

Suspended obviation and spelled out PRO are two sides of the same coin

The talk claims that the suspension of obviation and the possibility of overt nominative subject in infinitival complements have the same root. My explanation is semantic and it is based on scope-assignment.

Both phenomena occur with verbs like *akar*, allowing an infinitival complement whose subject is an empty PRO controlled by the matrix subject. If the subject of the complement clause is intended to be disjoint from the matrix subject, a finite, subjunctive complement clause is used, whose pronominal subject cannot be interpreted as coreferent with the matrix subject:

- (1) *János_i azt akarja, hogy pro_{*i/k} könyvet írjon.*
John_i that want.Sg3 that pro_{*i/k} book.Acc write.Subj.Sg3
'John wants him/her to write a book.'

However, obviation, i.e., the obligatorily disjoint reference of the embedded pronominal subject and the matrix subject is suspended if the embedded subject needs to occupy a scope position. In other words, a controlled overt pronoun (accompanied by a subjunctive verb) is used instead of a controlled phonologically empty PRO (accompanied by an infinitive).

These are the cases where obviation tends to disappear, i.e. the embedded subject is a spelled out pronoun which can be coreferent with the attitude bearer:

- When the embedded subject is in focus position:

- (2) *János_i azt akarja, hogy ő_{i/k} írjon könyvet.*
John_i that want.Sg3 that pro_{i/k} write.Subj.Sg3 book.Acc
'It is John who wants to write a book.'

- When the embedded subject is a negated focus:

- (3) *János_i azt akarja, hogy ne ő_{i/k} írjon könyvet.*
John_i that want.Sg3 that not pro_{i/k} write.Subj.Sg3 book.Acc
'John doesn't want to write a book.'

- When the embedded subject has a clitic attached to it:

- (4) *János_i azt akarja, hogy ő_{i/k} is könyvet írjon.*
John_i that want.Sg3 that pro_{i/k} too book.Acc write.Subj.Sg3
'John wants to write a book as well.'

The case of overt nominative subjects in the infinitival complements was investigated by Bartos (2006) and Szabolcsi (2009). Observe one of Szabolcsi's (2009) examples:

- (5) *Senki nem akart csak ő leülni.*
nobody not wanted.Sg3 only he/she sit.Inf
'Nobody wanted it to be the case that only he/she takes a seat.'

After analyzing the examples I will show that the same conditions changed the sentences here: a focused, or focused and negated constituent, or a constituent turned into a quantifier by *is* must be overt, i.e. an embedded subject cannot be a PRO if its relative scope must be clearly indicated.

I will argue that this is not a prosodically motivated phenomenon (a negated overt pronoun is unstressed). In Hungarian, scope-bearing elements take scope in surface position, and only overt subjects can be assigned scope.

The overlap of the conditions of the suspension of obviation and the spelling-out of PRO is not complete: this explanation does not give account of the connection between obviation and responsibility relation. Following Farkas (1992), Szabolcsi (2009) claims that

obviation is suspended if the matrix subject does not bear full responsibility for the event in the complement proposition, as in (6).

- (6) *Péter_i azt akarja, hogy pro_{i/k} meg-gyógyuljon.*
Peter_i that want.Sg3 that pro_{i/k} PRT-recover.Subj.Sg3
'Peter wants to be recovering.'

Szabolcsi (2009) attempts to extend this explanation to the infinitival cases, however, I will argue against this proposal, showing that the existence of alternatives introduced by an embedded quantifier does not necessarily suspend the responsibility of the matrix subject for the embedded event, e.g.

- (7) *Nem akart Ő be-futni elsőként a célba.*
Not want.Past.Sg3 he/she PRT-run.Inf at first the finish.
'He/she didn't want to be the first who was reaching the finish.'

Szabolcsi (2009) also analyzes the case of subject-to-subject raising illustrated in (8) as an infinitive with an overt PRO.

- (8) *Idén el-kezdett csak Péter kapni jó szerepeket.*
this.year PRT-begin.Past.Sg3 only Peter get.Inf good role.Pl.Acc
'This year it has begun to be the case that only Peter is getting good roles.'

I argue that constructions like this are cases of nominative with infinitive, where the subject of the infinitive clause is assigned nominative case by the finite matrix verb across the IP boundary of the clausal complement. (This explains why the embedded infinitive can have a lexical subject.) Therefore, I do not assimilate this case to the cases of overt PRO and suspended obviation.

Selected references

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