Generative Semantics

George Lakoff

Jim McCawley

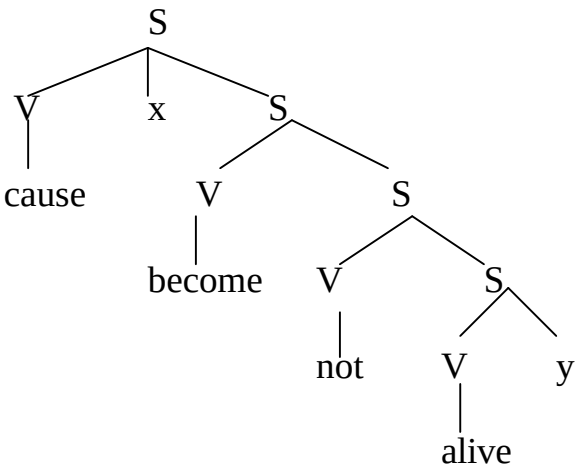
John Robert Ross

“Katz-Postal hypothesis”

(1) a. Bill is dead.

b. Bill is not alive.

kill



(1) I don’t beat my wife because I like her.

(2) a. It is because I like her that I don’t beat my wife.

b. It is not because I like her that I beat my wife.

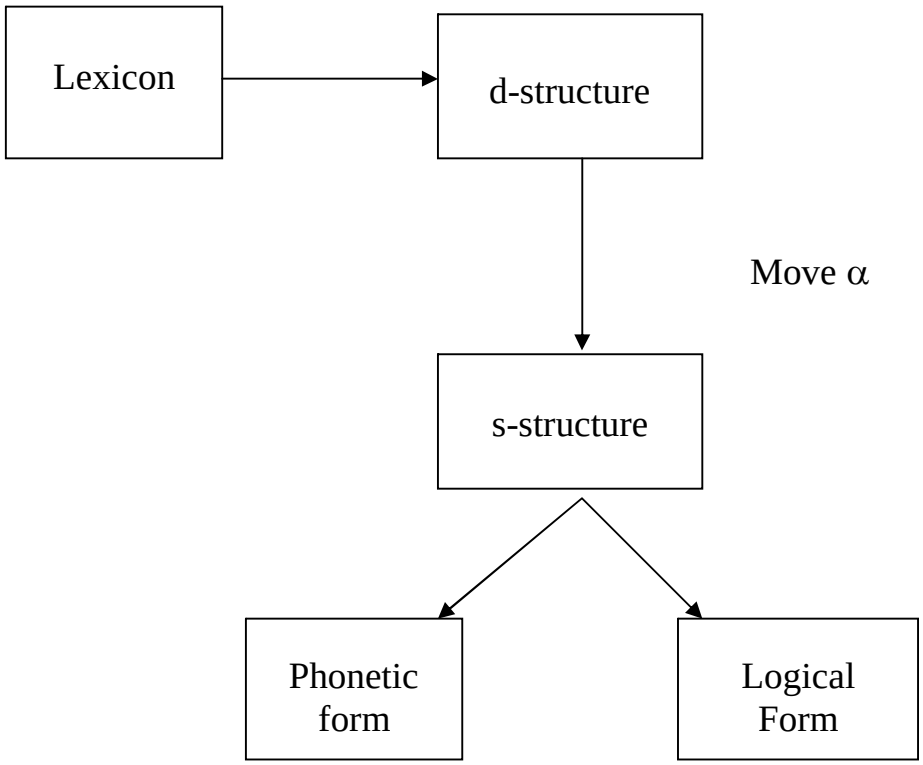
Remarks on Nominalization

1. Certain types of transformations were abandoned

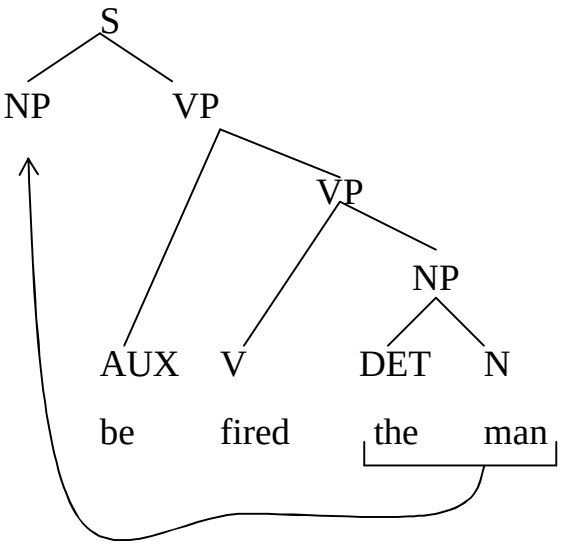
(1) a. The city was destructed by the enemy

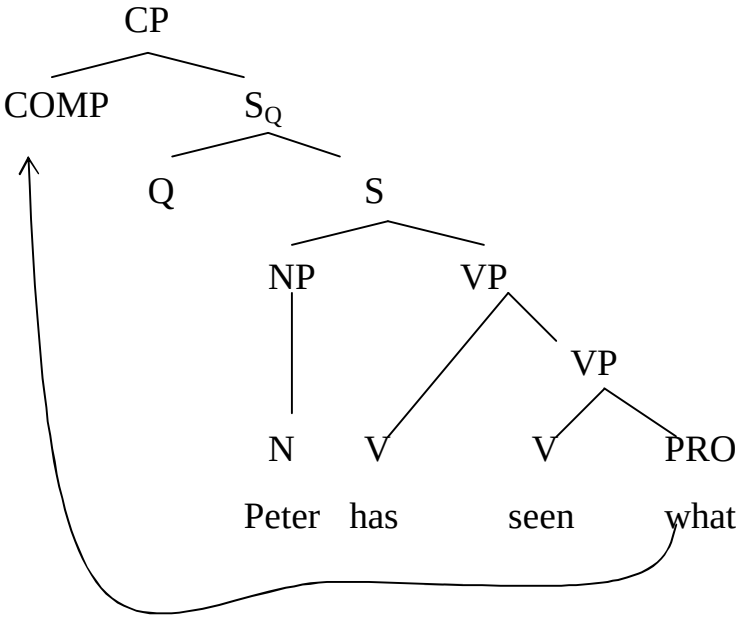
b. The destruction of the city by the enemy.

2. The use of movement transformations were restricted by constraints



Move α


S
NP
VP
VP
NP
AUX
V
DET
N
be
fired
the
man


CP
COMP
S_Q
Q
S
NP
VP
VP
N
V
V
PRO
Peter
has
seen
what

Other important constraints:

- The projection principle
- X-bar theory
- Binding theory
- θ-Theory
- θ-Criterion
- Case filter
- Empty category principle
- Bounding Theory (Subjacency)

θ-Theory

Defines θ-role assignment.

θ-Criterion

Each argument bears one and only one θ-role, and each θ-role is assigned to one and only one argument.

Case Filter

Every NP is assigned a specific morphological case at s-structure.

Empty Category Principle

A trace must be properly governed

Control Theory

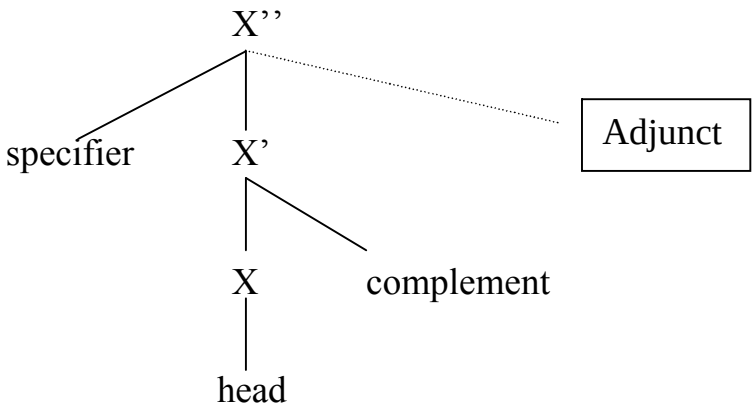
Defines control properties of non-finite subordinate clauses

Bounding Theory (Subjacency)

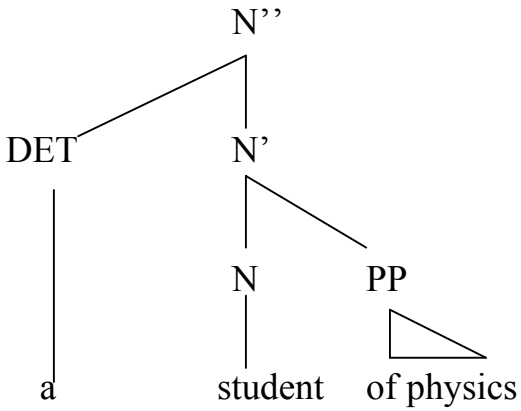
Island constraints

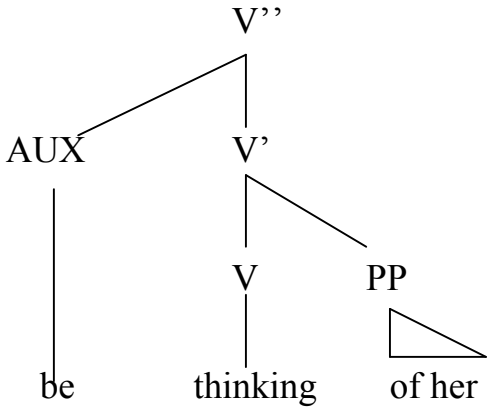
X-bar Theory

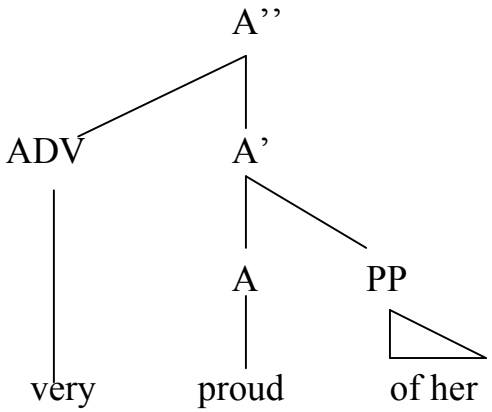
1. the head
2. the specifier
3. the complement

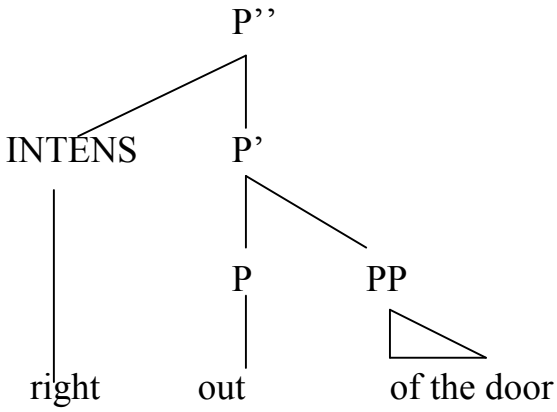


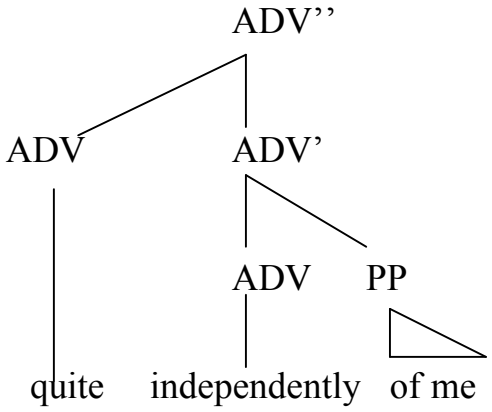
- The head determines the categorical status of the phrase.
- The complement occurs in the subcategorization frame of the head.
- The specifier is not subcategorized for by the head.
- Modifiers/adjunct are attached to the highest node of the phrase.

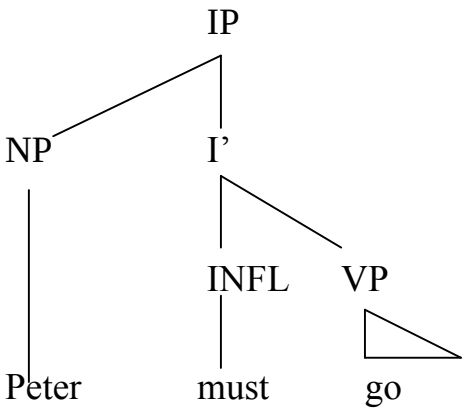

N’’
DET
N’
N
PP
a
student
of physics

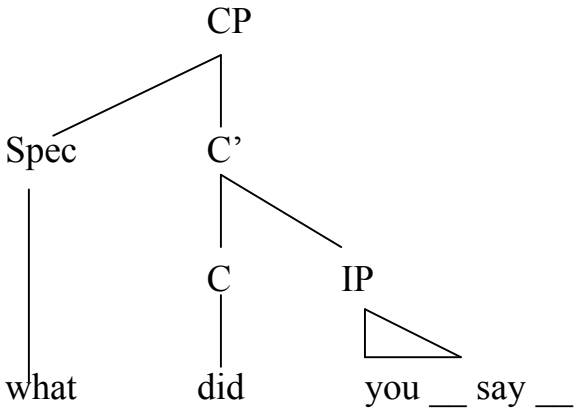

V’’
AUX
V’
V
PP
be
thinking
of her


A’’
ADV
A’
A
PP
very
proud
of her


P''
INTENS
P'
P
PP
right
out
of the door


ADV''
ADV
ADV'
ADV
PP
quite
independently
of me


IP
NP
I’
INFL
VP
Peter
must
go


CP
Spec
C’
C
IP
what
did
you __ say __

Theoretical assumptions

- Competence vs. performance
- Autonomy of syntax
- Grammatical well-formedness
- Language is rule-governed
- Language consists of finite means that generative an infinite number of sentences
- Observational-descriptive-explanatory adequacy
- Structure-dependence principle
- Innateness hypothesis
- Parameters