This paper discusses issues regarding the determination of the syntactic domains which can be crossed by quantifier raising (QR). A long-standing question, for instance, is why QR is apparently clause-bound in English and not possible out of finite clauses, whereas overt A’-movement (wh-movement, topicalization) can escape from finite clauses via successive cyclic movement. The issue becomes even more puzzling when scope in antecedent contained deletion (ACD) contexts is considered, which, assuming ACD is resolved via QR, point to the conclusion that QR out of finite clauses is possible when ACD resolution is at stake. A final issue concerns the variability in judgments and significant variation across speakers, which is found mostly when QR out of infinitival clauses is considered, but also for QR from finite clauses.

Based on the judgments and generalizations reported for English and Italian, the main observation I make in this talk is that scope interpretations requiring QR decrease in acceptability the more syntactic domains are crossed by movement. The hypothesis I put forward is that rather than imposing restrictions on the syntactic domains from which quantifier raising is possible (e.g., QR is ‘clause-bound’) or the application of QR itself (e.g., via Scope Economy), QR obeys the same syntactic restrictions as other A’-movement operations—i.e., QR is in principle possible successive cyclically, thus also across finite clauses. However, due to its invisibility, QR incurs a processing cost which increases with increased complexity of the structure as defined by a theory of syntactic phases. Thus, decreased acceptability (which is often gradient) reflects increased processing difficulty rather than a syntactic violation. This approach offers an explanation for the variability in judgments reported in this area, and it has consequences for the theory of syntactic movement and the determination of syntactic domains.