

On the Derivation of Relative Clauses in Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec

Much recent work argues that some or all externally headed relative clauses (RCs) are derived by raising of the head NP from an RC-internal position (Kayne 1994, Bianchi 1999, Bhatt 2002, a.o.). We present novel data from Teotitlán del Valle Zapotec (TdVZ) which show that relative clauses in this language lack the head-raising derivation entirely, indicating that the derivation of externally headed RCs is subject to cross-linguistic variation which is not obvious on the surface.

Evidence. The main strand of evidence suggesting that TdVZ relative clauses are not derived by head-raising concerns the absence of binding connectivity with the reciprocal *sa'adan* 'each other'. In English, an *each other* in an RC-head can take as antecedent an RC-internal DP ((1a)), suggesting that the head in these structures has raised from inside the relative clause, allowing the reciprocal to be bound in its base position. In TdVZ, however, structures like (1a) are unacceptable:

- (1) a. The cars of [each other]_i's that [Elsa and Benito]_i saw yesterday are blue.
b. *Nga'a naa d-kamion xten **sa'adan** ni ba-yee **Els kun Beniit** nai.
blue be PL-car of each.other REL PERF-see Els and Beniit yesterday

The deviance of (1b) cannot be due to a general lack of binding connectivity in the language, as *sa'adan* regularly reconstructs for binding under other types of \bar{A} -movement. If TdVZ relative clauses could be formed by head-raising, (1b) would have a structure in which a copy of *sa'adan* 'each other' was locally bound by its RC-internal potential antecedent *Els kun Beniit* 'Els and Beniit', and the sentence would therefore be predicted to be acceptable.

Apparent counterevidence. Two classes of facts initially seem to suggest that TdVZ does allow head-raising after all. First, certain modifiers of RC-heads can be interpreted within the scope of RC-internal elements (cf. Bhatt 2002). Secondly, a particular VP-idiom can be "split up," with the verb RC-internal and the object as RC-head, and the idiomatic reading retained.

Analysis. We show that, despite initial appearances, the only plausible analysis of TdVZ relatives is one on which they are not derived by head-raising. On our Chomsky (1977)-style analysis, what moves to [Spec,CP] in a TdVZ relative clause is not the RC-head but rather a null operator (comparable to the English relative pronoun *which*), and the relative CP is adjoined to the NP head:

- (2) [_{NP} NP_{head} [_{CP} Op_i [_{C'} C ... t_i ...]]]

This accounts straightforwardly for the fact that a reciprocal inside an RC-head cannot take an RC-internal antecedent ((1b)): the head is generated outside the relative clause, so a reciprocal inside the head is never c-commanded by an RC-internal nominal phrase at any stage of the derivation.

We further show that our head-external analysis of TdVZ relatives accounts for a subtle difference between TdVZ and English with regard to variable-binding possibilities in a particular complex configuration—a difference utterly unexpected on a raising analysis of TdVZ relatives.

"Low" readings of modifiers of RC-heads come about not through syntactic reconstruction (which would require head-raising) but through semantic reconstruction. The VP-idiom evidence can be accounted for on the plausible assumption that the relevant verb has two distinct denotations. In short, the only analysis of TdVZ RCs that captures all the data is a non-head-raising analysis.

Broader implications. Our results reveal that the head-raising derivation is unavailable in some languages with externally headed relative clauses. This shows that externally headed relative clauses are a cross-linguistically heterogeneous category: garden-variety relative clauses in TdVZ and English look quite similar on the surface, but have very different syntactic derivations.

References

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