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FLAVORS OF ν

Consuming Results in Italian & English*

1. INTRODUCTION

The variable behavior of verbs has always been a fundamental issue for theories of the lexicon/syntax interface. The constructionalist approaches to this problem of the past decade or so have been very successful in accounting for a diverse range of alternations, largely because these approaches have formalized the influence of event structure on argument projection. The theoretical apparatus of this framework has made interesting predictions for previously puzzling grammaticality variations (Tenny, 1992; Borer, 1998; Davis & Demirdache, 1995; Travis, 2000a; Ritter & Rosen, 1998; van Hout, 1996; among others). However, the framework in some ways suffers from overgeneration: having introduced syntactic flexibility with respect to certain classes of alternating verbs, theorists are now faced with the inverse problem of accounting for gaps in alternation patterns. In short, why don’t all verbs exhibit all alternation patterns freely? Such limits on variation are the primary success of Lexicalist approaches to argument projection (Jackendoff, 1997; Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 1995; among many others).

We will treat a particular kind of a restriction on alternations by proposing that it depends on differences in ν, rather than on idiosyncratic restrictions on the root V. In particular, we argue that at least one particular kind of gap in alternation can be attributed to the semantic properties of one flavor of ν: DO. We will argue that a new typology of ν is needed to account for the behavior of consumption verbs, when they take an inanimate subject. These verbs, unlike non-alternating destroy-class verbs, do not generally allow inanimate agents. Compare (la,c) with (lb,d):

(1) a. The sea destroyed the beach.
The groom destroyed the wedding cake.

b. * The sea ate the beach.
The groom ate the wedding cake.

c. Il mare ha distrutto la spiaggia.
The sea has destroy.PST the beach
Lo sposo ha distrutto la torta nunziale.
The groom has destroy.PST the cake nuptial

P. Kempchinsky and R. Slabakova (eds.), Aspectual Inquiries, 95-120.
Nonetheless, despite the ungrammaticality of inanimate subjects in transitive structures like those illustrated in (1), it is possible in certain circumstances to have an inanimate subject argument for these verbs. Crucially, however, an inanimate subject is only grammatical in combination with a change in the event structure of the predicate. Consider the examples below:

(2) a. The sea ate away the beach.
   * The sea ate the beach.

b. The wind carved away the beach.
   * The wind carved the beach.

c. The sea is eat.PST the beach
   * The sea has eat.PST the beach

d. The wind is carve.PST a piece of beach
   * The wind has carve.PST a piece of beach.

In order to capture this restriction (which is quite general for the class of verbs in question), we propose that there are two different flavors of causative/agentive v: _vDo_ (Hale & Keyser, 1993) and _vCause_. These light verbs place different restrictions on their subjects and complements; in particular, _vDo_ needs an animate Agent subject, while _vCause_ only requires that the subject be a possible Cause. Secondly, _vDo_ can take a straightforward Incremental Theme as its complement—it is a true verb of creation—while _vCause_ must take a state as its complement, creating essentially a resultative structure. This difference in selectional properties accounts for the required change in clause structure when a verb of consumption takes an inanimate subject. In Italian, interestingly, this change in clause structure results in the appearance of the reflexive morpheme _si_ and the switch to the _be_ auxiliary, which we claim bolsters the case that the morpheme _si_ is a realization of a light verb, rather than a pronominal clitic (see Burzio, 1986; Manzini, 1986; Cinque, 1988; among others), along the lines of similar proposals in Zubizaretta (1987), Zagona (1996), Sanz (2000), and Folli (2002). We take this to be evidence in favor of a modified constructionalist approach to argument structure alternations. The introduction of flavors of v will also provide us with the tools to account for certain