Event encoding in a crosslinguistic perspective IV:
Talking about the weather

(Note: Sections 1, 8, and especially 6 are based on work by Bonnie Krejci; see Krejci (2014).)

In the eyes of linguists, such [=weather] expressions are nearly as problematic and ill-behaved as the weather itself: they not only have many special properties, but from one language to the next the same phenomenon is coded linguistically in ways that are lexically or grammatically quite distinct. (R. Langacker 1991:365)

1 Encoding weather events: Crosslinguistic variability

- As Langacker suggests, languages show considerable variation in how they encode meteorological events (Eriksen et al. 2010, 2012).
- For the source of each example below see Eriksen et al. (2010).

(1) Latin: No overt subject + weather verb
   Pluit.
   rain.3SG
   ‘It is raining.’ (Eriksen et al. 2010:566, (2))

(2) German: Expletive subject + weather verb
   Es regnet.
   it rain.3SG
   ‘It is raining.’ (Eriksen et al. 2010:566, (3))

(3) Fongbe: Weather noun as subject + semantically less specific intransitive verb
   jí jà.
   rain falls
   ‘It is raining.’ (lit. ‘Rain falls.’) (Eriksen et al. 2010:581, (33))

(4) Greek: Weather noun as object + semantically less specific transitive verb
   Ríxni vrodés.
   throw.3SG thunder.PL.ACC.F
   ‘It is thundering.’ (Eriksen et al. 2010:582, (36))

(5) Greek: Existential construction + weather noun
   Éxi katejída.
   have:3SG storm:ACC.SG.F
   ‘There is a storm.’ (Eriksen et al. 2010:582, (38))

(6) Digo: Weather verb + weather noun
   Mvula i-na-nya.
   9.rain 9-CONT-rain
   ‘It is raining.’ (lit. ‘Rain is raining.’) (Eriksen et al. 2010:566, (4b))
The questions:
— Can we find some order underlying this apparent diversity in event encoding?
— If so, what are the sources of this diversity? How do they relate to the event encoding problem?

The parts of the event encoding problem (from Lecture I):
— association of a root and event schema
  – includes determining which meaning component in the schema the root is associated with,
    which will be governed by the root’s ontological type;
— association of event schema and morphosyntactic frame
  – will reflect argument realization principles, which are sensitive to the schema’s components;
    – may be sensitive to the way a root attaches to an event schema.

2 Encoding weather events: The analytical challenges

Weather—or metereological—expressions encode happenings with several challenging properties.

2.1 Challenges involving event participants

• Identifiability: Depending on the metereological phenomenon, it can be difficult to identify any
  participants in the event (e.g., becoming dusk). At best, it might be possible to recognize a single
  participant (e.g., snow, rain). Certainly, it seems difficult to recognize two distinct participants, like
  an agent and a patient.

• Independence from the phenomenon: The participant, to the extent it is identifiable, is not
  independent from the phenomenon itself: snow and rain do not exist outside of the event of snowing
  or raining (cf. the Agent Proto-role entailments of Dowty (1991)).

• Semantic role: It is hard to determine what semantic role to assign to an entity involved in a
  metereological phenomenon: when rain rains from the sky, is it acting or being affected?

• Selectional restrictions: Weather verbs impose fairly strict selectional restrictions on their argu-
  ments: outside of metaphorical uses, only snow can snow, only rain can rain.
2.2 Challenges involving event schemas

- The challenges involving the participants are partially reflective of the challenges involving the determination of the appropriate event schema.

- There are considerable superficial differences in the expression of weather events: they are encoded as impersonals, existentials, transitives, and intransitives.

- Are these differences indicative of the availability of multiple construals of a particular chain of happenings in the world as a weather event, giving rise to multiple event schemas?

- Or are these differences indicative of multiple associations of a particular event schema with morphosyntactic frames?

- What is the nature of the relevant morphosyntactic frames?

  — Many of the encodings are taken to be avalent—having no arguments—but how does this fit into a typology of transitivity types?

  — In particular, can avalent verbs be accommodated in the unaccusative or unergative verb classes?

There is considerable controversy about this issue related (i) to the definition of an unaccusative verb (Is it a verb that simply takes an internal argument or is it a verb that lacks an external argument?) and (ii) to difficulties with identifying robust unaccusative diagnostics and applying them properly.

3 Major patterns of weather event encoding

Eriksen et al. (2010) suggest that weather event expressions fall into three major types according to which element in the sentence lexicalizes the “weather”:

- The predicate type: *It is raining*, e.g., (1), (2) “where the meteorological event is encoded as a predicate, and where any eventual argument is either semantically empty or irrelevant to expressing the event as such” (Eriksen et al. 2010:596)

- The argument type: *Rain is falling*, e.g., (3), (4), (5) “where the meteorological event is encoded as an argument, and where the predicate is largely semantically irrelevant to expressing the event as such, and functions more like a supportive [=light] verb” (Eriksen et al. 2010:596)

- The argument-predicate type: *It is raining rain*, e.g., (6) “where the meteorological event is encoded in the form of a predicate and an argument simultaneously” (Eriksen et al. 2010:596)

4 Subclasses of weather events

- Although reference to a notion of weather verbs might suggest that the class is behaviorally homogeneous, in fact, it is constituted of several subclasses of verbs, whose members refer to meteorological phenomena which are quite different in critical respects, with these differences reflected in event encoding.
Evidence comes from work on a variety of languages which shows that the preferred encoding of precipitation events is distinct from that of temperature and certain other meteorological events.

Eriksen et al. (2010:596) write: “Whereas events of temperature easily adopt the predicate type, precipitation events seem to be much more ‘resistant.’”

— Precipitation events can be quite easily understood to have a participant: the relevant form of precipitation.

— Temperature events are not so easily understood as involving any participants.

(10) Ha gelato stanotte.

have.PRS.3SG frozen tonight

‘It froze tonight.’ (Italian; Benincà & Cinque 1992:156, (2c))

Thus, Eriksen et al. (2010) find a whole range of event encoding strategies are used for precipitation events, although they suggest that the argument strategy is the default.

The encoding strategy for events involving entering a particular stage of the day is different from that of precipitation events (Fábregas 2013, Manente 2007, Meulleman & Stockman 2013).


— Such events too are expressed via the predicate type; like temperature events, they too are not easily understood as involving any participants.

(12) Aquí amanece tarde.

here dawn.PRS.3SG late

‘Here, the dawn is late.’ (Spanish; Fábregas 2013:7, (1))

— Although there is agreement that the verbs that lexicalize such events differ from precipitation verbs in their grammatical behavior, there is disagreement as to their precise analysis, which will not be resolved here.

Compare Fábregas (2013), who takes them to be unergative, with Meulleman & Stockman (2013), who take them to be unaccusative verbs of appearance.

There are still other meteorological phenomena, such as those involving thunder and lightning, whose encoding options need further investigation.

These differences in event encoding most likely reflect differences in the nature of the chains of happenings in the world that are involved in temperature, stage of day, and precipitation events, which lead to their being construed as events in different ways, i.e. being assigned different event schemas. These different schemas are then reflected in the different attested event encodings.

The focus here is precipitation events, although there is much to be investigated about other kinds of weather events.
5 Understanding precipitation events: A roadmap

• THE BIG QUESTION:
  Why do precipitation events show such diversity in their crosslinguistic encoding?

• AN ANSWER:
  — Such events show two construals: as substance emission events and directed motion events.
  — Each construal leads to a distinct event encoding.

  SUBSTANCE EMISSION EVENT: *It rained (a light rain)* — Unergative
  DIRECTED MOTION EVENT: *The rain rained down on my head* — Unaccusative

  — One verb is used with both event construals as it lexicalizes the common form of precipitation.
  — In this respect, precipitation events in English are rather like the *whistle* example in Lecture I, where a single verb is used to describe two quite different chains of happenings because the verb lexicalizes only a small number of the attributes of either chain of happenings.

(13)  a. The teakettle whistled. (Sound emission event)
  b. A bullet whistled past him. (Directed motion event)

• EVIDENCE: The expression of precipitation events in English and Romance languages.

6 The construal of weather events—specifically precipitation events—in English

• The standard way to encode precipitation and other weather events in English is as in (14).

(14) It is raining/snowing/hailing.

• Such sentences are said to be impersonal, having expletive subjects; that is, weather verbs are said to lack arguments.

THE QUESTION: What is the status of “weather” *it*?
— Is the *it* actually an expletive subject, inserted for purely syntactic reasons?
— Or is *it* selected by the verb and assigned a semantic role, either as a nonreferential “quasi-argument” or a referential argument?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>True expletive</th>
<th>Quasi-argument</th>
<th>Referential argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huddleston &amp; Pullum 2002</td>
<td>Rizzi 1990</td>
<td>Bennis 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seppänen 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pesetsky 1995</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stephens 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROPOSAL:
— Weather *it* is not an expletive: it is assigned a semantic role.
— English precipitation verbs are a subtype of substance emission verbs, displaying analogous syntactic and semantic properties.
— Precipitation verbs assign the source role to their subjects.

(15) SUBSTANCE EMISSION VERBS: bleed, drip, gush, ooze, seep, spew, . . .
(16) PRECIPITATION VERBS: drizzle, hail, rain, sleet, snow, . . .

6.1 Semantically contentful *it*

As several researchers have noted, weather *it* does not always behave as expected if it were a true expletive, that is, not assigned a theta-role.

These behavioral properties will be illustrated by contrasting precipitation verbs with raising verbs like *seem* or *appear* which take an expletive *it* subject when they take a *that* sentential complement.

(17) It seems that Tracy jogged yesterday.

• Control verbs: Raising verbs cannot appear under control verbs like *try*, which semantically restrict their subjects, but weather verbs may (Chomsky 1981, Pesetsky 1995, Stephens 2007).

(18) a. It tried [ _ to rain today] but the sun came out! (web)
    b. The first in ten summers that it refused [ _ to rain]. (web)
    c. * It tried/refused [ _ to seem that Tracy jogged].

• Purpose clauses: Raising verbs cannot appear with purposes clauses, which also semantically restrict their subjects, but precipitation verbs may (Stephens 2007).

(19) a. That’s why it rains, [ _ to sedate you]. It rains [ _ to turn you numb]. (web)
    b. It only seems that Tracy jogged [ _ to annoy us]. (on intended reading)

• Lexical subjects: The subject of a precipitation verb need not always be an expletive; in contrast, raising verbs do not permit such subjects.

(20) a. The clouds rained blood. (web)
    b. The night the twins came to our town, the skies rained ice. (web)
    c. * The fact seemed that Tracy jogged.

• Accusative case assignment: Precipitation verbs often take objects (Ruwet 1991), but raising verbs do not. By Burzio’s Generalization (1986), this property suggests that precipitation verbs should also take “thematic” subjects.
(21)  
a. It rained a light thin rain. (COCA)
b. It rained a few drops of rain. (COCA)
c. * It seemed Tracy’s awakening. (cf. It seemed that Tracy awakened.)

- **Genitive complement to a noun:** Expletives are said to be disallowed as the genitive complement to a noun (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1261). This holds of the *it* of raising verbs, but not the *it* of precipitation verbs.

(22)  
a. Such as torrential rain, hail, and sun within a matter of hours in one place and its tendency to rain all the way through summer (web)
b. It had its chance to rain all this week (web)
c. * Its tendency to seem that Tracy jogs.

- **Subjects of imperatives:** Weather *it* can be the addressee in an imperative (Stephens 2007).

(23)  
a. Please don’t rain. (web)
b. Please rain this weekend. (web)
c. * Please (don’t) seem that Tracy jogged.

- **Discourse reference:** Weather *it* can be referenced later in discourse, showing up as a nonexpletive (Stephens 2007).

(24)  
a. It only began to rain in earnest just as we got to the gate. Very thoughtful of it, I’m sure! (Jespersen 1965:241)
b. * It seemed that Tracy jogged. How thoughtful of it!

**CONCLUSION:** Weather *it* is not a true expletive, but is semantically selected by the verb.

**QUESTION:** What semantic role is assigned to weather *it*?

**PREVIOUS PROPOSALS:**
— the environment/ambient conditions (Bolinger 1977)
— atmospheric role (Rizzi 1990)
— natural or abstract force (Pesetsky 1995)

**PROPOSAL:** The subject of a precipitation verb, as with a substance emission verb is a **source**.

### 6.2 Parallels with substance emission verbs

**PROPOSAL:** Precipitation verbs are a subset of the substance emission verbs.

**MOTIVATION:** Precipitation verbs show two key properties of substance emission verbs.
• **Limited range of subjects:**

(25) Emission verbs involve the emission of a substance that is particular to some entity, and consequently, these verbs take a very limited range of subjects . . . There is a sense in which verbs in this class describe intrinsic properties of their subjects. (Levin 1993)

Precipitation verbs take this property to an extreme: They only allow *it* as their subject.

• **Source/substance alternation:**

— Subjects of substance emission verbs can be the source, with an optional object denoting the emitted substance, as in (26a).
— The emitted substance may be the subject, with a directional PP denoting the source, as in (26b).

(26) a. The well_{source} gushed (*oil_{substance}).
    b. *Oil_{substance} gushed from the well_{source}.

Precipitation verbs display the same pattern, as in (27).

(27) a. It_{source} rained (*icy water_{substance}) when I left from work by car. (web)
    b. Icy water_{substance} rained from high heaven_{source} onto my body! (web)

This parallel receives support from the grammatical behavior of substance emission verbs:
— Substance emission verbs are unergative when taking a source subject.
— Substance emission verbs are unaccusative when taking a substance subject.
The same pattern holds of precipitation verbs.

### 6.2.1 Unergativity with source subject

Although the source argument of substance emission verbs is nonagentive, these verbs are nonetheless unergative when the source is the subject (L&RH 1995).

Precipitation verbs with source subjects also behave as unergatives.

(28) Source as subject:

a. The well_{source} gushed (*oil_{substance}).
    b. It_{source} rained (*icy water_{substance}) when I left from work by car. (web)

• **Cognate objects:** Substance emission verbs are able to assign accusative case to cognate objects, as well as hyponyms of such objects; precipitation verbs can too.
(29) a. The well gushed (a huge gush/oil).
   b. It rained (a heavy rain/a heavy shower). (web)

(30) It’s dripping a little drip but boy, a drip can fill a small bucket in 48hrs . . . (web)

(31) Lots of babies don’t drool. My 1st never drooled. My 2nd child was like a slug—oozing a constant stream of ooze. (web)

- **Resultatives:** Substance emission and precipitation verbs pattern with unergatives in requiring nonselected objects, including fake reflexives in resultative constructions.

(32) a. The well gushed *(itself) dry.
   b. It rained *(itself) silly. (web)
   c. It rained us out of the pool. (web)

- **Causative alternation:** Neither substance emission, nor precipitation verbs show this alternation.

(33) a. *The workers gushed the fountain.
   b. *God/the high humidity rained it/the sky.

- **Adjectival passive participles:** Neither substance emission verbs, nor precipitation verbs allow such participles to be predicated of the source.

(34) a. *the gushed well
   b. *the snowed sky/clouds/heavens

- **There-insertion:** Some but not all unaccusative verbs allow there-insertion, but unergatives do not. Substance emission verbs do not allow there-insertion when the source is the postverbal NP; neither do precipitation verbs.

(35) a. *There gushed a well.
   b. *There rained it/a sky/some clouds.

### 6.2.2 Unaccusativity with substance subject

When substance emission verbs take the substance as their subject, they behave as unaccusative verbs (L&RH 1995); precipitation verbs pattern the same way.

(36) Substance as subject:

   a. \(Oil_{\text{substance}} \) gushed from the well_{\text{source}}.
   b. \(Icy \text{ water}_{\text{substance}} \) rained from high heaven_{\text{source}} onto my body! (web)
- **Cognate objects:** When the substance is the subject, neither substance emission verbs, nor precipitation verbs may take cognate objects.

  (37)  
  a.  * Oil gushed a gush from the fountain.  
  b.  * Icy water rained (a) rain from the sky.

- **Resultatives:** When the substance is the subject, substance emission verbs cannot appear with nonselected objects; neither can precipitation verbs.

  (38)  
  a.  * Oil gushed the well dry.  
  b.  * Heavy drops rained the sky clear.

- **Directional phrases:** When the substance is the subject, substance emission verbs can appear with directional complements of various types predicated of their subject, as can precipitation verbs.

  (39)  
  a.  Oil gushed up (from the well).  
  b.  Icy water rained down (from the sky) onto the parched fields.

- **Causative alternation:** When the substance is the subject, both substance emission verbs and precipitation verbs can be causativized.

  (40)  
  a.  The boy gushed liquid from the rubber toy.  
  b.  He [God] rained water from the heavens (web)

- **Adjectival passive participles:** Substance emission verbs allow such participles to be predicated of the substance; precipitation verbs do too.

  (41)  
  a.  the gushed(-out) oil  
  b.  the rained down water

- **There-insertion:** Both types of verbs allow *there*-insertion when the postverbal NP is the substance, particularly in the presence of a directional PP.

  (42)  
  a.  She passed a spring, set back deep in a hollow where the water winked and shifted like an eye, and there gushed out into the night air the deep earth smell of black loam.  (E. Spencer, *The Voice at the Back Door*, McGraw Hill, 1956; LSA Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1984, p. 234)  
  b.  There rained a ghastly dew. (web)
6.2.3 A summary of the parallel properties

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Source as subject</th>
<th>Substance as subject</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Precipitation verb</td>
<td>Emission verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes object</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake refl. w/result.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causative</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. passive part.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There-insertion</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Substance emission verbs and precipitation verbs are strikingly parallel in their behavior.
- These parallels are left unexplained if weather *it* is analyzed as an expletive, but can be captured under an analysis where *it* is analyzed as a source.

6.3 Is weather *it* referential?

- **Questioning it:** Chomsky (1981) argues that weather *it* is a quasi-argument, and, “as a matter of grammatical principle”, there is no entity that can serve as its denotatum.

(43) A: It’s raining out today.
    B: #What’s raining out today? (Chomsky 1981:Chapter 6)

However, (43)’s infelicity does not help determine whether *it* is referential.

Suppose *it* does refer, but that there is only one entity that can serve as its denotatum. *What* presupposes that there is more than one possible denotatum available for *it*, so the question will still be infelicitous.

- **Emphasizing it:** Seppänen (2002) argues against weather *it* having any semantic content at all, showing that it cannot be emphasized, among other properties denied to what he claims are expletives.

(44) a. # Raining? No, IT isn’t raining, IT is snowing.
    b. # I hope it isn’t IT that is snowing. (Seppänen 2002:451)

However, the examples in (44) use contrastive focus, which again is not available if *it* refers to exactly one denotatum.

- **Tough movement:** This process cannot apply to expletive subjects, nor can it apply to weather *it*.

(45) a. * It was impossible to seem that Tracy jogged.
    b. * It was impossible to prevent from raining.

However, the unacceptability of (45) could be due to pragmatic reasons.

(46) ?? It was impossible to prevent the sky/London from raining.
6.4 The significance of the English data

• As noted, English precipitation events show two distinct encoding options:

(47)  a. **SOURCE AS SUBJECT:** It<sub>source</sub> rained (icy water<sub>substance</sub>).
    b. **SUBSTANCE AS SUBJECT:** Icy water<sub>substance</sub> rained **from** high heaven<sub>source</sub>.

**The source subject pattern:**

— This pattern represents the basic event schema and related event encoding pattern used for emission events in general—whether substance, light, sound, or smell.

(48)  a. The candle flickered/glowed.
    b. The stream babbled/burbled/gurgled.
    c. The trash reeked.

— The source in a precipitation event is understood as the emmittee, and, thus, realized as subject.

— The unergative behavior of a precipitation verb in the source subject pattern is consistent not only with that of substance emission verbs, but of emission verbs more generally (L&RH 1995).

**The substance subject pattern:**

— This pattern represents the basic event schema and related event encoding pattern for directed motion events.

— The source or other directional phrase typically required in this schema is characteristic of directed motion events.

(49)  a. *Heavy drops rained.
    b. Heavy drops rained from the sky.
    c. Heavy drops rained onto the ground (from the sky).

— In this pattern, then, the substance is the theme of the event, and, hence, realized as the subject.

— The unaccusative behavior of a precipitation verb in the substance subject pattern is consistent with the behavior of directed motion verbs (L&RH 1995).

— This analysis is consistent with the observation that (49b) can be paraphrased using a directed motion verb as in *Heavy drops fell from the sky*, an observation that leads Bleotu (2012, 2013) to suggest that all weather events involve a light motion verb.

• The two patterns and the encoding options they each represent, then, are reflexes of distinct con-struals of precipitation happenings as events.

— The precipitation is not independent of event, a property that holds of the substance in substance emission events in general.
— The precipitation moves from the sky to the ground—an instance of directed motion.

• The multiple construals are unsurprising given the challenging properties of weather events, including precipitation events: they do not conform to common event schemas, and, specifically, the agent-act-on-patient schema that is prototypically expressed via a transitive sentence.

7 Precipitation events in Romance languages

7.1 Weather verbs and unaccusativity

• Precipitation events have figured intermittently in the literature on unaccusativity in Romance.

• There has been controversy over whether weather verbs are unaccusative or unergative (e.g., Benincà & Cinque 1992, Bleotu 2012, 2013, Meullemel & Stockman 2013, Paykin 2010, Ruwet 1992).

EXAMPLES:
— Ruwet: In French, they are unaccusative across the board.
— Benincà & Cinque: In Italian, some are unergative; others are either unaccusative or unergative.

• Although the controversy might be attributable in part to the issues surrounding the choice and application of unaccusativity diagnostics, the controversy might dissolve once it is recognized that:

— Stage of day events are fundamentally different from precipitation events (e.g., Fábregas 2013, Meullemel & Stockman 2013). See section 4.

— Multiple construals of precipitation events are available in Romance languages too (e.g., Benincà & Cinque 1992, Manente 2007).

7.2 Precipitation events in Italian

• Benincà & Cinque (1992) point out that those Italian weather verbs that show both unaccusative and unergative behavior are understood as “activity” verbs when unergative and directed motion verbs when unaccusative.

• They use auxiliary selection as a diagnostic for unaccusativity:
  — Unaccusative verbs select the auxiliary essere ‘be’.
  — Unergative verbs select the auxiliary avere ‘have’.

• When the substance is the subject, as shown by the verb agreement in the (b) sentences in (50) and (51), the auxiliary is essere.

• The presence of an overt directional phrase as in the (c) sentences in (50) and (51) is only possible when the auxiliary is essere.

(50) Auxiliary essere ‘be’:

  a. È piovuto.
     be.PRS.3SG rained
     ‘It rained.’
b. Sono piovute pietre.
be.PRS.3PL rained stones
‘It rained stones.’

c. Sei forse piovuto dal cielo?
be.PRS.2SG perhaps rained from.the sky
‘Have you perhaps rained from the sky?’

(Benincà & Cinque 1992:156, (3))

(51) Auxiliary avere ‘have’:

a. Ha piovuto.
have.PRS.3SG rained
‘It rained.’

b. * Hanno piovuto pietre.
have.PRS.3PL rained stones
‘It rained stones.’

c. * Hai forse piovuto dal cielo?
have.PRS.2SG perhaps rained from.the sky
‘Have you perhaps rained from the sky?’

(Benincà & Cinque 1992:156, (4))

(52) Mi è /*ha piovuto sulla testa.
I.DAT be.PRS.3SG have.PRS.3SG rained on.the head
‘It rained over [on] my head.’ (Sorace 2000:878, (49))

• Compare auxiliary selection with manner of motion verbs in Italian: They too must be found with
the auxiliary essere when they are used to describe a directed motion event, but are found with avere
when used to describe an activity.

(53) a. Giorgio ha corso con uno stile perfetto /*a casa.
Geoerge have.PRS.3SG run with a perfect style A house
‘George has run in a perfect style/to the house.’

b. Giorgio è corso a casa /*con uno stile perfetto.
Geoerge be.PRS.3SG run A house with a perfect style
‘George has run to the house/in a perfect style.’

(Benincà & Cinque 1992:157, (6))

• Benincà & Cinque also point out that the weather verbs that only show unergative behavior are
not precipitation verbs:

(54) a. UNERGATIVE ONLY: tuonare ‘thunder’, lampeggiare ‘lightning’, gelare ‘freeze’

b. VARIABLE: piovere ‘rain’, nevicare ‘snow’, grandinare ‘hail’, diluviare ‘pour’

(Benincà & Cinque 1992:158–159)

(55) Ha /??è gelato stanotte.
have.PRS.3SG be.PRS.3SG frozen tonight
‘It froze tonight.’ (Benincà & Cinque 1992:156, (2c))
• Although *tuonare* ‘thunder’ and *lampeggiare* ‘lightning’ in (54a) do not fall into the temperature or stage of day verb classes, they too describe weather happenings where it can be difficult to distinguish the participant from the event.

• **Conclusion:** There is evidence that Italian too shows two construals of precipitation events: one is as a directed motion event; the precise nature of the other needs further investigation (i.e. is it also a substance emission event construal?).

8 **Conclusion: Checking the weather**

• There is a great deal of crosslinguistic variability in the encoding of weather events.

• This variability most likely arises because such events do not have prototypical participants, failing to conform, for instance, to the “ideal” transitive event in which an agent acts on and causes a change of state in a participant. In fact, it can even be hard to discern whether such events even involve any arguments at all.

• Precipitation events, in particular, are open to more than one construal. English, for example, construes such events in two ways, as (substance) emission events and as directed motion events. These construals are behind the varied expressions attested with English precipitation verbs.

• The *it* of English precipitation expressions behaves differently from the expletive *it* of raising verbs like *seem*: precipitation verbs do select a subject, one which may be referential.

• This behavior is unsurprising as English precipitation verbs are semantically and syntactically analogous to substance emission verbs, and weather *it* plays the role of a “source”.

• Much more remains to be investigated in the domain of weather events in English and beyond.

**References**


