ON HOW TO BE ROOTED IN A CONTEXT (Abstract, GLOW 35, University of Potsdam)
Valentina Bianchi & Mara Frascarelli

1. Introduction. The impact of information-structural categories on the formal properties of the sentence has led some authors to assume dedicated discourse/contextual projections in the C-domain (Rizzi 1997 and related work). However, this conflicts with a strongly modular view according to which only features that are truth-conditionally relevant, but not purely contextual features, belong in the syntactic computation (Horvath 2010, Fanselow–Lenertova 2010). The arguments are often focussed on a single phenomenon; we contend instead that an approach comparing different phenomena allows a more comprehensive view of the interplay between syntax and context. This will be shown by considering a set of ‘root phenomena’ which can apply in distinct types of embedded clauses, requiring a fine-grained distinction in their distributional properties. Our discussion will focus exclusively on declarative clauses.

2. Data. We show that it is necessary to distinguish at least two types of ‘root phenomena’:

– **Type I phenomena** occur in clauses embedded under bridge verb (e.g. the question tag in (1)), and their interpretation does not interact with elements in the matrix clause: (a) In Italian, a **fronted focus** cannot associate with a matrix clause negation (2); (b) In English, a **Left Dislocated QP** in the embedded clause does not scopally interact with a matrix QP (3):

   (1) I [think/am glad] you like it, don’t you?

   (2) ?* Leo non ha detto che [DI SARA] è innamorato.

   Leo neg has said that with SARA (he) is in-love

   (3) ? Every student tells me that one exam, I can prepare it in two weeks (*∀x∃y)

– **Type II phenomena** (German **V2**, English **Topicalization**) also occur in clauses embedded under non-bridge verbs (4), and they do not require an independent interpretation of the embedded clause w.r.t. the matrix clause: cp. (5) to (2) and (6) to (3):

   (4) I am glad that this unrewarding job, she has finally decided to give up.

   (5) (?) Hans glaubt NICHT, Peter hat GEWONNEN...

   (Truckenbrodt 2006, (67))

   Hans believes not, Peter has won...

   (6) a. Jeder meiner Kollegen meinte auf ein Examen kann ich mich innerhalb von 2 Wochen vorbereiten. b. Every student tells me that one exam, I can prepare in two weeks (*∀x∃y)

Drawing a first distinction, type I phenomena occur in **discourse active** embedded clauses (in the sense of Dayal–Grimshaw 2009): the proposition expressed bears a non-vacuous update potential w.r.t. the **discourse context**, because the modal base introduced by the matrix verb is not realistic. Type II phenomena also occur in embedded clauses whose update potential gets ‘absorbed’ into the **derived context** introduced by the matrix attitude verb (Gärtnner 2002, Truckenbrodt 2006; cf. also KriIka 2011, §3.6), with no impact on the discourse context. Our **conclusion** is that root phenomena are not a unitary class; the debate about whether or not ‘assertive potential’ is a necessary condition for root phenomena (Bentzen et al. 2007) is due to the failure to distinguish the two subclasses.

3. **Analysis. Step 1**: How to characterize the two types of root-like embedded clause?

   In Stalnaker/Heim update semantics, the Context Change Potential (CCP) of an assertion updates the set of **shared** beliefs of the conversational community (common ground), while in Gunlogson (2003) it updates the set of public commitments of a **single** participant. Farkas–Bruce (2010) propose a componential view of the context which subsumes both these aspects: an assertion has the effect of updating the speaker’s commitment set and also of projecting an updated common ground. Suppose, however, that these two updates can be separated; we then have the following parameters w.r.t. CCP: (i) individual commitment / (proposed) shared commitment; (ii) discourse context / derived context introduced by a matrix attitude verb. We
assume that derived contexts do not comprise a shared common ground, but only individual commitment sets (cf. Truckenbrodt 2006, 281). We obtain the following combinations:

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<td>Shared</td>
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<td>commitment</td>
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This view of discourse-active subordinates agrees with Dayal–Grimshaw’s claim that the speaker does not commit herself to the truth of the proposition expressed by the subordinate (pace Hooper–Thompson 1973), yet the latter has a proper CCP w.r.t. the discourse context. In other terms, the speaker places the embedded proposition ‘on the table’ as a potential relevant update of the shared common ground, without taking responsibility for its truth.

**Step 2**: The permissible contexts for root phenomena depend on their interpretive impact.

- Type I phenomena are linked to the **conversational dynamics**. Specifically, we show that:
  a) Question tags implement a request for the addressee to confirm the relevant proposition;
  b) Italian focus fronting implements a correction (partial reversal of a previous assertion);
  c) English LD implements a topic shift, steering the conversation toward a new topic.

These conversational moves update the shared commitments of the conversational community; this is why type I phenomena are only allowed in the **first and third** clause type.

- Type II phenomena, instead, have no impact on the conversational dynamics, but they at most implement the structuring of information within a single assertion: hence, they only require the presence of an individual commitment set, either in the discourse context or in a derived context. This is why they are licensed in **all three** clause types.

- Type I phenomena are only licensed if the proposition expressed by the embedded clause has autonomous CCP w.r.t. the matrix clause: this is why there cannot be any scopal interaction (or association with focus) between a matrix element and an element included in the embedded clause (cf. (2)-(3)), contrary to type II phenomena (cf. (5)-(7)).

4. **Consequences.** The data in (2)-(3) show that the discourse active status of the subordinate clause rules out a syntactically and semantically permissible relation between a matrix and an embedded element. The two competing views of the syntax–context interface then reduce to the opposition between failure-proof grammar vs. «free generation + filtering» (Boeckx 2010, a.o.). If syntax and semantics are blind to the discourse active status of the embedded clause, (2)-(3) must be filtered out at the interface with the context. (CP-extraposition (Meinunger 2004) may account for (2)-(3), but, if it is interface-driven, it still requires reference set computation and filtering of the non-interface-complying outputs.) If instead the syntax encodes the CCP status of a clause in its C head, the relevant scope interactions will be blocked in the course of the derivation. We believe that, by considerations of computational efficiency, failure-proof computation should be regarded as the null hypothesis.