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X'-theory

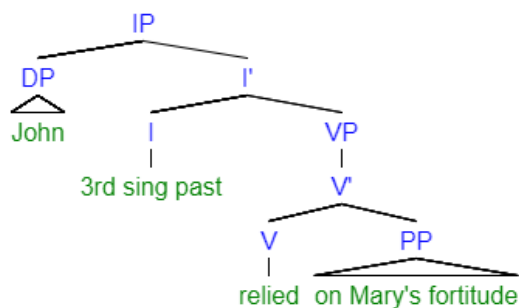
The most influential syntax system currently in use is called X'-theory. This theory was proposed by the linguist Chomsky. The underlying concept of the system is that of an universal grammar. In every human's brain there is a language faculty that enables the person to speak a language. This language faculty is universal. Based on these premises, it is possible to create a syntactic system that works for each language. And so we come to X'-theory, which accounts for universal properties of languages.

To give an example of the problems that X'-theory solves, I will first discuss a syntactic problem, illustrating this with the following sentences:

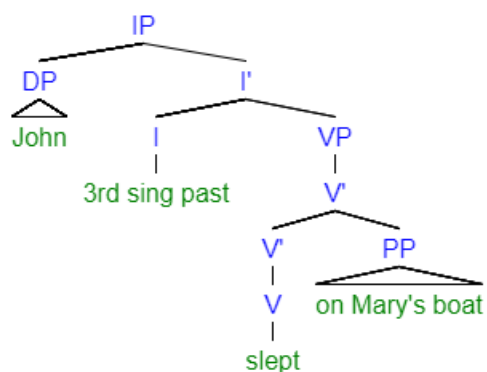
1. John relied on Mary's fortitude.
2. John slept on Mary's boat.

These sentences may seem the same, but there is an underlying difference. This becomes clear when using do-so substitution. You can't say: (1.) * "John relied on Mary's fortitude and Mark did so on Matthew's skill." This is ungrammatical. You can say: (2.) John slept on Mary's boat and Mark did so in the car. Saying that do-so substitutes just for the verb is

incorrect, as our examples illustrate. However, if there is an intermediate category between the verb and the verb phrase we can explain this difference. To conclude, “slept” in sentence 2 is a V' on its own, it is intransitive, and do-so substitutes not for a V but for a V' . “Relied” is not a V' on its own but takes a complement, and when replacing it with do-so you also have to omit the complement “Mary’s fortitude”, making it substitute for the whole V' . Therefore: (1.) “John relied on Mary’s fortitude and Mark did so too.” is perfectly fine.



Sentence 1. Illustrating that “relied” has a complement and is not a V' on its own.



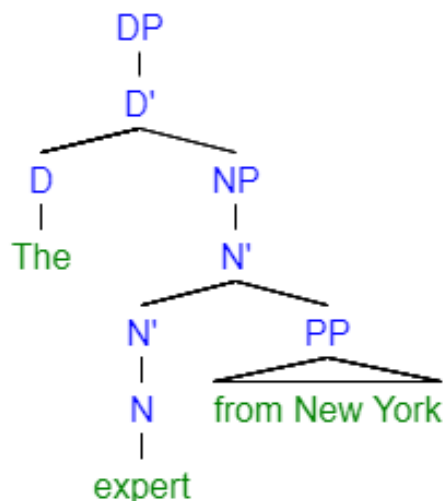
Sentence 2. Illustrating that “slept” is a V' on its own.

In fact, the intermediate categories in the X'-theory are an essential component of it.

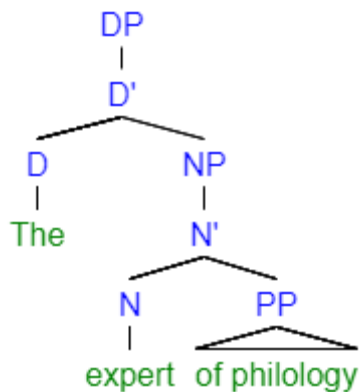
We can see a similar distinction when we look at the nominal domain. Illustrated by the following sentences:

1. The expert from New York.
2. The expert of linguistics.

When using one substitution for the noun we can make the following sentences: (1.) "The expert from New York and the one from Cambridge." But if you do that with sentence 2 it becomes ungrammatical: (2.) * "The expert of linguistics and the one of philology." This constitutes for the fact that it is not just the noun that should be replaced by one substitution. There has to be an intermediate level. And this is where N' makes its contribution to the theory. Similarly, it is the case again that one substitutes for N' and not for an NP or N. In sentence 2 "of linguistics" is a complement to "expert" and they belong to the same N', one cannot split these constituents when doing one substitution.

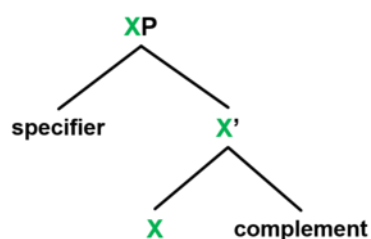


Sentence 1. Illustrating that "from New York" is an adjunct.



Sentence 2. Illustrating that “of philology” is a complement to “expert”, and therefore one has to substitute for both of these daughters of N’.

Focusing on economy Chomsky introduced the X’-theory. A theory that follows simple principles, and with the notion that universal grammar also inherently incorporates this system. X can be any category. XP branches out to a possible specifier and X’. X’ branches out to X and a possible YP. X’ then again branches out to X and a possible ZP. All X are of the same category. A complement is a sister of X, an adjunct is a sister of X’.



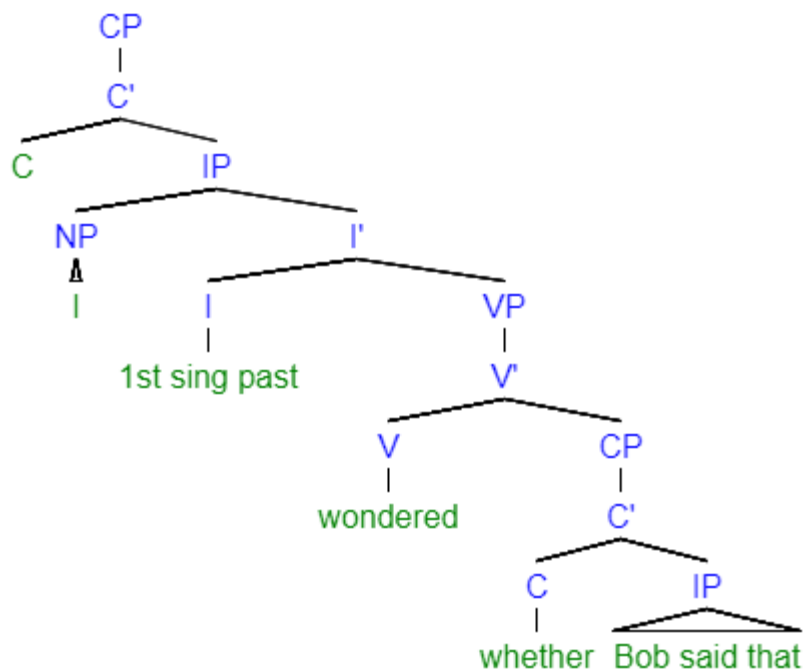
An illustration of a simple X’-theory structure.

A strict rule of X’-theory is that all phrases follow the same, before mentioned, structure. This also holds for more complicated sentence structures, like sentences with complementizers.

1. I wondered whether Bob said that.

“Bob said that”, is a sentence in its own right. And it is a complement to the verb

“wondered”. However, you can not say “wondered” takes an IP as its complement. This would cause an inconsistency in the rules of X'-theory. This would also mean that “I wondered Bob said that” is correct. The complementiser “whether” has to have its own category. And this is where the CP (complementisers phrase) enters the theory. There are many languages where main clauses start with complementisers, that is why we also start a tree structure with a complementizer.



This shows how the complementizer is a functional category.

X'-theory is not complete yet, there are still some issues that are unresolved. For example with ConjP (Conjunction Phrases). The most basic conjunction is “and”. In X'-theory it should be the head of a conjunction phrase. This creates problems.

1. They went up and down the stairs.

This is analyzed as a PP containing a ConjP “in and out”, and “the stairs” as a DP. It has no P as a head. This is one of the issues with X'-theory.