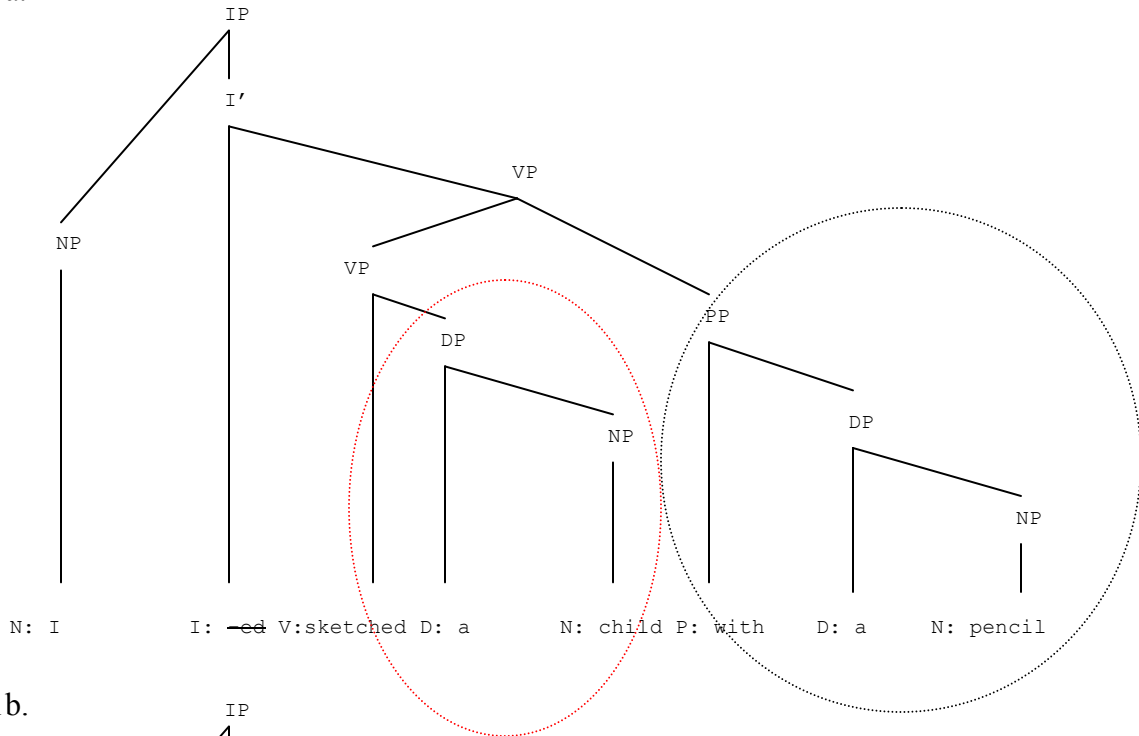


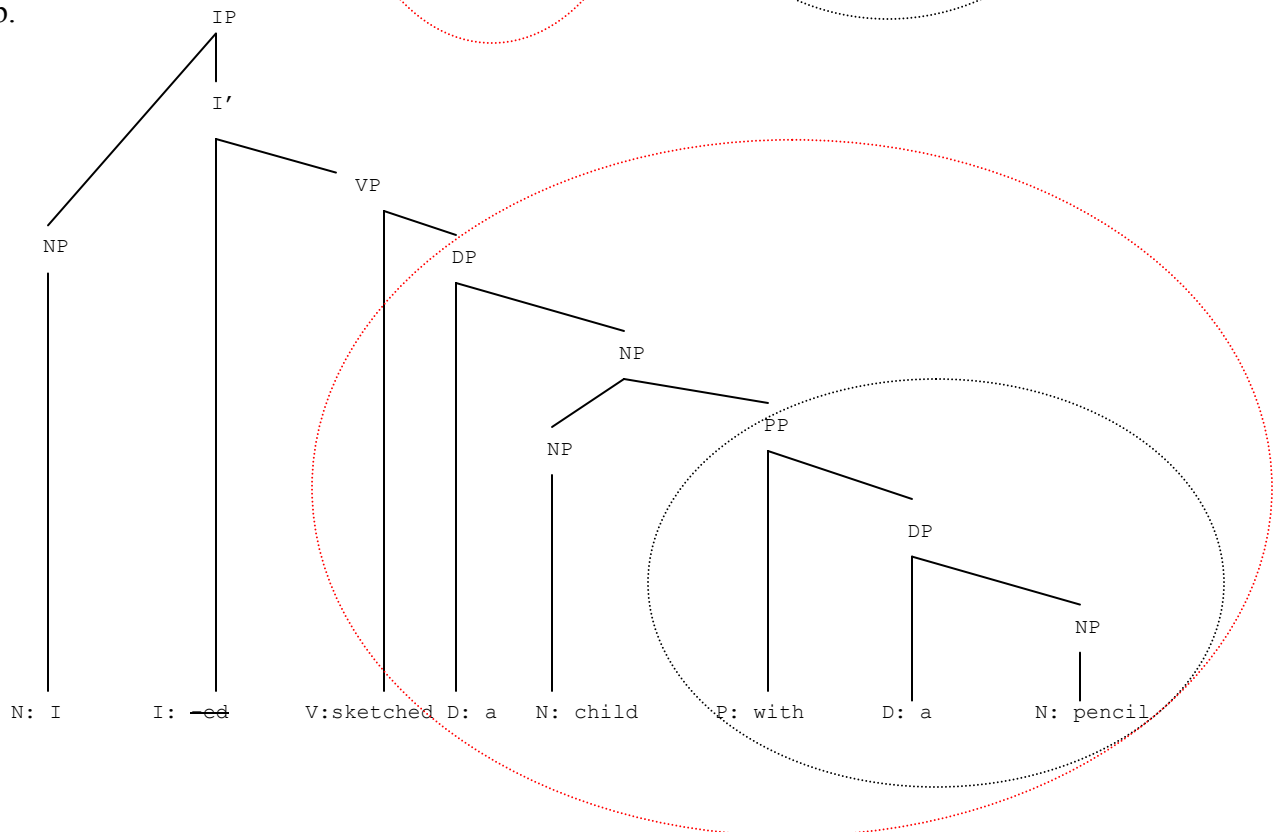
The Mysterious Disappearing Meaning

A sentence like *I sketched a child with a pencil* has two meanings; either I did the sketching with a pencil, or the child I sketched had a pencil. The trees in 1 show the structural difference.

1a.



1b.



In 1a, the Determiner Phrase *a child*, and the Prepositional Phrase *with a pencil* are both part of the Verb Phrase. *A child* is the complement of the verb *sketch*, and *with a pencil* is an adjunct (modifier) of the Verb Phrase, showing how the sketching was done. In 1b, *with a pencil* is included within the Determiner Phrase, so that *a child with a pencil* in its entirety is the complement of *sketch*. *With a pencil* is an adjunct of the Noun Phrase, this time describing the child. The word order in the two meanings is exactly the same and both sound the same when they are spoken. So we see that there are two clear meanings for the same sentence and that each is related to a particular structure. It's also clear that the structural differences match up with the meaning differences in a totally natural way.

When we try to move the prepositional phrase, *with a pencil* to the front of the sentence we get 2.

2. With a pencil, I sketched a child.

Surprisingly, this version has only one meaning! It can only mean that I used a pencil when I sketched a child. What happened to the other meaning? The answer turns out to be that this operation is restricted by a UG constraint. This restriction, called the complex DP island constraint, forbids the movement of a phrase to the beginning of a sentence if it is inside a Determiner Phrase. Where *with a pencil* is part of the VP, it does not run afoul of this constraint, because it's outside the Determiner Phrase, but where it's part of the DP, it does. In other words, *with a pencil* can “get out” of its original position without crossing a red line in 1a, but not in 1b. The result is that, after movement, the only possible meaning is the one associated with 1a, where *with a pencil* is a VP adjunct. Again, there is nothing that a child hears that could yield this constraint. What they hear tells them that they can move certain phrases to the front of sentences. The evidence that you can't do this movement out of a DP is negative and so it is not available to the child language learner. We are led to conclude that the constraint is part of UG.

Extra Exercise: Now here is another exercise, a follow-up to Exercise 3.2 in the text. If you constructed 3.2q correctly, it has the same structure as 1a. This suggests that the same sequence of words could also have the structure of 1b, with a slightly different meaning. If we try to move “in the café” to the front of the sentence, it will have only the meaning associated with 1a (=3.2q). In the sentence about the lattes, though, the two meanings are different in only a rather subtle way. What is the meaning it can have in its original form that it loses if we change it to “In the café, those young people drink lattes.”?