Some island properties of indirect objects

Recently a lot of attention has been devoted to accounting for subject islands, e.g. that-trace effects and sub-extraction data (e.g. Rizzi & Shlonsky 2007, Roussou 2007, Boeckx 2008). However, relatively little ink has been spent on objects and their island properties, in particular indirect objects. Several important works have recently appeared which have refined and vastly improved our understanding of the syntax of indirect objects/applicatives (cf. McGinnis 2001, Pylkkänen 2002, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Jeong 2007; the term will be used interchangeably). However, none of these discuss how to deal with islands related to these structures. The goal of this paper is to provide an account of the English data shown in (1) and (2). The data show that extraction of the entire indirect object is not possible in English whereas extraction is possible when the indirect object is a PP.

The literature on indirect objects/applicatives converge on there being two kinds of applicatives, which is commonly called a high and a low applicative. English is representative of the latter (3) whereas Chaga is representative of the former (4). The (b)-examples show the semantics. The phrase structures are given in (5) (cf. Pylkkänen 2002). The phrase structural difference in height has been argued to derive the distinction between symmetric and asymmetric applicatives (McGinnis 2001, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Jeong 2007). In symmetric applicatives either the applied object or the direct object can raise (6), whereas in asymmetric applicatives only the applied object can raise (7). My point of departure will be the phrase structures in (5), and the question is then how we are to account for the ungrammaticality of (1).

I suggest that a natural account emerges when taking the general proposal in Boeckx (2008) into account. Boeckx suggests that when an item enters a checking domain, the element cannot be remerged further (cf. the Principle of Unambiguous Chain in Boeckx 2003; see also Richards 2001). A checking domain looks like (8), and Boeckx argues that the domain is unambiguous because it identifies a checking relation tied to movement, which commonly is difficult to identify because Agree (feature checking at a distance) and non-feature-driven movement (movement to intermediate landing sites) exist. Movement is necessary because if an element with an identical feature is not remerged in “__”, there will be an intervention effect because of H$_2$ (as H$_1$, H$_2$ and this element would stand in an asymmetric relation and share a feature). Consequently, an element remerged in a configuration like (8) cannot be remerged further.

Boeckx’ theory suggests, then, that when an item enters a checking domain, it becomes frozen. Thus is natural to conclude that the indirect object in (1) is frozen and is not able to A-bar move. Jeong (2007) argues that Case is an important ingredient in explaining various properties of high and low indirect objects, and I would like to follow this insight. A natural way to account for (1) is to argue that English indirect objects need to check a structural Case feature. This is in effect the suggestion by Baker (1997), and it has also been suggested in the literature following Baker. Baker himself suggests an AspP merged below vP, which is compatible with the theory advocated here. When the indirect object is remerged in SpecAspP (which on my approach is a checking domain), the indirect object is unable to remerge; hence the ungrammaticality of (1). The crucial difference between my proposal and Baker’s is that I am not assuming that there is a dative transformation; for convincing arguments that this is an empirically well-established assumption, see Oehrle (1976) and Harley (2002), among many others. As for the grammaticality of (2), this follows from the fact that who does not enter a checking domain. Thus who can move freely.

The account of the English data predicts that there are languages where the indirect object does not enter into a checking domain by virtue of having inherent Case. On the usual and uncontroversial assumption that Norwegian indirect objects have inherent Case, Norwegian is one such language. As the data in (9) illustrate, the prediction is indeed confirmed. Inherently Case-marked items do not freeze when they move, and they are able to move freely as units. However, inherent Case typically renders the internal structure of the item opaque (see Řezáč 2008 for convincing discussion from a minimalist perspective).

In sum, I argue that Jeong (2007) indeed is right in arguing that Case is more important than e.g. Anagnostopoulou (2003) has argued. Whether a language has structural or inherent Case is crucial as to whether indirect objects are allowed to A-bar move or not. This is a natural point of variation as it means that the variation is confined to the lexicon, thus there is no need for a syntactic parameter of the sort suggested by Anagnostopoulou (2003).
Examples

(1) Who did Mary give a book?

(2) Who did Mary say that she sent a present to?

(3) a. John sent Mary a book.
   b. John sent a book and Mary got it.

(4) a. N-ä-i-lyi-i-ä m-kà k-élyá (Chaga)
   FOC-1SUB-PR-eat-APPL-FV 1-wife 7-food
   ‘He is eating food for his wife.’

   b. He is eating food and it (i.e., eating food) was for his wife.

(5) a. [vP [[^Appl HAppl [vP V DO]]]]
   high applicative

   b. [vP [vP V [LAppl LAppl DO]]]
   low applicative

(6) a. N-ä-i-lyi-i-ä m-kà k-élyá. (Chaga)
   FOC-1SUB-PR-eat-APPL-FV 1-wife 7-food
   ‘He is eating food for his wife.’

   b. K-ely k-i-lyi-o m-ka t.
   7-food 7SUB-PR-eat-APPL-PASS 1-wife
   ‘The food is being eaten for the wife.’

   c. M-ka n-a-i-lyi-i-o t k-elya.
   1-wife FOC-1SUB-PR-eat-APPL-PASS 7-food
   ‘The wife is having the food eaten for her.’

(7) a. John baked Bill a cake.
   b. Bill was baked t a cake.
   c. *A cake was baked Bill t.

(8) checking domain

\[ [H_1^{o\rightarrow F}] \underline{[H_2^{o\rightarrow F}]^{\uparrow}]} \]

checking site

(9) Hvem gav Marie en bok?
who gave Mary a book

References


