Syntax Seminar (BBN-ANG-252): Handout 4

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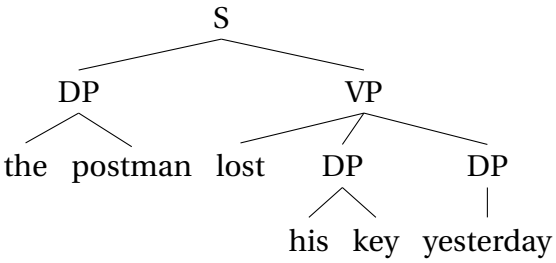
This is a summary of BESE: Ch. 3.1.

1 Recap

- Rewrite rules: how structures of various kinds decompose into their constituent parts
- The head provides the label for the phrase.
- Distinction between arguments (external argument vs. internal argument (=complement)) and adjuncts

  But: the way we have been representing complements and adjuncts in the trees does not reflect the differences between them. Also, what is the position of the external argument?

(1)



↛ we need a more elaborated structure for (1)

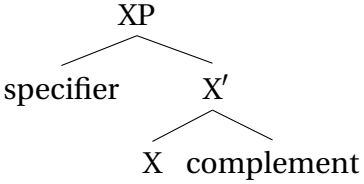
2 X-bar theory

- The **Projection Principle** requires that all lexical information (for category, subcategorisation, and theta-role assignment) must be syntactically represented – the **X-bar theory** provides the technical format in order to obey this.
- Rewrite rules:

(2) a. $X' \rightarrow X\,YP$ **complement rule**
b. $XP \rightarrow YP\,X'$ **specifier rule**
c. $X^n \rightarrow X^n, Y/YP$ **adjunction rule**

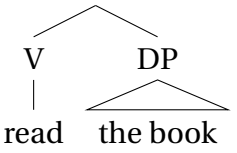
- Based on (2a,b) we can update the minimal structure of each phrase as in (3):

(3)



The head (X/X^0) projects its categorial status to the X' (pronounced: X-bar) and ultimately to the XP (the maximal projection).

- The immediate constituents of X′ are the head X and its complement (2a).
- In English, the complement follows the head (this is why English is called a *head-initial* language; in Hungarian, for example, many phrases are *head-final*).

(4)


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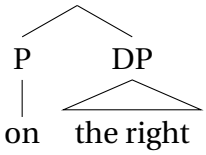

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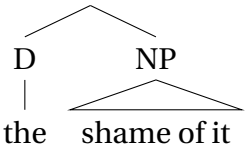

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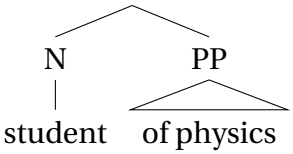
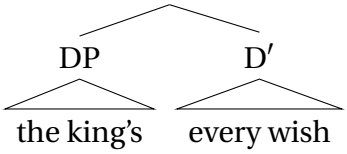


- The rule in (2b) introduces a structural position called the *specifier*: it is a phrase and it precedes the X′. The specifier and X′ are the immediate constituents of XP.

  Examples of specifiers: possessors in the DP (8), theme arguments of verbs (9)

(8)


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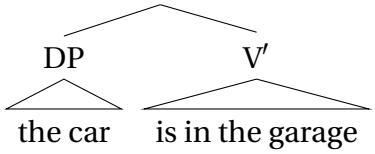
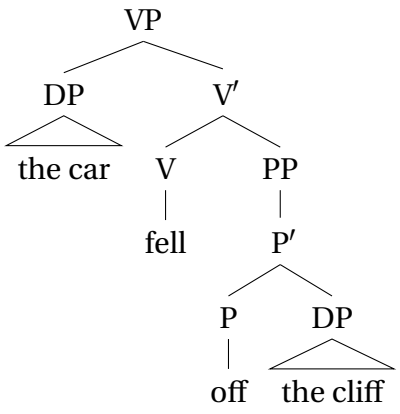


  NB: We will talk more about other types of verb arguments next week

- The lexical entry of *fall* is given in (10); (11) provides an illustrative example.

(10) *fall*
category: [−F, −N, +V]
θ-grid: <theme, path>
subcat: [prepositional]

(11)


✍ Let's draw the trees for (12):

(12) a. The boy is in the classroom.
b. The ball dropped.

- How are theta-roles related to syntactic positions?

(13) **the Uniform Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH)**
A θ-role Þ is assigned in the same structural configuration in all structures in which it is present.

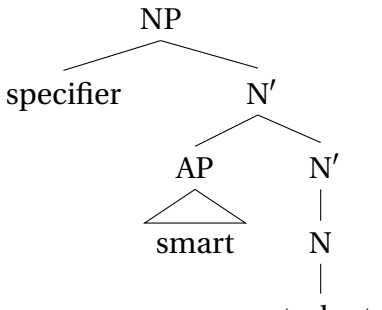
⇝ the theme argument is always assigned to the specifier of the verb phrase

- The adjunction rule in (2c) states that it is possible to adjoin to X^n, i.e., to XP, X′ or X^0. The adjunct may be a word (Y) or a phrase (YP). The comma indicates that the linear order of X^n and the adjunct is not fixed.

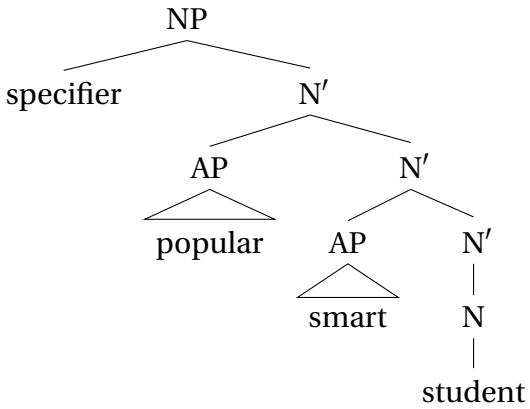
  NB: while adding arguments always raises the bar up one notch, adjunction does not raise the bar level of the projection!

  1. Adjunction to X^0: compounds, e.g., *winter coat*
  2. Adjunction to X′: adjectives modifying a noun (14); adjunction is recursive (15).
     Note: Noun phrases may also contain PP-adjuncts; we will study them later.

(14)

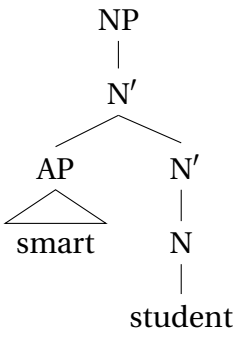


(15)

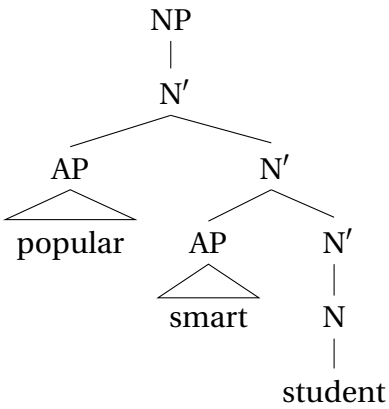


A technical note: You don't necessarily need to have the word 'specifier', if the specifier position is not filled; the trees below are identical to (14) and (15).
What is important is to keep the two levels, N′ and NP.

(16)



(17)



More examples of adjunction to X′:

(18) a. John is *very* cold.
b. My professor lives *right* in the middle of nowhere.

✍ Draw the trees for (18).

3. Adjunction to XP: relative clauses (see textbook; to be covered later in this course)

- How about adjuncts to verb phrases?

  In the verb phrase, we find one very important type of adjunction to X^0, which will be covered in HO5. Adjunction to the X′ and XP-levels is also possible and we will study it later in this course.

3 Homework

- Find the adjuncts and put them in square brackets:

  (19) a. The little boy gave a nice drawing to his mother for her birthday.
  b. The teacher wanted to know whether the new students would know what to do when they arrive.
  c. Why do you ask me whether I want to buy a new computer next year?
  d. The new guest professor of mathematics will probably arrive at the recently renovated railway station at 2:15.
  e. How can you decide whether a loaf of bread on the shelf is fresh or not?

- Determine arguments and adjuncts in (20). For arguments, determine theta roles and grammatical functions.

  (20) Yesterday the girl in a blue dress sent a nice postcard to the boy with glasses.

- Determine the argument/adjunct status of the PPs in (21) by applying the diagnostics discussed in HO3.

  (21) a. Mary stayed [in the bed].
  b. Mary slept [in the bed].

  Now consider (22). Can you come up with tests that help us determine the argument/adjunct status of the PPs in the noun phrases below?

  (22) a. the book [of poems]
  b. the book [with a red cover]

- Draw the trees for (23):

  (23) a. a big evil vicious dog
  b. the teacher of English
  c. John's destruction of the city
  d. the ball drop on the floor