TOP-DOWN DERIVATION AS FLEXIBLE SYNTAX

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Flexible Syntax (Neeleman & Weerman1999)

- Subjects and objects are base generated in their grammatical function positions
- No A-movement
- Arguments don't have theta-roles in syntax
- Thematic roles are LF interpretations of case features

Are there theta-positions?

- Traditionally, argument noun phrases become associated with a certain theta-role by being generated in particular positions within the vP (theta-positions) (Chomsky 1981)
- In Chomsky et al. (2023) argument noun phrases *must* be generated in a vP-internal theta-position

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- Argument noun phrases often occur outside of the vP

(1) … dat **Jan** **Marie** *waarschijnlijk* *niet* [$_{vP}$ gezien heeft]
that John Mary probably not seen has
'… that John probably did not see Mary'

Are there theta-positions?

- Thematic roles are typically not morphologically marked on argument noun phrases (unlike grammatical functions)

- Syntactic position is not a reliable indicator of thematic interpretation
  → Subjects and objects can be interpreted as carrying a range of thematic roles

- The association of grammatical functions and thematic roles can be affected by syntactic operations (e.g. passivisation)

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- The association of grammatical functions and thematic roles can be affected by syntactic operations (e.g. passivisation)

→ We do not need to assume that theta-roles are assigned to arguments in theta-positions in (narrow) syntax

Syntactic decomposition

- vP-internal theta-positions are linked to the idea that there are verbal shells (Larson 1988; Hale & Keyser 1993; Kratzer 1994), leading to a decomposition into roots and event structure heads (Harley 1995; Ramchand 2008)

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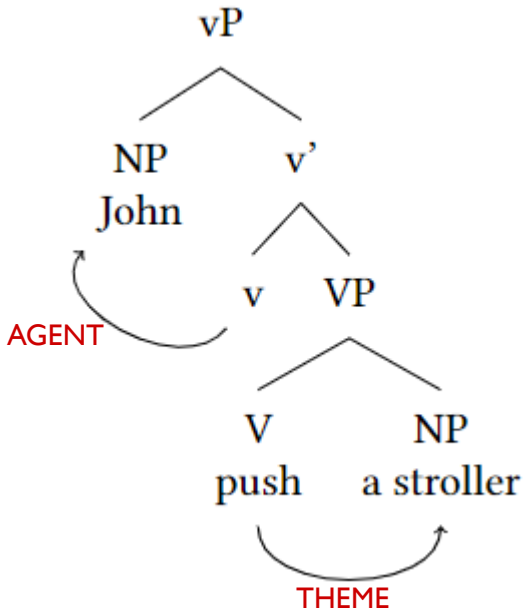

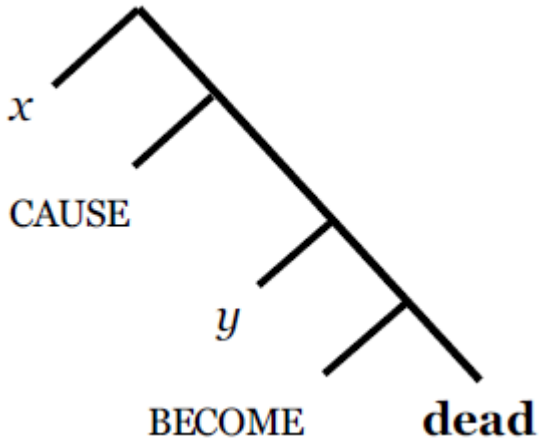

Hale and Keyser paradox

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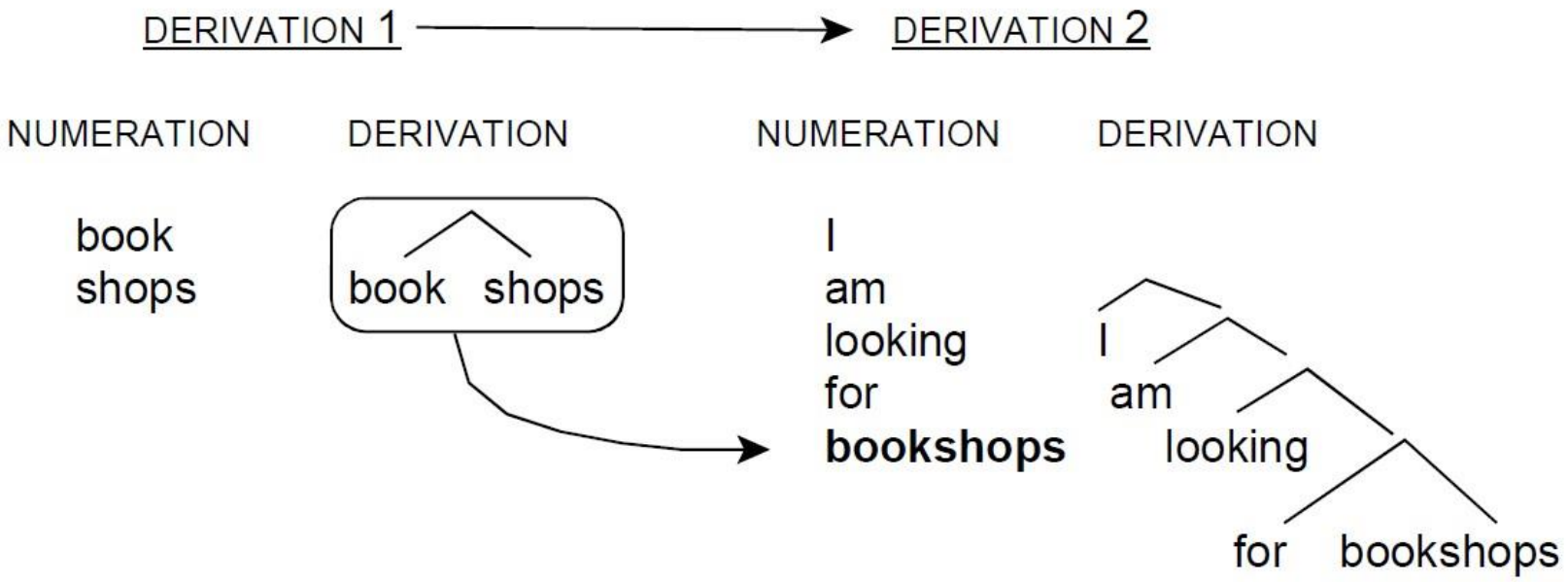
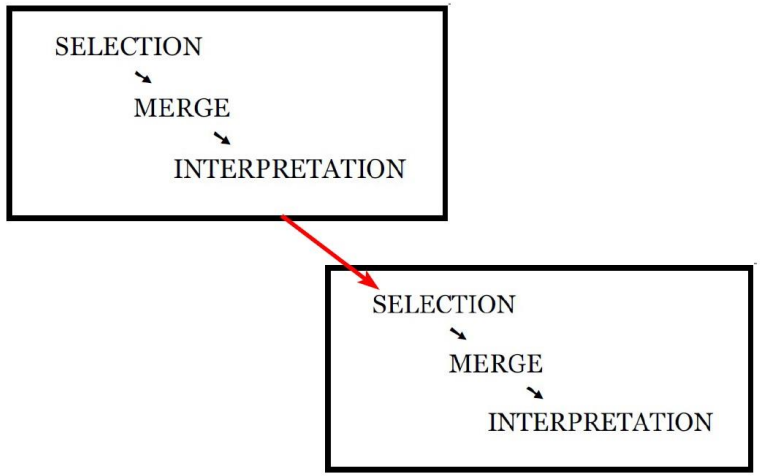
- Lexical or syntactic decomposition?

Layered derivations



Layered derivations

- Every derivation is a network of derivations
- What is complex in one derivation can be an atomic element in the next
- If atomic means 'opaque', we derive a very general locality condition
- Idiomaticity is determined at the interfaces



Locality: in any subderivation, you can only merge material that is in the selection (Numeration) of that subderivation.

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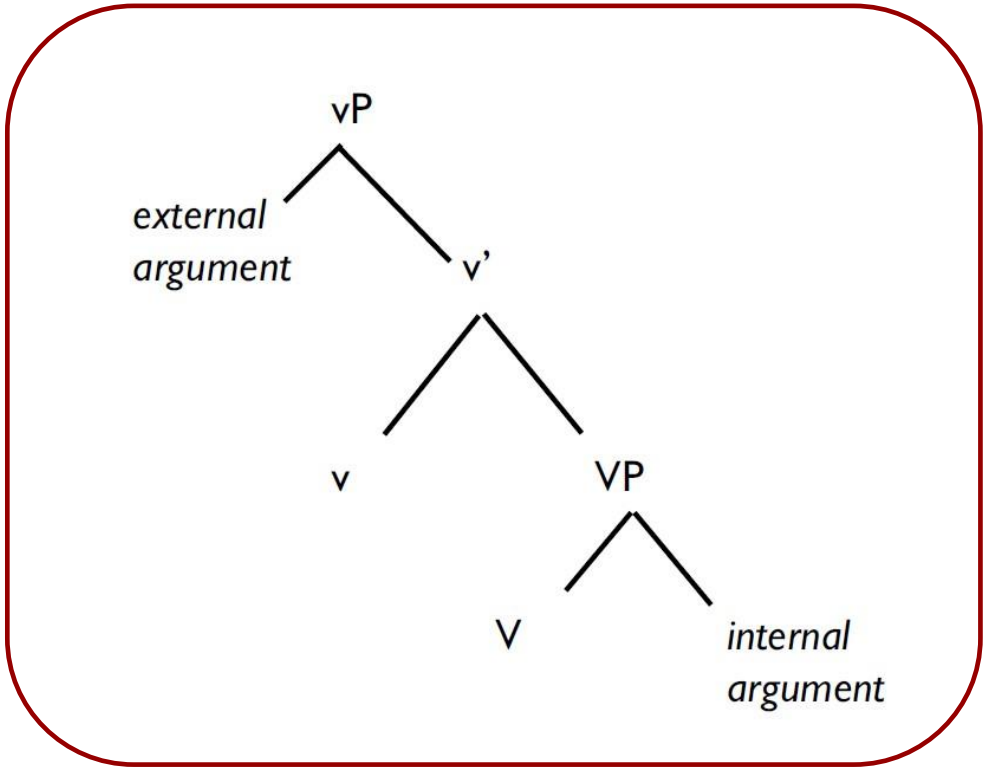
- Predicates seem to have both syntactic and lexical qualities
- Lexical or syntactic decomposition?
  → Predicates are built in a separate derivation
  - They have an internal syntactic structure
  - They behave like atoms (single lexical items) in the clausal derivation

VP-internal argument positions



VERB = derived in a subderivation

- is then included in the next Numeration as a single atomic element
- If so, the arguments of the verb cannot be generated inside vP
  (because they would never be able to move out, by the general principle of locality)

Theta-role interpretation

- Predicates are built in a separate derivation (VERBS) → No A-movement
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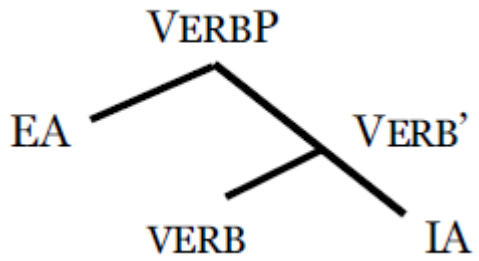

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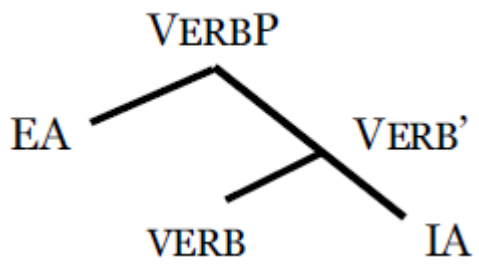

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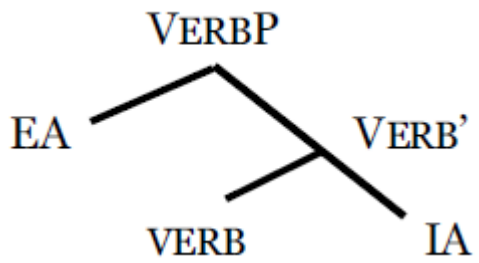

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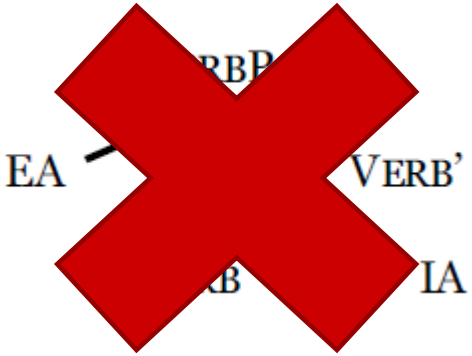

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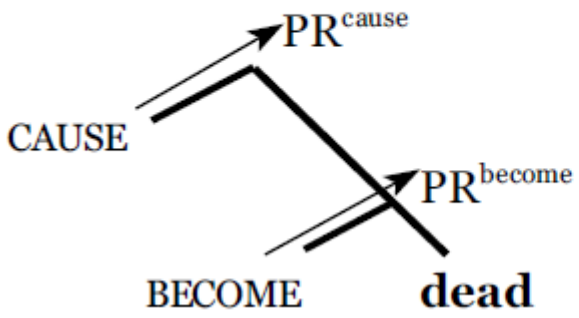
Theta-role interpretation

Talsma (to appear):

- The subcomponents of the VERB (*Cause, Become*) make PR (participant requirement) features available
- These express the VERB's valency

Theta-role interpretation

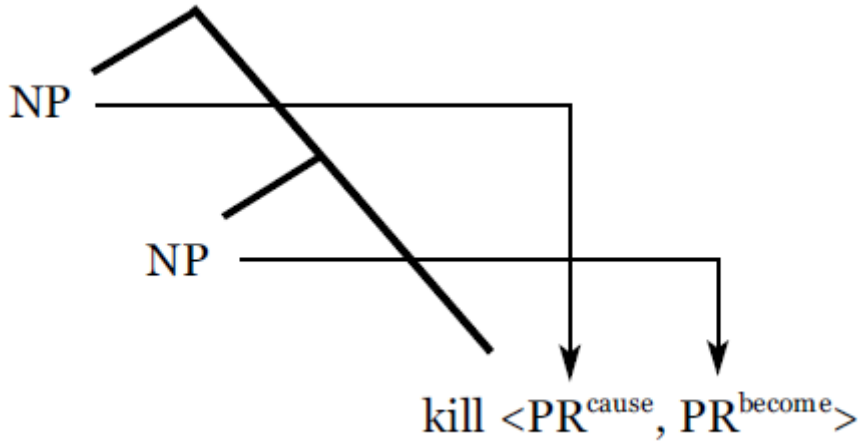
Talsma (to appear):

derivation of the complex verb	resulting lexical item
	*kill* <PR^{cause}, PR^{become}>

Theta-role interpretation

Talsma (to appear):

- In the clausal derivation, NPs value these features under c-command (top-down)



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- Arguments are interpreted as playing a certain role in the event at LF

- *Interpretation-Determining Arguments' Hierarchical Order*
  The interpretation of the arguments, i.e. the "role" they play in the event, is determined by their hierarchical order, which reflects the hierarchical order of the functional heads in the internal structure of the predicate.

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NP/PR-feature mismatches

- More PR-features than NPs results in an existential object interpretation

(2) John was eating (pasta)

- More NPs than PR-features results in an uninterpretable structure

(3) *John was eating pasta the Bible

Alternations with "IA" subjects

- Passives: the "external" theta-role is suppressed

(4) The pasta was eaten *eat*<~~Pr~~^~~cause~~, PR^become>

- Unaccusatives: there is no *Cause* layer present in the VERB's the internal structure

(5) The vase broke *break*<PR^become>

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(6) John broke the vase *break*<Pr$^{\text{cause}}$, PR$^{\text{become}}$ >

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- We need to account for this difference based on the internal structure of the predicates
  - Unergatives: *eat*<Pr^{cause}, PR^{become}>, *walk*<PR^{do}>
  - Unaccusatives: *break*<PR^{become}>

Unergatives versus unaccusatives: semantics

- *-er* nominalization (unergatives: yes, unaccusatives: no)
  - *walker, eater, *breaker*
  - *-er* is inherently agentive (semantics)
  - *-er* can value a PR-feature
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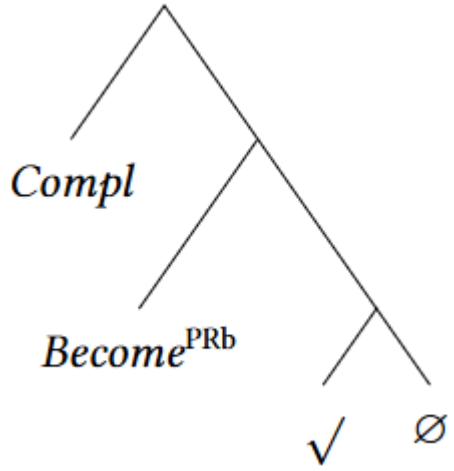
- Prenominal past participle (PPP) (unergatives: no, unaccusatives: yes)
  - *The *walked/*eaten/broken man*
  - The PPP is formed by affixation of a Completive head (Compl)
  - Compl combines with a BECOME head (the only head expressing a transition to a final state (semantics))
  - CAUSE is not part of this structure
    → The modified noun cannot be associated with this head



Unergatives versus unaccusatives: Spell-Out

- Auxiliary selection in the periphrastic past (unergatives: HAVE, unaccusatives: BE)
  - *Ik heb gegeten/gelopen* *Ik ben gebroken/gestorven*
  - Auxiliaries are a spell-out of features on V (Zwart 2017)
  - Contributing features on V:
    - PST + ANT: periphrastic past
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- Why the highest valued PR-feature?
  → Related to type of predicate
  → Auxiliaries are a vehicle of subject agreement
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- Passives: highest *valued* PR-feature → PR^{cause} is skipped

Unergatives versus unaccusatives: licensing

- Secondary resultative predicates (unergatives: yes, unaccusatives: no)
  - *He walked his shoes to shreds* **The lamp fell itself broken/*He died his children rich*
  - The matrix and embedded predicate form a complex predicate (cf. Neeleman 1994), formed in a separate derivation
  - The complex predicate expresses a single, complex event with one set of PR-features
  - The highest PR-feature of the embedded predicate and the lowest PR-feature of the matrix predicate fuse (*paint white*<PR^{cause}, $PR^{become/be}$>)
    → Links the two predicates together as a single event
    → Creates order among the PR-features (necessary for IDAHO)

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  - A secondary resultative predicate can only be integrated into the complex event if there is a CAUSE
    → The secondary resultative predicate must be licensed by the matrix predicate
    → Unaccusatives lack a CAUSE head

Unergatives versus unaccusatives: licensing (cont.'d)

- Impersonal passives (unergatives: yes, unaccusatives: no)
  - *Er werd gegeten/gelopen* **er werd gebroken/gestorven*
  - The passive makes one PR-feature unavailable for valuation
  - The passive cannot affect the BECOME head (similar to existing proposals stating that passive affects the (head introducing the) external argument)
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Conclusion: the internal structure of the predicates in combination with IDAHO ensures that there is no need to assume different base positions of unergative and unaccusative subjects to account for their difference in behavior

Traditional approach vs our approach

	Traditional approach	Our approach
Mismatch theta-roles allowed	✗	✓
Single configuration for "theta-assignment"	✗	✓
Same predicate for pseudotransitive alternation	✗	✓
Dispenses with A-movement	✗	✓

Duality of semantics and a top-down derivation

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→ The EM/IM distinction hinges on the Chomsky et al. (2023) conception of duality of semantics and is now untenable

→ The special status of theta-positions and EM is rooted in a commitment to a bottom-up orientation of the derivation

Duality of semantics and a top-down derivation

- Traditionally EM combines two elements (a verb and an NP) into a set, which results in theta-role assignment (and the creation of a theta-position)

- But:
  - Noun phrases do not 'carry' theta-roles
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- But:
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→ The bottom-up approach therefore loses much of its intuitive appeal

A top-down approach

- Split-Merge (Zwart 2009:162):

"Each derivation of syntactic structure needs (a) a set of elements N manipulated in the course of the derivation, called 'numeration' and (b) a procedure establishing relations among the members of N, called 'merge'.

Simplicity considerations then demand:

(1) a. Merge manipulates a single element of N at each step of the derivation.
b. Merge manipulates each element from N only once.

These requirements are not met in standard conceptions of the derivational procedure […]."

A top-down approach

- Split-Merge targets one element at a time
- This element is an element in the Numeration (an unordered set)
- Split-Merge splits the element off from the Numeration, creating an ordered pair where the split-off element is the first member and the remainder of the Numeration the second
- This creates a dependency relation where the second member depends on the first
- Split-Merge continues until there are no more unordered elements (the Numeration is empty)

A top-down approach

(7)
a. $\{ \alpha, \beta \}$ Numeration
b. $\{ \alpha, \{ \alpha, \beta \} \}$ Result of Split Merge
c. $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$ ordered pair

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  → No need for the EM/IM distinction
- Grammatical function is a function of Merge: the first NP merged becomes the subject

Bottom-up versus top-down

Bottom-up:

- Theta-positions most important

Top-down:

- Grammatical function positions most important

Returning to Flexible Syntax (Neeleman & Weerman1999)

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- Thematic roles are LF interpretations ~~of case features~~ established by IDAHO

Questions?

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- How does PR-valuation take place in obligatory control infinitives?

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- Obligatory control is to be described in terms of a relation between (PR-features of) predicates