Lexical Aspect and Object Deletion*

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1. Introduction
1.1. Grammatical aspect and lexical aspect

It is well-known that there are two kinds of aspects, i.e., grammatical aspect and lexical aspect (for details, see Smith (1994) and Olsen (1997)). In English, grammatical aspect is instantiated typically by the simple and progressive form of the verb, whereas lexical aspect is generally associated with verbs and other lexical items and does not usually have special grammatical forms representing it.

1.2. Grammatical aspect and object deletion

It has often been pointed out that grammatical aspect has some influence on the so-called object deletion.[1] The simple or perfective aspect permits a certain class of transitive verbs to go without the direct object as shown in the following examples, with the implied objects indicated in the brackets.

(1)   a. Horowitz practices daily. [the piano] (Rice (1988))

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[1] We use the term "object deletion" to refer to cases where an intransitive verb with a corresponding transitive verb implies the existence of a certain object. As a matter of fact, object deletion can be divided into two subtypes, definite object deletion and indefinite object deletion (see section 5 for details), and the latter is the main theme of our discussion. Accordingly, note that when we refer to object deletion, we usually mean indefinite object deletion.

b. Bill always interrupts. [people, someone] (*ibid.*)

c. John always nibbles before dinner. [food] (*ibid.*)

d. John steals for a living. [things] (*ibid.*)

e. Cecil murders [people] ; Max steals (sells,etc.) [things]. (Fraser and Ross (1970))[2]

Usually, the sentence with the simple present form of a verb is cited as an example, making the present tense seem to be necessary, but even the past simple form allows object deletion. In either case, the verb has a generic interpretation, expressing the present or past habitual property of the subject. According to Dixon (1991 : 288), the progressive or imperfective aspect as well has some effect on object deletion, as shown in (2) and (3).

(2) a. She is knitting.

  b. *She knitted.

(3) a. He has been sawing all morning.

  b. *He has sawn.

Here, we accept Dixon's claim as it is, although these examples may not be convincing, because both *knit* and *saw* have an independent intransitive use according to several English dictionaries.[3] Probably there are dialectal variations. This aspect of the influences of aspect on object deletion we only mention and we have no intention of dealing with it here, though there appear to be interesting problems yet to be solved.

1.3. Lexical aspect and object deletion

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[2] In this example, another factor may also be responsible for object deletion, namely, a syntactic parallel structure.

[3] The following examples are found in *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* :

(i) The old lady sat in her doorway and knitted.

(ii) We'll have to saw through the tree.

Recently, claims have been made that lexical aspect of the verb plays an important role in object deletion. We can find such claims in Brisson (1994) and Hovav and Levin (1998). In essence, their claims are similar and the point is that arguments of transitive activity verbs need not be expressed syntactically under a certain condition. These arguments are called content arguments by Grimshaw (1993) and constant participants by Hovav and Levin (1998). Brisson and Hovav and Levin claim that these arguments can be omitted because they have no role in terms of aspect or event structure. It is this facet of the aspectual effects on object deletion that we are going to address in this paper. We are going to focus our discussion on Brisson's analysis and show that it is confronted with some problems. We believe that what will be said is applicable to Hovav and Levin's analysis as well. We will also consider Olsen's (1997) view of lexical aspect and its connection with Brisson's analysis.

2. Overview of Brisson's analysis

Brisson deals with the relation between object deletion ("unexpressed objects" in her terms) and two groups of verbs which show different aspectual properties. The two groups are called the *write* verbs and the *sweep* verbs, respectively. The two groups of verbs Brisson deals with are the following :

(4) *write* verbs : write, knit, bake, draw, paint, sew, drink, type, dig, eat

(5) *sweep* verbs : sweep, plow, pack, dust, vacuum, clean, mow, rake, (study, read)[4]

Her point is that only those verbs having a direct internal argument with a certain aspectual property, namely *sweep* verbs, can undergo object dele-

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[4] According to Brisson, the last two verbs in parentheses differ from other *sweep* verbs in that they can't take a location argument.

tion if they satisfy a certain contextual condition.[5]

2.1. Dyadic *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs

Transitive *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs share a property of behaving as an activity as well as an accomplishment. However, *write* verbs differ from *sweep* verbs in that some restrictions are put on the activity reading of the former. Observe the following :

(6) a. John wrote a letter in an hour.
　　 b. John wrote letters for an hour.
　　 c. *John wrote the letter for an hour.

In order to get an activity reading, *write* verbs must take an indefinite plural object.[6] Brisson calls this restriction the object effect. Furthermore, according to Brisson, *write* verbs can only have an iterative interpretation on their activity reading. (6b) means that John's writing a letter took place several times during an hour. These restrictions are characteristic of accomplishment verbs.

The paradigmatic set of examples of *sweep* verbs is given in (7).

(7) a. Jack swept a floor in an hour.
　　 b. Jack swept floors for an hour.
　　 c. Jack swept the floor for an hour.

Unlike *write* verbs, *sweep* verbs do not show either the object effect or the iterativity effect. There are further differences. For example, *write* verbs

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[5] For Brisson, object deletion takes a form of suppressing syntactic realization of the direct internal argument of a verb.

[6] Brisson herself states that the object must be indefinite. However, the indefiniteness requirement alone cannot rule out *John wrote a letter for an hour,* which is usually judged unacceptable. To do so, we must add the plurality requirement. To be more precise, this is not sufficient either, for we also get an activity reading when the object is an indefinite mass noun, as in *write poetry* or *drink beer.*

entail a resultant state, whereas *sweep* verbs do not, as shown in the following contrast.

   (8)   John swept the floor in ten minutes and then took off. But there's
         still dirt all over it!
   (9)   ?? Mary wrote the letter in ten minutes, but it didn't get written!

In (9) the result which is lexically entailed is disclaimed by the clause introduced by the conjunction *but*, and as a consequence the sentence is bad. In contrast, in (8) the result is "a pragmatically favored result" (Brisson 1994 : 94) and therefore it can be cancelled. Based on such differences, Brisson takes *sweep* verbs as activity verbs. As for the accomplishment-like behavior shown by (7a), Brisson attributes it to "a kind of 'job is done' reading" (*ibid.* : 95). That is, when someone sweeps somewhere, most likely a floor, they can finish after a certain amount of sweeping. According to Brisson, this is not an accomplishment reading, but a completive reading without a grammatically specified result state. Thus, for Brisson, *sweep* verbs are activity verbs, their apparent accomplishment reading being the result of pragmatic inference.

2.2 Monadic *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs

   Both *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs can appear as intransitive verbs, as shown in (10) and (11) :

   (10)   a. John wrote for an hour.
          b.*John wrote in an hour.
   (11)   a. Jack swept for an hour.
          b. Jack swept in an hour.

According to Brisson, intransitive *write* verbs allow activity reading with no iteration, but do not allow accomplishment reading as shown in (10). Intransitive *sweep* verbs, in contrast, allow both activity reading and accomplishment-like reading as shown in (11). Brisson treats (11b) in the

same way as (7a).

2.3. Brisson's analysis of the objects of *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs

Brisson focuses on the difference in aspectual property between the objects of the two groups of verbs. The object of *write* verbs, like that of other accomplishments, functions as an identifier of one of the subevents of the event structure of the accomplishment verbs (see Grimshaw and Vikner (1993) for details). Thus, in terms of aspect it plays an important role. In contrast, the object of *sweep* verbs is not needed for the identification of the event structure of verbs. In this way the object argument of *write* verbs and that of *sweep* verbs are different. Brisson goes on to relate this difference to the difference of argumenthood pointed out by Grimshaw (1993).

According to Brisson's explanation, Grimshaw divides arguments of verbs into two classes. One class is called the content argument and the other the structure argument. The content argument is not linked to the semantic structure of the verb, but is only a part of the verb's semantic content which serves to distinguish verbs with the same semantic structure from each other. The contrast between the semantic structure and the semantic content is illustrated by using two verbs, *melt* and *freeze*. The meaning they share is the semantic structure which is represented as "x causes y to change state." The meaning which serves to distinguish these verbs constitutes the semantic content. The respective semantic contents of these verbs, namely, "turn from solid to liquid" and "turn from liquid to solid" differentiate their meanings. Although these transitive verbs do not have a content argument, their arguments being all structure arguments, activity verbs like *study* have one. For example, in "study English," the object *English* is a content argument. It adds information about the event expressed by the verb, but this information is not structurally necessary.

Based on Grismshaw's distinction, Brisson assumes that the object of *write* verbs is a structure argument and that of *sweep* verbs is a content argument. The object of *write* verbs is, therefore, necessary for identifying the event structure of the verbs, whereas the object of *sweep* verbs is not.

It is important to note that because the object of *sweep* verbs is a content argument and not required for event structure identification, it need not be expressed syntactically and can be deleted if an appropriate condition is fulfilled.[7] Taking these differences into consideration, Brisson analyses the monadic forms of *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs quite differently. Usually, both are regarded as object deletion verbs. But the object of *write* verbs is syntactically obligatory because it is a structure argument and is linked to the event structure of the verbs. Therefore, according to Brisson's theory, it can never be deleted or omitted. Consequently, the monadic form of *write* verbs is not regarded as the result of object deletion. On the other hand, because the object of *sweep* verbs is a content argument and not linked to the event structure of the verbs, it can be deleted. Brisson proposes the following two licensing conditions on object deletion.

(12) grammatical licensing condition : structure arguments must be expressed.

(13) contextual licensing condition : the unexpressed object must be understood.

The object of transitive *sweep* verbs need not satisfy the condition (12), so that their objects or content arguments can be omitted, if the condition

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[7] Hovav and Levin (1998) makes a similar analysis of *sweep* verbs. In fact, their analysis is based on both Grimshaw's idea and Brisson's. Grimshaw's structure and content argument correspond to their structure and constant participant, respectively. The structure participant is licensed by the event structure template and the constant, while the constant participant by the constant alone. These two types of participants are governed by the distinct conditions on syntactic realization. The structure participant must be realized syntactically, whereas the content participant need not. However, the content of a constant participant must be recoverable, whether the constant participant is syntactically expressed or not. It may be unexpressed when a certain contextual condition is met. With respect to *sweep* verbs, their second participant, which corresponds to the object participant, is a constant participant and therefore is not required for event structure identification. So, in principle, it can be dispensed with syntactically.

(13) is met. Accordingly, *sweep* verbs are always transitive and their intransitive form is only a surface variant of the transitive form. On the other hand, the object of transitive *write* verbs is a structure argument and therefore it must satisfy the condition (12). Hence, the impossibility of object deletion. This means that intransitive *write* verbs are pure intransitive verbs.[8] They are supposed to exist independently in the lexicon with no alternation relation to their transitive counterparts.[9]

3. Content and structure arguments and object deletion

To repeat Brisson's idea, content arguments are not linked to the event structure of the verb and thus they are in principle susceptible of object deletion, while structural arguments are linked to the verb's event structure and accordingly they are never allowed to be deleted.

The idea of structure arguments blocking deletion is not unique and can be found elsewhere. Tenny (1994) considers the following two groups of verbs whose direct internal argument functions as a measuring argument.

(14) a. *break* verbs : break, crack, shatter, smash, split, tear,···
      b. *bend* verbs : bend, crumble, fold, stretch, wrinkle,···

Tenny states that "Verbs of change of state are verbs which *require* a measuring argument, that is, verbs which *enforce* a delimiting change of state, or impart an endstate entailment on the interpretation. These verbs do not have the option of being used without a measuring argument" (Tenny 1994 : 46)). The verbs in (14) are all accomplishment verbs and so

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[8] Brisson claims that there are cases where the understood object is not necessary for intransitive *write* verbs. But we are not sure how she accounts for the cases in which certain objects are implied. See the discussion in section 7.

[9] These statements are based on Brisson's following remarks. "I believe that we must conclude that the unspecified object alternation of this verb [*write*] is not an 'alternation' at all. Rather, there are two variants of the verb in the lexicon" (Brisson 1994 : 98).

their internal argument is a structure argument. However, Tenny differs from Brisson in that she allows the process of object deletion to affect other accomplishment verbs. For example, the transitive *eat* is supposed to change into its intransitive counterpart through the process of erasing its measuring argument. Brisson would not allow such an operation. But here we wonder if there is an independent motivation for prohibiting such a process. We now turn to consider this question.

4. Olsen's view of lexical aspect

Olsen proposes an analysis of lexical aspect in terms of privative semantic features. According to Olsen, four main classes of verbal lexical aspect, namely, state, activity, accomplishment and achievement can be characterized by three privative features "marked in the representation of a verb's semantics : [+dynamic], [+durative], and [+telic]" (Olsen 1994 : 25). State, for instance, is specified only as [+durative], the remaining two features left unspecified. This marked semantic feature [+durative] does not determine the verb's aspectual interpretation, but rather limits it. It is assumed that the plus value of the marked semantic feature never changes. Therefore, [+durative] is constant and state is always durative. Default interpretation of state is equivalent to the fully specified version, [+durative], [−dynamic], and [−telic] in an equipollent analysis. One advantage of a privative analysis over an equipollent analysis is that the former can explain aspectual change more easily. It is often pointed out that state verbs can appear in certain constructions which force dynamic interpretation. Observe the following examples from Olsen.

(15) a. What the garbage did was stink.
      b. The recent assault forced Ted to know where Jae was at all
         times.
      c. Elis was deliberately silent.

In these cases, one of the unspecified features of state, that is, [dynamic], is positively specified, resulting in a reading associated with activity or

change. In an equipollent analysis, in which every semantic feature is specified as either plus or minus, it is rather hard to explain why and how a minus value may be changed into a plus value and a plus value may never be changed into a minus value.

Thus, Olsen's hypothesis prohibits aspectual change which results in a change of value of a marked feature, because a marked aspectual feature must remain constant. It serves to put a severe restriction on possible aspectual change, allowing only the addition of the plus value of an unmarked feature.

Now we return to the question raised in the last part of section 3. When we see Brisson's analysis of *write* verbs in light of Olsen's hypothesis, we realize that the result happens to obey that hypothesis. If we tried to relate transitive *write* verbs and intransitive *write* verbs via object deletion just like *sweep* verbs, it would be in conflict with Olsen's hypothesis, because the marked feature [+telic] would change to [−telic].[10] Consequently, Brisson's idea of excluding *write* verbs from object deletion verbs may find a support from Olsen's hypothesis. We will show, however, that Brisson has gone too far in that she has rejected the alternation relation between transitive *write* verbs and intransitive counterparts completely.

5. Two types of object deletion

Fillmore (1986) points out that there are two types of object deletion. One involves indefinite objects. We will call it indefinite object deletion.[11] The other involves definite objects and this we will call definite object deletion. In the case of indefinite object deletion, an understood object is ei-

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[10] Generally, aspectual change, often called aspectual type-shifting, occurs when a verb appears with certain other constituents or in certain pragmatic contexts (see, for example, Olsen (1994)). That is, aspectual change is usually associated with the addition of constituents to a verb. Though object deletion might be somewhat peculiar in that the subtraction is involved, we treat it as a case of aspectual change.

[11] Note that our object deletion is only a subpart of Fillmore's null complements which, as the name suggests, cover wider range of deletion.

ther very general as in (16a) or is semantically specialized as in (16b).

(16) a. When my tongue was paralyzed I couldn't eat or drink.
     b. We've already eaten.

In (16a) the understood object is *stuff* and in (16b) it is *a meal*, according to Fillmore.[12] We believe that *sweep* verbs Brisson deals with fall under indefinite object deletion. As regards the contextual licensing condition for *sweep* verbs, Brisson states that it "requires that an unexpressed object must be somehow understood in the context in which the sentence is uttered. This condition will be met if the class of possible objects for the verb is both limited enough and common enough that there's not much chance of misunderstanding if the object is left out" (Brisson 1994 : 97). As for *sweep* verbs she states that "most of the verbs in the *sweep* group are verbs of cleaning or agriculture. Verbs of this type all meet the contextual condition because the job of keeping one's household clean is common to nearly everyone. So the class of objects is common enough. It is also limited enough, because there is some prototypical object associated with these verbs : one sweeps the floor, plows a field, mows the lawn" (*ibid.*).[13] We understand this characterization to be essentially equivalent to that of the indefinite and specific object deletion discussed in Lehrer (1970) and Fillmore (1986).

In the case of definite deletion, deleted object "must be retrieved from

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[12] Fillmore uses the word *stuff* in place of *something*. According to Lehrer (1970), "eat something" and "drink something" may not be equivalent to "eat" and "drink," the former being able to imply *physical objects* and *liquid,* respectively, which correspond to the selectional restriction of the verbs. The simple *eat* and *drink* imply more specific objects, namely, *food* or *a meal* and *beverage*, respectively. Though they are general in meaning, they are nonetheless specific. Here, we are going to adhere to Lehrer's analysis and assume the deleted objects of *eat* and *drink* to be specific.

[13] It is not clear whether this licensing condition is powerful and restrictive enough to be able to do without any lexical specification of the deletable objects and recover the deleted object correctly. We will show in section 6 that there are examples which the licensing condition appears to fail to handle.

something *given* in the context" (Fillmore 1986 : 96)). Observe the follow-
ing example from Lehrer (1970).

(17) I tried to learn to play the piano but I can't play well yet.

In (17), the understood object is "the piano" which is present in the preced-
ing coordinated clause.

6. Two types of object deletion and aspectual change

Among the two types of object deletion, definite object deletion, as
exemplified in (17), does not affect the verb's lexical aspect. (18) is a further
example of this type.

(18) John didn't want to continue the bridge game, but Henry wanted to
continue. (Lehrer (1970))

Here, *continue* is interpreted as equivalent to *continue the bridge game* and
so there is no change in aspectual property. In contrast, in the case of in-
definite deletion, intransitive forms can be accompanied by a change of
the marked feature of the lexical aspect of the corresponding transitive
forms. As for *sweep* verbs, we can show that Brisson's analysis is con-
forming to Olsen's hypothesis. Transitive *sweep* verbs with both atelic and
telic readings become intransitive with the same range of readings through
Brisson's version of object deletion. So there is no aspectual change (for
the verb *eat* see the discussion in section 8). Furthermore, with respect to
the alternation of atelic and telic readings, Brisson assumes the atelic
reading of *sweep* verbs is basic and the telic reading is obtained by prag-
matic inference, so the relevant aspectual change is from atelic to telic
and is in accord with Olsen's hypothesis. On the other hand, with *write*
verbs, transitive forms are telic and intransitive forms atelic. Therefore,
as we have already pointed out in section 4, if we applied to these verbs
the particular formulation of object deletion proposed by Brisson for
sweep verbs, it would be incompatible with Olsen's hypothesis, because

object deletion would cause aspectual change from telic to atelic. Thus, Brisson's move to bar *write* verbs from undergoing object deletion happens to be in harmony with Olsen's hypothesis, although in fact her move is problematical, as will be shown in the following section.

7. Problems with Brisson's analysis

There are several problems with Brisson's analysis. We will take them up one by one.

The first problem to be presented might not be a real problem for Brisson. We have transitive activity verbs which do not allow their object to be deleted, for example, *Mark should comb* **(his hair)*.[14] It may be a counterexample to Brisson's analysis, because the auxiliary condition associated with Brisson's contextual licensing condition, that is, the deletable object must be both common enough and limited enough, can't seem to deal with it successfully. The object *his hair* seems to be common and limited enough in relation to the verb *comb*, yet it can't be deleted. However, it would be easy for Brisson to amend her condition so that it will be able to explain such cases.

The second problem concerns the possibility of definite object deletion with some accomplishment verbs. The following examples of definite object deletion are given by Fillmore (1986) which contain accomplishment verbs.

(19) a. They accepted my offer.
　　 b. They accepted.
(20) a. They closed the shop early.
　　 b. They closed early.
(21) a. She opened the shop early.
　　 b. She opened early.

We can add *build* and *wash* as further examples of accomplishment verbs

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[14] This example is cited from Rice (1988).

which allow definite object deletion (see Lehrer (1970)). It might not be fair to Brisson to use these examples as posing a problem for her analysis, because, as we have shown above, she seems to be dealing with indefinite object deletion only.[15] Nonetheless, since Brisson claims that the object of accomplishment verbs must be syntactically expressed, a violation will occur of the grammatical licensing condition if the object is unexpressed, unless definite object deletion is taken as overruling the effect of the grammatical licensing condition. These examples therefore may offer a problem to Brisson. It is obvious that we cannot resort to the split hypothesis which Brisson uses for *write* verbs, where the intransitive form is treated as completely independent of and distinct from the transitive form, because these are cases of definite deletion and in a sense examples of a true object deletion, an intransitive form directly related to a transitive form.

The third problem to be noted is related to the similarity of behavior between monadic *sweep* verbs and *write* verbs. Specifically, the contextual condition would be equally applicable to *write* verbs if we supposed them to undergo object deletion contra Brisson. Each of *write* verbs can imply specific objects, just like *sweep* verbs. In fact, according to Lehrer's classification, seven of the *write* verbs, namely *bake, draw, drink, paint, type, eat, write* and three of the *sweep* verbs, *plow, read,* and *pack* belong to either type I or type II, both types being basically similar because understood objects are indefinite and specific. Brisson speculates that *write* verbs, though usually considered to be object deletion verbs, may not always require the object to be present in their representation. Brisson says that "It is possible to write in the sand, for example, or write on the

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[15] In Hovav and Levin's account of *wipe* and *rub*, which they regard as members of *sweep* verbs, it appears that the distinction between indefinite deletion and definite deletion is blurred when they state that because these verbs are not associated with a particular surface unlike *sweep*, "an intransitive use is possible only if there is sufficient context available that the relevant surface can be determined" (Hovav and Levin (1998 : 115)). Though judgement is hard to make only from this statement, it seems that *wipe* and *rub* are likely to be cases of definite deletion.

blackboard, in which case one doesn't write 'something' " (Brisson 1994 :
99). But as Lehrer points out, the intransitive verb *write* usually implies
specific objects, namely, words, letters, or sentences.[16] Thus, Brisson ap-
pears to fail to take note of this common property exhibited by these two
groups of verbs when she goes so far as to dispense with object deletion
analysis of intransitive *write* verbs. Brisson must explain why intransitive
write verbs and intransitive *sweep* verbs are similar in that they can imply
semantically specialized objects. One possible explanation for this problem
will be given by positing intransitive counterparts of both groups of tran-
sitive verbs in the lexicon with deletable objects specified for each of
them, following Lehrer's analysis. The effect of object deletion is reflected
in the specification of deletable objects in the lexical entry of intransitive
forms. But we are faced with one dilemma, which is that by treating
intrasitive *write* verbs as related to their transitive counterparts through
object deletion, we have difficulties in avoiding the aspectual change from
telic to atelic. Applying object deletion analysis to *write* verbs means that
transitive forms are basic, and consequently the lexical aspect of transi-
tive forms is naturally taken as basic. It will leave us with two alterna-
tive moves to make. One is to stick to Olsen's hypothesis, but this would
require us to expel object deletion from the realm of aspectual change.[17] It
is not clear whether it is possible to do so under our assumption about ob-
ject deletion. The second is to decide that Olsen's hypothesis is in the
wrong, taking the aspectual change associated with the alternation of *write*
verbs as a counterexample. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to
choose from these two alternatives, so we must leave the problem open.[18]

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[16] Other members of the *write* verbs behave similarly according to Lehrer.
[17] One might do this by limiting aspectual change to the case in which a sin-
gle lexical item is involved, assuming that separate lexical items in the lexi-
con are irrelevant to aspectual change. On this assumption, the verb *run in
John ran* and that in *John ran to the station* are the same single verb,
whereas the transitive form and the inransitive form of *write* and *sweep*
verbs are not, because they are listed separately in the lexicon. But, we will
need to have some independent principle which will guide us in making such
a distinction.
[18] We are going to give one more case which might disfavor Olsen's hypothe-

The fourth problem is that it is not clear how *write* verbs can imply objects at all when they have no structural nor content arguments, if the implication of an object depends solely on the presence of such an argument at some level of representation, which is the case with *sweep* verbs. Maybe Brisson has some way to recover deleted objects in her mind, but that may lead to another problem. It concerns the necessity for Brisson to use content arguments to explain the understood objects of *sweep* verbs. If the understood objects of intransitive *write* verbs, whose property is very similar to that of intransitive *sweep* verbs, can be recovered somehow without postulating implicit arguments, it may well be questioned whether content arguments are necessary for intransitive *sweep* verbs at all.

8. Treatment of the intransitive *eat* — a proposal

Brisson finds the aspectual property of the intransitive *eat* troublesome to her analysis. She notes that *eat*, a member of intransitive *write* verbs, permits both activity and accomplishment readings and moreover, intransitive *eat* strongly implies a telic or accomplishment reading in the unmarked case. Rice (1988) also notes that the default reading of the sentence *John ate* is *John ate a meal*, which suggests that the default reading of the intransitive *eat* is an accomplishment reading.[19] In order to deal with this exceptional behavior of *eat*, Brisson proposes to consider these two uses of *eat* separately. If we ignore the unmarkedness of an accomplishment reading for the moment and see the ambiguity or vagueness of the intransitive *eat* in light of Olsen's theory, we find that this is the result of an expected aspectual change in so far as we can assume that the verb is an activity verb like other *write* verbs. On this assumption, it is just that unmarked feature [telic] of the verb becomes prominent, which

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sis in section 9.

[19] On the other hand, Tenny (1994) claims that the intransitive *eat* is an activity verb, while at the same time she states that the implied object of the verb is *a meal*. If the implied object is *a meal*, then we expect an accomplishment reading, but Tenny rejects the sentence *Bill ate in 10 minutes* as unacceptable. It is not clear why such an incompatibility is possible. Anyway, there seem to be dialectal variations as to which of the two readings is favored.

is also the case with *sweep* verbs which are basically activity verbs, but allow an accomplishment-like or telic reading as well.[20] If we suppose the intransitive *eat* to be an activity verb and treat an accomplishment reading as a result of aspectual change, we must explain why an accomplishment reading is dominant. We can do this by letting pragmatic inference decide the interpretation. Among the two kinds of deletable objects (see Lehrer (1970) and Onozuka (1997)), in case a delimiting object, *a meal,* is inferred, we get an accomplishment reading, which is dominant, at least for Brisson and Rice.[21] Otherwise, when a non-delimiting object, *food* is inferred, it gives an activity reading. Then, probably, it is not necessary to set up two distinct *eat*'s.

9. The validity of Olsen's hypothesis

Olsen hypothesizes that the marked feature will never change its plus value. Although this holds true in general, there are aspectual changes which seem to contradict her hypothesis. One such case has already been discussed in section 7 with respect to the alternation of *write* verbs. Here we give one more case. According to Smith (1997 : 115), when an aspectual clash occurs in a sentence between an accomplishment verb and a durative adverbial, the result is an atelic interpretation which is compatible with the adverbial.

(22) a. Jerry wrote a report for two hours.
      b. Jerry did 2 hours of report-writing.

(22a) is an example of such a clash and (22b) represents the atelic interpretation of (22a). This means that the feature [+telic] can change into

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[20] Note that with respect to *sweep* verbs, the aspectual change is actually a change from an atelic situation to a telic situation, not one from activity to accomplishment, according to Brisson's distinction.

[21] Here we follow Lehrer's analysis and assume that the deletable objects of the verb *eat* are specified in the lexicon. This assumption might be unnecessary if Brisson's contextual licensing condition could recover the deleted object properly.

[−telic]. We are not certain how natural examples such as (22a) are, but if such an interpretation is possible at all, it might be said that Olsen's hypothesis is too strong. Thus we must draw a conclusion that its validity is yet to be proved.

10. Conclusion

Although the proposal itself is very intriguing, we have to conclude that we cannot find in Brisson's argument any truly convincing reason for rejecting object deletion analysis for *write* verbs. Given the similarity of the property of the deletable objects between *write* verbs and *sweep* verbs, Brisson's differentiation of these two groups of verbs based on the contrast between content arguments and structure arguments has been shown to be problematical in several respects. We believe Rice (1988) is quite right in saying that "Omitted objects are still objects, which is to say that they are still present at some level of organization, perhaps not at a lexical or syntactic level, but certainly at a conceptual one. Most importantly, the object does not go away when it is omitted" (Rice 1988 : 203). Rice also points out that the possibility of object deletion is affected by various factors and discusses several generalizations which are not bound to particular verbs.[22] As for what Brisson has revealed about *sweep* verbs, it might constitute an additional generalization about indefinite object de-

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[22] For example, there is a generalization that verbs with a basic meaning or a neutral meaning tends to allow object deletion as shown in (i) and (ii).

(i)a. Celia ate.
   b.*Celia nibbled/chewed/devoured/gobbled.
(ii)a. Hemingway drank.
   b.*Hemingway sipped/guzzled.

We believe it is safe to say that the cases Rice discusses are examples of indefinite object deletion.

By the way, it is interesting to note that it seems to be possible to restate this observation by Rice in Brisson's terms : namely, verbs with the least semantic content among those verbs containing the same semantic structure tends to allow object deletion, although Brisson herself would not accept such a statement because *eat* and *drink* are accomplishment verbs and should not allow object deletion.

letion based on a verb's aspectual property. The generalization is that transitive verbs expressing activity tend to allow indefinite object deletion.[23] Therefore, putting aside her formulation of object deletion, we agree with Brisson that the aspectual property of *sweep* verbs, namely their status as activity verbs, has some relevance to object deletion, but we disagree with her idea of excluding *write* verbs from the domain of object deletion.

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[23] We are not certain if we can also say that transitive verbs expressing accomplishment tend to disallow object deletion, partly due to the existence of *write* verbs and partly due to Tenny's observation on certain accomplishment verbs (see section 3).

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