

It's a conspiracy! The A/A'-distinction as an Epiphenomenon

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The A-A'-distinction has been a useful and striking divide in the set of relations over a distance in syntax that has never received a solution that not only successfully separated the classes of operations and structures, but that also explained why each class should have exactly the characteristics it has. Building on ideas of Rezac (2003) and Safir (2010), it is proposed that movement to an adjoined position must be 'insulated' to keep it from interfering with Case assignment and agreement that would otherwise frustrate derivations. The insulation accounts for what Rezac calls 'A'-opacity'. Safir achieves A'-opacity by immediately late-adjointing a head to the moved constituent that renders the phrase PP-like, and thus not an appropriate antecedent for binding of DPs, or for agreement with T. Insulation is optional, but if it does not apply, the adjoined element will interfere with Case and agreement relations – in other words, insulation enables long distance movement that cannot participate in Agree with T or be assigned Case en route. The most reliable syntactic effects that characterize A'-binding, namely, the inability of A'-antecedents to bind anaphors, the inducement of weak crossover effects, the ability to support parasitic gaps, pied piping and typical improper movement cases are all shown to derive from insulation (or else nearly so). The insulator may be identified with the quantificational head that Cable's (2010) has proposed to account for pied piping. In cases of DP movement without insulation, known as A-movement, the moved DP can bind anaphors, participate in T agreement and Case, but cannot license parasitic gaps or induce WCO or pied piping. On this account, the A/A'-distinction is nowhere stated in the grammar nor is it encoded in a distinction between edge features and other sorts of features, as in Chomsky (2008).