

## Passivized Possessives

Burzio's generalization involves a cross-modular effect: whenever the object is no longer case-marked, the subject position is dethematized; it no longer allows the projection of the Agent argument. *-Able* is like passive *-ed* with respect to subject dethematization. Compare (1a) and (1b).

- (1) a. The grammar is learnable. (= The grammar is learnt.)  
b. \*The child is learnable. (= \*The child is learnt.)

In fact, the properties of passive percolate higher to a nominalization with *-ity*. Now Burzio's constraint takes effect: the Agent in (2b) cannot appear as the Possessor which we take to be the subject position of the nominal; only the underlying object can appear there, as in (2a).

- (2) a. the grammar's learnability  
b. \*the children's learnability of grammar

Similarly, *John's irresistibility* means that "John cannot be resisted", but *\*our irresistibility of John* cannot mean "We cannot resist John". This is not an accidental property of *-ity* nominals.

Nominalization of passive *-ed* with *-ness* also keeps the passive pattern of argument projection. The effect of subject dethematization accounts for (3b) as well.

- (3) a. John's excludedness by the team (= John was excluded by the team.)  
b. \*the team's excludedness of John

This is not a general property of Possessors. Compare a deverbal *-ity* nominal in (4b) and a non-deverbal one in (4a): dethematization of the subject is noticeable only when there is an underlying verb.

- (4) a. John's ability to learn French  
b. \*John's learnability of French

The restriction truly is a ban on Agents in subject position, not on Agent projection in general, as Agents may incorporate into the nominal, (5a), appear as modifying adjective, (5b), or in *by*-phrases, (5c); only not as subject, (5d).

- (5) a. machine-decipherability  
b. human learnability of grammar  
c. the learnability of grammar by a machine  
d. \*the human's learnability of grammar

We propose that the Possessor position is the subject position and therefore can receive verbal arguments. How does it get there? Invisible movement carries THEME to subject position.

If present, it should block other elements and have LF effects. Temporal adverbs are not acceptable in *-ability* nominalizations, but they are in others (*-ance*, *-tion*):

- (6) a. the acceptability of nudity on East-coast beaches last year  
b. \*last year's acceptability of nudity  
c. last year's acceptance of nudity is gone this year

Passive effects quantification (everyone knows two languages=two languages are known by everyone). We predict, if LF movement is obligatory, that only wide-scope is possible with *-ability*:

- 7) a. the election of nobody surprised me = no one elected  
b. nobody's election surprised me = of those elected, none were a surprise  
c. the electability of nobody surprised me = of those electable, none a surprise  
d. nobody's electability surprised me. = of those electable, none a surprise

Though subtle, it seems correct. Therefore we argue that Possessives function as subjects, serve as landing sites for LF-movement, and LF movement must operate below the sentence level.