

CHAPTER 2

FEATURES, CATEGORIES AND CHECKING

TOWARDS DERIVING THE EPP AND ABSTRACT CASE

1. INTRODUCTION

As discussed in chapter 1, the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) and the theory of abstract Case have played a central role for the analysis of the syntax of A-positions within the generative literature. However, both theoretical concepts are basically stipulations. Within the GB framework (cf. e.g. Chomsky 1981, 1986a), the EPP is a principle which states that every clause needs a subject and more precisely that [Spec, IP] has to be filled ($S \rightarrow NP\ INFL\ VP$). Yet, it has never been entirely clear what the motivation for this requirement is. The main attempts to derive the EPP are based on the notion of predication (Williams 1980, Rothstein 1985). But to relate the EPP to predication is problematic. Given that predication is basically a semantic concept, it is unexpected that the EPP can be satisfied by semantically empty elements (expletives) which do not seem to be involved in a predication relationship. Rothstein (1985) therefore argues that the EPP is the result of a syntactic form of predication. Yet, such an extension of the semantic concept of predication is obviously again stipulative and the predication approach therefore is not able to derive the EPP in a satisfactory way.

The GB theory of abstract Case is equally stipulative. The main aspect of Case Theory within the GB framework is the Case Filter, which requires that every overt NP must be assigned abstract Case (Chomsky 1981, Rouveret and Vergnaud 1980). Although the Case Filter (plus several additional assumptions such as the status of infinitival inflection) has desirable consequences for the analysis of the distribution of overt NPs, it is simply a stipulated principle which does not seem to be derivable in any way. Attempts have been made to relate the Case Filter to more fundamental properties of the grammar but they are equally stipulative. In particular, it has been proposed that Case can be related to Theta Theory under the assumption that Case makes an argument "visible" for theta role assignment (Visibility Condition, cf. Chomsky 1986a:94 referring to Aoun) and that therefore Case is a prerequisite for theta role assignment. Yet, the Visibility Condition has some undesirable

consequences. For example clausal arguments are not subject to the same distributional properties as nominal arguments (cf. e.g. Stowell 1981:145ff. and section 5.1.1 below) although the Visibility Condition predicts that all arguments should behave identically, regardless of their categorial status. Furthermore, Case seems to interact with the distribution of expletives (cf. e.g. Davis 1986, Lasnik 1992) although expletives, being non-arguments, should not depend on Case at all in terms of a Visibility approach. Apart from such empirical problems, the Visibility Condition also faces the same conceptual problem as the Case Filter. There is no independent motivation for assuming that theta role assignment should depend on Case assignment and the Visibility Condition is therefore by no means less stipulative than the Case Filter.

The same problems that have occurred within the GB framework with respect to the EPP and Case Theory reappear in a different form within the MP. Within the MP, syntactic processes are driven by the presence of features which are uninterpretable for interface interpretation and therefore must become invisible through feature checking in the course of a derivation. Given these assumptions, the EPP and abstract Case have been expressed in terms of uninterpretable features by Chomsky (1995). The effects of the EPP are obtained through an uninterpretable categorial D-feature on Infl. However, such a feature has a problematic status within a framework with minimalist goals. D on Infl does not seem to be related in any way to the two interface levels LF and PF in Chomsky's system. Hence, its sole function is to be deleted in the course of a derivation. It is therefore unclear at first sight why D on Infl is generated at all. In other words, the presence of D on Infl simply has to be stipulated within Chomsky's (1995) system. The same problem arises with the uninterpretable EPP-feature proposed by Chomsky (2000, 2001). Like the D-feature in Chomsky (1995), the EPP-feature is also simply introduced to be eliminated again and it does not have any content which can be interpreted by the LF or the PF component. An additional problem Chomsky's (2000, 2001) system raises is related to the fact that the use of the EPP-feature is not restricted to Infl (or T) but it is extended to other heads. To capture the effects of the traditional Extended Projection Principle ([Spec, IP] has to be filled), Chomsky (2000:109) suggests that "the EPP-feature of T might be universal" whereas EPP on other heads is optional. However, it remains unclear why T (Infl) would have a special status with respect to the presence of an EPP-feature. Thus, as in GB analyses, EPP effects have to be stipulated within the Minimalist framework.

Similar problems arise in connection with the Minimalist equivalent of the Case filter. In Chomsky (1995), Case Theory is reinterpreted in terms of checking of abstract Case features like Nominative or Accusative which are generated on heads (Nom on T, Acc on V) and on nominal constituents. As pointed out by Chomsky (1995:278ff.), we may assume that abstract Case features are not relevant for the LF interface and therefore have to be checked by the time the derivation reaches LF. Furthermore, in languages without an overt morphological case system (e.g. Chinese, many Creoles), it seems that Case is also irrelevant at the PF interface.

Hence, abstract Case features are generated on two elements (a head and a nominal constituent) although they may not play any role at all at the two interfaces. It therefore seems again that their sole purpose is to be deleted and one may therefore wonder why abstract Case features are generated at all. Chomsky's (2000, 2001) framework does away with uninterpretable Case features on heads like T or V. For nominal elements, it is assumed that they bear unvalued Case features which are assigned a value in an Agree relation with some head and that a Case feature is deleted once it has been assigned a value. Again, in languages with no morphological case system, Case would be a feature that does not play any role at all at the interfaces and is simply introduced to be deleted. Chomsky (2000, 2001) tries to motivate the existence of Case features by proposing that a Case feature activates a nominal element so that it can participate in some syntactic operation (Agree or Move; cf. 2000:123, 2001:6). Agree allows for example a head like T to value and delete its uninterpretable agreement features. These features could not be deleted if no nominal element were activated by a Case feature. However, this type of analysis provides only a very weak motivation for the existence of Case features. Just like Case features, agreement features play no role at the interfaces in some languages. Thus, an uninterpretable feature (Case) has to be introduced to allow deletion of another uninterpretable feature (agreement), and it remains unclear why such features should exist as basic properties of UG. Thus, at first sight, the Minimalist versions of Case Theory are exactly as stipulative as their predecessors within the GB framework.

In summary, we have seen that the EPP and the Case Filter seem to be underivable stipulations in GB and MP. The question that arises is whether such stipulations are indeed unavoidable for the analysis of the syntax of A-positions or whether their effects can be derived from more fundamental properties of the grammar. Pursuing Chomsky's (1995) analysis of the EPP, I will propose in this chapter that the occurrence of uninterpretable categorial features can be related to the definition of categories in terms of categorial features (cf. Chomsky 1970, 1974 and much subsequent work). The EPP and abstract Case therefore do not have to be stipulated but their effects can be derived on the basis of an independent component of the grammar, namely the theory of syntactic categories. As a consequence, the EPP and the theory of abstract Case can be eliminated as components of the grammar.

The chapter is organized as follows. In section 2, the main proposal is introduced on the basis of the phenomenon of object movement. It is argued that Case checking can be replaced by categorial feature checking. This proposal is extended to EPP phenomena in section 3. Section 4 deals with some consequences and makes certain basic theoretical points more precise. On the basis of these refinements, additional issues related to the EPP and Case Theory are explored in section 5. In section 6, a possible extension of this approach to the CP-domain is considered. Finally, section 7 briefly discusses an alternative model which dispenses with the concept of feature checking. Section 8 concludes the chapter.

2. OBJECT MOVEMENT AND CATEGORIES - TOWARDS DERIVING ABSTRACT CASE

The empirical starting point for my discussion is a well-known phenomenon which can be found in several languages (examples from Icelandic, cf. Diesing 1996:67, 75, 78; for similar phenomena in other languages cf. e.g. Diesing 1992, Enç 1991, de Hoop 1992, Laka 1993, Meinunger 1995):

- (1) a. Hann las ekki bækurnar *Icelandic*
 b. Hann las bækurnar ekki
He read the-books not the books
'He didn't read the books.'
 c. Hann las ekki bækur
 d. ?* Hann las bækur ekki
He read books not books
'He didn't read books.'
 e. Ég las ekki þrjár bækur
 f. Ég las þrjár bækur ekki
I read three books not three books
'I didn't read three books.'

The examples in (1a) and (1b) show that a definite nominal object can either follow or precede negation in Icelandic. As pointed out in chapter 1.3, negation and certain other adverbs have often been considered as constituents which occur at the periphery of the VP (cf. e.g. Jackendoff 1972:73ff and much subsequent work) and which therefore can be used as diagnostics for movement (cf. e.g. Emonds 1978, Pollock 1989). An element following negation occurs within the VP whereas an element preceding negation has moved out of the VP. Given this assumption and the assumption that all arguments are base-generated VP-internally (cf. chapter 1.2.1.1), it has generally been proposed that the order in (1b) is derived through object movement out of the VP to the left of the adjunct ("object shift", "scrambling").¹ But, as has often been observed (cf. the references cited above), there are certain restrictions on movement of nominal objects out of the VP. In a neutral context, the bare plural object in (1d) cannot precede negation. As Diesing (1996:67f.) points out, the only way to make (1d) grammatical is by forcing a generic interpretation for

¹ The term object shift has generally been used for object movement in the Scandinavian languages. For a similar type of movement in West Germanic languages like Dutch or German, the term scrambling has generally been used. However, I will follow much recent work (cf. e.g. Bobaljik 1995, Zwart 1997) in treating object movement past a VP-peripheral adjunct in these two language groups in a uniform way. To avoid terminological confusion, I will simply refer to the process shown in (1b, d, f) as object movement out of the VP in this chapter. This general term will not include topicalization of objects to [Spec, CP]. This movement is an A'-movement type and it therefore is not relevant for our purposes here. Cf. also chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of object movement in the West Germanic languages ("scrambling").

the object, for example by stressing the verb ('he doesn't *read* books, he only *buys* them'). Thus, the ungrammaticality of (1d) concerns the existential reading of the object. The same kind of restriction with respect to object movement is also illustrated in (1e) and (1f). Although object movement in (1f) is unproblematic, movement affects the interpretation of the object. Whereas the object in (1e) can have an existential reading, the existential reading is lost in (1f) and only a specific (partitive) interpretation is possible for the object.

The conclusion that has often been drawn on the basis of data like those shown in (1) is that object movement past a VP-peripheral adjunct is basically restricted to specific objects and that objects with an existential or non-specific interpretation cannot move out of the VP (cf. e.g. Cecchetto 1994, Diesing 1992, 1996, Enç 1991, Moltmann 1991, Sportiche 1996). However, Laka (1993) argues that the crucial factor determining movement in cases like (1) is not a semantic notion like specificity as such, but rather the categorial status of nominal arguments. Based on data from Basque where object movement is not related to specificity but to whether an object has a determiner or not, Laka proposes that objects remaining in their base position are NPs whereas objects which can move out of the VP are DPs. The observation that in many languages only objects with a specific interpretation can move out of the VP can then be captured under the assumption that in these grammars the semantic content of D is [+specific] (Laka 1993:162, cf. also Chomsky 1995:342 for relating specificity to D).² However, in a language like Basque, the content of D would not be determined in terms of specificity.

I will adopt Laka's distinction between NPs and DPs here, a distinction which has also been proposed independently by Philippi (1997:68ff.) (cf. also Chomsky 1995, Frampton 1995 on the NP/DP distinction in the context of expletive-associate constructions; for a similar intuition cf. also de Hoop's 1992 analysis of scrambling in terms of different NP types). I will thus assume that object NPs remain in their VP-internal base position (cf. 1c/d) whereas DPs move out of the VP, at least at some stage in a derivation (cf. 1a/b and 1e/f with a non-existential interpretation of the object). The question that arises then is why the distributional properties of nominal elements are closely related to their categorial NP/DP status.

Descriptively, the contrast between NPs and DPs can be expressed in a simple way: A constituent headed by a lexical head (N) stays within a projection headed by another lexical head (V) whereas a constituent headed by a functional head (D) moves to a projection headed by another functional head. This observation alone obviously does not provide an explanation for the difference in syntactic behavior

² Support for the assumption that there may be a close relation between D and specificity comes from creole languages. As Bickerton (1981:56ff.) observes, creoles generally have determiner systems in which specific nominal constituents are marked by a (definite or indefinite) determiner whereas non-specific nominal constituents do not have determiners. This contrast could be accounted for by saying that DP is present only with specific nominals but not with non-specific ones. If, as Bickerton (1981, 1984) suggests, certain aspects of creole languages reflect fundamental properties of Universal Grammar, then specificity could be argued to be the unmarked property of D.

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