

# The Phasehood Paradox of Passive/Unaccusative vPs and the Feature-Valuation-Sensitive Box System

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**Paradox** Chomsky (2000, 2008, 2021, 2024) argues that transitive/unergative v\*Ps are phases, but passive/unaccusative vPs are not. This allows the internal argument (IA) of a passive/unaccusative to move directly to SPEC-INFL, as in (1). If these vPs were phases, PIC/Transfer would force the IA through the vP phase edge, as in (2). However, since the phase edge counts as an A'-position, subsequent movement to SPEC-INFL would be improper A-A'-A movement like (3), where movement of *John* from the base position (an A-position) to SPEC-INFL (an A-position) via the CP phase edge (an A'-position) is illicit. These considerations suggest that the passive/unaccusative vP is not a phase. However, there is plenty of evidence to show that the passive/unaccusative vP is a phase. One evidence is that fronted *wh*-phrases in both transitives (4) and passives/unaccusatives (5, 6) must be reconstructed to the v\*P/vP edge (✓) to satisfy Principle C and variable binding (Legate 2003). These facts indicate that all verbal phrases function as landing sites for movement, and thus as phases.

- (1) [<sub>IP</sub> **IA**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub>]]]      (2) [<sub>IP</sub> **IA**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> **t'**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub>]]]      (3) \* [<sub>IP</sub> **John**<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>CP</sub> **t'**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub> [is intelligent]]]]  
 (4) [Which of the papers that he<sub>i</sub> gave Mary<sub>i</sub>] did every student<sub>i</sub> [<sub>v\*P</sub> ✓ ask her<sub>i</sub> to read    carefully]?  
 (5) [At which of the parties that he<sub>i</sub> invited Mary<sub>i</sub> to] was every man<sub>i</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> ✓ introduced to her<sub>i</sub>    \*]?  
 (6) [At which conference where he<sub>i</sub> mispronounced the invited speaker<sub>i</sub>'s name] did every organizer<sub>i</sub>'s embarrassment [<sub>vP</sub> ✓ escape her<sub>i</sub>    \*]?  
 (7) [what C-do [<sub>IP</sub> you [<sub>v\*P</sub> **what**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>RP</sub> like **t**<sub>i</sub>]]]]      (8) \* [<sub>IP</sub>    INFL ... [<sub>CP</sub> **John**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub> [is intelligent]]]]

**Resolution** To resolve this paradox, we refine Chomsky's (2024) Box System. Chomsky claims that elements Internally Merged (IM-ed) to a phase edge are "boxed" ("separated from the ongoing derivation"). A *wh*-object thus halts at the v\*P phase edge; its interpretation and externalization at the CP phase edge are derived not by successive-cyclic IM, but by "Access" from the C phase head, as in (7) (solid=IM; enclosure=boxing; dotted=Access; shading=externalization). This Box System explains the ban on improper movement (3) without the A/A' distinction: in (8), since *John* is "boxed" at the embedded CP phase edge, it cannot move to the matrix SPEC-INFL. Also, since the matrix INFL is not a phase head, it cannot access the boxed *John* for externalization at SPEC-INFL.

Refining Chomsky's Box System, we propose that boxing is sensitive to feature valuation (*Feature-valuation-sensitive Box System*): only elements without any unvalued features are boxed at the phase edge; an element carrying an unvalued feature "escapes" boxing even at the phase edge. This system follows naturally from the interface requirement prohibiting unvalued features: if an element carrying unvalued features, such as  $\phi$  or Case, were separated from the ongoing derivation by boxing, those features would remain unvalued, causing the derivation to crash. Thus, boxing must be restricted to elements that have already completed their valuation processes. We argue that all verbal phrases, v\*P and vP, are phases. The IA of a transitive/unergative is boxed at the v\*P phase edge, as in (9), and cannot undergo IM because the IA's Case is valued within v\*P/RP (Chomsky 2015). On the other hand, the Case of the IA of a passive/unaccusative remains unvalued within vP/RP due to the lack of  $\phi$ -feature and Case valuation; IA "escapes" boxing at the vP phase edge, as in (10), and can undergo IM.

- (9) ... [<sub>v\*P</sub> **IA**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>RP</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>R</sub> **t**<sub>i</sub>]]]      (10) ... [<sub>vP</sub> **IA**<sub>i</sub> [<sub>RP</sub> **R** **t**<sub>i</sub>]]

Thus, under our system, although the passive/unaccusative vP is a phase, the IA can undergo IM through the edge of the vP phase due to the lack of "boxing"; this resolves the apparent paradox concerning passive/unaccusative vPs.

**Selected references** Chomsky (2024) The Miracle Creed and SMT, in *A Cartesian Dream*, 17-39.

