Problem 1 solution
Winter 2010 601 final exam

This problem represents a straightforward application of the tests we’ve already found to yield mutually consistent results in identifying VPs, NPs and PPs. There are two phases to the solution: provide evidence for the phrasehood of the bolded string *pleased with her new job*, and identify what kind of phrase this string is an instance of. The two diagnostics we’ve identified so far are the displacement and replacement tests, and when we apply them we get

(1) a. (...and) Pleased with her new job, Robin indeed seems___.
   b. Leslie seems pleased with her new job, and Robin seems even more so.

where *so* has no meaning of its own, but is understood as standing in for the preceding *pleased with her new job*, thus identifying the latter as a syntactic unit, i.e., a phrase. As to what *kind* of phrase it is, the standard omission test yields the following:

(2) a. Leslie seems pleased.
   b. *Leslie seems with her new job.
   c. *Leslie seems her new job.

and so on. Thus, *pleased* seems to be the obligatory element here, and we know from several different tests that *pleased* is an adjective. For one thing, only adjectives and adverbs can be modified by *very, extremely* or certain other adverbs (as vs. verbs and VPs, which cannot be), and we see that we have

(3) Robin seems *very, extremely* pleased with her new job.

But *pleased* does not appear capable of modifying a VP itself, cf.

(4) Robin *quickly, casually* ate a sandwich.

Furthermore, unlike adverbs, *pleased* can directly modify a noun:

(5) Robin returned with a *pleased, *pleasantly* expression on her face.

Hence *pleased* must be an adjective, and since it’s the indespensible element in this phrase, the latter must be an adjective phrase (AP).

A note of caution to those of you who reasoned that since *Robin seems pleased with her new job* can be paraphrased *Robin seems to be pleased with her new job*, we somehow have reason to describe *pleased with her new job* as a VP since *to be pleased with her new job* is an infinitive VP: **this doesn’t compute.** Here’s why:

- The fact that X and Y are paraphrases of each other says nothing at all about their syntactic relationship. *Robin is blind* and *Robin cannot see* are paraphrases, but you wouldn’t want to argue on that basis that *blind* is of the same category as *cannot see*, would you?
- Leaving the issue of paraphrase aside, we have excellent reason to believe that X and *to be X* are not, in general, the same category. Consider e.g.
(6) a. Robin happens to be pleased with her new job.

If pleased with her new job were assumed to be a VP simply because it could be replaced by an infinitive in certain contexts, then we would expect that it could show up wherever a infinitive VP can appear. But that’s not the case, as (6) makes clear. Thus, there must be a category difference between to be X and X itself which leads to this lack of parallelism in their respective distributions.

- Finally, it should be clear that whether or not Robin seems pleased with her new job can be paraphrased by Robin seems to be pleased with her new job, some category must be assigned to pleased with her new job which actually refers to the category of the elements within that particular string of words (where there is no verb anywhere). The category of pleased with her new job can’t be VP in the latter case, since be can’t be followed by infinitival VPs: *Robin seems to be to like ice cream, where to like ice cream is an infinitive VP, clearly not a possible continuation of Robin seems to... So the fact that pleased with her new job can follow seems to be here means it clearly is not an infinitive. But it behaves the same as in the original example with respect to displaceability, so replacement and the rest, indicating that it is indeed a phrase. Does it then make sense to say that in Robin seems pleased with her new job, pleased with her new job is a completely different category from the same phrase when to be is present following seems?

For all of these reasons, the paraphrase relationship I’ve mentioned is completely irrelevant to determining just what pleased with her new job is in the original problem 2 example. The fact is, so cannot in general replace an infinitive VP (*I want to visit Paris and Leslie wants so as well). That so replacement in this particular context therefore is therefore pretty much absolute confirmation that the phrase in question is adjectival in nature.