This paper proposes an l-syntactic (in [11]’s sense) approach to adjuncts that extends the dyadic pattern of (1) to traditional VP modifiers (e.g. *happily with the key* etc.) thus supporting a Figure-(Ground-based approach to predication (see [9, 11, 18]). In particular and assuming a (neo-) Davidsonian treatment of adjuncts as predicates of the event ([22]), we claim that prepositions relate VPs *qua ‘subjects’* (formally specifiers of P) to adjuncts *qua ‘predicates (formally complements of P)* as shown in (2). Such a structure follows straightforwardly in the case of *bona fide* PPs (e.g. *in Boston by John* etc.) for the P is overt but what about other adjuncts most notably adverbs (e.g. *peacefully now* etc.)?. We argue that (2) can be extended to them under [18]’s hypothesis that adverbs decompose into a non-relational element (typically a noun or Root) and a relational one (typically a P) (see [9, 13]). What this amounts to is that the VP-Adjoint relation in the examples in (3) resorts to the same l-syntax (3b) being decomposed as in (4b) thus (3a) and (3b) can be roughly paraphrased as ‘the event of John speaking is (placed) on Monday/clear’. As can be seen we crucially assume that the external argument is first-Merged as Spec-V (see [11, 15, 23]).

Technically, though, the analysis poses a categorial problem: in (2) we have a PP not a v*P/YP. This goes against one robust empirical property of adjuncts namely that they do not modify the (syntactic/semantic) nature of the object they attach to (see [2, 4, 10, 12, 16, 22, 24]). This fact has been taken particularly by [4] to indicate that adjuncts occupy a parallel plane’ being introduced by a dedicated operation that yields predicate composition: pair-Merge. We hold that such move is not forced upon us: although adjuncts and arguments behave differently on both semantic (and syntactic) grounds we do not need to invoke an independent operation instead all we need is a different syntax for a different semantics to follow. For concreteness, we claim that the main difference between arguments and adjuncts concerns labeling, as (5) shows: arguments require it, whereas adjuncts do not (see [4, 12, 24]) a possibility we relate to the asymmetric nature of argument taking, which requires a formal way of encoding the predicate-argument asymmetry —this distinction could of course be achieved through different means (e.g. diacritics, lexical marking, theta grids, relational templates, etc.) but labeling suffices and furthermore respects [3] ’s inclusiveness. If so, the categorial problem goes away since adjuncts give raise to unlabeled syntactic objects, which capture the ‘parallel’ behaviour of these dependents (see [2, 4, 8, 12,19, 24]). Suppose in this vein that clustered adjuncts of the sort of (6a) conform to this specific syntax with no scope dependencies arising —if no label is projected c-command cannot be calculated. As [12, 24] plausibly argue, this may be responsible for the scopeless interpretation of adjuncts endorsed by the neo-Davidsonian framework (see [10, 12, 16, 22, 24]). Simply put: we argue that the syntax of (2)-(5b) captures the paratactic semantics of adjuncts, the one encoded in (6b). If so, (6a) should be analyzed as in (7), with the adjuncts on Monday and
from Boston taking the VP John called Mary as their subject ‘in parallel (that is, both PPs take the VP as its specifier).

There are more consequences: if c-command between VP and adjuncts fails, binding should fail too, but this is empirically false, as ( shows (see [20]), which leaves us with two possible ways out: binding obtains either at SEM (after [4]’s Simplification) or by raising adjuncts to a specifier in a cascade-like structure a la [20]. We adopt the latter solution, identifying the landing site as an outer-Spec-V. If correct, then binding from subjects goes through unproblematically, as these end up occupying SpecV* (or Spec-T); as for binding from objects, binding is possible if, as [17] convincingly argues, these dependents move to a Case checking position higher than Spec-V: be it Spec-AgrP (as [17] contends) or Spec-ToP (see [21]); importantly, it cannot be Spec-V (contra [5]) due to anti-locality (see [1]).

In sum this paper argues for a configurational approach to adjuncts that builds on [11]’s l- syntactic system, claiming that traditional VP modifiers start off as PPs that establish a birelational dependency between a Figure/Subject (P’s would-be specifier: the VP itself which we take to embody the event position) and a Ground (P’s complement, either conflated or not). In order to solve the categorial problem this analysis raises, we propose that when VP and PP undergo external-Merge, no label projects, and so the adjunct does not participate in regular phrase structure relations (being in a ‘parallel plane’). Nevertheless, evidence from binding (also NPI licensing, topicalization, etc.; see [12, 16, 17, 20]) indicates that adjuncts manifest themselves as regular dependents too through labeling either as complements (see [16]) or as specifiers (see [6, 7, 14]); we have supported the second alternative: adjuncts can optionally become specifiers by means of internal-Merge. These two options are depicted in (9). The resulting scenario is interesting in various respects: first, it captures the paradoxical nature of adjuncts (see [20]) without extra operations (e.g. pair-Merge, Simplification, etc.), nor massive remnant movements (see 6, 7); second, it fits with [5]’s observation that \{X(P Y(P)\) structures created by external-Merge must be destroyed —either by expelling adjuncts to a parallel plane (this happens when no label projects) or else by raising adjuncts to a specifier (where labeling is obligatory; see [3]); and third, the duality in (9) reinforces [9]’s idea that Subject-Predicate dependencies, though configurational, are non-directional, being expressed in both predicate-complement (see (9a)) and predicate-specifier (see (9b)) fashions.

Examples

(1) **DYADIC STRUCTURE (X=PREPOSITION)**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[} & \text{XP ZP (Subject/Figure)} & \text{[} & \text{X YP (Predicate/Ground)} & \text{]}
\end{align*}
\]

(2) **DYADIC STRUCTURE APPLIED TO ADJUNCTS**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[} & \text{PP VP (Subject/Figure)} & \text{[} & \text{P YP (Adjunct/Ground)} & \text{]}
\end{align*}
\]

(3) a. John speaks on Monday.

b. John speaks clearly.

(4) a. \[
\begin{align*}
\text{[} & \text{PP [VP John speaks] [P on Monday]} & \text{]}
\end{align*}
\] (= (3a))
b. \([pp [vp John speaks] [p √ clear ]] (= 3b))

(5) a. Argument-taking. \([x, XP YP (Argument)]\)

b. Adjunction. \([XP YP (Adjunct)]\)

(6) a. John called Mary on Monday from Boston.

b. \([∃ e : call(e) & Agent(John, e) & Theme(Mary, e) & on (Monday, e) & from (Boston, e)]\)

(7) a. John called Mary on Monday.

b. [Spec [pp on Monday (Ground1)]]

(8) a. I saw two men, on each other’s birthdays.

b. [For which of his crimes do you think every gangster has been put into jail?]

(9) a. \([vp (Subject/Figure) [pp P YP (Adjunct/Ground)]]\)  Adjunct in parallel

b. \([vp [pp P YP (Adjunct/Ground) ] [vp (Subject/Figure) t]]\)  Adjunct as specifier

References


