Readings for next time:


Comments on Larson (1988)

This is a very famous paper about the double object construction in English (John sent Mary a letter) and how one might derive it using something very much like the passive. The paper is kind of a precursor to a lot of later work, but the relation to the later “Split-VP” hypothesis (with vP and VP separated) should be evident.

p. 340: A discussion of idioms begins here, and the relevant assumption that Larson is making is that if a verb θ-markings an argument, there can be some special non-compositional meaning associated with the verb+argument complex (e.g., kick the bucket). Larson’s defending the idea that the verb+IO forms a unit which is close enough to make an idiom (in dative constructions) while verb+DO does not, and he suggests that in apparent cases of verb+DO “idioms” they are actually just idiosyncratic interpretations of a DP object like the boot in John got the boot, Mary gave Bill the boot.

pp. 342–3: Larson characterizes this as movement of V into an “empty V” position, but it could as easily just be considered to be regular head-movement adjoining send to some abstract verbal head which heads the higher VP. This would then be quite similar to the more recent “Split-VP” structures involving the abstract verbal head v.

p. 350: Even though we aren’t going to read anything by Baker this semester, pay attention to the UTAH defined there. It’s referred to (and assumed) often. The idea is that if John sent Mary a letter and John sent a letter to Mary involve the same θ-roles being assigned to the same arguments, than the position of the arguments at DS must be the same in both examples.

Section 3.3 is not as crucial as the rest of the paper—concentrate more on the nature of the problems that arise for the analysis and less on the speculative solutions proposed.

Comments on Johnson (1991)

This paper is essentially an argument against an approach to Case assignment that says that (in English, at least) Case must be assigned under adjacency. In the process, Johnson argues that the verbs in English actually do move (cf. the widespread belief that while verbs in French move to Infl, English verbs stay put), but they don’t move all that far. Specifically, they move to a low-ish functional projection which Johnson calls “µ”.

Don’t lose sight of the fact that µP is the name used for lack of a better name—there may well be a better name for it, it may have a real role to play in the clause, but what Johnson is concerned about is simply to show that there is some functional projection there with certain properties.

Note: Johnson also proposes that NPs (DPs) in English must move to SpecVP. Although he doesn’t talk about this part really, this of course also interacts with the issue of whether the subject is base-generated inside the VP. In a sense, it doesn’t strictly matter for his point whether the position into which the object moves is SpecVP or the specifier of another functional head between µP and VP, like below. Johnson does discuss the possibility that µ is responsible for assigning accusative Case, and supposes that µ assigns Case under government to SpecVP; but more recent approaches to accusative Case via AgrOP have it assigned in a Spec-head relation instead, which is what led to the tree below. In this tree, the middle projection (“ΩP”) is probably AgrOP, but we still need to retain µP in order to account for the word order (the verb moves all the way up to µP).
p. 588, (27): Note that this tree corresponds to (26b), which is ungrammatical. So (27) is ill-formed. Feel free to draw a star by it.

p. 591, “Gapping” refers to a construction like John bought ice cream, and Mary, coffee, where the verb is “gapped” in the second conjunct.

The appendix is not really crucial to read.

Comments on Bobaljik (1996)

This is a paper about do-support and the participation of the morphophonology in the grammar, from which some consequences about object shift are derived.

There are no particular warnings about this paper—it should all be pretty much followable, even though it does occasionally make reference to ideas from the Minimalist Program.

Stuff for you to do:

• Do the readings.
• Write a short (1–2 page) summary of Larson’s article.

Some points about the write-ups (this one and future one):

• Single-space them, so that you have more room to comment if you wish.
• Email is fine, just get them in by class (need not necessarily be earlier).
• Mention: major points, major arguments.
• Don’t mention: ways of dealing with isolated possible objections / potential counterexamples, picky technical revisions to the theory, (unless they significantly “advance the plot”)
• For one or more major point(s), try to outline at least one argument for it in somewhat more detail—no examples needed, something like: In Icelandic, a shifted object can (under certain circumstances) be seen overtly preceding the subject, which indicates that the base position of the subject must be lower than the derived position of the object—hence, providing damaging evidence against the Split-VP hypothesis.
• If something occurs to you—questions, possible support or possible counterexamples from a language you know—mention those too.

Next time:
Student presentations of Larson (1988), with the discussion of Johnson (1991) and Bobaljik (1996) led by me.