Case As an Irreducible Feature

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Park, Yoen Mee. 2012. Case As an Irreducible Feature. The Journal of Studies in Language 28.1, 73-88. The goal of this paper is to provide some empirical data to reinforce an argument that both the Extended Projection Principle and structural Case are needed as an independent formal feature in the grammar although their formal properties may overlap to a great extent. To lead the argument this paper deals with subject inversion constructions such as expletive constructions, quotative inversion and locative inversion constructions. This paper is solely based on a model of grammar that distinguishes the covert component from the overt component. (Hankyong National University)

Key words: Case, EPP, expletive, quotative inversion, locative inversion

1. Introduction

The study of Case and the distribution of NP in natural languages is one of the areas in which generative syntax has made the most outstanding advancement over previous approaches. At the same time, it is an unavoidable reality that the phenomenon related to Case has been a thorn in the Minimalist program in which all properties of syntactic computation should be understood as arising from either the interaction of independent mental systems or general properties of organic systems (Chomsky 2004). That is, although many attempts have been made to reduce Case to some more general principles, there seems little connection between Case and the principles, not to mention general properties of organic systems.\(^1\)

\(^1\) An early attempt of this sort was presented by Chomsky (1981), developing a suggestion by Aoun (1979). Chomsky speculated that Case is a precondition for an NP to receive an interpretation at LF, which is called the Visibility Hypothesis. Also Pesetsky and Torrego (2001) have suggested that Case is actually the uninterpretable counterpart of some interpretable feature, that is, T(tense).
In particular, there have been many attempts to get rid of Case in the grammar as an independent formal feature, articulating another feature called the Extended Projection Principle (Chomsky 1995, Lasnik (2000), (2001a), (2002)). The EPP is generally assumed to be responsible for externalization of subject argument that is base generated in the VP internal position. In other words, it is the EPP, not Case feature that triggers movement of subject to the Spec of TP. Case is treated as a simple activator for movement rather than a genuine trigger for movement.

This paper deals with constructions where subject is not externalized, that is, stays in its base position. These constructions raise a question as to how the EPP of T can be satisfied given that the subject does not move to the [Spec,TP] to check the EPP feature. They also lead to a question regarding what the syntactic nature of both the EPP and Case are. In other words, are both the EPP and Case needed independently in the grammar, or is the one to be reduced to the other?\textsuperscript{21}

This paper is to reinforce a classical argument that both the EPP and Case have its own syntactic status in the grammar, each bearing different syntactic properties although they share some formal features.\textsuperscript{3} To lead the argument I look into the constructions which involve the non-externalized subject such as there-constructions, quotative inversion constructions, and locative inversion constructions in English.

2. Theoretical Assumptions

This section spells out some basic theoretical assumptions necessary for the proposal to be suggested in this paper. First, the EPP is treated as an uninterpretable categorical D feature such that it is dubbed as a syntactic requirement irreducible to any constraints of logic, discourse or phonology (Chomsky 1995). The EPP defined as such is extended to mean that the EPP is a strong formal feature which triggers overt

\textsuperscript{21} Also there have been attempts to reduce the EPP to some other general properties. Refer to Bošković (2007) and references therein.

\textsuperscript{3} I leave the possibility open that the EPP could be replaced by some other fundamental principles. Just note that the main goal of this paper is to present empirical support for the pertinence of Case in the grammar.