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VP ellipsis and the position of adverbs

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It is well known that an elided VP can be contained in an adverbial phrase that modifies the antecedent VP:

(1) I visited Mary before (/when/after/because) you did

The goal of this snippet is to argue that some constructions of this sort have an ACD analysis, which depends on QR of the adverbial phrase (see, also, von Fintel and Iatridou 2002):

(2) 'Adverbial ACD'
  [before OP$_i$ you did <visit Mary(at) t_i>]$_j$

  [I [$_{VP}$ visit Mary (at) t_j]]

$\exists t_j$ (t_j < the time t_i such that you visit Mary at t_i) $\wedge$ (I visit Mary at t_j)

Consider the two versions of (3) when uttered by a hotel manager who is trying to coordinate a dinner schedule.

(3) a. Room 1 wants to have dinner before Room 2 does **<want to have dinner>**
  b. Room 1 wants to have dinner before Room 2 does <**have dinner**>

In both cases the adverbial phrase provides information about the time at which the occupants of room 1 ought to have dinner if their present time desires are going to be satisfied (in other words, it provides no information about the time of desiring). This means that the adverbial phrase has to be interpreted in construction with the embedded VP. However, under interpretation (3a) the antecedent VP contains the embedded clause that in turn dominates the ellipsis, hence antecedent contained deletion. To resolve this problem, one needs to resort to the general mechanism for ACD resolution, we assume QR. In other words, to derive the interpretation of (3a) one must postulate QR of the adverbial phrase yielding the structure in (4).

(4) [before OP$_i$ Room 2 <wants to have dinner (at) t_i>]$_j$

  [Room 1 [$_{VP}$ wants to have dinner (at) t_j]]

$\exists t_j$ (t_j < the time t_i such Room 2 wants to have dinner at t_i) $\wedge$
(Room 1 wants to have dinner at t_j)

This analysis predicts that the before-clause (interpreted as a quantifier over times) will outscope the verb want in (3a). This seems correct as the time description provided by the before-clause has to be interpreted de-re. That is, (3a) cannot be read as imputing a de-dicto desire to Room 1's occupants relating to when Room 2 wants to be served. Compare this to (3b), which easily can be read as imputing a de-dicto desire (in this case concerning the time Room 2 is to be served).

The ramifications are obvious. Certain adverbial phrases have to be interpreted as quantificational phrases rather than simple VP modifiers. We have to assume that they can move and that their movement has consequences for scope. One should then use caution when treating adverbs as unmovable anchors that tell us the base position of other constituents in the clause (cf. Emonds, Pollock and much subsequent work).

Reference
Fintel, Kai v. and Sabine Iatridou (2002) "Since (since)", ms. web-accessible at
http://web.mit.edu/fintel/www/since.pdf.