

Chomsky's Box Theory and wh-movement

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Chomsky's (2024) *Miracle Creed* paper proclaims another revolutionary move in syntactic theory: successive cyclic movement of α disappears in favor of Access (establishing scope of α) and Externalization (establishing the position for the pronunciation of α). We explore elements of this new minimalist mechanics in long-distance relations that invite alternative analyses. We pay close attention to Condition A and Condition C reconstruction that challenges Chomsky's newest proposals.

The 'box theory' of Chomsky (2024) eliminates successive-cyclic Internal Merge: a constituent that has been moved (IM-ed) is placed in a 'box' and remains inactive for the remainder of the derivation, yet its terms (subconstituents) can be 'accessed for instructions' from outside (Chomsky 2024:13). Long wh-movement is derived as (1):

[_{CP} Who [_{CQ} do] you think [_{CP} that John [_{VP} ec₂ saw ec₁]]]

Ec₁ marks the thematic position of *who* moved locally to [_{spec},vP], marked ec₂. Since IM has been involved, *who* is put in a 'box' and inaccessible to either EM or another step of IM. The derivation continues until matrix C_Q accesses the boxed *who*, which gets externalized in [_{spec}, CP] for the benefit of interpretation at interface levels (with ec₂ as input).

The aspect of locality of Externalization and Access calls for clarification in the context of robust research on dependencies which cross multiple CPs (Chomsky 1981, 1986, 1995, 2001, 2013; Lasnik and Saito 1984; Rizzi 1990; Cinque 1991; Manzini 1992):

(1) [_{CP} who does John say [_{CP} you think [_{CP} that he ec₂ saw ec₁]]]

Ex. (2) raises stakes on accessing the 'box' at phase level and Externalization, which now spans multiple derivational phases. How should the access to the 'box' be treated if it: (a) holds long distance and (b) observes conditions regulating movement (Subjacency, PIC)? Are Externalization and Access a pseudo-movement (IM) in disguise? Pseudo-movement, as it creates no copies in NS.

But wh-reconstruction requires intermediate copies:

(3) [_{CP} [which picture of himself_{1/2}] did John₁ say [_{CP} # Peter₂ [_{VP} * sold ~~which picture of himself~~_{1/2} yesterday]]]

Ex. (3) has two interpretations, with either *John* or *Peter* anteceding *himself*. Relevant reconstruction sites are indicated in (3): the thematic position of the wh-phrase in the embedded clause, the position marked *, where it is IM-ed in the box theory ([_{spec},vP) and the position marked # in [_{spec},CP] of the embedded clause. English is sensitive to the Specified Subject Condition (Chomsky 1981), so for the interpretation *himself_i*, the anaphor is licensed in [_{spec}, CP], marked #, a position which does not exist in Chomsky (2024). Furthermore, Condition C reconstruction require intermediate copies, (Fox 1999):

(4) [[which of the papers that he₁ wrote for Ms Brown₂] did every student₁ [_{VP} # get her₂
[PRO₂ to *grade **]]]

Ex. (4) illustrates a ‘reconstruction trap’; the only position in which a wh-copy satisfies both Condition C and variable binding is [spec,vP] marked #, which does not exist. This position is created by successive-cyclic IM, a concept that has now been abandoned.

The parsimonious theory outlined in Chomsky (2024) raises many questions on phenomena that were previously explained through successive cyclic movement. The areas of Condition A and Condition C reconstruction are particularly challenging, as multiple copies have provided reconstruction sites.

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