

Syntax: Context-Free Grammars

LING 571 — Deep Processing Techniques for NLP

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Roadmap

- **Constituency**
- Context-free grammars (CFGs)
- English Grammar Rules
- Grammars — Revisiting our Motivation
- Treebanks
- Speech and Text
- Parsing

Constituency

- Some examples of noun phrases (NPs):

Harry the Horse	a high-class spot such as Mindy's
the Broadway coppers	the reason he comes into the Hot Box
they	three parties from Brooklyn

- How do we know that these are constituents?
 - We can perform constituent tests

Constituent Tests

- Many types of tests for constituency (see Sag, Wasow, Bender (2003), pp. 29-33)
- One type (for English) is **clefting**
 - It is _____ that _____
 - Is the resulting sentence valid English?

It is the Supreme Court that made the ruling



It is the Supreme Court of the United States that made the ruling



It is they that made the ruling



It is the Supreme Court of that made the ruling



Constituent Tests

- Another popular one: **coordination**.
 - Only constituents *of the same type* can be coordinated.
 - ... _____ CONJ _____ ...

Shane and all of the students



three players and the coach's brother



The friends drank wine and laughed at the show together.



The friends drank wine and all of the students together.



ambiguity!

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Representation: Context-free Grammars

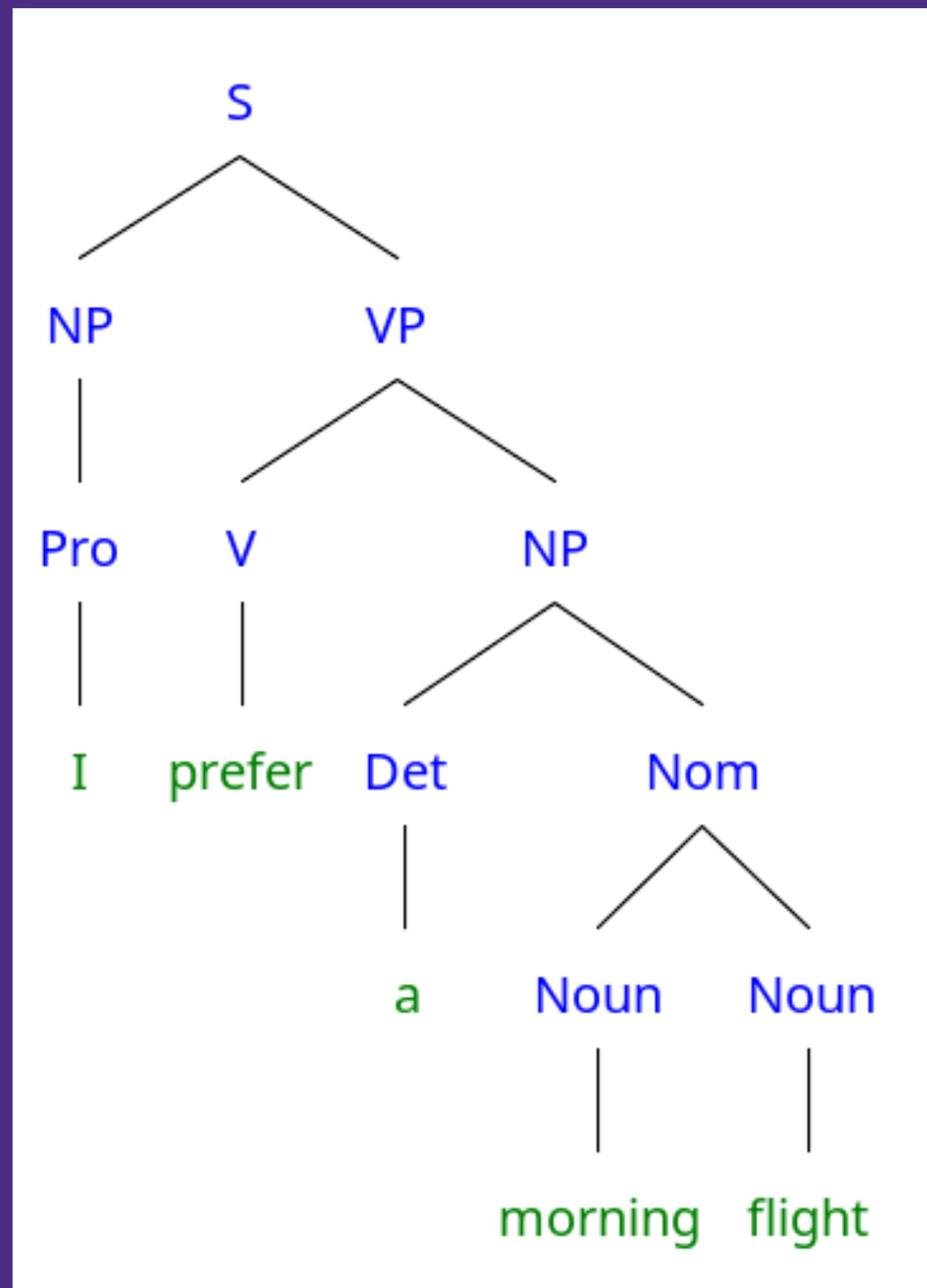
- CFGs: 4-tuple
 - A set of **terminal** symbols: Σ
 - (think: words)
 - A set of **nonterminal** symbols: N
 - (Think: phrase categories)
 - A set of **productions** P :
 - of the form $A \rightarrow \alpha$
 - Where A is a non-terminal and $\alpha \in (\Sigma \cup N)^*$
 - A **start** symbol $S \in N$

CFG Components

- Productions:
 - One non-terminal on LHS and any seq. of terminals and non-terminals on RHS
 - $S \rightarrow NP VP$
 - $VP \rightarrow V NP PP \mid V NP$
 - $Nominal \rightarrow Noun \mid Nominal Noun$
 - $Noun \rightarrow \text{'dog'} \mid \text{'cat'} \mid \text{'rat'}$
 - $Det \rightarrow \text{'the'}$

Grammar Rules			Examples
S	→	NP VP	I + want a morning flight
NP	→	Pronoun	I
		Proper-Noun	Los Angeles
		Det Nominal	a + flight
Nominal	→	Nominal Noun	morning + flight
		Noun	flights
VP	→	Verb	do
		Verb NP	want + a flight
		Verb NP PP	leave + Boston + in the morning
		Verb PP	leaving + on Thursday
PP	→	Preposition NP	from + Los Angeles

Parse Tree



Some English Grammar

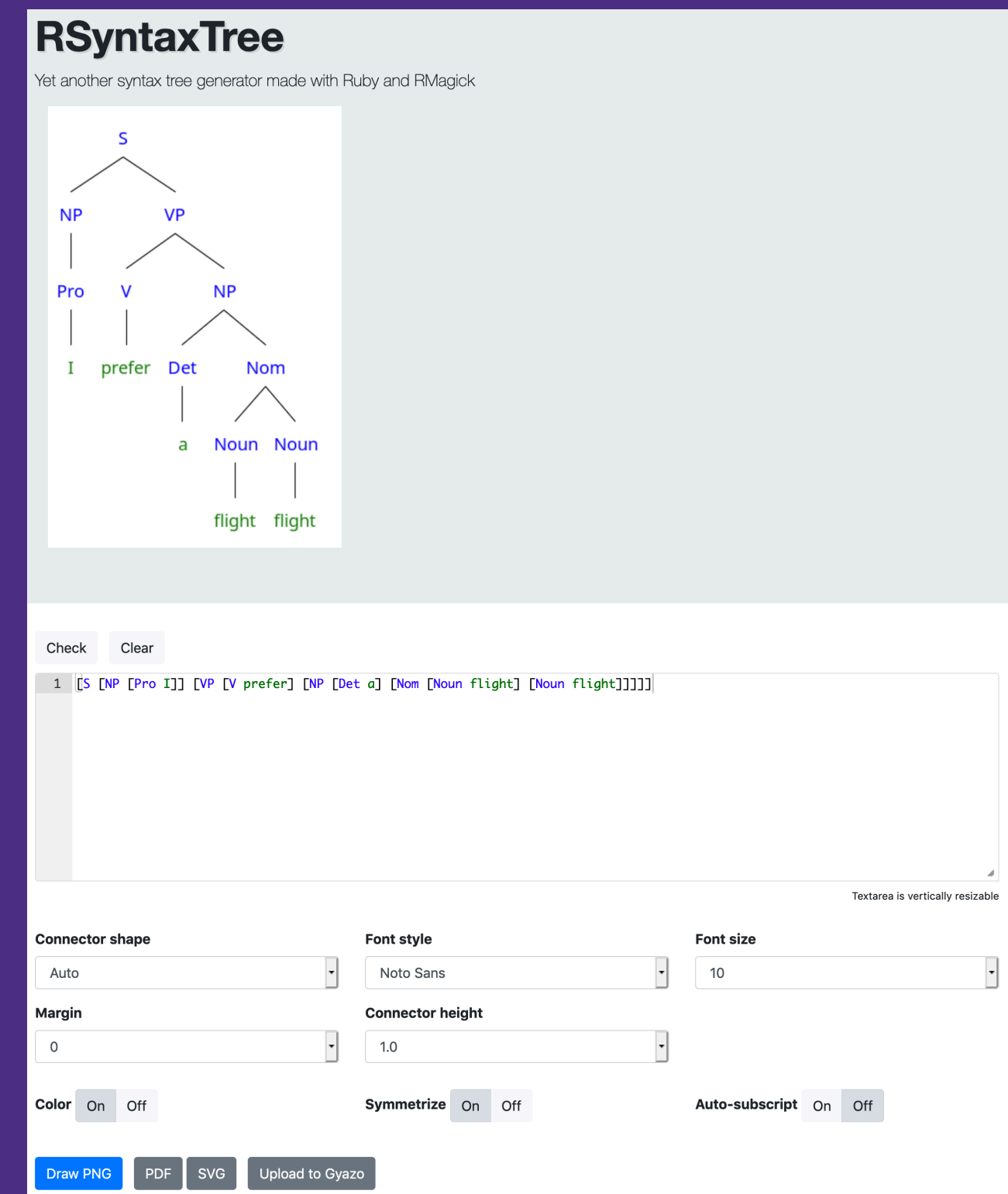
- Sentences: Full sentence or clause; a complete thought
- **Declarative:** $S \rightarrow NP VP$
 - (S (NP I) (VP want a flight from SeaTac to Amsterdam))
- **Imperative:** $S \rightarrow VP$
 - (VP Show me the cheapest flight from New York to Los Angeles.)
- **Yes-no Question:** $S \rightarrow Aux NP VP$
 - (Aux Can) (NP you) (NP give me the nonstop flights to Boston?)
- **Wh-subject question:** $S \rightarrow Wh-NP VP$
 - (Wh-NP Which flights) (VP arrive in Pittsburgh before 10pm?)
- **Wh-non-subject question:** $S \rightarrow Wh-NP Aux NP VP$
 - (Wh-NP What flights) (Aux do) (NP you) (VP have from Seattle to Orlando?)

Visualizing Parse Trees

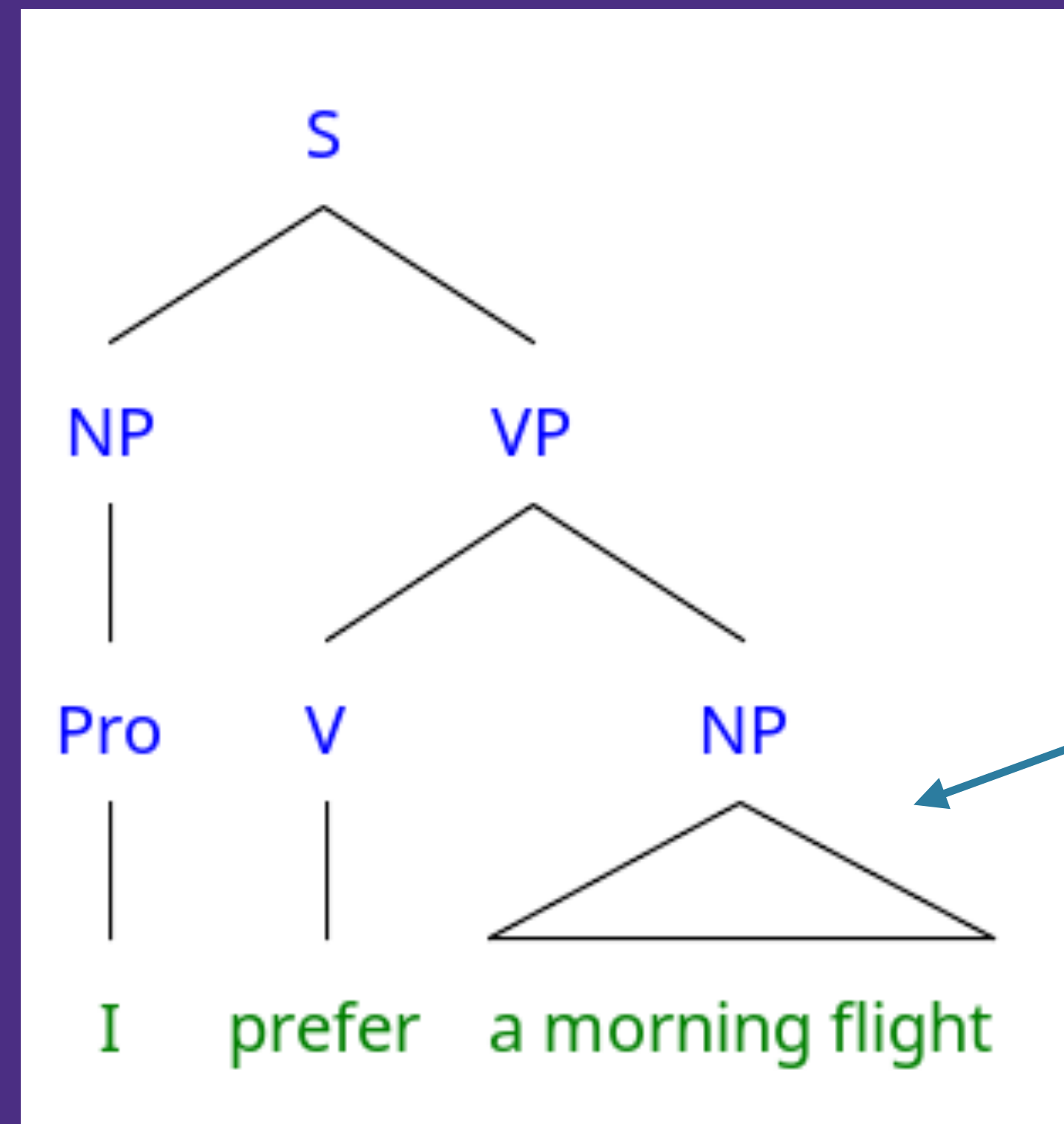
- ```
>>> tree = nltk.tree.Tree.fromstring("(S (NP (Pro I)) (VP (V prefer) (NP (Det a) (Nom (Noun flight) (Noun flight)))))")
```

```
>>> tree.draw()
```
- Web apps: <https://yohasebe.com/rsyntaxtree/>
- LaTeX: `qtree` (/ `tikz-qtree`) package



# Partial Parses



When internal structure  
doesn't matter  
for whatever reason

# The Noun Phrase

- Noun phrase constituents can take a range of different forms:

|                 |                                   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Harry the Horse | a magazine                        |
| water           | twenty-three alligators           |
| Ram's homework  | the last page of Ram's homework's |

- We'll examine a few ways these differ

# The Determiner

- Determiners provide referential information about an NP
- Often position the NP within the current discourse

a stop

those flights

the flights

any flights

this flight

some flights

- Can more explicitly introduce an entity as part of the specifier

United's flight

United's pilot's union

Denver's mayor's mother's canceled flight

# The Determiner

- Det → DT
  - *'the', 'this', 'a', 'those'*
- Det → NP 's
  - “United’s flight”: (Det (NP United) 's)
  - “the professor’s favorite brewery”: (Det (NP (Det the) (NP professor)) 's)



# The Nominal

- Nominals contain pre- and post-head noun modifiers
  - Occurs after the determiner (in English)
- Can exist as just a bare noun:
  - Nominal → Noun
    - PTB POS: NN, NNS, NNP, NNPS
    - *'flight', 'dinners', 'Chicago Midway', 'UW Libraries'*

# Pre-nominal modifiers (*“Postdeterminers”*)

- Occur before the head noun in a nominal
- Can be any combination of:
  - Cardinal numbers (e.g. *one, fifteen*)
  - Ordinal numbers (e.g. *first, thirty-second*)
  - Quantifiers (e.g. *some, a few*)
  - Adjective phrases (e.g. *longest, non-stop*)

# Postmodifiers

- Occur after the head noun
- In English, most common are: (*a flight...*)
  - Prepositional phrase (e.g. ... *from Cleveland*)
  - non-finite clause (e.g. ... *arriving after eleven a.m.*)
  - relative clause (e.g. ... *that serves breakfast*)

# Combining Everything

- NP → (Det) Nom
- Nom → (Card) (Ord) (Quant) (AP) Nom
- Nom → Nom PP

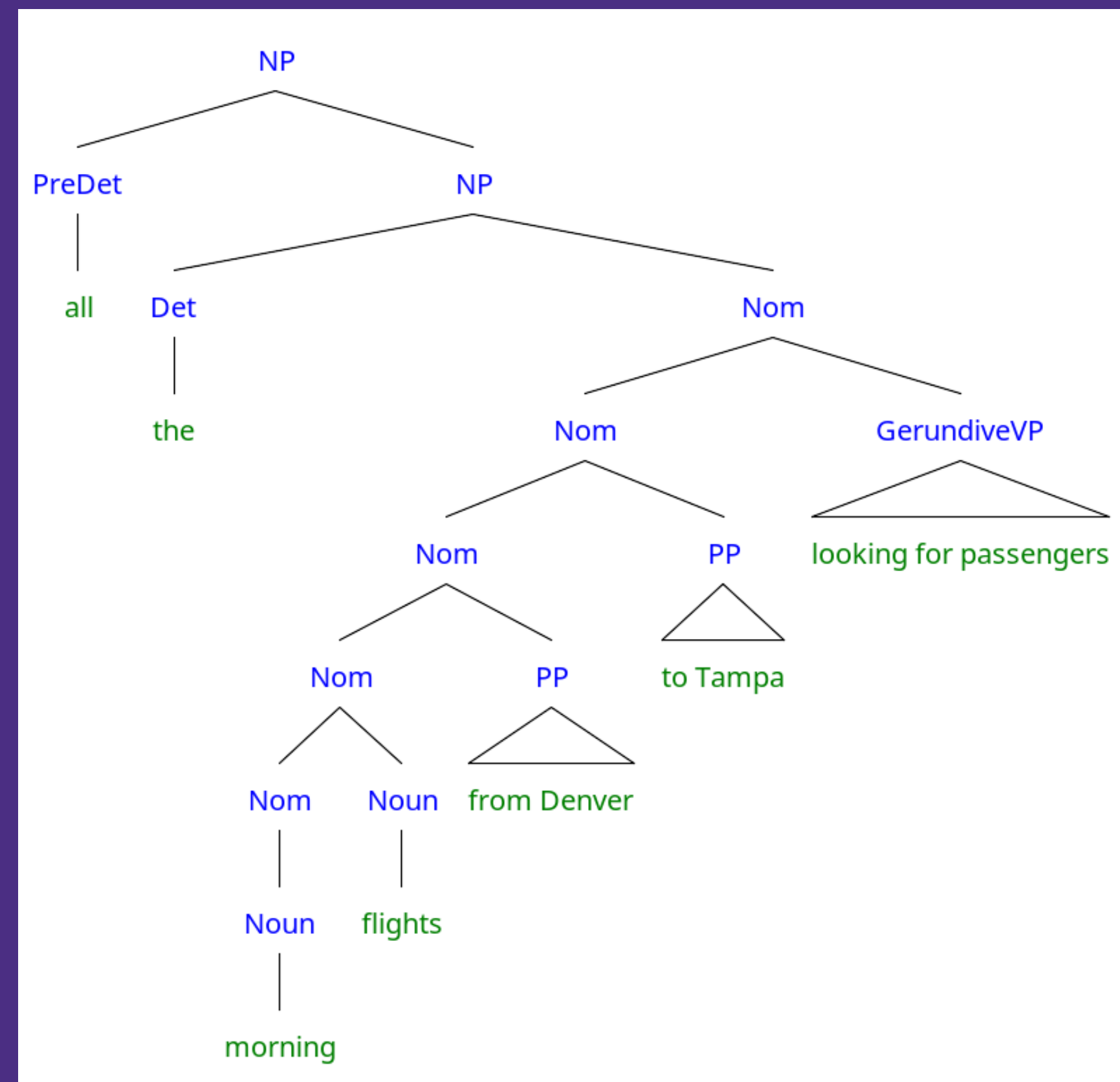
- The least expensive fare
- one flight
- the first route
- the last flight from Chicago

# Before the Noun Phrase

- “Predeterminers” can “scope” noun phrases
  - e.g. ‘*all*,’
  - “*all the morning flights from Denver to Tampa*”

# A Complex Example

- “all the morning flights from Denver to Tampa looking for passengers”



# Verb Phrases and Subcategorization

- With this grammar:



- This grammar licenses the following **correctly**:
  - *The teacher handed the student a book*
- And the following **incorrectly** (i.e. the grammar “overgenerates”):
  - *\*The teacher handed the student*
  - *\*The teacher handed a book*
  - *\*The teacher handed*

# Verb Phrases and Subcategorization

- With this grammar:



- It also licenses
  - *\*The teacher handed a book the student*
- This is problematic for semantic reasons, which we'll cover later.



# Verb Phrase and Subcategorization

- Verb phrases include a verb and *optionally other constituents*
- Subcategorization frame
  - what constituent arguments the verb requires

VP → Verb  $\emptyset$

disappear

VP → Verb NP

book a flight

VP → Verb PP PP

fly from Chicago to Seattle

VP → Verb S

think I want that flight

VP → Verb VP

want to arrange three flights

# CFGs and Subcategorization

- Issues?
  - “I prefer United has a flight.” (  $\rightarrow S$  )
  - “I prefer a window seat.” (  $\rightarrow NP$  )
- How can we solve this problem?
  - Create explicit subclasses of verb
    - Verb-with-NP  $\rightarrow \dots$
    - Verb-with-S-complement  $\rightarrow \dots$
  - Is this a good solution?
    - No, explosive increase in number of rules
    - Similar problem with agreement ( $NN \leftrightarrow ADJ \leftrightarrow PRON \leftrightarrow VB$ )

# CFGs and Subcategorization

- Better solution:
  - *Feature structures:*
    - Further nested information
    - a.k.a → *Deeper* analysis!
  - Will get to this toward end of the month

# Roadmap

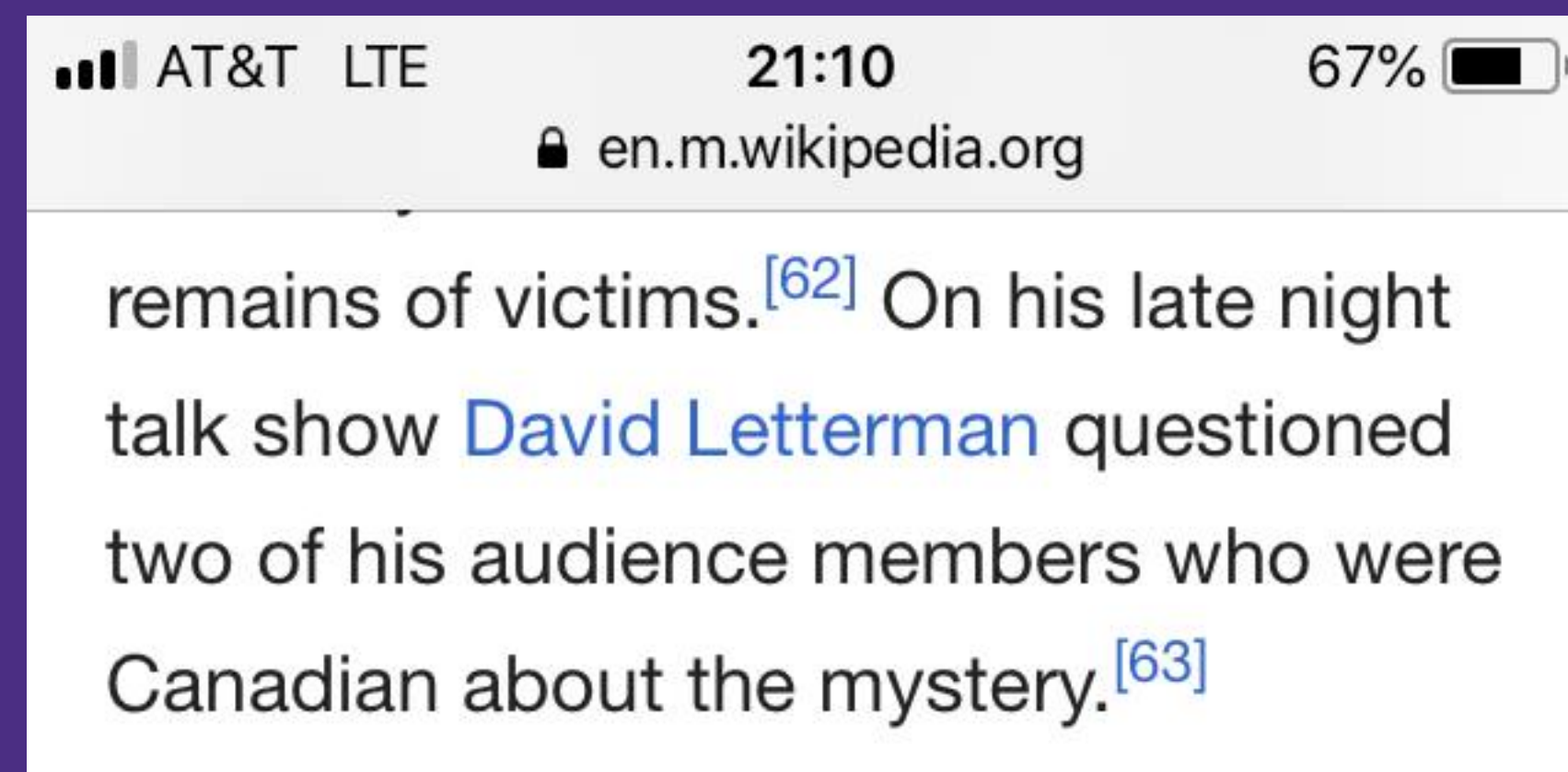
- Constituency
- Context-free grammars (CFGs)
- English Grammar Rules
- **Grammars — Revisiting our Motivation**
- Treebanks
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- Parsing

# Grammars... So What?

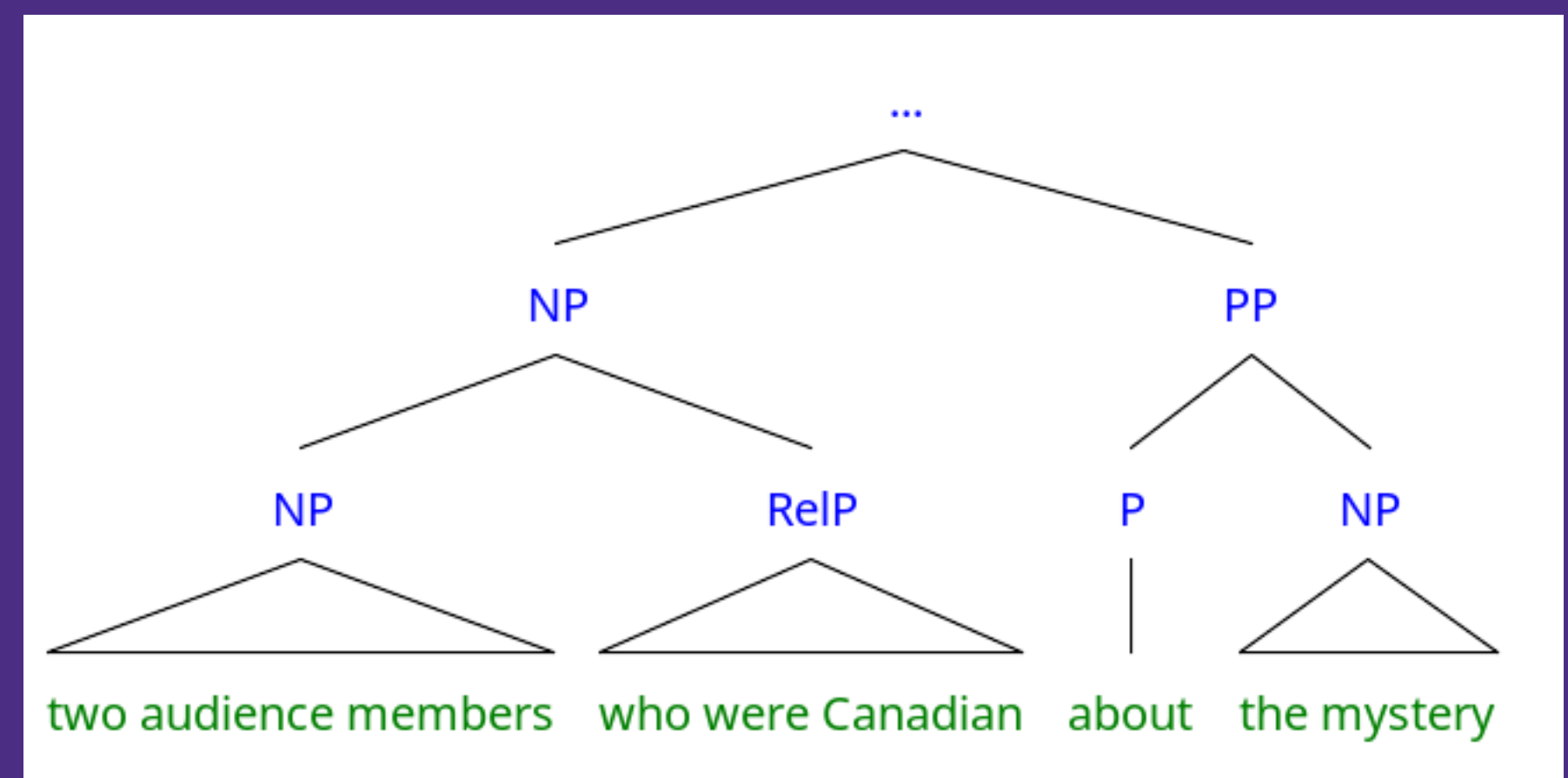
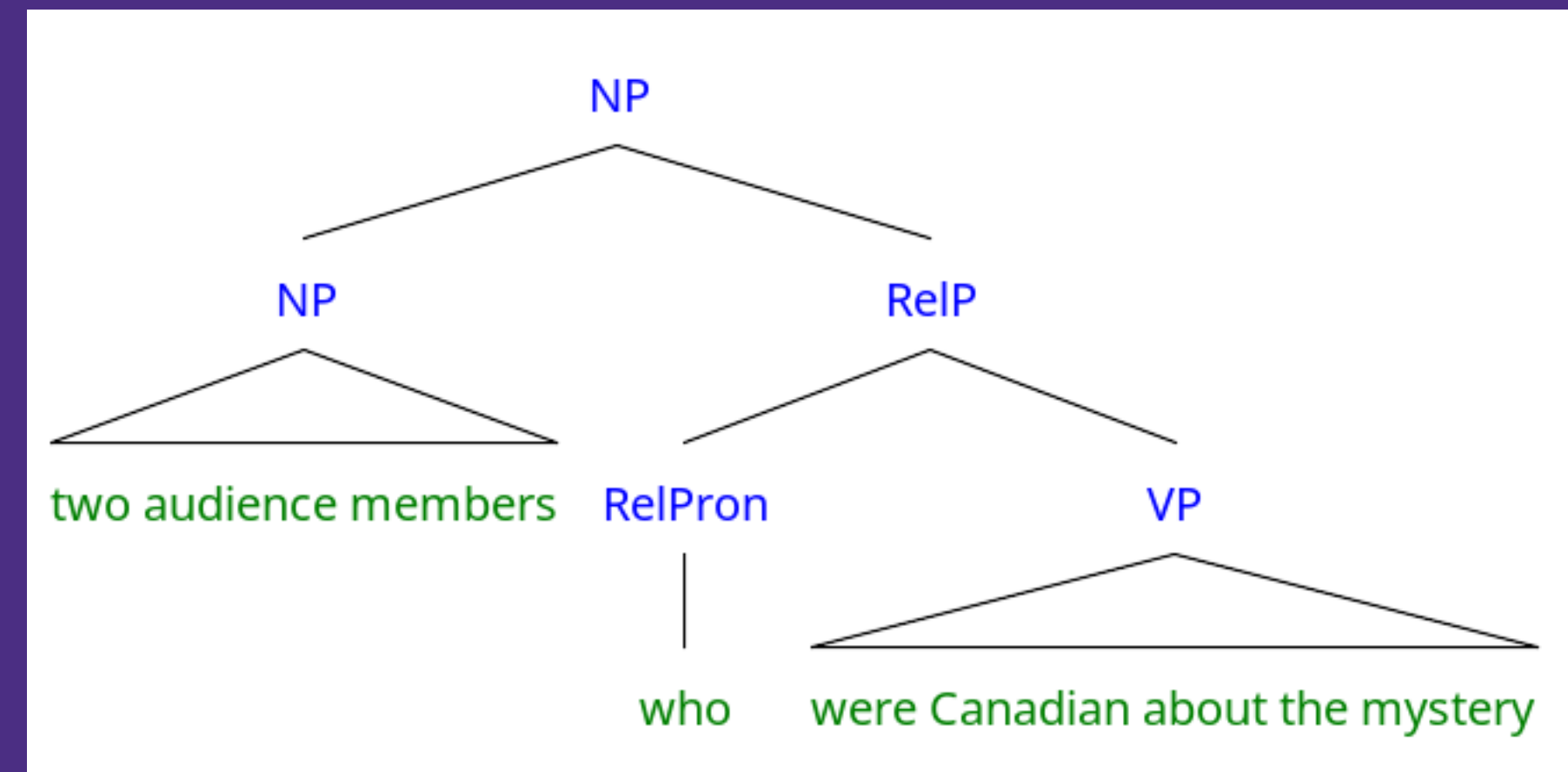
- Grammars propose a formal way to make distinctions in syntax
- Distinctions in syntax can help us get a hold on distinctions in meaning

# Syntax to the Rescue!

- Possible Interpretations:
  - A. Two audience members, when questioned, behaved Canadian-ly
  - B. Two audience members, who happened to be Canadian Citizens, were questioned

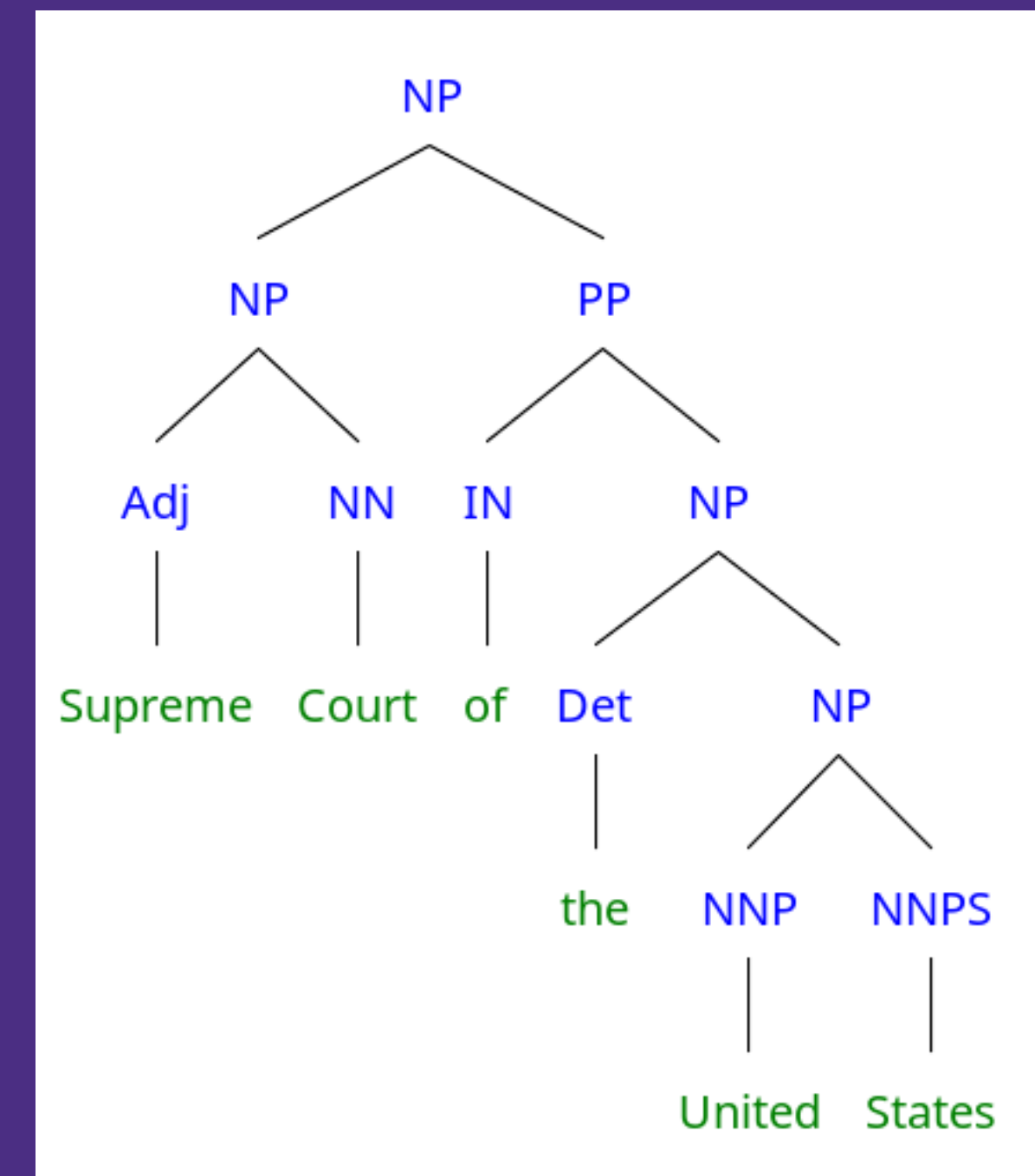


*h/t to Amandalynne Paullada*



# Grammars Promote Deeper Analysis

- Shallow techniques useful, but limited
  - “Supreme Court of the United States”
  - ADJ NN IN DET NNP NNPS
  - What does this tell us about the fragment?
- VS.





# Grammars Promote Deeper Analysis

- Meaning implicit in this analysis tree:
  - “*The United States*” is an entity
  - The court is specific to the US
- Inferable from this tree:
  - “*The United States*” is an entity that can possess (grammatically) other institutions

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- **Treebanks**
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# Treebanks

- Instead of writing out grammars by hand, could we learn them from data?
- Large corpus of sentences
- All sentences annotated syntactically with a parse
- Built semi-automatically
  - Automatically parsed, manually corrected

# Penn Treebank

- A well-established and large treebank
- English:
  - Brown Univ. Standard Corp. of Present-Day Am. Eng.
  - Switchboard (conversational speech)
  - ATIS (human-computer dialog, Airline bookings)
  - Wall Street Journal
- Chinese:
  - Xinhua, Sinoarma (newswire)
- Arabic
  - Newswire, Broadcast News + Conversation, Web Text...

# Other Treebanks

- DeepBank (HPSG)
- Prague Dependency Treebank (Czech: Morphologically rich)
- Universal Dependency Treebank (60 languages, reduced POS tags)
- CCGBank (Penn, but with CCG annotations)

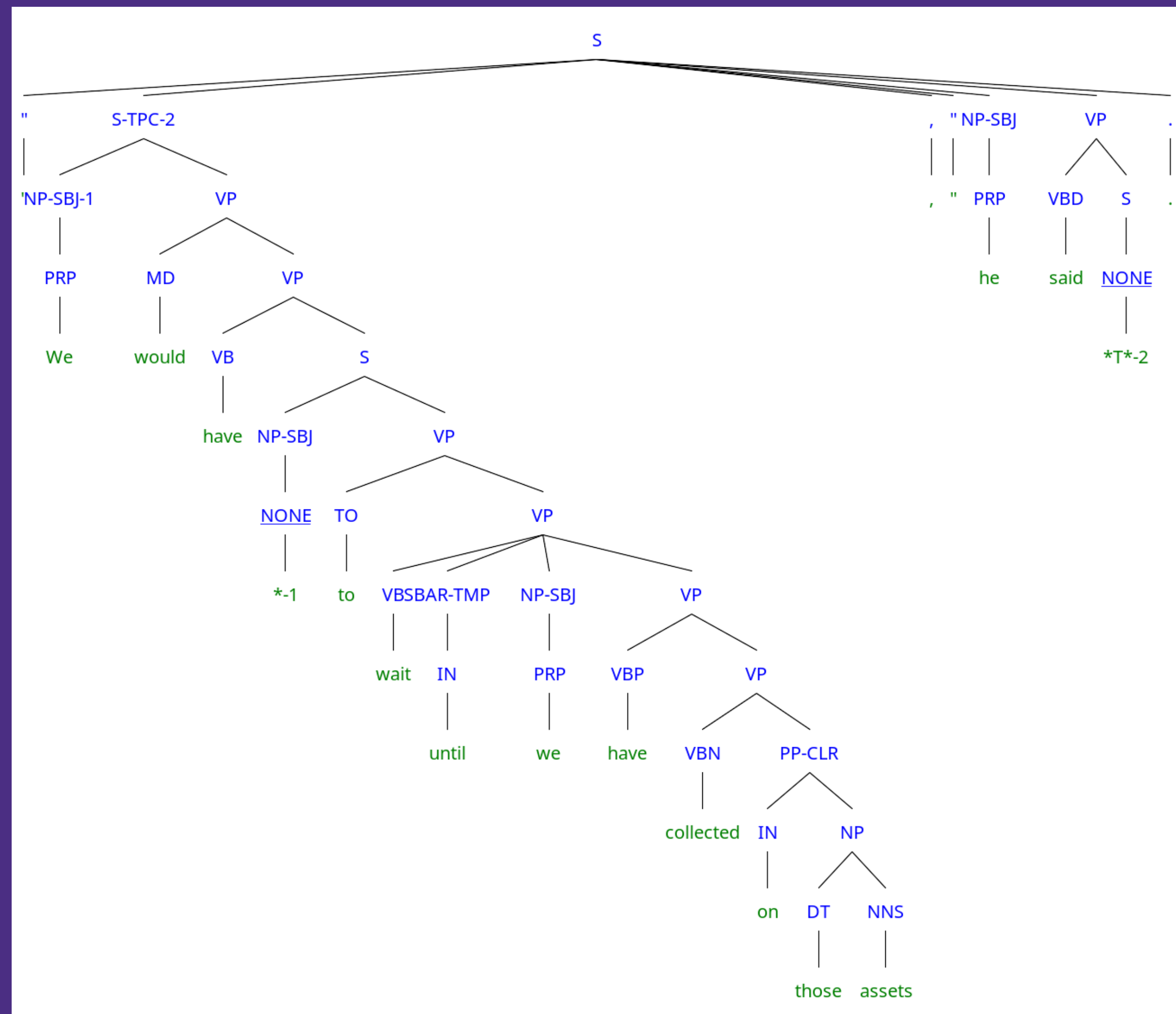
# Treebanks

- Include wealth of language information
  - Traces (for movement analyses)
  - Grammatical function (subject, topic, etc)
  - Semantic function (temporal, location)
- Implicitly constitute grammar of language
  - Can read off rewrite rules from bracketing
  - Not only presence of rules, but frequency counts
  - Will be crucial in building statistical parsers

# Treebank WSJ Example

```
(S (' ' ' ')
 (S-TPC-2
 (NP-SBJ-1 (PRP We))
 (VP (MD would)
 (VP (VB have)
 (S
 (NP-SBJ (-NONE- *-1))
 (VP (TO to)
 (VP (VB wait)
 (SBAR-TMP (IN until))
 (NP-SBJ (PRP we))
 (VP (VBP have)
 (VP (VBN collected)
 (PP-CLR (IN on)
 (NP (DT those) (NNS assets))))))))))
 (, ,) (' ' ' ')
 (NP-SBJ (PRP he))
 (VP (VBD said)
 (S (-NONE- *T*-2)))
 (. .)
)
)
)
)
```

# Treebank WSJ Example





# Treebanks & Corpora on Patas

```
patas$ ls /corpora
```

birkbeck

coconut

Communicator2000\_Emotion

ComParE

Conll

delph-in

DUC

ELRA

enron\_email\_dataset

europarl

europarl-old

framenet

freebase

grammars

HathiTrust

ICAME

ICSI

JRC-Acquis.3.0

LDC

LEAP

lemur

levow

mdsd-2.0

med-data

nltk

OANC

opt

private

proj-gutenberg

reuters

scope

tc-wikipedia

TREC

treebanks

UIC

UWCL

UWCSE

# Treebanks & Corpora on Patas

- Many large corpora from LDC, such as the Penn Treebank v3:
  - `/corpora/LDC/LDC99T42/`
  - Find the full LDC corpora catalog online: [catalog.ldc.upenn.edu](http://catalog.ldc.upenn.edu)
- Web search interface: <https://cldb.ling.washington.edu/livesearch-corpus-form.php>
- Many corpus samples in NLTK
  - `/corpora/nltk/nltk-data`
- **NOTE:** do not move corpora, either *within* or *off of* patas!!

# Treebank Issues

- Large, expensive to produce
- Complex
  - Agreement among annotators can be an issue
- Labeling implicitly captures bias in theory
  - Penn Treebank is “bushy,” long productions
- Enormous numbers of rules
  - **4,500** rules in PTB for VP alone
  - 1M rule tokens; 17,500 distinct types — and counting!

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# Spoken vs. Written

- Can we just use models for written language directly?
- **NO!**
- Challenges of spoken language:
  - Disfluency
    - *Can I um uh can I g– get a flight to Boston on the fifteenth?*
  - Short, fragmentary
    - *Uh one way*
    - Only 37% of Switchboard utterances > 2 words
  - More pronouns, ellipsis
    - *That one*

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# Computational Parsing

- Given a grammar, how can we derive the analysis of an input sentence?
  - Parsing as search
  - CKY parsing
- Given a body of (annotated) text, how can we derive the grammar rules of a language, and employ them in automatic parsing?
  - Treebanks & PCFGs

# What is Parsing?

- CFG parsing is the task of assigning trees to input strings
  - For any input A and grammar G
    - ...assign  $\geq 0$  parse trees T that represent its syntactic structure, and...
    - Cover all and only the elements of A
    - Have, as root, the start symbol S of G
    - ...do not necessarily pick one single (or correct) analysis
- Subtask: Recognition
  - Given input A, G – is A in language defined by G or not?



# Motivation

- Is this sentence in the language — i.e. is it “grammatical?”
  - *\* I prefer United has the earliest flight.*
  - FSAs accept regular languages defined by finite-state automata.
  - Parsers accept languages defined by CFG (equiv. pushdown automata).
- What is the syntactic structure of this sentence?
  - *What airline has the cheapest flight?*
  - *What airport does Southwest fly from near Boston?*
  - Syntactic parse provides framework for semantic analysis
    - What is the subject? Direct object?

# Parsing as Search

- Syntactic parsing searches through possible trees to find one or more trees that derive input
- Formally, search problems are defined by:
  - Start state  $S$
  - Goal state  $G$  (with a test)
  - Set of actions that transition from one state to another
    - “Successor function”
  - A path cost function

# Parsing as Search: One Model

- Start State S: Start Symbol
- Goal test:
  - Does the parse tree cover all of, and only, the input?
- Successor function:
  - Expand a nonterminal using a production where nonterminal is the LHS of the production
- Path cost:
  - ...ignored for now.

# Parsing as Search: One Model

- Node:
  - Partial solution to search problem (partial parse)
- Search start node (initial state):
  - Input string
  - Start symbol of CFG
- Goal node:
  - Full parse tree: covering all of, and only the input, rooted at S

# Search Algorithms

- Depth First
  - Keep expanding nonterminals until they reach words
  - If no more expansions available, back up
- Breadth First
  - Consider all parses that expand a single nonterminal...
  - ...then all with two expanded, etc...
- Other alternatives, if have associated path costs.

# Parse Search Strategies

- Two constraints on parsing:
  - Must start with the start symbol
  - Must cover exactly the input string
- Correspond to main parsing search strategies
  - Top-down search (Goal-directed)
  - Bottom-up search (Data-driven search)

# A Grammar

| Grammar                            | Lexicon                                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| $S \rightarrow NP VP$              | Det $\rightarrow$ that   this   a                         |
| $S \rightarrow Aux NP VP$          | Noun $\rightarrow$ book   flight   meal   money           |
| $S \rightarrow VP$                 | Verb $\rightarrow$ book   include   prefer                |
| $NP \rightarrow Pronoun$           | Pronoun $\rightarrow$ I   she   me                        |
| $NP \rightarrow Proper-Noun$       | Proper-Noun $\rightarrow$ Houston   NWA                   |
| $NP \rightarrow Det Nominal$       | Aux $\rightarrow$ does                                    |
| $Nominal \rightarrow Noun$         | Preposition $\rightarrow$ from   to   on   near   through |
| $Nominal \rightarrow Nominal Noun$ |                                                           |
| $Nominal \rightarrow Nominal PP$   |                                                           |
| $VP \rightarrow Verb$              |                                                           |
| $VP \rightarrow Verb NP$           |                                                           |
| $VP \rightarrow Verb NP PP$        |                                                           |
| $VP \rightarrow Verb PP$           |                                                           |
| $VP \rightarrow VP PP$             |                                                           |
| $PP \rightarrow Preposition NP$    |                                                           |

Jurafsky & Martin, Speech and Language Processing, p.390

# Top-down Search

- All valid parse trees must be rooted with start symbol
- Begin search with productions where S is on LHS
  - e.g.  $S \rightarrow NP VP$
- Successively expand nonterminals
  - e.g.  $NP \rightarrow Det Nominal$ ;  $VP \rightarrow V NP$
- Terminate when all leaves are terminals



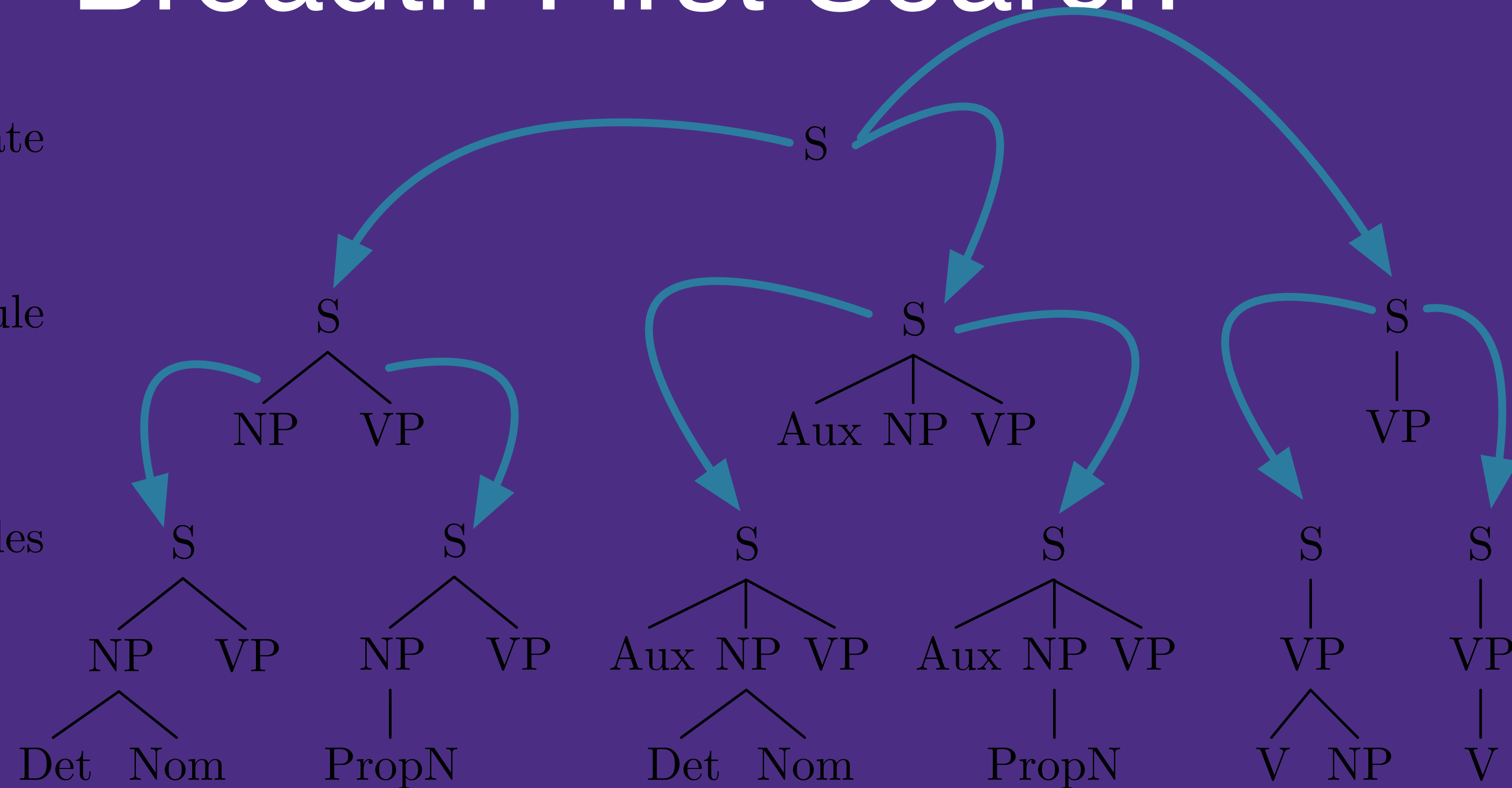
# Depth-First Search

# Breadth-First Search

Start State

1 Rule

2 Rules



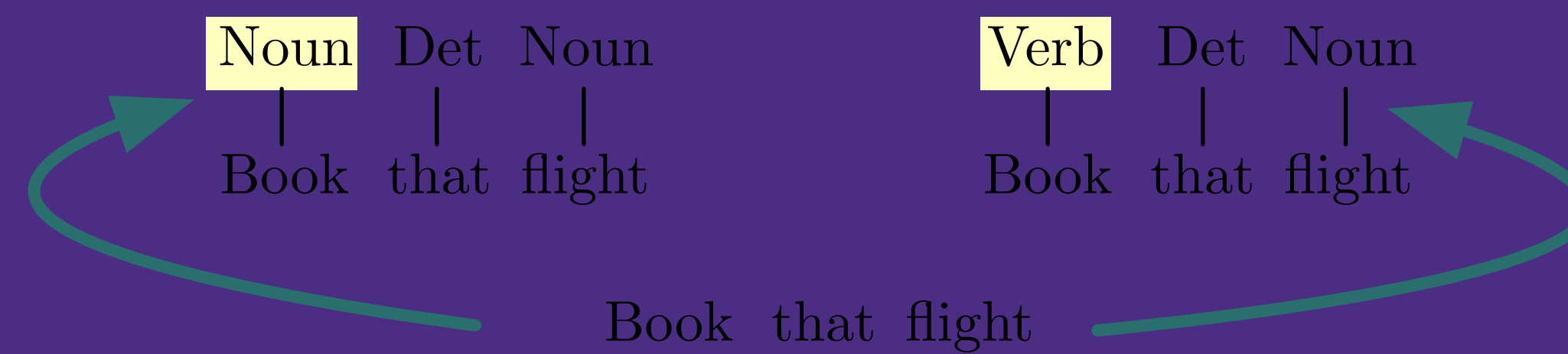
# Pros and Cons of Top-down Parsing

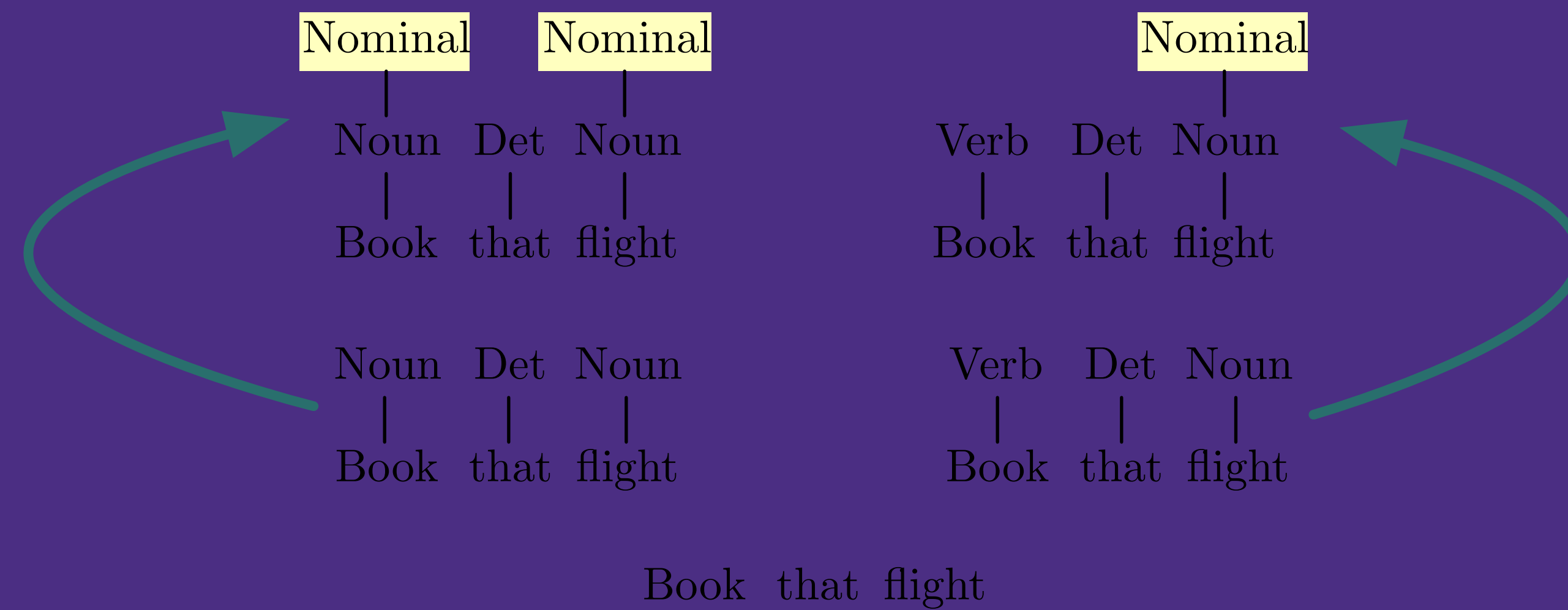
- Pros:
  - Doesn't explore trees not rooted at S
  - Doesn't explore subtrees that don't fit valid trees
- Cons:
  - Produces trees that may not match input
  - May not terminate in presence of recursive rules
  - May rederive subtrees as part of search

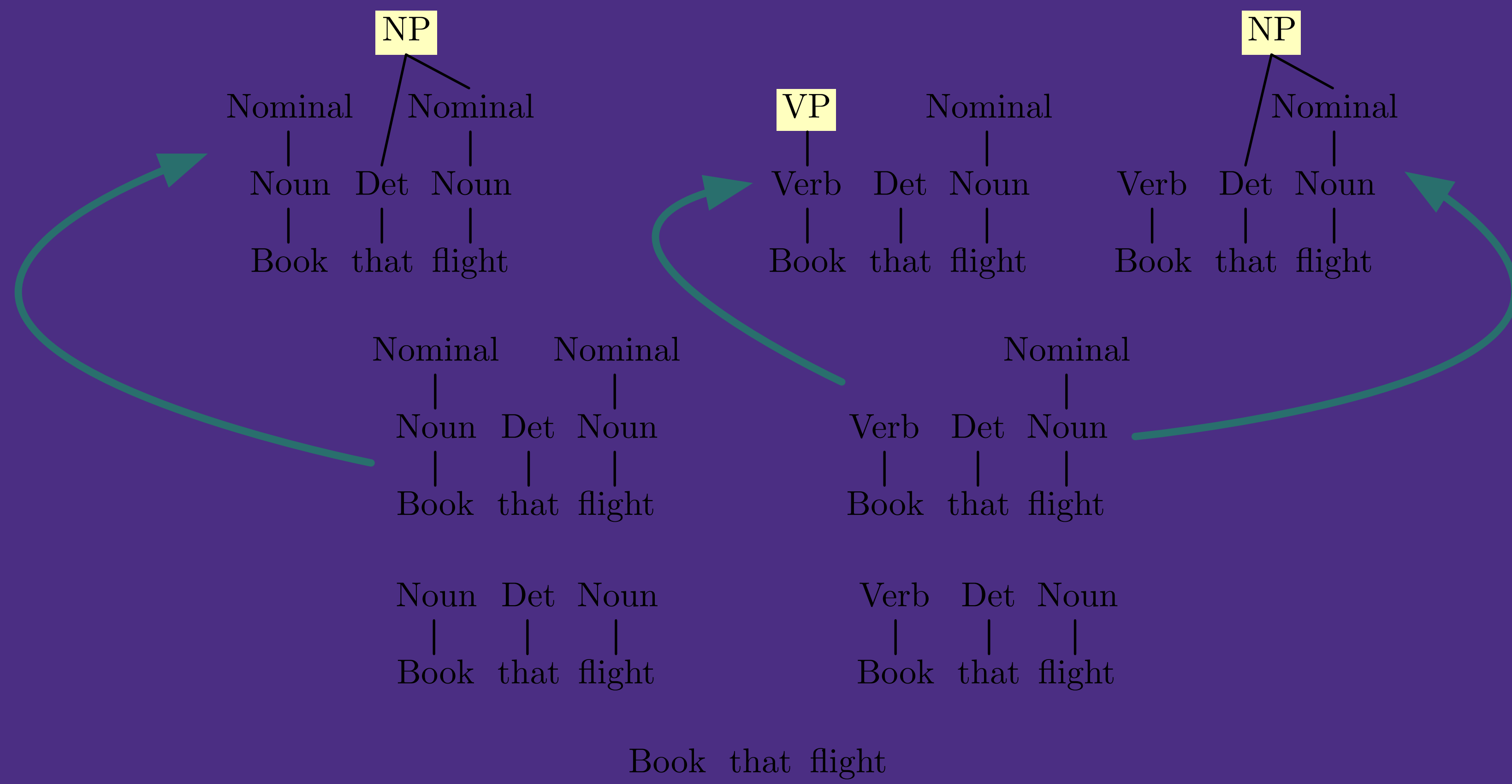
# Bottom-Up Parsing

- Try to find all trees that span the input
  - Start with input string
    - Book that flight
- Use all productions with current subtree(s) on RHS
  - e.g.  $N \rightarrow \text{Book}$ ;  $V \rightarrow \text{Book}$
- Stop when spanned by S, or no more rules apply

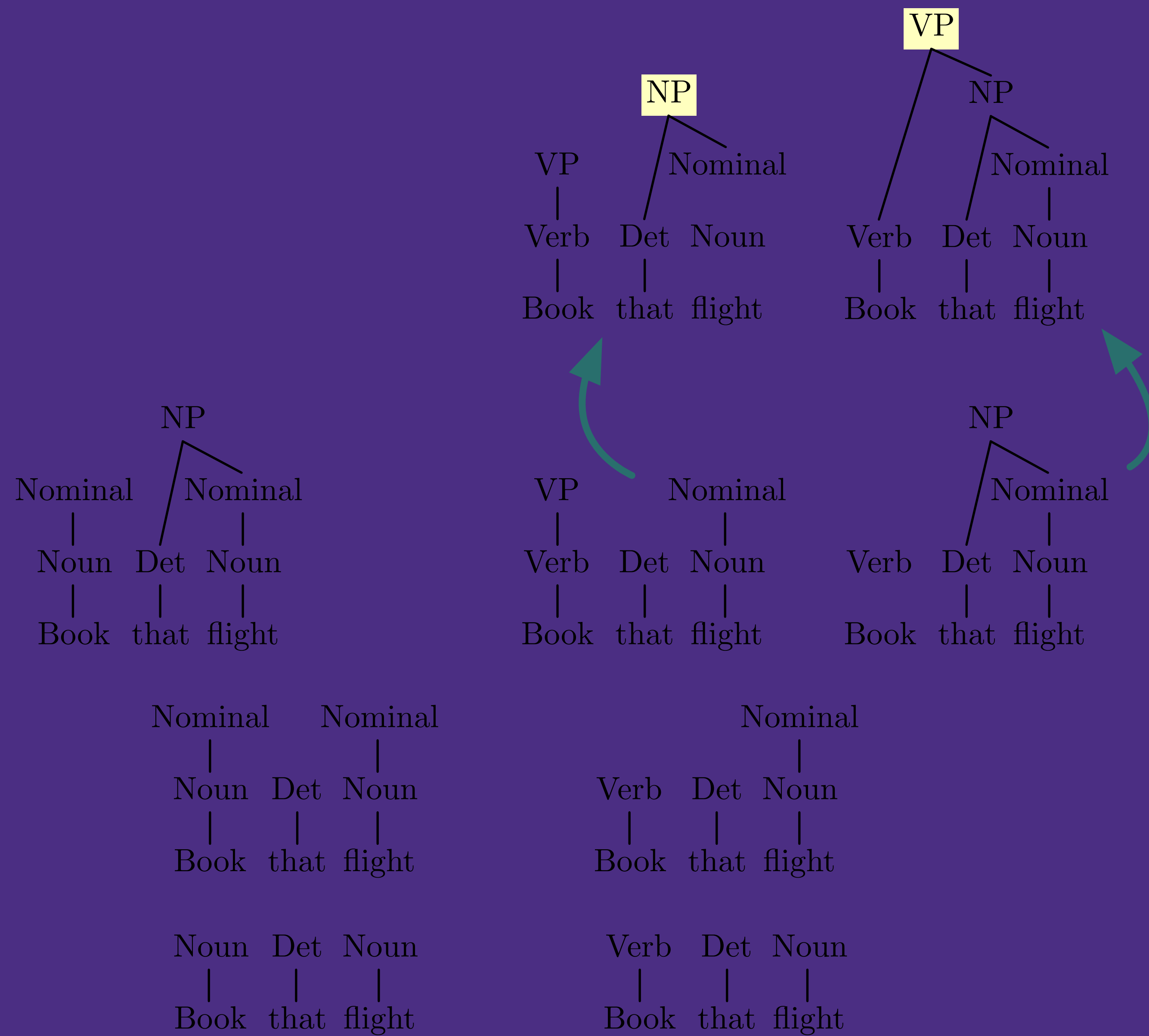












Book that flight

# Pros and Cons of Bottom-Up Search

- Pros:
  - Will not explore trees that don't match input
  - Recursive rules less problematic
  - Useful for incremental/fragment parsing
- Cons:
  - Explore subtrees that will not fit full input

# Cross-Serial Dependencies, Revisited

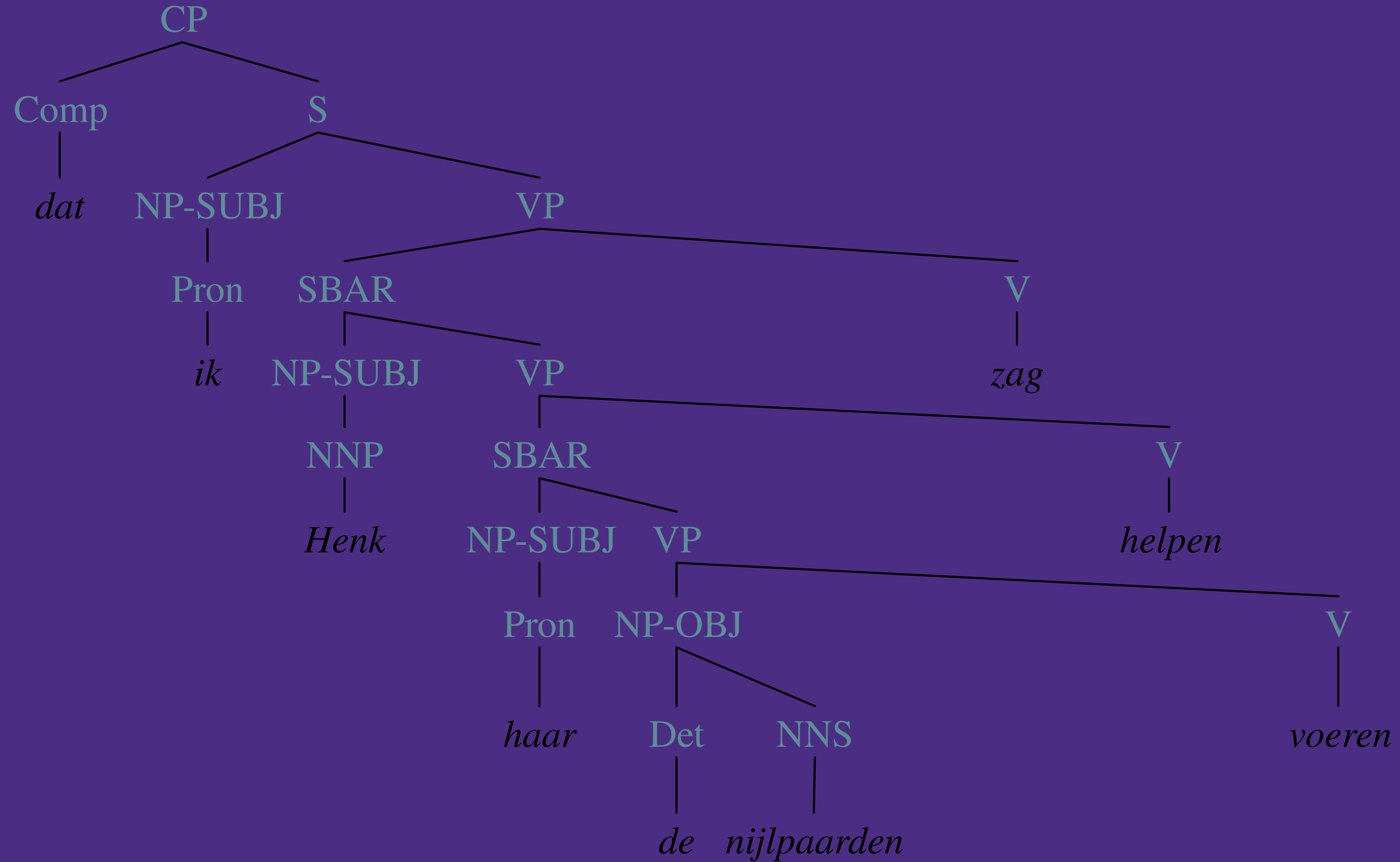
$$L' = a^m b^n c^m d^n$$

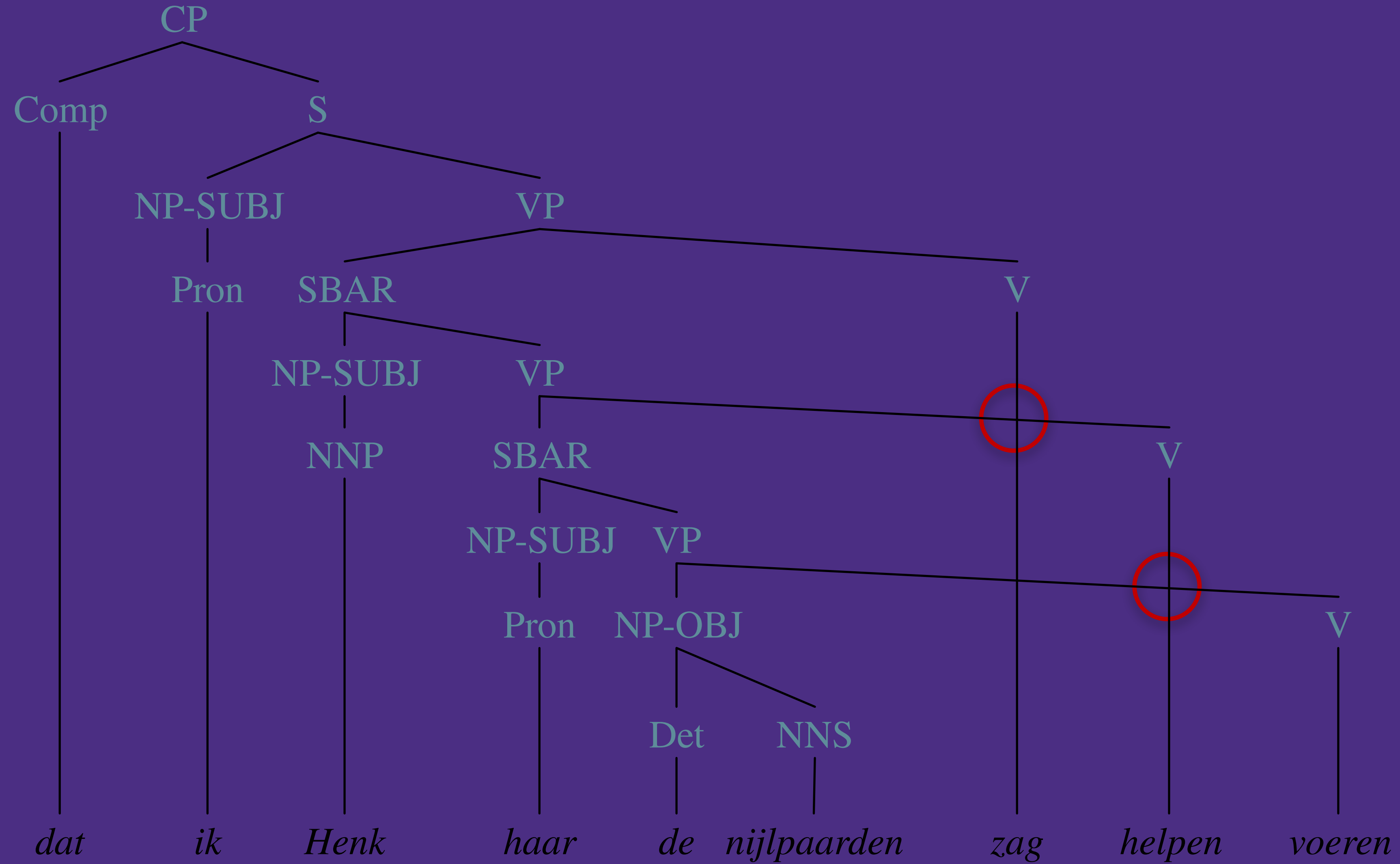
dat ik<sub>1</sub> Henk<sub>2</sub> haar<sub>3</sub> de nijlpaarden<sub>3</sub> zag<sub>1</sub> helpen<sub>2</sub> voeren<sub>3</sub>

that I<sub>1</sub> Henk<sub>2</sub> her<sub>3</sub> the hippos saw<sub>1</sub> help<sub>2</sub> feed<sub>3</sub>

*“...that I saw Henk help her feed the hippos”*

*A Dutch example from Rentier (1994)*





# Next Time

- Beginning to implement CFG parsing algorithms
- Conversion to Chomsky Normal Form
  - Required for CKY algorithm
- HW2 out