Chapter 5. Verb Phrases

1 Introduction

A verb phrase (VP) is a syntactic constituent headed by a verb and containing its arguments and adjuncts. The study of the combinatorial properties of verbs and the arguments they obligatorily select is known as argument structure. Syntactically, argument structure classifies verbs according to valency and accounts for the mechanisms that increase or decrease verbal valency within a language. Semantically, a well-formed verb phrase denotes an event on the conceptual level, whose arguments correspond to the participants in that event. Events can be classified according to internal aspectual properties such as punctuality vs. durativity, dynamicity vs. non-dynamicity and telicity vs. atelicity, that is, whether the event has an inherent endpoint.

In this chapter, we introduce the distinction between arguments and adjuncts, examine verbal valency and the strategies for increasing and decreasing valency in Catalan, and discuss verb classes in Catalan with respect to lexical aspect. We also discuss manner and result in order to provide a deeper understanding of Catalan argument structure.

2 Arguments and adjuncts

An argument is a determiner phrase that is required or selected by the verb. It is part of the verb's argument structure and is necessary to complete its meaning. Arguments are typically subjects, direct objects and indirect objects. For example, the verb *donar* 'give' takes three arguments, which are the subject (agent), the direct object (theme) and the indirect object (recipient), see example (1).

(1) En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan.
the.M Guang him.DAT 3SG.PST give INDEF.F hug.F DAT the.Yifan
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan.'

On the other hand, an adjunct is an optional modifier, be it a prepositional phrase or an adverbial. It is not selected by the verb and adds extra information such as time (2a), place (2b), manner (2c), cause (2d), instrument (2e) and frequency (2f), etc. If an adjunct is removed, the sentence remains grammatical and complete.

(2) a. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan a les setze.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan at the sixteen
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan at sixteen.'

b. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan al seu despatx.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan at.the their office
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan in their office.'

c. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan amb força.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan with force
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan tightly.'

d. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan pel robatori.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan for.the theft
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan because of the theft.'

e. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan amb els braços.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan with the arms
'Guang gave a hug to Yifan with his arms.'

f. En Guang li va donar una abraçada a l'Yifan de vegades.
the Guang him 3SG.PST give a hug DAT the.Yifan of times
'Guang sometimes gave a hug to Yifan.'

It is worth noting that arguments are typically realized as determiner phrases, which are referential, rather than as bare noun phrases, which are generally non-referential. When a verb appears to select a noun directly, the noun is often not functioning as an independent argument but instead forms part of a complex predicate together with the verb, as in Table 1.

Table 1: Complex predicates: V + N

Catalan	English
tenir lloc	take place
tenir por (de)	be afraid (of)
tenir raó	be right
tenir gana	be hungry
tenir set	be thirsty
tenir son	be sleepy
fer por (a)	scare
fer cas (de)	pay attention (to)
fer falta	be necessary
fer olor (de)	smell (like)

3 Verbal valency

Verbs can be classified into four types according to the number of arguments they obligatorily select. Zero-valency verbs, which typically describe natural phenomena, do not require any arguments. One-valency verbs, also known as intransitive verbs, require one argument. Two-valency verbs, also known as transitive verbs, require two arguments. Three-valency verbs, also known as ditransitive verbs, require three arguments. See some examples in Catalan:

1. Zero-valency verbs: *ploure* 'rain' (*Plou* 'It rains'), *nevar* 'snow' (*Neva* 'It snows')
2. One-valency verbs: *caminar* 'walk', *córrer* 'run', *venir* 'come', *morir* 'die'
3. Two-valency verbs: *mirar* 'look', *veure* 'see', *escoltar* 'listen', *sentir* 'hear'
4. Three-valency verbs: *donar* 'give', *dir* 'say', *enviar* 'send', *mostrar* 'show'

3.1 Intranstive: Unergative verbs and unaccusative verbs

Intranstive verbs can be divided into types: unergative verbs and unaccusative verbs. For unergative verbs, the single argument behaves like an agent. In other words, the subject actively performs the action. It is similar to the subject of transitive verbs.

In contrast, for unaccusative verbs, the single argument behaves like a theme or patient. In other words, the subject does not initiate the action. Instead, something happens to it. Then it is similar to the direct object of transitive verbs.

Cross-linguistically, unergative verbs are typically associated with activity predicates, whereas unaccusative verbs tend to denote changes of state or location. However, this semantic generalization is not absolute, and many verbs exhibit mismatches between their semantic class and their syntactic behavior. For this reason, syntactic diagnostics are generally considered more reliable for identifying the unergative–unaccusative distinction.

In Catalan, only unaccusative verbs, but not unergative verbs, can form past-participle adjectives in (3a), license absolute participial constructions in (3b), and allow VS order in (3c).

(3) a. La porta està tancada.
the door COP.3SG closed
'The door is closed.'

b. Arribat el tren, vam marxar.
arrive.PART the train 2PL.PST leave
'When the train arrived, we left.'

c. No va venir ningú.
NEG 3SG.PST come nobody
'Nobody came.'

Here are some typical unergative verbs in Catalan:

1. Activity verbs: *treballar* 'work', *caminar* 'walk', *córrer* 'run', *nedar* 'swim', *volar* 'fly', *ballar* 'dance', *saltar* 'jump', *jugar* 'play', *descansar* 'rest', *viatjar* 'travel', *dormir* 'sleep'
2. Speech verbs: *parlar* 'speak', *cridar* 'shout', *xerrar* 'chat', *telefonar* 'call'
3. Emission / sound verbs: *riure* 'laugh', *plorar* 'cry', *tossir* 'cough', *esternudar* 'sneeze', *roncar* 'snore'

Here are some typical unaccusative verbs in Catalan:

1. Change-of-location verbs: *arribar* 'arrive', *entrar* 'enter', *sortir* 'go out', *venir* 'come', *anar* 'go', *pujar* 'go up', *baixar* 'go down'
2. Change-of-state verbs: *morir* 'die', *néixer* 'be born', *créixer* 'grow', *envellir* 'age', *florir* 'bloom', *aparèixer* 'appear', *desaparèixer* 'disappear', *sorgir* 'arise', *emergir* 'emerge', *caure* 'fall', *trencar-se* 'break', *fondre* 'melt', *obrir-se* 'open', *tancar-se* 'close'

3.2 Increasing valency in Catalan

In Catalan, several grammatical strategies can increase verbal valency, meaning they add an additional argument to the predicate (e.g., turning an intransitive verb into a transitive one, or adding an extra participant such as a beneficiary or causer). These strategies can be morpho-syntactic, or periphrastic.

3.2.1 Causative constructions with *fer* 'do / make'

The most productive way to increase valency in Catalan is with the causative verb *fer* 'do / make', see (4) and (5).

(4) a. El nen va dormir.
the child 3SG.PST sleep
'The child slept.'

b. La mare va fer dormir al nen.
the mother 3SG.PST make sleep DOM.the child
'The mother made the child sleep.'

(5) a. Els estudiants no van llegir els materials.
the students NEG 3PL.PST read the materials
'The students did not read the materials.'

b. El professor no va fer llegir els materials als estudiants.
the teacher NEG 3SG.PST make read the materials DOM.the students
'The teacher did not make the students read the materials.'

3.2.2 Applicative constructions

An applicative is a grammatical mechanism that introduces an additional argument to a verb, usually giving that argument a role such as beneficiary, recipient, or affected participant. Catalan can add this argument through a dative clitic, see (6), and (7).

(6) a. En Guang va cuinar el dinar.
the Guang 3SG.PST cook the lunch
'Guang cooked the lunch.'

b. En Guang els va cuinar el dinar als seus companys de pis.
the Guang them 3SG.PST cook the lunch DAT.the his mates of flat
'Guang cooked the lunch for his flatmates.'

(7) a. ?? Va caure el seu mòbil.
3SG.PST drop the his mobile
'His mobile dropped.'

b. Li va caure el mòbil.
him 3SG.PST drop the mobile
'His mobile dropped.'

When the affected argument is co-referential with the third person subject, the clitic SE, but not *li/els*, is used, see (8).

(8) a. ?? Va rentar la seva mà.
3SG.PST wash the his hand
'His washed his hand.'

b. Es va rentar la mà.
SE 3SG.PST wash the hand
'He washed his hand.'

3.2.3 Agent reflexive / aspectual SE

Some uses of SE introduce an affected participant or increase involvement, see (9) and (10). This use is to some degree similar to (8).

(9) a. Va menjar el pastís.
3SG.PST eat the cake
'He ate the cake.'

b. Es va menjar el pastís.
SE 3SG.PST eat the cake
'He ate up the cake.'

(10) a. Va baixar del cotxe.
3SG.PST go.down from.the car
'He got out of the car.'

b. Es va baixar del cotex.
SE 3SG.PST go.down from.the car
'He got himself out of the car.'

Although debated, many analyses treat this as adding an affected-subject interpretation, modifying the argument structure or event structure.

3.3 Decreasing valency in Catalan: More uses of SE

In Catalan, several constructions decrease verbal valency, meaning they reduce the number of arguments expressed by the verb. Typically this involves suppressing the external argument (agent) or saturating an argument position. In Catalan (and many other romance languages), the clitic SE is the most productive way to decrease valency.

3.3.1 Reflexive

3.3.2 Reciprocal

3.3.3 Anticausative

3.3.4 Antipassive

3.3.5 Passive

3.3.6 Impersonal

3.3.7 Middle

3.4 Decreasing valency in Catalan: Periphrastic passive