Subject Islands in Hungarian

Subjects used to be treated as opaque for extraction, hence designated as a strong syntactic island (Ross 1967). According to the Condition on Extraction Domains (CED, Huang 1982) it is impossible to move an item out of subject position, because it is not properly governed by the verbal head in the VP (it occupies a non-complement, Spec position). Stepanov (2007) challenges CED and suggests an eclectic, minimalist approach to the subject island effect based on Chain Uniformity (cf. Takahashi 1994).

The different types of subjects show different properties as regards extraction, not only cross-linguistically but within a given language as well. A possible approach counts the derived position of the subjects. According to VISH (VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis, cf. Koopman & Sportiche 1991), the English subject always moves out of its base position (i.e. *v*P for external and VP for internal subject) to be assigned case in Spec, TP. If this hypothesis is true, then freezing effects occurs and prevents the subject from further extraction. Tackling this effect, Jurka (2010) and Polinsky (2013) investigate languages (e.g. German and Slavic languages) in which the subject can remain in situ but can be extracted as well.

Another possible approach considers the base position of subjects. Chomsky (2008) argues that internal arguments are more permeable than external arguments. This suggests that extraction out of unaccusative and passive subjects and objects should be equally acceptable, as they are internal arguments, while transitive and unergative subjects should be opaque. From a theoretical point of view Chomsky (2008) suggests that A- and Ā-movements operate in parallel and the former do not feed the latter.

As the Hungarian subject also can remain in situ, it could be examined with and without movement. In our experiment we investigated subjects of unaccusative and transitive predicates and objects in pre- and postverbal positions (3×2 experimental design). The 33 native speakers of Hungarian had to judge acceptability of subextraction from the NP in each condition on a 7-point Likert-scale. The non-specific subject NPs were headed by a noun derived from a verb. The complement was subextracted to the superordinate matrix clause. There were 5 different lexicalizations of each condition resulting in 30 target sentences. Target sentences were presented in three different pseudo-randomized orders, together with 60 well- and ill-formed filler sentences, using a Google questionnaire.

Our results show unaccusative advantage and transitivity penalty, similarly to the other investigated languages: the extraction out of the unaccusative subject is less degraded, than out of the transitive subject, although movement out of the object is more acceptable, than out of the unaccusative subject. From the theoretical point of view, this challenges the assumption of Chomsky (2008) because the unaccusative subject and the object are internal arguments, hence it is assumed to be equally acceptable.

A further important result is that there is no significant difference between pre- and postverbal conditions. It means that this type of movement does not show freezing effects. Bearing in mind the former results of other languages it is an unexpected outcome. According to É. Kiss (2002) the Hungarian preverbal subject is in topic position. The lack of freezing effects suggests that the landing site of the Hungarian subjects is probably not in the left periphery – maintaining the cross-linguistic generalization that topic movement, as an Ā-movement, shows freezing effects.

The fact that there is a significant difference between the unaccusative subject and the object – although they are internal arguments and expected equally permeable (Chomsky 2008) and that the unaccusative and the transitive subjects also differ from each other, confirm that the subject island effect cannot be analyzed only in a grammatical framework. As Sprouse (2013) Phillips (2013) and Boeckx (2012) suggest it could be fruitful to take language processing into account resulting in an interface approach to syntactic islands.

Experimental details

1. Pre-verbal, transitive subject, external argument
   Melyik *gyerekről* *szeretnéd,* *hogy* [*némi gondoskodás* __]
   which child$_{\text{DELAT.}}$ want$_{\text{COND-SG2-PRES}}$, that [some care$_{\text{NOM}}$ __]
   megalapozza *a bizalmat?*
   $_{\text{PRE}}$ground$_{\text{SUBJ-SG3}}$ the confidence$_{\text{ACC}}$
   'Which child do you want [some care of __] to inspire confidence?'

2. Pre-verbal, unaccusative subject, internal argument
   Melyik *gyerekről* *szeretnéd,* *hogy* [*némi gondoskodás* __] *fontosnak* *látsszon?*
   which child$_{\text{DELAT.}}$ want$_{\text{COND-SG2-PRES}}$, that [some care$_{\text{NOM}}$ __] important$_{\text{DAT}}$ seem$_{\text{SUBJ-SG3}}$
   'Which child do you want that [some care of __] should seem important?'

3. Pre-verbal object, internal argument
   Melyik *gyerekről* *szeretnéd*, *hogy* [*némi gondoskodást* __]
   Which child$_{\text{DELAT.}}$ want$_{\text{COND-SG2-PRES}}$, that some care$_{\text{ACC}}$
   átvállaljon *az iskola?*
   $_{\text{PRE}}$undertake$_{\text{SUBJ-SG3}}$ the school?
   'Which child do you want the school to take over [some care of __]?'

The repeated measure Friedman ANOVA test shows there is a significant main effect on the means of NPs. (Friedman $\chi^2 = 45.738$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$). According to Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the pairwise comparisons are significant as well: UnS–TrS ($Z = -2.246$, $p < 0.05$), TrO–UnS ($Z = -4{,}862$, $p < 0.001$), TrO–TrS ($Z = -4.937$, $p < 0.001$).

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
TrS	33	3.33	0.93	1.80	5.53
UnS	33	3.74	0.93	2.27	6.00
TrO	33	4.94	0.96	3.13	6.60

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