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THE FINE STRUCTURE OF THE LEFT PERIPHERY

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Under current assumptions, the structural representation of a clause consists of three kinds of structural layers, each layer an instantiation of the X-bar schema:

1. The lexical layer, headed by the verb, the structural layer in which theta assignment takes place.
2. The inflectional layer, headed by functional heads corresponding to concrete or abstract morphological specifications on the verb, and responsible for the licensing of argumental features such as case and agreement.
3. The complementizer layer, typically headed by a free functional morpheme, and hosting topics and various operator-like elements such as interrogative and relative pronouns, focalized elements, etc.

In the mid eighties, each layer was identified with a single X-bar projection (VP, IP, CP), but this assumption quickly turned out to be too simplistic. Under the impact of Pollock's (1989) influential analysis of verb movement, IP dissolved into a series of functional projections, each corresponding to a single feature specification overtly or abstractly expressed on the verbal system (Agr, T, Asp, . . .). Kayne's (1984) binary branching hypothesis naturally led to the postulation of multiple VP layers for multi-argument verbs, e.g. along the lines of Larson (1988) and much related work.

Various proposals in the recent literature indicate that the complementizer layer should share the same fate: much more than a single X-bar schema seems to constitute the left (pre-IP) periphery of the clause.[2]

In this article, I would like to explore some aspects of the fine structure of the left periphery. The first part (sections 2–6) is devoted to the identification of the basic configurational structure. Four kinds of elements typically occurring in the left periphery will be taken into account: interrogative and relative pronouns, topics and focalized elements. Studying the interactions between these elements, we will be led to postulate an articulated array of X-bar projections which will be assumed to constitute the complementizer system. The second part (sections 7–12) concerns a number of adjacency and anti-adjacency effects involving elements of the C system and different kinds of fillers of the subject position (overt DP, PRO, trace) which are amenable to an explanation in terms of the assumed structure of the C system. The core of the empirical material to be discussed is drawn from Italian, French and English, with occasional comparative extensions to other Romance and Germanic languages.

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A preliminary word on the theoretical framework adopted in this work is necessary. An idea borrowed from the system presented in Chomsky (1993) will play a crucial role: syntactic movement (or, more neutrally, the formation of non-trivial chains in syntax) is "last resort" in the precise sense that it must be triggered by the satisfaction of certain quasi-morphological requirements of heads. As I will be concerned with the A′ system, I will phrase such requirements in the style of the Criteria (Rizzi 1991, Haegeman 1995 and much related work), rather than as feature checking, the main reason for this choice being that such features have an interpretive import (Wh, Neg, Top, Foc, . . .): they determine the interpretation of the category bearing them and of its immediate constituents (e.g., see section 3), function as scope markers for phrases with the relevant quantificational force in a local configuration, etc. so that their role cannot simply be to trigger movement and disappear from representations. Independently from the particular style of presentation, the "last resort" intuition provides the conceptual justification for postulating a rich and articulated structure to host the different kinds of phrases moved to the left periphery: no free preposing and adjunction to IP is permissible, all kinds of movements to the left periphery must be motivated by the satisfaction of some criterion, hence by the presence of a head entering into the required Spec-head configuration with the preposed phrase. So, the "last resort" guideline will be critical for drawing the map of the left periphery; the presence and action of the system of heads involved will be independently detected by the various adjacency and anti-adjacency effects that we will focus on in the second part. A restrictive theory of adjunction (à la Kayne (1994) and related work) is also instrumental for this endeavor.

On the other hand, in the following discussion I will continue to assume that Relativized Minimality (RM) is a representational principle, and that one of the core structural relations allowed by UG is head government, as in Rizzi (1990) and contra Chomsky (1993). As for the second point, head government continues to be needed, as far as I can see, for optimally simple accounts of various familiar subject-object asymmetries of the *that*-t kind, as well as for many cases in which a head enters into some kind of "action at a distance" with the specifier of its complement (for Case assignment/checking or the licensing of different kinds of ec's). A number of examples of this sort are analyzed in what follows; we will adopt approaches based on head government and will occasionally allude to properties of possible alternatives not referring to head government, even though no systematic comparison will be attempted.

As for the representational view of RM, it is not the goal of the present article to argue for this theoretical option, and I intend to address the issue in independent work (see also Manzini (1992, 1995), Brody (1995) for relevant discussion). It should be clear though that there is a significant (even though not a necessary) connection between the two conservative