Abstract—Here I outline an alternative approach to two types of minimal contrast in sentence acceptability that have previously been described (and explained) in terms of abstract formal grammatical mechanisms, namely, that-trace effects in English, and wh-island effects in Vietnamese. This alternative treatment—parsing out—is argued to be preferable to standard analyses, inasmuch as it makes use of independently needed parsing principles to yield equivalent or even superior empirical coverage.

Keywords—Source Ambiguity, cross-linguistic variation, *that-trace effects; Wh-island effects, Parsing Out

I. INTRODUCTION

Chomsky noted in 1977: ‘We may make an intuitive judgment that some linguistic expression is odd or deviant. But we cannot in general know, pre-theoretically, whether this deviance is a matter of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, belief, memory limitations, style, etc. [1].’ This frequently cited observation, now over forty years old, gets to the heart of a debilitating problem in generative research: we know that speakers of a language are able to judge some utterances as being more acceptable than others, but we don’t know what determines these judgments. Moreover, in spite of what Chomsky implies, this is not only pre-theoretical, it is also a post-theoretical problem: it persists long after we have developed theoretical tools to analyse it [2–5]. Indeed, if anything, the problem of explaining unacceptability in a particular case becomes more acute after a grammatical analysis has been proposed, when the catch of a fashionable treatment may lead us to disregard other diagnoses—especially, the idea that the unacceptability is not due to grammatical factors at all.

Whilst there are many possible non-syntactic explanations for the relative unacceptability of an utterance in a given context—lexical, pragmatic, dialectal, (?)regional, and so forth—the alternative explored in this talk relates to parsing in spoken as well as written language comprehension: that is, to whether the perceived deviance of a particular utterance is due to formal featural properties of the analyzed sentence (grammar) or to the parse assigned to the utterance string. This choice between syntax and processing has recently been dubbed the ‘Source Ambiguity problem’: in a series of papers, Ivan Sag and his co-authors have suggested that many paradigm instances of putatively syntactic anomalies are better explained in terms of an interaction between independently-motivated processing factors—‘super-additive factors’—than as resulting from purely formal constraints (such as the ECP, or the Subjacency condition, in earlier versions of generative theory). These anomalies include putative violations of the Superiority Condition, ‘Complex NP’- and ‘Wh-island’-Constraints in (1b)-(3b), respectively [6–8].

(1) a. Who t said what?
   b. ?What did who t finish t?
   (2) a. Which old piece of junk did you say that the guy had bought t?
   b. ??Which old piece of junk do you know the guy that bought t?
   c. ??Which old piece of junk do you know that the guy bought t?
   (3) a. What did Craig say [ that doctors knew t ]?
   b. ?What did Craig wonder [ if doctors knew t ]?
   c. ??What did Craig wonder [ how doctors knew t ]?

Notice in passing that (2b)—the alleged CNPC violation—appears no more deviant than the ‘factive island’ in (2c); thus, it is difficult to tell in this particular instance whether the unacceptability of (2b) compared to (2a) is due to the difference in verb type (think vs. know) or due to a difference in complement type (clausal vs. nominal complement). Likewise, in the case of indirect questions, both (3b) and (3c) are analyzed as grammatical (Subjacency) violations, yet—as is well-known—(2b) is markedly more acceptable than (2c) [9, 10], cf. [11].

Sag and his colleagues have stressed that the goal of the exercise is not to eliminate formal factors entirely from explanations of unacceptability, but rather to assign relative responsibility for deviance in a given case as honestly and economically as possible: if unacceptability in problematic utterances, such as the (b) examples above, can be shown to be due to an interaction among factors that explain increased processing difficulty in utterances that are hard to parse in spite of being grammatical, as this one is (!), then Occam’s razor should lead us to prefer a processing diagnosis over a grammatical one.

In this paper, I first show how ‘parsing out’ can account for a frequently studied phenomenon in English, the so-called that-trace effect [12], [13]. I then consider how this analysis may be extended to explain apparent violations of island effects in Vietnamese, without recourse to abstract formal mechanisms [14], [15, 16].

II. PARSE OUT IN ENGLISH: *THAT-TRACE EFFECTS

Consider the paradigm in (4), variants of which are used to illustrate a minimal contrast in English between ‘long-distance’ object vs. subject wh-extraction: complementizer deletion seems to be optional in the former case (a) vs. (b), but obligatory in the latter, where the complementizer is linearly adjacent to the trace of the extracted subject (hence, the term *that-trace) [17].

(4) a. Who did you say Kate really likes t?
   b. Who did you say that Kate really likes t?
   c. Who did you say t really likes Kate?
   d. *Who did you say t that really likes Kate?

Viewed in isolation, this paradigm indicates a dysfunctional—or at least non-functional—explanation for the unacceptability of (4d); certainly, the complementiser...
seems to be no more disruptive to the process of obtaining a long-distance interpretation for the *wh*-phrase here than in the case of object extraction. What’s more, by signalling the start of the subordinate clause, *that* apparently serves a useful parsing function, making the unacceptability of (*4d*) even more surprising.

This is not the whole picture, however. In order to properly appreciate the nature of the *that*-trace effect requires that at least four additional factors be considered: when taken together, these considerations suggest that *that*-trace effects are largely, perhaps entirely, epiphenomenal. First is the fact that *that*-trace sequences are fully acceptable whenever *that* introduces a relative clause (that is to say, when it functions as a relativiser). Indeed, as the paradigm in (5) below demonstrates, relativiser *that* must not be deleted in subject relatives: (5c) is unacceptable in most English varieties [18], [19], [20].

(5) a. Who is the person Kate really likes?
   b. Who is the person that Kate really likes?
   c. *Who is the person *t* really likes Kate?
   d. Who is the person that *t* really likes Kate?

To account for the contradictory judgments in (4) and (5), those who wish to provide a grammatical account of *that*-trace are forced to stipulate that these two *thats* are (accidentally) homophonic lexical items, with distinct formal features; see [21], for example. This seems unintuitive, to say the least.

Second, it has been observed that *that*-trace effects, which are absent from some non-standard English varieties [22-24], are also reduced or eliminated in *all* varieties by the presence of an intervening adverbial phrase; this is demonstrated in (6) [25, 26]. This amelioration is unexpected on most formal analyses (in which string-adjacency is assumed to play no explanatory role).

(6) a. Lee forgot which dishes Leslie had said that *(under normal circumstances) should be put on the table.*
   b. Which kinds of medicines did you say that *(without proper testing) had been released onto the market?*

Conversely, as is illustrated by the examples in (7), ‘*that*-trace’ effects are observable even where the ‘trace’ position is a non-subject. In their discussion of ECP effects [27] acknowledge that for many speakers the presence of the complementiser inhibits construal of *wh*-adjuncts (*when*, *where*, *why*, etc.) with positions inside the embedded clause: as a result, whereas (7a) is ambiguous with respect to the interpretation of *why*, (7b) only permits a main clause interpretation. The blocking effects of *that* increase as more embedded clauses are added ((7b) > > (7c) > (7d) > *more acceptable than*). The gradient nature of this effect again suggests a processing source for the unacceptability [3].

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1. This is true of object relatives in some contexts; see below.
2. In the case of relative clauses, the trace positions are generally not thought to be linked to the head-noun directly, but to an abstract operator (OP) in the root specifier position of the relative clause. Nevertheless, the grammatical configurations are identical in the two cases, so that without further stipulation, the judgment pattern for (4) and (5) should also be the same.

Finally—most relevantly to the present discussion—it is simply not self-evident that example (4e), the supposed baseline utterance, involves any long-distance extraction, since there exists a parallel analysis in which the string *did you say* is treated as a parenthetical expression. To see this more clearly, (4e) should be compared with the sentences in (8), where commas and/or extraposition of the parenthetical string to the utterance edge, reveal that *likes*, rather than *say*, is the main clause predicate; hence, no long-distance extraction is involved in these cases.

(8) a. Who, did you say, *that* really likes Kate?
   b. Who *t* really likes Kate, *did* you say?*

In (4d), by contrast, the complementizer *that* provides an unambiguous signal that complementation is involved, meaning that *did you say* cannot be parsed out as a parenthetical, nor can it be extraposed as a tag, either with *that* (9b), or without it (9b):.

(9) a. *Who, did you say, that *t* really likes Kate?
   b. *Who *t* really likes Kate, did you say that?
   b.’ *Who that *t* really likes Kate, did you say?*

A similar contrast obtains in the sentences in (10) vs. (11): in (10), it is the absence of inversion, rather than the presence of a complementizer, which prevents the second clause in the string from being interpreted as a main clause; conversely, in (11) the presence of inversion in the second clause allows this construal, once the medial AUX-NP-V string is parsed out as a parenthetical:

(10) a. *Where would you happen to know (that) I can find the toy department?
   b. *What do you know (that) her maiden name was?
   c. ’*Who can you tell me brought what?*
   c.’ *What can you tell me (that) who brought?*
explaining factive islands.

11. a. "Where, would you happen to know, can I find the toy department?"
   a’. "Where can I find the toy department, would you happen to know?"
   b. "What, do you know, was her maiden name??"
   b’. "What was her maiden name, do you know?"

In short, the English examples in (9)-(11) demonstrate that obtaining a matrix scope reading for an apparently embedded wh-expression does not necessarily imply the existence of any long-distance dependency: on occasion, the containing clause may simply be parsed out of the analysis. The examples also show that whether or not the first clause can be parsed out in this way depends on the conventional pragmatic uses of the particular matrix construction involved, as well as on the presence of markers of root status—in this case, SUBJ-AUX inversion—in the second clause.

The meaning of the expression ‘parsing out’, as used here, is quite intuitive. Nevertheless, for the sake of explicitness, it can be informally defined as the disregarding of elements in a utterance string having low informational content in a given context—such as tags, parentheticals, hesitations, conversational particles—whose omission allows for an efficient and grammatical syntactic analysis of that string.3 In the case of ‘long-distance’ subject questions, parsing out will favour treating the first verb complex in the string as a parenthetical (e.g., did you say, do you think), unless a complementizer is present (as in (4d): hence, the *that*-trace effect.

It turns out that this Parsing Out approach extends beyond direct questions to the other that-trace contexts identified in (13): in virtually every case, the resulting sentence is acceptable where parsing out applies to a string without the complementizer element, and remains unacceptable where that appears:

12. a. This is the person who I thought (*that) met Sue. [relativisation]
   i. This is the person who I thought met Sue. (I thought).
   ii. *This is the person who I thought that met Sue.
   b. Mary, we think, (*that) met Sue. [topicisation]
   i. Mary, we think met Sue. (we think).
   ii. *Mary, we think that met Sue.
   c. It is Mary that we think (*that) met Sue. [cleft]
   i. It is Mary that we think met Sue. (we think).
   ii. *It is Mary that we think that met Sue.
   d. More people like Mahler than we think (*that) like Bruckner. [comparative]
   i. More people like Mahler than we think like Bruckner. (we think)
   ii. *More people like Mahler than we think that like Bruckner.
   e. *Bill will be easy for us to say (*that) met Sue. [‘tough’-movement]
   i. *Bill will be easy for us to say met Sue.
   ii. *Bill will be easy for us to say that met Sue.

3 As used here, the term ‘parsing out’ here bears close resemblance to [28]’s notion of ‘annotative usage’, in explaining factive islands.

The exception is the ‘tough’-movement construction in (12e). Notice, however, that even without a complementizer (12e1), the sentence is less than perfect. Just as important, there is no ‘first clause’ string that can readily be parsed out to derive a simpler main clause, without losing significant propositional content.

III. PARSIING OUT IN VIETNAMESE: ILLUSORY ISLANDS

By applying the same combined strategy of attending to non-syntactic factors and/or parsing out what would otherwise be analyzed as main clauses, it is possible to explain apparent ‘neutralization of island effects’ in Vietnamese. The relevant data, which are supposed to illustrate (covert) extraction from Complex Noun Phrases, Sentential Subjects and Adjunct Clauses, respectively, were first presented in [14], and are reproduced in (13)-(15) below.

13. a. *Tân sẽ chụp hình [sp con hộ [cp dâa đải ai]]? 
   Tan ASP catch photo CL tiger ASP scare who
   ‘Tan will take a photo of the tiger that scared who’?/ **Who will John take a picture of the tiger that scared?’
   b. Tân vua chụp hình [sp con hộ [cp dâa đải ai ]] thê?
   Tan ASP catch photo CL tiger ASP scare who PRT
   ‘Tan took a photo of the tiger that scared who?’
   (14) a. *[cp Ai sẽ bò dì] làm mọi người bối rối?
   who ASP leave make everyone embarrass
   ‘That who will leave will make everyone embarrassed?’
   b. *[cp Ai vừa bò dì] làm mọi người bối rối thê?
   who ASP leave make everyone embarrass PRT
   ‘That who left made everyone embarrassed?’
   (15) a. *Tân sẽ thua cuộc [cp vì [cp ai làm hư xe của anh ta ]]?
   Tan ASP lose event because ai make damage car
   POSS PRN
   ‘Tan will lose the race because who will damage his car?’
   b. Tân thua cuộc [cp vì ai làm hư xe của anh ta ] thê?
   Tan lose event because who make damage car
   POSS PRN PRT
   ‘Tan lost the race because who damaged his car?’

According to [14]—henceforth BT—the near minimal contrasts between the (a) and (b) sentences in (13)-(15) above show that a direct wh-interpretation for the wh-indefinite element ai (‘who’) is unavailable if it is contained within a ‘syntactic island’—the (a) examples—unless the utterance also contains the final discourse marker thê, as in the (b) examples. In other words, the addition of final thê suspends island effects.

That there is a contrast between the (a) and (b) examples is not in dispute here: native speakers that I have consulted are agreed that the addition of thê makes a direct question interpretation more available, to the extent such an interpretation is available at all. The question is why.

Before sketching a ‘dumb alternative’ to the formal account proposed by BT, it is necessary to control properly for other confounds in the data. The most obvious of these is
the fact that the unacceptability (a) examples above contain the pre-verbal future morpheme sẽ, whereas the acceptable (b) examples contain either the adverbal aspectual morpheme vừa—in (13a) and (14a), or else no preverbal element at all (15a). This difference would be innocuous if these elements all had the same syntactic status: BT assign the same gloss (ASP) in each case. They do not, however, for although it is conceivable that vừa is an aspectual morpheme, on a par with (perfect) đã and (progressive) đang, there is nothing aspectual about future sẽ, either in its distribution or in its interpretation [...]. Furthermore, for a variety of reasons, sẽ is excluded from a range of other contexts, including (future) Yes-No questions (16a), declarative ‘future-perfect’ constructions (16c), and emphatic contexts containing the assertion marker có (16c). None of these restrictions is observed with true aspectuals or with temporal adverbs [29-31].

(16) a. Nắm sau vợ anh (*sẽ) (có) làm việc ở Paris không? year next wife PRN FUT Q work be.loc paris NEG ‘Will your wife work in Paris next year?’
   b. Đèn cuối năm, tôi (*sẽ) dã ra trường. arrive end year DEM PRN FUT ANT go.out.school ‘I shall have graduated by the end of the year.
   c. Nắm sau vợ anh sẽ (*có) làm việc ở Paris. year next wife PRN FUT ASR work be.loc paris ‘Your wife will work in Paris next year!’

The reasons for the unacceptability of sẽ in these latter examples are not of immediate concern. What is relevant is the fact that sẽ is independently problematic. So, it turns out that once sẽ is deleted from the canonical examples in (13)-(15) above, the contrast in acceptability between the (a) and (b) examples is greatly reduced, such that addition of the in (b) only alters the availability of a direct question interpretation slightly: from strongly to weakly dispreferred, that is (?? vs. ?), as opposed to (?? vs. ?).

A second difficulty is that, once again, the supposed base-line example in (17) below is not perfectly acceptable with the intended (long-distance) reading, cf. Fig 1 above: specifically, the direct question reading (ii) is less accessible than it should be if other factors were not at play, even though no possible island is involved in this sentence:

(17) Tấn biết ai đi New York.
    Tan know who go New York
    (i) ‘Tan knows for which person x, x went to NY.’
    (ii) ‘For which person x, Tan knows x went to NY?’

Quite aside from the basic issue of acceptability—for many native-speakers consulted, the sentence has only one acceptable interpretation under normal intonation and stress, namely, (i), as a declarative (indirect question)—it is likely that for those that allow it the direct wh-interpretation is not the result of covert movement: it could as readily arise from parsing out the main clause in the right conversational context; compare (10) vs. (11) above. On the other hand, the availability of a direct reading may well be diagnostic of an alternative parse: namely, a relative clause analysis. Notice that in (17) there is an ambiguity within the ‘direct question reading,’ between a ‘short-distance’ direct object interpretation ‘who is the person x, Tan knows x (& x went to NY)?’ and a long-distance subject interpretation ‘Who is the person x, such that Tan knows that x went to New York.’ In both languages, this ambiguity arises due to the optionality of relativisers/complementisers (in English that, in Vietnamese rằng, mò, respectively).2 Compare the English examples in (18):

(18) a. Who do you know [CP t (CP *(that/who) t went to New York last year)]? CP = Relative Clause
   b. Who did you say [CP *(that??who) t went to NY last year]? CP = Embedded Clause
   c. Who did you know [NP t (CP that Amy met t in NY last year)]? CP = Relative Clause
   d. Who did you know [CP that Amy met t in NY last year]? CP = Embedded Clause

The acceptability of (18a) with that, as well as the substitutability of that with who in the subordinate clause, clearly indicates that the bracketed constituent is parsed as a relative clause here; conversely, the ‘*that-trace effect’ in (18b)—and the awkwardness of replacing the complementiser with a relative pronoun—suggests, equally forcefully, that this is a case of ‘long-distance’ movement. Observe that in examples (18c) and (18d), which involve object construal within the subordinate clause, the same string is compatible with either a relative clause or complement clause analysis. Crucially, in (18c) the relativiser that is not omissible, in spite of this being an object relative construction; cf. (4b) above.

By applying similar tests in Vietnamese—i.e., inserting optional complementisers and relativisers, or using verbs that unambiguously select for clausal complements—it is possible to test whether wh-expressions can in fact be extracted from embedded domains, and also to exclude a relative clause interpretation. So, the examples in (19) below show that complement clauses in Vietnamese can be unambiguously marked by an overt complementiser: rằng in the case of declarative complements, лиè for indirect questions. In such contexts, the prediction based on BT is that long-distance wh-extraction should be possible in principle, and that this direct question reading should be facilitated by the addition of final the. (The notation here is intended to mark that the is obligatory if the string is used to express a question.)

(19) a. Ông ta nói rằng công việc nào thích hợp với ông ta *(thék).
    PRN say COMP work WH suitable with PRN PRT
    The man said that for any job x, x was suitable for him. For which job x, the man said that x was suitable for him?
   b. Người đã ông từ hỏi liệu có ai ở lại với ông ấy không (thék).
    man self ask COMP exist COMP A BE stay with
    PRN DEM NEG PRT
    The man wonders whether there is any person x, x would stay with him/For which person x, the man wonders whether x would stay with him.

The relevant judgments do not square with BT’s predictions, however: while the addition of the to embedded declaratives containing wh-indefinites does facilitate a direct question reading to some extent—in fact (19a) cannot be interpreted as a question without the—the application to

4 This difficulty is compounded by the semantic ambiguity of the verbs Eng. know, Viet. biết: compare Spanish conocer (‘know’ = be familiar with a person, place) vs. saber (‘know’ = understand a proposition).
embedded questions (19b) is only optional, and has no scope-altering effect: (19b) remains preferentially interpreted as an indirect question (ai = ‘anyone’).

The contrast sentences in (20), containing the disambiguating complementizer rạng and the relative marker mà, respectively—but which are otherwise identical to (18)—provide clinching evidence against BT’s proposal:

(20) a. Tận biết rạng ai đi New York (*thẹ). Tan know that ai go New York
   ‘Tan knows that someone went to New York.’
   (No long distance wh-reading available)

   i. ‘Tan knows (someone) who went to New York.’
   ii. ‘Who does Tan know (someone) who went to New York?’
   (No long-distance wh-reading available)

There are three points to observe. First, neither sentence is wholly acceptable: once the string [ai đi New York] is clearly marked as a subordinate clause in (20a)—alternatively, once ai is shown to be outside the relative clause, as in (20b)—speakers consulted judge both utterances as less than perfect, even on a declarative reading. This suggests that (18) is not equivalent to (20) with complementiser deletion; rather, it involves parsing out. The second point is that no direct question interpretation is available in either case, no matter that these are non-island contexts. Finally, as indicated by the dialectics within the parentheses, the addition of thẹ only makes things worse: in (20a), adding thẹ excludes any grammatically acceptable analysis of the string; in (20b), the relative clause reading is further degraded (?>?!).

The preceding discussion of the baseline data, taken in conjunction with the fact that thẹ is not restricted to wh-environments, casts real doubt on BT’s analysis of the function of thẹ. Indeed, it suggests the more radical possibility that wh-constituents are barred from embedded contexts in Vietnamese entirely. In other words, there are no long-distance questions. But, if there are no long-distance dependencies, then there can be no islands; and if there are no islands, there can be no island effects, for thẹ to suspend.

With this in mind, let us revisit BT’s paradigm, using the revised examples in (21a-c), with judgments for the direct question reading (after deleting the future morpheme sẽ):

(21) a. Tận vừa chụp hình con hổ đã đó ai thẹ? Tan ADV catch picture CLF tiger ASP scare who PRT
   String: ‘Tan took a photo of the tiger that scared who.’
   Interpretation = Who was the person x, the tiger scared x (Tan took a picture of the tiger)?
   b. Ai (vụa) bọ đó mọi người bồi rỗi thẹ? who ASP leave make everyone bosome PRT
   who ASP leave make everyone bosome PRT
   String: ‘Who left everyone embarrassed?’
   Interpretation = Which person x, x left & x made everyone embarrassed?

c. Tận thuuc quyết vì ai làm hư xe của anh ta thẹ? Tan lose event b/c who damage car POSS PRN PRT
   String: ‘Tan lost the race because who damaged his car?’

Interpretation = Who was the person x, x damaged Tán’s car (caused Tán to lose the race)?

Assuming now that no syntactic islands are involved in any of these examples, the question is how to derive a direct question interpretation from a different analysis of the utterance string in these three cases. In each case, we will assume that the discourse function of final thẹ—like SUBJ- AUX inversion in English, see above—is to signal a reanalysis of the preceding string.

With respect to the alleged Complex NP Island in (21a), an obvious alternative parse is that this utterance involves two consecutive main clauses linked by a common topic Tán with shared pro subjects, as in (22) (subscripts indicate coreference):

(22) [TOP Tán] [TP pro vừa chụp hình con hổ ] [TP pro dâ đọa ai ] thẹ?
   ‘Tan (he) took a picture of someone; who(m) did he frighten?’

Under this analysis—which comports with most speakers’ intuitions, namely, that Tán rather than the tiger is the one frightening someone—the wh-phrase ai occupies a matrix object position; no embedding is involved. Without thẹ, the most natural parse remains a relative clause analysis, treating chụp hình (‘take picture’) as the matrix predicate. However, as the revised string in (23) this is not a possible source of long-distance extraction, with or without thẹ: if the clause is unambiguously marked as a relative, with mà and a post-VP adverbal, no extraction is possible:

(23) *Tàn vừa chụp hình con hổ mà đọa ai kieu gù (thẹ)?

Tan ADV catch picture CLF tiger REL ASP scare who by growing PRT
   ‘Tan took a photo of the tiger that scared someone by growing.’ (No direct question interpretation)

As for the alleged sentential subject in (21b), here there are two plausible alternative analyses—diagrammed in (24) below—both of which allow for the wh-phrase ai to be treated as a matrix argument. The first possibility is that the initial clause contains a relative, rather than a sentential subject; the second is that the utterance is analyzed as two consecutive main clauses, the rightmost being treated a conversational run-on. In either case, we derive the intended interpretation without long-distance extraction.

(24) a. ?Ai [(mà) (vụa) bọ] lạm mọi người bồi rỗi thẹ?
   who REL ADV leave make everyone bosome PRT
   ‘Who, that just left, made everyone embarrassed?’

b. ?Ai [(vụa) bọ] pro lạm mọi người bồi rỗi thẹ?
   who ASP leave make everyone bosome PRT
   ‘Who just left, who/wh made everyone embarrassed?’

Finally, the data in (25) clearly speak against the possibility that extraction is possible from true adjunct

5 Under this analysis, it is also possible to interpret the string such that the tiger as the subject of the second clause, with topic switch.
Acceptability judgments are as imprecise as most medical symptoms considered in isolation. A sore throat tells the doctor very little: it could indicate a bacterial or viral infection, or it could be due to environmental toxins, or too much shouting the night before. Or it could be throat cancer. Without further investigation, proper diagnosis is impossible; it would be unwise to prescribe antibiotics, much less surgery, much less radioactive substances. One way of writing the sentence is via the tag clause 'if it is diagnosed correctly':

(27) a. Alexa thinks the girls will win, isn’t she?
    b. Alexa thinks the girls will win, won’t they?

IV. CONCLUSION

Acceptability judgments are as imprecise as most medical symptoms considered in isolation. A sore throat tells the doctor very little: it could indicate a bacterial or viral infection, or it could be due to environmental toxins, or too much shouting the night before. Or it could be throat cancer. Without further investigation, proper diagnosis is impossible; it would be unwise to prescribe antibiotics, much less chemotherapy, even if these treatments have proven effective in some other patients with similar symptoms. And where further tests allow us to exclude a particular underlying condition, it is irresponsible to continue treatment.

Returning to linguistics, it has been argued that, just as is the case for that-trace effects in English, BT’s analysis of putative island contexts in Vietnamese is based upon questionable assumptions about the source of deviance in the unacceptable cases, and at the same time misinterprets the ameliorating function of final the in the acceptable ones. Once non-syntactic factors are controlled for, and alternative parses are taken into account, the likelihood that syntax plays any significant role in explaining the initial contrast is markedly reduced.


