

“On *Wh*-Movement” FAQ¹

1. Where should I start? What should I pay attention to?

The action (for our purposes) starts on the last two lines of page 82. Feel free to skim the paper until then.

Pay special attention to discussion of Topicalization, It clefts and Focus, Infinitival relative clauses, Tough-Movement, and Comparatives—through the end of the paper.

2. What are the SSC and the PIC?

The SSC (Specified Subject Condition) was a condition proposed by Chomsky in earlier papers that prevents movement (and other processes) from crossing a subject, as in bad examples of passive like (1):

- (1) *Mary was preferred [for *John* to seem [____ to have read the book]]

where the italicized *John* blocks movement of *Mary* to the highest subject position.

(The effects of the SSC can be reinterpreted in more modern approaches as the consequence of Attract Closest. In a probes and goals system, we can say that the highest T (acting as a probe) looks down the tree for the closest bearer of ϕ -features, and finds *John*, not *Mary*. So if anything were to move to the highest T in (1), it would be *John*, not *Mary* — though movement of *John* is blocked by the fact that *John* is happy where it is (it has Case already), and thus cannot move.)

The PIC (Propositional Island Condition) was a short-lived successor to Chomsky’s previously proposed Tensed S Condition that blocked movement out of a finite clause, as in (2) vs. (3):

- (2) *Mary was believed [____ is reading the book].
(3) Mary was believed [____ to be reading the book].

(Cases like (2) are now claimed to be blocked by (among other things) the same kind of condition as the one that prevents *John* from moving in (1). Other examples of the PIC/Tensed S Condition are redundantly blocked by the SSC, e.g. movement from non-subject position in a finite clause.)

The Propositional Island Condition did not last long in the literature. Unfortunately its initials were recycled for the Phase Impenetrability Condition in more recent literature, so don’t get confused!

¹Based on a handout by David Pesetsky.