Defective C

1. BACKGROUND AND GOAL: An interesting but not fully articulated trait of Chomsky’s (2001) framework concerns the dual nature of functional heads, which are taken to come in both strong and weak varieties, only the former qualifying as bona fide phase heads, capable of probing and triggering Transfer of their complements. For the most part, Chomsky’s (2001) dichotomy has been explored in the case of the light verb (v), for which both strong (transitive/unergative) and weak (unaccusative/passive) counterparts have been identified. The goal of this paper is to argue for the existence of a weak (in our terms, defective) version of C, present in subjunctive dependents of the Romance type (see 1).

2. DEFECTIVITY: Much recent literature (see López 2002; 2007, Pesetsky & Torrego 2007, among others) has considered different ways to implement what Chomsky refers to as defectivity. Consider, e.g., those in (2). The option in (2a) is surely the most radical one, and is instantiated by so-called truncation (see Rizzi 1995); option (2b) corresponds to Chomsky’s take, under which some feature of X (typically, either person or number) is missing. Here we want to explore (2c), the option put forward by Pesetsky & Torrego (2007), for it is the one that --we will see-- allows us to capture various of the properties of subjunctives (and, more generally, C_{def}) in a straightforward fashion. To begin with, it readily accounts for the fact that subjunctives’ tense is parasitic of matrix’s verb, as illustrated in (3).

Note that, once (2c) is adopted, the next question is whether the featural make-up of subjunctive C lacks any other a value, apart from tense? In this paper, we argue it does, and propose that the Case feature of the C-T complex comes in an unvalued fashion too, as shown in (4); in this respect, we follow Pesetsky & Torrego (2007) in teasing Case and agreement apart. This conclusion is actually forced on us, since Romance subjunctive displays full agreement (verb and subject in the embedded clause agree in number and person): this is the reason why there is no ‘raising’ into the matrix clause – in other words, this is what explains the well-known asymmetry in (5) (see Kayne 1984).

3. OBVIATION: The analysis just outlined entails that the subject DP of subjunctive dependents is not assigned Case by the embedded C-T cluster. If so, Case, much like tense, must come from an element higher up in the structure (a higher Probe). We would like to argue this element is matrix v*-T_0, which assigns accusative to the subject ‘at a distance;’ this is --we contend-- the factor responsible for subjunctives displaying long-distance obviation (see Kempchinsky 1987): if the embedded subject receives accusative, then it is possible to offer a unitary account of both local and non-local obviation, for which we assume Uriagereka’s (1997) hypothesis that formal distinctness (i.e. nominative vs. accusative) entails interpretive distinctness (i.e. obviation). Our proposal makes the next prediction: if the embedded subject cannot receive structural Case from matrix v*-T_0, then correference with the matrix subject should in principle be possible: (6), which contains the quirky subject a él (Eng. to him), shows that the prediction is borne out.

4. DEFECTIVE HEADS AND OBLIQUE ELEMENTS: For the punch line, we want to show some evidence that reinforces the defective status of subjunctive C. In Uriagereka (2006), it is pointed out that subjunctive dependents trigger BE selection in Basque matrix clauses, contrary to indicative dependents, which activate the regular Case system of the matrix v*-T_0 complex (see 7, and note that the upstairs verb is always transitive, but the auxiliary behaves as if it was not in the case of subjunctive C). From this, we conclude that Basque reveals the true nature of subjunctive C: it is a defective C that has a morphological impact (manifested through auxiliary selection) on matrix v*. To round up the argument, we want to argue that the unaccusativization process witnessed in (7a) is due to the presence of the locative morpheme –n, which we take to be related to the processes studied by Torrego (1989); as this author first noted, transitive verbs such as Spanish trabajar (Eng. work) can syntactically become unaccusative if a locative element (aquí, in 8) is added. That the presence of a locative element truly unaccusativizes the v^P is shown by the Catalan example in (9b), which licenses the partitive clitic en/ne.

Leaving aside a more fine-grained analysis of this process, what the Basque data below indicate is that locative elements somehow have the same effect that passive morphology has. We want to push this idea, and argue for there being a (locative) P element in subjunctive C that, in a sense, turns the clause into a ‘giant participle,’ de-activating the otherwise expected morphological properties of the C-T complex.

5. CONCLUSION: This paper argues that, together with the v_{comp}/v_{def} distinction, there is a C_{comp}/C_{def} one. The new phase head, C_{def} has been argued to be present not only in regular raising/ECM cases, but more importantly in Romance subjunctives, for which --as we have seen-- there is morphological evidence. Following Pesetsky & Torrego (2007), we argue that defectivity is to be understood as lack of some value, and take C_{def} to have its tense and Case features valued by a higher element/Probe. If the analysis is correct, the tense sequence (see 3) and long-distance obviation (see 7) effects witnessed follow from the analysis just outlined with no further ado. Finally, we have capitalized on evidence from Basque showing that subjunctive spells-out a locative/P morpheme in C, which we take to be akin to passive (participial) morphology. It is tempting to relate this locative morpheme to Collins’ (2005) idea that by (again, a P morpheme) is the spell-out of v_{def}. If the parallelism turns out to be tenable, it allows us to investigate the hypothesis that defectivity boils down to a process whereby a given head manifests itself in an oblique fashion, preventing some property to show up: the external argument and accusative case in v_{def}, the event time argument (in the sense of Zagona 1990 and Stowell 1993) and nominative Case in C_{def}. 


Defective C

(1) Alonso quiere [CP que el R28 sea más rápido] (Spanish)
   Alonso want3SG that the R28 be more fast
   ‘Alonso wants the R28 to be faster’

(2) X is defective if:
   a. X is absent
   b. X lacks some feature
   c. A feature F (of X) lacks a value

(3) a. Platón dice [que Aristóteles {lee/leía/leerá} a Sócrates] Indicative (Spanish)
   Plato say3SG that Aristotle read{PRES/PST/FUT}-IND-3.SG to Socrates
   ‘Plato says that Aristotle {reads/read/will read} Socrates’
   b. Platón quiere [que Aristóteles {lea/*leyera/*leyere} a Sócrates] Subjunctive (Spanish)
   Plato want3SG that Aristotle read{PRES/PST/FUT}-SUBJ-3.SG to Socrates
   ‘Plato wants Aristotle to read Socrates’

(4) C\textsubscript{def} = C [\sqrt{\varphi}] [\textt{tense}] [\textt{Case}] (where \textt{t} = unvalued)

(5) a. I believe John, [C [T to [t, be the most intelligent ] ] ]
   I believe1SG Jean be\textt{INF} the more intelligent of all
   ‘I believe Jean to be the most intelligent of all’
   b. *Je crois [Jean, être [t, le plus intelligent de tous ] ] (French)

(6) a. *Juan querría [C que él admire el cine de Tarantino]
   Juan want\textt{COND.3SG} that he\textt{SUBJ.3SG} admire the cinema of Tarantino
   ‘Juan would like that him admire Tarantino’s cinema’
   b. Juan querría [C que a él le gustase el cine de Tarantino]
   Juan want\textt{COND.3SG} that to him\textt{CL-him like} the cinema of Tarantino
   ‘Juan would like for him to admire Tarantino’s cinema’

(7) a. Jon [Mirenek pisua gal zezan C] saiatu zen. (Basque)
   Jon\textt{ABS} Miren\textt{ERG} weight\textt{ABS} lose have\textt{SUBJ.LOC} try\textt{PART} 3.BE
   ‘Jon tried that Miren lose weight’
   b. Jonek [Miren polita dela C] pentsatzen du. (Basque)
   Jon\textt{ERG} Miren\textt{ABS} pretty be-C\textt{SUBJ.3} think\textt{PART} 3.HAVE.3
   ‘Jon thinks that Miren is pretty’

(8) Aquí trabajan niños. (Spanish)
   here work3PL children
   ‘There are children working (here)’

(9) a. En aquest lloc, hi treballen molts nens. (Catalan)
   in this place, CL\textt{LOC} work\textt{PPL} many children
   ‘There are many children working in this place’
   b. N’ hi treballen molts. (Catalan)
   ‘Many of them work here’

REFERENCES
Kayne, R. 1984. Connectedness and Binary Branching, Dordrecht: Foris