SYNTAX
Handout 5

Verbs

1. The simple sentence: the seven clause types
Clause structure: SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, SVOO, SVOC, SVOA
- verb classes: intransitive (SV), copular (with subject complement (SVC) or adverbial (SVA)), transitive (mono- (SVO), di- (SVOO), complex-transitive (SOC, SVOA))
- potential multiple class membership: get a letter, get (sy) in trouble
- phrasal verbs vs. preposition al verbs: look sg up, look at sg

Fundamental lexico-semantic relations stay constant across structures.
   b. [A book]₂ was sent to [Jill]₃ by [Jack]₁
   d. [Jill]₃ was sent [a book]₂
   e. [Jack]₁ seems to have sent [Jill]₃ [a book]₂
   f. [Jill]₃ seems to have been sent [a book]₂

Names/definitions of relations: thematic or theta roles (marked by Θ = Greek letter 'theta').
AGENT: person or animate being that intentionally initiates the action in the predicate
THEME/PATIENT: person/thing affected by or undergoing the action
EXPERIENCER: entity experiencing the psychological state in the predicate
BENEFICIARY/BENEFACTIVE: entity benefitting from the action
GOAL: entity toward which the action is directed
SOURCE: entity from which something moves, inanimate cause
INSTRUMENT: means by which the action is carried out
LOCATION: place in which the action is situated
PROPOSITIONAL: event/state expressed in the (finite or nonfinite) complement clause
Examples:
   d. The book pleased Jill. e. He lives in Paris. f. The key opened the door.
   g. Jack was blown away by the storm. h. Jack opened the door with a key.

Lexical information:
Category: [±F, ±N, ±V]
Thematic structure/0-grid: all the arguments. Argument structure: all the arguments
Subcat(egorisation) frame: only the complements (every predicate has a subject)
Arguments = subject + complement(s)

2. Verbs:
Verb: two senses: a) an element in clause structure b) a member of a word class, traditionally: full lexical verbs, primary verbs (be, have, do), modal auxiliaries (always finite; the primary verbs be, have, do have both finite and non-finite forms!)
Main verbs: if only one, or the last if more (Peter runs three miles every day, Peter has a dog vs. Peter has been running for two hours).

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: the Thematic Criterion

The Projection Principle: lexical information is syntactically represented.
The Extended Projection Principle: every clause has a subject.
The structure of the Verb Phrase reflects the basic properties of the verbal head.

One/two/three-argument verbs
One/two/three-place predicates

**A problem for X’-Theory:**
three-arguments for the two positions (specifier and complement) within the VP?!
Further problem: seemingly similar structures can have different syntactic properties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THERE</th>
<th>COGNATE OBJECT</th>
<th>TRANSITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A door opened.</td>
<td>*There opened a door.</td>
<td>*A door opened an opening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Uniform Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis** (UTAH): a theta-role is assigned in the same structural position in all structures in which it is present.
→ Different structural positions for agents, themes, experiencers.

**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.*
Some problems related to the alternation between the dative construction and the double object construction (available for verbs with goal/beneficiary PP):
Dative construction: *I gave/sent a letter (=direct object) to Peter (=PP complement).*
Double object construction: *I gave/sent Peter (=indirect object) a letter (=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/close moves to v and adjoins to it

**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 (=not an unaccusative but an intransitive 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 and adjoins to v

Thematic hierarchy: agent > experiencer > theme

Experimenter 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

Structure:
- vP taking VP,
- subject in Spec, vP, V adjoins to v

Summary: major subcategories of verbs:
- multiple complement verbs (complex-transitive): a problem for X'-Theory, but once this problem is solved, solutions for some other VP-related problems automatically follow.
- intransitive verbs
- transitive verbs
- unaccusative verbs
- ergative verbs
- light verbs