



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

C-command



Definition

- There are many definitions for the term. Let's begin with a commonly used one.
- A **c-commands** B if
 - the **first branching node** that dominates A also dominates B; and
 - A **does not dominate** B, and B **does not dominate** A.



Unpacking the definition

- As you can see, c-command is a very abstract relationship between **nodes** on a **tree**.
- It is commonly used in **syntax** and sometimes in other areas as well.

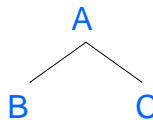
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Dominance

- Imagine entities A, B and C.

The lines connecting the nodes B, C to A indicate a part-whole relationship (or any asymmetrical relationship)



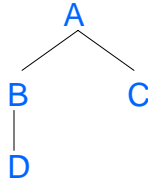
A **dominates** B and C.
B does not dominate C.
C does not dominate B. Neither B nor C dominates A.

- Suppose A stands in some **asymmetrical** relationship with B and C. For instance, A is composed of B and C.

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Branching



- A is a node that branches into B and C. A is a **branching** node.
- B immediately dominates nothing else but D. B does not branch. B is not a branching node.

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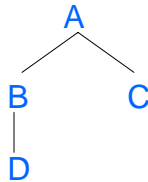
Recall ...

- A **c-commands** B if
 - the **first branching node** that dominates A also dominates B; and
 - A **does not dominate** B, and B **does not dominate** A.

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Illustration

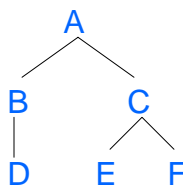


- B c-commands C? **YES!!**
- C c-commands B? **YES!!**
- D c-commands C? **YES!!**
- C c-commands D? **YES!!**

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Illustration



- B c-commands C, E and F.
- C c-commands B and D.
- D c-commands C, E and F.
- E c-commands F only.
- F c-commands E only.

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C-command

- Any node A c-commands node B, no matter how many layers of structure there may be, as long as
 - The **first branching node** that dominates A also dominates B; and
 - A **does not dominate** B, and B **does not dominate** A.

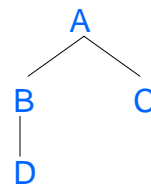
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Other definitions

- X **c-commands** Y if
 - the node that **immediately dominates** X also dominates Y; and
 - X **does not dominate** Y, and Y **does not dominate** X.

By this definition, D does not c-command C, but C c-commands D.



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Other definitions

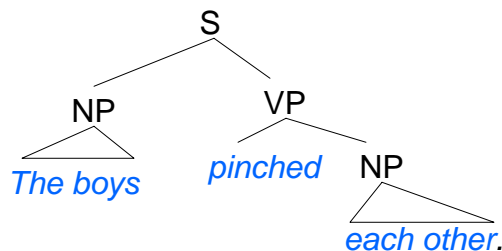
- There are a number of other definitions of c-command.
- There are also other notions that relate to c-command (such as **m-command** or **f-command**).
- The main idea is to work out the definition carefully in the same way presented here.

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Using c-command

- In syntax for example, **reflexives** (herself, himself, themselves, etc) and **reciprocals** (each other) are always c-commanded by their antecedent.



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Further reading

Aronoff, Mark and Janie Rees-Miller (eds.) (2001) *The Handbook of Linguistics* pp. 276-277. Blackwell Publishers.

Baltin, Mark and Chris Collins (eds.) (2001) *The Handbook of Contemporary Syntactic Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.

Haegeman, Liliane (1995) *Introduction to Government and Binding Theory*, 2nd edition, Chapter 2.4, pp.126-137. Blackwell Publishers.

Horrocks, Geoffrey (1987) *Generative Grammar*, pp.110-111. London: Longman.

Ouhalla, Jamal (1999) *Introducing Transformational Grammar: From Principles and Parameters to Minimalism*, 2nd edition. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.

Radford, Andrew (1988) *Transformational Grammar*, Chapter 3.3, pp.114-155. Cambridge University Press.

Radford, Andrew (1997) *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: A Minimalist Approach*, Chapter 3.3, pp.110-115. Cambridge University Press.

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The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University.