Parametric Variations in the Licensing of Left Periphery Elements

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This paper argues that languages are parameterized as to whether they employ a local spec-head relation or a long-distance probe-goal relation for determining scope-discourse properties of constituents located in the clausal left periphery. Spec-head agreement originally postulated for implementing subject-verb agreement in TP has been extended to grammatical phenomena in CP (see Rizzi (1991, 1996) for wh-movement; Rizzi (1997) and Puskas (1996) for topicalization and focalization). The central idea is that a phrasal category bearing a feature relevant to scope-discourse semantics is licensed by spec-head agreement with a functional head that carries a matching feature. This approach, called the criterial approach, constitutes the core part of the tenet in the cartographic study of clause structure (see Rizzi (1997) et. seqq., Cinque (1999)). However, by comparing topicalization in Japanese and its English counterpart, this paper demonstrates that some languages makes use of a long-distance probe-goal relation instead of spec-head agreement and that the cross-linguistic variation is ultimately reduced to different machinery each language employs in the labeling of a constituent formed by the merger of two phrases.

Japanese and English exhibit parallel behavior with respect to embedded topicalization. While it takes place in the complement clause of an attitude-denoting predicate, it is impossible in the control clause, as illustrated in (1a, b) and its English translation.

   -Top the ring -Top -Nom buy will C said
   ‘Mary said [ that the ring, John would buy ].’
     -Top -Dat the ring -Top to.buy C asked
   ‘*Mary asked John [ the ring, to buy for her ].’

The parallelism breaks when the topic element construed with the most deeply embedded attitude-denoting clause is positioned in the higher control clause. While long-distance topicalization of this kind is possible in Japanese, it is impossible in English.

(2)  a. Daizin-wa hisyo-ni [ sono kane- wa, kaiken-de
       minister -Top secretary -Dat the money -Top press. conference -at
       [ tuma -ga e i, kanrisuru daroo to ] iu yooni, meizita.
       wife -Nom manage will C to.say C ordered
   b. *The minister ordered his secretary [ the money, to say at the press conference [ that
       his wife would manage e i ]].

(2a) casts doubt on the validity of the criterial approach to Japanese topicalization. The failed topicalization in (1b) suggests the absence of spec-head agreement inside the control clause. By contrast, the legitimate topicalization in (2a) implies the opposite possibility.

In order to solve this quandary, this paper proposes that the topic element is licensed by probe-goal relation with an epistemic modal in Japanese. This proposal reflects the fact that Japanese topicalization occurs only in the clause which is able to contain the modal daroo. Compare (1a) and (3). The relation between the topic and the modal is not symmetric. The modal may occur even without topicalization (see (4)) but not vice versa (see (3)).

(3) Mary-ga John-ni [ sono yubiwa -{o/*wa} kattekureru (daroo) yooni ] tanonda.
   -Nom -Dat the ring -{Acc/ Top} to.buy will C asked
   ‘Mary asked John the ring, to buy for her.’

(4) Kyoo-wa samui ne. Tabun yuki -{ga {*wa}} huru daroo.
   today -Top cold Prt probably snow -Nom | Top fall will
   ‘It’s cold today. It will probably snow.’

Based on these facts, let us suppose that the topic carries an uninterpretable modal feature <uM> and that this feature is checked and valued as a result of Agree with the modal carrying an interpretable feature <iM>. Viewed in this light, topicalization is possible in (2a) even though the topic is merged with the control clause, because the topic enters into Agree with the modal occurring in the clause embedded within the control clause. On the other hand, the ungrammaticality of (2b) indicates that English topicalization is not licensed by long-distance probe-goal relation with the epistemic modal. Instead, the local spec-head agreement within TopP plays a crucial role.
The cross-linguistic variation in question reflects different devices each language employs in the labeling of a syntactic object formed by the merger of two phrases. In English, a topicalized phrase is merged with TopP. This merger leaves the resulting syntactic object unlabeled. Following Chomsky (2013), we assume that the most prominent feature shared by the merged phrasal categories becomes the label. The label of the syntactic object \{DP, TopP\} in (5) is determined by means of the topic-related feature \(<\text{top}>\) shared by DP and TopP. Japanese does not make use of the local spec-head (or feature-sharing) relation in TopP. Instead, the topic element can in principle be merged with any phrasal category so long as it enters into Agree with an epistemic modal. This instance of merger also results in an unlabeled syntactic object. Saito (2016) observes that a case-marked constituent is ignorable in labeling because case morphology makes constituent invisible. His analysis is extendable to topicalization. we argue that the topic particle -wa makes the topicalized constituent invisible for labeling (see (6)).


The proposed analysis has both empirical and theoretical implications. From an empirical point of view, topic licensing in Japanese is seen as part of a broader picture of left-right concord widely observed in the language. For example, similarly to topics, sentential adverbs (S-adverbs) are also required to occur with a particular type of predicate. By contrast, such a constraint is not imposed on English S-adverbs.

(7) a. Dooyara ame-ga yanda \{yooda / *hazuda / *ø\}. apparently rain-Nom stopped \{seem / should\} 'Apparently, it stopped raining.'
   b. Kitto ame-ga yamu \{*yooda / hazuda / *ø\}. certainly rain-Nom stop seem should 'Certainly, it will stop raining.'

(8) a. I thought she had retired, but apparently she hasn’t.
   b. Certainly, the early years are crucial to a child’s development.

The Japanese-English difference here is in parallel with what is observed with topicalization. According to Cinque (1999), an English S-adverb is licensed under the spec-head relation with a functional head that shares the same feature. Since functional projections hosting S-adverbs are aligned in a fixed order as in (9), S-adverbs also follow the same distributional pattern. Thus, an evidential adverb cannot precede an evaluative adverb (see (10)). However, Japanese is free from this restriction (see (11)). Here again, Japanese does not choose a local spec-head relation for the licensing of constituents in the left periphery.

(9) … [Mood_Pevaluative Evaluative … [Mood_Pevidential Evidential … [Mod_Pepistemic Epistemic …

(10) *Seemingly, he has, unbelievably, won the game.

(11) Dooyara John-wa saiwa-nimo siken-ni gookakusita yooda. apparently -Top luckily exam-Dat passed seem ‘Apparently, John seem to have luckily passed the exam.’

In the proposed analysis, Japanese does not use TopP. From a theoretical viewpoint, this leads to the denial of the existence of a universal template for the alignment of functional heads. Instead, it lends support to the approach dubbed “cartography light” by Craenenbroeck (2009). While there is a universal inventory of morphosyntactic features, the number and type of features carried by a single functional head differ from language to language (Rizzi 1996, Giorgi and Pianesi 1997, Bobaljik and Thraínsson 1998, Polletto 2000, etc.).

**Selected References**