

Subject as a Probe

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1. Relativized Probing

Probe and *goal* are relative notions: when α and β have some matching feature, the c-commanding one is the probe and the c-commanded one is the goal. This is explicitly stated in Chomsky (2000, 2004, 2008) when he explains how expletive *there* and T undergo Agree. When generated in SPEC of finite T, the expletive (D) probes its c-commanding domain T' and finds T as a goal. When it moves successive-cyclically, higher T is the probe for the expletive. "Apparent Spec-H relations are in reality head-head relations involving minimal search (local c-command)" (Chomsky (2004: 113)).

I suggest that all subjects in SPEC-T be the probe for T at the phase level. It is a necessary consequence of recent minimalist assumptions. Consider (1):

- (1) a. [_{TP} T [_{v*P} John v*-buy [_{VP} t_V a book]]]]
b. [_{CP} C [_{TP} John T [_{v*P} t_{John} v*-buy [_{VP} t_V a book]]]]]

When the derivation has reached the stage (1a), T (probe) and *John* (goal) match but feature valuation must wait until the phase level (Chomsky (2007, 2008)). T searches for a matching goal again at the phase level (1b). But the search fails since traces are invisible (Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2008)). For feature valuation, then, *John* in SPEC-T must be the probe for T.

An apparent problem arises when the subject is complex. Take *The boy bought a book* for example. Since neither D (*the*) nor T c-commands the other, Agree cannot be established between them. But there is a way out of this problem:

- (2) Transfer applies to DP when it is moved to SPEC-T.

By the application of Transfer, the internal structure of the DP is made invisible. But the label D cannot be made invisible since it would tamper with the Merge relation between D(P) and T(P) (cf. Chomsky (2000: 136)). Since a label "is always a head" (Chomsky (2004: 109)), the transferred DP becomes identical with D. Hence the label D (*the*) can probe T' and find T.

If this is correct, then, D (the label of transferred DP) is the probe when DP moves to SPEC-T, but T is the probe when DP remains in v(*)P. Given this analysis, a variety of syntactic facts are given a simple, unified account.

2. Number Paradox

- (3) a. A man and a woman {are/*is} in the house.
b. There {is/*are} a man and a woman in the house. (Bošković (1997: 87))

The verb agrees only with the first conjunct when the conjoined phrase remains in vP. The relativized probing analysis explains this fact as follows, adopting Bošković's (1997) BP (Boolean phrase) assumption. B takes two conjuncts and somehow adds up them. Each conjunct may bear a [Singular (Sg)]-feature but the BP bears a [Sg+Sg=Plural (Pl)]-feature. If the BP remains in vP, T finds the head of the first conjunct (D) as the closest goal. (T cannot see [Pl] since it is held by a *phrase*.) On the other hand, if the BP moves to SPEC-T, it undergoes Transfer and the label B involving [Pl] becomes the probe. The preverbal coordinated subject therefore triggers plural agreement.

3. Person Paradox

(4) a. There {is/*am} only me.

b. There are only us. (Chomsky (2000: 149, note 90))

Baker (2011) observes that in many languages DP triggers person agreement on head X only when it occupies SPEC-X. The relativized probing analysis can account for this fact, given the common assumption that pronouns have a complex structure (Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002), Chomsky (2012)). Based on independent evidence, I suggest that D may bear [Number (Nr), Gender (Gr)] but not [Person (Pn)], which is associated with a lower head. A full ϕ -set is located at the level of DP as a result of feature percolation. When a pronoun DP remains in vP, T can only see and agree with [Nr, Gr] of D. On the other hand, when the pronoun moves to SPEC-T, undergoing Transfer, the label D with a full ϕ -set becomes a probe and triggers full agreement.

4. (The Absence of) Subject Island Effects

In English, PP-extraction is allowed from the object but not from the subject. The asymmetry is explained as follows. An internal argument DP need not undergo Transfer when it moves to the object position (SPEC-V) since it is a *goal* for v^* -V. Therefore PP inside, remaining visible, can be extracted. When DP is an external argument, on the other hand, Transfer applies when it moves to SPEC-T, rendering PP inside invisible. Subject island effects thus result. It will be shown in the presentation that the relativized probing analysis can also account for cases where PP-extraction from the subject is licit: when the subject is an internal argument and when the subject (an external argument) undergoes successive-cyclic A-movement (Chomsky (2008)).

References: Baker, Mark C. (2011) "When Agreement is for Number and Gender but Not Person," *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 29, 875-915./ Bošković, Željko (1997) *The Syntax of Nonfinite Complementation*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA./ Chomsky, Noam (2000)/(2001)/(2004)/(2007)/(2008)/(2012)/ Déchaine, Rose-Marie and Martina Wiltschko (2002) "Decomposing Pronouns," *Linguistic Inquiry* 33, 409-442.