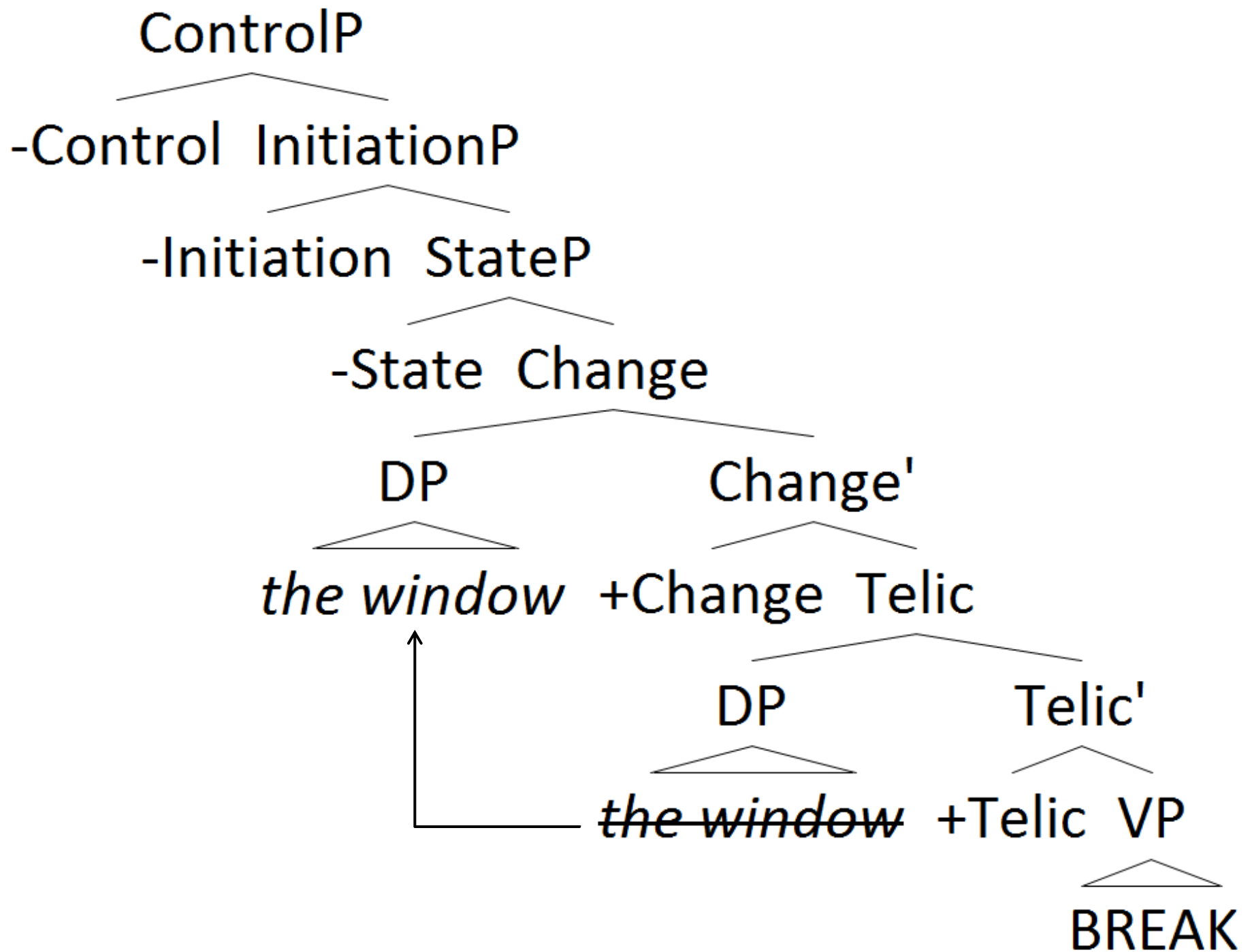
❖ Arguments can bear multiple roles (through movement)

❖ E.g. *Lucy worked*:

Lucy is Θ -CONTROL+ Θ -INITIATION

❖ *The window broke*:

the window is Θ -CHANGE+ Θ -TELIC



The thematic functional hierarchy

- ❖ The same roles can be used in describing transitive clauses, e.g.

Lucy *ate the cake.*

Θ-CONTROL

Θ-CHANGE

Θ-INITIATION

The thematic functional hierarchy

- ❖ The same roles can be used in describing transitive clauses, e.g.

Dogs frighten Chris.

Θ-INIT

Θ-STATE

etc.

Why a hierarchy?

- ❖ *Cross-linguistic evidence* from e.g. variation in auxiliary selection (Sorace 2000)
- ❖ *Diachronic evidence* ...
- ❖ Distinction in transitives between typical subject properties (control, initiation) and object properties (state/change, boundedness).
- ❖ Cf. cartography generally.

Diachronic evidence

- ❖ General trend in Romance to associate auxiliary BE with fewer categories, moving down the hierarchy (see Sorace 1993, Legendre 2007).
- ❖ Similar evidence from history of English (Baker 2015).

4. Conclusion

Conclusions

- ❖ Split intransitivity diagnostics identify more than just the two classes traditionally assumed.
- ❖ This behaviour can be related to a hierarchy of functional heads.
 - The insight that split intransitive behaviours relate to different structural positions of arguments is retained.
 - These heads can be associated with thematic roles more generally.

Thank you

References

- ❖ Baker, J. (2015). *Factors governing split intransitivity*. Presentation at ShefLing PGC, University of Sheffield, 6th March 2015.
- ❖ Burzio, L. (1981). *Intransitive verbs and Italian auxiliaries*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology dissertation.
- ❖ Keyser, S.J. & T. Roeper. (1984). On the middle and ergative constructions in English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 15(3), 381–416.
- ❖ Legendre, G. (2007). Optimizing auxiliary selection in Romance. In R. Aronovich (ed.), *Split Auxiliary Systems: A Cross-linguistic Perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- ❖ Levin, B. & M. Rappaport. (1986). The formation of adjectival passives. *Linguistic Inquiry* 17(4), 623–61.
- ❖ Levin, B. & M. Rappaport-Hovav. (1995). *Unaccusativity: At the syntax-lexical semantics interface*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- ❖ Marantz, A. (1992). The *way*-construction and the semantics of direct arguments in English: A reply to Jackendoff. In T. Stowell & E. Wehrli (eds.), *Syntax and semantics*, vol. 26. New York: Academic Press.
- ❖ Massam, D. (1990). Cognate Objects as Thematic Objects. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 35(2), 161–90.
- ❖ Perlmutter, D.M. (1978). Impersonal passives and the unaccusative hypothesis. In *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 157–90.
- ❖ Schoorlemmer, M. (2004). Syntactic unaccusativity in Russian. In A. Alexiadou, E. Anagnostopoulou & M. Everaert (eds.), *The unaccusativity puzzle: Explorations of the syntax-lexicon interface*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ❖ Sorace, A. (1993). Unaccusativity and auxiliary choice in nonnative grammars of Italian and French: asymmetries and predictable indeterminacy. *Journal of French Language Studies* 3(1), 71–93.
- ❖ Sorace, A. (2000). Gradients in auxiliary selection with intransitive verbs. *Language* 76(4), 859–890.
- ❖ Zaenen, A. (1988). Unaccusative verbs in Dutch and the syntax-semantics interface. *CSLI Reports* 88–123