A note on p-stranding and adjunct extraction from nominals

Bradley Larson and Norbert Hornstein

*University of Maryland*

1 Intro

Bošković 2005, 2008 outlines a phase-based analysis of adjunct extraction in determinerless languages like Serbo-Croatian (SC). The analysis is modeled on recent phase-based analyses of P-stranding (c.f. Abels 2003, 2012) wherein the richness of the functional structure of the PP determines whether extraction is possible. This squib identifies a problem for a unified analysis of these two phenomena. Prohibitions of adjunct extraction are obviated under sluicing while prohibitions of p-stranding are not.

2 The Paradigm in Question

First, Bošković 2008 (as well as Uriagereka 1988 and Corver 1992) notes a distinction between languages with regard to adjunct extraction from nominals. Languages that lack overt determiners like SC allow extraction of nominal modifiers. Languages with determiners like English (2) and Spanish (3) do not.

(1) [Iz kojeg grada]i je Petar sreo [djevojke t.i]? (SC)

from which city is Petar met girls

‘From which city did Petar meet girls?’

(2) *[From which city] i did Peter meet [girls t.i]?
(3)  *[Con que], comiste [une hamburguesa t],?

   with what 2nd a hamburger

   ‘what [topping] did you eat a hamburger with?’

Bošković develops a phase-based, derivational account for this distinction as follows. English is a language with DPs and assuming that DPs are phases, no movement can cross them without first landing in the specifier position Spec,DP. However, the PP in (2) is adjoined to its host NP and cannot move to that specifier position due to conditions that block derivational steps that are too “small.” These anti-locality restrictions require that a moving element minimally cross an entire phrasal boundary, segments being insufficient (Ishii 1997, 1999, Grohmann 2003, and Abels 2003). There is thus no licit derivational avenue for extracting the adjunct
This problem does not arise for SC, which, according to Bošković, lacks a DP layer. As NPs contrast with DPs in not being phases, there is no need for the adjunct to first move to the NP edge before exiting the nominal and so anti-locality can be honored. Consequently, movement of the adjunct can proceed unimpeded out of the NP.

Second, as is widely known, some languages allow preposition stranding (e.g. English (5)), while other languages do not (e.g. German (6) and Spanish (7)).

(5) Who_i did you talk to t_i?

(6) *Wem_i hast du mit t_i gesprochen?

Who have you with spoken

‘who have you spoken with?’

(7) *Quien_i contaron todos con t_i?

who counted everyone with

‘Who did everyone count on?’ (from Campos 1991)

The same logic applies to preposition stranding. The derivational constraints that work together to rule out (2) also rule out (6). In German, the preposition is a phase head that cannot be crossed without first landing in its specifier position. However, the complement of this phase-head preposition will not cross a full phrasal boundary in moving to the specifier position and is thus blocked:

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1 Bošković has two different yet related theories about the phasehood of nominal and we have concentrated on the simpler one. In other work (Bošković 2010) he argues that some NPs are phases in languages without determiners. Adjunct extraction is allowed here because the adjunct is generated on the edge of a phasal NP. The problem presented in this squib holds for both theories.
In English, preposition heads are not phasal and movement can proceed across them freely (Abels 2003).

3 The Problem: Ellipsis Facts

The phase-based analysis of preposition stranding is understood derivationally so as to accommodate an important fact: ellipsis does not improve P-stranding violations. The tight parallelism between the proposal and Bošković’s analysis of extraction from nominal’s would suggest a parallel interpretation of his proposal. This predicts that subsequent ellipsis should leave the nominal extraction data unaffected. For example, just as German and Spanish do not allow the extraction of the object of a preposition even if followed by sluicing English and Spanish should not allow the extraction of nominal modifiers even if followed by sluicing. However as (9)/(10) and (11)/(12) indicate, this is incorrect.

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2 There is disagreement in the literature as to how much p-stranding violations are or are not ameliorated by ellipsis. If it is the case that the are often salvageable (as suggested in Nykiel and Sag 2009), then there is an apparent problem for the derivational prohibition on p-stranding. We assume the prohibition to hold under sluicing, but our argument does not crucially rely on this.

3 It should be noted that Rodrigues et al. (2009) show that under most circumstances P-stranding under sluicing in Spanish (and Brazilian Portuguese) is superficially possible. This is because the sluice has an
(9) Johannes hat mit jemandem gesprochen, aber ich weiss nicht *(mit) wem.  
Johannes has with someone spoken but I know not with who  
‘Johannes spoke with someone, but I don’t know who’

(10) Con que chica ha salido Juan? *(con) Elena?  
with what girl has gone.out Juan with Elena  
‘What girl did Juan go out with? Elena?’ (Rodrigues et al. 2009)

(11) Ivan wanted to eat a cheeseburger with a particular topping. I just can’t remember  
with which topping.

(12) Ayer comi una hamburguesa con algo pero no me acuerdo con que  
Yesterday ate.1st a hamburger with something but no CL recall with what  
‘Yesterday I ate a hamburger with something, but I don’t remember with what.’

Note again that the un-elided version of (11) is unacceptable:⁴

(13) *[With which topping] did Ivan want to eat a cheeseburger

Both Spanish and English are DP languages in Bošković’s sense and are correctly predicted to forbid extraction from nominals. However, as these ellipsis data indicate, the effects of ellipsis on acceptability do no correlate with its effects on P-stranding. Bans on

underlying clefting source in which there is no p-stranding. The example in (10) is an instance where the clefting source is ruled out (though see Almeida and Yoshida (2007) for arguments against a clefting source). A reviewer notes that the fact of a licit clefting source might be correlated with the fact that DP extraction under sluicing is generally free.

⁴ The pied-piping of preposition is generally dispreferred in English, but there is nevertheless a very strong distinction between (11) and (13).
preposition stranding hold under ellipsis whereas bans on adjunct extraction from nominals do not hold under sluicing.

3.1 Short Sources

Some explanations of island effect amelioration under sluicing have posited that there is sometimes no island in the elided material (see discussion in Merchant 2001 or van Craenenbroeck 2010 among others). For example, English disallows left-branch extraction (14a) generally, but allows it under sluicing (14b). An explanation of this could be that there is a clefting ‘short source’ of (14b) that does not actually involve left-branch extraction (14c).

(14)  a. *How large did Ivy sell a car?

    b. Ivy sold a large car, but I can’t remember how large.

    c. Ivy sold a large car, but I can’t remember [how large] \text{ the car was } t_i

It is logically possible that the apparent island obviation in (11) actually stems from a short source and that the derivational ban on adjunct extraction from nominals can still hold. However, the copular short source of (11) is unacceptable:

(15)    *With which topping was the cheeseburger (to be)?

The \textit{with}-phrase above is used in a modifying sense and cannot be used as a predicate, ruling out the cleft source. Further, Merchant and van Craenenbroeck note that
else-modification cannot co-occur with clefting, but can with sluicing. As a reviewer notes, this holds with the relevant example here, further militating against the cleft short source:

(16) Joe wanted to buy a burger with ketchup but I don’t know with what else (*it was).

Thus, the with-phrase cannot be base generated as a copular predicate. Nor can it be base generated as a VP-adjunct. This would only permit a comitative reading (‘to eat with Dana’), an instrumental reading (‘to eat with a fork’), or a manner reading (‘to eat with relish’). In sum the particular modifier reading of the phase can only arise via NP-adjunction and thus effect an island violation in lieu of sluicing. Given the lack of short source for this case of island amelioration, the example in (11) may be a unique case with the palliative effect of sluicing necessarily attributed to the ellipsis itself.

Conclusion
The differential effects of ellipsis on derivations involving P-stranding and adjunct extraction from nominal (even within a single language in Spanish) suggest that different conditions regulate the two processes. A unified phase-based account of the kind proposed by Bošković would thus seem to be inapposite.


Bošković, Željko. 2008 What will you have, DP or NP? In *Proceedings of the Northeast Linguistics Society 37*, ed. by Martin Walkow and Emily Elfner, 101-114.

Amherst, MA: GLSA, University of Massachusetts


