

LONG-DISTANCE AGREEMENT AND
 THE SYNTAX OF *FOR-TO*
 INFINITIVES
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Throughout the history of generative grammar, expletive constructions in English and other languages have been a major focus of interest. The long-distance agreement effect attested in such constructions (see (1a–b)) has always represented a major theoretical challenge, a challenge that motivated some of the innovations of recent work within the Minimalist Program. Chomsky (2000), for instance, suggests the operation Agree as part of his account of this effect.

- (1) a. There was/*were elected an unpopular candidate.
- b. There seems/*seem to have been elected an unpopular candidate.

Avoiding unnecessary technical details, the main points of Chomsky's proposal are the following. The long-distance agreement effect attested in (1a–b) is due to a 'T-associate relation that involves features only and is independent of the expletive' (p. 126). This relation involves a probe (T) and a goal (the associate, *an unpopular candidate*) within the domain of the probe (the sister of T in this case) and effects the erasure of uninterpretable features of probe and goal. This operation is referred to as Agree. The satisfaction of Case-theoretic requirements of the associate (i.e., the erasure of an uninterpretable Case feature) is one effect of this operation. As for expletive *there*, because of its formal properties, this element has no need for structural Case. It merges with T, thus becoming Spec,T, and in this way satisfies the EPP feature of T.

For-to infinitives such as the bracketed parts in (2a–b) represent a difficulty for this approach.

- (2) a. [For there to be a unicorn in the garden] would be a surprise.
- b. It is unimaginable [for there to be a unicorn in the garden].

The difficulty is this. If a (long-distance) T-associate (probe-goal) relation is the mechanism by which postverbal subjects are licensed, one does not expect (2a–b) to be grammatical given the general fact that an infinitival T is not the right element to be engaged in such a relation with an overt, lexical NP/DP. As is well known, a probe-goal relation with an infinitival T could never license an overt preverbal subject in infinitival clauses.

- (3) *It is unimaginable [Mary to arrive on time].

This reasoning is supported by the ungrammaticality of (4a–b). These examples, to be contrasted with (2a–b), show that the occurrence of *for* in such infinitives is crucial.

- (4) a. *[There to be a unicorn in the garden] would be a surprise.
- b. *It is unimaginable [there to be a unicorn in the garden].

Note that *there* in these constructions would not need to enter into any relation with *for* in order to be licensed since, by hypothesis, it does not need to be involved in any relation of Case assignment/checking. As seen above, *there* may occur in finite sentences such as

(1a–b) where, according to the theory under consideration, T is (directly) engaged in an Agree relationship with a postverbal subject whereas *there* serves simply to satisfy (check) the EPP feature of T. Thus, within the approach under consideration, the ungrammaticality of (4a–b) could not be due to a failure to satisfy some formal requirement of *there*.

Given examples like (2a–b) and (4a–b), an attempt to maintain an approach based on Agree leads inevitably to an assumption that grammatical cases like (2a–b) involve a long-distance probe-goal relationship between the postverbal subject and *for* (rather than T). If an assumption along these lines turns out to be wrong, a different account of the syntax of postverbal subjects in examples like (2a–b) (and generally) must be sought, given that T and *for* are, under standard assumptions (but see discussion below), the only apparent candidates for entering into an Agree relation with a postverbal subject in such cases.

The crucial question is then, how does *for* fit into the syntax of *for-to* infinitives so as to render sentences like (2a–b) grammatical? The postulation of a long-distance probe-goal relationship between *for* and a postverbal subject is easily refuted. Emonds (1985:297) observes that sentence adverbs (‘‘which are typically analyzed as daughters of S’’) cannot appear between *for* and the following lexical NP/DP, in clear contrast to the behavior of other ‘‘Comp-elements’’ such as *whether*, *if*, and *that* (‘‘even in present subjunctive clauses whose semantic affinity with *for-to* clauses is well known’’). The following examples are borrowed from Emonds (1985):

- (5) a. They suggest that *initially* he be put on probation.
- b. They asked whether *initially* he was put on probation.
- c. *They intend for *initially* him to be put on probation.
- (6) a. I find it irritating that *usually* this street is closed.
- b. *I find it irritating for *usually* this street to be closed.

As the above examples seem to indicate, and as has traditionally been assumed, the subject in *for-to* infinitives enters into a (local) relationship with the (prepositional) complementizer *for*, similar to the one that holds between a preposition and its complement. In addition to disallowing intervening adverbs, this relationship is manifested through the accusative Case marking of the subject, as shown by the pronominal subject in (7).

- (7) [For *her*/**she* to arrive on time] is unlikely.

As for constructions with a postverbal subject, the following contrast may serve to make the point:

- (8) a. [For there *unexpectedly* to be a unicorn in the garden] is unlikely.
- b. *[For *unexpectedly* there to be a unicorn in the garden] is unlikely.

If the postverbal subject (*a unicorn*) in (8a) were licensed by a long-

distance probe-goal relationship with *for* (across an entire clause, including a sentence adverb), it is unclear why an intervening adverb (*unexpectedly*) in (8b) should disturb that relationship. Rather, what this adverb seems to disturb in (8b) is a (local) relationship between *for* and *there*, in the same way that the intervening adverbs in (5c) and (6b) are (apparently) the cause of ungrammaticality.

A potential alternative explanation of (8b), as well as (5c) and (6b), comes to mind, based on a different analysis of *for-to* infinitives suggested by Bošković (1997). Bošković, following Watanabe (1993) (who follows a suggestion by Chomsky) and Roger Martin (personal communication),¹ suggests an analysis that takes *for-to* to be a single, morphologically complex item generated under I (T in current usage), with *for* undergoing movement to C. As an anonymous reviewer suggests, under an Agree-based approach it could be assumed that the *for-to* complex in I/T enters into an Agree relation with a postverbal subject. Within such an approach, the ungrammaticality of (8b) (as well as (5c) and (6b)) could be explained as resulting from the movement of *for* from I to C across a sentential adverb (rather than from a failure to license a postverbal subject). Such movement would presumably violate some constraint. Note, however, that an account along these lines yields the wrong prediction that (8a) should be ruled out as well for the same reason as (8b), namely, as an instance of illicit movement of this kind (across a sentential adverb), given the visible fact that the adverb is located between I/T (*to*) and C (*for*) in both cases. Instead, it seems that the respective ordering of a sentential adverb and a subject is what makes the difference. This analysis thus fails to account for the contrast between (8a) and (8b), just like the one based on a standard view of *for* as a (base-generated) infinitival complementizer.

Given this failure, there is no need to discuss other problematic aspects of this ‘*for-raising*’ hypothesis. We may simply note that it is questionable whether the operation of raising *for* to C qualifies as an instance of I-to-C (or, rather, head movement more generally) given that it does not affect a syntactic head but only a morphological subpart of such a head. It is thus not clear how this operation fits into a general typology of movement operations.

An additional possible analysis, based on an assumption regarding the particular nature of *for-to* infinitives, must be considered. This variant rests on the assumption that *for* is base-generated as head of CP, augmented by the assumption that *for* selects an I/T head that has the ability to license Case. This theory is thus free of the difficulties associated with the nature of I-to-C displacement just alluded to. The head I/T in this case would be engaged in an Agree relation with a postverbal subject in *for-to* infinitives such as those in (2a–b). The difficulty represented by cases like (3) is resolved under this theory

¹ An anonymous reviewer also points out Martin 1996 as relevant in this respect.

since the infinitival I/T in a non-*for-to* infinitive like that embedded in (3) (unlike I/T in *for-to* infinitives) is not a ‘‘Case assigner.’’²

This hypothesis must, however, be tested with respect to its ability to account for the facts in (8a–b). In particular, (8b) seems potentially problematic since, on this analysis, the sentential adverb intervening between *for* and the following subject could not be claimed to interact in any way with a movement operation from I to C so as to produce ungrammaticality (a line of argument that, in any case, has already been shown to be unsuccessful). Rather, it seems that a more plausible explanation of (8b) compatible with the hypothesis under consideration can be related to the nature of Case assignment/checking of the subject. In fact, (7) provides substantial evidence for such a view, showing that the subject of a *for-to* infinitive bears overt marking for accusative Case when it happens to be pronominal. That is, the subject in a *for-to* infinitive is apparently Case-theoretically licensed through a relationship with *for*. This being the case, the most plausible account of (8b) would be based on the view that expletive *there* must be Case-marked (i.e., bears an uninterpretable Case feature that must be erased) through a relationship with *for*, and that this relation is disturbed by an intervening adverb.

Note now that such an account of (8b) necessarily implies a view of *for-to* infinitives like those embedded in (2a–b) as involving two elements that need to be engaged in a relation of Case assignment/checking, namely, the postverbal NP/DP (*a unicorn*) and expletive *there*. On the account under consideration, this is fine as far as such infinitives are concerned since, by hypothesis, they have two ‘‘Case assigners’’ available, namely, *for* and the particular head I/T postulated to be selected by *for*. However, this account fails when it comes to the simple, basic case of finite sentences like (9).

(9) There is a unicorn in the garden.

Here the same two elements (*there*, *a unicorn*) occur, but only one ‘‘Case assigner’’ is available, namely, a finite I/T assumed in Chomsky’s (2000) theory to be engaged in an Agree relation with, in this case, the postverbal NP/DP. Thus, the assumption that expletive *there* has no need for structural Case is a crucial component of an account of postverbal subjects based on Agree. It is, however, incompatible with what seems to be the most plausible account of (8b) just considered.³ If this assumption is dropped, the problem represented by (9)

² This analysis was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.

³ An alternative account of (8b) suggested by an anonymous reviewer is based on the assumption that the intervening adverb blocks, or interferes in some way with, the selection relation postulated to hold between *for* and I/T. In fact, however, the empirical evidence seems to point in exactly the opposite direction: an adverb preceding the subject does not interfere with (or disturb) the assumed selectional relation between C and I/T. Thus, (5a–c) and (6a–b) show the contrast between *for* and other ‘‘Comp-elements’’ with regard to the admissibility of intervening adverbs. In particular, it is well known that the

arises. More generally, the crucial observation regarding the syntax of expletive *there* is that it always cooccurs with a postverbal NP/DP in both finite and infinitival clauses. Therefore, an ad hoc assumption in the form of the theory just considered regarding a particular infinitival I/T that is selected by *for* and has the ability to check/assign Case clearly misses the genuine theoretical challenge represented by these constructions.

I conclude that an account of postverbal subjects in *for-to* infinitives based on Chomsky's (2000) notion Agree and the postulation of an Agree relation between the postverbal subject and *for* (or any of the other accounts considered above) cannot be maintained. Some of the facts considered here, such as the ungrammaticality of (4a–b) and (8b), can clearly be interpreted to indicate that *there* must be assigned (or check) Case (as various researchers have previously argued; see, e.g., Belletti 1988, Lasnik 1992, 1995, 1999). The ungrammaticality of these examples is thus explained as arising from a failure to satisfy this requirement. However, in itself such an assumption regarding *there* does not suffice to account for the facts. Thus, in grammatical examples such as (2a–b), a postulated Case requirement on *there* may be assumed to be satisfied. This, however, does not yet account for how the postverbal subject (*a unicorn*) is licensed in sentences of this kind. Additional assumptions would be needed to achieve such an account.⁴

The argument presented above refutes the hypothesis regarding long-distance agreement (Chomsky's (2000) Agree) to the extent that it shows, as I believe it does, that there are at least some constructions (e.g., (2a–b), (8a)) with a postverbal subject where this mechanism cannot possibly be at work. Rather, a different mechanism is needed that can be assumed to operate generally, including in the simple stan-

English complementizer *that* enters into a dependency with its IP/TP complement whereby it can be said to select a finite (rather than nonfinite) I/T. In examples such as (5a) or (6a), this selectional relation cannot be said to be disturbed by the occurrence of an adverb located between *that* and the following subject.

⁴ Approaches to the syntax of postverbal subjects within generative grammar have mostly been based on assuming some form of dependency between a postverbal subject and an expletive (e.g., *there*) in subject position. Theories belonging to this general category include analyses based on the notions of chain formation and Case transmission (Safir 1982, 1985, Chomsky 1986), as well as various implementations involving some form of LF relatedness between the postverbal subject and the subject position, or the expletive element occupying this position (e.g., 'LF affixation') (Chomsky 1991, Lasnik 1992, 1995, Groat 1995). The development of Chomsky's (2000) Agree-based analysis seems to be motivated by a recognition of the inadequacy of such analyses. In Hazout 2003, I develop an alternative account of postverbal 'subjects' and long-distance agreement based on postulating a different kind of association between an expletive subject and a postverbal NP/DP—namely, the subject-predicate relation.

dard cases of finite sentences with a postverbal subject, such as (1a–b) and (9). Such sentences provided the initial motivation for postulating Agree.

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