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Verb Phrase Constructions in Hemingway's *The Old Man at the Bridge*: A Syntactic Analysis through X-Bar Theory



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Abstract

This research offers a syntactic examination of the construction of verb phrases in Hemingway's *The Old Man at the Bridge* using X-bar Theory (1970). The main goal of the study is to analyze the verb phrases, describe their role in the context, and how these phrases contribute to the meaning of respective sentences in the selected text. X-Bar Theory explains the structure of phrase in particular how phrases are built in a hierarchy of levels and gives primary importance to head verb and how it relates to its complements, adjuncts, and modifiers. From this perspective, the study investigates how the verb phrase, as the basic syntactic construction, carries the core information of the action, its location, manner, and modality in Hemingway's prose. The findings of the study illustrates a new dimension of the interaction of syntax and semantics by showing how verb phrases depict actions as well as the states of mind. Furthermore, the analysis of negatives, modals, embedded clauses, and coordinated clauses has been carried out to show the versatility and complexity of verb phrase structures in the selected text. The study rests on the claim that the joining of constituent components into higher units has profound implications for the semantics of sentences and provides evidence for the syntactic structure of a representative sample of sentences penned by Hemingway.

Keywords: Verb Phrase, X-bar theory, Constituents, Literary text, Complement, and Adjunct.

Introduction

Syntactic analysis focuses on the arrangement of words and phrases in a syntactic construction. According to Chomsky (2002), syntax is the study of the rules, which govern how sentences are constructed in a particular language. The verb phrase is particularly important as it situates an event temporally. Morley states, "A verbal phrase is a phrase which has a verb headword as a main verb" (p. 55, 2003). Such structural units of sentence are essential components of constructions at all levels. In particular, X-bar Theory, proposed by Noam Chomsky in 1970, sheds considerable light on the structure of verb phrase from maximal to minimal level. Rather, this theory shifts the focus to a phrase's internal structure, looking at heads, complements, and specifiers, and how they function as the constituents of a sentence.

Shifts in narrative discourse can be defined within the framework of literary linguistics as

changes from one particular order of speech to another, which is accompanied, by relevant changes in means of expression as well as in content. Narrative discourse shifts, each having its own function, are common features in literary texts.

The goal of this research is to study the constituents of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge*, using X-Bar Theory. One of the focuses is to understand the organizational patterns of these verb phrases by analyzing their structuring into heads, complements, and specifiers. Furthermore, this study seeks to explain how these constituents convey the meaning of the phrase in the context of the text. This study seeks to accomplish its goal by outlining in detail the syntactic structure of the verb phrases in Hemingway's fiction. This analysis will help understand the aspect of the narrative these structures serve. As Morley (2007) stated, phrase is important for intelligent sentence building; with this study, the authors hope to observe with regard to the verb phrases' syntactic and thematic constructions in the selected short story by Hemingway.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the constituents of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway using X-Bar Theory.
2. To analyze the functions of the constituents of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway based on X-Bar Theory.

Research Questions

1. What are the constituents of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway according to X-Bar Theory?
2. What are the functions of the constituents of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway based on X-Bar Theory?

Research Problem

The uniqueness of the syntactic structure of verb phrases (VPs) in Hemingway's *The Old Man at the Bridge* has not been studied before; even its significance with respect to narrative tone and meaning remains unexplored. While Hemingway often credited for his economy of words, his world-renowned simplicity with words tends to hide the profound sophistication behind his syntactic choices. Verb phrases, which help portray action, agency, and emotions, are usually not given adequate attention, particularly in modern syntactic paradigms such as X-bar theory. This theory, which deals with the hierarchical structure of phrases, allows for the analysis of verb phrase constructions and the functions of their constituents at three levels:

maximal, intermediate and minimal. As already stated, X-bar theory has not been applied on Hemingway's verb phrase constructions in *The Old Man at the Bridge* before. This study tries to explore how the author's unique syntactic choices affect the story's polemic and deeply evocative style. This study tries to deal with the issue at two levels: one, it elucidates the role of verb phrase constructions in meaning making in the selected text, and secondly, it tries to establish that X-bar theory is an essential tool of syntactic analysis for working out the deeper syntactic structures which underlie the text's narrative function. To fill this gap, the research seeks to understand better the syntactic choices that Hemingway made in the selected text and how those choices relate to the themes in the selected short story.

Literature Review

A review of the literature centered on X-bar theory, particularly verb phrase constructions, will enable one to have an understanding that X-bar theory holds paramount significance in generative grammar. It tries to explain the internal make up of phrases, particularly the verb phrase which is central to the structure of the sentence. This literature review focuses on particular works that have dealt with the structure of verb phrases and X-bar theory along with previous instances of the application of X-bar theory on literary works in order to contextualize this syntactic analysis of verb phrase constructions in *The Old Man at the Bridge*.

X-Bar Theory and Verb Phrases

X-Bar theory, as formulated by Noam Chomsky in 1970, suggests that syntactic structures are hierarchically arranged in a series of successive 'bars' with each phrase having a head and optional complements and specifiers. In the case of the verb phrase (VP), the head of the VP is the verb, while arguments and specifiers are integrated into the structure (Kornai & Pullum, 1990). The VP is conceivably that piece of sentence, which can be broken down in terms of its constituents with the verb as the nucleus, or head of the unit and its direct objects, indirect objects and modifiers arranged around it in a hierarchy.

One of the important aspects of X-bar theory is the principle of projection, which preserves the recursive formation of syntactic constituents. According to Chomsky (1981), a phrase is always projected by a head word, which accounts for the recursive nature of complex structures in a system of clauses, in particular, the ones found within the verb phrase.

Verb Phrases in Literary Analysis

While much of the research on X-bar theory has focused on out-of-context linguistic data,

literary linguistics has increasingly employed syntactic theories to analyze the grammatical structures used by different authors. Studies have shown that an author's syntactic choices can reveal deeper insights into the thematic elements and stylistic features of a literary text (Leech, 2014). For instance, the use of verb phrases can reflect character psychology, tone, and narrative voice.

Among literary texts, particularly those with minimalist or sparse descriptions such as *The Old Man at the Bridge*, Hemingway's syntax plays a crucial role in conveying mood and characterization. Researchers such as Knott and Sanders (1998) have explored how the use of verbs and verb phrases in literature contributes to narrative pacing, character development, and the portrayal of internal states. In Hemingway's works, the economy of words and the precision of his verb choices create a sense of immediacy and tension, and an X-Bar analysis of these choices provides insights into the syntactic strategies used to convey these features.

Application of X-Bar Theory to Literary Texts

Several studies have applied X-Bar theory to literary texts to explore how syntactic structures contribute to narrative style. Hockett (1958) was one of the first to apply linguistic theory on a literary text, emphasizing the role of syntax in shaping literary meaning. More recently, authors like Biber et al. (2002) have employed syntactic analyses to investigate verb phrases and sentence structures across genres, demonstrating that verb phrases are central to the construction of narrative style and meaning. These studies highlight that syntactic structures, particularly in terms of verb phrase projections, can influence how readers interpret tone, focus, and action within a narrative.

In particular, X-bar theory has been used to analyze syntactic complexities in modernist texts, where authors, such as Hemingway, often use simplified syntax to reflect the inner workings of their characters' minds or to suggest the fragmented nature of reality. (Fellbaum & Pustejovsky, 1997) on syntactic structures in modernist texts demonstrates that minimalist verb phrase constructions, often without overt arguments or complex complement structures, mirror the stark and often disjointed psychological states of characters. This aligns with Hemingway's style in *The Old Man at the Bridge*, where the simplicity of the verb phrases most likely reflects the old man's isolation, helplessness, and the overarching theme of loss.

Hemingway's Syntax in *The Old Man at the Bridge*

Hemingway's minimalist style has been widely discussed by critics. According to Bell (1985),

Hemingway's prose is characterized by short, direct sentences with minimalist use of modifiers, creating a sense of emotional and psychological immediacy. This is particularly evident in *The Old Man at the Bridge*, where the syntax is simple but emotionally resonant. Previous studies on Hemingway's syntax have identified his reliance on simple verb phrases to reflect the complex emotional states of his characters (Baker, 1972).

By applying X-Bar theory to Hemingway's verb phrases in the selected short story, one can analyze the structure of sentences and the specific placement of verb phrase heads, complements, and specifiers. For instance, Hemingway often uses intransitive verbs (e.g., 'walk', 'sit', 'think') that require no or fewer complements, reflecting the old man's passivity and internal turmoil. The verb phrase analysis can also focus on the role of auxiliary verbs, which are used sparingly in Hemingway's writing, mirroring the limited emotional expression of his characters.

While there is an abundance of research on the syntax of Hemingway's prose, few studies have specifically applied X-bar theory to analyze his use of verb phrases. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a syntactic analysis of the verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* through the lens of X-bar theory. This approach will reveal how Hemingway's syntactic choices contribute to the text's emotional and narrative depth, as well as how his use of minimalist verb phrases reflects broader themes of isolation, resignation, and the futility of war. Hemingway's *The Old Man at the Bridge* presents a compelling use of verb phrases that, when analyzed through the lens of X-bar theory, reveal structural and thematic depth. The syntactic composition of verb phrases in the text aligns with linguistic frameworks that explore hierarchical sentence structures and phrase projections (Ishtiaq & Gill, 2024; Arshad et al., 2024).

Ultimately, a syntactic examination of *The Old Man at the Bridge* through X-bar theory reveals an interplay of structural economy and thematic depth positioning Hemingway's work within broader linguistic and literary discourses.

The review of literature suggests that verb phrases play a central role in both syntactic theory and literary analysis, especially when employing X-bar theory to uncover deeper structural meanings. While studies have examined Hemingway's minimalist syntax and its thematic implications, the specific application of X-bar theory to his verb phrase constructions remains unexplored. This literature review sets the stage for a detailed syntactic analysis of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge*, contributing to both the fields of

syntactic theory and literary linguistics.

Theoretical Framework

The present study follows the guidelines laid out in the theoretical model of X-bar theory, which is a part of Generative Grammar as envisioned by Noam Chomsky. X-Bar Theory offers a comprehensive account of the hierarchy of phrases and the constituents that form them. It is particularly helpful in understanding phrase structure grammar since it accounts for the internal composition of phrases such as Verb Phrases (VP), Noun Phrases (NP), Adjective Phrases (AP), etc. According to X-bar theory, a phrase in any language is systematically organized into levels: a maximal level (XP), an intermediate level (X'), and minimal level (X). For instance, a head (V) and a number of other complements and adjuncts accompanying the verb, which modify it, project a verb phrase (VP). The essence of this framework is that the head of the phrase is important for determining the structure and function of the whole phrase. In the structure of the phrase, the head and the complements (if any) lie at the minimal level, the adjuncts at the intermediate (or bar) levels and the specifiers at the maximal level. For studying Verb Phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Hemingway, X-bar theory provides a fitting framework for analyzing the syntactic constructions of verb phrases and how these constituents interact in a sentence. X-bar theory is useful as it depicts the hierarchy in which a sentence is organized, enabling one to appreciate how different semantic categories such as subjects, predicates and their complements and modifiers are syntactically organized. While exploring the selected text, X-bar theory will be the guide in enlightening how verb phrases are generated as well as how the verbs and their arguments and modifiers relate to each other and what other syntactic operations have been utilized.

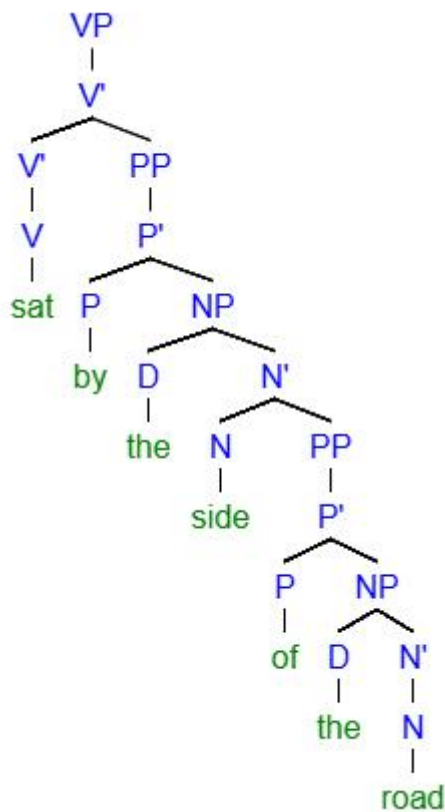
Methodology

This study aims to perform a syntactic analysis using Chomsky's X-bar theory of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Hemingway. The analysis for this study is based on a specific section from the short story, which includes a well-chosen set of thirty sentences exhibiting various syntactic patterns. X-bar theory, which is a theory in generative grammar, is used to parse the structure of the selected verb phrases. According to X-Bar theory, verb phrases (VPs) contain a head verb and other projections, such as VP, V' and V that are organized at increasing levels of hierarchy. The first step of the analysis involves determining the verb phrases that are contained in the sentences, and then identifying their constituents in terms of the verb head and its complements, modifiers and specifiers. Of particular interest is

the way these parts of the phrase work together to create a well-formed structure. The structure of each verb phrase is also depicted in tree diagrams, which provide a graphic representation of the structure and show the relationships among the maximal, intermediate and minimal projections of the phrase. This information is further analyzed with regard to the syntactic structure and complexity of the verb phrases in the selected text, specifically with regard to the phrase structure as proposed by X-Bar theory. Though the analysis is based on a chosen set of sentences from the selected short story, it is an attempt to capture the essence of the syntactic construction of the verb phrases in the selected text. X-bar theory, which provides a framework for analyzing the structure of phrases, will help conduct a thorough analysis of syntactic structures of verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge*. This syntactic analysis will enhance the understanding of the text regarding the arrangement of verbs as phrasal heads, their complements, specifiers, and adjuncts as well as the organization of whole phrases and their functions at the level of discourse.

Analysis and Discussion

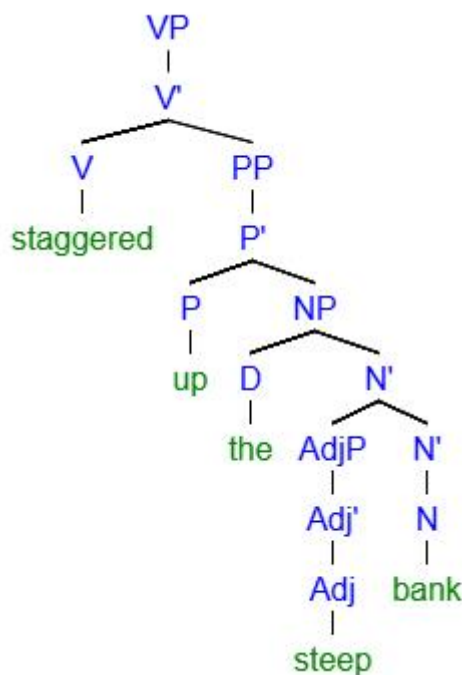
Excerpt 1: Sat by the Side of the Road



The phrase “sat by the side of the road” is more complex in meaning. The head of the verb

phrase is “sat” which is the verb. The old man positions himself in a static manner instead of executing a motion. The action is further modified by the locative prepositional phrase “by the side of the road” which explains where the action happens. In this prepositional phrase, the preposition “by” gives a clearer relationship between the adopted action and the noun phrase “the side of the road.” This implies that the subject’s position is somewhat close to the road. “The side of the road” is the object of the preposition, which gives more information about the location of the action. The noun phrase's determiner “the” reveals which “side”; it indicates one specific side of the road instead. Furthermore, “side” is the head noun making this a fully integrated phrase. “Side of the Road” is the last phrase stating the position of the subject. In addition, inside this noun phrase, there is a smaller prepositional phrase ‘of the road,’ where the preposition ‘of’ shows the relationship between the side and the road, thus specifying the location. All these elements function together to provide the spatial context of the verb ‘sat’ as the subject is sitting on the specified side of the road.

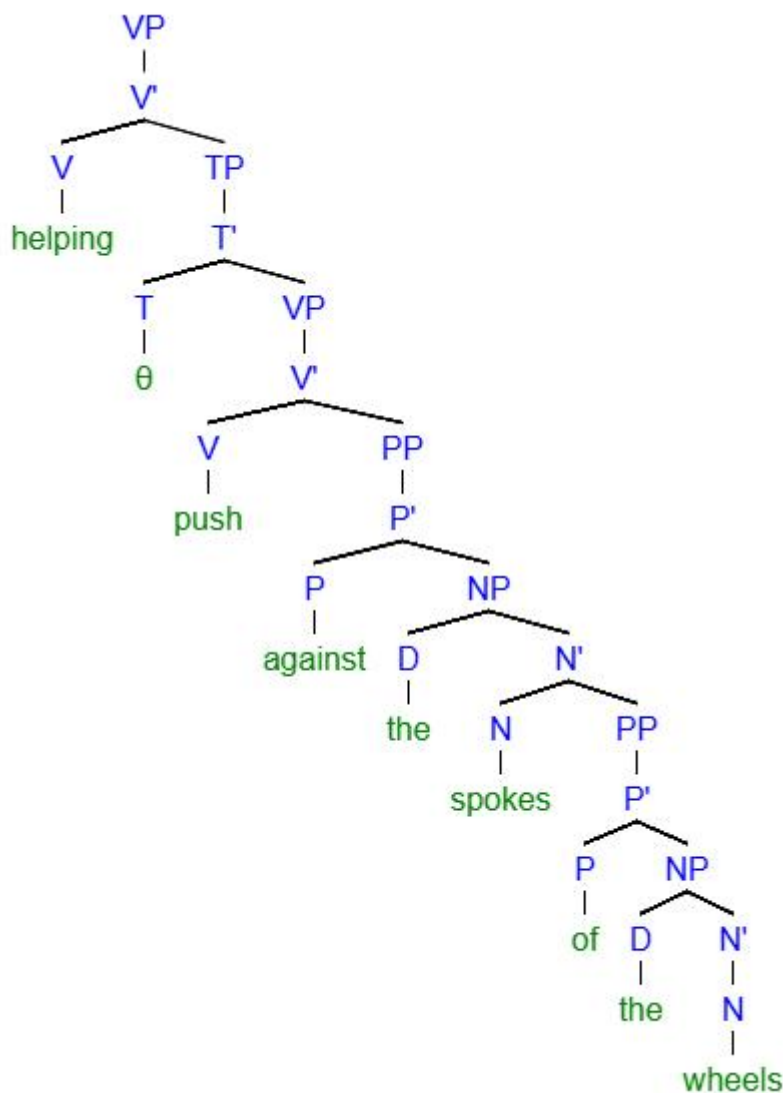
Excerpt 2: "Staggered up the Steep Bank"



The phrase, "staggered up the steep bank", contains a number of phrases that are critical in contributing to the meaning of the entire sentence. The head of the verb phrase is the word ‘staggered’, which refers to the action done by the subject. It describes a wavering and unsteady progress, which suggests that the subject is moving in a jerky manner. The

prepositional phrase ‘up the steep bank’ further clarifies the action of the verb as well as specifies its scope. In this case, ‘up’ is the preposition used, which suggests the subject moves to a higher level. This prepositional phrase has the noun phrase ‘the steep bank’ as its complement. This noun phrase forms the object that indicates the level to which the subject’s movement is directed. The noun phrase is categorized by the determiner “the” which refers to a specific bank, while the noun ‘bank’ is further qualified by the adjective ‘steep’ which indicates the slope of the bank. The combination of all these constituents captures the subject’s shaky motion in the upward direction towards a particular, steep location.

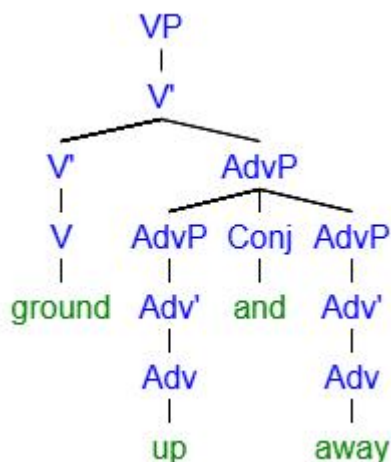
Excerpt 3: "Helping Push Against The Spokes Of The Wheels"



The phrase “helping push against the spokes of the wheels,” conveys a distinct action that is spatially contextualized. Here, the phrase of interest is “against the spokes of the wheels.”

The main verb, “helping,” signals a concurrent or assisting action. “Push,” the crux of the phrase, describes the utilizing power, which is the motion of applying force. The preposition “against,” marks the direction of the push, which is toward the spokes. The phrase “the spokes,” serves as an object of the proposition “against,” which in essence, captures what is being pushed. While the determiner “the” identifies a unique set of “the spokes,” which serves as the head of the noun phrase assumed to act upon the motion. Furthermore, the prepositional phrase “of the wheels,” situated within the noun phrase, outlines the relationship between the spokes, and the wheels by suggesting that spokes are part of wheels. All constituents collectively work to aid propel “helping” the main action with a descriptor, not just an object but also motion (pushing), direction (where) and the target (what).

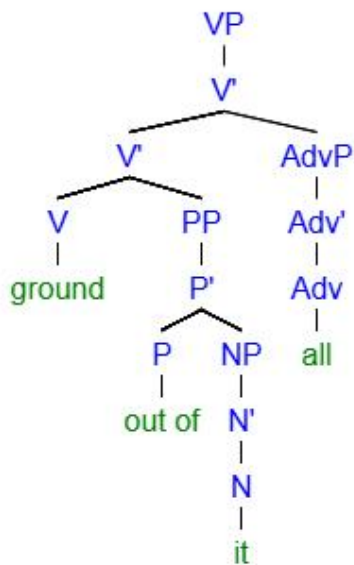
Excerpt 4: "Ground Up And Away"



The phrase ‘up and away’ has the verb adverbial ‘up’ as describing of ‘ground’ and follows the verb phrase structure that begins with the core verb phrase head. The structure of the phrase reveals that ‘ground’ as a comprehensive term employed to define performance is the primary action taken in this context. The primary action of a sentence is indicated by the verb ‘ground,’ which is assumed to be utilized in the context of commanding something to rest or set down on the ground. In addition, the adverb ‘up’ hints that this action has a modified direction, and instead of being horizontal, the movement is received upwards. The phrase ‘up and away’ also complements ‘ground’ and provides additional details on the movement being performed. The utilization of both adverbs ‘up’ and ‘away’ in ‘up and away’ is even further proposing a specific direction of movement. The term away emphasizes to a distance or separated from the present position alongside showing movement. Therefore, the latter term

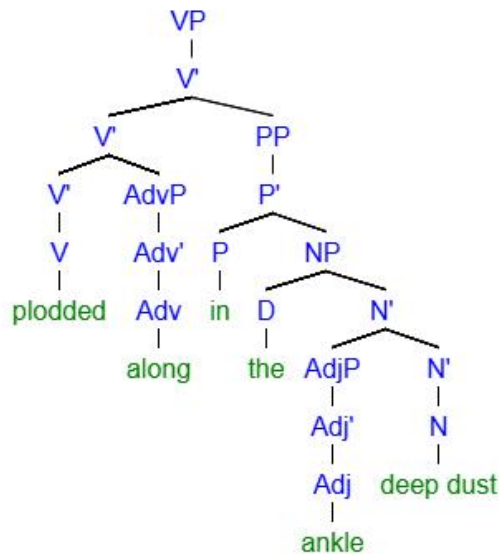
reinforces the distance up has already set. Hence, the description of ‘sit verb’ further enhances the manner and direction of the action being performed and vividly expresses spatial intentions. ‘Up’ emphasizes the describing of ‘ground,’ while the adverbial phrase as a whole provides explicit detailed spatial context to the expression. ‘Up and away serve as vivid spatial sensations to the contextual phrase above.

Excerpt 5: "Heading Out Of It All"



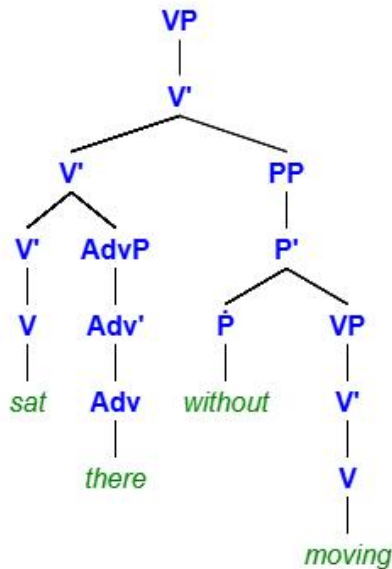
The phrase “heading out of it all” is verb phrase with ‘heading” as a head word. The first PP, "out," serves as modifier that shows direction while the second PP “of it all” makes it more specific, denoting everything that is being left behind. The noun phrase “it all” which forms the head of the PP “of it all” has a determiner “it” and a noun “all” which denotes totality. The structure of the verb phrase (VP) stands for a sense of departure and separation as it relates to the overarching narrative of the story-escape and inevitability from The Old Man at the Bridge.

Excerpt 6: "Plodded Along In The Ankle-Deep Dust"



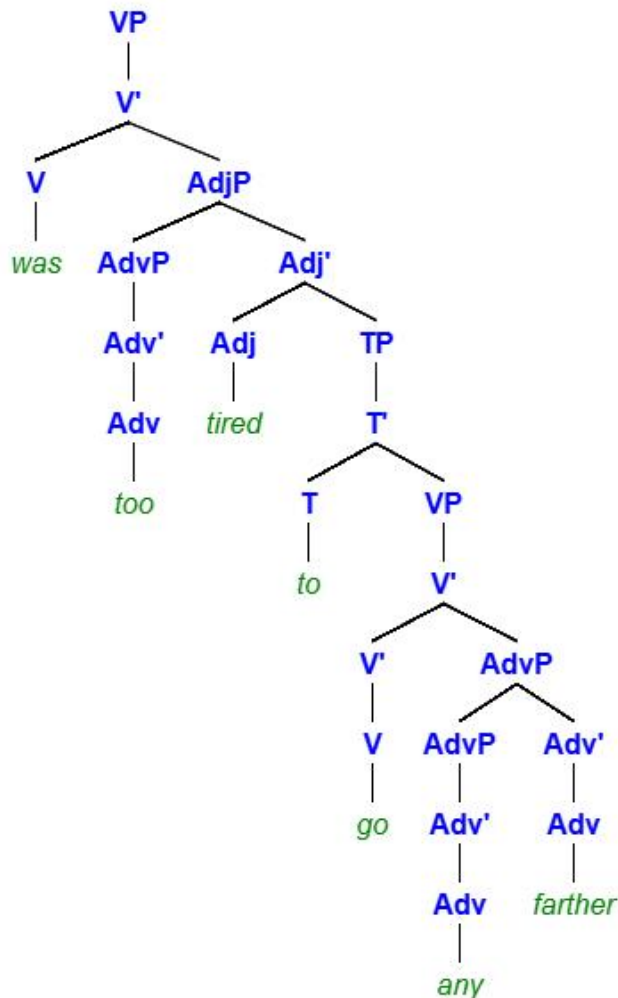
The verb phrase (VP) "plodded along in the ankle-deep dust" has a PP "in the ankle-deep dust," which forms an adjunct to PP "along." The first PP, "along," serves as an adverbial adjunct expressing the manner of the movement. The second PP nested under PP "in" defines the condition of the environment, and it gives more detail about the action that has been described previously. The determiner "the" in the noun (NP) phrase "the ankle-deep dust" indicates definiteness, as "ankle deep dust" denotes an NP that qualifies dust for its quantity and quality. The embedding of the PP's in this VP shows the dragging, and the difficulty of the motion, and adds to the feeling of fatigue and harshness. The PPs is effective in giving a clear image of the area within the story, which is likely there to show the struggle and bravery encompassing the Hemingway story.

Excerpt 7: "Sat There Without Moving"



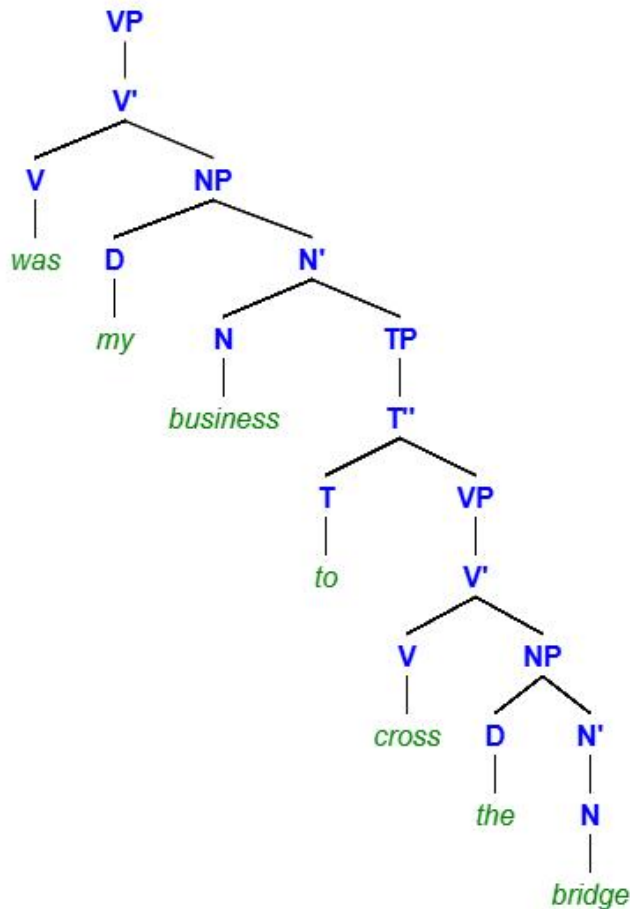
The phrase functions with an AdvP and PP modifier, which are “there” and “without moving” respectively, while “sat” is the head. The AdvP “there” refers to the location where the action takes place. The PP is a modifier adjunct, which has the head, preposition “without” and the verb “moving” which functions as a VP in this case. It is also a prerequisite that “moving” is in the present participial form which suggests an idea of inactivity and stillness. The elderly man's passive state is the focus with “sat” signifying inaction as the head verb and “there” and “without moving” referring to his physical and psychological movement. The arrangement of modifiers synthesizes the thematic essence of his narrative where the old man stands as a symbol of inaction depicting numbness, hopelessness, and helplessness towards war and displacement.

Excerpt 8: "Was Too Tired To Go Any Farther"



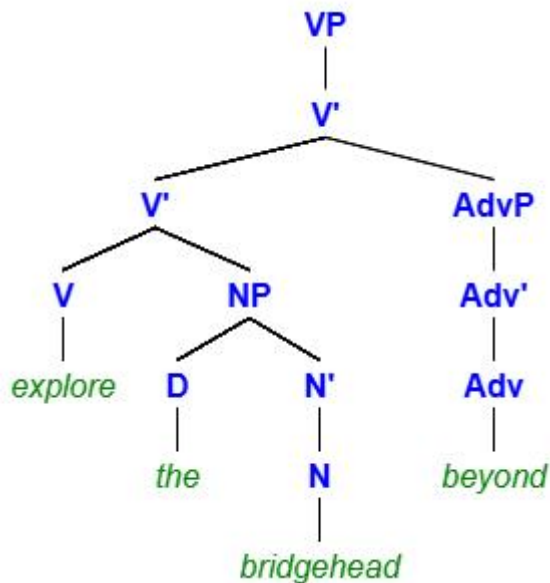
The verb phrase "was" heads a clause with an AdjP complement "too tired." The AdjP "too tired" includes an AdvP "too" and an Adjective "tired". The AdjP is exhausted by its complement TP "to go any farther." In this structure, "to" is an infinitival marker selecting the VP "go any farther." "Go" is the head of this VP, and AdvP "any farther" modifies it. In this case, "any" is a degree modifier for the adverb "farther." This structure suggests a syntactic blend that captures deeper levels of the protagonist's physical and psychological exhaustion. The encapsulating infinitival clause over "to go any further" adds to the feeling of inability and supports the idea of helplessness and finality instead. The arrangement of adverbial elements configurationally reveals the overarching degree of exhaustion the character experiences, countering the broader narrative of violence and displacement.

Excerpt 9: "Was My Business To Cross The Bridge"



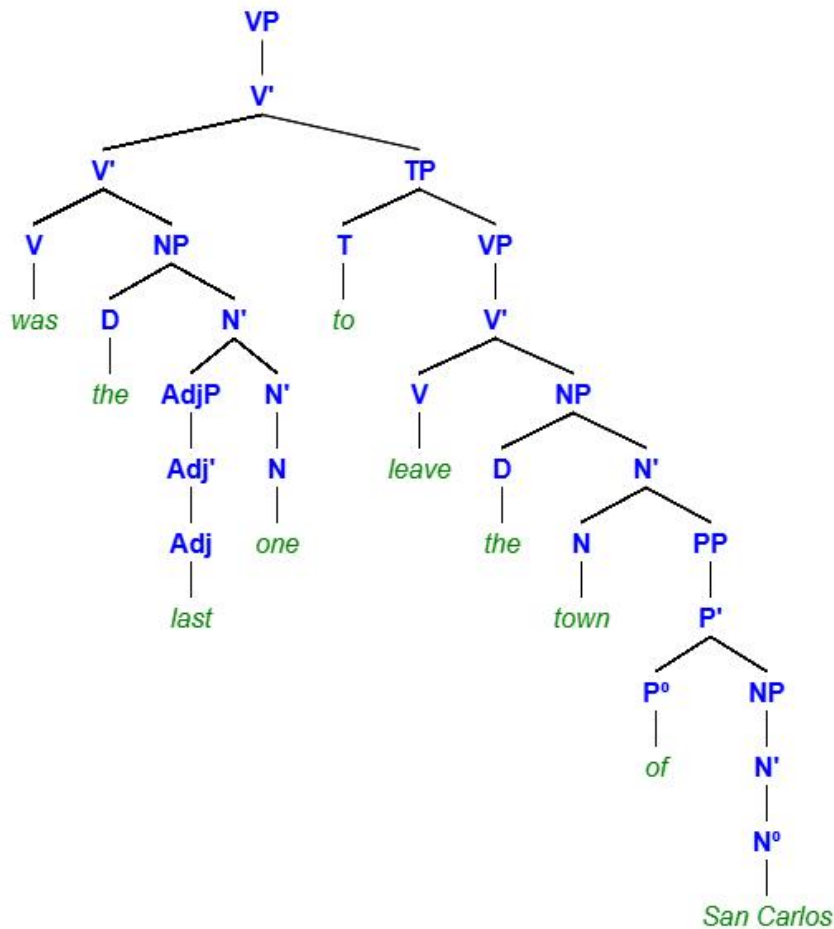
The head of the verb phrase is “was,” and “my business,” which is an NP consisting of possessive determiner “my” and head noun “business,” forms an NP complement. This NP is further complemented by TP “to cross the bridge,” which contains the infinitival marker “to” selecting the VP “cross the bridge.” In this VP, the head word verb “cross” has an NP complement “the bridge,” which is determined by “the” and head noun “bridge.” The syntactic structure assumes the sense of obligation, i.e., “was my business” suggests a personal responsibility bound to an action. The obligation theme is reinforced within the narrative through the embedded infinitival clause “to cross the bridge”, reflecting an unapplied yet intended course of action, underlining the overarching idea of motion and change. The noun “bridge” not only emphasizes physically but also metaphorically serves as a border within the narrative, providing an important yet abstract point of crossing. The outline reveals the character's estranged sense of conflict as the dominant war outside intensifies with the obligation adding a certain turmoil underneath.

Excerpt 10: "Explore The Bridgehead Beyond"



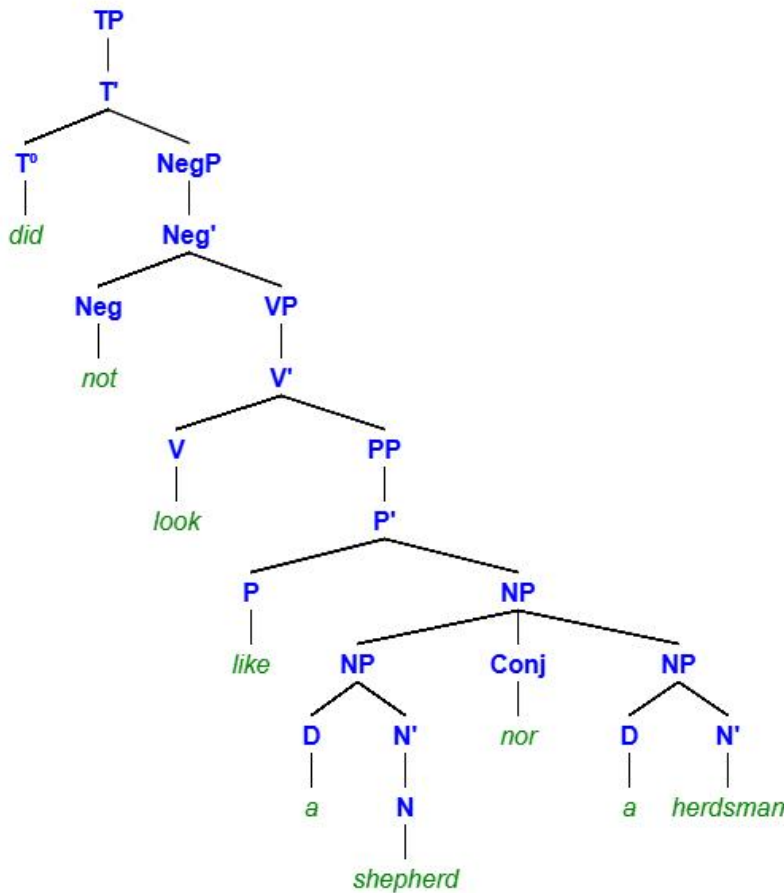
The verb phrase is headed by “explore,” which takes the noun phrase complement “the bridgehead” and the adverbial phrase modifier “beyond.” The AdvP “beyond” is an adjunct, marking the region in space where the action is applied. The NP or object of exploration is fully formed as the determiner and noun bridgehead. The VP structure illustrates movement and curiosity because “explore” suggests active contact with the environment as JA engages in some form of interaction. The NP “the bridgehead” is an important geographical feature, denoting strategic or transitional position of the subject. The narrative has this kind of flavor: unsettled, uncertain, and an unfamiliar edge of the possibility is posed beyond correlates with the other themes in the story. The syntactic structure corresponds to some intentional operation directed to a crucial yet indistinct area that points toward conflict and The Old Man at the Bridge displacement.

Excerpt 11: "Was The Last One To Leave The Town Of San Carlos"



The VP is headed by "was" and takes an NP complement. The NP consists of the determiner "the" and an N' projection containing the adjective phrase "last one," where "last" modifies "one." The VP further selects a TP as its complement, where "to" serves as the T head introducing the embedded VP "leave the town of San Carlos". In the embedded VP, "leave" is the main verb, selecting an NP as its complement. The NP consists of "the town," which is further expanded with a PP modifier "of San Carlos," specifying which town is being referenced. The copular verb "was" in the main clause links the subject to a descriptive phrase, suggesting a static yet significant state. The verb phrase "to leave the town of San Carlos" implies an inevitable departure, reinforcing the sense of displacement and forced movement. The choice of "last one" within the NP suggests finality, exhaustion and an unavoidable transition. The phrase "of San Carlos" provides geographical specificity, grounding the theme in a real-world setting affected by war. The overall syntactic structure reinforces themes of abandonment, inevitability and the emotional weight of departure.

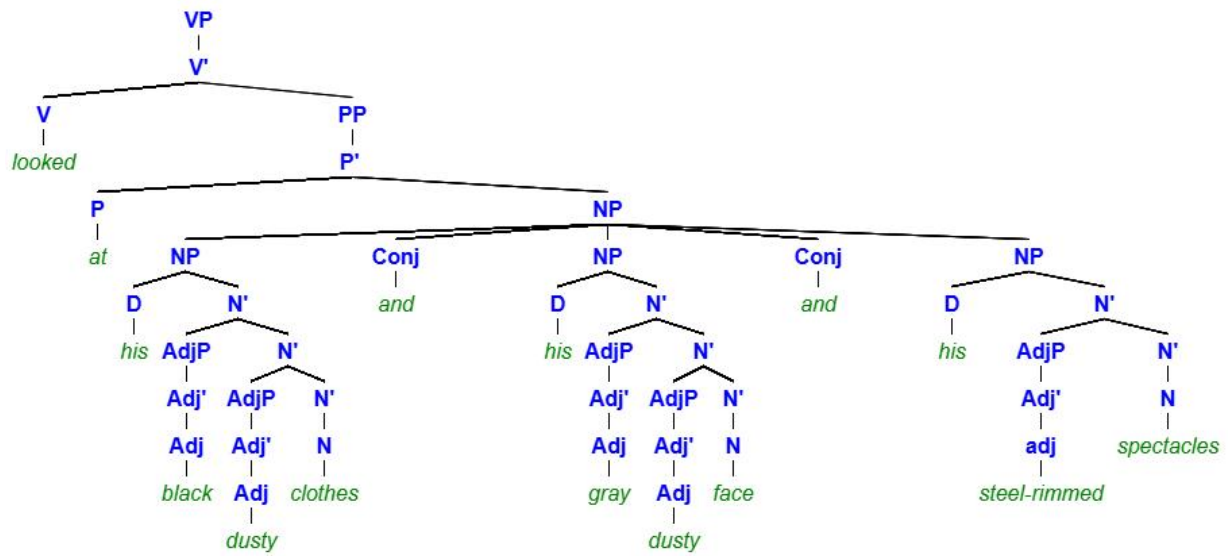
Excerpt 12: "Did Not Look Like a Shepherd Nor a Herdsman"



The Tense Phrase (TP) where the auxiliary verb "did" occupies the T-head position. It projects onto a Negation Phrase (NegP), with "not" functioning as the negation marker modifying the verb phrase (VP). Within the VP, the head verb "look" selects a prepositional phrase (PP) as its complement, maintaining a binary branching structure. The PP is headed by the preposition "like," which takes a conjoined noun phrase (NP) as its complement. The NP follows an X-Bar configuration, where two noun phrases, "a shepherd" and "a herdsman," are coordinated by "nor." Each NP consists of a determiner ("a") and a noun ("shepherd" / "herdsman"), forming an N' projection. The verb phrase structurally, the negation "not" precedes the VP, directly modifying the verb's predicate function. The PP "like a shepherd nor a herdsman" is a complement, indicating a comparison. The conjunction "nor" connects two alternative identities that the subject does not possess. This structure suggests a clear negation of resemblance, emphasizing the subject's detachment from these roles. The tree's organization reveals that the core meaning of the sentence is built through negation and comparison. The syntactic structure, particularly the placement of negation, modifies the VP

entirely, reinforcing a lack of resemblance rather than simply asserting a characteristic. The phrase's structure shows how Hemingway's sentence minimizes unnecessary elaboration while maintaining syntactic clarity through a well-defined VP and its constituents.

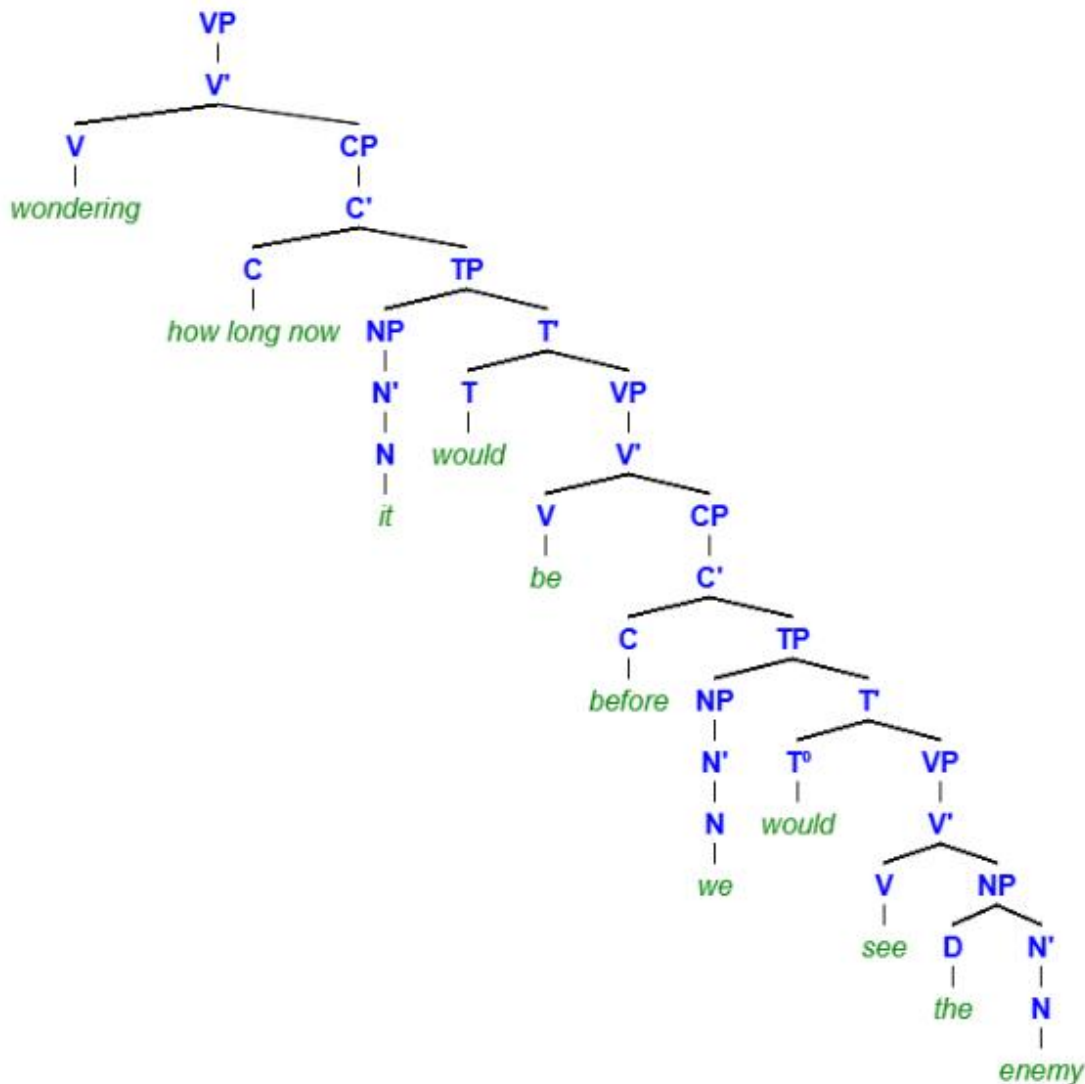
Excerpt 13: "Looked At His Black Dusty Clothes And His Gray Dusty Face And His Steel-Rimmed Spectacles"



The phrase (VP) with "looked" as the head verb. The PP, in turn, is headed by the preposition "at," which takes a noun phrase (NP) as its complement. The NP comprises a coordinated structure, consisting of three conjunct NPs linked by the conjunction "and." Each NP follows a hierarchical X-Bar structure, where the determiner (D) "his" functions as the specifier of the noun phrase. The nouns "clothes," "face," and "spectacles" serve as the heads of their respective N' projections, each modified by adjective phrases (AdjPs). The adjectives "black" and "dusty" modify "clothes," while "gray" and "dusty" modify "face," and "steel-rimmed" modifies "spectacles." The coordination of three NPs under a single PP shows a complex yet balanced syntactic structure, a characteristic feature of Hemingway's descriptive style. In terms of syntactic function, the verb "looked" is an intransitive verb that requires a prepositional complement to complete its meaning. The PP "at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel-rimmed spectacles" functions as an obligatory complement, specifying the direction or focus of the looking action. The coordinated NPs contribute additional descriptive elements, enhancing the vivid imagery while maintaining syntactic parallelism. The hierarchical organization of these constituents, as shown in the X-Bar structure, reflects how Hemingway constructs detailed yet syntactically structured

descriptions. This analysis illustrates how verb phrases in *The Old Man at the Bridge* follow systematic syntactic patterns while maintaining stylistic fluidity.

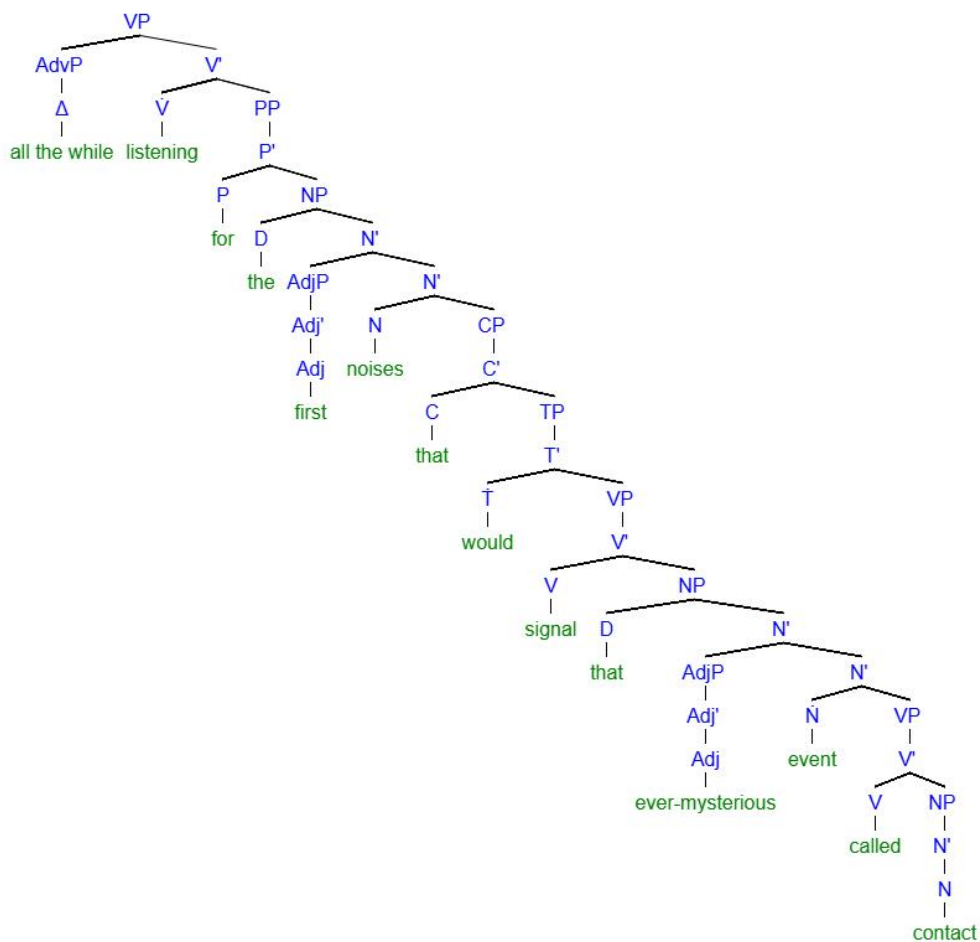
Excerpt 14: "Wondering How Long Now It Would Be Before We Would See The Enemy"



The verb phrase structure in the sentence "wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy", the head verb "wondering" functions as the head of the VP and takes a complementizer phrase (CP) as its complement. The complementizer "how long," introduces the CP now, indicating an embedded indirect question. Within this CP, the tense phrase (TP) follows, where "it" serves as the subject (NP), and "would" as the tense marker (T), governing the verb phrase "be before we would see the enemy." The VP "be before we would see the enemy" contains another CP, introduced by the complementizer "before," which

embeds another TP. In this TP, "we" functions as the subject, and "would" as the auxiliary, modifying the main verb "see." The VP "see the enemy" has "the enemy" as its object, structured as a noun phrase (NP) with "the" as the determiner (D) and "enemy" as the head noun (N). The recursive embedding of CPs within VPs illustrates the hierarchical syntactic structure of the sentence, a key feature in X-Bar Theory. The tree captures the relationship between different constituents, showing how Hemingway structures complex verb phrases while maintaining clarity.

Excerpt 15: "Listening All The While For The First Noises That Would Signal That Ever-Mysterious Event Called Contact"

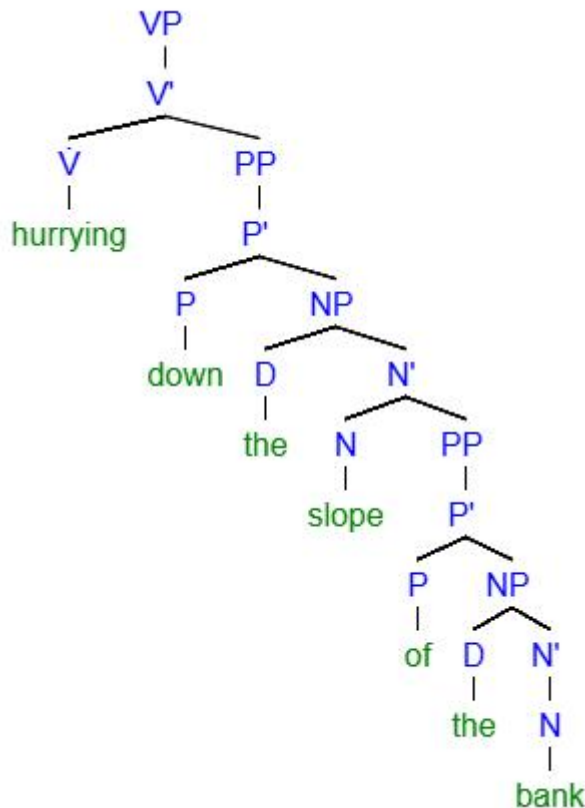


The verb phrase with verb listening, which spans across multiple embedded clauses detailing the subject's action and the particulars of the event described. In this case, listening is the primary verb and the head of the verb phrase sitting in the kernel sentence, which shows that the subject performs the act of listening. The phrase "all the while listening" is adverbial phrase modifying "listen," explaining that listening is performed during some time. In

combination, the phrase functions as an adverb, while the quantifier ‘all’ sets the time frame of the noise being referred to, while ‘listening’ occurs during it. The phrase modifies by a prepositional phrase “for the first noises,” where “for” is a preposition that qualifies the point of attention the subject is listening to. “The first noises” is more specific and describes what is being listened to. In this noun phrase, the first noises provide more detail; ‘the’ is determiner, and ‘first’ serves as an adjective to the head noun ‘noises’, which describes their order.

Further in the structure, the sentence embeds a complementizer phrase (CP) "that would signal," with the complementizer "that" starting a new clause which modifies the event. In 'would signal', the auxiliary 'would' behaves as a modifier for the main verb 'signal', depicting a conditional or future action that is highly anticipated. ‘That’ is a determiner, while ‘ever-mysterious’ serves an attributive function as it characterizes the ‘event’. Lastly, the verb phrase “called contact” elaborates the details of the event within the context of the clause. Listening serves as a defining aspect of the lasting action the subject is taking within a given timeframe. The additional complexes provide steps that go deeper into the comprehension of what is being listened to and the eventual consideration of the event as “contact”. This verb phrase has two layers - the first layer outlines the listening span while the second details the specifics of the event. Each addition increases the level of depth from the time when the conversation is taking place up to the phrase the person is actively participating.

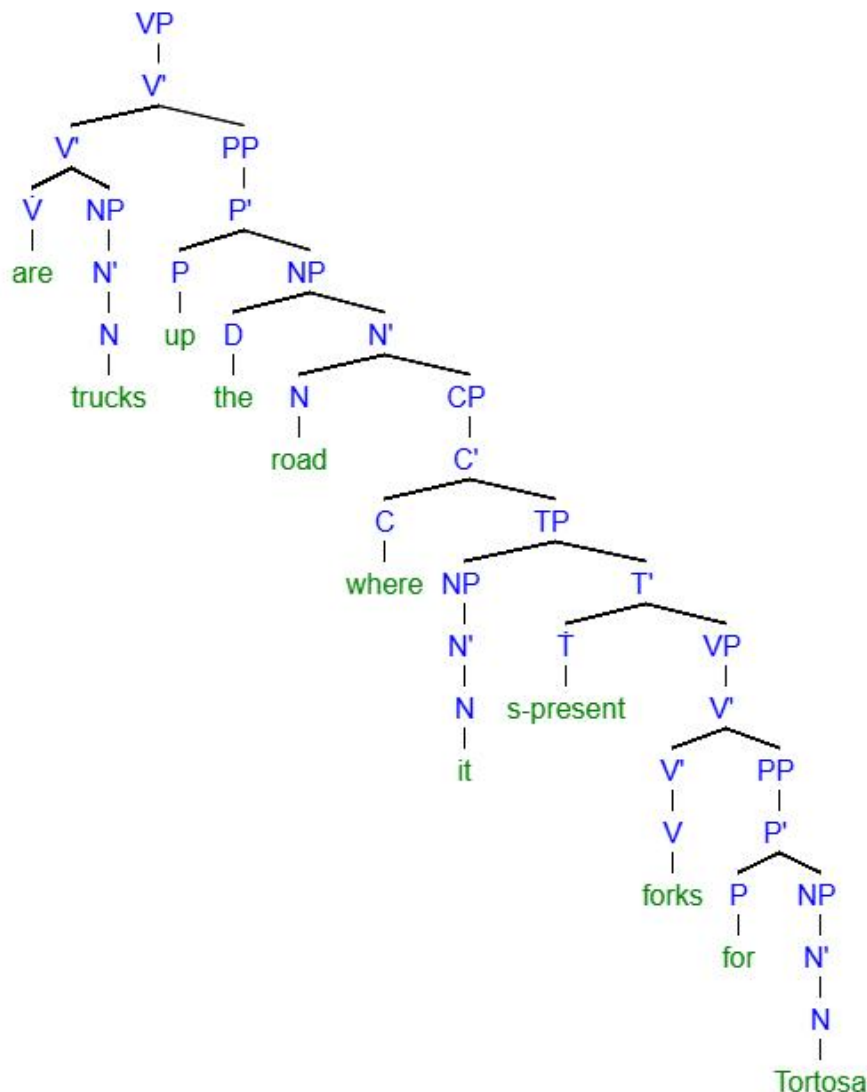
Excerpt 16: "Hurrying Down The Slope Of The Bank"



The verb phrase that begins with the auxiliary verb “were” follows by a main verb phrase, which is, “hurrying down the slope of the bank.” This head phrase depicts the action along with its direction. The auxiliary verb “were” is the head of the first verb phrase (VP), and it helps in the past progressive form. The auxiliary verb states that the action of hurrying was in progress at some specific time in the past. The main verb “hurrying” serves as the head of the second verb phrase marks the core action of the sentence, which is to move quickly. The verb "hurrying" accompanied by a prepositional phrase "down the slope of the bank." directs toward a goal lower than the starting point. The object of the preposition “down” is noun phrase “the slope.” It indicates the position along which the action takes the place. The phrase is supplemented by the prepositional phrase “of the bank”, which gives specification to the phrase by indicating the specific bank that the slope is belonging to. “Of” serves as a preposition, that connects the object “the bank” to the noun “slope”. Preposition “of” the phrase suggests “the”, which is a definite article, and shared as a head of the noun suggesting some type of a bank whether it is a riverbank or something similar. In this case, the verb phrase in general depicts the action of the subject as one is hurried and associates some

particular place where this action took place, which geographically further specifies by the prepositional phrases. Each phrase, starting from the auxiliary verb phrase and ending with the prepositional phrases, adds more insight into the details of the hurrying action in a spatial aspect. Hurrying serves as the main emphasis of the action, whereas the phrases explain the degree of the slope and where the slope is situated.

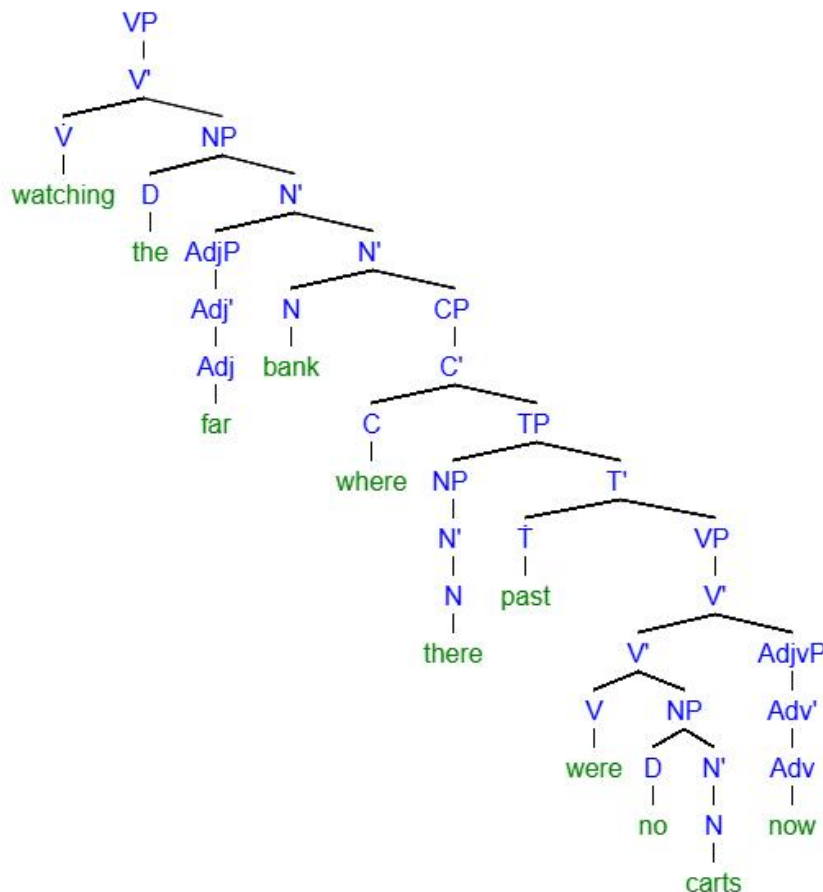
Excerpt 17: "Are Trucks Up The Road Where It Forks For Tortosa"



In the tree diagram, the verb phrase begins with the auxiliary verb "are," and contains a head verb phrase "trucks up the road," which defines the subject and action they are doing. In this case, the head of the verb phrase 'are' and the rest of the phrase signifies the present progress verb form, which means that an action is happening now. It associates the subject with action being executed. The main "trucks" in the context serves as a verb, meaning to transport

something, which in this case the trucks are actually performing. In addition, a prepositional phrase follows the verb phrase, which is “up the road” or in other words, the area the trucks are moving in. The term ‘up’, which is the preposition, indicates direction, which means to move to a higher place. The noun phrase ‘the road’ becomes the object of the preposition ‘up’ specifying the area where the trucks are heading. The auxiliary verb “are” denotes an ongoing action and together with the prepositional phrase ‘to the coast’ depicts the frontier’s action in full. The main action with its context expressed on sentence level through the verb trucks, which functions as the center of the action. These constituents portray a movement that is in progress, capturing both the action of the subject and the direction of the subject’s motion.

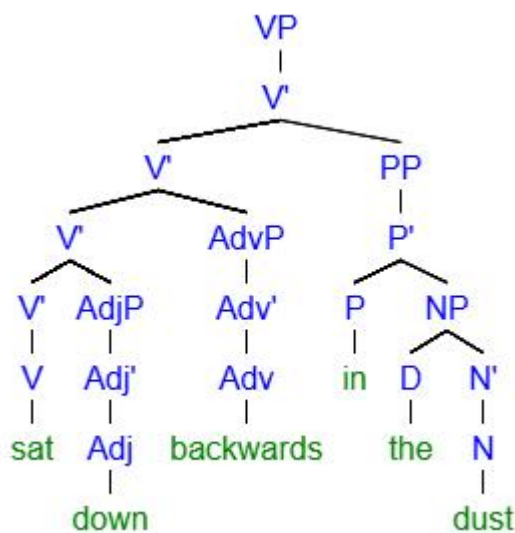
Excerpt 18: "Watching The Far Bank Where Now There Were No Carts"



In the tree diagram, the verb phrase “watching” follows by other elements that provide adverbial context for the action. The subject “I” of the sentence denotes the action of the verb “watching,” which serves as the head of the first verb phrase (VP), and therefore, the central action of the sentence depicts the subject’s action of watching intently. The phrase extended

by the noun phrase “the far bank” that serves as the object of the watching action. His “the” serves as a determiner to the noun phrase “bank” which is also modified by “far”. This indicates that it refers to a bank that is far off, perhaps, from the person watching. “Where” a preposition intends to provide a subordinate clause indicating specific location of the observation, thus, showing the place being described. The adverbial phrase “now” and an additional verb phrase (VP) suggest that “bank” is being modified into a prepositional phrase. As an insert modifying the whole verb phrase, he has further embedded it in a complementizer phrase (CP). The phrase serves to indicate the currently determined time to which “watching” is referring. The negation of the action in the embedded verb phrase is marked by ‘were’ (auxiliary verb) and the negation ‘no.’ the auxiliary verb ‘were’ connected the subject to the predicate of “being” The object of ‘carts’ serves as the noun phrase that contains the verb phrase and provides the element that is being acted upon. Thus, the entire phrase means that the subject is looking at the far bank and currently does not see or “there are no” carts visible. This analysis of the verb phrase illustrates that a great number of constituents combine to express the watching action, and the surrounding circumstances.

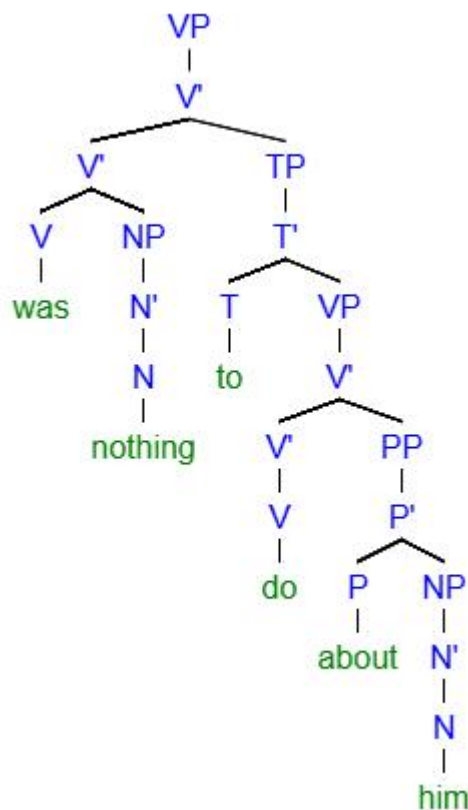
Excerpt 19: "Sat Down Backwards In The Dust"



In the tree diagram, the action of sitting incorporates both adverbial and prepositional verbs with the initial part detailing, “sat.” The verb of the action “sat” is the head of the verb confirming that the subject seated. The action of sitting is expounded by the phrase “backwards,” indicating that the sitting action is happening not only downwards, but also in the backward direction. This adverb adds further detail pertaining to the subject's spatial

motion. This motion is further extended through the prepositional phrase “in the dust” which enhances the details by indicating where the motion of sitting is taking place. The adjustment of “in” preposition brings forward the dimension of location where the action targets and the common noun phrase “the dust” brings life to the intersection and serves as the object of the preposition. The overall meaning of the verb phrase represents a downward and backward action of sitting. There is also a prepositional phrase, which provides more context to where the verb phrase is taking place, and in this case, it is in the dust. The adverbial phrases further explain the subject's movement and stance in relation to the action, and the prepositional phrase provides context to the where the action is taking place. Each part works together and adds to the meaning of the sentence, elaborating on the action, direction, and location.

Excerpt 20: “Was Nothing To Do About Him”



The verb phrase (VP) is headed by "was," which takes the noun phrase (NP) "nothing" as its complement, indicating a state of absence. The VP also contains a to-infinitival phrase (TP) "to do about him," where "to" serves as the tense marker introducing the embedded verb phrase. The VP within the infinitival clause is headed by "do," which takes the prepositional phrase (PP) "about him" as its complement. The PP "about him" consists of the preposition

"about" and the noun phrase "him," indicating the referential focus of the action. The hierarchical structure emphasizes a theme of helplessness and inaction, reinforcing the broader narrative tone of resignation in *The Old Man at the Bridge*.

Discussion

The aims of the research were to find the constituents of verb phrases and the functions, which graphically illustrated in the dissection of the VPs through tree diagrams using X-bar theory. The examination of verb phrases (VPs) in Hemingway short story *The Old Man at the Bridge* using X-bar Theory provides important information regarding the constituent structure and the grammatical functions of the sentences. Since X-bar Theory focuses on the vertical embedding of syntactic units, it has proven to be immensely useful in dissecting the sentence constructions of this text and in appreciating the underlying syntactic structure. This analysis shows that most important element in verb phrase construction is the head verb. For example "sat by the side of the road" and "staggered up the steep bank." In both phrases, the head verbs "sat" and "staggered" are actions that form the head of the verb phrase. This is compatible with the principle of X-bar theory that posits that in a phrase, its head is the most important element (Chomsky, 1995). In this sense, the verb of action or the verb of state provides the meaning of the phrase and becomes the primary element in construction of further phrases. Incorporating adjuncts further develops the depth of the verb phrase, making it richer in meaning. For instance, in the sentence "sat by the side of the road," the action is further elaborated by the prepositional phrase "by the side of the road," which acts as a complement. Adjuncts such as "backwards" or "all the while" also add extra information concerning manner or time, thus changing the meaning of the verb phrase. As highlighted by Chomsky (1995), these adjuncts and complements are arguably indispensable to capturing the full semantic content of the verb phrase. The hierarchical nature proposed by X-bar Theory allows for the tracking of relationships between different constituents of the verb phrase. In this representation, the head verb is at the minimal level with or without complement depending on the nature of the verb. The structure also gives credibility to the notion that the meaning is built incrementally at different levels of the phrasal hierarchy. Other scholars, including Haegeman (1991), have also pointed out the necessity of hierarchical structures in phrase construction, for example, how constituents put together in syntactic trees in accordance with a phrase's deeper meaning. One of the critical steps is the integration of negation and modality into the verb phrase. In phrases such as "did not look" and "would go,"

it is evident how auxiliary verbs and even negation phrases contribute to the notions of possibility and necessity. These components serve as parts of the sentence that convey the key point of the selected text. Modality and negation are important notions to which transformational generative grammar (Chomsky, 1981) pays attention because they add another layer to the primary meaning of the sentence. The analysis goes on to show that there are more complex examples of embedded clauses such as “wondering how long it would be” or, “listening for the first noises that would signal contact.” These examples demonstrate how larger syntactic constructions are capable of embedding in a verb phrase because they allow for more information about the action. The essentiality of embedded clauses as constituents in construction of a sentence has been extensively covered in syntactic literature; Radford (2009) explored the concept that embedded clauses can exist as complements or adjuncts of phrases. At last, coordination and conjunction within phrases, as seen in the examples “black dusty clothes and gray dusty face”, shows the nature of Hemingway’s verb phrases even further. Coordinated elements enable the expression of refinement through the articulation of context or ideas embedded in a sentence, while bringing together opposing or similar elements in a smooth and unified approach. Complexity in syntax, such as with coordination, is crucial for separating the interdependence of sentence components; as Haegeman (1991) points out, coordination expands the sentence's structural scope and is therefore one of the pivotal aids. The analysis of the verb phrases using X-bar theory informs us about the importance of hierarchical organization in phrase structure, the significance of the grammatical functions of complements and adjuncts, and grammatical intricacies involved in the use of negation, modality and coordination. Moreover, syntax-semantics interface revealed through the study of the constituent parts of phrases as the construction of each verb phrase serves as a window to glimpse deeper into the meaning of the text. The study illustrates the importance of X-bar theory in relation to the analysis of verb phrases and at the same time demonstrates how the parts of the phrase have a bearing on the accuracy and beauty of expression. This analysis expands on existing literature including Chomsky’s (1995) work on syntactic structures and Haegeman’s (1994) studies on hierarchical grammatical structures as they pertain to X-bar theory and its applications on phrase structure. The results of this analysis illustrate how complex phrases can be unpacked into their component parts to gain deeper understanding of their structure and meaning. In so doing, it broadens our understanding of meaning encoded in language and the role of structural constituents in achieving the desired narrative

profundity.

Conclusion

This paper examined the verb phrase constructions in *The Old Man at the Bridge* by Ernest Hemingway using X-bar theory. The analysis revealed the systematic and recursive construction of verb phrases, which include the head verb, complements, adjuncts, and modifiers as meaningful parts of the phrases within sentences. The analysis showed that the head verb is the most important element in the construction and dictates the principal action or state of being, which is further specified by the various complements and adjuncts in terms of place, direction, manner, or time. Moreover, the arrangement of these components indicates that the meanings packed in the phrases are complex and become increasingly complex as adjuncts and complements added to each phrase incrementally. Moreover, the embedding of negation and modality features in verb phrases through auxiliary verbs and negation phrases mark the levels of degree of possibility, necessity, and certainty, which is a certain aspect of the complexity of functions of syntax. It also uncovered the expressions with embedded clauses and even coordinated phrases or clauses where each embedded or conjoined structure increase the grammatical depth of the phrase by adding further details. Applying X bar theory to the verb phrases provides a glimpse into the grammatical constructions of Hemingway's prose. This approach not only offers insights into the construction of verb phrases but also the interaction of syntax and semantics where all the elements work together to achieve meaning making in each phrase. This analysis confirms the value of hierarchical structure, relations between constituents and the order of phrases in attaining sentence meaning. The simple verb phrase 'sat by the side of the road' or the more complicated 'wondering how long it would take' both are packed with meaning because they entail action and context. Therefore, the application of the X-bar theory serves as a tool for bringing out the complexities in the grammatical structure of Hemingway's prose.

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