

One Filler, Two Gaps

Across-the-board *wh*

One of the “island constraints” that apply to *wh* constructions is the “Coordinate Structure Constraint,” which says that it is not possible for the “filler” to correspond to a “gap” in a coordinate structure:

- (1) a. I did the homework and failed the exam.
 b. *What did you do ___ and fail the exam?
 c. *What did you do the homework and fail ___?

However, it is grammatical for the filler to correspond to gaps in both conjuncts of the coordinate structure:

- (2) a. I bought a hamster and brought it home.
 b. What did you buy ___ and bring ___ home?

This is called an “across-the-board” *wh* construction.

Parasitic gaps

Parasitic gap constructions are ones in which one “filler” corresponds to more than one “gap”. Typically, one of these gaps occurs in a position where a gap could not ordinarily occur (because of “island constraints”). This gap is said to be “parasitic” on the other gap. In the following, the “normal” gap is represented by *g* and the “parasitic” one by *pg*.

- (2) a. Which articles did John file *g* without reading *pg*?
 b. Which articles did John file ___ without reading them?
 c. *Which articles did John file the books without reading ___?
- (3) These papers were hard for us to file *t* without reading *pg*.
- (4) This is the kind of food you must cook *g* before you eat *pg*.
- (5) a. Which boy did Mary's talking to *pg* bother *g* most?
 b. Which boy did Mary's talking to the star of the soccer team bother ___ most?
 c. *Which boy did Mary's talking to ___ bother her father the most?

In some cases, neither one looks “parasitic”:

- (6) Which girl did you send a picture of ___ to ___?