

CHAPTER 3

SYNTACTIC EFFECTS OF MORPHOLOGICAL CASE

1. INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapter, the distributional properties of nominal arguments have to a large extent been related to the theoretical concept of *abstract Case* within the generative framework. However, the notion of case already played a central role in many traditional discussions of the distribution of nominal constituents. What was relevant in these discussions is the notion of *morphological case*. It has generally been observed that the presence of a morphological case system allows nominal constituents to occur in a relatively free order within the clause. One source for this observation is the fact that the loss of a morphological case system and the loss of free word order generally seem to be closely linked in diachronic developments. For example, Sapir (1921:168) talks about "the drift toward the abolition of most case distinctions and the *correlative* drift toward position as an all-important grammatical method" (*italics mine*). Similar points are made by Meillet (1921) and Jespersen (1922). Meillet (1921:9) observes:

Les relations des mots entre eux et les nuances de sens exprimées par les cas ont été rendues par d'autres procédés: par l'ordre des mots qui tend à devenir fixe, de libre qu'il était, et par des mots spéciaux: prépositions, conjonctions, articles.¹

As for Jespersen (1922:361), he notes:

This, then, is the conclusion I arrive at, that as simplification of grammatical structure, abolition of case distinctions, and so forth, always go hand in hand with the

¹ "The relations among words and the subtleties of meaning expressed by cases are expressed by other means: by the word order which tends to become fixed, as opposed to free as it used to be, and by particular words: prepositions, conjunctions, articles."

development of a fixed word order, this cannot be accidental, but there must exist a relation of cause and effect between the two phenomena.²

This "non-accidental" correlation between case morphology and word order is also assumed in more recent work. For example, in his comparative study of English and German, Hawkins (1986:40) observes:

It is plausible to argue that the case system of German is responsible for the greater clause-internal word order freedom of that language. Across languages the existence of rich surface case marking typically correlates with word order freedom of the kind we have seen in German.

Similarly, Baker (1996:18) considers Japanese, Hindi or German, for example, as languages "where the nonconfigurational characteristics seem to be due to Case marking" and, as the endnote related to this statement suggests (1996:36, n.12), Baker's observation concerns in particular the property of word order freedom. Finally, in his study of case, Blake (1994:15) summarizes the situation as follows:

It has frequently been observed that there is a correlation between the presence of case marking on noun phrases for the subject-object distinction and flexible word order and this would appear to hold true.

The question that arises then is why such a correlation between case morphology and word order should exist. The traditional and intuitively attractive answer to this question is summarized by Hawkins (1986:40):

The reason most commonly advanced for this [i.e. the correlation between case morphology and free word order - EH] is that 'fixed' word order at the sentence level in a language like English encodes grammatical relations such as subject, direct object and indirect object, which are morphologically encoded in a case-marked language. And word order permutations are possible in a case-marked language since grammatical relations are recoverable morphologically.

Although this explanation is intuitively plausible, it is far from clear how it can be used for a theoretical account of word order differences, i.e. it is not clear how the

² Jespersen then argues that the development of a fixed word order is the *cause* of the disappearance of flexional endings. However, the analysis proposed in this chapter would rather imply that fixed word order is the *effect* of the loss of flexional endings. I will not go into the details of Jespersen's proposal here. Note however that at least for the history of English Jespersen's account does not seem to be correct since it is not the case that word order became rigid before the loss of case morphology (cf. Haeberli 1999:chapter 8.2.1 for discussion). Furthermore in Jespersen's view of cause and effect, it would be difficult to explain why word order ever should become more rigid.

presence or absence of case morphology could be related to the distributional options of argument NPs within the clause structure.

Another syntactic phenomenon that has sometimes been related to the presence of case morphology, apart from word order freedom, is the occurrence of nominal complements of adjectives. Thus, van Riemsdijk (1983:223) points out that there appears "to be a correlation between the existence in a language of a morphological case system and the possibility for adjectives to assign case", where "to assign case" means to license the presence of an overt nominal complement. Similarly, Maling (1983:254) suggests that "the loss of transitive adjectives in English can be seen as a consequence of the almost complete loss of morphological inflection" and she concludes that "in sum, there is a correlation between having transitive adjectives and having surface morphological case". Yet, as in the case of word order freedom, it is again not clear at all from a theoretical point of view why there should be such a correlation between a syntactic phenomenon (nominal complements of adjectives) and the presence of case morphology on nominal constituents.³

The observations quoted above suggest that the occurrence of a morphological case system can have an influence on the distribution of nominal arguments. Thus, there seems to be a tendency for languages with a rich morphological case system to allow variable argument order and to license nominal complements of adjectives and for languages without rich case morphology to lack these properties. Although there are certain exceptions to these correlations, the general tendency is robust enough that, as Jespersen already observed, it is unlikely to be accidental. A theoretical explanation therefore should be available which accounts for this tendency and this is the issue that this chapter will focus on. The main claim will be that there is a close connection between morphology and syntax in the sense that properties of the inflectional morphology are reflected in the syntactic representation and, as a consequence, in the syntactic processes occurring within a clause. Given the proposal made in chapter 2 that the concept of abstract Case should be eliminated from the grammar, I will argue that the presence of case features is restricted to languages which show clear evidence for the presence of case, i.e. to languages with a rich morphological case system. I will propose that these case features are partly uninterpretable and that they therefore have to be deleted by the time the derivation reaches the interfaces. To be deleted means to be checked within a Minimalist system, and to be checked means to undergo certain syntactic operations. I will argue that these syntactic operations are the source of the syntactic properties which have been attributed to case morphology.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 deals with the correlation between word order freedom and the presence of morphological case on the basis of a comparative analysis of Dutch and German. First (sections 2.2 to 2.4), the properties of scrambling in Dutch and German will be discussed. Then, in section 2.6, an

³ The distribution of objects with respect to the verb (SOV vs. SVO) has sometimes also been related to case morphology (cf. e.g. Greenberg 1963). I will leave this issue aside here for the moment and return to it in section 4 of this chapter.

analysis of scrambling in Dutch will be provided which is based on the proposals made in chapter 2 and which accounts for the rigid ordering of arguments in Dutch. Based on the claim that case features are only available in languages with a rich morphological case system, I will then show in section 2.7 how word order freedom in German can be derived within the framework outlined here. Section 2.8 deals with some consequences of the proposals made for the analysis of Dutch and German. In section 2.9, it will be argued that the analysis of German can be extended to another language exhibiting freedom of word order, namely Korean. Finally in section 2.10, some general issues will be discussed concerning the distinction between languages with and without a rich morphological case system. In section 3, I will show that the analysis proposed for the correlation between word order freedom and morphological case also provides the basis for explaining the correlation between the occurrence of transitive adjectives and morphological case. Finally, section 4 discusses some issues related to the order of objects and verbs (SVO vs. SOV).

2. WORD ORDER FREEDOM AND MORPHOLOGICAL CASE

2.1. German vs. Dutch

My discussion of the interaction between morphological case and word order freedom is based on a comparison of German and Dutch. These two languages have several basic syntactic properties in common. In particular, both languages are Verb Second (V2) languages in which the finite verb occupies the second position in main clauses but not in subordinate clauses (asymmetric V2). In subordinate clauses the finite verb generally occurs in clause-final position. Based on the word order properties in subordinate clauses, German and Dutch both have been described as SOV languages. For our concerns, another common property of German and Dutch is important. Both languages allow nominal objects to occur in a position which is non-adjacent to the verb, as illustrated in (1).

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| (1) | a. | dass Hans | <i>gestern</i> | Maria | geküsst hat | <i>German</i> |
| | b. | dass Hans | Maria | <i>gestern</i> | geküsst hat | |
| | c. | dat Jan | <i>gisteren</i> | Marie | gekust heeft | <i>Dutch</i> |
| | d. | dat Jan | Marie | <i>gisteren</i> | gekust heeft | |
| | | <i>that John (Mary)</i> | <i>yesterday (Mary)</i> | <i>kissed</i> | <i>has</i> | |
| | | 'that John kissed Mary yesterday.' | | | | |

As observed already in chapter 1.3 and chapter 2.2, certain adverbs or negation have often been considered as diagnostics to delimit the VP-boundary. Given also the assumption that all arguments are generated VP-internally (cf. chapter 1.2.1.1), it has been proposed in the literature that, when an object is not adjacent to the verb as in (1b) and (1d), the object has undergone movement out of the VP to the left of the

adverb (cf. e.g. Bennis and Hoekstra 1984, den Besten and Webelhuth 1987, de Haan 1979, Haegeman 1991, Vanden Wyngaerd 1989 and many others). This word order option has generally been referred to as "scrambling" and is reminiscent of the object movement discussed in chapter 2 for Icelandic.⁴

Although both German and Dutch allow object movement out of the VP, it is only in German that we can find word order options where object movement seems to lead to movement past subjects or to reordering of the two objects in double object constructions. Thus, we can find examples of the following type in German (example from Fanselow 1997:1; SU=subject, IO=indirect object, DO=direct object).

- (2) a. dass der Mann dem Kind das Buch zeigte Ge.
 that the man (SU) the child (IO) the book (DO) showed
 'that the man showed the book to the child.'
- b. dass der Mann das Buch dem Kind zeigte (SU-DO-IO)
 c. dass das Buch der Mann dem Kind zeigte (DO-SU-IO)
 d. dass das Buch dem Kind der Mann zeigte (DO-IO-SU)
 e. dass dem Kind der Mann das Buch zeigte (IO-SU-DO)
 f. dass dem Kind das Buch der Mann zeigte (IO-DO-SU)

These word order options also have been referred to as scrambling. The idea would be that, given the unmarked order SU-IO-DO, all the other orders are obtained through argument movement. However, the type of scrambling illustrated in (2) seems to be of a different kind than the one shown in (1). The reason for

⁴ An alternative way to analyze scrambling (and object movement in Icelandic) would be to say that the occurrence of objects before or after an adjunct is due to different base generation options for the adverb. Thus, the variation in (1) would occur because the adverb can be generated above or below the object. Here, I will adopt a movement analysis of (1) for two main reasons. First, from a purely theoretical point of view, in a framework such as the Minimalist Program in which movement is an option anyway, it seems natural to use this option for the analysis of word order variation. Base generation can then be treated in very simple and restrictive terms. Furthermore, in a framework which makes use of movement, it seems to be easier to express cross-linguistic variation as variation with respect to whether a movement process occurs or not rather than as variation with respect to where certain elements can be base generated (cf. also chapter 4.3.1). The second main reason for adopting a movement analysis is that there are certain empirical problems that arise for base generation approaches to scrambling. Several of them will be discussed in the context of German scrambling in section 2.4.2 below. For the time being, let us simply mention one point which is related to some issues discussed in chapter 2. In a system in which scrambling is simply a matter of inserting an adjunct above or below an object, the object does not seem to be directly involved in the mechanism giving rise to variation and we might therefore not expect that scrambling imposes any constraints on the object. However, this expectation is not borne out. As in Icelandic, we can find restrictions on the interpretation of objects preceding adjuncts in Dutch and German (cf. e.g. de Hoop 1992, Diesing 1992, 1996, Meinunger 1995). Such objects generally can only have a specific interpretation. It is not clear what the source of this restriction would be within a base generation approach. In terms of a movement approach, interpretational restrictions can be accounted for by assuming that, as proposed in chapter 2, only a particular type of object can undergo movement. For additional observations concerning the movement/base generation distinction, cf. section 2.4.2 below.

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