1 Overview

I propose a novel account of adjunction, independently motivated by the Conjunctivist theory of the composition of neo-Davidsonian logical forms, that provides a natural explanation for some of the basic syntactic differences between arguments and adjuncts.

The pattern to explain is that some non-head constituents, such as ‘Caesar’ in (1a), contribute crucially to making a projection maximal and therefore accessible to syntactic operations; whereas others, such as ‘quietly’ in (2a), leave the “maximality” of a projection unchanged.

1a. Brutus stabbed Caesar.
1b. Stab Caesar, (is what) Brutus did.
1c. *Stab, (is what) Brutus stabbed Caesar.

1. Brutus stabbed Caesar violently.
2a. Sleep quietly, (is what) Brutus did.
2b. Sleep, (is what) Brutus did quietly.
2c. *Sleep, (is what) Brutus did violently.

Crucial ingredients of the proposal are two pre-existing intuitions:

• The phenomenon of “movement” can be thought of as merely re-merging (Epstein et al. 1998).

• A mode of semantic composition used by adjectives is simpler than that used by arguments; this permits a degree of syntactic freedom for adjuncts that is unavailable for arguments (Pietroski 2005, Hornstein and Nunes 2008).

I take as a starting point the formalism from Stabler (2006), this embodies the “re-merge” conception of movement in a way that leaves room for an appealing account of adjunction:

• Every XP is a phase
• External Merge = Select/Insert + (roughly) Internal Merge
• Adjunction = Select/Insert

2 Syntactic Background: Move as Re-merge

Central ideas from Stabler (2006):

• The insert operation adds an element to the derivation without checking any features
• An element is integrated more fully into the structure only when its last feature is checked
• As a result “merge” steps and “move” steps look the same

A straightforward derivation without “movement”:

1. Brutus stabbed Caesar.
2. *Stab Caesar, (is what) Brutus did.

A derivation with “movement”:

1. Brutus stabbed Caesar violently.
2. Sleep quietly, (is what) Brutus did.
3. *Sleep, (is what) Brutus did violently.

3 Adjunction as Mere Insertion

Let us suppose that (PF and LF) interpretation occurs not “directly compositionally”,

but only at the end of each maximal projection:

Incorporating this idea into the framework in (2), we construct head-argument relations and then spellout shortly thereafter:

This construct-then-spellout picture leaves room for certain elements to be:

• only inserted into the derivation, and yet
• still contribute to interpretation when spellout applies.

I propose that this is exactly what adjunction is. From the point where ‘Brutus’ is merged in the derivation above:

This picture of the argument/adjunct distinction receives independent motivation from the Conjunctivist view of neo-Davidsonian logical forms (Pietroski 2005):

• every constituent contributes a monadic predicate, and
• the only mode of composition is conjunction of monadic predicates.

On this view, ‘Brutus’ and ‘Caesar’ — but crucially not ‘violently’ — must undergo a kind of conjunctivist view of neo-Davidsonian logical forms (Pietroski 2005):

4 Semantic Motivation

The two adjunction options in (4) and (5) are not semantically distinct:

In (4): [Phase][v] = stabbing(c) & Patience(c)
[Phase][v] = compose[ed] with [Phase][v] =... stabbing(c) & Patience(c)

In (5): [Phase][v] = sleeping(e) & quiet(e)
[Phase][v] = compose[ed] with [Phase][v] =... sleeping(e) & quiet(e).

Crucially, the TP-phase insertion option is not available for arguments, whose interpretation depends on specific VP-internal positions:

X [Phase][v] = stabbing(e)
[Phase][v] = compose[ed] with [Phase][v]

This pattern can derive original facts as follows:

1. a. Brutus stabbed Caesar.
   (unambiguous: 3)
   b. Stab Caesar, (is what) Brutus did.
      (‘Caesar’ inserted early, as in (3))
   c. *Stab, (is what) Brutus stabbed Caesar.
2. a. Brutus slept quietly.
   (ambiguous: (4) or (5))
   b. Sleep quietly, (is what) Brutus did.
      (‘quietly’ inserted early, as in (4))
   c. Sleep, (is what) Brutus did quietly.
      (‘quietly’ inserted late, as in (5))

General Result: If an adjunct is to modify a certain XP, it can do so by being inserted in:

• the phase in which XP is being constructed, or
• another phase in which XP is present

Arguments of XP only have the first option.

References


5 Explanation for the Flexibility of Adjuncts

So the two VPs considered in (1a) and (2a) differ in the following way:

To see how this derivational difference leads to the empirical contrast between (1) and (2), consider how these VPs fit into the next phase up. The “obvious” way is as follows:

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