Notes on the Infinitival Complement of *try*-type Verbs

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Abstract

PRO is in complementary distribution with lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs in Standard English. However, lexical subjects are allowed in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs in varieties of English. The analyses based on the current Case-theory, based on a PP approach or a Minimalist approach, contribute to the attempt to characterize the syntactic properties of the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs, but provide no empirically adequate explanation for the cross-linguistic variation. The cross-linguistic variation is closely related to the properties of the C-system in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs, not to the Case-system concerning PRO and lexical subjects in the complement. More precisely, it is ascribed to the choice of deleting the uT feature and its EPP property on C.

Keywords: *try*-type verbs, PRO, lexical subject, EPP property, T-to-C movement

1. Introduction

Distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in infinitival clauses has been the major focus of interest throughout the history of generative grammar. PRO is in complementary distribution with lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs as in (1).

(1) a. John tried [PRO to solve the problem].
b. *John tried [her to solve the problem].

With respect to this complementary distribution, there are at least two well-established claims based on the framework of the Principles-and-Parameters Theory and the Minimalist Program. The first claim is that the complementary distribution can be reduced to the PRO Theorem, which capitalizes on the notion of government (see Chomsky (1981)). The second claim emerged with the advent of the Minimalist Program that PRO would carry a special Case (i.e. null Case) and it can be checked by the infinitival head, while lexical subjects need check other types of Case (contra Bouchard's (1984) claim that PRO is in complementary distribution with lexical subjects because PRO is Case resistant but lexical subjects need be assigned a Case).

This paper examines the syntactic properties of the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs and aims to show that the empirical claims in the literature are not sufficient to cover the distributional properties of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement by virtue of the fact that PRO is not in complementary distribution with lexical subjects in the infinitival complement in varieties of English. This paper also focuses on this fact and argues that the cross-linguistic variation of the distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement is explained as a consequence of the choice of deleting an uninterpretable feature on C and its EPP property in the infinitival complement.

2. The Previous Analyses

Let us begin a review of the previous analyses on the distributional properties of PRO and lexical subjects in infinitival clauses. According to the framework of the

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Principles-and-Parameters Theory, when a matrix verb takes an infinitival complement and PRO occupies the subject position of the complement, the PRO theorem requires PRO to be ungoverned. Since the subject position is ungoverned and thus not Case-marked, it cannot allow lexical subjects, which are considered to occur only in governed positions. However, the advent of the Minimalist Program dispensed with the notion of government because of the fact that government is a rather heterogeneous and arbitrary notion. A number of phenomena that had previously been defined in terms of government are characterized separately from it. Thus the distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in infinitival clauses can be accounted for without making recourse to the PRO Theorem.

Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) note that PRO must undergo NP-movement from non-Case positions and is not allowed to undergo NP-movement from Case positions even to escape government, as shown in (2), and propose that PRO is always Case-marked like all other argument NPs and is marked especially for null Case, which is checked by *to* filled in the infinitival head of IP (TP in current usage) via Spec-head agreement (see also Chomsky (1995)).

(2) a. We never expected [PRO to be found t].
b. *It is unfair [PRO to talk about t].

Unlike (2a), (2b) is ruled out by the Last Resort Condition, since PRO undergoes movement from Case to Case positions.

Based on the analysis of Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) and the disparity between ECM verbs' complements and control verbs' complements, Bošković (1997) accounts for the complementary distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs. ECM infinitives disallow PRO in their subject position, which is attributed to the Tense value of them. Control infinitives specify a time frame that is unrealized with respect to the Tense of the matrix clause (i.e. possible future) as in *John tried to climb the mountain*; whereas ECM infinitives have no independent Tense value and thus their time frame is determined by the Tense of the higher clause (see Stowell (1982)). According to Bošković, the null Case of PRO is checked under Spec-head agreement with [+Tense, -finite] head. Examples such as (3a) are ruled out because the infinitival complement of ECM verbs is specified as [-Tense] and the null Case which PRO is marked for remains unchecked.

(3) a. *John believes [PRO to be intelligent].
b. John tried [PRO to kiss Mary].

In (3b), on the other hand, the infinitival head is marked as [+Tense] and thus can Case-check PRO.

Lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs are not allowed and cannot be passivized unlike exceptionally Case-marked NPs. Bošković (1997) assumes that lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of control verbs as well as exceptionally Case-marked NPs are Case-checked after undergoing object shift into the Spec-AgroP of the superordinate clause as in (4a) and (4d).[1]

(4) a. John believed$_i$ [$_{AgroP}$ him$_j$ t$_i$ [$_{IP}$ t$_j$ to be crazy]]
b. Johni was believed [$_{IP}$ t$_i$ to be crazy]
c. *Johni was tried [$_{IP}$ t$_i$ to win]
d. *John tried$_i$ [$_{AgroP}$ him$_j$ t$_i$ [$_{IP}$ t$_j$ to win]]

The subject position of the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs, which contains a [+Tense] head, is a Case-checking position. (4c) and (4d) are ruled out by the Last Resort Condition, which prohibits movement from Case-checking to Case-checking positions. The Last Resort Condition, on the other hand, is not violated in (4a-b), where the head of the infinitival clause is specified as [-Tense] and its Spec position is not a Case-checking position. Thus (4a) and (4b) are ruled in.

Martin (2001), based on the temporal properties of the infinitival complement of control verbs and the null Case hypothesis, also argues the distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs. He suggests that lexical subjects have ϕ-features but PRO does not. Since PRO need not enter a ϕ-feature-checking relation, it suffices to check null Case with the infinitival head bearing [+Tense] feature. Lexical subjects, on the other hand, have ϕ-features and thus need enter a ϕ-feature-checking relation. However, the infinitival head lacks ϕ-features, predicting the impossibility of lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs.

3. Lexical Subject

We have reviewed the previous analyses on the distributional properties of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs. A closer examina-

tion, based on a computer search, however, shows that the claims in the literature are not well-supported. The restriction on the subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs discussed above is not so strong as previously posited in that there are attested examples where PRO is not in complementary distribution with lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*. Varieties of English allow lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try*.

(5) a. Lord George Cavendish tried Godolphin to be a good horse.
(J. Kent, Racing *Life Ld. G. Cavendish Bentinck* 47, *OED* 2nd. ed. CD-ROM)
b. The story is good but it has his details that any secret agent would never do, for example to trust blindly Asta and try her to be against her step father.
(Customer Reviews of *On Dangerous Ground* by Jack Higgins, Amazon.com 〈http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/〉)

In varieties of English, a lexical NP can be realized in the form of reflexive in the subject position of the infinitival complement of *try* in place of an obligatorily controlled PRO.

(6) a. "I try myself to go move it back or over whatever is necessary so it won't be on city property," said Hartin.
("Political 'signs' of the times," *WALB News,* June 16, 2004 〈http://www.walb.com/global/Story.asp?s=1947258〉)
b. I try myself to make conversation with the English tourists, but fail to get any form of understanding.
("Is there a welcome in NW Wales?" *Wales Home,* BBC Homepage, September 20, 2005 〈http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northwest/yoursay/topics/welshdebate2.shtml〉)
c. He was too poor in spirit ever to try himself to paint one of the big machines which made one a historical painter.
(R.Fry, *Characteristics French Art* iii. 62, *OED* 2nd. ed. CD-ROM)

Another curious feature of the infinitival complement of *try* in varieties of English is that a complementizer *for* precedes a lexical subject. A case in point is Ozark English.

(7) Ozark English
a. I try for John to go.
b. I want for John to go.
(Henry (1995: 101))

As shown above, in varieties of English the complementary distribution of PRO and lexical subjects breaks down with the infinitival complement of *try* and the infinitival complement including a lexical subject can be introduced by a complementizer *for*. This situation parallels quite closely the syntactic properties of the infinitival complement of *want*-type verbs.[2]

(8) a. I want [PRO to work].
b. I want [him to work].
c. I want [for him to work].[3]

The cross-linguistic variation of the distributional properties of the infinitival complement of *try* observed between varieties of English and Standard English (i.e. the surprising symmetry between the infinitival complement of *try* in varieties of English and that of *want*-type verbs) provides the negative view of the restriction on PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try* discussed in the previous analyses. What follows instead provides a unified account of the cross-linguistic variation.

4. T-to-C movement and the EPP Property

We have seen that in contrast to Standard English, lexical subjects are allowed in the infinitival complement of *try* in varieties of English as in the case of *want*-type verbs. This cross-linguistic variation may be attributed to the application of T-to-C movement proposed by Pesetsky and Torrego (2001, 2004). They assume that C in a finite clause bears an uninterpretable T feature (henceforth uT), and a complementizer *that* is not an element of C but an instance of T that moves to C for the purpose of deleting the uT on C. In the case of the null-*that* clauses, the nominal subject bearing uT, but not *that,* moves up to Spec-CP and deletes the uT on C. The following illustrates this mechanism.

(9) a. Mary expects that Sue will buy the book.
b. Mary expects $[_{CP}$ [that]$_j$ +[C, uT] $[_{IP}$ Sue will$_j$ buy the book]].

(10) a. Mary expects Sue will buy the book.
b. Mary expects $[_{CP}$ [Sue, uT]$_j$ +[C, uT] $[_{IP}$ t-$_{Suej}$ will

buy the book]].

The distribution of infinitival clauses parallels quite closely that of finite clauses headed by *that.* Like *that, for* in infinitival clauses is optionally omitted when they appear in an object position and is obligatory when they appear in a subject position.

(11) a. I would prefer [for Sue to buy the book].
b. I would prefer [Sue to buy the book].
c. [For Sue to buy the book] would be preferable.
d. *[Sue to buy the book] would be preferable.

When the subject of an infinitival clause is extracted by *wh*-movement, *for* may not appear (i.e. *for*-trace effect), just as *that* may not appear in comparable finite clauses (i.e. *that*-trace effect).

(12) a. Who$_i$ would you like [t$_i$ to buy the book] ?
b. *Who$_i$ would you like [for t$_i$ to buy the book] ?

Based on these similarities between the distribution of *for* and the distribution of *that,* Pesetsky and Torrego (2001) take C in infinitival clauses to be identical with the C that introduces finite clauses, and suggest that C in infinitival clauses bears uT and its uT can be deleted by movement of T to C or by movement of the subject to Spec-CP which yields the infinitival clauses that lack *for.*[4]

(13) a. ... [$_{CP}$ [$_T$ for] $_j$ +[C, u~~T~~] [$_{IP}$ Sue to$_j$ buy the book]]...
b. ... [$_{CP}$ [Sue, u~~T~~]$_j$ [C, u~~T~~] [$_{IP}$ t-$_{Suej}$ to buy the book]]...

According to Pesetsky and Torrego, if C bears an instance of uT that has the EPP property, it can choose freely between T and its specifier when it looks for a way to delete its uT feature as shown above. If, however, uT on C does not have the EPP property, C will mark uT for deletion by Agree rather than Move. They assume that uT on C does not have the EPP property in the infinitival clauses whose subject is PRO. Since the C in such infinitival clauses bears an instance of uT that lacks the EPP property, it will mark uT for deletion by Agree rather than Move. The absence of T-to-C movement will account for the absence of *for* in the infinitival clauses as follows.

(14) a. Sue would like [PRO to buy the book].
b. *Sue would like [for PRO to buy the book].

With this background, now let us consider the difference between the acceptability judgement in (5)-(7) and Standard English. For those who take lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try* to be acceptable as in (5)-(6), the C bears an instance of uT that has the EPP property, and a lexical subject bearing uT can move up to Spec-CP in order to delete the uT feature on C. This yields the infinitival clauses that lack *for.* For the speakers of Ozark English, as cited in (7), T-to-C movement realized as *for* is chosen in order to delete the uT feature on C as in the case of T-to-C movement in the embedded infinitival clauses as follows.

(15) a. I would prefer [for you to play the guitar].
b. He wants [for me to leave].
c. I hate [for you to work late].

For the speakers of Standard English, on the other hand, the C in the infinitival complement of *try* always bears an instance of uT that lacks the EPP property and thus the C will mark uT for deletion by Agree rather than Move. The uT feature that lacks the EPP property accounts for the absence of *for* in the infinitival complement of *try* and the presence of PRO in its subject position.[5] If our analysis is on the right track, the cross-linguistic variation of the distribution of PRO and lexical subjects in the infinitival complement of *try* can be ascribed to the possibility of the choice of movement which deletes the uT feature and its EPP property on C.

5. Conclusion

Lexical subjects are allowed in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs in varieties of English in marked contrast to Standard English, where only PRO is allowed in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs. The analyses based on the current Case-theory contribute to the attempt to characterize the syntactic properties of the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs, but provide no empirically adequate explanation for the cross-linguistic variation. The cross-linguistic variation is closely related to the properties of the C-system in the infinitival complement of *try*-type verbs. More precisely, it is ascribed to the choice of deleting the uT feature and its EPP property on C.

Notes

1 Much work has argued that ECM is object shift of the lexical subject of infinitive to a specifier position in the higher clause (see also Lasnik and Saito (1991) and Chomsky (1995)). Under the framework of Chomsky (2005), exceptionally Case-marked NPs undergo object

shift into the Spec of VP subordinated by v*P in the higher clause.

2 In varieties of English, a lexical subject can be realized in the form of reflexive in place of PRO in the infinitival complement of *want* as in the case of (6).

(i) a. I assume that most people who go there don't want themselves to appear in the media, even if I faked their names.
("Shopping queen shelves host 'illusion'" *The Japan Times,* Janu-ary 12, 2003 〈http://www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/makeprfy.pl5?fl20030112a3.htm〉)

b. I do not want myself to be defined in any particular way.
("Bollywood's Rai reflects on career," *BBC News (South Asia)*, May 15, 2003 〈http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3029861.stm〉)

3 According to Quirk et al. (1972: 739), this type of infinitival clause occurs in dialectal American English.

4 We assume here that the lexical subject of these infinitival clauses enters a Case-checking relation with the infinitival head I (T). This may be supported by the infinitival head where other languages would show ϕ-feature realization (e.g. Greek) or Case-agreement (e.g. Latin). Although the question of what Case enters a checking relation with the infinitival head requires more theoretical and empirical arguments, I leave it open here.

5 A significant body of work has provided the account of the distribution of PRO, e.g. current favorites such as selectional stipulation (Culicover and Jackendoff (2001)), movement approach (Hornstein (1999)), non-movement approach (Landau (2000, 2003)), and so on. Although no agreement has been reached concerning the proper analysis of the distribution of PRO, we restrict attention to the traditional approach (i.e. non-movement approach) here.

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