Formal study of the parenthetical clauses in English

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ABSTRACT
The relevance theory is used as a way which attempts to explain how parentheticals are related to the host sentence and how they contribute to the interpretation of the speaker’s intention. The article has two goals: - to explain in what way parenthetical clauses are linked to their host clauses and whether the various types of parentheticals differ in this respect; - to draw attention to the reason for introducing a parenthetical clause into the main utterance. Using the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 2018), the article explains what governs the use and the position of such structures. The methodology employed in the current study might encourage future studies dealing with word order, information structure and related issues. The scientific novelty of the article is that parentheticals consist of words, phrases or sentences that are inserted into a sentence to provide additional explanatory or commentary information.

Keywords: Parenthetical Clauses, Linguistic Analysis, Publications, Circumstantial Clauses, Sentence Adverbials.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite grammarians’ occasional references to the term "parenthetical clauses", this notion has not been explicitly defined - a fact that may explain two difficulties that arose during the research:

- to create a comprehensive list of parenthetical clauses referred to the exegetical literature while trying to detect all occurrences of the term "parenthetical clauses". It seems that the lack of criteria for syntactically identifying parentheticals has led to various options among the commentators, and in many cases one commentator identifies varied constructions of parentheticals which are not mentioned by the others;

- another prominent problem in the exegetical literature is the complexity of determining the exact border between parenthetical units and clauses such as circumstantial clauses, e.g. “They will desire to come forth from the Fire, but they will not come forth from it, for them awaits a lasting chastisement.” According to Dehe (Kaltenbock, 2016, p. 55), the clause in bold might be analyzed as a circumstantial clause or as a parenthetical clause.
The challenge for any linguistic analysis is to explain first, why expressions which lack integration in the overall sentence in so many respects appear within that utterance, i.e., are a linear constituent of the utterance, and second, how the relation between parenthetical and host clause can best be explained. Should parentheticals be dealt with in narrow syntax, or should they be considered a mere performance phenomenon, explained in terms of utterance interpretation alone? In what way(s) are they linked to their host clauses and are there differences between the various types of parentheticals in this respect?

In linguistic research, parentheticals represent a rather peripheral and often neglected phenomenon. However, they have received more attention in recent years. A recent overview and introduction to the phenomenon has been provided by Burton-Roberts (Burton-Roberts, 2006, p. 179-182).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Parentheticals are a motley crew. Elements that have been considered parentheticals in the literature include expressions as varying in length / complexity, category and function as the following: one-word expressions such as what, say, like and clauses which may or may not be introduced by a connector, and which can or cannot be elliptical. Their places of interpolation are variable, including positions such as between head and complement, between subject and predicate, and between modifier and head; they occur sentence-initially, -medially and -finally. The interruption is sometimes marked by backtracking, i.e., repetition of some part of the frame utterance after an interpolation, leading back to the main proposition. Some parentheticals are not semantically or pragmatically related to the host utterance at all, but represent a separate, detached utterance interwoven with the host due to the situational context. Here and below, parentheticals are printed in bold.

- sentence adverbials:

  I must **however show** you this my dear Mr Chatwick.

  Uhm I don’t have a sleeping bag **unfortunately**.

- comment clauses and reporting verbs:

  And the woman had brought up two kids with this guy and yon **know** lived all her life with him and basically he pissed off.
• nominal appositions and non-restrictive relative clauses:

She claimed that the new Prime Minister Jim Callaghan had offered his predecessor the job of Foreign Secretary in his government.

• question tags:

They’re called Gasser the people next door are they.

• clauses:

It’s been a mixture of extreme pleasure I’ve had hundreds of letters from all sorts of people.

As noted in work of Burton-Roberts (Burton-Roberts, 2006, pp. 179-182), parentheticals are problematic in a strictly syntactic account because in syntactic theory (since Kayne 1994), linear order is usually assumed to be determined by hierarchical relations (De Vries 2003). Parentheticals, however, seem to be linearly integrated in, but structurally independent from, their host. It has also been shown that certain syntactic relations between parenthetical and host do exist.

At the extreme end of the unintegrated approach is Haegeman (2016), who argues that parentheticals are orphan constituents which are syntactically unattached at all levels of representation, and whose interpretation follows from general principles of utterance interpretation.

3 RESULTS

In a series of publications in the 1970s and early 2016s, it has been argued that parentheticals are adjoined constituents. Emonds (1973, 1976, 1979) and McCawley (1982) all assume the same underlying structure which has the parenthetical as a sister and daughter of the root node. The accounts differ in the way they derive the surface word order in which a parenthetical appears in a non-peripheral position.

Emonds (1973, 1976, 1979) suggests postposing of a constituent of the host structure, and McCawley (1982) proposes crossing branches. His latter treats parenthetical placement on a par with other "order-changing transformations”, among them scrambling, Heavy NP Shift, Relative Clause Extraposition and Right Node Raising. More recently, Corver and Thiersch (2018) argue that speaker-oriented parentheticals are structurally identical to adverbs. D’Avis (2017) suggests adjunction of the parenthetical to the closest phrasal projection (the projection in whose vicinity it is interpreted) along with intonation-guided interpretation of the interpolated constituent in order to account for the ambivalent properties of parentheticals.
Along with the question of whether or not parentheticals are integrated in the syntax of the frame utterance, there is another research question that deserves to be addressed here. One such phenomenon is the parenthetical verb or comment clause in English. Expressions such as I think, I feel (Emonds 1973: 333) have been considered parentheticals at least since Jespersen. Under the latter analysis, the parenthetical expression starts out as the matrix clause taking the rest of the utterance as complement, and ending in the parenthetical position as a result of a movement operation:

Max is a Martian, I think/I feel/ don’t you think.

Just as there are various approaches dealing with the syntax of parentheticals and host, the treatment of parenthetical structures in semantic and pragmatic contexts is not uniform either. Along with various approaches to identical parenthetical structures, we also encounter works with focus on different grammatical representations - parenthetical clauses, phrases, and one-word expressions. In this section, we will touch upon a few works which have focused on the status of parentheticals in semantics and pragmatics.

Before delving into any particular approach, the speculations that parentheticals may be an instance of disfluency need to be addressed. Are parentheticals the result of unplanned discourse and spontaneity with no relation to the utterance which they interrupt? Consider Burton-Roberts’ (Burton-Roberts, 2006, p. 180) example of a parenthetical lacking syntactic and discourse relations:

‘the main point - why not have a seat? - is outlined in the middle paragraph.

Burton-Roberts’ argument is that even though the parenthetical clause is not associated syntactically, nor pragmatically with the host, its occurrence is constrained by the host structure and the interpolation position of the parenthetical on the linear axis is severely limited.

In the same vein, the implementation of the backtracking device encourages perceptions of the parenthetical expression as an instance of disfluency. In particular, Biber et al. (2017: p. 1067) describe the use of backtracking to mark a disfluency and as a direct consequence of online processing. In their analysis, it is distinctively longer parentheticals which put pressure on the temporary memory of the hearer and backtracking is called upon to ease the processing of the utterance.

At the opposite end, linguists argue that parentheticals are in fact the result of a deliberate stylistic choice (Blakemore, 2017, p. 1167, Dehb; Kavalova, 2006, p. 302). In Blakemore’s case, the mere fact that parentheticals are encountered in written as well as spoken material, where the written text is
subjected to revisions and repairs, defies any claims that parentheticais are errors’ of online communication. Indeed, instances of parentheticais are abundant in written corpus material too, where they are often marked orthographically by dashes, commas, or brackets:

She becomes greedy (and who can blame her) for recognition.

In Dehe and Kavalova (2006) parenthetical what is seen to implicitly communicate assumptions. The speaker’s motivation for opting for a parenthetical insertion is discussed in Kavalova’s contribution in this volume.

In an early study, parentheticals are seen as expressions. In an attempt to show that the language harbours verbs which do not describe goings on, Crystal discusses ‘parenthetical verbs’ which include verbs like suppose, believe, think, expect, regret, etc. In their function the author likens them to stage-directions. Relying on the existence of basic conventions which govern the use of discourse, Crystal (Crystal, 1969, p. 484) justifies the licensing of these verbs by language - the speaker uses them as discourse devices. Hence, parenthetical verbs are seen as showing rather than stating, and their function has the nature of a comment on the main proposition.

In addition to parenthetical verbs, and ignoring syntactic form differences, Crystal (Crystal, 1969, p. 150) identifies certain adverbs (sentential adverbials) which share the same role and grammatical relation to the indicative sentence with parenthetical verbs - they all signal the force of the utterance to which attached. Moreover, the sentence position of adverbs can vary. Some of the adverbs mentioned are luckily, happily, certainly, presumably, unfortunately and are seen as indicators which modify the sentence by giving "a warning how [it is] to be understood" (Crystal, 1969, p. 486).

In analysing mitigation as a way to modify speech acts, Fraser (2016) lists parenthetical verbs as a strategy employed by the speaker to indicate intent to mitigate. Mitigation in his account is seen as a device to soften an unwelcome effect and is always associated with reducing the harshness or hostility a speech act- may have on the hearer. The reasons for that may be altruistic as well as self-serving. Following Urmson, Fraser (Fraser, 2016, p. 348) also includes sentential adverbials under this strategy and reiterates that these are less personal than parenthetical verbs. In this volume, Schneiders contribution focuses on parentheticals as mitigators.

While in Crystal’s account parenthetical verbs are seen as indicators per excellence and as being inherently non-truth conditional, Astruc (2017) opens a discussion on issues unanticipated by speech-act theorists. The sentence adverbials associated with parenthetical verbs in Crystal (1969) are studied in the context of utterance proposition, testing four groups of sentence adverbials for truth-conditional meaning. The results reveal that while attitudinal (unfortunately, sadly) and illocutionary (frankly, honestly)
adverbials are indeed non-truth conditional, hearsay \textit{(allegedly, reportedly)} and evidential \textit{(obviously, clearly)} adverbials affect the truth conditions of the host utterance.

Astruc develops account in the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) and along with the question of truth-conditionality, she also examines the type of information sentence adverbials encode and the way they encode it. Because evidential and hearsay adverbials are truth-conditional, she argues, they must be treated as encoding conceptual information. For attitudinal and illocutionary adverbials, these too encode elements of conceptual representation. However, while the former two contribute to the proposition expressed, the latter two contribute to higher-level explicatures. In a different study of a parenthetical expression, Dehe and Kavalova (Dehe and Kavalova, 2006, p. 300) establish that parentheticals can encode procedural information, too. Urey apply three diagnostic tests to demonstrate that parenthetical what does not encode concepts. Also, parenthetical what is argued to contribute to the implicit aspect of communication.

The lack of semantic interaction between host and parenthetical resonates in analysis of parentheticals as a source of conventional implicatures. Similar to Fraser’s observation that mitigation involves certain effects that arise as a result of the utterance, conventional implicatures too are influenced by the properties of the utterance and usually receive their interpretation within its domain. Astruc (Astruc, 2017, p. 43) refers to this as a one-way dependency where the conventional implicature is “saturated by something from the at-issue realm”. Conceptually, this resembles Ackema and Neeleman’s (2018) one-sided dependency between host and parentheticals as outlined in the previous section; this also supports the view that parentheticals are to be differentiated from disfluency phenomena.

So far the role of the parenthetical gravitates around the host and how this additional expression assists its interpretation. However, Blakemore (Blakemore, 2006, p. 1684) underlines that not all parentheticals achieve relevance by contributing to the interpretation of their hosts. Based on previous research, she distinguishes two types of parentheticals; grammatical (including non-restrictive relative clauses, nominal appositions and parenthetical adverbial clauses) and discourse.

Along with studies of parentheticals encoding procedural and conceptual information, and contributing to the explicit and implicit aspects of communications, other linguists have focused their research on the speaker’s tailoring of the utterance with the assistance of parenthetical expressions. While for Blakemore (2006) the exact position of the parenthetical verb is not seen as crucial from an interpretation point of view, Ackema and Neeleman (2018) consider this important and discusses parenthetical expressions as participating in information structuring. They implement parenthetical phrases (of the comment clause type) to analyse textual structure; more specifically, the marking of theme and rheme. They demonstrate that comment clauses can function as partitions. In (a) example the comment clause you know marks the theme, John. In (b) example the comment clause I think marks the rheme a warmer climate.
a. John, you know, I have painted the shed.

b. They // prefer, /I think/ a warmer climate.

Crucially, the marked theme and rheme contain an intonation focus and they are always assessed by the hearer as conveying new information (Ackema and Neeleman, 2018). The relationship between places of interpolation and focus is also discussed in Dehe and Kavalova (Dehe; Kavalova, 2006, p. 301).

4 DISCUSSION

In the context of information structure, Ackema and Neeleman (2018) comparison between subordination and parenthesis comes to the conclusion that the two phenomena represent different aspects of text structuring. While subordinated constituents are part of the focus background structure of the main utterance and provide background information, parentheticals contribute additional information on a plane parallel to the main information. This parallel level of information has its own focus background structure. Therefore, subordination and parenthesis do not compete with, but complement each other.

It is a common belief that a parenthetical interpolation “interrupts the prosodic flow of the frame utterance”. The quotation refers to parenthesis in English, but the assumption is a general one and has also been put forward for a number of other languages. Parentheticals form their own prosodic domains, set off from their host by pauses and/or tonal cues. Typical prosodic characteristics of parentheticals are: surrounding pauses / preceding and following prosodic boundaries (Astruc 2017), lower pitch (Crystal 1969), diminished loudness (Crystal 1969), increased tempo (Crystal 1969), rising-type tones (Bolinger 1989 and Crystal 1969), and the blocking of sandhi rules. It is also possible for the parenthesis to be marked by higher, rather than lower pitch (Bolinger 1989). Parentheticals are furthermore marked by falling-rising pitch at the end of immediately preceding material (Local 1992). Any one of these features can be suspended depending on the parenthetical’s function, length and position (Bolinger 1989), which implies that none of the defining features, including the intonational break so frequently referred to in the literature, qualifies as a necessary condition for parenthesis.

One of the two main objectives in the contribution by Gunther Kaltenbock, Spoken parenthetical clauses in English: a taxonomy, is to offer a detailed analysis of the parenthetical class in terms of variety in syntactic form and to unify the plethora of terminology associated with parentheticals (Kaltenbock, 2016, p. 26). To avoid circularity in the process of identifying and defining parentheticals, the author establishes three syntactic criteria which are to be distinguished from the functional features of parentheticals. Kaltenbock discriminates between parentheticals proper and instances of anacolutha,
discourse markers, and questions tags. In the context of the first objective, he also incorporates a detailed analysis of comment clauses. His findings are summarised in an elaborate taxonomic representation.

The paper by Yordanka Kavalova, And-parenthetical clauses (2016), focuses on a specific parenthetical construction. She opens with a detailed presentation and analysis of the types of cmd-parenthetical clauses occurring in the two corpora used, which culminates in the introduction of two types of parentheticals: anchored and floating. Then some key differences between canonical coordination and nd-par-entheticals are considered. Syntactically, Kavalova favours an approach based on Ackema and Neeleman’s (2018) Insertion theory over both the integrated and the unintegrated approaches. To account for the preferred places of interpolation and also the relations between host and parenthetical, the paper concludes with a section on the speaker’s motivation to use such constructions, developed in the context of Relevance Theory.

In his paper, Christian Fortmann concentrates on the origins of the internal argument of the verb in verb-first constructions and related constructions missing an overt verbal complement (2018). While he dismisses a transformation account from the outset - where the parenthetical is the root structure and the host its complement, the author examines three hypotheses for the syntactic representation of the ‘missing’ argument, specifically the option of an implicit argument, the presence of a trace or copy, and the representation of the null argument by an empty pronominal category e, which is anaphorically linked to the host. He argues in favour of the latter option, i.e., the presence of an empty pronominal. Certain restrictions observed for the constructions discussed are also analysed.

He experimentally investigates the question of whether the construction is best accounted for under a parenthetical or an extraction analysis. Using the magnitude estimation technique along with the pattern matching technique, she carried out a series of related experiments. The results provide supporting evidence for the parenthetical analysis.

Peterson's paper (2009) addresses from a syntactic point of view the above described problem that parentheticals are linearly integrated in the host structure, but at the same time show behaviour that suggests structural independence. Based on examples mainly from Dutch and English he argues that parentheticals are in fact structurally integrated, but that parenthetical and host do not interact in terms of c-command-based relations (his Invisibility hypothesis). He accounts for these properties by developing two concepts: b-inclusion represents a paratactic hierarchy (as opposed to a syntactic hierarchy represented by d-inclusion) and blocks c-command, while specifying coordination accounts for and formalises the similarities between coordination, apposition and parenthesis.

Two contributions to this volume take a closer look at prosodic properties of parenthetical constructions. In her contribution The relation between syntactic and prosodic parenthesis, Nicole Dehe analyses a number of spontaneous British English speech data taken from ICE-GB, showing that several
prosodic patterns can be found with parentheticals (2016). They can be “prototypical” in that they show all the characteristic features such as preceding and following intonational breaks and a change in pitch and tempo. However, they can also be prosodically integrated in the hosting material in various ways. All five examples are cases of interpolated clauses. Her main empirical result is that these clausal parentheticals do have their own intonation domain which is clearly set off from the host clause by prosodic features, such as a potential pause, accelerated speech rate and a change in pitch level / range. She particularly concentrates on the transition zone between the host clause and the left edge of the parenthetical. However, not all features have to be realised simultaneously, which corresponds to previous research findings.

Overall, there is a lot of variation in the prosodic realisation of syntactic interpolations, initialising questions for future research on the relation between the syntactic type and category of the parenthetical and its prosodic characteristics, among others.

To conclude, this volume offers a unique selection of papers studying the parenthetical phenomenon. It encompasses research findings on parentheticals from different European languages, presents an enviable breadth of coverage in terms of approaches, methodologies and forms, and supports the belief that for a comprehensive analysis we need to consider all aspects of grammar. Each of the papers touches on the relation between host and parenthetical and they collectively answer many of the questions outlined in this introduction. Naturally, some questions remain open for future research and new research questions arise from the discussions.

Elements which have been considered parentheticals in previous literature form a heterogeneous set and there is no general agreement as to the exact delimitation of a potential class of parentheticals. As Dehe and Kavalova (2016) put it, they are “a motley crew”, although, “everyone recognizes [parenthesis] intuitively”. The examples listed above provide an overview of this heterogeneous family. While this list does not claim to be exhaustive, it does illustrate how parentheticals vary in length and complexity, syntactic category and projection level, and in function. So the various types have in common the particular way in which they are syntactically related to their host, which is referred to as ‘parenthetical merge’.
5 CONCLUSION

The parenthetical’s position is determined by the place of the component to which it refers. Only when it takes this position it has a contextual effect, which can be immediately identified by the addressees and hence he interprets the utterance correctly.

Table 1. Overview of the formal study of parenthetical clauses in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Study</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>A parenthetical clause is a non-essential clause that adds extra information to a sentence but can be removed without altering the basic meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Parenthetical clauses are typically set off by punctuation such as commas, dashes, or parentheses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types</td>
<td>1. Non-restrictive relative clauses: Provide additional, non-essential information about a noun. &lt;br&gt; 2. Appositive phrases: Renames or defines a noun, often set off by commas. &lt;br&gt; 3. Adverbial clauses: Provide additional information about the action in the main clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>1. Provide additional information &lt;br&gt; 2. Add emphasis &lt;br&gt; 3. Express an aside or digression &lt;br&gt; 4. Show a change in tone or mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Parenthetical clauses can appear at various positions within a sentence, including at the beginning, middle, or end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>Proper punctuation, such as commas, dashes, or parentheses, is crucial to set off parenthetical clauses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Improper placement or punctuation of parenthetical clauses can lead to ambiguity or confusion in meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylistic Considerations</td>
<td>Writers often use parenthetical clauses to enhance clarity, coherence, and style in their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Analysis</td>
<td>Corpus linguistics studies can analyze the frequency, distribution, and syntactic patterns of parenthetical clauses in large bodies of text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Processing</td>
<td>Psycholinguistic research investigates how readers process and comprehend sentences containing parenthetical clauses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The authors.

This table provides an overview of the formal study of parenthetical clauses in English, including their definition, structure, types, functions, position, punctuation, ambiguity, stylistic considerations, corpus analysis, and cognitive processing.

Scholars argue that the host is in no way grammatically dependent on the parenthetical clause and therefore it can be omitted. However, establishing the contextual effects of the Qur’anic parenthetical clause can provide convincing evidence that parenthetical clauses do not carry peripheral information but contribute to a correct interpretation of the host; therefore, they cannot be dropped.

The representation of the intended utterance is achieved by the fact that despite the interpolation the information is arranged in logical and sequential order, providing the listener the prerequisites that guarantee an efficient inferential process. In an inferential process, the listener should proceed from one premise to another, ending with a conclusion.
This process can be demonstrated by example, which consists of three premises: first, a condition (if you do); second, the speaker’s comment (you will not do); third, the result (you will be punished). Changing this sequenced order can create an utterance where the listener derives a certain intention even before reaching the end of the utterance; but then he/she might encounter a parenthetical clause that will require re-processing all the information in the utterance.
REFERENCES


