

## A note on adjunction (session 6)

In discussing the phrase-structural difference of the **linearly identical** *send letters to Peter* (ditransitive) and *burn letters to Peter* (transitive; p. 107), which was to everyone's satisfaction (?) captured by different analyses of the PP *to Peter* (i.e. VP-shell vs. complement of the NP *letters*), we touched on the topic of adjunction, in particular, whether the PP in *burn letters to Peter* should indeed be treated as a **complement**, or rather as an **adjunct** of the NP *letters* (or, in semantic terms, as an argument or as a modifier of it, respectively).

- (1) a. burn letters to Peter  
b. NP[*letters* PP[*to Peter*]] – complement  
c. NP[NP[*letters*] PP[*to Peter*]] – adjunct

It seems that, here, the status of the PP as to its syntactic category is far from clear. Evidently, the traditional **omissibility test** to determine the **obligatoriness/optionality**, and thus the complement/adjunct status, of a constituent is not sufficient: undoubtedly, the PP in *send letters to Peter* is the prepositional object of the verb (*to*) *send* bearing a GOAL  $\theta$ -role, but still, *send letters ~~to Peter~~* is perfectly grammatical (where it is in principle arguable if the monotonitivisation of the regularly ditransitive (*to*) *send* might result in a whole new verb); just the same holds for the PP in the transitive *burn letters ~~to Peter~~*, the omission of which leaves behind a grammatical structure as well. Thus, if omissibility is no criterion for the syntactic status of a constituent, what then makes the difference?

A syntactic test which would suggest the PP in *burn letters to Peter* to be an adjunct, and not a complement (of whatever), is the **Constraint on Extraction Domains** (CED; Huang 1982, in Radford 2006:161): “Only complements allow material to be extracted out of them, not specifiers or adjuncts.”. Thus, in question formation, it is possible to extract the NP *Peter* out of the PP *to Peter* in (2), but not in (3).

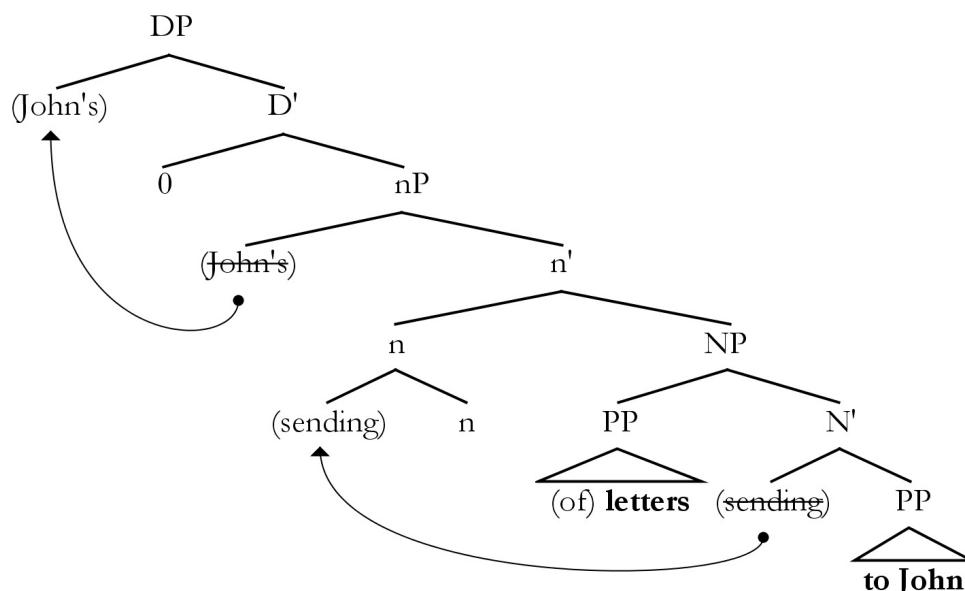
- (2) Who did you send letters PP[*to who*]?  
(3) \*Who did you burn letters PP[*to who*]?

What this tells us, however, is only that the PP in (3) is no complement/argument of *the verb*. So, from a selectional point of view, it seems clear that in (2) the PP, subcategorised by the verb (*to*) *send* (as captured by the VP-shell analysis:  $v_P$ [Subj  $v'$ [send  $v_P$ [letters  $v'$ [send PP[*to Peter*]]]]]), is *c-commanded* by, but *not contained* in the NP *letters*, while in (3) the PP is *contained* in (and

immediately dominated by) the NP *letters*. The question that remains is in what kind of configurational relation the PP in *burn letters to Peter* stands with the N(P) *letters* – **adjunction or complementation?**

I think a tentative solution would be to treat the PP as a **DP-internal** THEME argument of an implicit *n* (i.e. the nominalisation of the verb (*to*) *send* to (*the/a*) *sending*) according to Adger’s extension of the UTAH to the dominal domain (ch. 7, particularly on pp. **268f.**). Akin to the *vP*-analysis, the N *sending* checks features with its GOAL-PP *to Peter*, raise-adjoins to *n*, and checks features with its THEME-PP *of letters*, upon which the AGENT-NP *John* is merged into [Spec,*nP*], only subsequently receiving its GENITIVE case-feature.

(4)



Although it is not evident why only so little of DP-internal argument structure should have overtly survived into the sentence *John burned letters to Peter*, such an analysis might make explicit the semantic (and ultimately syntactic) difference between a PP like *to John*, which could stand in some selectional relation with *letters* (and ultimately an implicit *sending*), and a more prototypical adverbial PP like *on Mondays* (*John burned letters on Mondays*), which is most likely adjoined to *letters*.

In any case, an example like *burn letters to John* appears not well-chosen in a context discussing the differences between complements and adjuncts. It should be noted, however, that on p. **276**, Adger states that “[i]f the PP is an argument of the noun, then it must be in complement position. If the PP is not an argument, then it must be adjoined.” However, the problem with *letters to Peter* is that the ‘nominalised verb’, i.e. the N/*n* denoting the action, is missing.