The Complexity of Clauses Comes from Within

This paper argues for the thesis that the syntactic complexity of an embedded clause is directly mapped from its information structural import, so that information structure can be read off the phrase itself without reference to external factors (such as the selecting verb, or the position occupied by the clause itself). In particular, we argue against approaches making reference to ‘factivity’ in analyses of the internal structure of embedded clauses. Since Kiparsky & Kiparsky 1971, verb classes have been exploited to explain the syntactic and semantic behavior of embedding constructions. While the classic Kiparskian stance is that factives embed a CP headed by a nominal, several recent works have argued that it is non-factive complement clauses that have a more elaborate left periphery (McCloskey 2005; Haegeman 2006; etc.). Our claims, in contrast, are: (Ia) Clauses do in fact come in two varieties: referential CPs denote a proposition that is already present in the context, while non-referential cPs ([cP][CP]) participate in predication by adding a new proposition. (Ib) All syntactic, semantic and prosodic effects traditionally associated with factivity are observed in non-factive contexts as well in case the embedded proposition is present in the context. (II) Since CPs are taken to be core propositions, we expect them to encode all truth-conditionally relevant relations (e.g. contrastive focus) internally, and show similarities to referring expressions externally. (III) Once ‘factivity’ is abandoned as the motivation for the syntactic contrasts holding between different embedded clauses, there remains no reason to expect contrasts of this kind to be limited to the CP domain; phrases used predicatively and phrases used referentially should be distinguishable via local inspection in general. Our analysis substantiates the above claims.

The program of eliminating factivity from syntax has the consequence that well-documented phenomena like factive islands, or the unavailability of long-distance NPI-licensing (among other related effects) will require alternative explanations. Factive islands (shown to be universal by Szabolcsi & Zwarts 1993) are argued to be a subcase of the more general requirement that only referential expressions may be extracted through Spec,CP. In Hungarian, for one, both factive and non-factive embedded clauses disallow the extraction of a non-referential wh-phrase (1a). This is because a non-factive verb like think is compatible with either CP (which is a weak island, cf. (1a)) or cP – but in this language (unlike in English) cP is not an escape route for non-referential wh-phrases, but is filled by a wh-expletive, so when cP is present, it is the wh-expletive that ends up raising to take matrix scope. (Examples (1c-d) show that long-distance wh-extraction and the wh-expletive construction contrast in terms of information structure – the former involves a contextually given CP, from which a specific wh-phrase is able to extract. Meanwhile, extraction out of novel complement cP – evidenced by the out-of-the-blue interpretation on the question - is blocked by the wh-expletive.) In English, meanwhile, information focus on the matrix verb (which demotes the embedded clause in the information hierarchy) also assimilates the construction to factive embedding (the example shows the unavailability of long-distance NPI licensing, see (2)).

Our approach takes CPs to be expressions referring to propositions in the context. Examples (3) illustrate some of our evidence that only clauses classified as CPs (rather than cPs) can be used referentially (they can be topicalized; associated with a referential pronoun like ‘it’) evidenced by, for one, the unavailability of negative preposing normally only allowed in a cP (3d). Further, CPs (but not cPs) can be contrastively focused – via it-clefts in English, for example, or via a scope marker in Hungarian (4). Interestingly, contrastive focusing of the embedded clause opens up focus positions inside the clause that are otherwise unavailable (cf. 4-5). In particular, this focus position in Hungarian appears to the left of a sentence adverb, see (4), and the element in this position must receive a wide-scope interpretation. We examine these constructions thoroughly and show that the information structural import of the CP (in this case, contrastive focus) once again determines its structure and extraction possibilities in a local way.

Finally, we sketch an analogous approach to other categories. In particular, other types of clauses (e.g. relative clauses – temporal vs. causal) and non-clausal categories (e.g. predicative vs. attributive APs) are discussed (the latter based primarily on Hungarian predicate fronting data) to show that the presence of a functional shell can be exploited to account for internal movement possibilities. In Hungarian, cPs form a complex predicate with the matrix verb via a clausal expletive generated in cP (azt ‘Dem-Acc’; cf. (1d)) which is mirrored by the way other predicative elements – crucially, only ones embedded in a predicative functional shell - participate in complex predicate formation.
Hungarian – extraction of a non-specific WH is out with either verb class:

(a) *Hogyan gondolod / sajnáld, hogy Péter viselkedett t?

   how you-think / you-resent CPeter behaved

(b) Mit, gondolsz / *sajnálsz, t, hogy hogyan viselkedett Péter?

   What-Acc you-think / you-regret Comp how behaved Peter
   ‘How do you think/*regret Peter behaved?’

LD-extraction (CP) vs. WH-expletive construction (cP) for a specific WH:

(c) Kivel gondolod hogy találkoztam t?

   who-with you-think C I-met
   “Who do you think I met?” (possible context: you accuse me of meeting someone)

(d) Mit, gondolsz, t, (hogy) kivel találkoztam?

   what-ACC you-think C who-with I-met
   “Guess who I ran into yesterday?” (out of the blue context)

cP in Hungarian:

(e) Péter azt mondta, hogy itt volt.

   Peter Dem-Acc said C here was
   ‘Peter said he was here.’

Long-distance NPI-licensing:

(a) I don’t believe/*regret that Jim smokes anymore.

   (only with a non-factive)

(b) *I don’t BELIEVE that Jim smokes anymore!

   (‘reacting’ believe)

Referential uses of CPs

(a) Hogy elkéstem, sajnálam. / *azt hiszem.

   Comp I-was-late I-regret / I-think
   ‘That I was late, I regret. / * I think.’

(b) It’s [that John is not coming] that I regret / *that I think.

   Cf. ?It’s [that John is not coming] that I said. – when a set of alternative propositions is present in the context

(c) I regret it / *think it [that…]

   Cf. ?I believe it [that…] – only when the complement clause is contextually present

(d) *It’s [that never in his life has he been so happy] that Bill regrets/said.

(4)

(Csak) AZT sajnálam, hogy JÁNOSSAL (végül) MARI táncolt.

   only Dem-ACC I-regret Comp John-Instr finally Mary danced
   ‘It’s only for JOHN that I am sorry that it was Mary who danced with him in the end.’

   (cf. * JÁNOSSAL (végül) MARI táncolt. – ungrammatical as a matrix clause because normally only one focus position is available before the verb)

(5)

(a) It’s (only) [that JOHN didn’t come to the party] that I resent.

   (b) I (only) resent [that JOHN didn’t come to the party].

   ‘There were a number of people who didn’t come; of these I only resent John’s absence.’

   (cf. narrow scope focus on ‘JOHN’ is unavailable: ??I resent that JOHN didn’t come to the party. meaning that – of the relevant set – John was the only one who didn’t come)

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