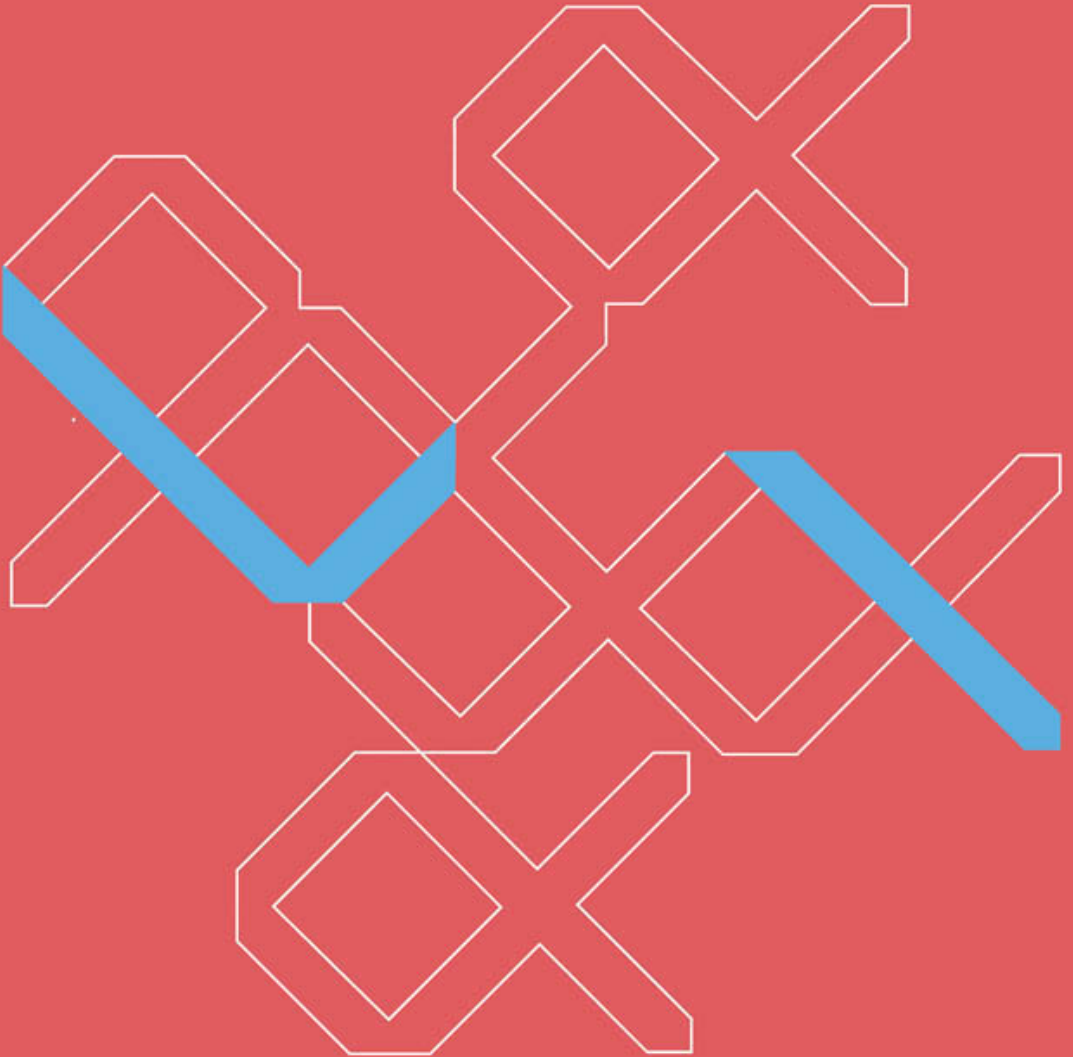




Linguistic Inquiry
Monograph Eighty-Eight

When Arguments Merge

Elise Newman



When Arguments Merge

Linguistic Inquiry Monographs

Samuel Jay Keyser, general editor

A complete list of books published in the Linguistic Inquiry Monographs series appears at the back of this book.

When Arguments Merge

Elise Newman

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For Arnie and Bingy

No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise.
—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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Series Foreword

We are pleased to present the eighty-third volume in the series Linguistic Inquiry Monographs. These monographs present new and original research beyond the scope of the article. We hope they will benefit our field by bringing to it perspectives that will stimulate further research and insight.

Originally published in limited edition, the Linguistic Inquiry Monographs are now more widely available. This change is due to the great interest engendered by the series and by the needs of a growing readership. The editors thank the readers for their support and welcome suggestions about future directions for the series.

Samuel Jay Keyser
for the Editorial Board

Acknowledgments

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The inspiration for this book originated in a conversation with Kenyon Branam, to whom I am very grateful. Our conversation began with some thoughts on selection, and somehow ended with wh-movement in Mayan, which didn't make a lot of sense at the time, but hopefully will once you've read the book.

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Abbreviations

A	Set A	INCH	Inchoative Aspect
ABS	Absolutive	INDF	Indefinite
ACC	Accusative	INST	Instrumental
AF	Agent Focus	INT	Internal
AGR	Agreement	INTER	Interrogative
AP	Anti-passive	IO	Indirect Object
APPL	Applicative	IPFV	Imperfective
ASP	Aspect	IRR	Irrealis
AUG	Augment	ITV	Intransitive
B	Set B	LOC	Locative
CONJ	Conjunctive Clitic	M	Masculine
CL	Clitic	N	Neuter
CLF	Classifier	NACT	Non-active
COM	Completive Aspect	NEG	Negation
DAT	Dative	NMLZ	Nominalization
DET	Determiner	NOM	Nominative
DIM	Diminutive	OBJ	Object
DIR	Direct	OBL	Oblique
DO	Direct Object	OBLV	Oblique Voice
EP	Established Past	OV	Object Voice
ERG	Ergative	OM	Object Marking
EXCL	Exclusive	PART	Participant
EXT	External	PASS	Passive
F	Feminine	PFV	Perfective
FOC	Focus	PL	Plural
FUT	Future	POSS	Possessed
FV	Final Vowel	P	Preposition
GEN	Genitive	PRES	Present
INC	Incompletive Aspect	PST	Past

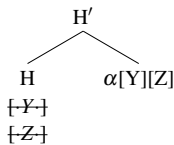
PTCP	Participial
RDR	Redirective
REL	Relative Complementizer
REFL	Reflexive
REM	Remote
RN	Relational Noun
RS	Relative Suffix
SG	Singular
SM	Subject Marking
SUBJ	Subject
SV	Subject Voice
TV	Transitive
UNM	Unmarked Case

1 Introduction

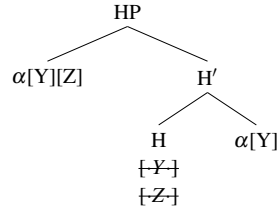
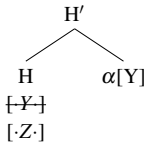
This monograph defends a novel approach to argument structure, which predicts structural relations between arguments from conditions on feature-checking. Assuming that all kinds of Merge (external Merge, A-movement, and \bar{A} -movement) are driven by features (Chomsky 1995), I propose that subset relationships between different sets of features can constrain the distribution of arguments in unexpected ways. The distribution of arguments in different contexts has many observable correlates, such as the case and agreement alignment of a clause, word order, accessibility to movement, and binding profiles. We will see that unexplained puzzles in each of these domains can be accounted for by a reanalysis of basic clause structure, which is predicted by the logic of feature-checking advanced here.

The logic of the approach is that subset relationships between feature sets create potential for bleeding derivations. Suppose that a head selects for two kinds of elements, one bearing the feature [Y] and one bearing the feature [Z]. An element bearing both [Y] and [Z] should be able to check both features, while an element bearing only one of those features can check only one. Assuming that a single instance of Merge can result in the checking of multiple features, the order of Merge matters here—merging $\alpha[Y][Z]$ first bleeds the possibility of merging both elements, while merging $\alpha[Y]$ first does not.

- (1) Feeding/bleeding due to subset relationships between features sets
a. Merging $\alpha[Y][Z]$ before $\alpha[Y]$ bleeds $\alpha[Y]$ by checking both features



b. Merging $\alpha[Y]$ before $\alpha[Y][Z]$ licenses both



The result is that for certain pairs of elements, one element has the capacity to restrict the distribution of the other, with structural consequences for any phrase containing them both. I show that subset relationships affect structure in two kinds of scenarios: (1) when a *wh*-argument and a non-*wh*-argument occupy the same position at some point in the derivation, and (2) when a head selects for both a DP and a non-DP argument. The theory that regulates the distribution of arguments in both scenarios provides an explanation for *wh*-movement/Voice interactions crosslinguistically as well as puzzling facts about verb phrase syntax more generally.

There are two kinds of observations that inform the approach taken here. First is that there are meta-restrictions on what kinds of subcategorization requirements verbs can have within and across languages. As discussed by K. Hale and S. J. Keyser (1993), Ken Hale and Samuel Jay Keyser (2002), Marelj (2002), and Juarros (2003), among others, the extended projection of a verb cannot contain more than four arguments crosslinguistically. We will additionally see that there are restrictions on the categorial composition of these arguments: at most two of them can be DPs, and at most two of them can be non-DPs. These kinds of restrictions indicate that the space of attested selectional patterns is much smaller than the space of imaginable ones, which demands an explanation.

The second observation is that A-syntax and \bar{A} -syntax influence each other more than originally thought. I say A-syntax and \bar{A} -syntax, rather than A-movement and \bar{A} -movement, because of the nature of the interactions under discussion, which do not obviously reflect properties of movement. We will examine several well-known examples of interactions between *wh*-movement and Voice, which show that the distribution of *wh*-elements sometimes affects the acceptable distribution of non-*wh*-elements (and/or vice versa). I will argue that both of these kinds of patterns, meta-restrictions on subcategorization and *wh*-movement/Voice interactions, lend themselves to the following conclusion: the position of one kind of phrase is impacted by the presence of another kind of phrase, due to how the features on these respective phrases interact with conditions on feature-checking.

These two kinds of observations have separately received much attention throughout the literature. Attempting to leverage the logic in (1) to explain crosslinguistic patterns therefore directly or indirectly bears on a number of debates in syntactic theory. In my opinion, the most fundamental issue addressed by this monograph has to do with the source and nature of features driving syntactic operations. While it is common to treat Merge-inducing features as properties of lexical items, I will motivate an alternative view, in which they are grouped according to syntactic category.

I propose that this choice allows the combinatorial system to provide a very limited amount of flexibility in what kinds of structures it can generate: just enough to capture the range of verb phrases that we find and no more. More specifically, I argue that the inventory of Merge-inducing features is quite small, as is the inventory of categories. Because it is categories, not individual lexical items, that are defined as having a certain set of Merge-inducing features, the combinatorial system produces a much smaller set of structures than it might have if the number of primitives were as vast as the lexicon.

This choice harkens back to discussion in the Minimalist Program, where Chomsky argued that we should eliminate the phrase-structure rules of previous frameworks because they were redundant with information in the lexicon. According to his reasoning, if the lexicon already contains features driving c-selection, and the derivation can be instructed from those features according to conditions on feature-checking, then stating separate rules of combination is unnecessary. Though the present theory does not contain any phrase structure rules, the spirit of the proposal is the opposite of what Chomsky suggested. Rather than remove structure-building information from the syntax, I essentially propose that we remove structure-building information from the lexicon, instead relegating it to the syntax proper. The result is a system in which conditions on feature-checking can be leveraged to explain generalizations about verb phrase syntax that transcend the properties of individual lexical items, creating a space of possible structures and structural variation within and across languages.

One of the advantages of this approach is it provides a new hypothesis space for explaining *wh*-movement/Voice interactions. In many languages, *wh*-movement of certain arguments has surprising implications for the kinds of Voice that are available to the clause. For example, *wh*-movement of an external argument in many Mayan languages obligatorily corresponds to intransitive morphosyntax, despite the fact that the clause is “logically” transitive (i.e., it has both internal and external arguments). A regular transitive clause in Q’anjob’al is shown in (2), where we observe agreement with both arguments and transitive verbal morphology. Attempting to *wh*-move the external argument, shown

in (3), requires the clause to bear different morphology—there is no agreement with the external argument, and the verb has intransitive-looking affixes.

(2) Max-ach y-il-a’.

PFV-OBJ2SG SUBJ3SG-see-TV

“She saw you.” (Q’anjob’al; Coon, Pedro, and Preminger 2014, ex. 12a, p. 187)

(3) Maktxel max-ach il-on-i?

who PFV-OBJ2SG see-AF-ITV

“Who saw you?” (Q’anjob’al; ex. 1, p. 180)

These kinds of phenomena are surprising on standard assumptions because it is typically assumed that the factors that contribute to the Voice of a clause are separate from those responsible for *wh*-movement. The Voice of the clause is thought to be sensitive to A-syntax, which generates the “basic” configuration of arguments and verbs that select them. *Wh*-movement, by contrast, is \bar{A} -syntax, which may displace arguments from their underlying position but is not expected to alter case/agreement outcomes predetermined by A-syntactic considerations. The present view, however, upends this distinction for the following reasons: (1) features driving *wh*-Merge and features driving argument-Merge have the same source and are subject to the same conditions, and (2) *wh*-arguments have a superset of features that non-*wh*-arguments have. *Wh*-arguments have whatever category feature their non-*wh*-counterparts have, in addition to a [*wh*] feature. The distribution of *wh*- vs. non-*wh*-arguments is therefore impacted by the logic in (1), which I propose may affect their base as well as their derived positions.

That *wh*-movement can affect basic clause structure is entailed by the proposal that *wh*-movement proceeds successive-cyclically through the edge of the verbal domain, as well as through the edge of each clause (Chomsky 1986). Following van Urk (2015) and Longenbaugh (2019), among others, we can represent the driver of clause-medial successive cyclic movement as a *wh*-hosting feature on *v*, namely the head that introduces the external argument. The presence of both an argument-introducing feature as well as a *wh*-hosting feature on *v* creates situations like (1). In the presence of two arguments, one of which is a *wh*-phrase, we expect the position of one to be regulated by the presence of the other *within* *vP* because one has a superset of the other’s features. Assuming that the configuration of arguments within *vP* feeds agreement and case alignment, for example by making certain phrases closer to a higher agreement-inducing head, we expect the relative configuration of *wh*- vs. non-*wh*-arguments produced by (1) to have morphosyntactic consequences. I propose that this early choice about how to configure *wh*-specifiers of *vP* is

the source of the intransitive-looking verbal morphology in Q'anjob'al subject extraction and explains other wh-movement/Voice interactions discussed in chapter 5.

A second advantage of this approach is that scenarios like (1) provide insight into the inventory of syntactic features. I propose that we only need a very sparse inventory of Merge-inducing features in order to characterize verb phrase syntax, in both wh- and non-wh-contexts—the rest is handled by the conditions on feature-checking. Some of this sparseness is due to the observation that c-selection treats DP and non-DP arguments (such as prepositional phrases, clauses, adjectival phrases, and so on) differently. I propose that this asymmetry points to a subset relationship between the Merge features that introduce different kinds of arguments. The fact that the syntax distinguishes DP vs. non-DP, but does not appear to distinguish PP vs. CP in the same way, suggests that non-DP arguments are all merged in response to a common feature, one that is sufficiently underspecified to permit checking by an element of any category. As a result, non-DPs check a subset of the features that DP arguments can, since DP arguments can also check features specified for DPs.

(4) Proposal:

[·X·] is an argument-introducing feature that can be checked by an element of any category.

Non-DP arguments can only merge in response to [·X·].

DPs can merge in response to [·D·] or [·X·].

Any time a verbal head selects for both a DP and a non-DP, the logic in (1) predicts their relative positions: DPs can be specifiers or complements, but non-DPs must be complements of the heads that select them.¹ In a first result, this restriction accounts for word order restrictions on DP and non-DP arguments, as in (5).

(5) Emily told (*to Megan) a story (to Megan).

We will see that this logic has significant consequences for the distribution of arguments, both in wh- and non-wh-contexts, and also the position of verbal heads relative to each other. Each of these cases may look superficially different, but they reflect the same underlying mechanisms. Features drive (all

1. Though non-DPs are typically base generated as complements, they may of course move to a higher specifier position if they are attracted by a higher probe, as in wh-questions or locative inversion (e.g., *To whom did you speak?*). The type and distribution of features in the verbal domain therefore mainly affect the underlying position of arguments rather than their surface positions, since the type and distribution of features *outside* of the verbal domain may be different, though locality principles make the former issue relevant to the latter.

kinds of) Merge, and subset relationships between feature sets constrain structure through feeding/bleeding orders of operations. The number of syntactic features and kinds of verbal heads needed to predict the kinds of verb phrase structures that we find is very small, when we consider the logic in (1) in different contexts. The following is a brief outline of how these ideas are developed in each chapter.

In chapter 2, I outline a theory of feature-driven Merge, which draws extensively from prior literature, that captures the significance of subset-hood in clause construction. Aspects of this theory include a notion of simultaneous multiple feature-checking by a single element bearing multiple features, the possibility that unchecked features do not cause a crash, and a revised view of economy in syntactic derivation, which is much weaker than previous proposals. I propose one significant amendment to previous literature regarding the distribution of Merge features: while it is common to treat Merge features as properties of the lexical items that participate in Merge, I propose instead that Merge features are properties of syntactic categories. Lexical items therefore have access to Merge features according to their category, but the distribution of Merge features does not vary idiosyncratically across lexical items. This amendment is necessary to capture generalizations about verb phrases that transcend the individual properties of verbs that project them.

In chapter 3, I show that the theory generates two possible derivations for transitive subject questions, one of which should correspond to transitive morphosyntactic alignment and one that should correspond to intransitive morphosyntactic alignment. The source of this flexibility is the fact that v may host two kinds of operations: argument-Merge and *wh*-Merge. The order in which these two operations applies is in principle free, but it has consequences for which element becomes the highest specifier of vP (as well as how many specifiers v has), which in turn affects agreement outcomes. The availability of a second kind of derivation, which I propose leads to intransitive alignment, is proposed to explain why many Mayan languages' transitive subject questions require intransitive morphology. Thus, the theory introduces a previously unexplored avenue for parametric variation in transitive subject questions, which explains existing crosslinguistic variation between certain Mayan languages and, for example, English.

In chapter 4, I explore the distribution of arguments in non-*wh*-contexts. I propose that underspecified Merge features on certain heads both license non-DP arguments and constrain their distribution. Since underspecified features can be checked by any phrase, non-DP arguments necessarily check a subset of the features that any other phrase can, which leads to the following restriction: non-DPs must be *complements* of whatever head selects them. This causes any

other selected elements in the verbal domain (e.g., DP, VP) to merge as specifiers in the context of a non-DP argument. When VP is a specifier, binding and locality conditions are affected: arguments of V and arguments of *v* do not c-command each other in this configuration. I propose that VP-specifier-hood is predicted in certain ditransitive constructions, which explains long-standing puzzles about the dative alternation.

Chapter 5 investigates how the structural restrictions uncovered in chapter 4 interact with A- and \bar{A} -movement of different internal arguments. Here, two aspects of the theory interact: (1) complement-specifier asymmetries created by non-DP arguments, and (2) wh- vs. non-wh-specifiers of *v*P. What we find is that more internal arguments are accessible to A-movement than previously thought—either internal argument of a double object construction can raise to subject position in a passive due to a lack of c-command between them. However, apparent “dative intervention effects” may arise whenever the indirect object checks multiple features, such as when it is a wh-phrase or if it controls agreement/clitic doubling. In these special cases, I argue that derivational economy considerations enforce early movement/agreement with the indirect object, which accounts for apparent asymmetries in passives.

While most of the monograph focuses on the category features of arguments, chapter 6 addresses their thematic properties. The theory of feature-driven Merge advanced here predicts the position of arguments to be primarily regulated by category considerations, which leads to flexibility in the position of certain non-DP arguments (such as prepositional phrases). I show that this flexibility, while incompatible with a rigid thematic hierarchy, poses no problem for a compositional view of thematic role assignment. Thus, the presence of certain arguments can have variable effects on structure, as observed in chapters 3–5.

Chapters 3 and 5 both discuss the interaction between the distribution of wh-phrases and the resulting morphosyntactic alignment of the clause, otherwise known as wh-movement/Voice interactions. In both cases, I analyze interactions between wh-movement and Voice by reanalyzing the effects of wh-phrases on clause structure. Chapter 7 argues against alternative views of wh-movement/Voice interactions, which propose to explain these interactions by positing novel constraints on wh-movement from certain contexts. I suggest that these alternative views are unsuccessful due to their lack of crosslinguistic coverage. I also discuss a wider range of interactions between wh-movement and Voice and address whether and how this theory extends to those other cases.

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