

## Cost and intervention: a strong theory of weak islands

In this talk, I address certain problems in the analysis of weak islands that emerge within the feature-driven account of movement commonly assumed in recent syntactic theory. The puzzle involves the tension between Phase Theory (Chomsky 2001 etc.) with its assumed core PIC constraint (the Phase Impenetrability Condition) under which no feature can probe down inside the complement of a phase head, and the observation that basic *wh*-island effects are “mild”, everything else being equal (hence their description as “weak” islands):

- 1) a. ??Who do you wonder whether John knows *t*? (mild)
- b. \*How do you wonder whether John fixed the car *t*? (severe)

Traditional theories attribute the mild deviance of (1a) to Subadjacency (the “mild” constraint) and the severe deviance of (1b) to the Empty Category Principle, which in traditional form (Rizzi 1990), required that adjuncts, but not arguments, be antecedent governed. The problem is that the adjunct-argument asymmetry in (1) is entirely unexpected under current theories, which predict that all *wh* island extractions should be equally underivable, since the phase edge (intermediate SpecCP) is occupied (here by *whether*), and without accessing the edge, an element cannot be targeted for movement.

In this talk I motivate a theory that accounts for adjunct-argument asymmetries without recourse to any GB-era machinery. The account relies on a feature-based version of **intervention** (Rizzi 2004), on the one hand, and the **cost** of building additional edge positions for long distance extraction, on the other. I show that the theory successfully accounts for Scrambling / *wh*-movement asymmetries in Slavic as well as for the well-known indicative extraction ban found in Russian and Polish long-distance *wh*-movement.