Week 10a. VP-internal subjects and ECM

Syntax I

Revisiting VSO order in Irish, yet again

- Recall these examples from Irish:
  - An bhfaca tú an madra?
    Q See you the dog
    ‘Did you see the dog?’
  - Duirt mé gur phóg Máire an lucharachán.
    Said I that kissed Mary the leprechaun
    ‘I said that Mary kissed the leprechaun.’

- VSO order was supposed to be derived by verb movement, but since *an* and *gur* are in C, it must not be movement to C but rather to I.

A VP-internal subject?

- We ended up with a representation like this one, where the subject was in SpecVP rather than in SpecIP.
- That is, the subject appears to be VP-internal in Irish.
- If this is right, there are a couple of things that must be true in Irish under our current approach.

A VP-internal subject?

- First, since all DPs need Case, it must be possible for the subject to get Case in SpecVP in Irish.
- Second, since SpecIP is empty, it must be that the EPP is not active in Irish.
- We need to conclude that these are dimensions along which languages can vary.

A VP-internal subject?

- How does the subject get Case down there in SpecVP?
- For a DP to check Case features, it needs to be close to the “Case assigner” (the head that has the feature to check the DP’s Case feature):
  - in the specifier of that head
    - (e.g., SpecIP)
  - or in the complement
    - (e.g., complement of V).
- Both of these positions that are close to the Case-assigner

A VP-internal subject?

- X can check features with SpecXP.
  - (e.g., I and SpecIP)
- X can check features with its complement
  - (e.g., V and its complement object)
- If the subject in Irish is going to get its Case feature checked, it must also be the case that...
- X can check features of the specifier of its complement
  - (e.g., SpecVP, as shown on the right).
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- So if Case features can only be checked “nearby”, then these three positions count as close enough for Case-feature checking. Relative to a head X, the objects that can check Case-features with X are:
  - Sister
  - Specifier
  - Specifier of sister

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- These three environments
  - Sister
  - Specifier
  - Specifier of sister
- ...are together sometimes called the positions which are governed by the head X.

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- As for what features are checked, let us make these assumptions:
  - The specifier-features of X are checked against DP₁ in its specifier.
  - The complement-features of X are checked against YP in its complement, or, failing that, against DP₂ in the specifier of YP.

A VP-internal subject?

- Back to the question of the VP-internal subject.
  - Since the guiding intuition of our approach has been that languages are fundamentally alike, it is a bit jarring to think that English and Irish could differ in such a deep way as this.

A VP-internal subject?

- However, there is some evidence to support the idea that in English the subject originates in SpecVP too, contrary to what we’ve been assuming—and moves to SpecIP.
  - One of the least complex arguments for this concerns the “floating quantifier” all.
    - All the students will leave.
    - The students will all leave.
    - *The students will leave all.
    - Where can all be found?

Floating quantifiers

- All the students will leave.
- The students will all leave.
- *The students will leave all.
- Let’s suppose that all the students is a unit at underlying structure, which we can write as a “QP” (Quantifier Phrase) headed by all.
- Then, at this point, one of two things can happen—either the QP moves to SpecIP or the DP does.
Floating quantifiers

- All the students will leave.
- The students will all leave.
- *The students will leave all.
- If the QP moves, we get the first sentence above.

Expletive there

- If we hadn’t picked there and put it on the workbench at the outset, the subject would need to raise to satisfy the EPP (and check Case), yielding A student was reading a book.

Expletive there

- Speaking of Case, hold on a second. How did a student get Case checked in There was a student reading a book?
- This is a tricky question. It turns out that there must be some kind of mysterious relationship between there and a student. (The subject DP a student is called the “associate” of the expletive there)
Expletive *there*

- Notice that if the subject DP is plural, we get plural agreement on the auxiliary: *There were students eating a pizza.*
- Somehow the [+Plural] feature of *students* is able to check the [+Plural] feature of *I.*
- The special expletive-associate relationship between *there* and *students* serves as kind of a “feature conduit” such that the features of *student* are passed up to *there* to be checked.

Expletive *there*

- The sentence behaves as if *students* actually had moved up to SpecIP and checked its features there.
- This is actually a part of modern theory that’s a little bit fuzzy. We may return to another way to look at this in a few weeks, but a “feature conduit” is probably the best way to think of this now.

Expletive *there*

- So, to answer the question that got us here: *Students* is a DP and as such has a Case feature that needs to be checked. The Case feature, like the [+Plural] feature, can be checked across the expletive-associate feature conduit. So *Students* checks its Case feature with *I.*
- So, is *students* nominative?

Expletive *there*

- It turns out that it is difficult to tell, because only indefinite DPs are allowed in *there*-constructions, only pronouns show Case, and pronouns are never indefinite.
- If you try hard, you can find evidence that suggests that it isn’t nominative, but rather objective:
  - What do you remember of the scene in your dream?
  - Well, there was either him or me eating a pizza in the corner—that, I remember.
  - Let’s ignore this for now, and just assume that *students* can check its Case feature with *I.*

Expletive *there*

- One last thought about *there*…
  - If *students* is checking its Case feature with *I,* that means that *there* isn’t.
  - That is, *there* doesn’t seem to have a Case feature of its own to check. It’s *there* solely to satisfy the EPP.
  - This gives us way to differentiate expletive *there* from expletive *it.*
  - Neither *it* nor *there* get a [±role], both *it* and *there* satisfy the EPP—but *there* doesn’t have a Case feature, while *it* does.

The VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis

- It seems that we are being led to a view under which the subject *always* starts in SpecVP.
- VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis
  The subject originates in the specifier of VP at DS.
If we suppose that the subject originates in SpecVP, then we can also strengthen our view of where \( q \)-roles can be assigned.

Earlier, we’d supposed that \( q \)-roles can only be assigned within the same clause.

Now, we can in fact go further:

- A predicate can only assign its \( q \)-roles within the maximal projection of that predicate.
- A V can only assign its \( q \)-roles within the VP.

A side note: Adopting this requires a (very) slight tweak in what we consider to be an external \( q \)-role. We can no longer consider it to be a \( q \)-role assigned external to the VP, since there are no longer any such \( q \)-roles. Instead, we say that the external \( q \)-role is the \( q \)-role assigned to SpecVP.

If \( q \)-roles are assigned \textit{that} locally, then we can think of \( q \)-role as happening essentially as part of Merge, effectively just like feature checking.

If V has two \( q \)-roles to assign, it assigns/checks one (the internal \( q \)-role) on the first Merge, and the second one (the external \( q \)-role) in the second.

Small clauses

- I find Bill intolerable.
- I consider Bill incompetent.
- I want Bill off this ship. (Immediately!)

These have a pretty similar meaning as sentences with \textit{to be} inserted after Bill, but yet there’s no \textit{to} and no \textit{be}… there’s no evidence of a IP or a VP in \textit{Bill intolerable}. 

Armed with the VP-internal subject hypothesis, we are also now in a position to understand another type of sentence which we have not thus far considered.

- I find Bill intolerable.
- I consider Bill incompetent.
- I want Bill off this ship. (Immediately!)
Small clauses

- Whoops! Hold on there, slick.
- How did we get Bill in the specifier of intolerable?
- It can’t be done—or, rather, the tree shown there on the right can’t be formed. In that tree, Bill isn’t really in the specifier of AP, it’s a complement, but on the wrong side.

Small clauses

- Even in a small clause, all DPs need to check Case.
- In this sentence I checks nominative Case from the finite main clause I. Where does Bill get Case?

Small clauses

- How do we know that?
  - Bill finds me intolerable.
- Notice that the case of the pronoun which is the subject of the small clause is objective—it is the type of Case assigned by a transitive verb (and not the type of Case assigned by finite I).
  - *Bill finds I intolerable.

Small clauses

- What we need to assume is that Bill moves from its original position in the complement of intolerable into SpecAP.
- Intolerable has a single "participant", a single Q-role to assign, so it goes to Bill on the first Merge.
- So why would Bill move?

Small clauses

- Even in a small clause, all DPs need to check Case.
- In this sentence I checks nominative Case from the finite main clause I. Where does Bill get Case?
- Answer: from the transitive verb find, allowed because Bill is in the its radius of government.

Small clauses

- This kind of situation, where Case is checked in the specifier of the complement, often goes by the name ECM (Exceptional Case Marking).
- There are other common instances of ECM as well, all situations where the subject does not check nominative Case with a finite I.
  - finite = not to. Has tense and agreement features, checks Nom.
For example:
Bill finds me to be intolerable.

For example:
Bill wants for me to eat cake.