

# ABSTRACT

## On the pre-theoretical notion "phrasal head": ignoring the left periphery is always at your own risk!

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In addition to the well-defined X'-theoretical notion 'head', the term 'head' has also been used with pre-theoretical intent in both the traditional and the generative literature, sometimes with the added qualification 'external' or 'internal'. Such terms purported to denote a variety of *phrasal constituents* which, much like *lexical heads*, impressionistically play a crucial role in determining the category, logical type, and distributional properties of some larger containing construction.

In a number of recent papers, Henk van Riemsdijk (HvR) has argued for a (partial) analytical unification of (all) constructions with impressionistic phrasal heads (IPHs) in terms of a mechanism of 'Grafting' (GR), which basically amounts to the Re-Merger of a proper sub-element of a tree A with the root of an independently constructed tree B. Unlike 'standard' Re-merger (i.e., movement), Grafting must be allowed to *circumvent the left-edge condition on phases* (technically, by being allowed to operate *before* the most immediately containing phase is completed).

My talk compares the relative merits of this approach with those of competing GR-less analyses in relations to the analyses they make available for three constructions that have received comparatively little attention in earlier literature, and are of interest in their own right (these were prominently addressed by HvR): (i) non-constituent non-intersective modifiers (NNMs), (ii) transparent free relatives (TFRs), and (iii) Lakovian Andrews amalgams (LAAs), illustrated in (1)-(3) (the IPHs are boldfaced).

- (1) This matter is [*far from* [<sub>AP</sub> **simple**]]. ← NNM  
(2) John is playing with [what *seems* to be [<sub>DP</sub> **a toy**]]. ← TFR  
(3) John invited [you'll never guess [<sub>DP</sub> **how many people**]] to [you can imagine [<sub>DP</sub> **what kind of a party**]] at [it should be obvious [<sub>DP</sub> **which place**]] with [God only knows [<sub>DP</sub> **what purpose in mind**]], although he was [you can guess {<sub>AP</sub> **how tired**, [<sub>PP</sub> **under what kind of pressure**]]. ← LAAs

The comparison will show that the GR-approach, despite arguable initial attractiveness, runs into severe empirical problems with respect to all three constructions. An incomplete list of such problems follows:

[A] GR needs to ignore phasal boundaries in TFRs and LAAs, but must respect them in NNMs, as will be shown on the basis of data like (4). It is unclear how the distinction can be made in a principled way.

- (4) a. This matter is far from (being) simple.  
b. This is a far from (\*being) simple matter.

[B] The GR analysis of TFRs makes wrong predictions concerning Extraction options and Case-matching effects, sheds no light on a constellation of morpho-syntactic, configurational, and semantic properties internal to TFRs, and fails to explain the fact that adjectives in predicative position within TFRs may exhibit the morpho-syntax and semantics of attributive adjectives.

[C] A GR analysis of LAAs has no natural account of data like (5).

(5) Bill has been busy [you will never guess **what with**] since the morning.

In contrast to the difficulties that beset GR analyses, I will present alternative analyses of the three constructions which avoid all those problems, and shed significant light on aspects that the GR approach can only stipulate. -- Time permitting, I will show that a comparable state of affairs exists with respect to additional constructions for which HvR has proposed to resort to GR, in particular, 'ordinary' FRs and Lakovian Horn Amalgams (the latter is illustrated in (6)).

(6) John is flying to – I believe it is Chicago – next week.

The conclusion that will be reached is that even if all constructions with IPHs can be analytically unified in terms of a single mechanism (something that is not logically necessary, and does not seem particularly probable at the moment), that mechanism **cannot be Grafting**, because Grafting seems to be empirically inappropriate for each and every construction with respect to which it has so far been invoked.

On the conceptual front, HvR proposed that GR is a natural consequence of the null hypothesis about phrase structure, so that ruling it out would require a stipulation. This may be so, but in order to rule out analyses of IPHs by means of GR does not require blocking GR itself. Rather, one may envisage a semantic interface where multi-dimensional tree representations can only be construed in certain ways. For example, distinct trees that do not share nodes may be 'reserved' for distinct illocutionary units, such as parentheticals and appositive relatives, and distinct trees that do share nodes may be 'reserved' for certain types of coordinate structures (see Williams *IL* 1978, Citko *IL* 2005). In this way, GR analyses à la HvR may be filtered out at the interface without blocking GR *per se*.