

snippets

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Kleanthes Grohmann¹, Markus Pöchtrager², Tobias Scheer³, Michael Schiffmann⁴, Neven Wenger⁵ – ¹*University of Cyprus*, ²*Boğaziçi University*, ³*Université Côte d’Azur, CNRS (BCL)*, ⁴*University of Mannheim*, ⁵*Privatgymnasium Weinheim*

The Apex Paradox

kleanthi@ucy.ac.cy, markus.pochtrager@boun.edu.tr, tobias.scheer@unice.fr, mikschiff@t-online.de, neven.wenger@gmx.net

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In Phase Theory, the complement domain of a phase head spells out. Depending on the details of Transfer/Spell-Out or the exact formulation of the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), this is done whenever the current phase is complete (‘strong PIC’) or as soon as the next higher phase head is merged to the derivation (‘weak PIC’). Either way, Phase Theory has a dirty little secret that nobody talks about: what happens to the top part? If the Spell-Out domain equals a phase head’s complement domain, no matter how the condition is formulated, there remains a problem at the root of any given derivation in its final stage: when, how, and under what condition do the top-most (phase) head and its edge spell out?

At least since Emonds (1970), modern syntactic theory has shown that root (main clause, independent) and embedded (subordinate, dependent) contexts are empirically different. The need to keep root and embedded contexts distinct has occasionally been recognized in the literature (e.g., Bayer 2004, Emonds 2004), but, for the most part, it has gone unnoticed -- root CP and embedded CP are treated as structurally alike. Cartographic approaches to syntax (Rizzi 1997 *et seq.*) prove to be exceptional: by sketching a more fine-grained picture of the C-domain, a structural distinction of root and embedded contexts has been made possible qua highest functional projections such as Force. These could serve as an explanatory device for the absence of root phenomena under the assumption that they are absent in (a subset of) embedded clauses. There is in fact research within the cartographic program that aims to implement Emonds’ notion on root transformations by claiming that embedded clauses lack Force (e.g., Haegeman 2012). Even within cartography, though, an isomorphic conception of root and embedded contexts prevails.

An interesting connection of this root/embedded asymmetry with Phase Theory has remained virtually undetected: a root CP notionally non-distinct from embedded CPs poses a major problem. When syntactic chunks are sent off to the interfaces periodically, phase by phase, the complement XP of a phase head H1 is spelled out only upon External Merge of the next higher phase head, H2, such that H1 and its edge remain available to the derivation (e.g., ensuring successive-cyclic movement):

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