

# Middle *For*-Phrases as Low Benefactives

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## What are Middle *For*-Phrases?

- (1) a. The bread cut just fine **for Bilinda**.
- b. Flaming Lips records sell quickly **for indie record shops**.
- c. That guitar plays well **for most people**.

- Conflicting syntax of middles in terms of argument structure, agency
- Existing theories assume special operations, mechanisms

## Problems for Semantic Approaches

### Binding Effects

- (2) Non-Logophoric Anaphora
  - a. Mary photographs well only for herself/\*her.  
(Stroik 1999 p.129)

### Adverbs Not Required

- (3) Not argument of adverb
  - a. The program compiled for me.
  - b. Good bureaucrats don't bribe.

### Lexical Semantic Theories Undergenerate

- (4) Eventive Middles
  - a. Your package shipped last night.
  - b. My beer poured very smoothly.
- (5) Unergative Middles
  - a. My poster travelled to Portland well.
  - b. \*I travelled my poster to Portland.

## Problems for Syntactic Approaches

### Agentive and Non-Agentive Adverbs

- (6) Stroik's (1999) adverbs ok with plain unaccusatives
  - a. Trees grow slowly.
- (7) True agentive adverbs illicit with middles
  - a. \*The bread cut fine on purpose.

### Low Ellipsis Tests

- (8) Middles pattern as unaccusatives
  - a. It engaged them in a way that I did not think they could be <engaged> that early in the morning.
  - b. \*They sell Hyundais in Greece because Hondas don't <sell>.  
(Merchant 2013)

### Active/unaccusative morphology

- Middles rarely morphologically marked as distinct voice
- Indo-European, Changana, Quechua, Tarascan (Kemmer 1993)

## Proposal: MFPs are Low Benefactives

### Position

- (9) Low-merging applicatives, distinct from Affectee applicative (Bowers 2010)
  - a. Debbie baked a cake [for Kevin]<sub>aff</sub> [for Bilinda]<sub>ben</sub>.
  - b. Debbie baked [Kevin]<sub>aff</sub> a cake [for Bilinda]<sub>ben</sub>.

### Thematic Role

- (10) Interpreted contextually as agentive/benefactive
  - a. Kevin sang for me (when I pressured him to).
  - b. Kevin sang for me (so I wouldn't have to).

### Productivity

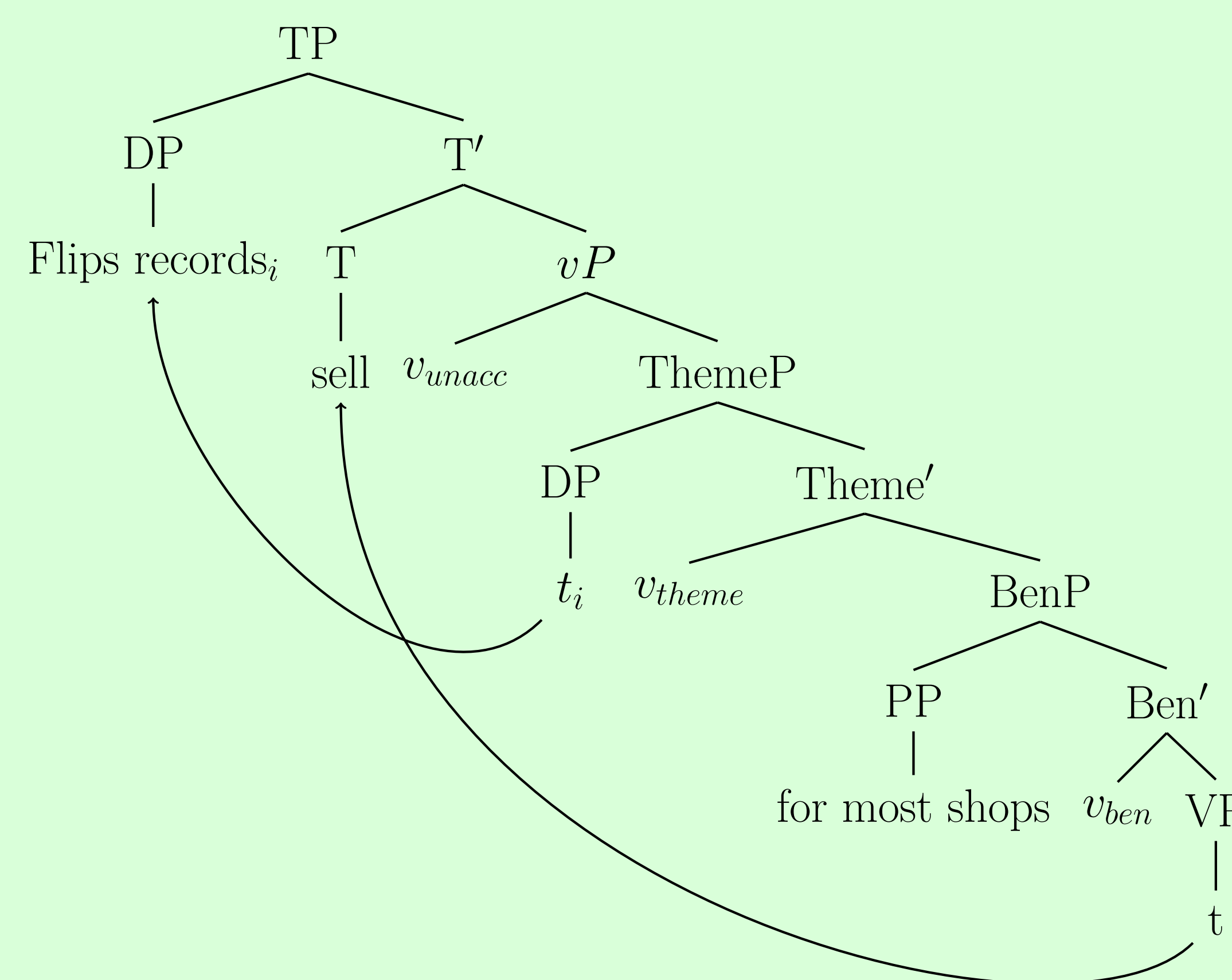
- (11) Compatible with unergatives, transitives
  - a. The dog sat for Bilinda.
  - b. The dog ate the food for Bilinda.
  - c. The dog was groomed for Bilinda.
  - d. The dog gave Kevin the toy for Bilinda.

### Compare to MFPs

- (12) Unaccusatives + Low Benefactive = Middle
  - a. The door opened for Debbie.
  - b. \*The floor waxed quickly for Kevin for Belinda.

## Derivation of a Middle

$\theta$ -roles map to arguments in specifier of argument heads  $v_{\theta}$ , interpreted via event-identification to eventuality variable  $s$ , following Kratzer (1996), Bowers (2010), Merchant (2013):  $[[v_{\theta}]] = \lambda f \lambda x \lambda s. f(s) \wedge \theta(s, x)$



- (13) a. Flaming Lips records sell for most shops.
- b.  $\exists s. \text{sell}(s) \wedge \text{ben}(s, \text{most shops}) \wedge \text{theme}(s, \text{flips records})$

## Predictions

No dependence on syntactic transitivity, genericity of middles predicts:

- Compatibility with binding theory
- Observable effects of lacking  $v_{trans}$
- Existence of non-generic and unergative middles
- MFP/Low Benefactive similarity outside English

## Supporting Evidence

### Binding Effects

- (14) Low Benefactive c-commanded by Theme
  - a. Mary<sub>i</sub> photographs well for herself<sub>i</sub>/\*her<sub>i</sub>.
- (15) Theme reflexives as Picture-NPs exempt from binding (Reinhart and Reuland 1993), no higher PRO needed
  - a. Books about himself<sub>i</sub>/\*him<sub>i</sub> read  $t$  easily for Kevin<sub>i</sub>.

### No Object Shift

- (16) No  $v_{trans}$  to assign case
  - a. Small packages ship to Bulgaria easily.
  - b. \*Small packages ship Bulgaria easily.
  - c. #Bulgaria ships packages easily.

### Evidence from Russian *u (at/by) + NP-gen*

As MFP:

- (17) Etot xleb rezet-sja u Ivana legko  
this bread cuts-REFL at John-GEN easily  
'This bread cuts easily for John' (Jones and Levine 2010)

As Low Benefactive-type argument:

- (18) U Peti vse podčinnnye rabotajut po desjat' časov v den'.  
at Petja.GEN all subordinates.NOM work po ten hours in day  
'Under Petya's supervision, all employees work ten hours a day.' (Wood and Livitz 2012)

## Selected References

- Bowers, J. (2010). *Arguments as Relations*. Linguistic Inquiry, MIT Press. Jones, C. and Levine, J. S. (2010). Conditions on the formation of Middles in Russian. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 18(2):291–335. Kemmer, S. (1993). *The middle voice*, volume 23. John Benjamins Publishing. Kratzer, A. (1996). Severing the external argument from its verb. *Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 33:109–137. Merchant, J. (2013). Voice and Ellipsis. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 44(1):77–108. Reinhart, T. and Reuland, E. (1993). Reflexivity. *Linguistic Inquiry*, pages 657–720. Stroik, T. (1999). Middles and Reflexivity. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 30(1):119–131. Wood, J. and Livitz, I. (2012). What Isn't an Oblique Subject in Russian and Icelandic? In *Non-Canonically Case-Marked Subjects — Iceland, June 4–8*.