

## What Natural Classes of (Weak) Islands?

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The classical example of a weak, i.e. selective island violation is the extraction of an adjunct out of a non-tensed *wh*-complement, and the classical account, purely syntactic, is that the intervening *wh*-phrase blocks one escape hatch with its bulk. Interestingly, work in the past two decades has demonstrated that many further relations are sensitive to weak islands, i.e. are blocked by roughly the same interveners that block the adjunct  $\bar{\lambda}$  gap relation, and that many further interveners induce such weak islands.

A sample of **weak island sensitive constructions** includes the extraction of non-referential expressions in general (whether adjuncts or arguments), the extraction of obligatorily collective arguments, event-related readings, functional questions, split constructions, partial *wh*-movement, some cases of *wh*-in-situ, comparative constructions and, more strikingly, NPI-licensing and cross-sentential anaphora.

A sample of **weak island inducers** includes besides *wh*-phrases downward entailing operators, response stance and non-stance predicates, VP-adverbs, any distributive quantifiers scoping between two terms of a sensitive relation, and focus-sensitive operators.

Some though not all of these are summarized in Szabolcsi 2006 (in: [The Blackwell Companion to Syntax](#)). That article furthermore observes that expressions that escape from **strong islands** (by binding a silent resumptive pronoun) are not unlike those ones that escape from weak ones: they tend to be referential individual-denoters. If not purely coincidental, this is intriguing.

The widening of the data sets has been paralleled by the emergence of new theories of weak islands. The first major innovation, Relativized Minimality, was largely though not purely syntactic. Due to the **heterogeneity of the data**, subsequent theories have gone more in the direction of semantics and/or pragmatics. They fall into two main categories. Kiss 1993, Szabolcsi & Zwarts 1993, Fox & Hackl 2006, and Abrus 2007 are squarely semantic; according to these proposals, weak island violations are essentially incoherent. In contrast, de Swart 1992, Cresti 1995, Honcoop 1998, Pesetsky 2000, Butler & Mathieu 2004, and Beck 2006 localize the problem **in syntax or at the syntax/semantics interface**; likewise Starke 2002, in the only systematic attempt to unify strong and weak islands in a new version of Relativized Minimality.

How is this relevant to linearization accounts of islands? To my mind, the task starts with identifying the natural classes of phenomena; then the question becomes, **do syntactic accounts, linearization among them, constitute a good theory of some natural class?** It is not clear to me whether the question has been asked this way.

It is to be stressed that although the constructions listed above are tantalizingly similar, it is by no means certain that they are instances of the same thing. In fact, the theories mentioned overlap in coverage, but none of them covers all the data. So the jury is out on exactly what the natural classes are, although it seems clear that those classes are fairly large, and therefore fairly challenging. Experimental studies could also provide important new insights here.