Parenthetical main clauses – or not?
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A number of different types of main clause phenomena can be distinguished:

I   a – verb second
    b – the possibility of topicalization/preposing
    c – the possibility of dislocation/high attachment

II a – speaker orientation
    b – the possibility of certain adverbs and interjections
    c – illocutionary force
   d – scopal independence

The characteristics in I are usually considered to be structural; the ones in II are at least partly semantic in nature. The question is whether Ia-c and IIa-d necessarily coincide, and if (not) so, why. I will not pretend to be able to come up with a general answer, but I will approach the issue from the perspective of appositive constructions, parentheticals, and so-called sentence amalgamation. In doing so, I will solve some puzzles – but also raise some new ones.

Although each sentence – however complex – arguably has only one structural root (linearizability is an issue here), there are clear indications that parts of sentences can be independent in certain ways, i.e. show root phenomena. A parenthetical like the one between brackets in the previous sentence is a clear example. Intuitively, parenthetical material (including appositive relatives and non-restrictive appositions) contains a secondary message/proposition that is linked to the main proposition, but not subordinate to it (see also Potts 2007). Such material is scopally independent of the main clause (Espinal 1991, De Vries 2007), and speaker-oriented. I will sketch the outlines of a syntactic theory that enables us to cope with these general characteristics of parenthesis. I argue (contra Potts, for instance) that there are good reasons for treating parenthesis in syntax, and not only in semantics. Parentheses can be added on the clausal level (parentheticals) or on the constituent level (appositive constructions); there can be recursive layering of parentheses; there can be syntax-based ordering effects; and there is an effect on the PF-side of grammar as well.

With the general theory in place, I will examine two problematic cases. The first involves appositive relative clauses. ARCs have always been subject to discussion because they show the semantic root phenomena listed in II, but not the structural ones in I: syntactically, they resemble subordinate clauses (particularly, restrictive relative clauses) as is evident in German and Dutch. A solution emerges if we analyze ARCs as complex appositions – or rather both as different instantiations of a more general schema, considering that recent work by Heringa (2007) and O'Connor (2008) has shown nominal appositions involve a clausal structure as well. In a nutshell: appositive material is 'parenthetically coordinated' to its antecedent/anchor. One can then analyze a regular ARC as a (semi-)free relative construction, which is a DP containing a relative CP. The DP *as a whole* is assigned a parenthetical status with respect to the antecedent. The relative CP, however, is embedded *within* the parenthetical DP, which is why it is syntactically a subordinate clause.

The second case involves sentence amalgams (Lakoff 1974, Guimarães 2004, Grosu to appear) as in *John ate you will never guess how many cookies*, or *John went to I think it's Paris*.

Apparently, the interrupting clause has just a modal import. On the other hand, they are clearly different from integrated sentence adverbials. The following diagrams show that there is a pause and/or an intonational break preceding the interruption in such sentences (recording of a non-linguist reading out a Dutch text):
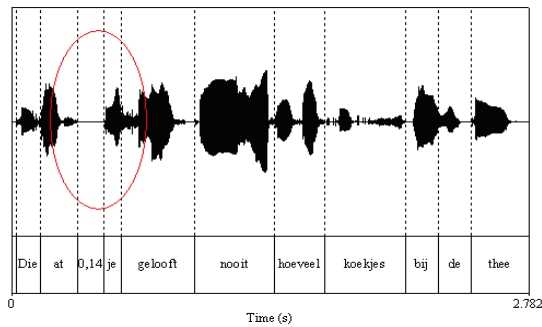
Spectral diagram of *'He ate you will never believe how many cookies with his tea'* in Dutch.
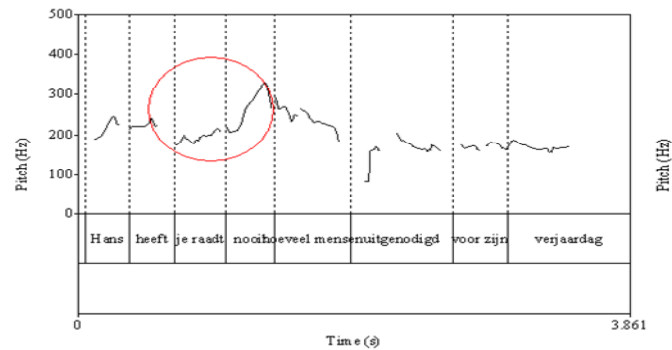
Pitch analysis of *'Hans invited you will never guess how many people for his birthday'* in Dutch.

Furthermore, syntactic tests suggest that the interrupting clause is outside the scope of the host clause, with the exception of the shared part (e.g., *cookies* in the first example). The question then is if it really constitutes a secondary proposition. An additional complication is the fact that there is ellipsis involved. Guimarães and others argued that *wh*-amalgams are sluicing constructions: compare *(John ate cookies, but) you will never guess how many <cookies John ate>*. This leads to the strange situation that the secondary proposition entails the primary one (the matrix).

Coming back to the list of root phenomena in I and II, I will suggest that they are principally one in the sense that they are characteristic of semantically non-dependent units (often, propositions), but the structure-related properties do not always apply for the simple reason that the internal make-up may differ, and not every unit projects up to a full CP at the outside.

References

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