

## MSc Intro to Syntax – examples of possible exam questions

1. For each of the following sentences, name all the Noun Phrase constituents. For each of the constituents you mention, provide some evidence that it is a constituent based on the replacement and the movement test.

- (1) The lonely man in the corner quietly drank a pint of beer in the pub.
- (2) I do not understand why ghosts cannot be seen in the dark.

NPs in (1): *the lonely man in the corner*, *the corner*, *a pint of beer*, *beer* and *the pub*

Evidence from replacement: *he* quietly drank a pint of beer in the pub

the lonely man in *it* quietly drank etc.

the lonely man in the corner quietly drank *it*

the lonely man .... drank a pint of *it*

the lonely man in the corner (...) in *it*

Evidence based on movement: A pint of beer the lonely man in the corner drank etc.

In the pub the lonely man etc.

But not e.g. \*A pint the lonely man in the corner drank of beer -- so *a pint* is not an NP on its own in (1).

If you are really precise, and take the hypothesis that *the lonely man in the corner* is a DP rather than an NP into account, then only *man in the corner* is an NP (and, similarly, only *corner*, *pint of beer*, *beer* and *pub* are the NPs). Either set of answers would get full marks.

NPs in (2): *I*, *ghosts*, *the dark* (or *dark* if you assume the DP hypothesis).

Evidence based on replacement: *I* is already a pronoun, so is an NP. Evidence for the other two: I do not understand why *they* cannot be seen in *it*.

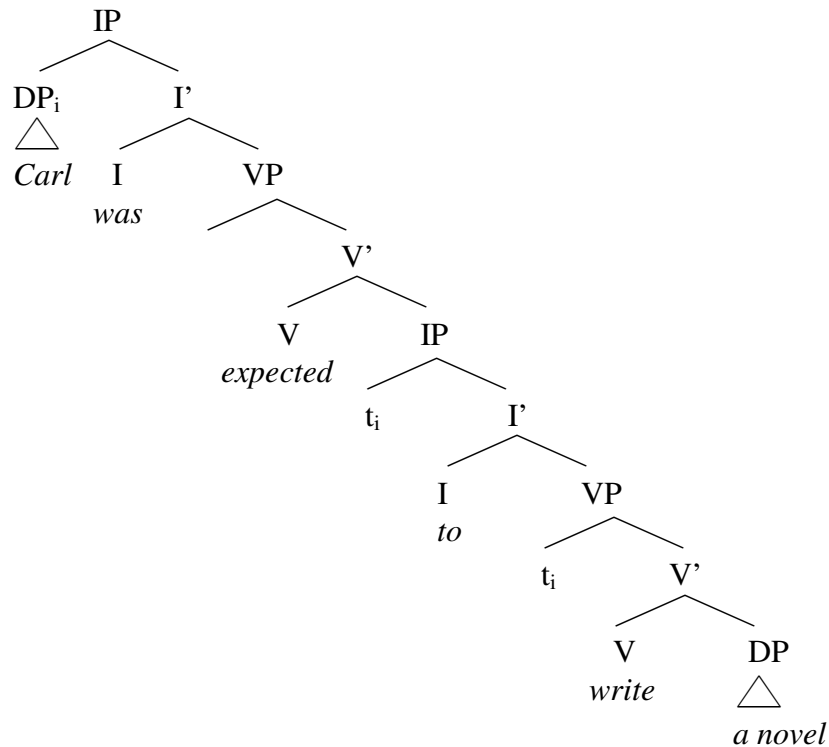
Evidence based on movement is actually impossible in this case (because you cannot move anything out of a sentence that starts with *why*), hence this would have been ignored in the marking.

2. Consider the following sentence:

- (3) Everybody expected Carl to write a novel.

Give the structure (in the form of a tree diagram) of the passive counterpart of this sentence (you may leave out the *by everybody* phrase from this passive).

The passive counterpart is *Carl was expected to write a novel*. The structure of this is as follows (the CP level of the structure is ignored here, as this is not relevant – including it is fine as well. Also, placing *to write* together under the V node, rather than placing *to* separately under the I node, is ok as well.)



3.

a. What causes the contrast in grammaticality between the following sentences?

- (4) a. Maria expected the kettle to boil over  
 b. \*Maria persuaded the kettle to boil over

Whereas (4a) is an a.c.i. construction, (4b) is a control construction. In (4a), *the kettle* is the subject of the infinitival clause in complement position, and as such it fulfills the selectional restrictions that the verb *boil over* imposes on its subjects. In (4b), there is an empty PRO subject in the embedded infinitival clause in complement position, which is controlled by *the kettle* (*persuade* is an object control verb: *Mary persuaded Frances to read the book* means that Frances, not Mary, read the book). In this case *the kettle* is the object in the main clause. This means the selectional restrictions of the verb *persuade* are violated here, since this verb selects objects that are human, or at least capable of intentional action.

4.

a. Why are the following sentences not well-formed?

- (5) a. #The star tries to emit radiowaves  
 b. #Maria tries to emit radiowaves

The verb *try* is a subject control verb, so in both these cases there is a PRO subject in the infinitival complement clause that is controlled by the subject of the main clause. This PRO subject has to satisfy the selectional restrictions of the verb in the embedded clause, whereas the main clause subject has to satisfy the selectional restrictions of the verb in the main clause. In (5a), the subject of the main clause, *the star*, violates the selectional restrictions of the verb *try*, since this verb must have a subject that is capable of intentional action. In (5b), the PRO subject in the embedded

clause violates the selectional requirements of the verb *emit*: since PRO is controlled by *Mary*, its referent is human, but humans do not emit radiowaves.

b. For both (5a) and (5b), explain why its well-formedness does or does not change when we replace the verb *tries* with the verb *seems*.

*seem* is a raising verb. The constituent that appears in its subject position is really the subject of the embedded infinitival complement clause, which has moved to the higher subject position. This subject therefore only has to satisfy the selectional restrictions of the embedded verb; *seem* never imposes any selectional restrictions on the constituent in its subject position. This means that (5a) will become grammatical if we replace *tries* with *seems* (*the star seems to emit radiowaves*), since *the star* does indeed satisfy the selectional requirements of the embedded predicate *to emit radiowaves*. In contrast, (5b) remains anomalous (*#Mary seems to emit radiowaves*), since, as noted, humans are not natural emitters of radiowaves. (Of course, it is possible to think of circumstances in which this sentence can be used, e.g. in a science fiction story, but those circumstances are precisely those in which the usual selectional restrictions of *emit* are suspended).

5. For each of the italicized phrases, (i) indicate what the head of the phrase is (ii) indicate what the complement is, if there is one (iii) indicate what the specifier is, if there is one.

- (6)
- a. They flew *right across the blue river*
  - b. I met a man who was *extremely fond of eating banana ice cream*
  - c. *To smoke cigarettes* is a health hazard

(a) head = *across*, complement = *the blue river*, specifier = *right*

(b) head = *fond*, complement = *of eating banana ice cream*, specifier = *extremely*  
(unless you adopt the DegP hypothesis, then *extremely* = head, and no specifier)

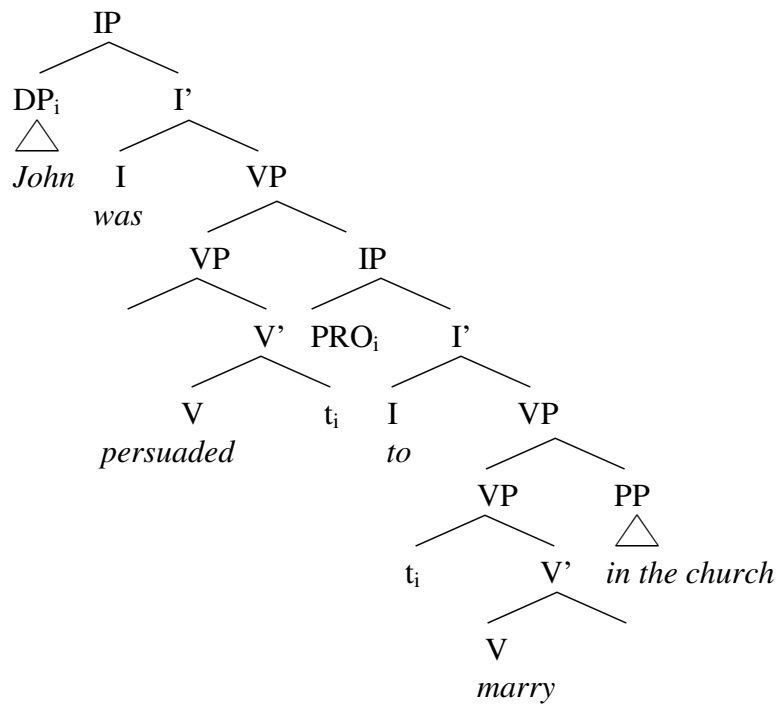
(c) head = *to smoke* (just *smoke* would also be ok), complement = *cigarettes*, no specifier

6. The following sentence is ambiguous:

(7) John was persuaded to marry in the church

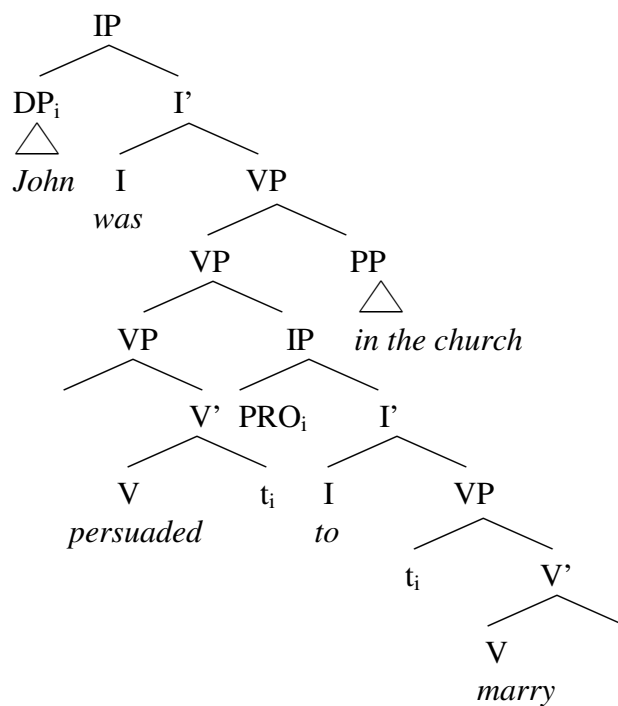
- a. Give a paraphrase of both readings.
- b. For each of the readings, provide the structure the sentence has in this reading.

reading 1: John was persuaded to do something, namely to marry in the church  
structure for this reading (again the CP level of structure is ignored as it is irrelevant here, but including it is fine as well):



reading 2: John was persuaded to marry, and the place where he was persuaded was the church.

structure for this reading:



The crucial thing is to put the modifier *in the church* in the embedded clause in reading 1, but in the main clause in reading 2.