Modular pivot

A **modular pivot** is a type of turn-constructional **pivot.** It is built from syntactically entirely optional items (i.e. linguistic adjuncts) that can occur in both turn-initial and turn-final position and can therefore be used to patch a wide range of otherwise discrete **turn-constructional units (TCUs)** together (Clayman & Raymond 2015). A prime example of an item that lends itself to be deployed as a modular pivot are address terms (Clayman 2012), as illustrated in Figure 1 (adapted from Clayman & Raymond 2015).
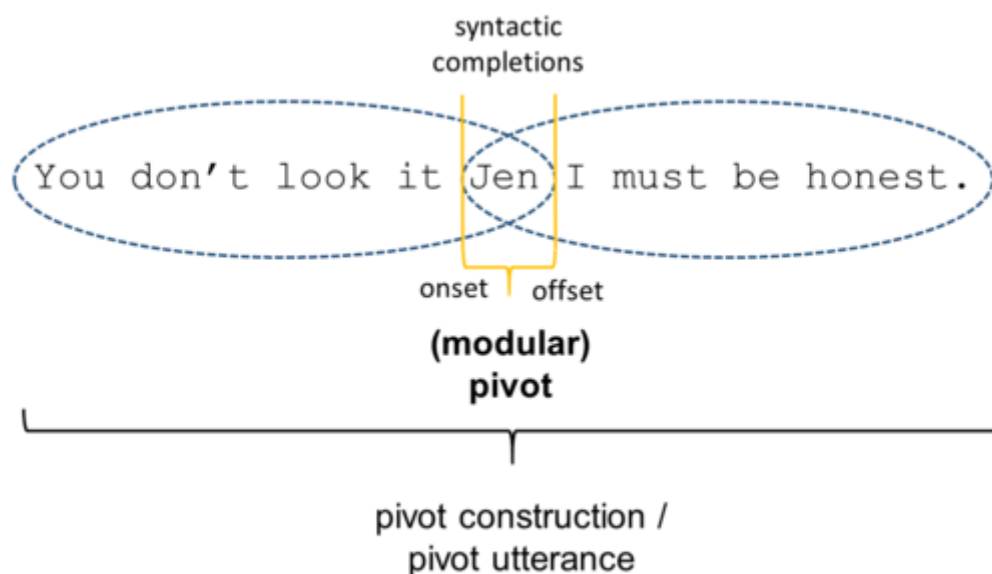

Figure 1: Modular Pivot Construction (Clayman & Raymond 2015: 391)

Other items that can be used in this way are lexical items, such as *now*, *then*, *(un)fortunately* and possibly other adverbs that can act as sentence adverbials, as well as a range of phrasal items that have tokenized, discourse marker-like status (e.g., *I guess*, *I think*, *you know*, and quotatives like *I said* or *s/he said*; see also Betz 2013; Norén 2007; Clayman & Raymond 2021a, 2021b).

The syntactic optionality and positional freedom of these items equips them with a 'modular' quality (hence the name), as it allows them to be used rather freely in a wide range of contexts and to extend various kinds of TCUs past a point of possible completion. By the same token, however, these items retain possible syntactic completion points at both their onset and their offset (see Figure 1). So in contrast to other kinds of pivots, for which syntax alone may enforce a pivot interpretation, this is not the case with modular pivots. Consequently, when these items are

used between two consecutive TCUs, multiple parsing options arise (see Figure 2; note that the first option is only possible for items that can also be used as stand-alone TCUs).
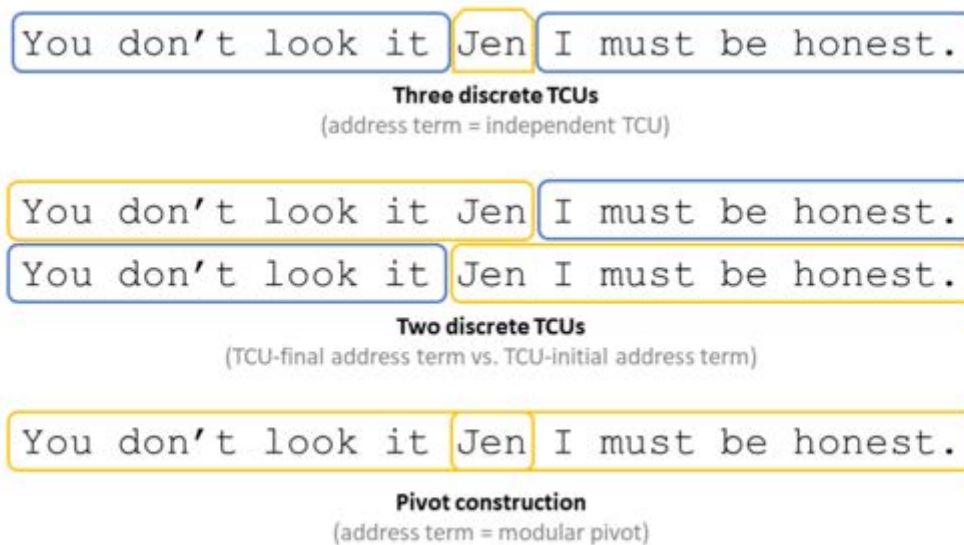
Figure 2: TCU Parsing Options (Clayman 2012: 1860)

What's decisive for hearing them as one or the other is their prosodic-phonetic packaging, specifically their prosodic-phonetic (non-)integration with the adjacent talk (on both or either side of the candidate pivot element). In order for the respective element to be hearable as a pivot, it is crucial that it is prosodic-phonetically seamlessly integrated with both prior *and* subsequent talk at the pivot's junctures (i.e. its onset and offset). Since prosodic-phonetic packaging involves the complex and poly-variable interplay of a multitude of phonetic parameters (e.g., pitch, loudness, tempo, phonation, articulatory movements and settings, etc.), the different parsing options illustrated in Figure 2 should be understood as (somewhat) idealized prototypes. In actual instances of talk, there is lots of gradience between them, so that hardline categorical distinctions are often hard to maintain (Barth-Weingarten, et al. 2021).

Additional Related Entries:

- **Turn-taking**
- **Pivot**
- **Rush-through**
- **Transition-relevance place (TRP)**
- **Turn-constructional unit (TCU)**
- **Increment**
- **Turn holding**
- **Self-repair**

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