

## **On Adverbial Clauses and their Status within Concepts of Hypotaxis, Subordination and Clause Embedding**

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### 1. Introduction

In M.A.K Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985/1994) finite adverbial clauses such as those in the following sentences are not considered to be embedded but hypotactically related:

- (1) John ran away *because he was scared*. (Ex. from *ib.*: 220.)
- (2) *When she had come close to it*, she saw that it was Humpty Dumpty himself. (Ex. from *ib.*: 236.)
- (3) The weather has been remarkably warm *since we returned from Italy last week*. (Ex. not from Halliday, but from Quirk *et al.* 1985: 45; used here in order to facilitate comparison between Halliday (1985/1994) and Quirk *et al.* (1985); see below.)

In Halliday's terms, such adverbial clauses belong to the "enhancement" type, which is one out of several types of logico-semantic clause relationships. "All 'logical' structures in language", says Halliday, "are either (a) paratactic or (b) hypotactic." (*Ib.*: 218.)

With respect to clause embedding, Halliday (*ib.*: 242) claims that there are exactly three possibilities for a clause to be embedded, namely:

- [1.] Postmodifier in a nominal group [e.g. *who came to dinner* in *the man who came to dinner*] [...]
- [2.] Head of a nominal group (i.e. as a nominalization), e.g. *that you're sorry* in *that you're sorry isn't enough* [...]
- [3.] Postmodifier in an adverbial group, e.g. *as you can* in *as quickly as you can*. [...]

Referring to his second category of clause embedding, Halliday (*ib.*) adds in a footnote:

Where the embedded element functions as Head, we may leave out the intermediate (nominal group) step in the analysis and represent the embedded clause or phrase as functioning directly in the structure of the outer clause, as Subject or whatever. This is a notational simplification; it does not affect the status of the embedded element as a nominalization. Note that this still does not make it resemble hypotaxis; in hypotaxis one clause is dependent on another, but in no sense is it a constituent part of it.

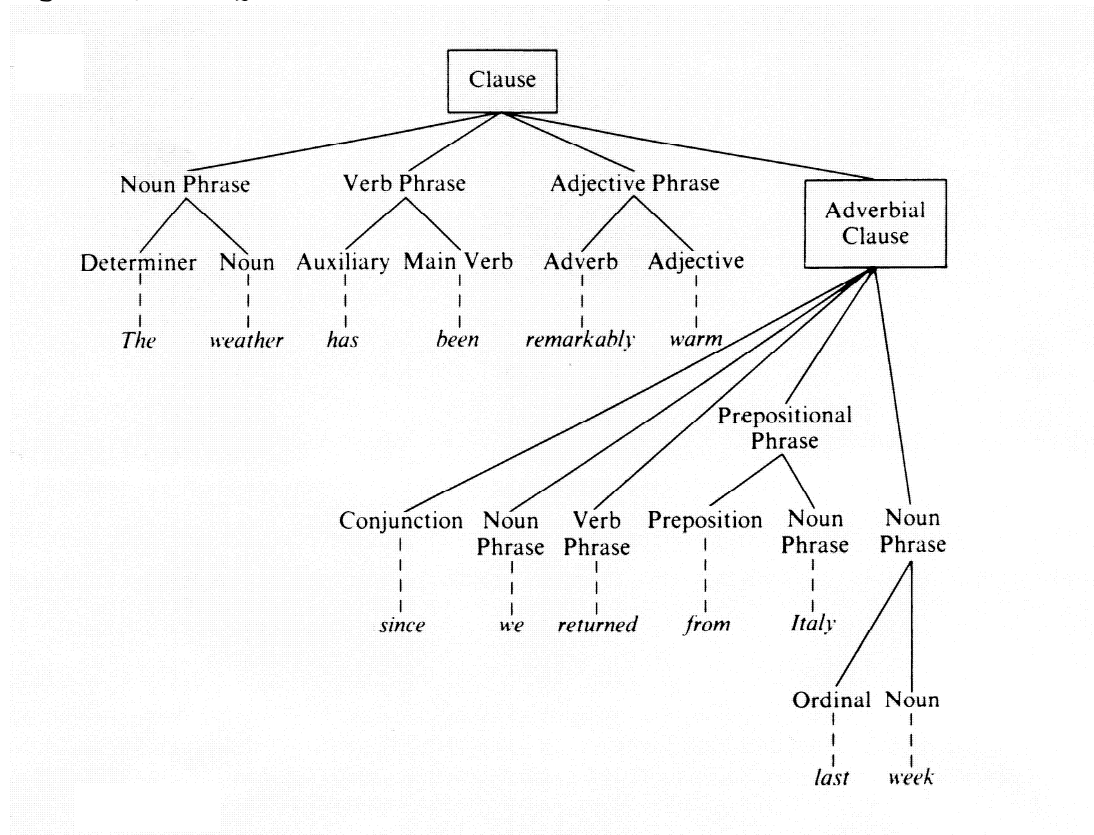
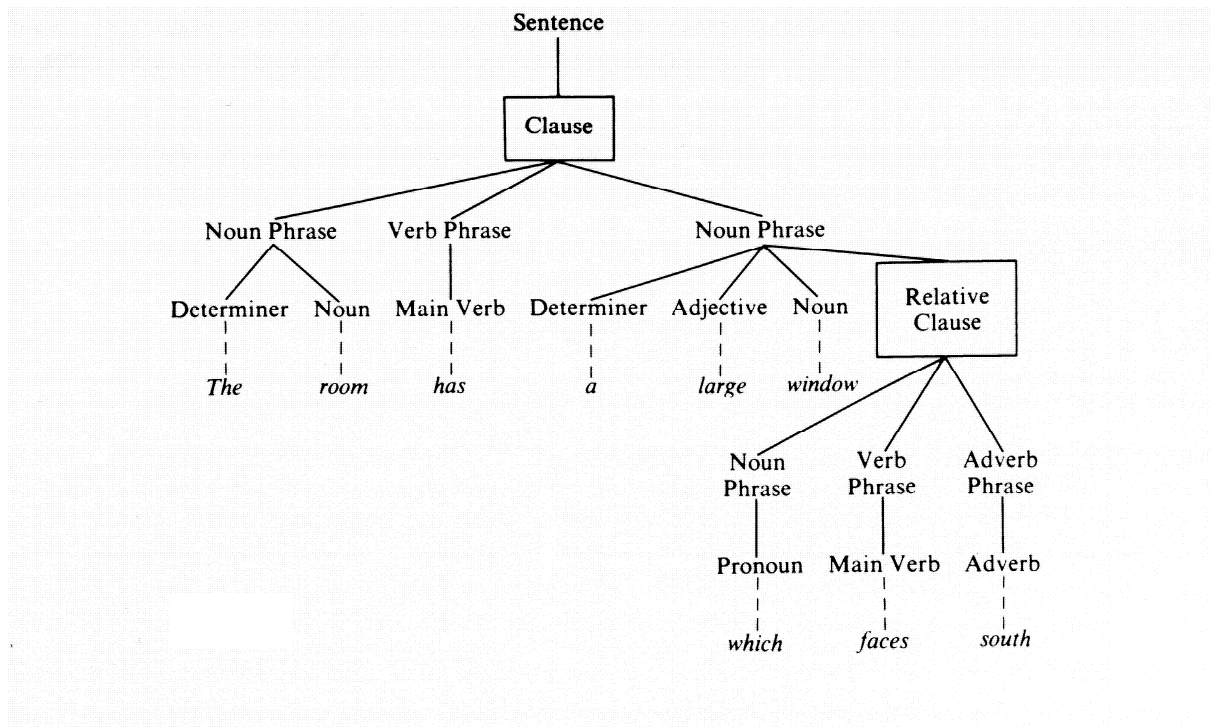
With this comment, Halliday accounts for the situation where an embedded clause seems to be an immediate constituent of its superordinate clause, but in fact is not. This is the case where an embedded clause functions as Head of a nominal group, i.e. where the nominal group-constituent mediates between the embedded clause and its superordinate clause, but where the nominal group is formally, materially identical with its head.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Comprehensive Grammar* by Quirk *et al.* (1985) on the other hand, all finite adverbial clauses are considered to be embedded, embedding and subordination being equated by the authors (see *ib.*: 44, chap. 15, 16). Let us have a look at the figures 1 and 2, taken from the *Comprehensive Grammar*:

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<sup>1</sup> This is similar to the generative syntacticians' distinction between, e.g., *Peter* as an NP and as an N in sentences like [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>N</sub>*Peter*]] *loved Mary*.

Fig. 1 (from Quirk et al. 1985: 45)

Fig. 2 (from *ib.*)

With respect to these figures and according to the view presented in the *Comprehensive Grammar*, a clause is embedded or subordinate when it is an immediate or a mediate constituent of another clause. The adverbial clause *since we returned from Italy last week* is considered to be an immediate constituent of the superordinate complex clause *The weather has been remarkably warm since we returned from Italy last week* and thus embedded (or subordinate) (see Fig. 1). The clause *The weather has been remarkably warm* is called 'matrix clause', i.e. the complex superordinate clause minus its subordinate clause. The relative clause *which faces south* is a mediate constituent of the clause *The room has a large window which faces south* (see Fig. 2). In the *Comprehensive Grammar*, for a clause to be embedded or subordinate, it makes no difference whether it is an immediate or a mediate constituent of the superordinate clause.

Halliday (1985/1994) has a different concept of 'embedding':

It is important to distinguish between embedding on the one hand and the 'tactic' relations of parataxis and hypotaxis on the other. Whereas parataxis and hypotaxis are relations BETWEEN clauses [...], embedding is not. Embedding is a mechanism whereby a clause or phrase comes to function as a constituent WITHIN the structure of a group, which itself is a constituent of a clause. Hence there is no direct relationship between an embedded clause and the clause within which it is embedded; the relationship of an embedded clause to the 'outer' clause is an indirect one, with a group as intermediary. The embedded clause functions in the structure of the group, and the group functions in the structure of the clause. (*Ib.*: 242.)

With respect to sentence (3) (i.e. the one used as an example in Fig. 1) this means that for Halliday there is no superordinate clause with regard to which one can say that the adverbial clause *since we returned from Italy last week* is embedded. For there is neither a mediating nominal group in which the adverbial clause could function as Postmodifier or Head nor an adverbial group in which it could function as Postmodifier (see first page of this paper). Thus, the clause relation that Halliday would focus on in

this example is the relation between the adverbial clause and the matrix clause (in Quirk *et al.*'s sense) *The weather has been remarkably warm.*

At first glance, this difference may seem only a problem of definition and a matter of point of view. I think, however, that there is more at stake here, namely a fundamental aspect of clause relations.

## 2. Discussion

There are certain constructions containing adverbial clauses which are embedded even according to Halliday's definition and criteria. Some examples are the following:

(4) The time to leave is *when people yawn.*

(5) His going home *because he felt ill* is unfortunate.

(6) That he went home *because he was ill* is unfortunate.

(4) is given by Halliday himself as an example of a sentence which contains an embedded adverbial clause (*ib.*: 248). Here, the *when*-clause is considered to be a nominalization, i.e. the Head of a nominal group in what Halliday calls an "identifying clause".<sup>2</sup> In (5) (taken from McTear 1979), the *because*-clause is a Postmodifier in a nominal group.<sup>3</sup> We may replace the *because* in (5) by other conjunctions such as *while, when, although, whereas*

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<sup>2</sup> A sentence like (4) is generally called 'pseudo-cleft sentence' (see e.g. Huddleston 1984: 459ff., Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1383ff.) In the *Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of British English* (LOB-Corpus), I found pseudo-cleft sentences with embedded *because*-clauses, e.g.:

(a) The only reason they are going to be allowed to see it is because some obscure official somewhere in Europe has already leaked the whole thing to another foreign government. The *because*-clause in this sentence is embedded for the same reason as the *when*-clause is in (4).

<sup>3</sup> That Halliday (1985/1994) considers gerundive constructions such as in (5) to be 'nominal groups' is obvious; see e.g. *ib.*: 248.

and thus get further examples of embedded adverbial clauses. And we may think of a sentence like

(7) The robbers' breaking in *where the weak spot of the alarm system was*, brought the police on their track  
where we have an embedded adverbial clause of place.

Maybe one is reluctant to regard the gerundive constructions as 'nominal groups' or 'nominal phrases' and rather wishes to regard them as non-finite clauses functioning as the subject of the superordinate clause. But in that case too, one is forced to concede that the adverbial clauses in the above sentences (5) and (7) are embedded, for they certainly are constituents of the constituents whose heads are the gerunds and thus they are mediate constituents of the superordinate clause.

(6) is structurally similar to (5), the only difference being that the structural slot of the nonfinite gerundive clause in (5) is filled with a finite clause (*he went home*) in (6). And it is similar to Halliday's example of an embedded clause as Head of a nominal group (nominalization) -- *That you're sorry isn't enough* (see first page of this paper) -- the only difference being that in (6) the nominalization is postmodified by an adverbial clause.

In generative grammarians' terms (see the works mentioned in footnote 11 below), it is the complementizer *that* which enables the construction *he went home because he was ill* to function as Subject of (6). The complementizer is the lexical head of a complementizer phrase (CP), the complement of this head being exactly one clause.<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is necessary to consider the construction *he went home because he was ill* in (6) as one

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<sup>4</sup> This seems intuitively obvious, but may not be so theoretically. However, a stronger argument than intuition in favour of the statement that a complementizer has exactly one clausal complement is the ungrammaticality of sentences like

(a) \*That Peter was ill, he went home, is unfortunate

(b) \*That Peter was ill and he went home is unfortunate

where we have obviously more than one clause (mal)functioning as complements of the complementizer *that*.

clause, one S (or IP). My argument now is that it would be implausible to say that in

(8) He went home *because he was ill*

tout court we are confronted with two hypotactically related clauses, whereas in (6) this very same construction is one clause.

Now consider examples (9)-(11), which are taken from the LOB-Corpus.

(9) It is *because democratic ideals and economic needs at the present time put a premium on the emergence of ability* that we are specially interested both in education and selection.

(10) It was *while I was at Tatsfield* that I first visited Oberammergau in Bavaria to witness the passion play.

(11) It was *not until Colmore had been at his desk for a half-hour* that his sense of power and control returned.

It could be argued that the adverbial clauses in these cleft constructions are embedded in the Hallidayan sense too. We could analyze the *because*-, *while*- and *not until*-clauses in (9)-(11) as nominalizations, i.e. as Heads of nominal groups, just as Halliday does with respect to the *when*-clause in (4). In both (4) and (9)-(11), the adverbial clauses follow a subject NP and the copula *be*. The *that*-clauses can be regarded as being cataphorically related to the subject *it*. With respect to the cleft-sentence *It was not until fairly recently that this problem was solved* (among other types of construction), Halliday (1985/1994: 98) explains: "In many instances an embedded clause functioning as Subject appears at the end of the clause in which it is embedded, with an anticipatory *it* occurring in the normal Subject position". And, although in the GG-framework subject *it* in cleft-sentences is considered to be an expletive, generative syntacticians acknowledge that there is a relation of 'association' between an expletive and another, referential, NP (see Freidin 1992: 221, Haegeman 1991/1994: 60ff.: 538f.). In the course of the derivation mapping S-structure onto LF, the

associate of the expletive replaces the latter at LF by application of move- $\alpha$  (see Haegeman 1991/1994: 538).

If these arguments are accepted, then I find it implausible that, when cleft-sentences are de-clefted, we should get 'normal' constructions, in which, according to Halliday, the adverbial clauses are not embedded any more, but are hypotactically related:

(9a) We are specially interested both in education and selection *because democratic ideals and economic needs at the present time put a premium on the emergence of ability.*

(10a) I first visited Oberammergau in Bavaria to witness the passion play *while I was at Tatsfield.*

(11a) Colmore's sense of power and control returned *not until he had been at his desk for a half-hour.*

The point I wish to make is the following: My discussion makes it more plausible to characterize the adverbial clauses in examples (8) and (9a)-(11a) and thus also in (1)-(3) as embedded rather than -- as Halliday would have it -- hypotactically related.<sup>5</sup>

The phenomenon of clefting is linked with my criticism of the account of embedding and subordination in Quirk *et al.* (1985). There, clefting is mentioned as one of the criteria which serve to distinguish 'adjunct adverbial clauses' from 'disjunct adverbial clauses' (see *ib.*: 1071). If clefting is applied to a sentence that contains an adverbial clause, and if the result is grammatical and semantically equivalent to the original sentence, then you are confronted with an adjunct, else it is a disjunct. Some obvious examples of the latter are the following:

(12) He always walks to work, *when really he could take a taxi.* (concession) (\*It is when really he could take a taxi

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<sup>5</sup> In a 1988 review of the first edition of Halliday's *Functional Grammar*, R. Huddleston essentially puts forward the same criticism (see *ib.*: 144ff.), without, however, trying to



that he always walks to work. Gloss: The sentence is not ungrammatical as such. But a grammatical reading always implies a time-reading, not a concession-reading of the adverbial clause. Thus, the clefting transformation of the original sentence is not meaning preserving.)

(13) *While John studied English literature in Oxford, his brother will study linguistics at UCL.* (contrast) (\*It is/was while John studied English literature in Oxford that his brother will study linguistics at UCL. Gloss: In contrast to (12) above, this sentence is straightforwardly ungrammatical since a time-reading of the adverbial conflicts with the tenses in the *while*- and *that*-clauses.)

(14) *Since no one wants to help me, I'll have to do it all myself.* (reason) (\*It is since no one wants to help me that I'll have to do it all myself.)

(15) *As he was there so early, I had no time to cook his food.* (reason) (\*It was as he was there so early that I had no time to cook his food.)

(16) *He studies linguistics, because I saw him read Chomsky's latest book the other day.* (speech act motivation) (\*It is because I saw him read Chomsky's latest book the other day that he studies linguistics. Gloss: Semantically not equivalent to (16).)

(17) *If you saw him yesterday, why are you phoning him now?* (speech act motivation) (\*It is if you saw him yesterday that why are you phoning him now?)<sup>6</sup>

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rescue the idea of the Hallidayan distinction between hypotaxis and clause embedding, which is the ultimate aim of my paper.

<sup>6</sup> These sentences as well as the indications of the semantic type of the adverbial clauses are taken from Haegeman (1985: 3f.) I will comment on this article later. -- It should also be noted that it is not always the conjunction as such which decides over adjunct or disjunct status of the adverbial clause it introduces. At least in the cases of the examples above, this decision depends on a combination of the semantic or pragmatic relations a particular conjunction may express on the one hand and the

I quote from Quirk et al. (1985) about the difference between adjunct and disjunct adverbial clauses:

The primary difference is that they differ syntactically in that disjuncts are peripheral to *the clause to which they are attached*.

The syntactic difference does not manifest itself in differences in form or position. For example, finite clauses that function as adjuncts and disjuncts may share the same subordinator, and in both functions the clauses may be positioned initially or finally. The peripheral status of disjuncts is indicated mainly negatively: they do not allow a number of syntactic processes to apply to them that are allowed by adjuncts, processes that reflect a measure of integration within *the superordinate clause*. (*Ib.*: 1070; my emphasis.)

(As I already pointed out, clefting is one of the syntactic processes mentioned in this quotation.) Here the authors do not compare disjuncts and adjuncts on equal terms, they subtly change their focus: First, they focus on adverbial clauses and their relation to "the clause to which they are attached" -- suggesting: 'matrix clause'; note that they do not say 'superordinate clause'. Then, a few words later, the focus is on the adverbial clause and its relation to the superordinate clause, which is *not* the one to which the adverbial clause is attached.

In my opinion, in order to explain the syntactic status of disjunct adverbial clauses, the authors of the *Comprehensive Grammar* momentarily and implicitly defect to the perspective adopted by Halliday, but instantly return to their own system when contrasting the syntactic status of adjuncts to the one of disjuncts. In fact, I believe that disjunct adverbial clauses cannot be called embedded at all, they are not at all constituents of a superordinate clause, neither immediate nor mediate, they do not fill a structural slot of another syntactic unit, they are, in terms of Halliday, 'tactically' related to

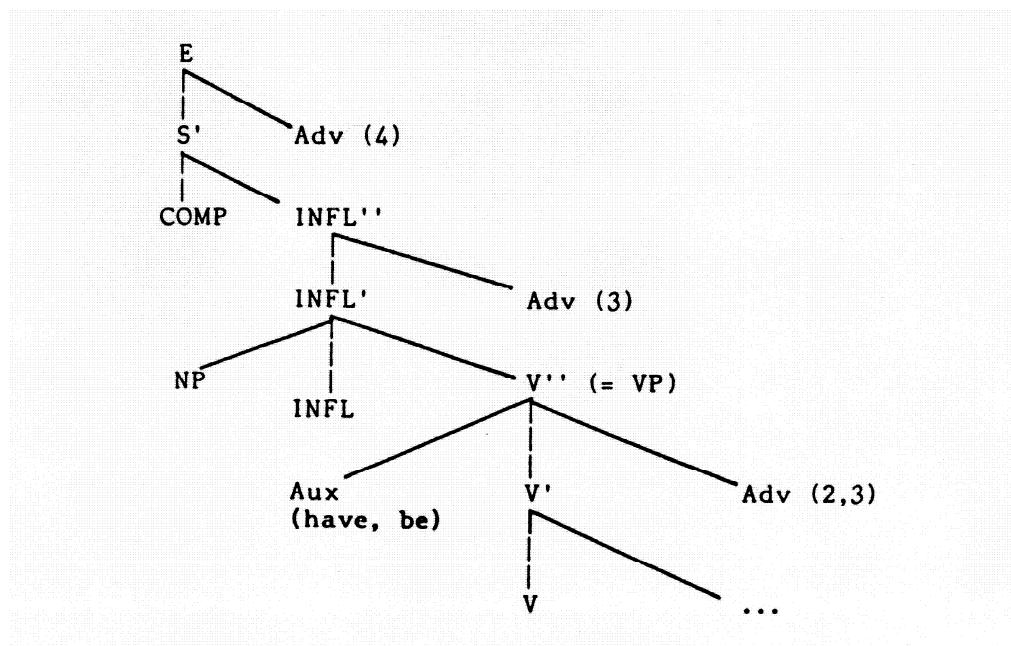
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meaning and (implicit or explicit) context of the clauses involved on the other hand.

another clause. And it is this fundamental distinction which gets lost or at least blurred in the concept of subordination or embedding as developed in Quirk *et al.* 1985.

In my critical interpretation of an article by L. Haegeman (1985), I find support for my position from a generative syntactician's point of view. Haegeman's final phrase structure is the following:

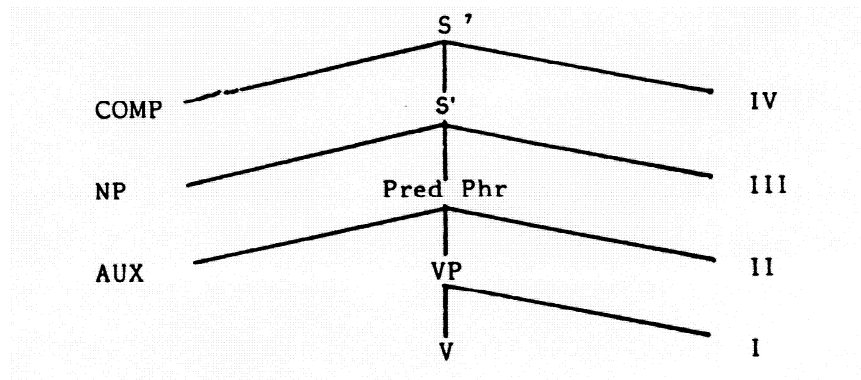
Fig. 3 (from Haegeman 1985: 38)



The position marked "Adv (2,3)" is occupied, among others, by adjunct adverbial clauses; the position marked "Adv (4)" is occupied, among others, by disjunct adverbial clauses.

In my opinion, the position marked "Adv (3)" is an unmotivated remainder of approaches which were discussed earlier in Haegeman's paper. The only information I find in the article about why there should be a distinction between adverbials branching from INFL'' and adverbials branching from VP is in the discussion of a proposal by E. Williams. Haegeman (1985) summarizes this proposal by giving the following phrase marker:

Fig. 4 (from Haegeman 1985: 24):



The author (*ib.*: 24f.) gives the following comment:

The distinction between II and III-complements can be justified in that II-adverbials usually precede III:

[(18)] (?) *John hasn't offended Bill since returning home (III) by telling jokes (II).*

[(19)] *vs John hasn't offended Bill by telling jokes since returning home.*

and manner-adverbials and time or conditional adverbials cannot easily be coordinated:

[(20)] ? *I did it like and when John told me.*

[(21)] ? *I'll do it like and if John tells me.*

I do not think that these arguments for the distinction are very strong ones. (18) seems to be quite acceptable in communicative circumstances which necessitate focus on *by telling jokes*. This becomes obvious when we manipulate the sentence so as to include alternate negation:

(18a) John hasn't offended Bill since returning home by telling jokes, but by teasing him constantly.

With regard to (20), its awkwardness seems rather due to two facts independent of the argument aimed at: First, *like* as a conjunction introducing an adverbial clause of similarity is considered to be informal (see Quirk et al. 1985: 1110f.). Second, for whatever reasons, it sounds 'less natural' to mention

the manner (similarity) before the time than the other way round.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a sentence like

(22) I did it *when and as John told me*

is perfectly acceptable despite the fact that it coordinates a time- and a manner-adverbial clause. The first counterargument concerning the informality of *like*-clauses is equally applicable to (21). A second counterargument with regard to this sentence is the following: (21) is semantically awkward because the superordinate clause with the manner-clause alone

(21a) I'll do it *like John tells me*

implies a piece of factual information -- namely the fact that John tells the speaker something -- information which would be only hypothetical in the sentence with the *if*-clause alone:

(21b) I'll do it *if John tells me*.

Thus, a semantic conflict adds to the awkwardness of (21). A third counterargument is that the *like*-clause is an adjunct adverbial clause whereas the *if*-clause is probably rather a disjunct one,<sup>8</sup> so that we have coordination of clauses of unequal status simply on that account without having to assume a third class between the two. In sum, Haegeman's arguments for the existence of adverbial clauses branching from a projection of I (INFL' in Fig. 3 above) do not appear to be convincing.

Haegeman (1985) calls the topmost node E in her final phrase structure (Fig. 3 above) a "textual unit" (*ib.*: 37), i.e. a unit which exceeds the clause level.<sup>9</sup> In short: According to this

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<sup>7</sup> A possible reason for this could be that information about time is more 'background-like' than information about manner.

<sup>8</sup> This assumption is based on the different behaviour of *like*- and *if*-clauses with respect to clefting:

(a) It's exactly like John told me that I did it.

(b) ??It's if John tells me that I'll do it.

<sup>9</sup> And: "It is interesting to observe that adverbial clauses type 4 have a special relation to S': [...] we note that in fact Adv (4)-clauses are almost like coordinate clauses [...] The fact that they have various root properties now comes as no surprise: being directly dominated by E adverbial (4) clauses are exactly like root clauses." (*Ib.*: 38.)

analysis and abstracting from the doubtful existence of adverbial clauses branching from a projection of I, adjunct adverbial clauses are constituents of the VP of their superordinate clauses, whereas disjunct adverbial clauses are not at all constituents of a clause -- which is exactly what I claimed a few pages ago.

If adjunct adverbial clauses are indeed constituents of the VP of their superordinate clauses, i.e. mediate constituents, then they would ultimately comply with Halliday's definition of clause embedding -- provided that Halliday acknowledges the generative grammarians' VP as a constituent of a clause. (I recall the fact that Halliday's (1985/1994) 'VERBAL GROUP' is not identical with the generative grammarians' VP. The former, e.g., does not comprise complements and adjuncts.)

To sum up, I would propose to consider the Hallidayan distinction between clause embedding on the one hand and the 'tactic' relations on the other hand more adequate than and superior to the concepts of embedding or subordination as explained in the *Comprehensive Grammar* -- with the modification that what are called adjunct adverbial clauses in the *Comprehensive Grammar* are embedded, whereas disjunct adverbial clauses are 'tactically' related.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I wonder which consequences this view has for the opinion that finite adverbial clauses are better described as PPs with the conjunctions introducing these clauses being a certain type of prepositions, namely those which take clause complements (see e.g. Huddleston 1984: 390f., Radford 1988: 133ff., Jackendoff 1977: 79). Can this position only be maintained with respect to embedded adverbial clauses but not to 'tactically' related ones? Or do the proponents of this view have to re-analyze the functions of PPs?

### 3. Conclusion

If my argument presented above is accepted, then, I think, there is an inadequacy in lumping together all finite adverbial clauses into one category called 'subordinate or embedded clause' as is done in the *Comprehensive Grammar* (see also Figs. 1 and 2 above). I believe, as does Halliday (1985/1994), that there is a fundamental difference between 'embedding' and 'hypotaxis' in his sense, and I believe furthermore that this difference also manifests itself with regard to adverbial clauses. It is the distinction between disjunct and adjunct adverbial clauses (as presented by Quirk *et al.* (1985)) which reflects the difference between 'tactically' related and embedded adverbial clauses. At present I can think of three consequences the discussion presented in this paper could have: First, terminological confusion about the terms *parataxis*, *hypotaxis*, *coordination*, *subordination*, *embedding* in the discussion of clausal relations involving adverbial clauses could perhaps be avoided, if the differentiation between 'tactic' relations on the one hand and clause embedding as developed here on the other hand proves tenable. Second, provided that I have not simply missed the relevant sources, generative syntacticians may see the demand for further discussion of or simply more information about their view on the status and function of adverbial clauses.<sup>11</sup> Third, the position that one type of adverbial clauses are constituents of the VP of their superordinate clauses (and thus embedded) and that the other type of adverbial clauses are no constituents of other clauses at all (and thus 'tactic'), may have speech act theoretical implications: It could be argued that a clause with an embedded adverbial clause represents *one* speech act, whereas a

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<sup>11</sup> I have found no account of the aspects discussed in the present paper in Freidin 1992, Haegeman 1991/1994, Ouhalla 1994, Radford 1988, Williams 1994.

succession of two 'tactically' related clauses represents two speech acts.

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