Introduction to Syntax: 24.951

Recitation #10

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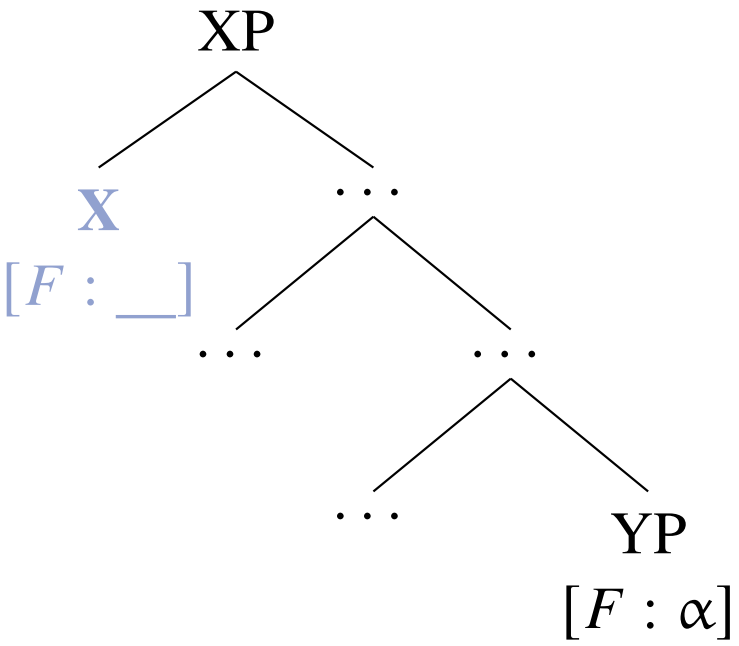
Today's topics and goals

- Formalization of Agree
- Two theories of agreement
  1. Agree as an infallible operation.
  2. Agree as a fallible, but obligatory operation.
- Agreement pattern in Kichean Agent Focus constructions

The operation Agree

(1)



- **Agree**: operation that involves a Probe and a matching Goal in its c-command domain, supplying a feature value to the Probe.

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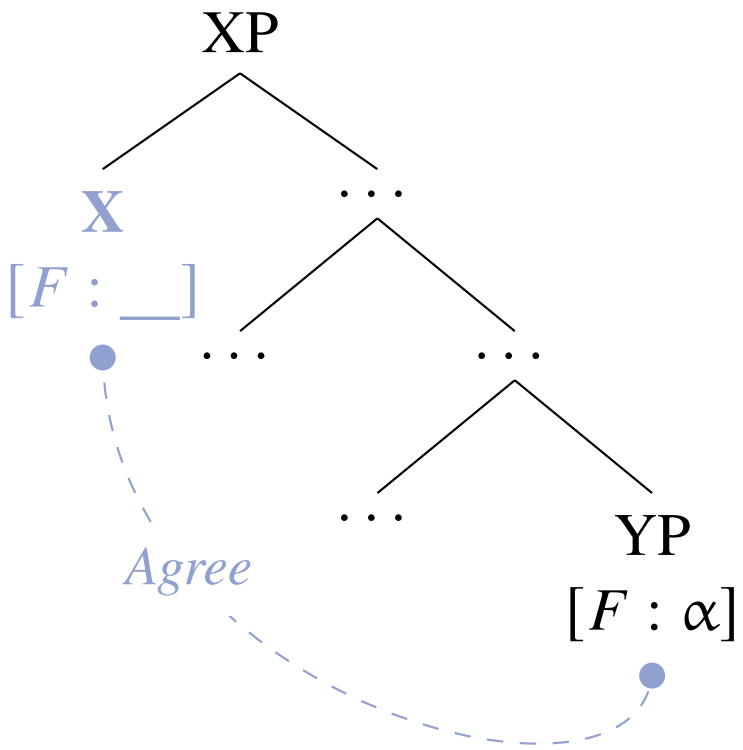

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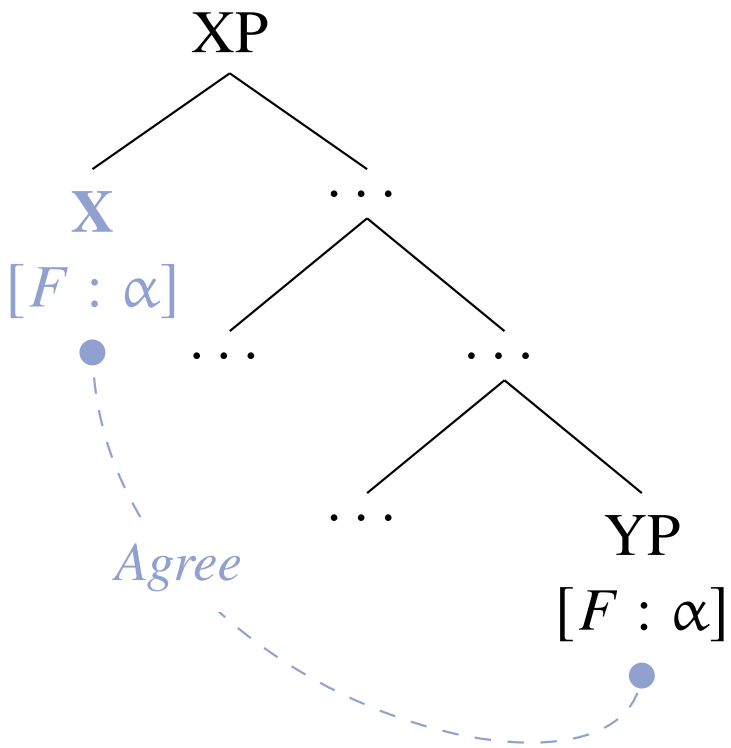

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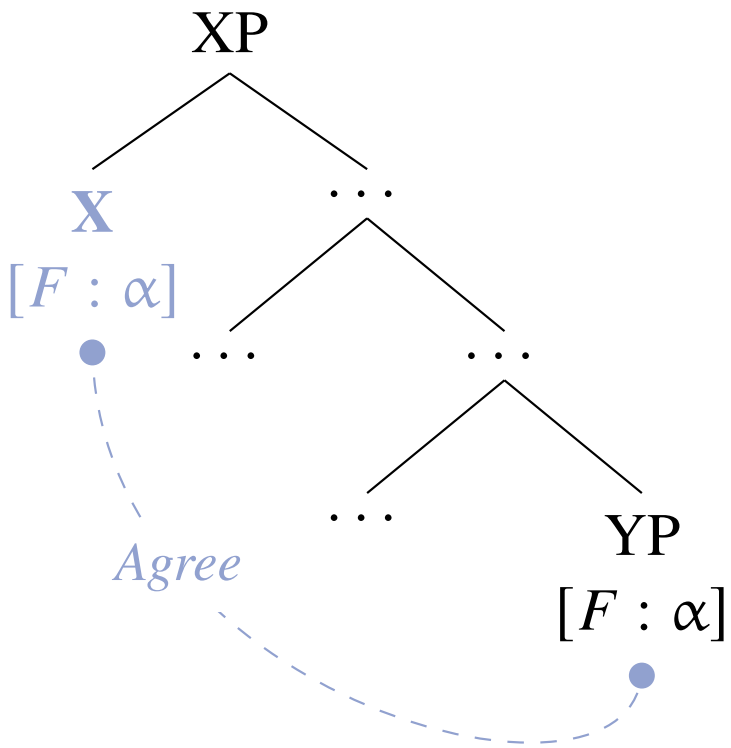

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Agreement

(2) Agreement (or φ-agreement) is morphophonologically overt covariance in φ-features between a verb-like element and one or morenominal arguments, where:

a. verb-like element = a lexical verb, auxiliary verb, or tense/aspect/mood marker

b. φ-features = some nonempty subset of {person, number, gender/noun class}

[Preminger 2014]

(3) *Hebrew*

a. ha-necig-im dibr-u.
the-representative-PL spoke-3PL
'The representatives spoke.'

b. * ha-necig-im diber.
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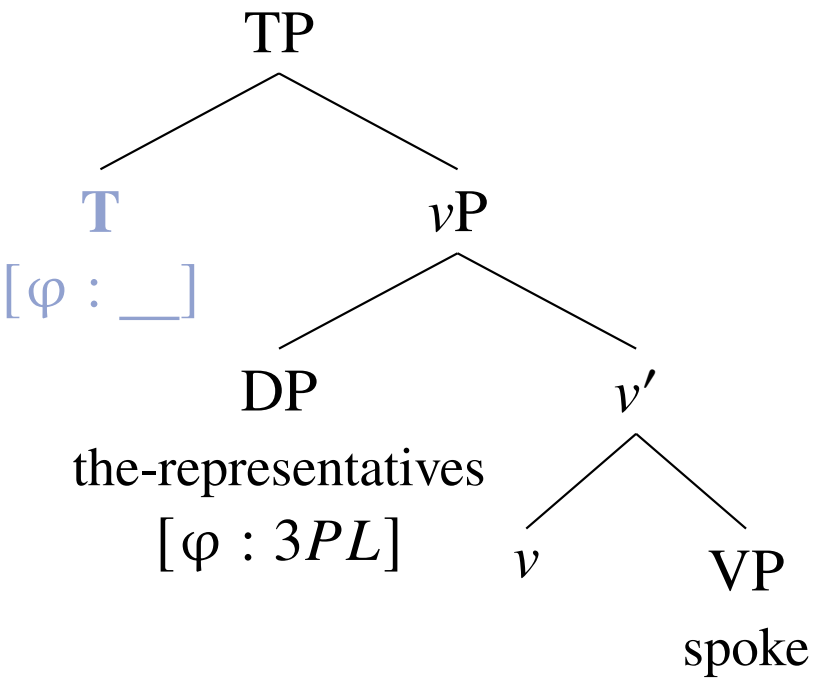

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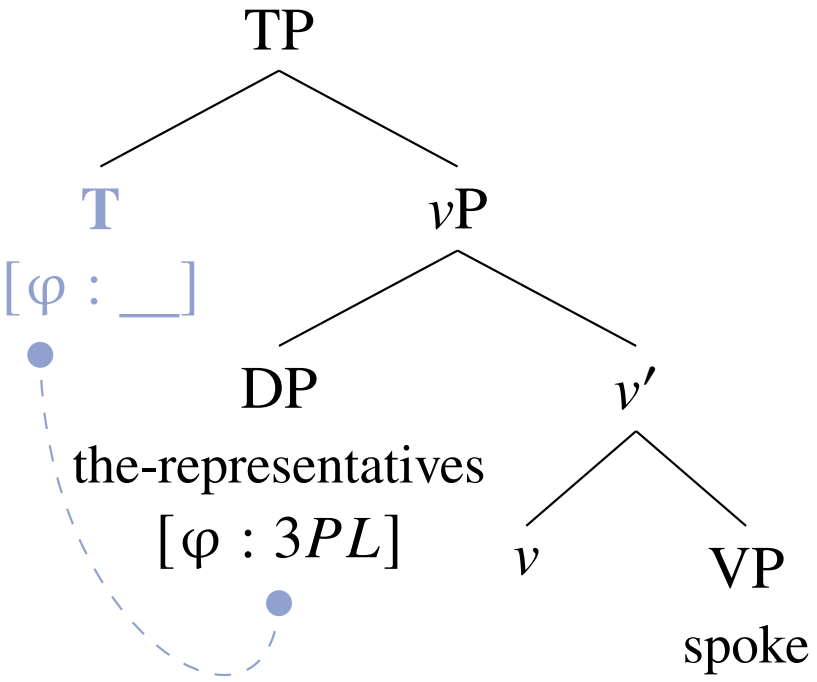

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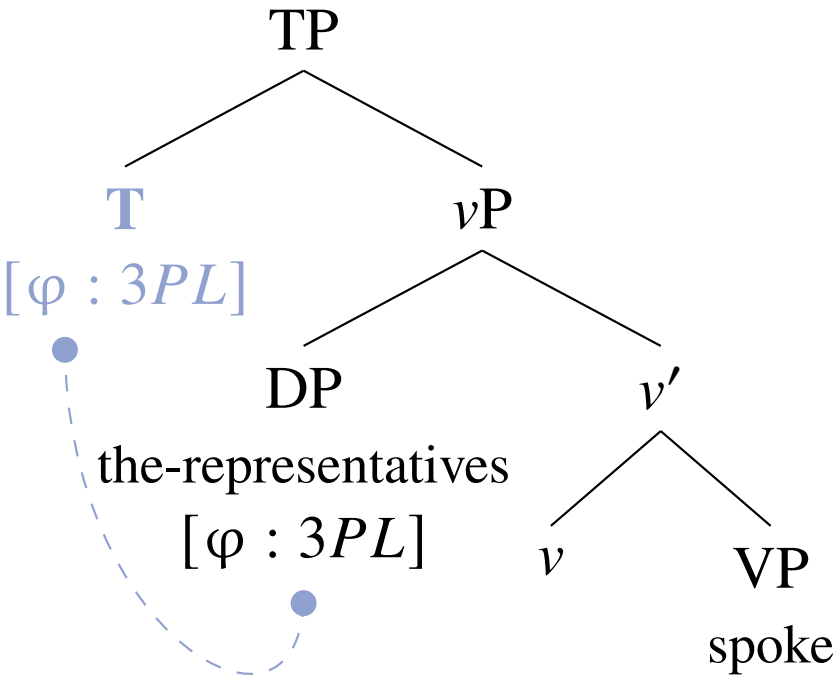

Two views of agreement

1. Agree as an **infallible** operation: if an unvalued feature survives until the end of the derivation, the derivation crashes.
2. Agree as a **fallible**, but obligatory operation: Agree must occur if the context of application is met, but otherwise unvalued features can survive until the end of the derivation without causing it to crash.

Agree as an **infallible** operation

- According to this view, (3b) is ungrammatical because T's [φ : __] remains unvalued throughout the derivation, causing it to crash.

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- What does it mean to say that the context of application of Agree is met/not met?
- Analogy with the application of phonological rules:

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$C_{[-son]} \rightarrow [-voice]$ / __#

(a word-final obstruent is obligatorily devoiced)

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- What happens if:
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  - The obstruent is in word-medial position?
  - ...
- The rule (5) does not apply in these cases because the requirements for its application are not met. Otherwise, the rule is **obligatory**.

- It is in this sense that, Agree is a fallible, though obligatory operation.

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- In (3), a probe (i.e. [φ : __] in T) is present and so is a goal (*ha-necig-im*), so it must occur.
  - Under the view that Agree is a fallible, though obligatory operation, (3b) is ungrammatical because there is no possible derivation that yields it.

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Taking stock

- We are comparing two views about the obligatoriness and fallibility of the operation Agree:

  1. Agree as an **infallible** operation
  2. Agree as a **fallible**, but obligatory operation

- Next up:
  - Data to distinguish between the two views
  - What it means to say that Agree can be a fallible operatton.

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Agent focus in Kichean

(6) a. rat x-Ø-aw-ax-aj ri achin.
you.SG COM-3SG-2SG-hear-ACT the man
'You(sg) heard the man.'

b. ri achin x-a-r-ax-aj rat.
the man COM-2SG-3SG-hear-ACT you.SG
'The man heard you(sg).'

(7) a. ri achin x-Ø-uk'lun.
the man COM-3SG-arrive
'The man arrived.'

b. rat x-at-uk'lun.
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- Agreement in Kichean: ABS–ERG agreement alignment.
- Order of morphemes: ABS > ERG.

- Coming up: what happens in agreement in the Agent Focus (AF) construction.

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FOC the dog COM-3SG.ABS-hate-AF the cat
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(9) rat x-e'-aw-ax-aj rje'.
you.SG COM-3PL.ABS-2SG.ERG-hear-ACT them
'You(sg) heard them.'

(10) a. ja rat x-at/*Ø-ax-$\boxed{\text{an}}$ ri achin.
FOC you.SG COM-2SG/*3SG.ABS-hear-AF the man
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b. ja ri achin x-at/*Ø-ax-$\boxed{\text{an}}$ rat.
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- If the arguments are in the 3rd and 2nd person, agreement is always with 2nd person, irrespective of grammatical function.

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FOC me COM-1SG/*3SG.ABS-hear-AF the man
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- If the arguments are in the 3rd and 1st person, agreement is always with 1st person, irrespective of grammatical function.

- What the data in (10) and (11) have in common: 1st and 2nd take precedence over 3rd person, irrespective of grammatical function.
- Why do 1st and 2nd person pattern alike, to the exclusion of 3rd person?
  - They are discourse participants.
  - Technical implementation: [**Part**], which 3rd person lacks.

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Omnivorous agreement (Nevins 2011)

Agreement pattern in which an agreement marker can be triggered by a given feature whether it is found on the subject or on the object

Accounting for Kichean AF

- Premises:
  - [φ : __] features can be relativized for a particular value, e.g. [**Part**].
  - Potential goals that lack the feature sought for are skipped over.

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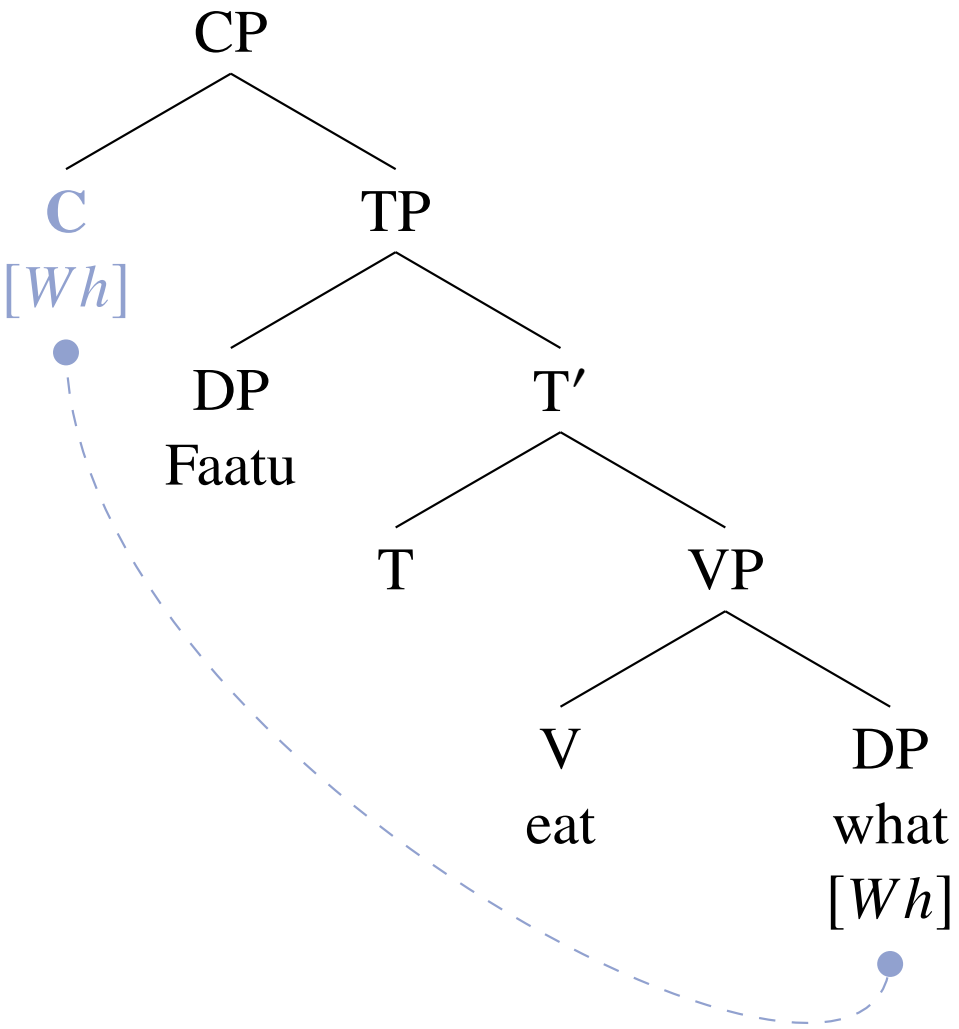
(12) What did Faatu eat __?



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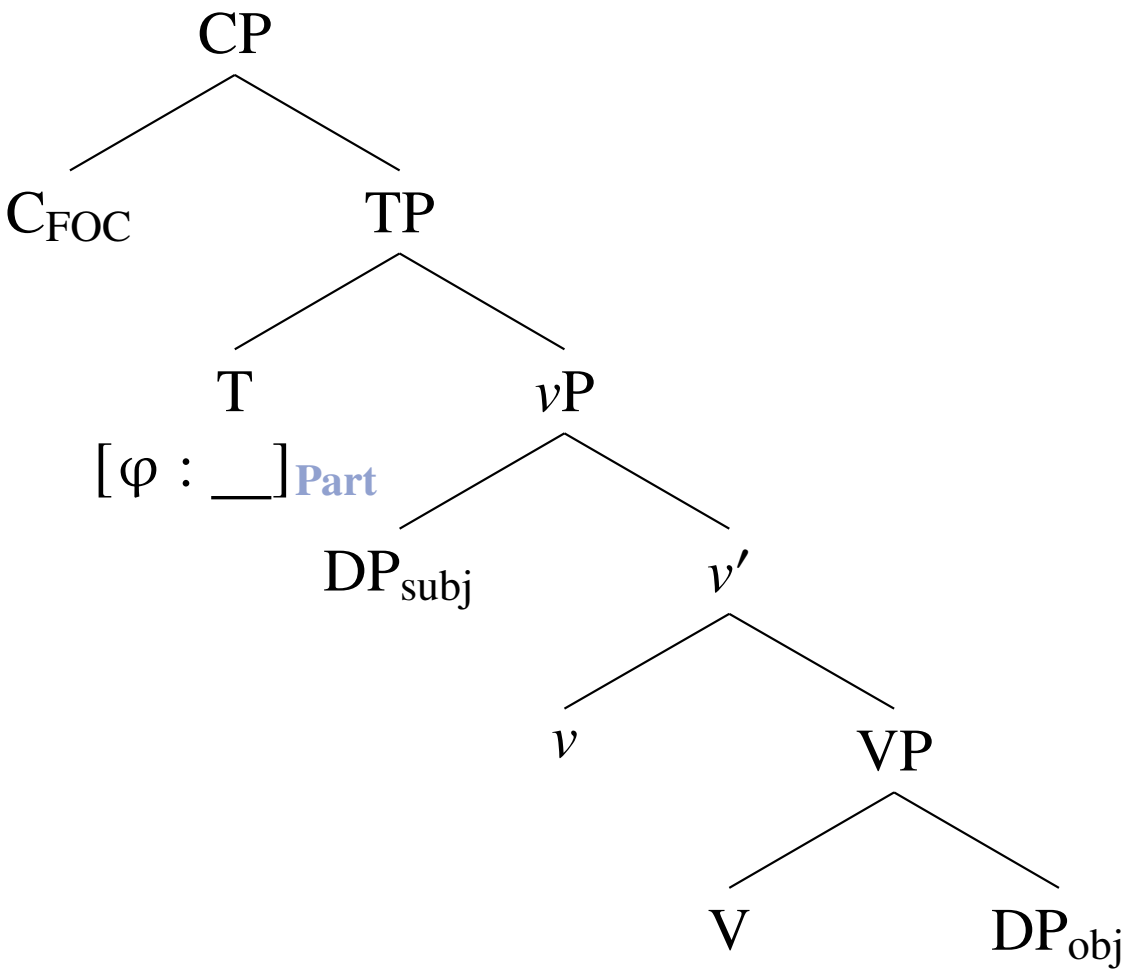

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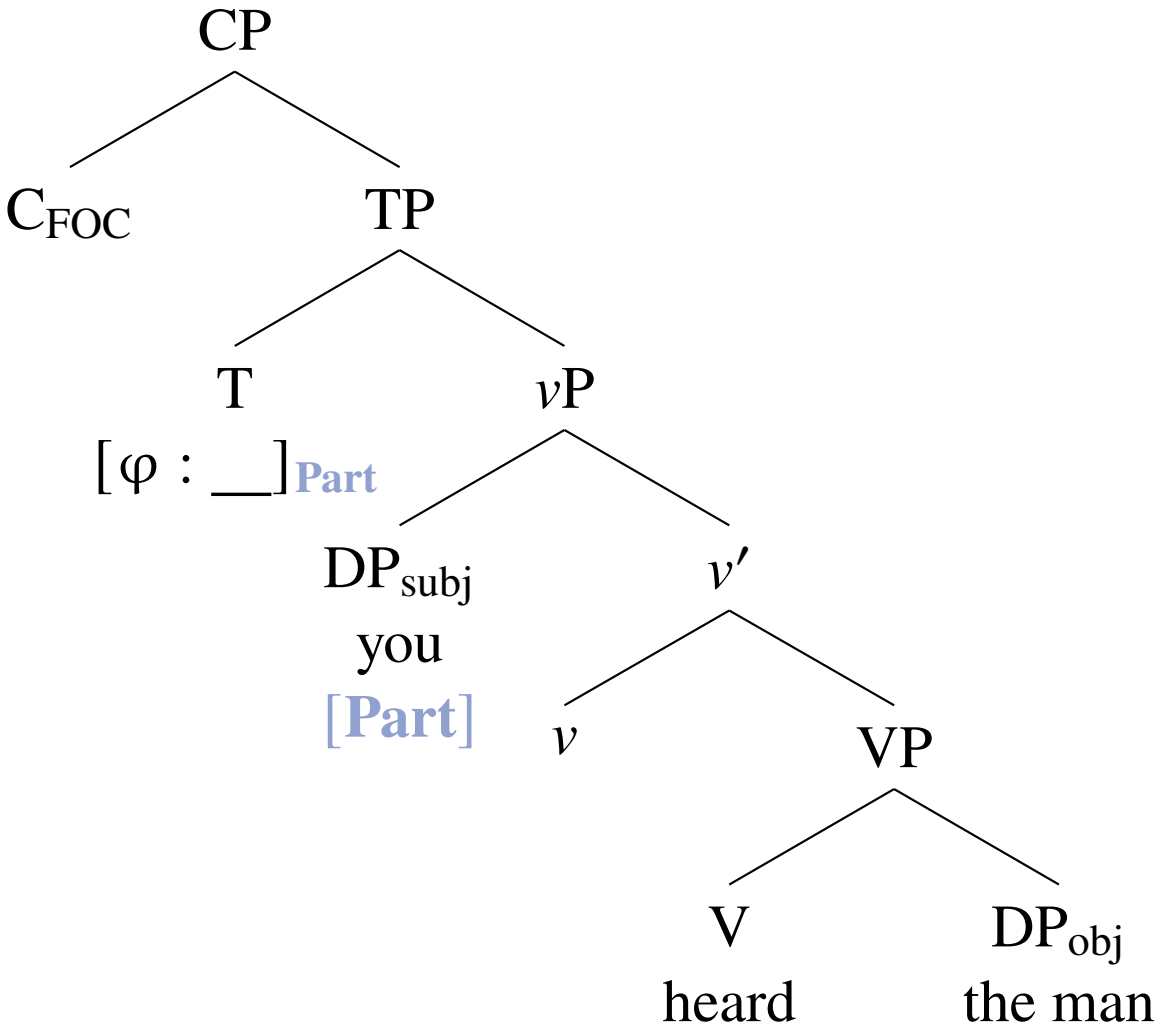
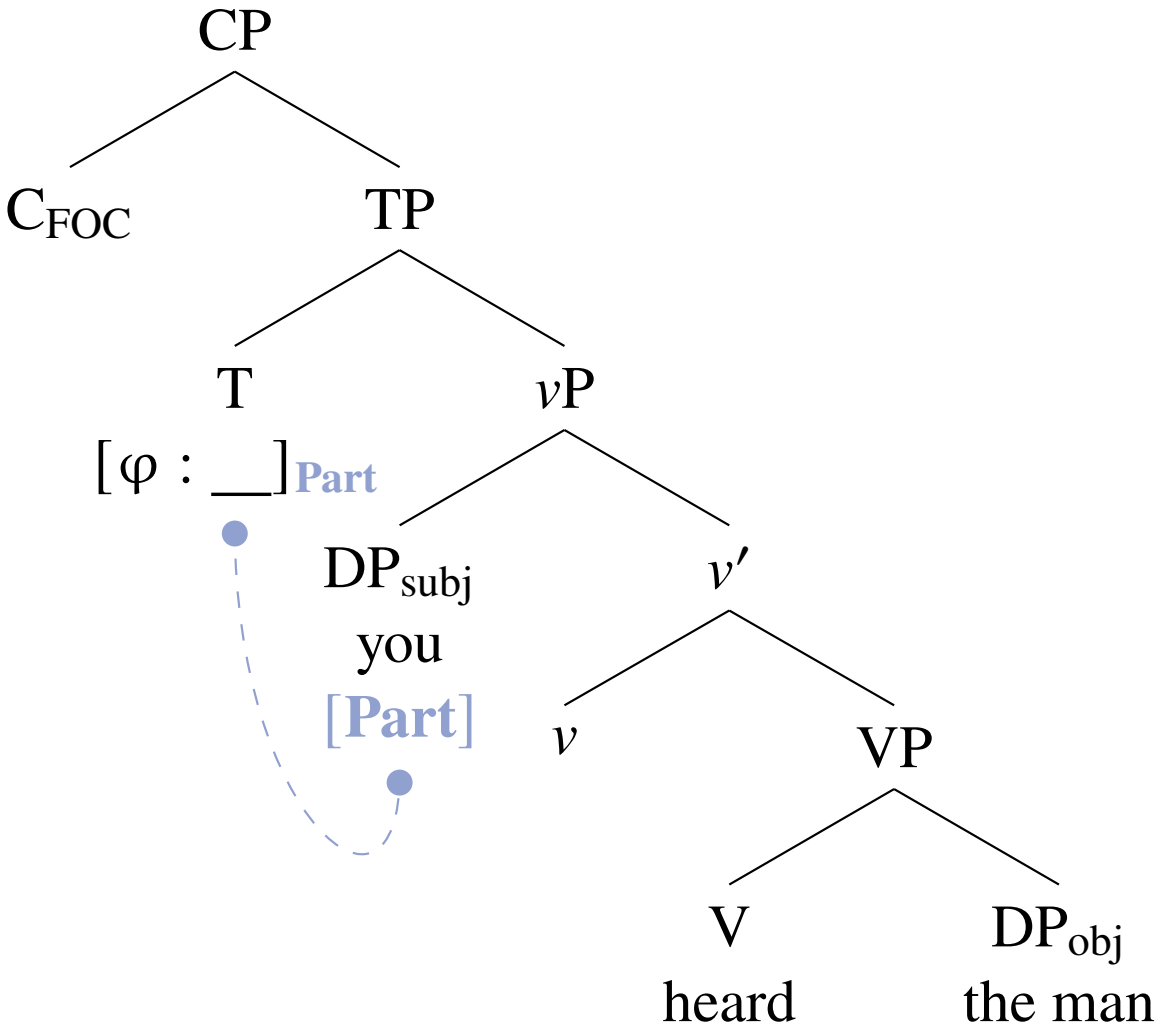
(10a′)


CP
C_FOC
TP
T
[φ : __]Part
vP
DP_subj
you
[Part]
v′
v
VP
V
heard
DP_obj
the man

(10a′)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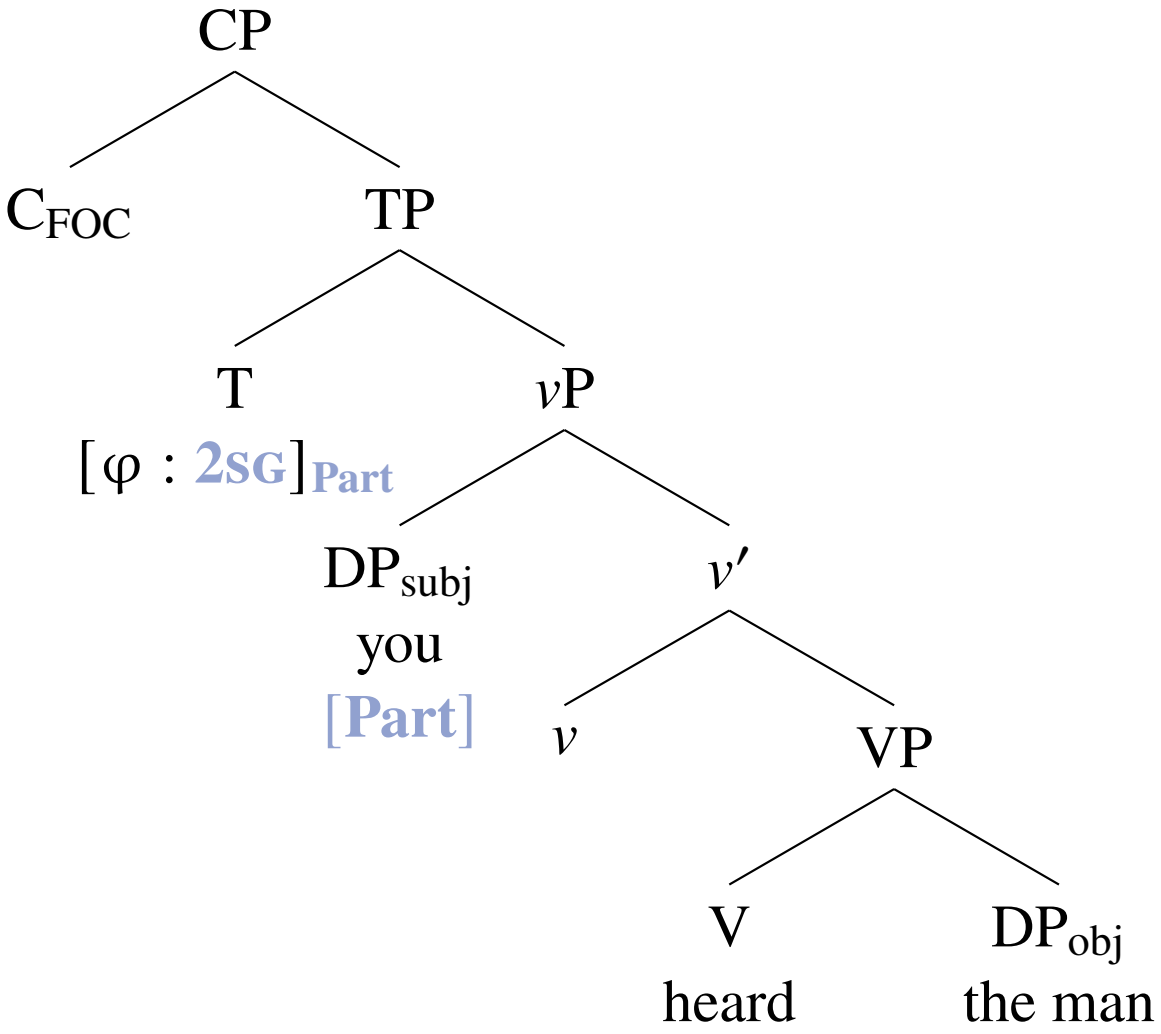
CP
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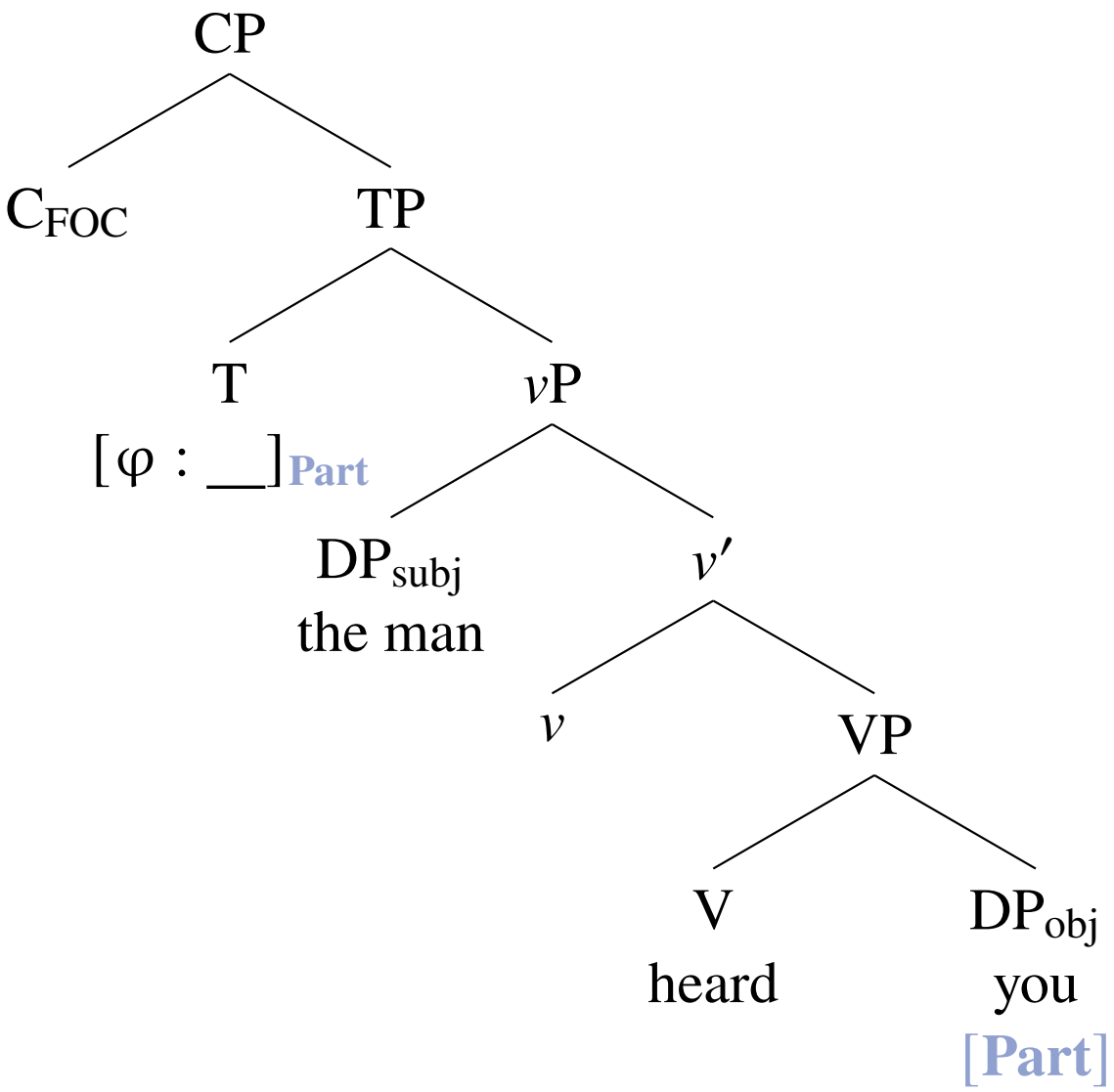
(10b′)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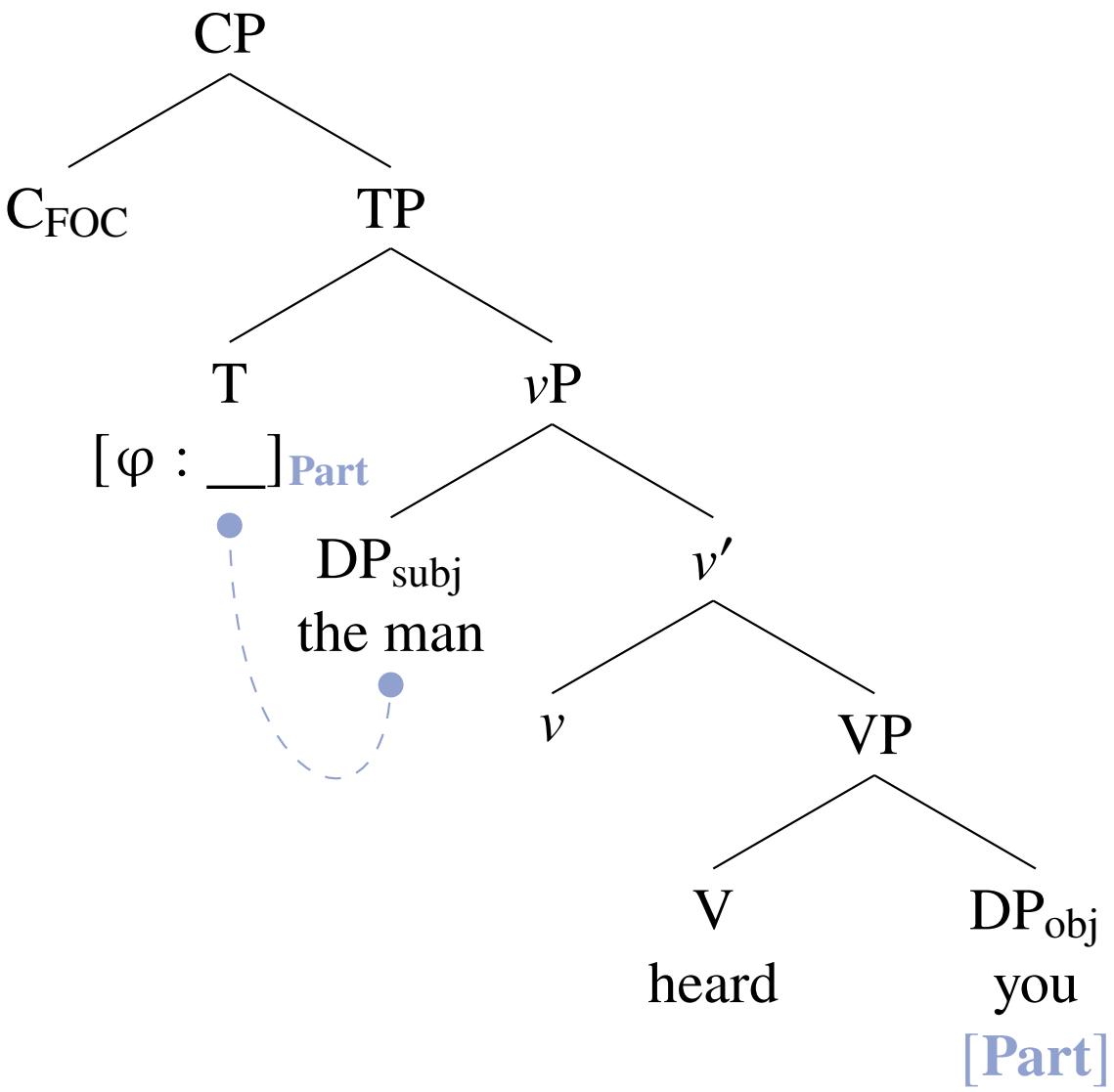
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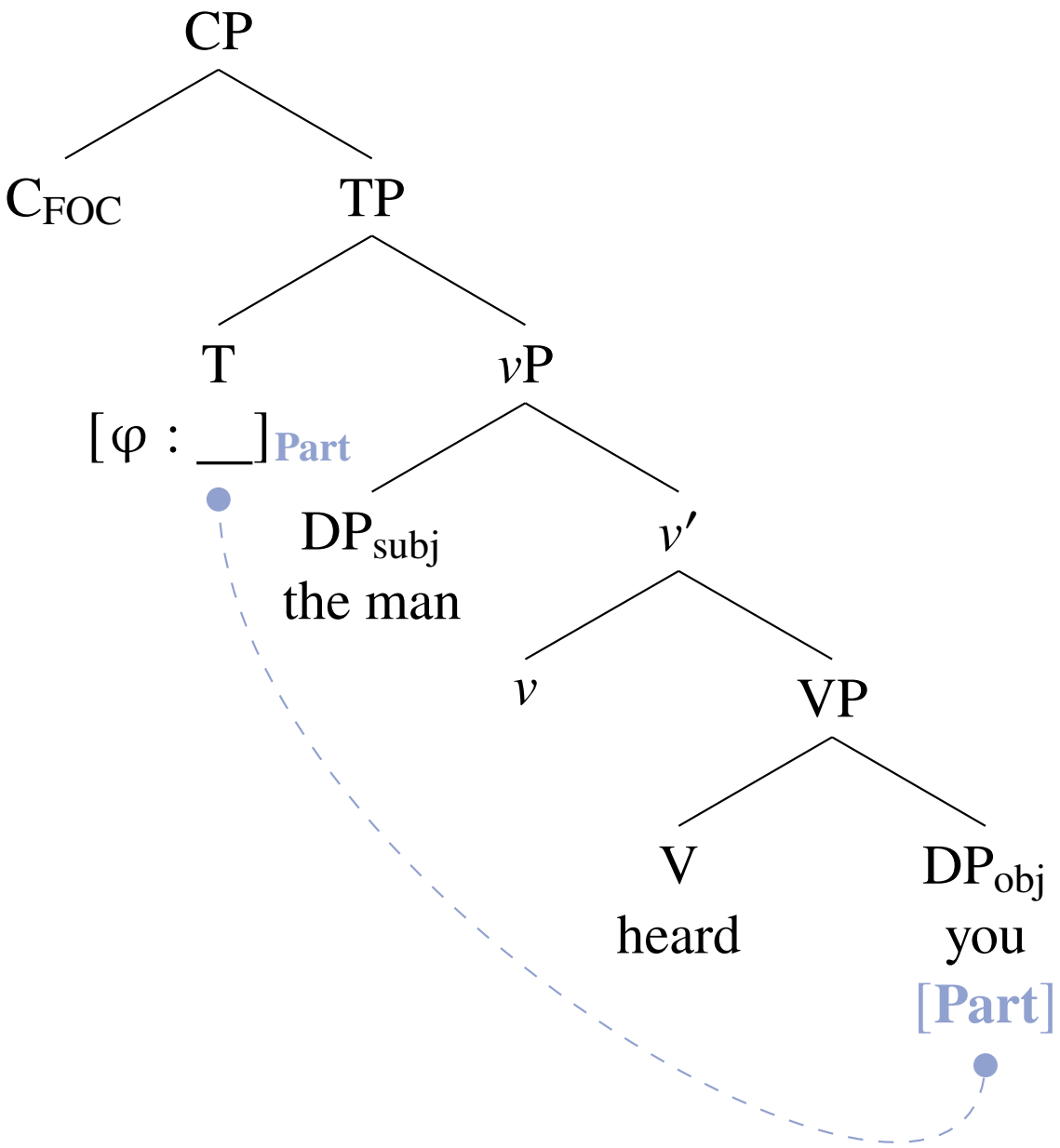
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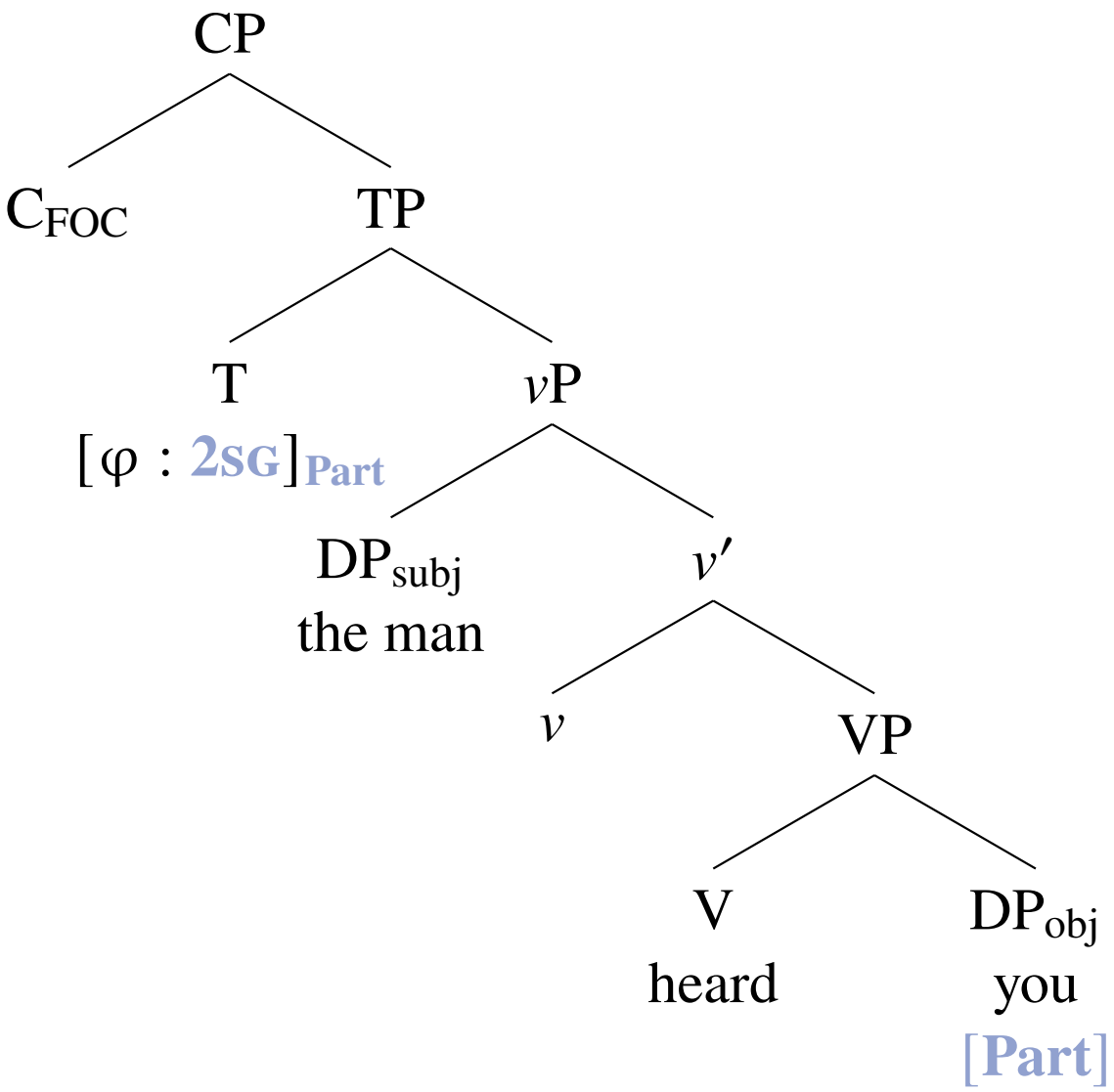
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- The same analysis applies for the examples where the arguments are in the 1st and 3rd person.

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- But what about the sentences where both arguments are in the 3rd person?

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- There is no [Part] argument here.

(14) i. In the absence of a [Part] argument, [φ : __] can Agree with the highest DP bearing some φ-feature.

ii. In the absence of a [Part] argument, [φ : __] remains unvalued and it is exponed as '3SG' (cf. our discussion of unmarked cases).

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- What is crucial for our purposes is the following conflict:
  - Sentences where there is a 1st/2nd and a 3rd person argument: we have to postulate that T in Kichean AF is specifically looking for a [**Part**] value.
  - Sentences where both arguments are 3rd person: nothing satisfies this valuation requirement and yet the result is grammatical.

Distinguishing between two views of Agree

1. Agree as an **infallible** operation: if an unvalued feature survives until the end of the derivation, the derivation crashes.
2. Agree as a **fallible**, but obligatory operation: Agree must occur if the context of application is met, but otherwise unvalued features can survive until the end of the derivation without causing it to crash.

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1. If Agree is an infallible operation, the sentences with only 3rd person arguments (i.e. non-**Part** arguments) should be ungrammatical.
2. If Agree is a fallible, but obligatory operation, these sentences are still allowed to converge.

References

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