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Subject-Object binding dependencies in Romance and Germanic

The view from Romanian

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**Introduction**. This paper investigates an interesting contrast between Romance (Romanian, Spanish a.o.) and Germanic languages (English, German a.o.) with respect to the syntax and the binding properties of the direct object (DO). In the English example (1a) the subject *any husband* will bind the possessive within the DO *his wife*, while in (1b) the binding relation between the DO and the possessive now hosted inside the subject DP may no longer be maintained. If we compare the examples in (1) with their Romanian counterparts in (2), an interesting contrast arises: while (2a) patterns with (1a) in allowing the subject *any husband* to bind into the DO *his wife,* (2b) constrasts with (1b) in that the bound interpretation between the two arguments remains possible (Cornilescu et al. 2017). The situation for English is straightforward and follows the principles of Binding Theory: the possessive in (1a) is bound by the c-commanding subject preceding it, while in (1b) the DO may not bind this possessive given that it does not c-command it. What is interesting, however, is the Romanian variant in (2b), given that it seems possible for the possessive to be bound by the DO, even if the latter does not precede it. What makes the situation even more interesting, is that only clitic doubled DOs (CDed DOs) give rise to this inverse binding. An undoubled DO does not allow for such effects: in (3), the only possible interpretation is an unbound one, where the possessive may pick up an antecedent from the larger context but definitely not *any client.*

**Aim**. This paper has a twofold aim: a) to present the results of an experiment on Subject - Object dependecies in Romanian investigating the possibility of the inverse binding in (2b); b) to provide a syntactic account for the experimental results.

**The experiment**.In order to test the observations above, we designed a forced choice experiment investigating the behaviour of unmarked and CDed DOs in binding configurations with the subject. We used 24 experimental items designed as in (4) in three conditions, as in Table 1: (i) *Subject before CDed DO* with the subject binding the DO (as a baseline and a control), (ii) *Subject before DO* with DO binding the subject, and (iii) *Subject before CDed DO* with DO binding the subject. Each item was preceded by a context and then followed by an answer option probing for the bound interpretation between the two arguments. We obtained 72 experimental items (Table 1), which were distributed evenly into 3 lists, using the Latin square method. We also used 12 fillers (ditransitive configurations with binding dependencies between DO and the indirect object), so each list contained 36 items. At least 20 native speakers of Romanian answered each list.

**Results.** Our experiment is still unfolding so we do not yet have a clear perspective on the final results. If the results confirm the claims in the literature for Romanian, and prove that binding of the subject by a CDed DO is possible irrespective of the order between the two arguments, we will have to find an explanation for the fact that the DO may bind into a preceding subject when doubled. In this configuration,it is not apparent from the surface word order that the DO c-commands the Subject so it is not clear how the bound interpretation obtains.

**A tentative account.** If ourhypothesis regarding the possibility of binding between a CDed DO and the Subject in the configuration *Su before DO, DO binds into Su* is confirmed, we would like to posit that this lack of regard for c-command requirements is only apparent. We tentatively propose that CDed DOs leave their merge position inside the VP (López 2012) and reach a landing site wherefrom they may c-command the Subject DP found in its merge position. We think that what triggers movement for CDed DOs is their internal structure: the clitic contributes some feature specification that needs valuation against a higher projection in the tree hence the necessity for these DPs to leave the VP. The parametric difference between Germanic and Romance thus boils down to the internal make-up of DO; Romanian does pattern with the other non-CD languages, which rely on c-command to resolve binding dependencies.

Examples

(1) a. Any responsible husbandi will help his wifei with the household chores.

b. Heri husband will help any wifei with the household chores.

(2) a. Orice soți responsabil o va ajuta pe soția luii la treburile casnice.

Any husbandi responsible her.cl will help DOM wife.the hisi at chores.the household

‘Any responsible husbandi will help hisi wife with the household chores.’

b. Soțul eii o va ajuta pe orice soției la treburile casnice.

Husband.the heri her.cl will help DOM any wifei at chores.the household

‘Lit. Heri husband will help any wifei with the household chores.’

(3) Consilierul săui bancar va sfătui orice clienti în așa fel încât investiția lui

Councillor hisi banking will advise any clienti in such a way that investment his

să aducă profit.

SUBJ bing profit

‘Hisi banking councilor will advise any clienti in such a way that his investment will be profitable.’

(4) Context: In our university the relation between PhD students and supervisors is very close and the supervisors do everything they can to make sure that the PhD students succeed in their work. Consider the sentence below:

Profesorul săui îl ajută pe orice doctorandi cu sfaturi și bibliografie.

Professor.the hisi him.cl helps DOM any PhD student with advice and bibliography

‘Hisi professor helps any PhD studenti with advice and bibliography.’

Given the context, does the sentence above have the following meaning?

Each professor helps his own PhD student.

Circle: YES or NO

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ****All conditions with Su < DO**** | ****Binding direction**** | ****CD of DO**** | Prediction |
| (i) Subject binds CDed DO | Su > Do | + | Good |
| (ii) DO binds Subject | DO > Su | - | Bad |
| (iii) CDed DO binds suject | DO > Su | + | Good |

Table 1 : parameters – word order and binding

References

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