

A Phase-Based Approach to Adjuncts

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The aim of this presentation is to demonstrate that adjuncts are visible in syntax unlike the assumption in Chomsky (2004). During the development of generative grammar, the nature of the adjuncts has been at the center of attention. Particularly, a number of researchers attempt to account for their invisibility in syntax. One of the empirical facts for their invisibility can be observed in (1).

- (1) a. *Who_i did John go home [before he talked to *t_i*]?
b. *Who_i did John go home [after he talked to *t_i*]?
c. *Who_i did John fall asleep [while he was talking to *t_i*]?

(Truswell (2011: 176))

As can be seen in (1), extraction from adjunct clauses is impossible, which is known as an adjunct island (Ross (1967)). The adjunct island effect is also observed from prepositional adjuncts.

- (2) a. *The break_i was met [after *t_i*].
b. *Which break_i did they meet [after *t_i*]?

(Bode (2020: 64))

In order to capture these cases of invisibility, Chomsky (2004) puts forth the notion of pair-Merge. Crucially, this operation renders syntactic objects invisible in syntax, and they are metaphorically argued to be on a “separate plane.” Since adjuncts need to be interpreted at the interfaces, they must come back to the “primary plane” at the timing of the Transfer. Hence, Chomsky (2004) proposes the operation SIMPL, which converts an ordered pair $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$ to a simple unordered set $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ at the timing of the Transfer.

However, there is some empirical evidence showing the visibility of adjuncts. Truswell (2011) argues that there are cases where extraction from adjunct clauses is not always impossible, as we can see in (3).

- (3) a. What_i did you come round [to work on *t_i*]?
b. Who_i did John get upset [after talking to *t_i*]?
c. What_i did John come back [thinking about *t_i*]?

(Truswell (2011: 129))

If they are on a “separate plane,” internal Merge cannot be applied to *wh*-adjuncts in (4), as pointed out by Oseki (2015) and Otsuka (2017).

- (4) {How/When/Where_[uQ]} do you fix it {~~how/when/where~~_[uQ]}?

Moreover, the pair-Merged analysis for adjuncts cannot account for the existence of overt inflections on adjectives in some languages (e.g. Baker (2008, 2011)).

Therefore, we argue that unlike Chomsky’s assumption, pair-Merged adjuncts are syntactically visible, and provide an explanation for the peculiar behavior of adjuncts with a phase-based analysis. In so doing, we claim that the notions of the “separate plane” and the

operation SIMPL are dispensable, which leads to empirically and theoretically desirable consequences.

References

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