

Goldberg, Adele. (2005). *Constructions at Work*. Oxford University Press: Oxford; 129-165.

Ch. 7. Island Constraints and Scope

Main ideas:

- Most of the traditional constraints on extraction and long-distance dependencies derive from clashes of information structure properties of the constructions involved.
- Specifically, **backgrounded constructions are islands** (BCI).
- BCI account provides explanation for previously-problematic cases, such as the ditransitive construction, as well as allows for a finer-grained distinction than possible using a purely syntactic account
- BCI also explains island effects in other discourse-level phenomena
- Processing not sufficient an explanation; must also have reference to the function of the constructions involved
- (Wide scope interpretation of quantifiers is also correlated with topicality)

Terminology:

- **Referential** givenness/newness: relationship between linguistic expressions and entities in the world. Correlated to cognitive activation.
 - *Given* arguments: Cognitively active, expressed by weakly accented pronouns
 - *Accessible* arguments: Cognitively semi-active, normally expressed by definite full NPs
 - *New* arguments: Cognitively inactive, normally expressed by indefinite NPs
- **Relational** givenness/newness: the informational contribution made by an utterance to the knowledge state of the addressee; the information structure.
 - *Topic*: The “matter of (already established) current interest”, typically the sentence subject.
 - *Potential Focus Domain*: The part of the sentence being asserted. Understood to be negated by sentential negation.
 - *Backgrounded elements*: Constituents neither the primary topic nor in the potential focus domain. Not negated by sentential negation. Includes presupposed clauses.

7.1. Island Constraints

Goldberg observes that the four “traditional” islands (CNPCs, Clausal subjects, Complements of manner-of-speaking “MOS” verbs, adjuncts) are also active in other

discourse-level (i.e. between speaker) phenomena: direct replies to questions and “ah!” exclamations. Cannot naturally be explained by purely syntactic accounts.

Direct replies

Note that a direct reply to (4) – i.e. that Laura was dating someone new – cannot be provided within one of the four island types:

(4) Why was Laura so happy?

CNPC/Relative Clause:

(5) #The woman [who thought she was dating someone new] lives next door.

Clausal subjects

(6) #[That she is dating someone new] is likely.

Complements of MOS verbs

(7) #John shouted [that she was dating someone new].

(Presupposed) adverbials

(8) #John was hysterical [‘cause she was dating someone new].

Exclamative ah!

Certain discourse particles, such as ah!, cannot be used to remark on propositions within islands.

CNPC/Relative Clause:

(9) - The woman [who thinks Laura is dating someone new] lives next door.
- #Ah! (Laura is dating someone new!)

Clausal subjects

(10) - [That Laura is dating someone new] is likely.
- #Ah! (Laura is dating someone new!)

Complements of MOS verbs

(11) - John shouted [that Laura is dating someone new].
- #Ah! (Laura is dating someone new!)

(Presupposed) adverbials

(12) - John was hysterical [‘cause Laura is dating someone new].
- #Ah! (Laura is dating someone new!)

7.2. Backgrounded constructions are Islands

Previous accounts using Information Structure to explain island effects (e.g. Erteschik-Shir 1979) claimed that extracted constituents must be part of the potential focus domain.

Goldberg account: to allow for extraction of primary topics (i.e. non-clausal sentence subjects) as well as elements in the potential focus domain, make the generalization that **Backgrounded Constructions are islands** (BCI).

The four constructions in 7.1 can be shown to be presupposed, backgrounded elements (by sentential negation test):

CNPC/Relative Clause:

(i) She didn't see the report that was about him. → The report was about him.

Clausal subjects

(ii) That she knew it didn't bother him. → She knew it.

Complements of MOS verbs

(iii) She didn't whisper that he left. → He left.

(Presupposed) adjuncts

(iv) She didn't leave the movie after they ate it. → They ate it.

The BCI account of islands also explains the direct answer and exclamative ah! judgments in 7.1, as well as predicts parentheticals to be islands [(15)-(17)].

7.3. *Ditransitive Constructions*

Empirical data:

The recipient argument of the ditransitive resists unbounded dependency relations:

(18) ??Who did Chris give the book.

(19) ??The boy [who Mary had already given the key] let himself in.

(Similar judgments are borne out by corpus data: prepositional paraphrases outnumber ditransitives by 40 to 1.)

BUT, when passivized, recipients can be questioned and relativized:

(33) Who was given the book?

(34) The man [who was given the book] left early.

These judgments are predicted if the ditransitive recipient is treated as *secondary topic*.

Evidence: compared to the theme, the ditransitive recipient strongly tends to be pronominal (or a definite NP), to be animate, and existence presupposed, can be omitted, and is overwhelmingly already given information in the discourse. Not negated by sentential negation [(26)-(28)]. Since a secondary topic is not in potential focus domain, then it can be thought of as a backgrounded element, and islandhood is predicted. But, when passivized, the recipient becomes the topic, and is no longer backgrounded. Extraction is now permitted.

7.4. Subordinate Clauses

Sentential negation test can be used to determine whether a subordinate clause is backgrounded information (and so will resist extraction), or not. This will distinguish between the manner-of-speaking verbs and the unmarked reporting verb, *say*:

- (36) He didn't say that they went to market.
(38) I didn't grumble that they sent the letter.

In (36), sentential negation can (apparently) be used to imply negation of proposition expressed by subordinate clause; in (38), it cannot. Gives evidence that SC is in potential focus domain for (36), but is backgrounded in (38), predicting that extraction is possible in (40) but not (42):

- (40) What did you say that they sent?
(42) ??What did you grumble that they sent?

7.5. Reason Clauses

The negation test can be used to determine whether a reason clause is backgrounded information (and so will resist extraction), or not:

- (43) She didn't travel to Memphis because she wanted to see Elvis.

Under the interpretation of (43) that she traveled to Memphis to see someone other than Elvis, this puts the because clause in the potential focus domain, predicting that extraction is possible:

- (44) ?Who did she travel to Memphis because she wanted to see?

Implication: **not all adjunct clauses are islands.**

7.6. Non-restrictive Relative Clauses

Seemingly, these convey new information, and so are in potential focus domain, and thus would allow long distance dependencies. However, the negation test demonstrates that they are indeed backgrounded information, and so resist extraction:

- (51) I saw John, who I told you about last week.
(52) I didn't see John, who I told you about last week.
(53) *Who did John, who I told _ about last week, leave early?

7.7. Presentational Relative Clauses

These are relative clauses that serve to convey the main assertion in a sentence:

- (57) That's the article that we need to find someone who understands.

The content of the relative clause is negated by sentential negation:

- (59) That's not the article that we need to find someone who understands.
~ That is the article that we don't need to find someone who understands.

These exceptional relative clauses are in the potential focus domain, and so allow long distance dependencies.

7.8. *Factive Complements*

By definition, factive verbs presuppose the truth of their complements. The BCI account predicts that factive complements are islands:

(60) It bothered Sue that the mayor smoked cigars.

(61) ??What did it bother Sue that the mayor smoked?

Problem for BCI account? (61) should be predicted to be unacceptable. Maybe the negation test is not perfect indicator of background status. Or maybe (p.141) backgroundedness is a gradient term.

7.9.1. *Problem Cases #1 - Indefinite Relative Clauses*

Negation test indicates content of indefinite relative clause is in potential focus domain, and so BCI would predict extractability, contrary to fact:

(66) *Who did she see a report that was about?

Compare this with reduced relatives, where contrast between definite/indefinite is seen:

(64) Who did she see a report about?

(65) ??Who did she see the report about?

7.9.2. *Problem Cases #2 - Wh-complements*

Negation test indicates *wh*-complements can be in potential focus domain, and so BCI would predict extractability, contrary to generally-accepted(?) judgments:

(69) ?What did Bush ask whether he could do?

(70) ?Which man is he wondering whether she's met?

However, clear degradation of acceptability when extracted element is an adjunct:

(71) *When did he ask whether he could bring dessert? (downstairs reading)

7.10. *Processing*

Lexical factors play a role in acceptability judgments [(72)-(74)] (Kluender and Kutas). Further, there is an additional processing load when arguments are displaced across clause boundaries, relative to canonical positions. [(75)-(77)].

Goldberg: Processing alone cannot account for range of facts outlined above. It does not explain:

- why clause boundaries present problem for extraction
- why factive and MOS verbs present more difficulty than other verbs
- the strong dispreference for long distance dependency in ditransitives, despite no clause boundary having been crossed
- why direct questions and exclamative *ah!* are sensitive to islands

Instead, need to rely on recognizing the **functions of the constructions involved**, in addition to recognizing the existence of processing constraints.

7.11. Cross-linguistic Evidence

Goldberg's account predicts that there should be some evidence of the dispreference for asking questions within backgrounded constructions, even in *wh* in-situ languages. However, results vary across languages, and judgments are quite variable.

Japanese/Korean:	Both readily allow for questioning within complex NPs [(78)-(79)] Japanese doesn't allow "-the-hell" questioning within relative clauses [(85)-(87)]
Thai:	Wildly varying judgments for questions in complex NPs [(80)], sentential subjects [(81)], complements of MOS verbs [(82)], adjuncts [(83)]
Lakhota:	Questions within islands are avoided [(84)]

Conclusion: cross-linguistically, questioning within constructions that convey background information is dispreferred, even in *wh* in-situ languages. Displacement from canonical position creates *additional* processing load, and this combines with the pragmatic clash to result in unacceptability.

Conclusion

The BCI account predicts the following to be islands:

Subjects, definite relative clauses, noun complements, ditransitive recipient, (presupposed) adjuncts, complements of MOS verbs, complements of factive verbs.

It also predicts that long distance dependencies are allowed from ditransitive recipients when passivized, presentational relative clauses, (reduced) indefinite relative clauses, non-presupposed adjuncts, verbs of saying.

It accounts also for the fact that direct questions and exclamatives (ah!) are sensitive to islands.

It does not account for two cases: full indefinite relative clauses and *wh*-complements. For these cases, the empirical islandhood of these constructions is not predicted by BCI.