POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS AND MICROPARAMETRIC VARIATION

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The 'pro-drop' parameter is standardly defined as the cluster of the following three properties: a) null subjects, b) postverbal subjects, and c) lack of *that*-t effects (Rizzi 1982). Properties (b) and (c) follow from (a). The 'pro-drop' parameter yields two basic groups of languages: those that do and those that do not allow for null subjects (Greek, Italian vs. English respectively). As it stands this parameter accounts for macrovariation: it yields typological classifications and formally expresses the fact that certain properties seem to go together. However, a closer examination of the data shows that the correlation in (a)-(c) has to be further refined. For example, the distribution and interpretation of postverbal subjects in typical +pro-drop languages like Greek and Italian varies, pointing towards some instances of microparametric variation.

There are (at least) two cases that illustrate the difference between Greek and Italian regarding property (b). First, while Greek permits both VSO and VOS (cf. Philippaki-Warburton 1985, Tsimpli 1995, Alexiadou 1999), as shown in (1a), Italian permits only VOS (cf. Pinto 1997, Belletti 1999), as in (1b) (SVO is permitted in both languages):

(1)   a.   Episkevase (*o Yiannis*) ton ipolojisti mou (*o Yiannis*).
                repaired-3s the John the computer my (the John)
         b.   Ha riparato *(*Gianni*) il mio computer (*Gianni*)
                has repaired   John   the my computer John
                "John has repaired my computer."

Second, in a narrow-focus context (i.e. subject questions) the felicitous answer in Greek yields SV(O), but V(O)S in Italian, as illustrated in (2a) and (2b) respectively:

(2)   *Who called?/ Who fixed my computer?*
         a.   Ha telefonato *Gianni*/ Ha riparato il mio computer *Gianni*.
                has   called   John/   has repaired the my computer John.
         b.   *O Yiannis* tilefonise/ *O Yiannis* episkevase ton ipolojisti mou.
                The John called-3s/ the John repaired-3s the computer my
                "John called / John has repaired my computer."

In (2) the subject is focused and is interpreted as new information (identificational focus). In the relevant context then, new information is represented in the left periphery in Greek and in the right periphery in Italian. This is not surprising as identificational (and contrastive) focus can be syntactically expressed in the C-system in Greek (cf. Agouraki 1990, Tsimpli 1995). In Italian, on the other hand, only contrastive focus can be realized in the C-field (cf. Rizzi 1997). The different orders in (2) then cannot be accounted for independently of the properties that are lexicalized (spelled-out) in C in the two languages.

Belletti (1999) derives VS (in Italian) by movement of the subject (S) to spec,FocusP:

(3)   [… V…[$_{FocusP}$ S Focus [$_{VP}$ t$_S$ t$_V$]]]

In (3) S is licensed by low Focus (and not Case). The ungrammaticality of VSO is due to a Relativized Minimality effect: S in Spec,FocusP blocks movement of the object (O) to a higher functional head, so that the latter fails to be licensed. VOS, on the other hand, although marked can be derived in terms of VO topicalization beyond S. If this is correct, why is VSO grammatical in Greek? Belletti (1999) considers Spanish in this respect and assumes, following Zubizarreta (1998), that S moves to a higher Case position (absent in Italian). The subject trace does not count as in intervener for Minimality, thus O can be licensed. However, if S is already licensed by Focus, why would it move further up to a Case position? At the same time, the motivation for postulating a low FocusP for new information can be problematic (cf. Kiss 1998). New information can be signaled by stress at PF; at LF it can be derived as part of the information packaging of the sentence; in this respect Reinhart (1995) treats focus assignment as

an interface strategy, thus casting doubt on the presence of a (low) FocusP. Dispensing with a low FocusP, we could still maintain that the postverbal subject is in a low functional projection above VP (contra Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2001).

Before we move on to the characterization of this position, let us briefly discuss the notion of 'licensing' of Belletti (1999). In her system, either Case or Focus can license the DP argument. While abstract Case is not well defined in Minimalism, (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001), morphological case has a visible PF-effect. The same holds for Focus (stress). Thus either way, 'licensing' can translate to some form of PF-realization (cf. Roussou 2001). In other words, the DP is 'licensed' by lexicalizing certain features in the clause structure. Notice that in 'pro-drop' languages like Greek and Italian, the nominal features of the subject are already lexicalized once by the agreement affix on V. In the presence of the DP subject, the affix has a doubling effect, while in its absence the affix plays a resumptive role (cf. Tsimpli 1997). A similar situation is attested with object clitics (with or without the object DP). Both Greek and Italian are similar in these respects. This approach is consistent with the idea that parametrization is a function of which features are spelled-out and how (cf. Roberts & Roussou 1999) (a microvariation model).

Given the above assumptions, let us go back to VSO. Recall that in Belletti's (1991) analysis, the problem has to do with the licensing of O. In present terms, O fails to lexicalise some features in the presence of S. In other words, we argue that S and O compete for the same position: once these features have been lexicalized by S, they cannot be further lexicalized by O, yielding ungrammaticality. Given that VSO is possible in Greek, the natural assumption is that S and O do not compete, presumably because they lexicalize different sets of features. In other words, the parameter has to be sought in the feature make-up of DPs. Notice that in Greek, but not in Italian, morphological case (nominative-accusative) is realized on both D and N (*o fititis – ton fititi* vs. *lo scolaro*). Related to this property is the use of 'expletive' determiners with proper names in Greek, unlike Standard Italian (*o Yiannis* vs. *(*il) Gianni*) (cf. Tsimpli & Roussou 1997, Longobardi 1994). Finally, 3rd person accusative clitics in both languages largely coincide with determiners (Italian: *la, lo, li*, add *il* for D / Greek: *ton, tin, to, tous, tis, ta*). In addition to this, Greek has a nominative series form for Ds as already mentioned (*o, i, to, oi, ta)* which has no correlate with a subject clitic series (these features are represented by agreement affixes as in Italian). In Greek therefore S and O functions are morphologically marked (case), while this is not so in Italian. Let us build on the similarity of Ds with clitics, in order to determine the possible positions for S and O. According to Sportiche (1992), Manzini & Savoia (1999) clitics project their own phrases in the clause structure: [CliticP1 – CliticP2], roughly corresponding to case distinctions (e.g. nominative – accusative) (but not only). Manzini & Savoia (2001) further argue that the 'clitic-shell' can repeat itself in the V-, I-, and C-fields: (x – C – x- I – x – V). For our purposes, it is the presence of the 'clitic-shell' above V that matters. Assuming that object clitics in Italian are in the lower CliticP2, and given the similarities with Ds, we argue that full DPs also lexicalise the features of this projection, irrespectively of their function as S or O. In Greek, on the other hand, only accusative Ds coincide with object cltics. On this basis we argue that S occurs in CliticP1, and O in CliticP2. This way we predict VSO in Greek but not in Italian. The advantage of this proposal is that it shows the correlation between clitics, DPs and the inflectional heads that form the clausal structure, without invoking the postulation of additional projections motivated by interpretative requirements only.

On this basis we consider a number of related issues: a) VOS in both languages, by exploiting the higher 'clitic-shells', b) the interaction of clitics with Focus and Topic, c) the data in (2) and the differences between the two languages in relation to the properties of the C-system, d) other possible derivations for VSO (in Spanish and even in Italian), and e) the correlation between syntactic realization and interpretation regarding the subject (+/-referential, generic, etc.), taking into consideration the argument structure of the predicate as well (cf. Pinto 1997).

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