

# **LIN232 Summer 2021 - Week 4**

Voice, Little v, Case Theory

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# **Welcome Linguists!**

**Little v**

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**We need to expand our VP domain even  
more**

# Where is the subject actually?

Consider the following English sentences:

- (1) a. Garth kicked the bucket  
b. Garth kicked rocks  
c. Garth kicked a rock  
d. Garth kicked a habit  
e. Garth kicked a ball

- (2) a. Geneviève grinned  
b. Her dog grinned  
c. I grinned  
d. My friend's uncle who runs a Kiwi farm smiled

Changing the object of a predicate changes its meaning, but changing the subject never does

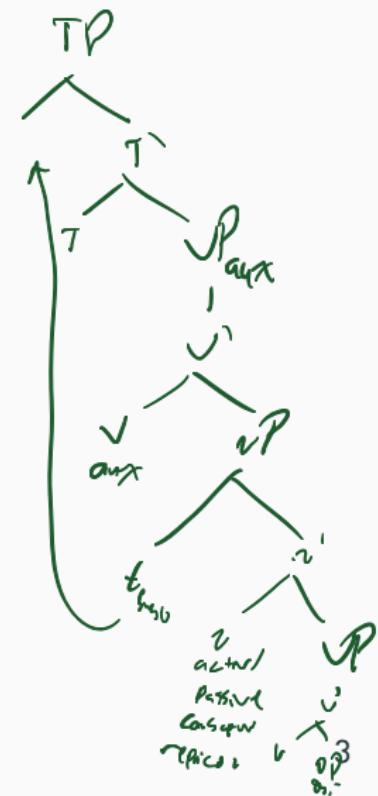
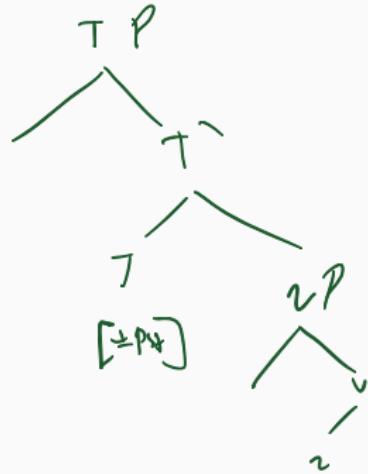
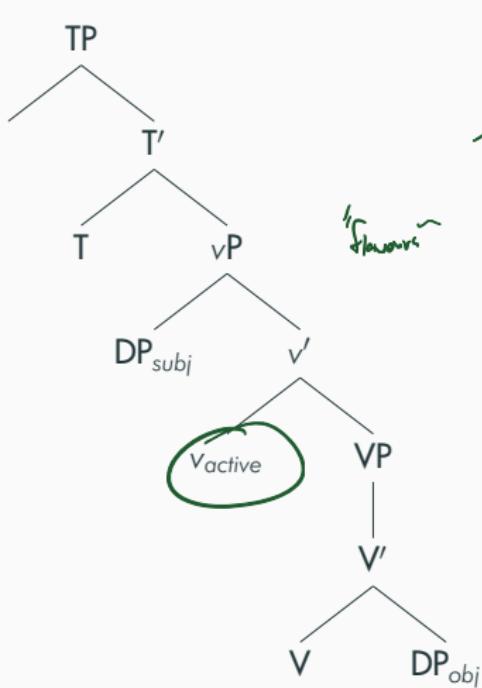
# Where is the subject actually?

Alec Marantz and Angelika Kratzer also noticed that idioms are either entire sentence idioms, or they are verb-object idioms. There aren't really ever subject-verb idiom



# Severing the External Argument

Let's learn a new tool: The little v hypothesis:

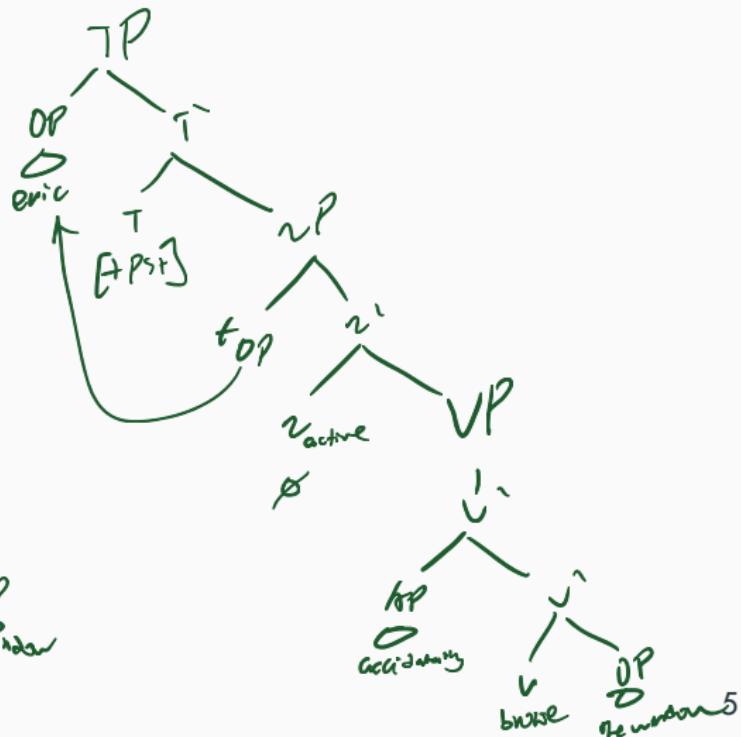
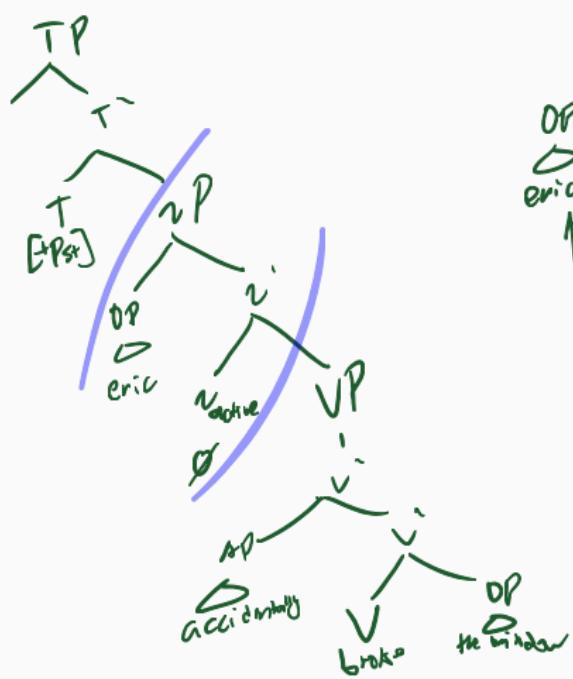


## Little-v

This allows us to handle voice alternations: active, passive, causative etc. can be expressed by a head of their own. In most languages, it is these heads that choose what kind of external argument we have

# English Practice Tree

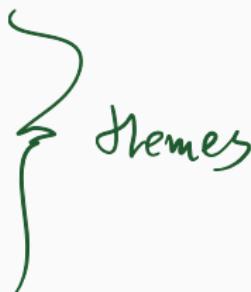
(3) Eric accidentally broke the window



# Unaccusatives and Little-v

What thematic roles do the subjects in the following English sentences take?

- (4) a. The window broke  
b. The lake froze  
c. The box floated



# Unaccusatives and Little-v

Unaccusatives are types of intransitive verbs that do not introduce an agent, and the only argument is a theme/patient. In these verbs, the little-v projection is not capable of introducing an external argument, so the object of the verb must move to spec,TP to satisfy the EPP.

$V_{\text{active}} \Rightarrow$  usually  
introduces  
agents or experiences

$V \Rightarrow$  introduces  
other themes

## Unaccusatives and Little-v

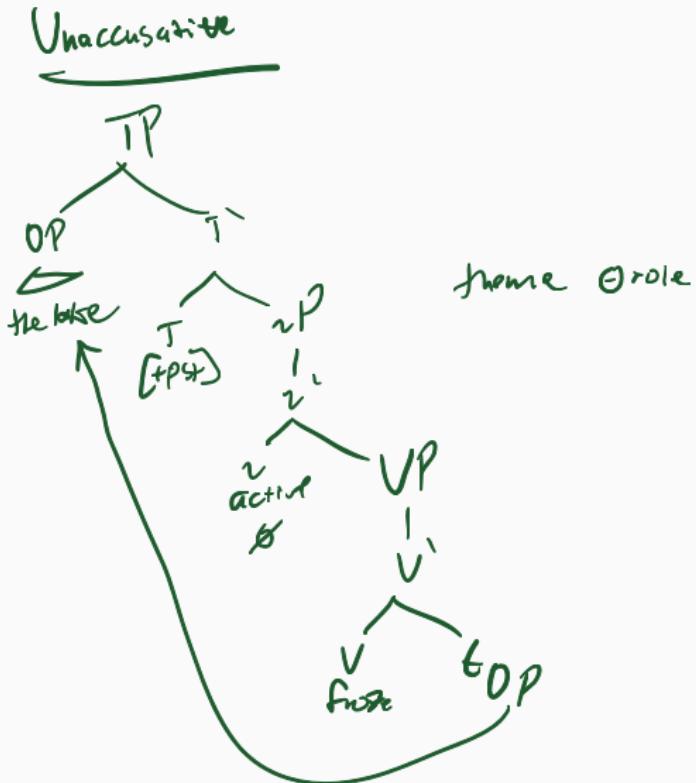
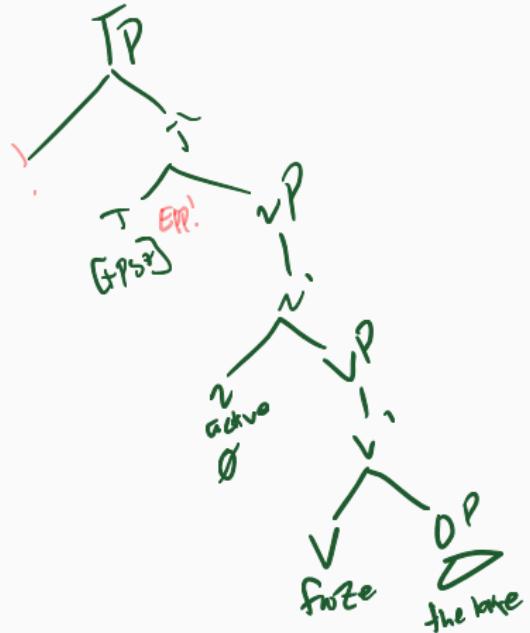
One test for unaccusative verbs is whether or not they can appear with agent-oriented adverbs like 'intentionally, accidentally, angrily' etc.

- (5) a. \*The window accidentally broke  
b. \*The log intentionally floated  
c. \*The lake angrily froze

(English)

# English Unaccusative tree

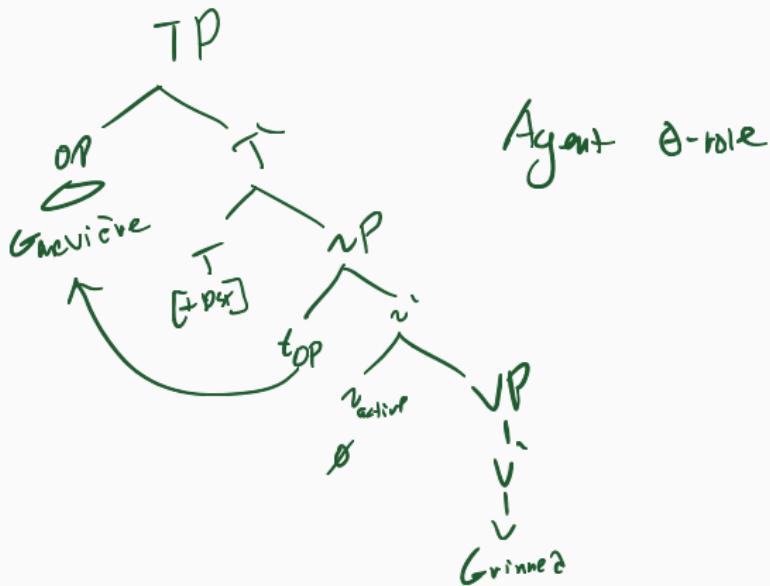
(6) The lake froze



# English Unergatives

Unergatives are the opposite type of intransitive verb: they take only an agent:

- (7) Geneviève grinned



**How do we handle voice alternations  
with little-v?**

## **Voice Alternations**

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## Voice

Voice is a category that affects the number of arguments a verb can take, and the relations those objects have to the predicate, as well as their syntactic position.

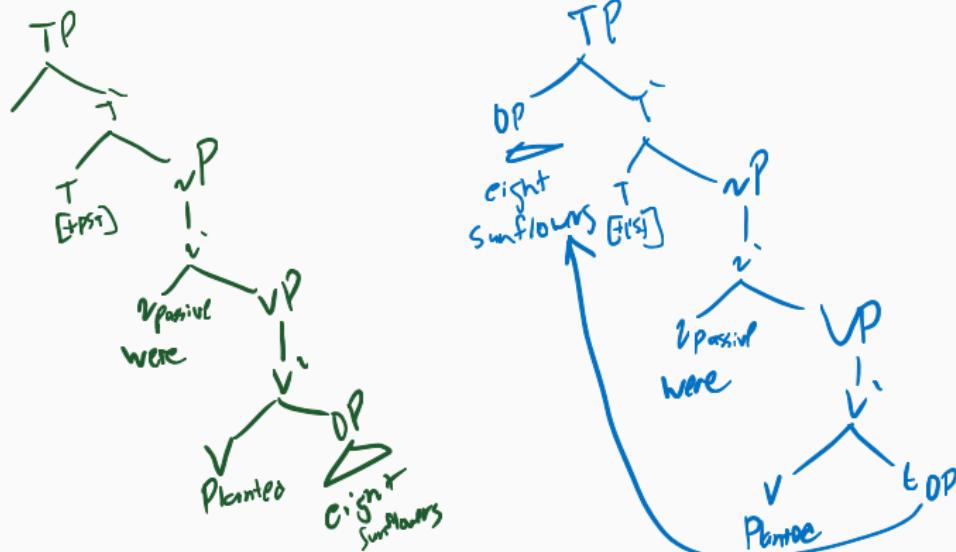
E.g. Passive voice sentences are derived from their active counterparts:

- (8) a. We planted eight sunflowers (Active)
- b. Eight sunflowers were planted (Passive)

# Passives

We can represent passives with a passive little-v head. Just like in unaccusatives, passive v cannot host an external argument. We had put the passive auxiliary was in  $V_{aux}$  before, but now we can hypothesise that it realises  $v_{pass}$

- (9) Eight sunflowers were planted



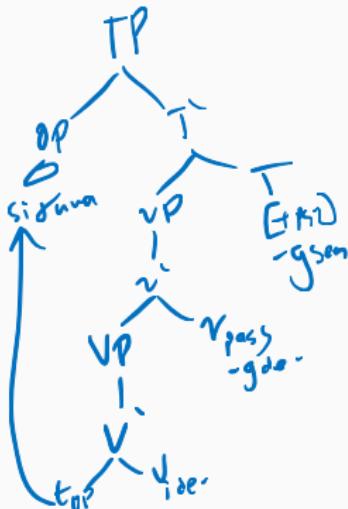
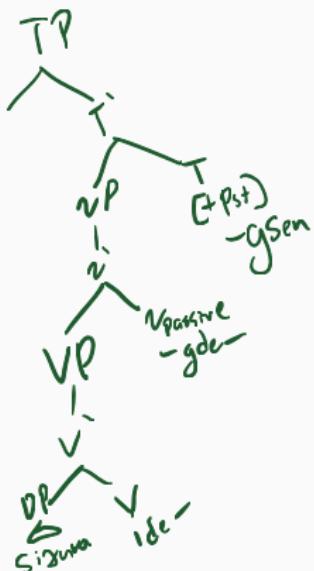
# Passives in other languages

Some languages, like Mongolian, represent passive voice with their own suffix:

- (10) Siyuwa ide-gde-gsen  
watermelon eat-PASS-PST

'Watermelon was eaten'

(Mongolian)



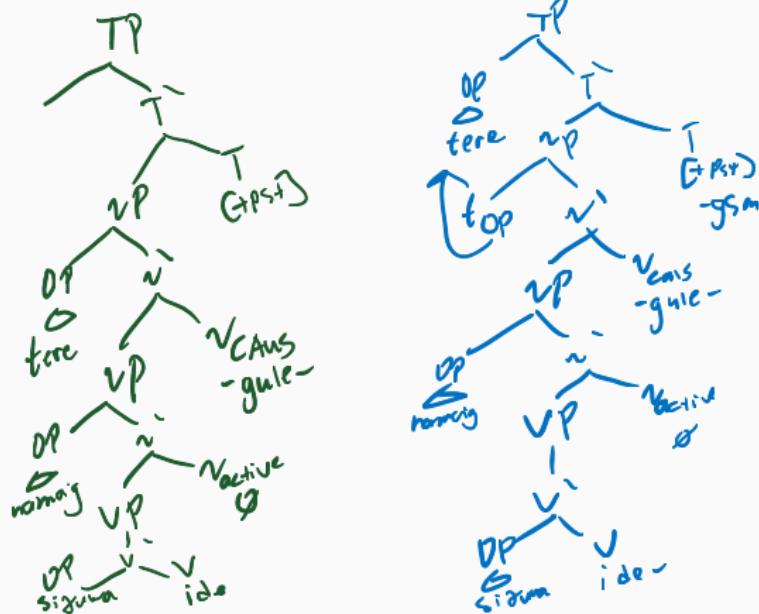
# Other Voice Alternations

More productive in other languages, we see the *Causative voice*:

- (11) Tere namaig Siyuwa ide-gule-gsen  
3SG 1SG.ACC watermelon eat-CAUS-PST

'They made me eat watermelon.'

(Mongolian)



**Can we formalise what we're saying  
about argument licensing?**

## **Case Theory**

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## EPP or Case?

Previously, we had accounted for the expletive pronoun 'it' in weather verbs by saying the EPP requires that spec,TP is filled.

If our understanding of passives is that we have a  $v_{pass}$  that can't host a subject, what prevents us from just using expletive *it*?

- (12) \*It was planted the sunflowers

# Case

- ▷ Case describes the ability to host or *license* arguments
- ▷ It was originally used to describe morphological distinctions to differentiate arguments
- ▷ In generative syntax it takes on a more abstract function

# Morphological Case

We have seen a number of cases already in languages like Mongolian:

- (13) a. *Bi doloγan cag-tu nomun sang-du oci-ba*  
I seven clock-dat library-dat go-pst

'I went to the library at 7 o'clock'

- b. *Tujaa Dorž German-ruu jav-sn gež med-sen*  
Tujaa Dorž Germany-all go-pst that know-pst

'Tujaa knew that Dorž went to Germany.'

- c. *Dorji mori-bar Höhhota-aca ire-ne*  
Dorji horse-inst Hohhot-abl come-npst

'Dorji will come back by horse from Hohhot.'

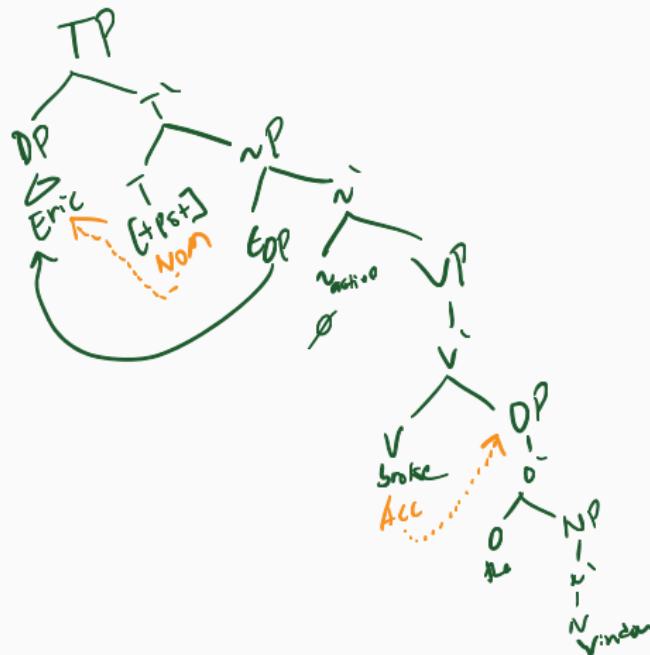
# Case

- ▷ We say that a head assigns case to an argument
- ▷ T assigns Nominative case / (in Non-ACC languages)
- ▷ V assigns accusative case
- ▷ Variations in their ability to do so gives us alternations in argument structure

# Transitives

Transitives require that T can assign NOM and V can assign ACC

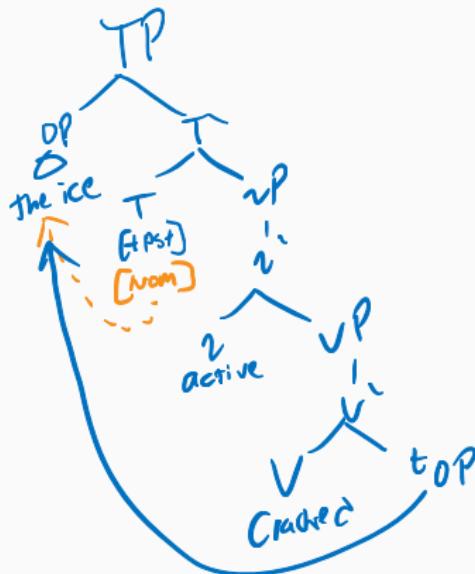
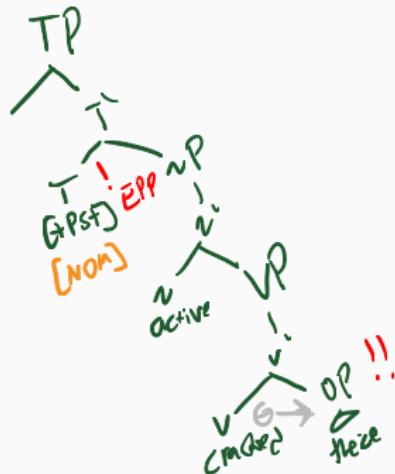
- (14) Eric broke the window



# Unaccusatives

In unaccusatives, T is still able to assign NOM, but V is unable to assign ACC, so the object must move to receive Case

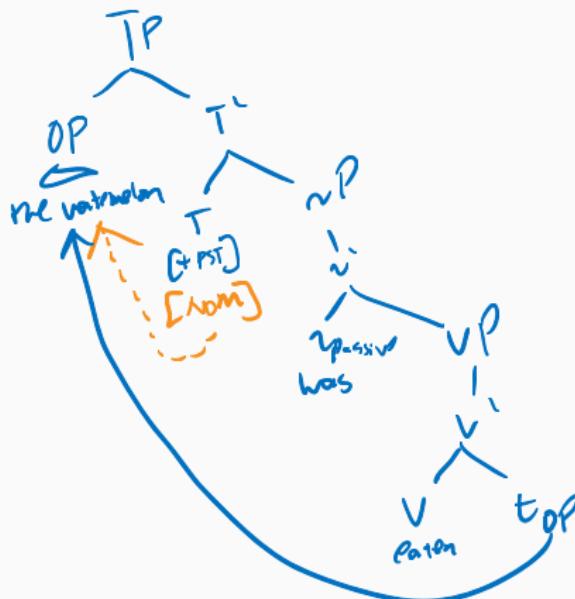
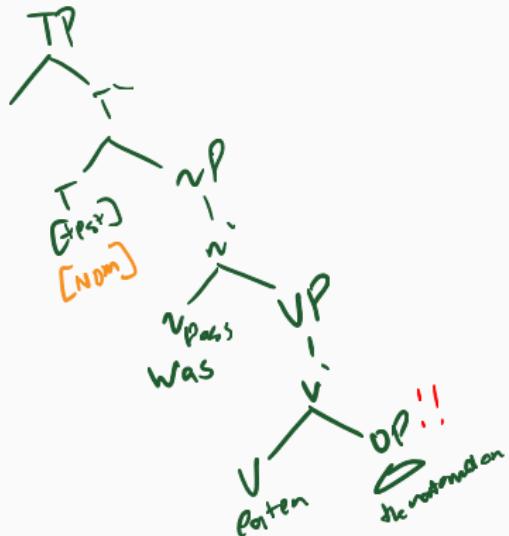
(15) The ice cracked



# Passives

This is similar to passives, where the  $v_{pass}$  selects a VP that cannot assign ACC

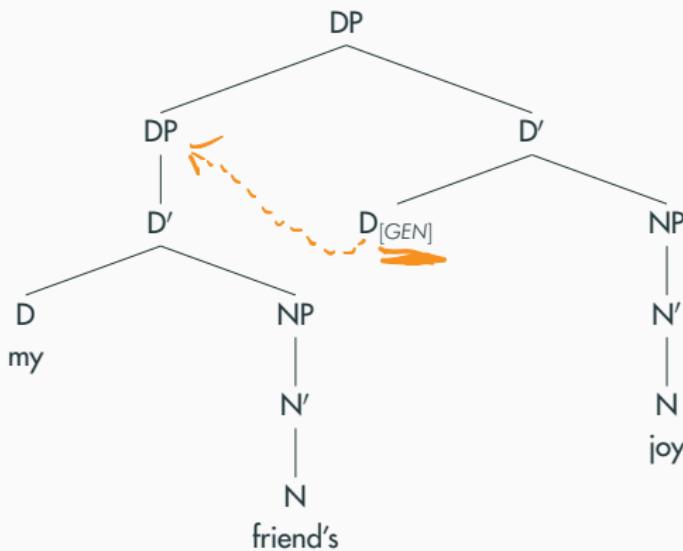
- (16) The watermelon was eaten



# English Genitives

We can now understand DP's as analogous to a clause: some of them assign GEN:

- (17) *My friend's joy*



# Types of Case

Name	Where seen	Where assigned	Type
Nominative	Often on Subjects	Spec of Finite T	Structural Case
Accusative	Often on Objects	Complement of transitive V	
Genitive	Often on Possessors	Spec of possessive D	
Instrumental	on Instruments	Complement of P	Lexical Case
Dative	on goals, recipients, locations, etc.	Complement of P	
Comitative	on accompanying args	Complement of P	
Ablative	on sources	Complement of P	
Privative	things that are lacking	Complement of P	
etc. etc.	...	Complement of P	

## The case filter

### (18) *The case filter*

All DPs must be marked with a case.

If a DP doesn't get a Case, the derivation will crash.

## Locality

A DP must be close enough to an appropriate case assigning position to be licensed and to receive Case there. This is sometimes talked about in terms of *checking*, because it refers to features. Here we'll just talk about case assignment and licensing.

## Seems & Likely Predicates

Consider the following in English sentences:

- (19) a. Bolor seems to be a brilliant doctor  
b. Urcilang is likely to win this game of Weiqi

Where do the matrix subjects receive their theta roles?

# Raising to Subject

Predicates like *seems*, *be likely* are called raising to subject

- ▷ They embed a non-finite clause
- ▷ non-finite T cannot assign NOM
- ▷ So the embedded subject must keep moving to get NOM case...
- ▷ all the way up to the matrix spec, TP position

## Raising to Subject

(20) Bolor seems to be a brilliant doctor

## Raising to Subject

- (21) Urcilang is likely to win this game of Weiqi