Klaus von Heusinger/Alina Tigău

Subject-Object binding dependencies in Romance and Germanic

The view from Romanian

Keywords: clitic doubling, differential object marking, binding dependencies

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 our hypothesis 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 husband$_i$ will help his wife$_i$ with the household chores.

　b. Her$_i$ husband will help any wife$_i$ with the household chores.

(2) a. Orice soț$_i$ 　　responsabil o 　va 　ajuta pe 　soția 　lui$_i$ la treburile 　casnice.

　　　Any 　husband$_i$ responsible her.cl will help 　DOM wife.the his$_i$ at chores.the household

　　'Any responsible husband$_i$ will help his$_i$ wife with the household chores.'

b. Soțul 　　　ei$_i$ o 　　va ajuta pe 　orice soție$_i$ la treburile 　casnice.

　Husband.the her$_i$ her.cl will help DOM any 　wife$_i$ at chores.the household

　'Lit. Her$_i$ husband will help any wife$_i$ with the household chores.'

(3) Consilierul său$_i$ bancar va sfătui orice client$_i$ în așa fel încât investiția lui

　　Councillor his$_i$ banking will advise any client$_i$ in such a way that investment his

să aducă profit.

SUBJ bing profit

'His$_i$ banking councilor will advise any client$_i$ 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   său$_i$ îl   ajută pe   orice doctorand$_i$ cu sfaturi și bibliografie.

Professor.the his$_i$ him.cl helps DOM any PhD student with advice and bibliography

'His$_i$ professor helps any PhD student$_i$ 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

Cornilescu, Alexandra, Dinu Anca and Tigău Alina. 2017a. Experimental Data on Romanian Double Object Constructions, *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* LXII (2), 157-177.

López, Luis. 2012. *Indefinite Objects. Scrambling, Choice Functions, and Differential Marking.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT.

Contact information

Alina Tigău

University of Bucharest

alina.tigau@lls.unibuc.ro