Explaining matrix/subordinate domain discrepancies

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Emonds 1976, developing Ross 1973, explained discrepancies between matrix and subordinate clauses through a theory of transformations: non-structure-preserving transformations could apply only in root domains. However, with the radical reduction in the expressive power of transformations, that approach soon became impossible. Once transformations were restricted to Move alpha, Affect Something or just Merge, there was nothing to have a rich theory of and one could not distinguish between Subject-Auxiliary Inversion, Preposing Around *Be*, and other such discarded ideas; a new explanation was needed for Emonds' observations.

An alternative is to understand them through a theory of language acquisition, particularly the notion that in the usual explanatory schema of (1), *primary* linguistic data are taken to be data from ambient speech that are robust, available to every child, as most people agree, AND drawn from simple domains. This is the Degree-0 learnability of Lightfoot 1991, 1994, essentially the polar opposite of an Emonds-influenced theory of language acquisition due to Roeper & Weissenborn 1990, that children learn grammatical operations by paying particular attention to *subordinate* clauses.

1. PLD (UG → grammar)

This immediately predicts that no operation can be learned that is instantiated only in embedded domains. An apparent example is the deletion of *ha* in Swedish discussed by Anderson & Dahl 1974. *Ha*, they argued, may optionally be deleted in embedded clauses (2a) but not in matrix clauses (2b). However, a better generalization is that *ha* may be deleted only in its base generated position; this allows deletion in matrix clauses like (2c) and extends beyond Swedish to explain the non-occurrence of (2d) in English. In the full paper I shall consider other cases of operations that appear to be limited to embedded clauses, showing that there are better analyses available.

2.a. … at han (hade) sett henne '… that he had seen her.'

b. Han hade sett henne 'He had seen her.'

c. Allan kanske redan (har) skrivit sin bok 'Allan perhaps already has written his book.'

d. *Who did Jay greet and who Ray treat?

It is also clear that the distinction is not one that applies to matrix and embedded *clauses*, because many operations appear to be sensitive to data from embedded clauses. For example, it is hard to see how children could learn the operation yielding Exceptional Case Marking structures (*John expected her to win*) without access to embedded clauses, or the operation yielding deleted complementizers in

some languages (*John expected she would win*). The relevant structure seems to be the binding Domain; Lightfoot 1999 argues that children's grammars are influenced by data from unembedded binding Domains, not unembedded clauses. Therefore, the search for the "clause types" in which MCP are found is misconceived.

This approach explains some of Emonds' observations but not others. The problem is now re-formulated: if all operations can be learned only from unembedded binding Domains, then the explanatory challenge is one of showing why certain operations do not show up in embedded Domains.

That problem is not as extensive as Emonds suggested. Phenomena generated by some of his "root transformations" occur readily in embedded clauses, e.g. Adverb Preposing, Topicalization, VP Preposing, Right and Left Dislocation, Preposing Around *Be*, and even Tag Questions.

Emonds' "Verb Placement in German" involves claiming that verbs are first merged in VP-final position and are copied into a fronted position in unembedded Domains. From den Besten 1983, the verb movement operation has been treated as structure preserving and therefore would no longer be open to Emonds' analysis as a root transformation. It will be shown how the initial position of verbs can be learned by Degree-0 children, also the copying operation, and crucially the fact that the copying may not occur in embedded Domains. The failure to move in embedded Domains is a function of no operation deleting complementizers like *dass*, which would free the C position to probe the fronted verb. That involves a new analysis of "that-trace" phenomena and re-analyzing material in Julien 2008 and Haegeman 2010.

All this suggests reversing the Penthouse Principle: everything happens upstairs but some things do not happen downstairs, because syntactic enabling conditions are not met.

References

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