A Layering Theory of the A/Ā-Distinction

Justin Colley

1. Introduction

A number of different kinds of phrasal displacements have been shown to pattern into two abstract types, dubbed A-movement and Ā-movement. The relevant properties are puzzlingly disparate, with a split in interpretational characteristics, like binding and reconstruction, as well as formal characteristics, like case and agreement. This is in tension with the idea that movement is the result of a unitary operation, Merge (Chomsky 2004). In this paper, I will offer a theory why Merge splits into these two types, and why A/Ā-movements have the properties that they do.

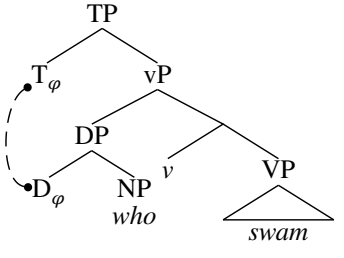
The explanation will draw on the fact that DPs do different kinds of things in A/Ā-contexts. In A-contexts, DPs are selected by predicates, and enter into case and agreement relations. In Ā-contexts, following Cable (2007), DPs serve as restrictors for Q(uestion), Top(ic) and Foc(us) heads (henceforth *QTF elements*).

If, as is widely assumed, QTF elements are present at the beginning of the derivation, they must be transparent for selection, case and agreement, since QTF-Phrases enter into A-dependencies prior to Ā-movement. This makes it puzzling that the very same QTF-phrases cannot enter into A-dependencies *after* Ā-movement (the Ban on Improper Movement). I propose instead that QTF elements *are* intervenors for selection, case and agreement. In addition to disrupting the sisterhood relation required for selection, QTF elements are *phase heads*, rendering their complement DPs opaque to A-operations.

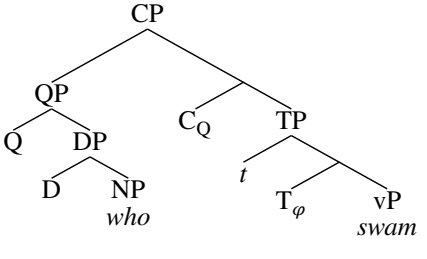
1.1. Layering

This necessitates a different kind of derivation for Ā-movement, if DPs are to able to participate in both A- and Ā-dependencies. I propose that QTF elements are added countercyclically, in what Thoms (2019) calls a *layering derivation*.[1] First, DP is merged in its base position,[2] fulfilling the sisterhood requirement on selection and entering into A-dependencies like case and agreement (1). Then, DP externally remerges with Q in the specifier of the (first) Ā-landing site (2), an instance of *sideward movement*.

(1) *DP projected, enters into A-dependencies*



(2) *Movement to spec-CP, layering of of Q*



In a layering derivation, A/Ā-operations involve different kinds of objects: A-positions are occupied by DPs, and Ā-positions are occupied by QTF-Phrases. Otherwise, QTF elements would prevent their

* Many thanks to David Pesetsky, Norvin Richards, Danny Fox, Dmitry Privoznov, and Colin Davis for helpful comments and suggestions.

[1] See Sportiche (2005), Iatridou & Sichel (2011), Johnson (2012), and Fox & Johnson (2016) for related proposals.

[2] It is possible that NP is the target of selection, with D also added countercyclically, as argued by (Sportiche 2005, Thoms 2019). I will set this possibility aside for ease of presentation.

complement DPs from entering into selection, case and agreement relations. I will argue that the properties of the A/A-distinction follow from the different kinds of objects involved.

1.2. Featural Cyclicity

Layering derivations violate the Extension Condition (Chomsky 1993), raising potential worries about overgeneration. The Extension Condition is arguably too strong, however, since it is also violated by head movement and tucking-in derivations. For this reason, Richards (1999) adapts a proposal from Chomsky (1995), that he calls *Featural Cyclicity*, which rules out a great deal of countercyclity, while allowing head movement and tucking-in.

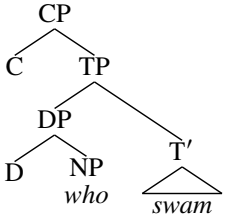
(3) **Featural Cyclicity:** pay attention to the needs of the currently projecting head.

An implicit assumption in (3) is that there is only one currently projecting head. Relaxing this assumption results in the formulation in (4).

(4) **Featural Cyclicity 2.0:** pay attention to the needs of *any* currently projecting head.

In (5), the only operations permitted by (3) are an Agree relation initiated by C, and internal/external Merge with C. (4) merely extends these possibilities to D, including external merging with a QTF element. This is only a mild increase in the number of permissible operations.

(5)



1.3. Roadmap

In section 2, I will briefly outline the puzzle posed by the A/Ā-distinction. I will argue that QTF-layering solves some empirical problems to Cable's 2007 theory of pied-piping, by allowing the distribution of pied-piping to follow from independent principles of movement (section 3). QTF-layering can also explain the Ban on Improper Movement, including its application to surfing and diving paths (section 4). Finally, QTF-layering, in conjunction with Featural Cyclicity, can capture the behaviour of A/Ā-movement in Principle C reconstruction (section 5).

2. A/Ā-properties

I will now illustrate the properties of A/A-movement, with English examples. (6a) shows that Ā-movement is potentially long-distance, able to skip intervening nominals and finite clauses. A-movement, on the other hand, is more local, and cannot skip over intervening clauses and nominals (6b).[3]

(6) a. Who$_1$ did Avon say that Marlo thinks that Sergey should talk to t_1?

b. *[This person]$_1$ was said that Marlo thinks that Sergey should talk to t_1.

Ā-movement can target non-nominals, such as AdvPs (7a) and PPs (7b). A-movements, however, cannot target non-nominals (7c).[4]

[3] Though some languages have hyperraising (Ura 1994), in which A-movement can escape finite clauses.

[4] Apparent exceptions, such as clausal subjects, arguably involve nominal structure (Davies & Dubinsky 2001).

(7) a. $[_{AP}$ How soon$]_1$ was it obvious to Beadie t_1 that Jimmy was irresponsible?
b. $[_{PP}$ To whom$]_1$ was it obvious t_1 that Jimmy was irresponsible?
c. $[_{PP}$ *To Beadie$]_1$ was obvious t_1 that Jimmy was irresponsible.

(8a) shows that Ā-movement obligatorily reconstructs for Principle C. A-movement is not required to reconstruct for Principle C (8b).

(8) a. *[Which aspect of Lester$_1$] does he$_{*1/2}$ find t_1 most admirable?
b. [This aspect of Lester$_1$] seemed to him$_{1/2}$ t_1 to be most admirable.

Ā-movement is subject to Weak Crossover (WCO) effects. QR (9a) and *wh*-movement (9b) are both unable to bind new variables, while A-movement can (9c).

(9) a. *[Her$_1$ partner] was kind to [every woman]$_1$.
b. *Who$_1$ was [her$_1$ partner] kind to t_1?
c. [Every woman]$_1$ seemed to [her$_1$ partner] t_1 to be kind.

Ā-movement is unable to bind anaphors in its landing site (10a), while A-movement can (10b).

(10) a. *[Which bosses]$_1$ did [each other$_1$'s] employees say t_1 were incompetent.
b. [These bosses]$_1$ seem to [each other$_1$'s] employees t_1 to be incompetent.

Ā-movement can license a parasitic gap, (11a), while A-movement cannot (11b).

(11) a. This is the guy [*Op*$_1$ Bunk chased after t_1], [despite having some affection for *pg*].
b. *[This guy]$_1$ was chased after t_1, [despite Bunk having some affection for *pg*].

Ā-movement fails to feed case assignment or agreement; A-movement systematically does so (12b). For example, despite seemingly being being local enough for case assignment, a *wh*-moved element in spec-CP cannot be assigned accusative (12a).

(12) *A-movement feeds case assignment, Ā-movement does not*
a. *I can't imagine whom$_1$ thought $[_{CP}$ t_1 promoting Bill was a good idea].
b. He$_1$ was expected $[_{TP}$ t_1 to be promoted in exchange for his silence].

Similarly, Ā-movement into the matrix clause in (13a) fails to feed agreement with the verb. A-movement into the matrix clause in (13b) does feed subject agreement.

(13) a. [Which tactics]$_1$ is/*are it clear that Russell considers t_1 necessary?
b. [These tactics]$_1$ *seems/seem to Russell t_1 to be necessary.

Finally, A/Ā-movements differ in their ability to feed one another. A-movement is perfectly able to feed Ā-movement: in (14a), *which people* has A-moved into the matrix clause, feeding φ- agreement, then *wh*-moved to spec-CP. In (14b), Ā-movement of *these people*—necessary to escape the finite clause—cannot be followed by A-movement. This is known as the Ban on Improper Movement (BOIM).

(14) a. [Which people]$_1$ were considered t_1 by Kima t_1 to be likely t_1 to be helpful?
b. *[These people]$_1$ were considered t_1 by Kima to be likely t_1 that t_1 will be helpful.

The A/Ā-distinction poses significant challenges to syntactic theory. One is explaining why such a binary split exists at all, if Merge is the only structure-building operation. Another is explaining why A/Ā-movements have this exact distribution of properties. Why should the ability to feed case and agreement correlate with Principle C reconstruction, for example? An explanatory theory of the A/A-distinction will explain these properties, without stipulating two kinds of movement. In the next section, I will examine pied-piping, and argue that, with the adoption of QTF-layering, the distribution of pied-piping can be made to follow from independent constraints on movement.

3. Selection, Pied-piping and the QP-Intervention Condition

Cable (2007) gives a theory in which *pied-piping* is really a misnomer. Ā-movement is driven by QTF elements, which can merge in different positions. For example, if, for example, Q merges between P and DP, the result is preposition stranding (15a). If Q takes P as its sister, the result is (the appearance of) pied-piping (15b).

(15) a. $[_{QP}$ Q $[_{DP}$ which department]] does Rhonda work $[_{PP}$ in *t*]?

b. $[_{QP}$ Q $[_{PP}$ in which department]] does Rhonda work *t*?

A theory of pied-piping, therefore, requires a theory of the distribution of QTF elements. Cable proposes that the distribution of QTF elements is regulated by the following condition (16, emphasis mine):

(16) **The QP-Intervention Condition (Cable 2007)**
A QP cannot intervene between a functional head F and a phrase selected by F.

This is motivated by the plausible assumption that selection requires sisterhood. Cable shows that the QP-Intervention Condition captures a number of restrictions on Tlingit's (overt) Q-particle. This particle cannot, for example, appear between a postposition and its complement; between a determiner and its complement; between a possessor and a possessed NP; or to the right of a matrix predicate (see Cable 2007 for details).

The QP-Intervention Condition faces some empirical challenges, however. One is that there are many apparent crosslinguistic counterexamples, such as Ā-extraction of possessors[5] (an instance of *Left Branch Extraction*), P-stranding, and *v*P-topicalization. These all seem to involve QP intervening between a functional head (D, P, *T*) and a selected phrase (Possessor, DP, *v*P).

Note also that the QP-Intervention Condition is explicitly formulated to only apply to *functional* heads. This is necessary if QTF elements are present at the beginning of the derivation. Otherwise, even object *wh*-movement would be ruled out, since QP would intervene between V and DP. Cable therefore suggests that lexical heads only ever *s-select* for semantic type,[6] and never *c-select* for category. However, there are many examples of c-selection by lexical heads. *Desire*, for example, c-selects for DP (17); see Merchant (2019) for many more such cases. This is clearly not s-selection, since *desire*'s nominal and adjectival counterparts require (different) PP complements.

(17) a. I desire (*for) chocolate.

b. My desire for chocolate knows no bounds.

c. I am desirous of chocolate. (Merchant 2019)

But rather than discarding the QP-Intervention Condition, QTF-layering allows it to be strengthened, so that QTF elements always intervene for selection, whether by lexical or functional heads.

[5] Cable argues that this only occurs in 'NP-languages,' where extracted elements are argued to be NP-adjuncts (Bošković 2005), and therefore don't violate the QP-Intervention Condition. But possessor extraction is also found in DP-languages like Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1983) and even many speakers' colloquial English (Davis 2019).

[6] In his proposal, QP always has the same type as its sister, and hence poses no problem for s-selection.

(18) **QTF-Intervention Condition, 2.0**
QTF elements cannot intervene between **any** head F and a phrase selected by F.

Because QTF elements are only merged in the landing site of Ā-movement, there is no disruption to the selectional relationship between V and DP in (19), or between T and *v*P in (20).

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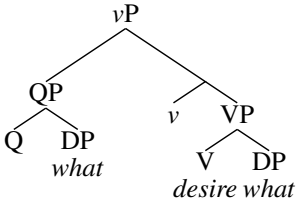

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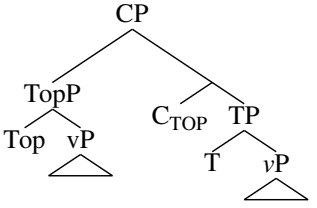


Since QTF-layering takes place in Ā-landing sites, it requires the independent availability of movement. The result is that the distribution of QTF elements—and therefore the distribution of pied-piping—can be reduced to independent constraints on movement, such as anti-locality (Abels 2003, Bošković 2005) and order preservation (Fox & Pesetsky 2005, Ko 2007).[7]

4. The Ban on Improper Movement

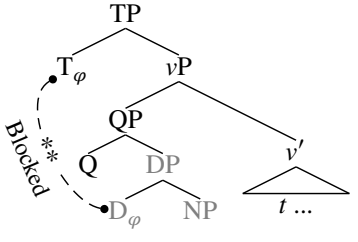
A QTF-layering derivation can also explain Ban on Improper Movement (BOIM, 21), as well as the related inability of Ā-movement to feed case and agreement (12–13).

(21) **Ban on Improper Movement**
A constituent that undergoes Ā-movement cannot subsequently undergo A-movement.

Crucially, QTF-layering correctly excludes improper surfing paths, while allowing improper diving paths. All that is needed is the following assumption:

(22) **QTF Phasehood:** QTF elements are phase heads.[8]

The BOIM immediately follows from (22). The first step of Ā-movement results in layering of a QTF element, triggering spellout of its complement DP (23). Phase impenetrability (Chomsky 2001) makes this DP opaque to any higher A-Probe. QTF-layering therefore makes A-movement and *φ*-agreement impossible.

(23) *Q triggers spellout of DP, blocking φ-agreement*


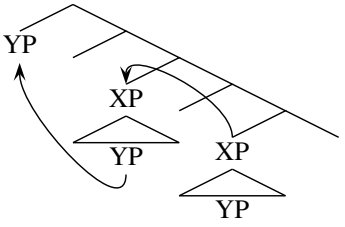
[7] This explains why, as Cable notes, the overt distribution of Tlingit's Q-particle so closely mirrors crosslinguistically attested constraints on movement.
[8] This could follow independently from the proposal that the highest head in an extended projection is a phase (Bobaljik & Wurmbrand 2005, Wurmbrand 2013, Bošković 2014, Harwood 2014).

In an Agree-based theory of case, the inability of Ā-movement to feed case assignment follows straightforwardly. In a dependent case theory (Marantz 2000, McFadden 2004: among others), this could follow either from phase impenetrability, or from QTF-layering bleeding the c-command relation between DPs. QTF-layering therefore provides a unified explanation for the BOIM, and the inability of Ā-movement to feed case and agreement.

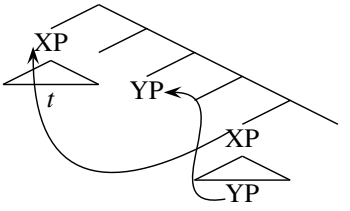
4.1. Surfing and diving paths

QTF-layering also makes the correct predictions for surfing and diving paths, which a number of researchers have argued that the BOIM should cover (Grewendorf 2003, Williams 2003, Abels 2007, 2009, Keine 2020). In surfing paths, a constituent XP moves, then a subconstituent YP moves out of XP (24). In diving paths, the subconstituent YP moves first, followed by movement of the remnant XP (25).

(24) *Surfing: XP moves first, YP moves out of XP*



(25) *Diving: YP moves out of XP, remnant XP moves*



Abels (2007, 2009) argues that the BOIM extends to surfing and diving paths. For example, Ā-movement out of an A-moved constituent is possible (26a). The opposite ordering—A-movement out of an Ā-moved constituent—is strikingly bad (26b). Surfing paths thus seem to be subject to the BOIM.

(26) a. ?Which movie do you think that the [first part of *t*] is likely *t* to create a big scandal?

b. *Oscar is known [how likely *t* to win] it was *t*.

Similarly, Abels argues, it is possible to Ā-move a remnant created by A-movement (27a), but not to A-move a remnant created by Ā-movement (27b).[9]

(27) a. It is known [how likely *t* to win] Oscar is *t*.

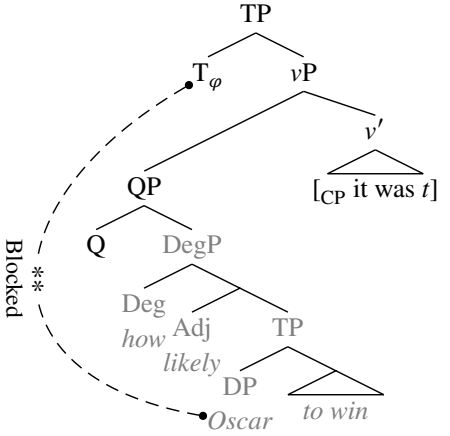
b. *[A picture of *t*] is known which king to have been sold *t*.

These patterns are problematic for many theories of the BOIM. The present account, however, makes the correct predictions. Take first a surfing path like (26b). Ā-movement of DegP results in QTF-layering (28). Because QTF elements are phase heads, a higher A-Probe cannot access anything inside it.[10] Thus, A-extraction of *any* subconstituent of an Ā-moved constituent is correctly predicted to be impossible.

[9] As Abels notes, independent constraints have been proposed for some of these cases. But since the paradigm appears to be systematic, he suggests that they should be given a unified account.

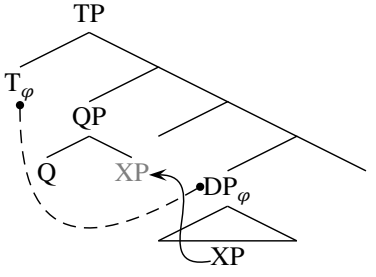
[10] Ā-extraction from on Ā-moved phrase is, however, marginally possible (Rizzi 2006). This is predicted by Richards' (1998) Principle of Minimal Compliance, which proposes that, once a Probe agrees with a phase, that Probe can ignore the phase boundary for the rest of the derivation. Thus, an Ā-Probe can 'unlock' a QTF phase via Agree, enabling the Ā-Probe to subextract from it. Since A-Probes cannot agree with a QTF phase, this ability to 'unlock' a phase will be restricted to Ā-Probes.

(28) *Q triggers spellout of DegP, blocking A-movement out of it*



QTF-layering makes different predictions for diving paths. Ā-movement from DP results in QTF-layering *outside* of the DP (29). The prediction, then, is that remnant A-movement of the DP should then be available, contra Abels (2007, 2009).

(29) *QTF layering takes place outside of DP, DP can be target of A-operations*



This is confirmed by (30). Ā-movement out of DP has occurred, licensing a parasitic gap. Low *v*P conjunction ensures that this step of Ā-movement has taken place below the surface position of the subject. This means that A-movement to spec-TP has taken place after the parasitic gap-licensing Ā-extraction, an (improper) instance of remnant A-movement.

(30) This is a painting that [any owner of *t*] will laugh [after buying *pg*] (and [cry after selling *pg*]).

A similar argument can be made for those English speakers who allow possessor extraction (Davis 2019).[11] Possessor extraction in (31) has licensed a parasitic gap in the embedded *v*P. The remnant DP, containing the stranded Saxon genitive, subsequently moves to spec-TP.

(31) This is the cat that I said [$_{DP}$ *t*'s purring] increased [after I petted *pg*].

I conclude that while improper surfing paths are ruled out, improper diving paths are possible.[12] This offers crucial support for a layering theory, since other approaches to the BOIM either rule them both in, or rule them both out.

[11] Thanks to Colin Davis for helping me construct this example.

[12] Abels (2007) argued that improper diving paths are ruled out on the basis of (27b), which would involve independently unattested A-movement out of an interrogative CP.

5. Principle C, Wholesale Late Merger

Finally, QTF-layering—in conjunction with Featural Cyclicity—offers an explanation for the distribution of Principle C reconstruction effects. Reconstruction for Principle C is obligatory in Ā-movement (32a), but not in A-movement (32b). A notable exception is that material contained within an adjunct does not have to reconstruct, even within an Ā-moved constituent. This is often attributed to the ability of adjuncts to undergo Late Merge (Lebeaux 1988, Chomsky 1995), as schematized in (32c).

(32) a. *[Which aspect of Lester$_1$] does he$_1$ find *t* most admirable?
b. [This aspect of Lester$_1$] seemed to him$_1$ to be most admirable.
c. [Which promises that Tommy$_1$ made] was he$_1$ never likely [~~which promises~~] to keep?

Takahashi & Hulsey (2009) offer a theory of why only A-movement can bleed Principle C. They propose that NP complements of determiners—like adjuncts—can undergo Late Merge (they call this *Wholesale Late Merger*, WLM). Since in (33), the NP *aspect of Lester* is not merged until after A-movement, it is never c-commanded by the matrix experiencer pronoun.

(33) [This aspect of Lester$_1$] seemed to him$_1$ [~~this~~] to be most admirable.

They further argue that NPs are subject to the Case Filter, thus restricting the distribution of WLM to case positions. This means that WLM—and therefore Principle C obviation—is unavailable in the landing sites of Ā-movement. This explains why reconstruction for Principle C is obligatory in cases like (32a): since case is unavailable in the landing site of Ā-movement, WLM cannot take place.

There are some empirical difficulties with this account, however. Consider possessors, for example: as DPs, they are predicted by Takahashi & Hulsey (2009) to allow WLM of their NPs. This is the correct result for the A-movement case in (34a). The question, then, is why WLM of possessor NPs is not also available in the landing site of Ā-movement, shown to be impossible by (34b). This cannot be attributed to the Case Filter, because possessors get case internal to the moving element.

(34) a. [$_{DP}$ Dee$_1$'s mother]$_2$ seems to him$_1$ to t_2 be selfish.
b. [Dee$_1$'s book]$_3$, he$_{*1/2}$ thinks t_3 is insightful.

Mongolian presents the inverse problem. Fong (2019) shows that hyperraising of accusative subjects bleeds Principle C. In (35a), the matrix goal argument *tüün-d* c-commands the embedded subject. In (35b), hyperraising into the matrix clause bleeds the potential Principle C violation.

(35) a. Bi Bat(-iig)$_1$ sain khün gej tüün-d$_{*1/2}$ khel-sen.
1SG.NOM Bat(-ACC) good person COMP 3SG-DAT say-PST
'I told her/him that Bat is a good person.'

b. Bat-iin$_1$ eej-iig bi [*t* sain khün gej] tüün-d$_1$ khel-sen
Bat-GEN mother-ACC 1SG.NOM good person say-PST COMP 3SG-
'I told her/him that Bat's mother is a good person.'

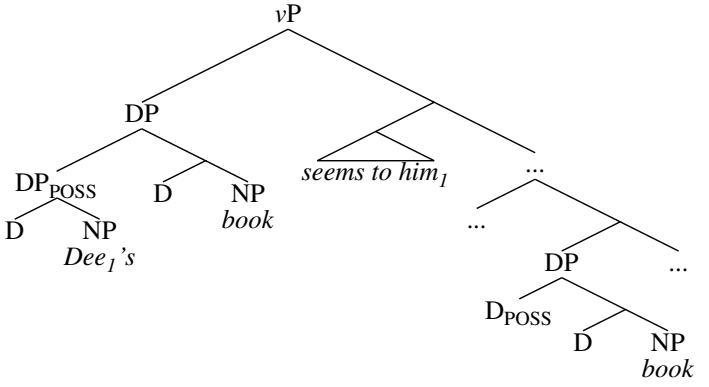
But crucially, accusative case assignment *precedes* hyperraising into the matrix clause.[13] What (35b) shows, then, is that movement to a non-case position can obviate Principle C. This should not be possible, if WLM is restricted to case positions.

Layering, in conjunction with Featural Cyclicity, can account for these patterns. Featural Cyclicity—as amended in 4)—requires that operations pay attention to the syntactic needs of any currently projecting

[13] This is already evident from (35a), since an accusative subject is subject to Principle C. Fong (2019) also shows that accusative subjects can follow embedded adverbs.

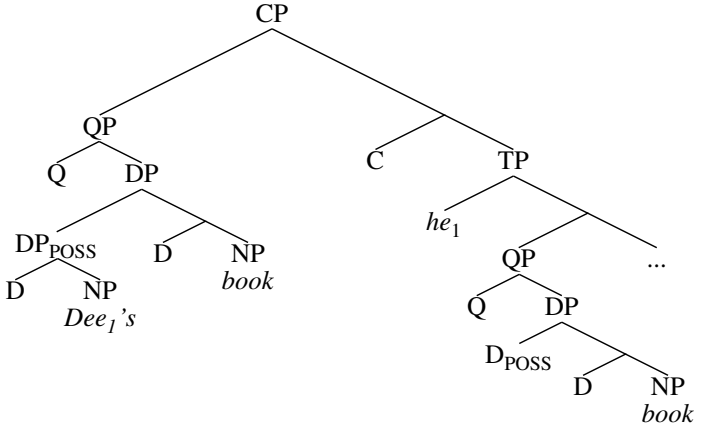
head. Take first the case of possessors: in A-movement, Featural Cyclicity is obeyed, since WLM of the possessor NP targets D, a projecting head.

(36) *WLM in spec-DP permitted by Featural Cyclicity*



In Ā-movement, on the other hand, QTF-layering has taken place, and D is no longer projecting. Featural Cyclicity therefore rules out WLM after Ā-movement, even when it would target a (DP-internal) case position.

(37) *WLM in spec-DP ruled out by Featural Cyclicity*



Conversely, Fong (2019) shows that Mongolian hyperraising involves A-movement. There is therefore no QTF-layering, and WLM does not violate Featural Cyclicity. Principle C obviation is predicted to be possible, even when the movement is to a non-case position. I conclude that QTF-layering, in conjunction with Featural Cyclicity, can explain why Ā-movement must reconstruct for Principle C, while A-movement does not have to.

6. Conclusion

This paper began with the observation that DPs perform different functions in A/Ā-contexts. In A-contexts, they are selected, agreed with and assigned case. In Ā-contexts, they serve as restrictors for QTF-elements, which I argued to be phase heads, and therefore intervenors for A-dependencies. In order for DPs to be able to perform both of these functions, QTF elements are introduced countercyclically, in a layering derivation. This has a number of appealing consequences for a theory of the A/Ā-distinction. QTF-layering improves the empirical coverage of Cable's 2007 theory of pied-piping, allowing the distribution of pied-piping to follow from independent constraints on movement. It provides a principled account of the Ban on Improper Movement and the inability of Ā-movement to feed case and agreement, correctly allowing improper diving paths while disallowing improper surfing paths. Finally, it can account

for the distribution of Principle C reconstruction, by ruling WLM out in Ā-movement (even in positions where case is available), and allowing WLM in A-movement (even in positions where case is unavailable). It also offers a plausible way forward for other properties of the A/Ā-distinction. For example, the binding profiles of A/Ā-movement could follow from the c-command bleeding properties of QTF-layering. I leave this for future research.

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