Upward Binding and Polysynthesis

In several polysynthetic languages that belong to different families, a phenomenon of what looks like free upward DP ellipsis, i.e. with the antecedent in the subordinate clause with the gap in the matrix clause, has been recorded. In the polysynthetic Adyghe language (West Caucasian, the Circassian branch), with all kinds of subordinate clauses, adjuncts and complements alike, both upward and downward DP ellipsis is available, cf. (1–3). Informants often produce left- & upward ellipsis of a DP spontaneously, especially when the matrix clause conveys new and unexpected information (4).

Similar facts have been found in Kadiweu, Waikuru family, Brazil (Sandalo 1997), Navajo, Na-Dene family, North America (Hale 1973), Passamaquoddy, Algonquian (Brüning 2005), and Nootka (Nuuchahnulth), Wakashan (Davis, Wojdak 2004), all polysynthetic, cf. (5–7).

A problem with Principle C of the Binding theory arises which rules out any pronoun (including pro's which might be postulated instead of the elliptic gaps, or corresponding pronominal arguments within polysyntactic verbs) to syntactically bind referential expressions. In Adyghe, within a single clause, Principle C is valid (8).

There is firm evidence that the subordinate clauses are really embedded in Adyghe, which can be seen from the usual restrictions on constituent permutations, from Negative Concord operating downward, but not upward etc.

Free pronouns, unlike pro’s or pronominal arguments, show no Principle C violation. Even more striking is the ability of pronominal arguments to undergo upward semantic binding, quite contrary to the well-known generalization that semantic binding (e.g. bound anaphora) requires syntactic binding(Bach, Partee 1980, Reinhart 1983:122–137; Heim, Kratzer 1998: 264), cf. (9–10). Brüning (2005: 105) claims explicitly that in Passamaquoddy semantic binding cannot operate upward; no relevant data are yet available from Navajo, Nootka, Kadiweu, or any other polysynthetic language. In Adyghe, free and personal pronouns cannot be semantically bound from below, and referential expressions cannot be bound at all.

In the paper, possible theoretical explanations for this phenomenon and its relationship with polysynthesis will be considered. Unrestricted Control or Raising in thematic positions seems unlikely; the account via Ellipsis is problematic in view of the bound anaphora cases (Everyone wants PRO to win ≠ Everyone wants everyone to win). The Movement approach seems the most prospective, in spite of the fact that the island restrictions suggested in (Beljaeva, Minor 2005) on movement have not been confirmed in Adyghe.

Complement subordinate clause

(1) a. [pšaše-m wered qa-?e-n-ew] ___ faj
   girl-ERG song DIR-sing-POT-ADV want
   (She)i,j wants the girlj to sing a song
b. ___ faj [pšaše-m wered qa-?e-n-ew] want girl-ERG song DIR-sing-POT-ADV
   (She)i,j wants the girlj to sing a song
c. pšaše-r faj [___ wered qa-?e-n-ew] girl-ABS want song DIR-sing-POT-ADV
   The girli wants to sing a song// wants herj to sing a song
d. [___ wered qa-?e-n-ew] pšaše-r faj song DIR-sing-POT-ADV girl-ABS хочет
   The girli wants to sing a song// wants herj to sing a song

Adjunct subordinate clause (the temporal ze-___-m converb)

(2) a. [pšaše-m ə-ʃ qa-ze-λ.ekwə-m] ___ qe-κa-κ
   girl-ERG 3SG-brother DIR-REL-see-ERG DIR-cry-PST
   (She)i,j cried, when the girlj saw her brother
b. ___ qe-κa-κ [pšaše-m ə-ʃ qa-ze-λ.ekwə-m]  
   DIR-cry-PST girl-ERG 3SG-brother DIR-REL-see-ERG
   (She)i,j cried, when the girlj saw her brother
c. pšaše-r qe-κa-κ [___ ə-ʃ qa-ze-λ.ekwə-m]
   girl-ABS DIR-cry-PST 3SG-brother DIR-REL-see-ERG
   The girli cried, when shei,j saw her brother.
d. [___ ə-ʃ qa-ze-λ.ekwə-m] pšaše-r qe-κa-κ
   3SG-brother DIR-REL-see-ERG girl-ABS DIR-cry-PST
   The girli cried, when shei,j saw her brother.

Head-internal relative clause

(3) a. ___ qa-κe-κe-κ e-κe-κ [qaf-ew šakwə-m šxwənčə-ʃ-r]
   DIR-find-PST man-ADV hunter-ERG gun-ABS
   Find the man with a gun
He, found the man who had sold the gun to the hunter, and the girls get frightened when they see you (Shapsug dialect).

Shave your beard. The girls get frightened when they see you (Shapsug dialect).

John, knows that he, loves Mary

Passamaquoddy, Algonquian (Brüning 2005):

Litahasu ['tahcuwi-tkon-ku-l Susehp hesis-ol

not nucihqonket]

this policeman

sit: He, thinks that Josephi’s older brother the policeman must arrest him,

Christine is saying that she is gonna knead bread tomorrow, lit. (Shei)-is-saying that Christinei is gonna knead bread tomorrow

He is looking at Lena

*Leni is looking at herself

I promised to him, to buy a toy for every kid,

References


