A Purely Mophological Account to Pseudo-Noun Incorporation in Tamil and Beyond

Claim: Many cases of Pseudo-Noun Incorporation can and should be reanalyzed as a purely morphological phenomenon. Alleged syntactic or semantic side-effects of PNI should be treated as epiphenomena which are only indirectly related to the morphological realization of the direct object (DO). Drawing on data from Tamil, I argue that we do not need to complicate the theory of syntatic or semantic selection (as proposed by Massam 2001 or Dayal 2011). Nor do we need complex syntactic machinery (as in Baker 2014) to derive cases of PNI. All we need is a theory of context-sensitive spell-out as in Embick (2010) or Bobaljik (2012). It can be shown that not only is a theory in terms of allomorphy conceptually much simpler but also that it is empirically more adequate. Evidence for this claim comes from coordination and causativization structures.

Background: In many languages, a subset of direct objects (DO) can appear without accusative case. If they do, they obligatorily receive a non-specific indefinite reading as in (1) vs (2) (cf. Lehmann 1989) and take low scope wrt. VP-adverbs, negation, aspect (cf Dayal 2011 on Hindi). Syntactically, these objects must appear adjacent to the verb, i.e. they cannot be scrambled (see (3) vs (4)) or precede VP adverbs. Examples of PNI come from Tamil:

(1) Kumaar [kar-(aik)] keeṭ-ṭ-aan.
kumaar car-ACC ask.PAST-3M.SG
'Kumaar asked for a car.'

(2) Kumaar kar-*(aik) keeṭ-ṭ-aan.
kumaar car-ACC ask.PAST-3SG
'Kumaar asked for the/a certain car.'

(3) paṇat-ai avan keeṭ-ṭ-aan.
money-ACC 3SG ask.PAST-3M.SG
'He asked for (some) money.'

(4) *paṇam avan keeṭ-ṭ-aan.
money.NOM 3SG ask.PAST-SG
'He asked for (some) money.'

This observation has led some to question the mechanism of selection and the syntactic and semantic category of the DO. Massam (2001), Dayal (2011) argue that the DO can either be a DP or an NP. The former is interpreted as an argument of the type (*e*)) whereas the latter is interpreted as a predicate modification of the type (*e,t*). Syntactically, NPs are stipulated to be inaccessible to movement so that the NP must remain close to the verb. While this, of course, is not a minor complication of the theory of selection, θ-assignment, etc., it provides some empirical coverage in languages such as Hindi and Niuean. However, Baker (2014) notes some problems with this account, both conceptually and empirically. Most notably, he shows, that the requirement of caseless objects of DOs to be adjacent to the verb cannot be due to the fact that these objects remain in base position. Even DP-internal material can disrupt the adjacency and cause the ungrammaticality of a caseless object. The requirement is that the head noun of the direct object is adjacent to the verb. Thus, Baker 2014 develops a complex theory according to which the direct object head-adjoins to the verb. This movement can, by stipulation, only be linearized if it is string-vacuous which derives the syntactic immobility and the adjacency requirement. On LF, this incorporated object is then interpreted by means of a specific operation, i.e. complex predicate formation yielding the low interpretation. On PF, a rule deletes the ϕ-features on the head-adjoined DP making it invisible for case assignment.

Proposal: I argue that we do not need specific assumptions about the categorial/featural makeup of DOs in these languages or about the selectional processes; nor do we need complex syntactic machinery á la Baker (2014) to derive the facts. All we need is the impoverishment rule in (5):

(5) [ACC] $\rightarrow \varnothing$ / _V

The logic behind the proposal is this: There is a correlation between caselessness of DOs, their syntactic position and their semantic interpretation. Massam (2001) and Dayal (2011) have taken this to mean that there must be a difference in syntacto-semantic category that is responsible for the movement restrictions, the interpretation and the caselessness. I argue that

we do not need to posit a categorial difference between marked and unmarked objects: Using (5), we can simply say that the low syntactic position is responsible for the caselessness. The case alternation does not lead to differences in syntactic behavior but rather it arises due to context-sensitive realization. There are no syntactic restrictions on nonspecific indefinite objects. They may (but need not) move in the syntax. But if they do, they are no longer verb-adjacent which then bleeds (5). Thus, DOs that have moved (for reasons of scope, scrambling, etc.) must be realized with accusative case. The reverse does not hold. In Tamil, the rule in (5) is optional (cf.(1)), so we find that cased objects can receive a maximally low scope interpretation:

(6) Naan tirumba tirumba pustagatt-e vang-an-een
1SG again again book-ACC buy-PAST-1SG
'I bought book(s) again and again (a different book each time).'

This shows that there is no need for special interpretative operations for unmarked objects. Every reading we can get without accusative marking, we can also get with accusative marking. Thus, we can state that whatever semantic mechanisms derive the low scope interpretation in (6), these mechanisms can also be used for deriving the interpretation of caseless objects.

Further Evidence: The main advantage of this approach is that we can do away with the complex syntactic and semantic machinery to derive many cases of PNI. All we need is the deletion rule in (5) (note that Baker 2014 also assumes an arbitrary ϕ-feature deletion operation). In addition, my approach also fares better empirically: (i) Coordination: It is possible to conjoin a cased and a caseless object if the latter still remains verb-adjacent:

(7) Kumaar [$_{\&P}$ kar-**aiy**-um paṇam-um] keeṭ-ṭ-aan.
kumaar car-ACC-COORD money.NOM-COORD ask.PAST-3M.SG
'Kumaar asked for the car and money.'

To derive (7), Baker (2014) would have to assume head-adjunction out of one conjunct, thereby violating the Coordinate Structure Constraint. Dayal (2011) would have to assume coordination of a DP and an NP, causing a semantic type-mismatch. In my account, (7) falls out as expected. Only the right conjunct is adjacent to the verb and can therefore undergo (5). (ii)Causativization of unaccusatives: The causee is in direct object position and, given a nonspecific indefinite reading as in (8), we would expect it to be unmarked. However, causees can never be unmarked:

(8) Na:n naay-*(e) saag-a vai-t-een
1SG dog-ACC die-INF cause-PAST-1SG
'I caused a dog to die.'

In Baker's system, there is no reason why the presence of a causative verb high in the structure should prevent PNI of the direct object into its verb. In Dayal's approach, it remains unclear why we cannot merge an NP in direct object position if there is some causative head higher up in the structure. In my analysis, (8) follows if we assume a cyclic PF derivation where the rule in (5) applies after spell-out of the vP-phase. Regular accusative assignment can be deleted by (5) at the vP-edge but ACC-assignment by a higher causativizing head comes too late to be deleted. (iii) A third argument can be made on the basis of examples from direct object extraposition.

Extending the Scope: A further argument comes from Turkish: In Turkish, some transitive subjects can undergo PNI as well (Öztürk 2005). Under the syntacto-semantic accounts, this can hardly be accounted for but a morphological analysis can by saying that the rule in (5) applies to structural cases in general. Turkish and Tamil then differ wrt. the locality of the allomorphy. Following Embick 2010, this can be derived as a difference in spell-out domains.

References

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