

Syntax problem set 3

24.900 — Introduction to linguistics

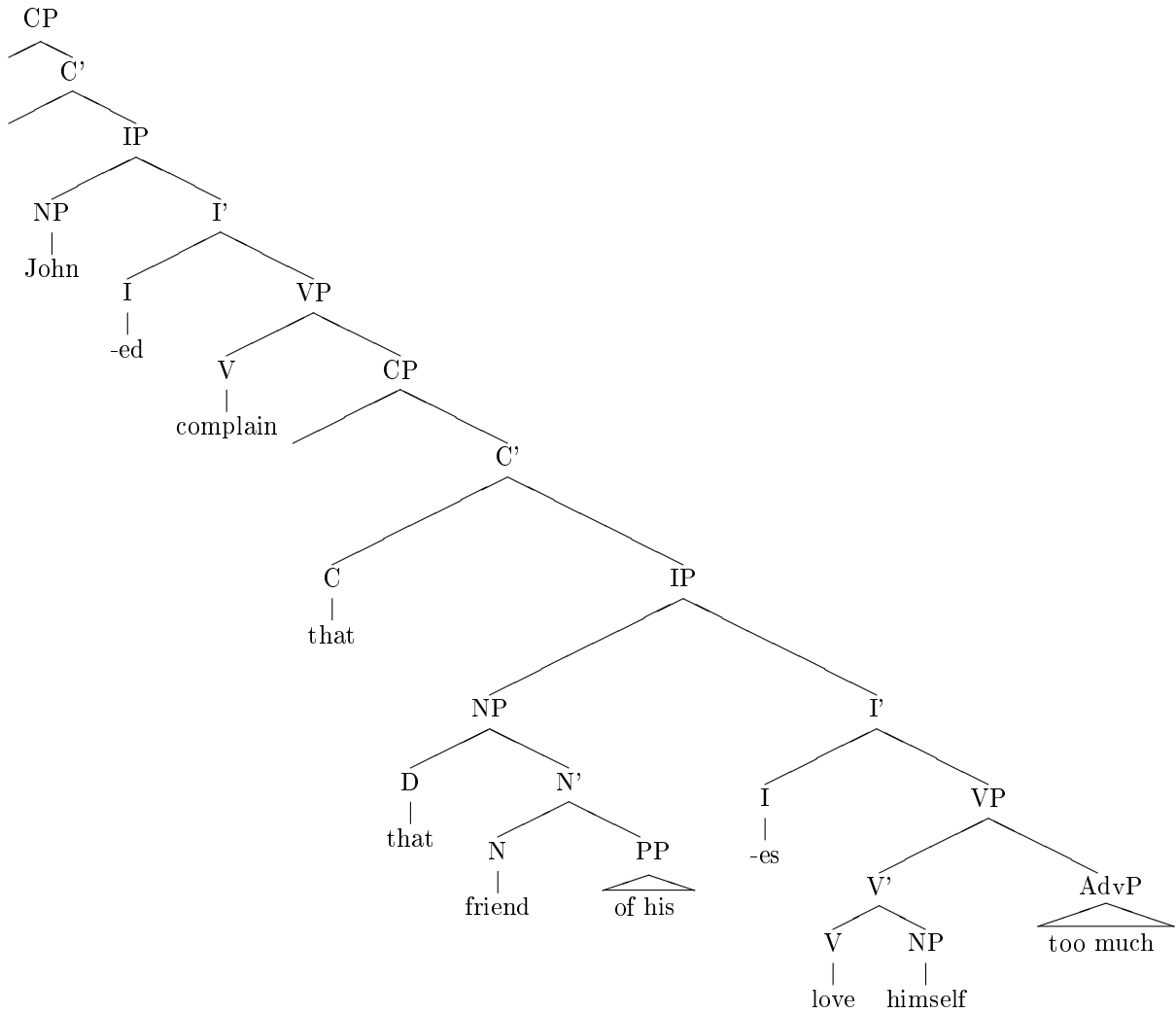
March 7, 2005

1 C-command and binding

Draw full trees for each of the following sentences and answer the questions that accompany them. Once again, you don't need to be punctilious about X-bar, but indicate all the structure that is necessary to show the complement vs. adjunct distinction and all c-command relations that are relevant to answer the questions.

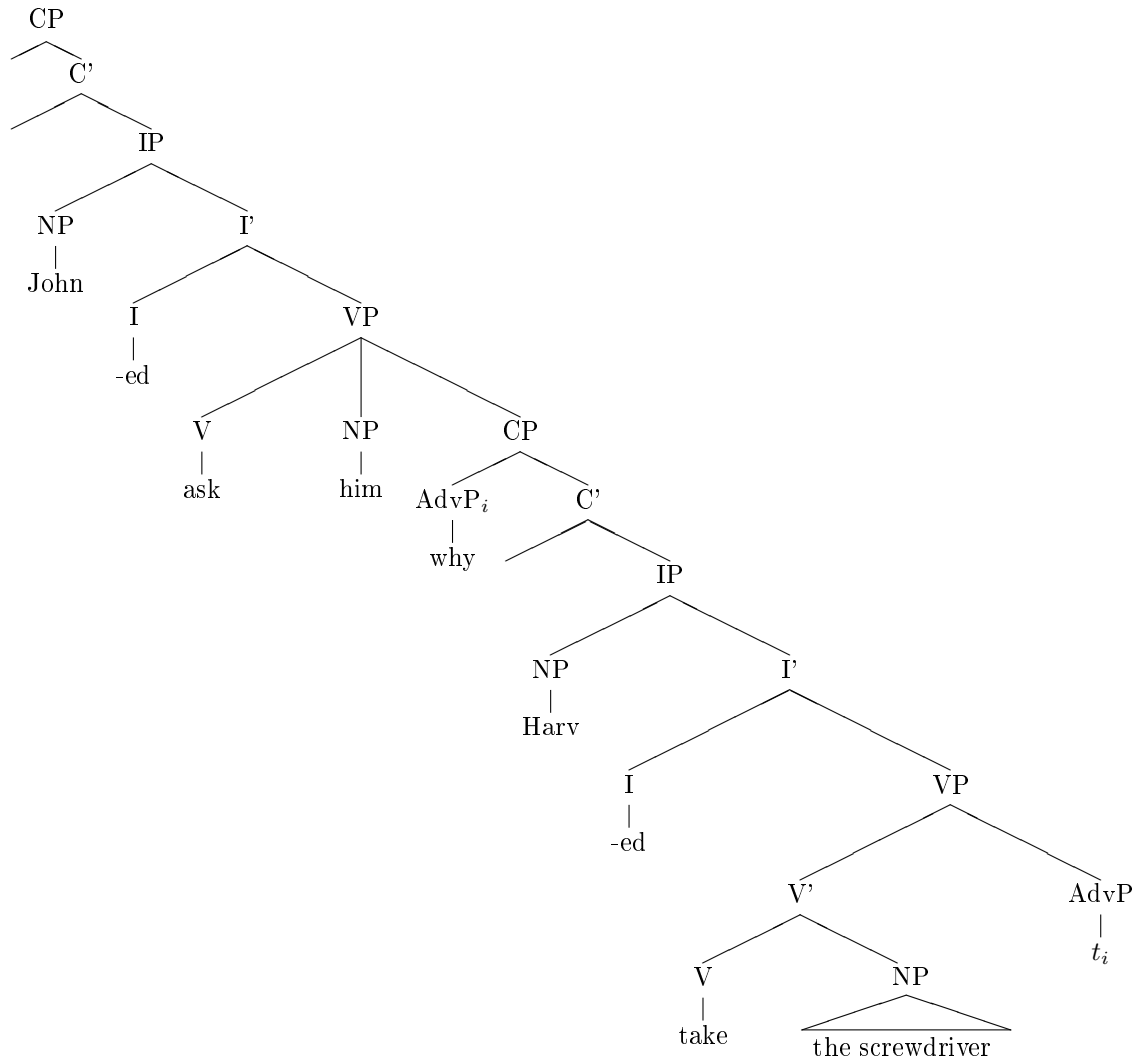
- John_{*i*} complained that [that friend of his_{*j*}]_{*k*} loves himself_{*k,*i,*j*} too much.¹

¹I.e., *j* is the index for *his*, and *k* is the index for the whole noun phrase *that friend of his*.



- For each of *John*, *his* and *that friend of his*, say whether it c-commands *himself*.
John and *that friend of his* c-command *himself*; *his* doesn't.
- Why is it not possible for *himself* to be coindexed with *John*?
Principle A requires that an anaphor be A-bound within its binding domain; *John* is outside of the clause that contains *himself*, so even though it A-binds *himself*, it doesn't do it within *himself*'s binding domain, violating principle A.
- Why can't it be coindexed with *his*?
his doesn't bind *himself* because it doesn't c-command it.

- John asked him why Harv took the screwdriver.



- What principle of the binding theory bears on what *him* can corefer with? Show how it bars *him* from being coindexed with *John*.

The coindexing possibilities of pronouns are restricted by Principle B of the binding theory, which states that a pronoun must be free within its binding domain; since John is in the same binding domain as him, principle B would be violated if they were coindexed.

- What principle bars *him* from being coindexed with *Harv*? How?

Principle C bears on R-expressions. It states that they have to be free. If Harv were coindexed with him, it would be bound, since the latter c-commands the former. Binding domains are irrelevant for R-expressions.

2 Presupposition, entailment, and implicature

For each of the following sentence pairs, indicate whether the first presupposes, entails or implicates the second. The sentence in parentheses is given for context.

- Where did you hide the smuggled goods? You hid smuggled goods. *presupposes*

- I know that John won the lottery. John won the lottery. *entails*
- John ate breakfast at noon today. John ate breakfast. *entails*
- The current king of France is bald. There is a current king of France. *presupposes*
- (How was your date?) He had neatly tied shoelaces. He was thoroughly unremarkable. *implicates*
- John did five homeworks. John did exactly five homeworks. *implicates*
- John stopped having fits in section. John had fits in section. *presupposes*
- John is a bachelor. John is unmarried. *entails*

Extra credit: the following sentences are nearly synonymous. Can you identify where the meaning difference lies?

- John is poor and honest.
- John is poor but honest.

It seems that if John is poor but honest, he is poor and he is also honest, so the second sentence includes the meaning of the first (it entails it; wow, I'm using the terminology I just learned!). In addition, though, it seems to imply (or more technically, presuppose – more terminology!) something else; namely that poor people are not generally honest.

3 Fieldwork

I collected a simple declarative sentence in Spanish, consisting of a transitive verb and its arguments, plus an adverb. The sentence that my informant spontaneously offered as the translation of Fido bit John hard was (1a); he later hesitated and offered also (1b):

- (1) a. Fido mordió a Juan duro.
 b. Fido mordió duro a Juan.

*My informant said that a is the preposition to. It always accompanies Juan in these sentences; I couldn't change the order of it with respect to the latter without making the sentence bad or changing the meaning. Having said this, I tried all 24 permutations of the 4 basic constituents. My results are tabulated below, where the y-axis represents the order of Subject, Verb and Object, and the x-axis the place of the adverb in the sequence, with 0 = before all others, and 3 = after all others. Cells are either blank (the order is good) or have a ?, ?? or *, indicating that the order is bad or worse. My informant kept saying things like 'this is poetic', 'that sounds like Góngora', and so on; to me this all translates to ? marks. Maybe further work is needed, especially in light of remarks such as 'this stresses such and such a constituent', which I consider good, but seem intuitively different from the spontaneously offered translations.*

	0	1	2	3
SVO	*	*		
SOV	*	*	??	?
OVS	*	*	?	?
OSV	*	*	??	?
VSO	*		?	??
VOS	*		??	??

From the table, we can conclude that word order in Spanish is much freer than in English, since SVO, VSO and VOS are allowed, and even SOV, OVS and OSV are not totally out all of the time. The adverb cannot be placed at the beginning of the sentence, and sentences are only totally OK if it follows the verb. I won't comment on the marginally good (?) cases for now.