Reconstruction in German A’-movement

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Background

Previous theoretical claims on binding and reconstruction in A’-movement:

► Argument-adjunct asymmetry: only R-expressions contained in arguments trigger Principle C effects, R-expressions inside adjuncts do not (which are thus merged late). cf. Lebeaux (1988).

► Predicate-argument asymmetry: Predicates obligatorily reconstruct (they contain the trace of the local subject, must reconstruct because they are non-referential), while arguments do not (always); cf. Heycock (1995).


Previous empirical work:

► English: Adger et al. (2017). Bruening and Al Khalaf (2018) found that Condition C effects were systematic only with adj. predicates, while partially absent with (nominal) arguments. Only weak argument/adjunct asymmetry.

► German: No experimental studies yet.

Our contribution: First experimental investigation of reconstruction for Binding Principles A and C in German A’-movement.

Method and participants

Maria tells us how proud of Anna she is.

Can this sentence be interpreted such that...

...Mary is proud? (Q1) □ Yes □ No...Anna is proud? (Q2) □ Yes □ No

► Forced-choice task, inspired by Bruening and Al Khalaf (2018): provide two potential referents (in local, higher clause).

► Innovation: we explicitly asked for each of the readings whether it is possible or not → optionality can be captured.

► web-based questionnaires using SoSci Survey

► four experiments, 32/36/48/36 participants

► Latin Square Design

► 1:1 items-fillers ratio

Design and stimuli

Sample item set: (see handout for original German items)

(1) Principle C
   a. Mary tells (us) that □ is very proud of Anna (and the teams).
   b. Mary tells (us) □ how proud of Anna (and the teams) □ is ___ moved

Principle C predicts: co-reference between she and Anna impossible.

(2) Principle A
   a. Mary tells (us) that Anna is very proud of □ (and the teams).
   b. Mary tells (us) □ how proud of □ (and the teams) □ is ___ moved

Principle A predicts: coreference between herself and Anna possible.

Results and Discussion

Adj. predicates — exp 1:  

Nouns — exp 1:

Main findings on Principle C:

► Reconstruction for Principle C is very robust, with both adjectival predicates and nouns. 
   → Principle C effects are not weak/illusory. 
   → No support for predicted arg-adj. asymmetry.1
   → Argues against a late-merger approach to adjuncts. 
   → No significant effect of linear distance. 
   → Significant effect of embedding. 
   → Pattern goes against predictions of Vehicle Change.

Main findings on Principle A:

► Reconstruction for Principle A is less systematic than for Principle C. 
   → Reconstruction is more likely with adjectival predicates than with nouns. 
   → Significant effect of linear distance. 
   → Intermediate binding accepted to an unexpected extent (50% with adj. predicates, 70% with nouns). 
   → Argues against obligatory trace of subject within AP. 
   → Argues against silent PRO within DP. 
   → Matrix binding accepted to an unexpected extent (up to 80%) (against claims in the lit.).

1Non-significance of effects is reported based on statistical analysis using GLMMs. See handout for detailed results.

Conclusions and outlook

Summary: Robust reconstruction for Principle C; no argument/adjunct asymmetry; anaphor binding in intermediate/final landing sites possible.

Open questions:

► More robust Condition C reconstruction than in recent experimental work on English. → Due to different methods, or difference between the languages?

► Surprisingly high proportion of matrix binding in the noun experiments (even in situ ~ 30%). → Logophoric anaphor binding in German? (claimed to be absent)


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