

Adjunct islands and the interplay of theoretical and empirical factors in refining universal claims

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A common occurrence in earlier work in broadly generative approaches was to make strong universal proposals on the basis of a very small number of languages, often accompanied by poverty-of-the-stimulus argumentation. Not surprisingly, many such proposals have fared poorly in the face of subsequent investigation on a wider sample of languages. Nonetheless, as strong, testable hypotheses they have served an important purpose in the development of the field, by providing the impetus for careful comparative and typological work (e.g. in the form of grammar-mining, careful literature surveys or coordinated original research on a series of languages). In many cases this has led to new generalizations with a more secure empirical footing, and in a few instances the original claims have withstood scrutiny, typically in more nuanced, sharpened form. This procedure has arguably led to the most insightful developments when the comparative/typological work was accompanied by theoretical endeavors to understand what might underlie hypothesized generalizations, which generate useful predictions that can drive further empirical work. A good example of this way of getting at universals comes from work on syntactic islands.

While agreement is possible under certain circumstances where the target is in a host clause and the controller is in an embedded complement clause (Hindi-Urdu (1)), we are aware of no language that allows the analogous pattern where the controller would be in an adjunct clause:

- (1) Vivek-ne [kitaab parh-nii] chaah-ii.
Vivek-ERG book.F read-INF.F want-PFV.FSG

One might then imagine that adjuncts are universally opaque for syntactic dependencies, but this is not the case. As discussed in Landau (2000; 2015), McFadden & Sundaresan (2018), a.o., obligatory control – which in contrast with non-obligatory control shows hallmarks of being (based on) a syntactic dependency – is possible into adjunct clauses, as in (2).

- (2) Mary_i went to the store [PRO_i to buy potatoes].

Building on work by Bjorkman & Zeijlstra (2019) and McFadden & Sundaresan (2018), we argue that such patterns of selective opacity of adjunct islands can be understood if grammatical dependencies are built on a scaffolding set up by selection, with the basic idea being that the target of a dependency must be contained in a unit that selects the unit containing its controller. If adjuncts, unlike complements, select their host asymmetrically, the facts in (1)–(2) can be made to follow under parallel analyses of agreement and control dependencies. This demonstrates how an alleged abstract generalization can be modified by providing a theoretical explanation for it that actually predicts apparent counterexamples.

References: Landau, I. (2000). *Elements of Control: Structure and Meaning in Infinitival Constructions*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Landau, I. (2015). *A Two-Tiered Theory of Control*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Bjorkman, B. & H. Zeijlstra (2019). Checking up on (phi-)agree. *Linguistic Inquiry* 50, 527–569. McFadden, T. & S. Sundaresan (2018). Reducing pro and PRO to a single source. *The Linguistic Review* 35, 463–518.