

# Week 8

## The status of preverbal subjects

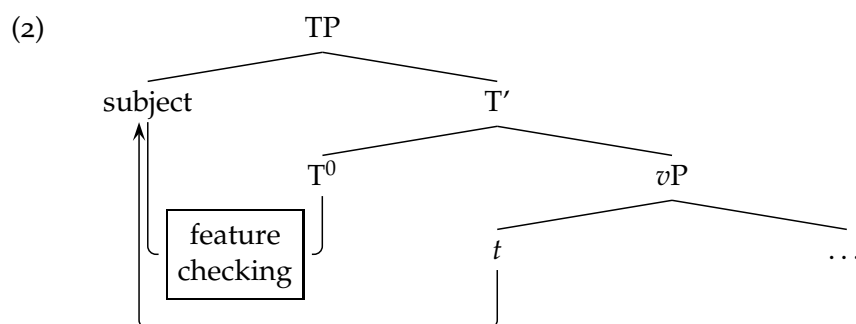
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### 1 Today's topic

In previous weeks, we have seen that Spanish subjects can appear in a preverbal as well as in a postverbal position.

- (1)
- a. **Juan** ha leído un libro  
Juan has read a book
  - b. Ha leído **Juan** un libro  
has read Juan a book
  - c. Ha leído un libro **Juan**  
has read a book Juan

This creates a problem wrt the licensing of subjects. Standard checking theory says that the Case/Agreement features of the subject are licensed in a head-specifier relation with  $T^0$ , for which they need to move to SpecTP.



However, we have also seen that postverbal subjects are not in SpecTP –rather, they remain in SpecvP. We have various options to solve this problem:

- Case/agreement feature checking is possible both in SpecTP and SpecvP.
- Case/agreement feature checking is only possible in SpecTP, and then some other mechanism allows subjects to exceptionally remain in SpecvP.
- Case/agreement feature checking is only possible in SpecvP, and raising to SpecTP is unrelated to Case/agreement.

We will see today that the last option is arguably the correct one.

## 2 The preverbal position is an A-bar position

Ordóñez and Treviño argue that the canonical licensing position for subjects is Spec $v$ P. The preverbal position (which they call SpecTP) is actually a topic position to which A-bar movement can take place. They support this idea by showing that preverbal objects pattern with left-dislocated objects in a number of ways.

### 2.1 Polarity ellipsis

Spanish has a construction in which a full sentence is elided to the exclusion of one single argument plus a polarity particle, such as *no* or *también* 'also'.

- (3) a. Juan le dió unos libros a María, y Pepe también [~~le dió unos libros a María~~]  
Juan CL gave some books to María and Pepe also CL gave some books to María  
b. Juan le dió unos libros a María, pero Pepe no [~~le dió unos libros a María~~]  
Juan CL gave some books to María but Pepe not CL gave some books to María
- (4) a. A María le dió Juan unos libros, y a Pepe también [~~le dió Juan unos libros~~]  
to María CL gave Juan some books and to Pepe also CL gave Juan some books  
b. A María le dió Juan unos libros, pero a Pepe no [~~le dió Juan unos libros~~]  
to María CL gave Juan some books but to Pepe not CL gave Juan some books

This type of ellipsis requires movement of the remnant argument to a preverbal position (see Depiante 2000 for more evidence). Ordóñez and Treviño take this position to be SpecTP, *qua* a topic position.

### 2.2 Negative quantifiers

In Spanish, negative quantifiers in the immediately preverbal position don't require the presence of negation.

- (5) a. Nadie \*(no) le debe la renta a María  
nobody not CL owns the rent to María  
b. Nada \*(no) le debe Juan a sus amigos  
nothing not CL owns Juan to his friends  
c. A nadie \*(no) le debe Juan la renta  
to nobody not CL owns Juan the rent

However, negative quantifiers separated from the verb by the subject are ungrammatical, regardless of the presence or absence of sentential negation.

- (6) a. \* Nada Juan no le debe a sus amigos  
nothing Juan no CL owns to his friends  
b. \* A nadie Juan le debe la renta  
to nobody Juan not CL owns Juan the rent

Ordóñez and Treviño assume that SpecTP is the only preverbal position where negative quantifiers can be licensed. If a subject is occupying that position, then the negative quantifier must move to a higher position where it cannot be licensed.

### 2.3 Wh-/quantifier movement at LF

The final piece of evidence that Ordóñez and Treviño discuss is that, in multiple questions, the lower wh- phrase cannot appear in a preverbal position.

- (7) a. \* ¿Qué dijiste que quién compró el otro día?  
what you.said that who bought the other day  
b. ¿Qué dijiste que compró quién el otro día?  
what you.said that bought who the other day
- (8) a. \* ¿Quién crees tú que a quién le va a dar eso?  
who think you that to who CL goes to give that  
“Who do you think will give that to who?”  
b. ¿Quién crees tú que le va a dar eso a quién?  
who think you that CL goes to give that to who  
[same meaning]

Similarly, a quantifier in the same position can only take narrow scope.

- (9) a. ¿A quién dices que cada senador amaba?  
to who say.you that each senator loved  
✓ “Which is the one person that was loved by all senators (wh > ∀)”  
\* “Which is the different person that each senator loved (∀ > wh-”  
b. ¿A quién dices que amaba cada senador?  
to who say.you that loved each senator  
✓ “Which is the one person that was loved by all senators (wh > ∀)”  
✓ “Which is the different person that each senator loved (∀ > wh-”

The technical explanation is slightly complicated (in short: the required readings require LF movement of the wh- phrase or quantifier into the main clause, but general economy principles say that LF movement cannot follow overt A-bar movement), but it follows if the preverbal position is uniformly an A-bar landing site.

## 3 The preverbal position is a topic position

One intriguing property of Spanish is that sentences with postverbal subjects tend to be a bit odd. One common strategy to make them perfect is to include some preverbal element.

- (10) a. ? Leyó Juan el libro  
read Juan the book  
b. Ayer leyó Juan el libro  
yesterday read Juan the book

The reason for this is because the preverbal position is a topic position (what the sentence is about), and topic-less sentences are more marked than sentences with a topic.

## 4 The licensing of postverbal subjects

If Case/agreement licensing requires a specifier-head relation, as in (2), how do explain the fact that postverbal subjects are licensed without apparently moving to SpecTP? There are various options.

## 4.1 Covert movement

In essence, the postverbal subject moves to SpecTP, but we don't see that movement. Ordóñez and Treviño don't really discuss this option, because it's problematic in various respects. First of all, it characterizes SpecTP as a dual-nature position, i.e., a Case/agreement position for subjects and a generalized topic position. Besides, we would have to say that the pronunciation (or not) of the subject in the SpecTP position depends on whether it qualifies as a topic or not, which is not so easy to implement.

[although after Ordóñez and Treviño (1999) was published, Chomsky proposed the operation *Agree*, which lets a head ( $T^0$ ) enter a feature checking relation with an argument it c-commands (the subject) without there being actually any movement to the specifier position. This option could be, I think, more promising, and we'll get back to it later on.]

## 4.2 Polysynthesis

*Polysynthetic languages* are languages which exhibit (i) very rich agreement morphology, and (ii) very free placement of arguments. Examples include several native languages of North America and Australia. In these languages, agreement morphemes are the real arguments of the verb, and the DPs that trigger agreement are actually adjuncts linked to the agreement morphemes via a binding process.

Ordóñez and Treviño also reject this hypothesis purely because of technical complications (i.e., it requires overly complicated assumptions about how lexical DPs are assigned case).

## 4.3 Subject agreement morphemes as clitics

The option that Ordóñez and Treviño settle on is that subject agreement morphemes are actually clitics (remember that we had already entertained a similar analysis for object clitics). In principle, this looks like a bad idea, since agreement morphemes and clitics differ in a number of respects.

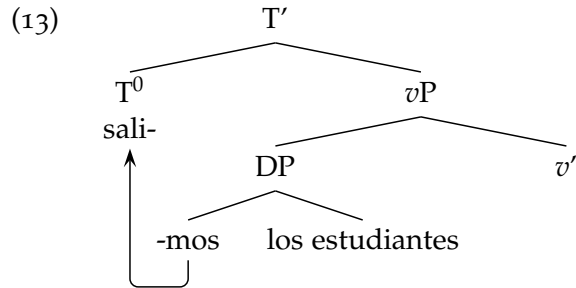
- Object clitics inflect for gender, but subject agreement morphemes do not.
- Object clitics are optional, but subject agreement morphemes are obligatory.
- Subject agreement morphemes form a tighter morphological unit with the verb than object clitics do.

However, there is one piece of evidence that supports their analysis, namely, the fact that the agreement morphology triggered by lexical DPs has the ability to bind pronouns.

- (11) a. \* Acusaron a los estudiantes<sub>i</sub> después de hablar con nosotros<sub>i</sub>  
they.accused the students after of talking with us  
(intended) "They accused us students after they talked to us"
- b. **nos** acusaron a los estudiantes<sub>i</sub> después de hablar con nosotros<sub>i</sub>  
CL.1PL they.accused the students after of talking with us  
"They accused us students after they talked to us"
- (12) a. \* Los estudiantes<sub>i</sub> salieron de la reunión después de que nos acusaran  
the students left.3PL of the meeting after of that CL.1PL accused  
"We students left the meeting after they accused us"

- b. Los estudiantes; **sali**mos de la reunión después de que nos acusaran  
 the students left.1PL of the meeting after of that CL.1PL accused  
 “We students left the meeting after they accused us”

Ordóñez and Treviño propose to capture these facts by having the clitics and the lexical DP be generated together in a “big DP” structure. Then, the clitic moves out of the big DP to adjoin to the verb. The binding properties follow because, in this configuration, the clitic can inherit the referential properties of the lexical DP.



Note, however, that in this structure, the clitic inherits the referential properties of the lexical DP only by stipulation. We can stipulate the same with a regular agreement relation, which gets us around the problems discussed above.