

Covert A-Movement: New evidence from the Caucasus

keywords: raising, covert movement

Introduction. This paper explores a case of covert A-movement in Adyghe (Circassian), a Northwest Caucasian language spoken in Russia. We show that in subject-to-subject raising (SSR) constructions, the ‘raised’ subject may appear in the higher or lower clause, with no difference in its syntax or semantics—in both cases, the subject may show ‘high’ behavior. We analyze the construction with the lower subject as involving covert SSR. The existence of covert A-movement has important implications for the analysis of A-movement within a Minimalist Grammar.

Analysis. Adyghe is an ergative SOV language with extensive scrambling. In constructions with SSR predicates like ‘happen’, ‘turn out’, and ‘begin’, the matrix verb agrees with the subject in number and person; however, the subject may appear in either the matrix clause, (1), or the embedded clause, (2). Such verbs are raising verbs because they impose no selectional restrictions on the subject and do not form imperatives.

Evidence for the indicated constituency comes from case morphology, NPI licensing, and scrambling. When the subject is in the absolutive case as is appropriate for the intransitive matrix verb, it is in the matrix clause, (1). When the subject is in the ergative case as is appropriate for the transitive embedded verb, it is in the lower clause, (2). Examples (3) and (4) show that the subject ‘boys’ can only scramble with embedded elements when it is the (ergative) subject of the embedded clause as in (2). We propose that (1) is a canonical instance of SSR in which the embedded clause subject raises overtly into the non-thematic matrix clause subject position. According to our analysis, the same derivation takes place in (2) except that the movement occurs covertly.

We call the two constructions Forward and Backward Raising, respectively, and we analyze the alternation as variation in which copy of the A-chain is pronounced, (5). Specifically, under Backward Raising, the lower copy is pronounced, (5b). Theoretically, such variation in Raising is permitted by Nunes’ (2004) principles of Chain Reduction.

The difference between Forward and Backward Raising is limited to the selective pronunciation of copies, and so the syntax of the two constructions is correctly predicted to be identical because they have the same LF. Agreement on the matrix verb is always triggered by the subject, regardless of its surface position. In addition, we predict that the subject in Backward Raising will show ‘high’ behavior and have a syntactic representation in the matrix clause. Evidence for the unpronounced higher copy in Backward Raising comes from the fact that it can i) license a reflexive in the matrix clause, ii) take scope over matrix adverbials, and iii) take wide scope with respect to matrix negation. For example, (6) shows that in a monoclausal structure, an ergative DP may take wide or narrow scope with respect to clausemate negation. (7) is the corresponding Backward Raising construction in which the ergative DP is in the embedded clause but may still take wide or narrow scope with respect to matrix negation. We conclude that Adyghe provides a compelling case of covert A-movement.

Other cases of covert A-movement have been proposed in the literature, including Greek raising verbs (Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1999), Russian unaccusative verbs with the genitive of negation (Babyonyshev et al. 2001), and Romanian raising verbs (Rivero and Geber 2004). We show that further investigation does not support the other analyses as covert A-movement. In particular, we show that in Greek, the subject does not show ‘high’ behavior. For Russian, we argue that the evidence for covert movement is undermined by additional data and the standard requirement that infinitives have a dative subject (Perlmutter and Moore 2002). Finally, the Romanian pattern follows from the scrambling of the matrix subject to the right, independently attested in this language (Ulrich 1985, Dobrovie-Sorin 1994).

Conclusion. The existence of covert A-movement has important theoretical consequences. First, covert movement cannot be modeled using long-distance Agree alone (as suggested in Chomsky 2000). Backward Raising shows that, in some cases, the moving XP has a genuine syntactic presence in the higher position that cannot be accounted for with just an Agree relation. Agree and covert movement must be kept distinct. Second, Backward Raising shows that Lasnik’s (1999) claim that A-movement does not leave copies cannot be correct since we see an actual copy of A-movement being pronounced.

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Examples

- (1) č'ale-xe-r [angliskə-bze-r a-še-new] qəçeç'ə-ɸ-ex
 boy-PL-ABS English-language-ABS 3ERG.PL-learn-SUPINE happen-PAST-PL
 'The boys happened to study English.'
- (2) [č'ale-xe-m angliskə-bze-r a-še-new] qəçeç'ə-ɸ-ex
 boy-PL-ERG English-language-ABS 3ERG.PL-learn-SUPINE happen-PAST-PL
 'The boys happened to study English.' (lit. "Happened that the boys study English.")
- (3) *[angliskə-bze-r šk_wjəlem č'ale-xe-r a-še-new] qəçeç'ə-ɸ-ex
 English-language-ABS at_school boy-PL-ABS 3ERG.PL-learn-SUPINE happen-PAST-PL
- (4) [angliskə-bze-r šk_wjəlem č'ale-xe-m a-še-new] qəçeç'ə-ɸ-ex
 English-language-ABS at_school boy-PL-ERG 3ERG.PL-learn-SUPINE happen-PAST-PL
 'The boys happened to study English at school.'
- (5) a. DP_i [~~DP~~_i Verb] happen FORWARD RAISING
 b. ~~DP~~_i [DP_i Verb] happen BACKWARD RAISING
- (6) zečemi zakonxe-r a-kecačer-ep
 all.ERG laws-ABS 3ERG-obey.PRES-NEG
 'Nobody obeys the law.' (lit.: All do not obey laws) ALL >> NEG
 'Not everybody obeys the law.' NEG >> ALL
- (7) [zečemi zakonxe-r a-mə-kecače-new] χ_wke-x
 all.PL.ERG laws-ABS 3ERG-NEG-obey-SUPINE turn out.PRES-PL
 'Everybody turns out not to obey the law.' ALL >> NEG
 '?Not everybody turns out to obey the law.' NEG >> ALL

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