

Event Structure, Phrase Structure, and A'-Locality

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Two trends have emerged over the past 40 years of locality theory: locality effects have been assigned to increasingly general classes, and properties of these classes have been derived from increasingly fundamental properties of the syntactic structure-building component. For example, the Condition on Extraction Domain (Huang 1982) unified subject and adjunct island effects, among others, and related them to the notion of proper government. Moving further in this direction, Multiple Spell Out theories (Uriagereka 1999, among others) seek to derive core CED effects from properties of Merge, the basic structure-building operation in minimalist grammars.

Although conceptually attractive, these approaches struggle to account for counterexamples to the basic empirical generalisations that subjects and adjuncts are islands. Beyond the basic fact of the existence of such counterexamples, which is problematic in itself, we also find variation within and between languages as to the distribution of these cases. (Stepanov 2007) shows that many languages such as Russian allow extraction from subjects, but not adjuncts:

- (1) a. S kem by ty xotel čtoby [govorit' ___] bylo by odno udovol'stvie?
with whom subj you wanted that-subj to-speak were subj one pleasure
“With whom would you want that [to speak ___] were sheer pleasure?” (Stepanov 2007:91)
- b. ??Komu Ivan ušol [ne posvoniv ___]?
Who.DAT John left not call.ADV
“Who did John leave [without calling ___]?”

Conversely, extraction from subjects is highly restricted in English, while extraction from adjuncts is relatively free:

- (2) a. *What did [whistling ___] drive Mary crazy?
b. What did John drive Mary crazy [whistling ___]?

This argues in favour of abandoning the pursuit of a unified approach to CED effects tied to invariant properties of syntactic structure. Instead, I propose to explore the possibility of a nonunified, interface-based approach to locality effects. Concentrating on the English data, I propose a theory based on the following condition:

- (3) **The Single Event Condition:** A wh-dependency is legitimate only if the minimal constituent containing the head and foot of the chain describes a single event.

In conjunction with a particular definition of *single event*, which I show to be irreducibly nonsyntactic, this condition predicts a wide variety of surprising patterns concerning the distribution and interpretation of legitimate cases of extraction out of adjuncts (and, time permitting, complements), making reference to a variety of syntactic and/or semantic factors such as aspectual class, agentivity, presupposition, and finiteness.

References

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