Functional Verbs

There are verbal elements that do not have a complete argument structure and require to be merged with a lexical verb, to which they may add some semantic property of tense, modality, aspect, voice, and/or add a thematic role. We call these verbs functional to distinguish them from lexical verbs which we have already observed in previous lessons.

Functional verbs must be classified in different classes that have very different properties. Elements of the same class are mutually exclusive in one and the same sentence, while elements of different classes can cooccur in the same sentence providing different semantic features and must be merged with one another in a given hierarchy: Modal/future/irrealis > perfective > progressive > passive (cf. Giusti 2003:104-106)

The verbs that add a thematic role to the argument structure of the lexical verb are merged immediately higher than the VP, they are also called restructuring verbs (Giusti 2.9) because contrary to regular verbs that take an infinitival clause in their complement, they restructure the sentence in a monoclausal structure.

Restructuring verbs include causative, perception and motion verbs.

Causation is a semantic notion which can be expressed by lexical verbs such as require or the expression do so that ..., with functional verbs such as let, make, or have, and can be included in a single lexical verb such as kill = cause to die, or transitive break= cause to (unaccusative)break, enlarge=cause to become larger, etc.

Let us compare a lexical verb such as want or require and a functional verb such as let, make, or have in their functional use:

- First of all the infinitive verb that follows the lexical verb want in (1a) must be preceded by the infinitive inflection marker to, while the infinitive verb that follows make in (1b) cannot have to:

(1) a. I want my students to do some homework every week.
    b. I make my students (*to) do some homework every week.

- Then, the subject of the infinitival clause with to in (1a) can be implicit if it refers to the subject of the matrix clause, as in (2a). We call this silent subject of infinitival clauses (big) PRO. On the contrary, the subject of the internal predication in (2a) can never be implicit

(2) a. I want [myself/PRO to do some homework every week].
    b. I make [myself/*PRO do some homework every week].

- The infinitive complement in (1/2a) can itself be merged with functional verbs provided that they are compatible with the to infinitive marker. On the contrary in the complement of functional make the only functional verb that is allowed is passive be in (5), while progressive be in (3b) and perfective have in (4b) are ungrammatical:

(3) a. I want [my students to be doing their test now].
    b. *I had [my students be doing their test now].
(4) a. I want [my students to have finished their test by twelve].
    b. *I had [my students have finished their test by twelve].
(5) a. I want [my students to be checked by the assistants several times].
    b. I have [my students be checked by the assistants several times].

Perception verbs allow the -ing form of the lexical verb to express progressive aspect, but without inserting progressive be:

\[1\] Make can also be a lexical verb as in make something. By now we are no more surprised that the same lexical item can be analysed in different classes or subclasses.
The sentence in (6a) implies that Mary actually crossed the street, while sentence (6b) does not imply the completion of the action of crossing, on the contrary it focalizes on the progression of the event.

**Motion verbs** obviously have a lexical counterpart which selects an infinitival with *to* as in (7a). When they are used functionally they enter a peculiar construction which resembles a coordination, as in (7b) or a bare infinitival as in (7c), which is found in American English:

(7)  
   a. They go [to buy vegetables at the market].
   b. They go [and buy vegetables at the market].
   c. They go [buy vegetables at the market].

While in (7a) the motion verb takes a clausal complement which refers to a separate event, which can be independently denied in the following sentence as in (8a). In (7b-c) we have a single event, namely the event of buying attained through a motion. For this reason we cannot deny a subpart of it, as the ungrammaticality of (8b) and (8c) shows:

(8)  
   a. They go [to buy vegetables at the market] but they never buy any.
   b. *They go [and buy vegetables at the market] but they never buy any.
   c. *They go [buy vegetables at the market] but they never buy any.

Another interesting and unexpected phenomenon is that (7b) is not a real coordination, contrary to appearances. In fact the two verbs cannot have any inflectional morphology:

(9)  
   a. He goes to the market and buys vegetables and meet.
   b. *He goes [and buys vegetables and meet at the market].
   c. *He goes [buy(s) vegetables and meet at the market].

Also notice the locative *at the market* we have used in the grammatical (7b/c), which is different from the Motion PP *to the market* that we used in (9a). In (9b/c) this would not make the sentences any better in any position, as shown in (10):

(10)  
   a. *He goes [(and) buys vegetables and meet to the market].
   b. *He goes to the market [(and) buy(s) vegetables and meet].

No tense, aspect or mood is allowed on the two verbs in this construction. We observe the simple past in (11), the present perfect in (12) and the progressive in (13). Notice that the presence of the Motion PP in the (a) sentences ensures that the verb is taken in its lexical usage. In this case we have a coordination of the complete predicate, including its tense specifications:

(11)  
   a. He went to the market and bought vegetables and meet.
   b. *He went [and bought vegetables and meet].
   c. *He went [bought/buy vegetables and meet at the market].

(12)  
   a. He is going to the market and is buying vegetables and meet.
   b. *He is going [and (is) buying vegetables and meet].
   c. *He is going [(is) buying vegetables and meet].

(13)  
   a. He has gone to the market and has bought vegetables and meet.
   b. *He has gone [and (has) bought vegetables and meet at the market].
   c. *He has gone [(has) bought vegetables and meet at the market].