

According to phase theory (Chomsky 2000), the computational system builds syntactic objects in stages. A subset of the numeration is fashioned into a hierarchical object and then transferred to the interfacing subsystems for interpretation. Part of the motivation for this conception of the derivation is that it promotes efficient computation. Once a construction is transferred to the interfaces, the computational system can “forget” its content, minimizing burden on working memory. This, however, is an oversimplification. To account for recursion and long-distance dependency formation, some subset of the phase must remain accessible for further computation. At the very least, phase heads must be accessible for selection to facilitate structure building beyond the phase level. This residue (the edge) is thus temporarily exempt from spell-out. This conclusion, which comes “for free” given the assumptions above, is framed in terms of the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC). Chomsky’s (2000) formulation appears below.

- (1) In phase  $\alpha$  with head H, the domain of H is inaccessible to operations outside  $\alpha$ , only H and its edge are.

Empirical considerations concerning (but not limited to) quirky subjects and nominative objects (cf. Taraldsen 1995, Sigurðsson 1996) prompted a revision to the PIC. If vP is a phase, then in order for  $T^0$  to probe inside VP, transfer of the vP phase must be delayed at least until completion of the TP projection. Chomsky (2001) revises the mechanics of cyclic spell-out, proposing that phasal transfer is delayed until a second higher phase head is merged. If vP transfer is delayed until merger of the  $C^0$  phase head, for example,  $T^0$  can successfully probe into VP. This is captured below in Chomsky’s (2001) revision of the PIC.

- (2) Given phases ZP and HP, the domain of H is inaccessible to operations at ZP, only H and its edge are.

(2) is incompatible with the theory of feature inheritance (Chomsky 2008). Chomsky contends that the  $\phi$ /Agree features borne by  $T^0$  are not indigenous to the head, but are rather part of  $C^0$ ’s feature composition and acquired by means of inheritance. This proposal directly captures the generalization that  $C^0$ -less raising and ECM infinitival  $T^0$  heads are  $\phi$ /case inert. The theory also makes it possible to formulate a minimal definition of phase in which phase heads are the loci of uninterpretable features. Additionally, Chomsky (2008) argues that C-T feature inheritance provides the optimal means for encoding the A/A-bar distinction at the semantic interface. Despite these advantages, the PIC in (2) becomes in formulable once C-T feature inheritance is admitted. Upon merger of  $C^0$ , the vP phase is transferred and  $C^0$ ’s probe features are passed to  $T^0$ . Following vP transfer, only  $v^0$  and its specifier(s) are accessible to  $T^0$ . The VP-internal DPs that value  $T^0$ ’s uninterpretable  $\phi$ -features and receive/check case would therefore be inaccessible, wrongly predicting a crash

at the hands of Full Interpretation. This technical flaw disappears if feature inheritance is abandoned and  $T^0$  is treated as a probe in its own right.

These considerations suggest re-evaluating the merits of feature inheritance.

## References

- Chomsky, Noam. 2000. Minimalist Inquiries. In Roger Martin, David Michaels, and Juan Uriagereka (eds.), *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalism in Honor of Howard Lasnik*, 89-155. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by Phase. In Michael Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*, 1-52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2007. Approaching UG from Below. In Sauerland, Uli and Hans-Martin Gärtner (eds.), *Interfaces + Recursion = Language?*, 1-30. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2008. On Phases. In Freidin, Robert, Carlos P. Otero and Maria Luisa Zubizarreta (eds.), *Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 133-166. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór. 1996. Icelandic Finite Verb Agreement. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 57: 1-46. University of Lund.
- Taraldsen, Knut. 1995. On Agreement and Nominative Objects in Icelandic. In Haider, Hubert, Susan Olsen, and Sten Vikner (eds.), *Studies in Comparative Germanic Syntax*, 307-327. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

---

## **Word count: 500**

- Submitted to *Snippets*. Please consult author before quoting/citing. Comments welcome.