

Deriving the Restrictions on Pronominal Complements of Nouns

This paper is concerned with developing an explanation of the restrictions on the occurrence of pronouns as complements of nouns. While the analysis is developed utilizing Russian data, it is quite general in character and is intended to apply to other languages that exhibit the relevant restrictions (Italian, English, etc). The basic pattern to be explained is illustrated in (1): unlike other nominal elements, pronouns are not permitted to surface as genitive complements of nouns. However, they are permitted to surface as complements of other heads, e.g., verbs (see (2)).

The degree of unacceptability of a pronominal complement of a noun is affected by several factors. The construction becomes more acceptable if the head noun assigns lexical case (see (3a)) or if additional material is present in the complement position (see (3b,c)). The argument structure properties of the head noun are also relevant: pronominals are least acceptable as complements of nouns that lack argument structure (see (4a)); they are also unacceptable with head nouns that take affected complements, i.e., complements that undergo a change of state as a result of the event described by the head noun (see (4b)); however, their acceptability improves significantly when they occur with head nouns that take unaffected complements (see (4c)).

I argue that the pattern of judgments illustrated above reduces to a single restriction – non-branching structures are barred from occurring in the complement position. Thus, in the unacceptable (1a) the complement position is filled by a pronoun, that is, a non-branching DP. In contrast, in (1b), the complement position is filled by a branching DP – a null D which takes the NP *many* as a complement. Under the natural assumption that inherent case is always assigned by a preposition, the complement position of the acceptable (3a) can also be viewed as filled by a branching structure – a null P head with a nominal complement. The branching nature of the complements in (3b) and (3c) is obvious. The relative acceptability of the unaffected complements of nouns illustrated in (4c) reduces to the same property, i.e., the presence of branching in the complement position, if we adopt the approach to NP-internal theta-marking developed in Anderson 1979. According to Anderson, a head noun cannot assign a theta-role to an unaffected complement directly, but must utilize a semantically active preposition. Under this view, the complement position in (4c) must be occupied by a phonologically null P with a nominal complement, that is, a branching structure.

I further argue that the prohibition on non-branching complements is explained straightforwardly by the interaction of the bare phrase structure theory of Chomsky 1995 and the Linear Correspondence Axiom of Kayne 1993, which states that asymmetric c-command is required to impose a linear ordering on terminal elements. For example, in the unacceptable (1a), the head *uni#enie* is a sister to the complement *tebja*; because no asymmetric c-command obtains between the two terminal nodes, no linear ordering can be established and the structure is ruled out by the LCA. In the acceptable (1b), *uni#enie* does asymmetrically c-command both the determiner and its nominal complement. However, no asymmetric c-command relation exists between the determiner and its complement, which creates another potentially problematic situation. In this structure, the violation of the LCA can be avoided: if the rightmost element cliticizes to the null D, the trace left in the complement position will not be visible to the LCA, and a linear ordering will be established without problems. A similar analysis is adopted for all other acceptable structures with branching complements. Crucially, the pronominal complement in (1a) cannot cliticize onto the head noun: in order to receive structural Case it must move into a Specifier position of an appropriate functional category at LF, but once it cliticizes to the head noun it will be treated as a head and this movement operation will no longer be possible. Of course, this is also true of any other structurally case-marked complement. Finally, no violation of the LCA is created by the pronominal complements of verbs, such as the one in (2), because the verb undergoes overt raising and the trace left behind by the movement operation is ignored by the LCA.

- (1) a. **uniženie* [_{DP} tebja] (Vanej)
 humiliation you-gen (Vanya-instr)
 ‘the humiliation of you (by Vanya)’
 b. [*uniženie* [_{DP} [_D] [_{NP} mamy]] (Vanej)
 humiliation mom-gen (Vanya-instr)
 ‘the humiliation of mom (by Vanya)’
- (2) Vanja unizil mamu/tebja
 Vanya-nom humiliated mom-acc/ you-acc
 ‘Vanya humiliated mom/you’
- (3) a. rukovodstvo vami
 leadership you-instr
 ‘the leadership of you’
 b. *uniženie* ego i ego brata
 humiliation he-gen and his brother-gen
 ‘the humiliation of him and his brother’
 c. *uniženie* tebja, Petra Petrova
 humiliation you-gen, Petr-gen Petrov-gen
 ‘the humiliation of you, Petr Petrov’
- (4) a. **komnata* tebja
 room you-gen
 ‘your room’
 b. **ograblenie* tebja
 burglary you-gen
 ‘the burglary of you’
 c. *bojazn’* tebja
 fear you-gen
 ‘the fear of you’