

Extraction Asymmetries in Ergative and Accusative Languages

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Within the C-T Inheritance framework of Chomsky (2008, subsequent work), features driving both A- and A'-movement enter the derivation on the phase head C. The $[u\phi]$ feature responsible for licensing the subject is then "inherited" by T, valuing nominative case on this DP and forcing it to move to [Spec, TP]. Features driving A'-movement remain on C, which then allows other constituents to move past the subject to [Spec, CP], as in the case of English object *wh*-movement, shown below.

- (1) [CP *what* [C_[#WH]] [TP *you*_[ϕ , NOM] [T<sub>[# ϕ]]] [vP ~~*what*~~-[v' ~~*you*~~ [v' v [vP *buy what*]]]]]]]
 'What did you buy?'</sub>

Ouali (2006), Legate (2014), and many others have proposed that when a subject undergoes A'-movement, as in (2), C-T inheritance does not take place, the subject moving directly to [Spec, CP]. C-T inheritance is obviated because all of the features on C (in this case $[u\phi]$ and $[uWH]$) are checked by the subject *wh*-word in a single landing site.

- (2) Who bought that?
 [CP *who*_[ϕ , NOM] [C_{[#WH, # ϕ]]] [vP <*who*> [v' v [*buy that*]]]]]}

In this presentation, I propose that there are languages that lack C-T inheritance altogether, because C in these languages carries only a single feature driving movement, specifically the $[u\phi]$ feature necessary for licensing the subject. Consequently, DPs valuing nominative case move freely, but movement of other DPs is blocked by the need for the nominative DP to value case.

An analysis such as this accounts for the well-known extraction restriction in Austronesian languages, according to which only the DP with nominative case can undergo A'-movement. For example, Tagalog exhibits a type of ergative alignment in which the direct object in a canonical transitive clause has nominative case, while the external argument has inherent genitive (ergative) case, as shown in (3a). (3b) shows that the nominative object can be extracted to form a relative clause, but this is not possible for the genitive external argument, as shown in (3c).

- (3) a. B<in>ili ng babae ang isda. (Transitive clause)
 <TR.PRV>buy GEN woman NOM fish
 'The woman bought the fish.'
- b. isda-ng b<in>ili ng babae (Transitive object moves: OK)
 fish-LK <TR.PRV>buy GEN woman
 'fish that the woman bought'
- c. *babae-ng b<in>ili ang isda (Transitive subject moves: *)
 woman-ng <TR.PRV>buy NOM fish
 'woman who bought the fish'

The analysis put forth in this presentation accounts for this asymmetry straightforwardly. The object in (3b) moves to [Spec, CP] as a reflex of its Agree relation with the ϕ -probe on C in order to value case. If the external argument were to undergo Agree with this probe, then the object would not be licensed. The external argument is licensed instead with inherent case in its base position by transitive *v*, along the lines of Legate (2002) and many others.

An extraction restriction like the one sketched above is observed in many languages with ergative alignment, e.g. Inuit and Mayan languages. However, it is not the case that extraction asymmetries of this sort are observed only in ergative languages. For example,

only nominative subjects are able to move in accusative Indonesian languages. Internal arguments are able to move over external arguments only in passive constructions. Interestingly, the ergative alignment manifested in Formosan and Philippine languages has its diachronic origin in an embedded nominalization, in which the external argument has genitive case (Starosta et al. 1982). Modern Rukai, which retains the accusative alignment of Proto-Austronesian (Aldridge 2016), requires that relative clauses formed on objects be nominalized. This fact is accounted for on my analysis, since the nominalized *v* (or *n*) assigns genitive case to the embedded subject, making it invisible to a ϕ -probe and allowing a lower argument to move over it.

The accusative language I examine in this presentation is Late Archaic Chinese (LAC; 5th-3rd centuries BCE). LAC also exhibits a subject/object asymmetry in A'-extraction. LAC was an accusative language with SVO basic word order. A topicalized object could also appear to the left of the subject, but object topics were always resumed by pronouns, as shown below. Subjects, were never resumed by a pronoun.

- (4) 子路，人告之以有過。 (Mencius 3)
 Zilu ren gao zhi yi you guo.
 Zilu person tell 3.OBJ with have error
 'Zilu, someone told him he made a mistake.'

This asymmetry is accounted for straightforwardly on my proposal. The subject is attracted by the ϕ -probe on C, valuing nominative case and moving to the specifier of this projection. However, as object is prevented from moving to [Spec, CP], because this would deprive the subject of nominative case. Consequently, an object topic can only be base generated as an adjunct and resumed by a pronoun in argument position.

When object movement was required, as in relative clause formation, then an alternative strategy had to be employed in order to license the subject independent of [$u\phi$] on C. Subjects in object relative clauses were marked with genitive case, as in Rukai. This made the subject invisible to the probe on C and allowed the object to move over it.

- (5) 人之所畏 (Laozi 20)
 [OP [ren zhi suo wei <OP>]]
 person GEN REL fear
 'what people fear'

Taking primarily LAC and Austronesian languages as exemplars, this presentation shows how a variety of subject/object extraction asymmetries in both ergative and accusative languages can be accounted for by positing that [$u\phi$] is the sole probe attracting movement to [Spec, CP].

References

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