

Syntactic Intrusions and The Notion of Grammatical Construction

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**Syntactic Intrusions
and
The Notion of Grammatical Construction¹**

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Introduction

It has always been assumed in the generativist tradition that **phrasal constituents** can be introduced into a sentence only by means of proper phrase structure rules (or their equivalents), and hence only at the initial level of a sentence's derivation. In the past two decades, in fact, it has seemed important to limit the introduction of individual **lexical elements**, even of the "syntactic trappings" sort, to phrase structural means². The phenomena that I'll be considering here, under the somewhat unhappy label of **syntactic intrusions**, will support the suggestion that the grammatical apparatus for introducing lexical and phrasal elements into a sentence sometimes require a kind of context-sensitivity best expressed by reference to **host constructions** of a particular sort, such constructions often endowed with properties which are not independently determined by facts about their constituency or their derivation.

The phenomena to which I wish to direct your attention are, in both cases, instances of disapproved linguistic usages in English. I take the social status of my phenomena as a guarantee of the importance of what I have to say about them, rather than as evidence for its triviality. Whenever we find impressive regularities in language that we know we didn't learn either at mother's knee or in Miss Fidditch's classroom, we can be sure that we are in touch with structures seated deep in the language, and not inventions externally imposed upon it.

In defending a "constructionist" point of view, I will need to point to situations in which semantic or pragmatic properties of linguistic structures can be seen as determinants of certain otherwise unexplained possibilities for introducing elements. And since some of the constructions which serve as hosts for phrase insertion have to be seen at what is, from a

transformationalist point of view, a "non-initial" stage of a derivation, I will also need to argue in favor of a single-level representation of complex syntactic objects, as opposed to multi-level or derivational representations. (I claim originality for neither of these inclinations.)

The Notation

In representing constituent structure I use **container diagrams**, as in Figure 1: constituents are portions of text shown as contained in ovals or rectangles bearing category labels. Transparently, container diagrams have the same properties as **branching tree diagrams** or **bracketing representations** of constituent structures - the "containers" constructed by closing off the brackets above and below. But since I intend to use lines and arrows for superimposing on pure constituent structure representations other sorts of information, the **branches** of branching tree diagrams would get in the way.

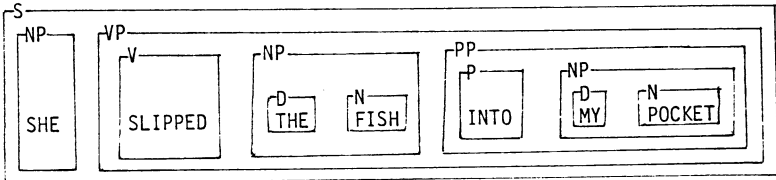


Figure 1

Syntactic Intrusion Type I

Consider, first, the mysterious extra syllable that occurs, in certain **past counterfactual** clauses, after the word HAD or HADN'T. It can be heard in the second of the following two examples.

- (1) IF YOU HAD EATEN IT, YOU WOULD HAVE DIED.
- (2) IF YOU HAD 've EATEN IT, YOU WOULD HAVE DIED.

Although there was a brief time when I thought this syllable was akin to the interloper syllable in expressions like "HOW BIG OF A BOX", it appears quite clearly to be a contracted form of HAVE, sometimes given full pronunciation, but most typically realized as [] before a consonant and [v] before a vowel. Using the name given it by the Oxford English Dictionary, I'll refer to the phenomenon as **redundant HAVE**. The form is disapproved by normative grammarians, but it appears not to be subject to social class variation (Lambert 1983). As Lambert's research shows, speakers are not easily made aware of it.

It may be necessary to point out immediately that **redundant HAVE** is not merely a colloquial variant of the pluperfect. That is, we do not find, at any level of informality, sentence (4) as a way of saying (3).

(3) AT THAT TIME I HADN'T OPENED YOUR LETTER.

a "redundant have" version

(4) *AT THAT TIME I HADN'T 've OPENED YOUR LETTER.

The principal generalization to make about **redundant HAVE** is that it occurs in past counterfactual clauses, that is in clauses pluperfect in form and with a polarity-reversing presupposition. We note that:

1. It occurs in the IF-clause of a counterfactual conditional sentence:

(5) IF I HADN'T 've SEEN IT, I WOULD HAVE STEPPED IN IT.

2. It occurs as the counterfactual complement of WISH:

(6) I WISH I HADN'T 've SAID THAT.

3. It occurs in exclamatory sentences beginning with WHAT IF or IF ONLY.

(7) WHAT IF I'D 've OPENED IT?³

(8) IF ONLY I HADN'T 've SAID THOSE THINGS.

4. It occurs in certain expressions which invite the addressee to imagine a non-actual situation:

(9) SUPPOSING YOU HADN'T 've CAUGHT THE TRAIN.

5. It occurs in certain contexts in which the non-actuality

or counterfactuality of the proposition is already assumed.

(10) BY THE TIME YOU'D 've NOTICED IT, IT'D'VE BEEN TOO LATE.

The reason redundant HAVE is a problem is that its occurrence in these contexts is not supported by anything else we know about English. There is no other situation in English calling for an infinitive form to occur after the perfect auxiliary, certainly none that could be limited to the past tense of that auxiliary. It is limited, we have said, to clauses construed **counterfactually**, and these can occur in a wide variety of syntactic environments.

Occasionally you hear speculation on the origin of the phenomenon in terms of an analogically introduced rhythmic pattern which allows protasis and apodosis of a counterfactual conditional sentence to achieve a kind of metric balance, as in (11),

(11) IF HARRY HAD'VE OPENED IT, LUCY WOULD'VE LEFT.

where HAD'VE and WOULD'VE are rhythmically paired. Such explanations are unsatisfying, not only because our HAVE syllable occurs in counterfactual contexts not supported by a following clause - such as as a complement of WISH - but also because its earliest appearances seem to be, not in the IF-form of a past counterfactual conditional sentence, but in the FRONTED HAD-form. In the O E D's section on **redundant "have"**, there are two early citations. The first is from Sir Thomas Malory, fifteenth century,

(12) HAD NOT HE HAVE BE, WE SHOLD NEVER HAVE RETURNED.

and the second from Owen Feltham, seventeenth century:

(13) CLEANTHES MIGHT WELL HAVE FAILED, HAD NOT ACCIDENT HAVE HELPED HIM.

Interestingly, the only instances of redundant HAVE I find in Fowler (Modern English Usage), where he describes the phenomenon as "illiterate blundering," are of the FRONTED-HAD form, that is, without IF:

(14) HAD I HAVE BEEN IN ENGLAND ON MONDAY, I SHOULD CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN PRESENT AT THE FIRST PERFORMANCE.

It is obvious from these examples that the intruded form is not simply cliticized onto HAD, since the word HAD can move away

from it in IF-less conditionals, as in (15).

(15) HAD I 've OPENED IT.

Nor does it appear likely that it is cliticized to the following participle, as shown by examples such as (16).

(16) WHAT IF I HADN'T 've EVER SAID THAT?

On the Non-Existence of Counterfactual Conditionals

Now since I have made such a point about the **redundant HAVE** being limited to counterfactually understood clauses, and since the most common occurrences of it are in counterfactual conditional sentences, I am obviously obliged to say something about recent claims that conditional sentences with counterfactive presuppositions do not exist. Reinhart (1976) has suggested that conditional sentences said to introduce counterfactive presuppositions really only implicate the falsity of their propositional content. She describes two interestingly different possible contexts for the following sentence:

(17) IF THE DEAN HADN'T ANSWERED MY LETTER, I WOULD
HAVE RESIGNED.

In one context we can imagine the speaker as someone who wrote to the dean, and who received an answer to her letter. The clause IF THE DEAN HADN'T ANSWERED MY LETTER is construed counterfactually by implication: the Dean did answer the letter, and the speaker proposes that any world, distinct from the actual one, in which the Dean fails to answer the letter, is a world in which the speaker resigns. We know that this is a matter of implicature only, says Reinhart, from the fact that there are contexts in which a sentence with exactly the same lexicosyntactic form can be spoken with such an implicature absent. In this second context, the addressee, not the speaker, has written to the dean, and the dean did not answer the letter. The speaker, putting himself in the addressee's place, says

(18) IF THE DEAN HADN'T ANSWERED MY LETTER I WOULD HAVE
RESIGNED.

This time there is no suggestion that the Dean answered the speaker's letter, or that the speaker ever wrote to the dean in the first place.

While it may be the case that the sentential form of a pluperfect clause in a conditional sentence does not always require a counterfactual interpretation, it happens that **redundant HAVE** can appear only when such an interpretation is present. Thus, the person who stayed on the job as a result of the Dean's correspondence could say

(19) IF THE DEAN HADN'T 've ANSWERED MY LETTER, I WOULD HAVE RESIGNED.

In the non-counterfactual context, however, you would not find anybody saying

(20) *IF THE DEAN HADN'T 've ANSWERED MY LETTER, I WOULD HAVE RESIGNED.

The "construction" at hand is a clause having the **pluperfect** form and understood as counterfactual; and the permitted intrusion is the intrusion of HAVE, in unstressed and hence contractable form, after the word HAD. See Figure 2.

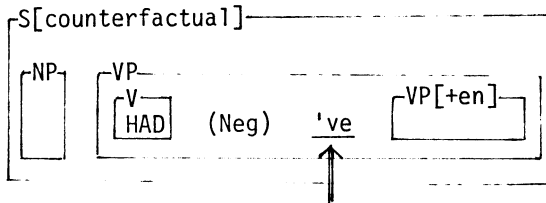


Figure 2

The very argument which I have just presented in favor of a view which recognizes grammatical constructions could, in an older framework, have been given in favor of a particular formulation of an insertion transformation, like **DO-Support**. If there is a difference, it is in my intuition that the phenomenon in question relates in a quite specific way to a structure which must be simultaneously formally and notionally defined, and my suspicion that grammatical theory will eventually provide the means of recognizing such structures. In the next example the inserted material is a class of phrases rather than a single morphological element, and so the feasibility of treating the phenomenon in terms of an insertion transformation is reduced.

Interlude on Displacement Structures

Since my second example involves **initial WH-phrases**, I need to digress on the "constructional" nature of **displacement** structures, structures in which a constituent is **presented** for some grammatical or rhetorical purpose in one part of the sentence but **interpreted** in another. The constituent in question, **displaced** to the front of its clause, is **linked** to a **gap** at a specific site elsewhere in the clause, in such a way that at the place of the **gap** it satisfies the requirements of some **predicational** structure or provides some sort of adverbial modification of the clause.

In the exclamatory sentence represented by Figure 3,

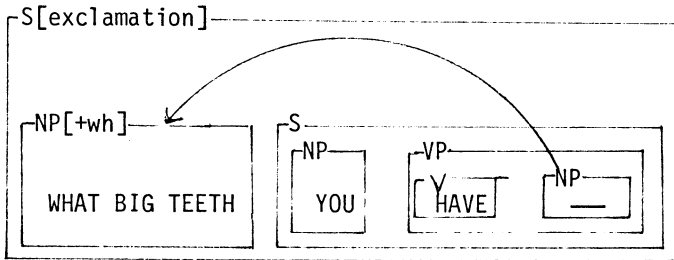


Figure 3

the phrase WHAT BIG TEETH, found at the sentence's beginning, is interpreted as the object of the verb HAVE. To say that, of course, is not yet to have given the sentence an analysis. We could view a **displacement structure** of the sort just noticed simply and only as a **grammatical construction** of a particular kind: a **WH-word phrase** is in construction with a clause containing a **gap**, bearing with that gap the kind of interpretive link just described. Alternatively, we could say that the initial WH-phrase has been moved to the sentence's front by a transformation of WH-Movement, and regard the diagram showing the gap and the link as a record of the **derivational history** of the sentence's development from an abstract **deep structure** to the observed **surface structure**. As a kind of abbreviated "T-Marker", in an older idiom.

The best sort of argument in favor of the "constructionist" view is the inverse of the kind of argument we all learned in

defending the transformationalist view. The standard case for the correctness of the movement treatment is a demonstration of the numerous ways in which "fronted constituents" fit their assigned gap, in respect to phrasal category membership, case assignment, selection restriction, potential for theta-role bearing, and all the rest. If in their form they satisfied expectations contracted at the site of the gap perfectly, we had reason to believe they were generated there, suited the requirements of their environment at that site and must therefore have ended up where we see them by way of a movement rule. Arguments for a constructionist or non-movement position, therefore, should concentrate on properties of initial constituents which do not agree with what is permitted or required at the site of the linked gap.

One such argument has been pointed out to me recently by Paul Kay, involving nominal constituents fronted before THAT and THOUGH, as in

- (21) FOOLISH CHILD THAT HE WAS, ...
- (22) STRONG TEAM MEMBER THOUGH SHE IS, ...
- (23) RIDICULOUS SUGGESTION THAT IT AT FIRST SEEMED, ...

Said in X' jargon, the nominal phrase in these expressions is an N' rather than an N"; that is, it is something which could not be found, just like that, in the position from which it is alleged to have "moved." Semantically there is no doubt the fronted constituent fits and needs to be interpreted at the gap to which it is linked, but it couldn't have been generated at that place in that form. That is, we don't say

- (24) *HE WAS FOOLISH CHILD.
- (25) *SHE WAS STRONG TEAM MEMBER.
- (26) *IT WAS RIDICULOUS SUGGESTION.

Syntactic Intrusion II

But the phenomena that interest me just now are not things which are left out in particular positions in a construction but things which are introduced into a construction.

A favorite exercise in middle level syntax classes is to explore the conditions under which in English it's possible to pepper up one's speech with certain intruding interjections. I have in mind mainly THE-phrases like THE HELL, THE DEVIL, THE HECK, THE DEUCE, etc. (there may be others), but also certain

formulaic prepositional phrases, usually with IN or ON, such as ON EARTH, IN THE WORLD, IN TARNATION, IN HEAVEN'S NAME, etc. (The two types have slightly different distributional possibilities, but I will ignore those here.) A generalization that can be made about these phrases is that they can occur immediately after any clause-initial interrogative WH-word, except WHICH.

1. The initial position requirement for our phrases predicts correctly that they do not occur in **echo questions**. Thus we get such judgments as the following:

- (27) WHAT DID YOU SEE?
- (28) WHAT THE HECK DID YOU SEE?
- (29) YOU SAW WHAT?
- (30) *YOU SAW WHAT THE HECK?

2. The requirement that the WH-word welcoming our phrases be clause-initial predicts that insertion of THE HECK, etc., is only possible when all preceding parts of a WH-phrase are left stranded. Thus we get the following judgments:

- (31) WHAT DID YOU FIX IT WITH?
- (32) WHAT THE DEVIL DID YOU FIX IT WITH?
- (33) WITH WHAT DID YOU FIX IT?
- (34) *WITH WHAT THE DEVIL DID YOU FIX IT?

3. The phenomenon occurs only in interrogative clauses, not in homophonous **free relatives**. In (35),

(35) I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT SHE COOKED.

WHAT SHE COOKED is an interrogative clause. In (36),

(36) I COULDN'T EAT WHAT SHE COOKED.

it is a free relative, meaning something like "that which she cooked." Notice that it is possible to say (37) but not (38).

(37) I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME SHE COOKED.

(38) *I COULDN'T EAT WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME SHE COOKED.

4. The phenomenon in question occurs only with **displaced WH-words**, hence not with the word **WHETHER** in a

subordinated interrogative clause. Thus we don't get

(39) *I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THE HECK THEY'RE
COMING.

5. It doesn't occur with the word WHICH, either as a determiner, as in (40),

(40) *WHICH THE HECK BOOKS DO THEY RECOMMEND?

or as a full NP, as in (41).

(41) *WHICH THE HECK DID YOU CHOOSE?

WHAT, as well as WHICH, can be used in "determiner" position in interrogated noun phrases, but a number of informants who reject WHICH THE HECK find (42) acceptable.

(42) WHAT THE HECK BOOK DID THEY READ?

6. Bolinger (1976) has suggested that the word ELSE that occurs after indefinite pro-words, plain and interrogative, really functions as a **suffix** rather than as a separate word. We can now see, however, that the mechanism that allows us to introduce THE HECK and its kin shows that to be not quite true. Notice examples (43) and (44):

(43) WHO THE HELL ELSE DID YOU INVITE?

(44) WHERE THE HELL ELSE DO YOU WANT ME TO TAKE
YOU?

7. We are accustomed to thinking of the word WHOSE as a single tightly bound word, but we are also aware of the modern English S-genitive as being sometimes called a **phrasal genitive**, as illustrated in such expressions as (45).

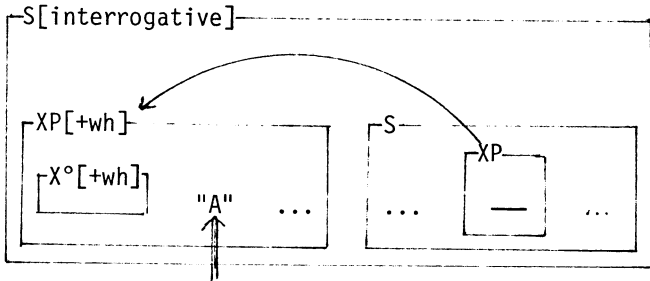
(45) THE KING OF ENGLAND'S HAT

Perhaps the suffix we see in WHOSE is not as tightly associated with the WHO as the spelling would suggest, since we can, after all, say (46).

(46) WHO THE HECK'S FAULT DO YOU THINK IT IS?

The observation that THE HECK follows the "first word" exposes the true structure of the word WHOSE.

It seems to me that the only way to account for the phenomenon of the **intrusion** of THE HECK into a question is to recognize a construction (see Figure 4) in which a WH-word, not WHICH, is in initial position in a fronted WH-word phrase, and to introduce into the position after that word a special category - possibly unique to this construction - capable of being realized as one of our peppery interjections. It is not easy to imagine this category introduced merely parasitically on some constituent participating in **WH-Movement**: the clause in which it occurs has to be an interrogative clause, the WH-word has to be destined to become the first word in the sentence, and it can't be the word WHICH⁴.



"A" = the heck, the hell, the devil, etc.
 X° ≠ which

Figure 4

Grammatical Constructions

It has been common, in recent work within the Transformationalist tradition (Chomsky 1981, Stowell 1981) to abandon the use of the phrase structural apparatus for providing the subcategorizational environment for lexical items, calling instead on structures linked to particular lexical items capable of serving as some such category as VP. The rejected batteries of phrase structure rules stand instead as a set of generalizations over the contents of subcategorization frames. Typically the pretense is maintained that such structures are shallow, consisting solely of the lexical item in question and its co-constituents - its structural sisters. This pretense requires various technical tricks to take care of the instances

in which a prepositional complement requires a particular preposition or a clausal complement requires a particular complementizer or a particular mood.

If new-style lexical entries for content words were to be seen instead as **constructions** capable of occupying particular higher-phrase positions in sentences and included both the needed semantic role and the needed specification of structural requirements (where sometimes nieces and grand-nieces are as important as sisters), we could see such structures as providing expansions of their containing categories. Structures of this sort with multiple occurrences of content-words would be the language's idioms. Structures of this sort lacking content words would be the language's major and minor grammatical constructions. Thus, it is possible to see Figure 2 as not merely the construction within which **redundant HAVE** is introduced, but as the construction which provides the form of a past counterfactual clause in the first place, the "intrusion" taken as optional. Figure 4, however, cannot be seen as the structure for WH-Movement, or for WH-Moved Questions, but only as the construction within which our family of interjections can be inserted.

The people who decide on such things would surely declare that the phenomena I have been describing belong to the "periphery" of grammar and not its "core", and they might be quick to tell us that within the "core," displacement structures are equivalently described constructionally or transformationally, the two being "mere notational variants" of each other. I would like to suggest that since in the "peripheral" cases the "constructional" account has, as I see it, a number of advantages, perhaps a constructional treatment should be preferred throughout. This would at least make it less necessary to believe that there is a major discontinuity between Core Grammar and The Periphery.

NOTES

1. The author is grateful to Farrell Ackerman, Amy Dahlstrom, Georgia Green, Paul Kay, Tom Larsen, Mary Catherine O'Connor, and Peter Trudgill for comments on an earlier version of this paper. I first learned about Valerie Lambert's thesis from Peter Trudgill.
2. Here I have in mind the lexical redundancy rule treatment of passivization, the phrase-structural introduction of COMP and

its fillers, etc.

3. Many American observers see examples like (7) and (10) as abbreviations of WOULD, not HAD. The examples are drawn from or modeled after BrE attestations, where interpretation as WOULD is ruled out. My assumption about the Americanism "If she would have come" is that it is a reconstruction (or "disabbreviation") of contracted "had have." Trudgill and Hannah speak of it as "relatively recent" (1982, p. 47) and limited to AmE. Victoria Liptack (U.C. Santa Cruz) has suggested in conversation that in **redundant HAVE** it is not the HAVE about which something special needs to be said, but the HAD: that, in fact, the word HAD comes to function, in past hypothetical clauses, as a modal. Looked at this way, the American "disabbreviation" of 'd as WOULD would seem quite natural. I am not able to evaluate this proposal.
4. The full story has not been told. Our phrases may follow some instances of the -EVER versions of free relatives: "Do whatever the hell you want" (example from Georgia Green). Green and Morgan (1976) propose some pragmatic conditions for the choice of THE HELL, etc., and these have something to do with whether the speaker (or somebody whose interests the speaker cares about) is "ignorant of" (to which one might add "has no interest in") "the answer to the question that corresponds to the WH-the-hell clause." (Green and Morgan 1976, p. 234). This explanation comes close, but counterexamples are disturbingly easy to construct.

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