

*The ECP and That-trace Effects in Denya**

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1 The goal of the paper

This paper is rather limited in scope. It focuses on the familiar that-trace effects, contrasting Denya with English. It is shown that the licensing of the subject trace in sentences with a complementizer cannot be explained by the Empty Category Principle (ECP) in Chomsky's 1986b formulation. It is also shown that although Denya is a pro-drop language like Italian, Rizzi's (1982, 1990) accounts of the phenomenon in Italian cannot explain the Denya data, since Denya lacks free inversion. A proposal is put forward to account for the facts in Denya in terms of head government, relaxing the condition that the head must θ -mark the trace, as under Rizzi's (1990) ECP.

2 The phenomenon of the *that*-trace effects

The contrasts in (1) give the standard illustration of this phenomenon in English and must be compared with (2) which shows the equivalent structures in Denya.

- (1) a. Who do you think [CP t' that [IP Bill saw 't]]
b. *Who do you think [CP t' that [IPt' left ?]]
c. Who do you think [CP t' [IPt' left ?]]
(2) a. [CP waa [IP wOO-fEre [CP t' nno [Eva a - gE t ?]]]]
who you AGR think [t' that [IP Eva AGR see]]
who do you think [CP t' that [Eva saw t]]
b. [CP waa [IP WO O-fEre [CP t' nno [IP t a-fE]]]]
who you AGR-think [CP t' that [IP t AGR-go]]
*who do you think [CP t' that [IP t left]]

*Denya is a pro-drop language spoken in Cameroon. (Abangma 1981, 1987, 1992;

Tyhurst and Tyhurst 1983). The phonetic symbol O is used in place of the standard IPA ɔ .

- c. * [CP Waa [IP wO O-fEre [CP t' [IP t afE]]]]
 who you AGR-think [CP t' [IP t AGR Go]]
 who do you think [CP t' [IP t left]]

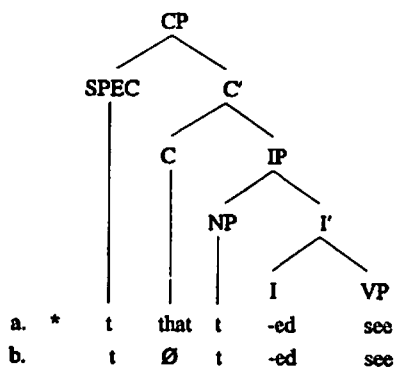
A careful comparison of the data in (1) with that in (2) reveals the following: there is an obvious subject-object asymmetry between (1a) and (1b) which is absent in the Denya examples, (2a) and (2b). The subject-object asymmetry in English suggests that the ECP is involved (Chomsky 1986b:47-48; Rizzi, 1990:29).

These data pose a number of problems, so far as the ECP in Denya is concerned. As regards (1a) and (2a), there is no problem.

The licensing of *t* is straightforwardly accounted for by the ECP requirement that complements be θ -marked by their heads. In both cases, *t* is properly governed by V. The problem, however is with (1c) and (2c). The assumption in (1b,c) is that an overt complementizer blocks antecedent-government whereas a null one does not. On the other hand, in (2b), there is an overt complementizer, yet the trace *t* in subject position is licensed. In (2c), where there is a null complementizer, the trace in subject position appears not to have been licensed since the sentence is ungrammatical. The partial trees in (3) and (4) illustrate these differences between English and Denya.

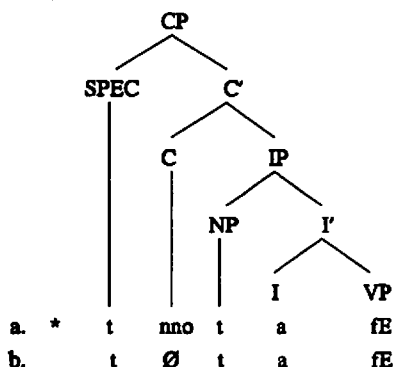
(3)

English:



(4)

Denya:



How do you account for these differences between English and Denya with respect to the ECP? In the Barriers system, there is no way in which (4a) can be grammatical, for the following reasons. First, although the complementizer *nno* is the head of the C and a potential governor, IP not being a barrier to government, it does not θ -mark the trace and hence does not θ -govern it. Second, there is no possibility of antecedent government since according to the Minimality Condition, the intermediate trace cannot govern into IP because C' headed by a lexical C is a barrier to government. Thus [*t*, IP] is left without a proper governor and therefore violates the ECP. It is only to be expected, following what has just been said, that (4b) ought to be grammatical. But like (4a), the reverse is the case. Faced with this problem, there are two assumptions that can be made:

- (a) The presence of a complementizer *nno* in (2b,4a) does not block antecedent government of *t* by *t'*.
- (b) Antecedent government is not a necessary condition for licensing a trace in subject position considering that Denya is a pro-drop language.

As for (a), to adopt it is to claim that antecedent government is involved in (2b,4a). If the presence of a complementizer did not block antecedent government of *t* by *t'*, we would expect a sentence without a complementizer to be also grammatical. Such expectations are not fulfilled in (2c, 4b). As for

(b), Rizzi (1982) demonstrated that the Italian example equivalent to (2b, 4a) would be grammatical, due to the fact that Italian is a null subject language. Rizzi (1990:75-6) on the same problem asks:

"why is it that subject extraction is systematically possible from wh-islands and across overt complementizer in a language like Italian?"

He answers by saying that this property is related to the fact that in such languages the subject can be placed in VP-final position, the so-called free inversion property. But as shown in Abangma (1990,1992), Denya, though a pro-drop language, does not permit free subject inversion.

My proposal as to why (2b, 4a) are grammatical is based on the notion of head government. As shown in (4), *uno*, the head of C, can govern into IP and would properly govern the subject trace if we relax the condition that it must θ -mark it. This indeed is in keeping with Rizzi's (1990) ECP. It has been assumed that an overt complementizer is not a proper governor (inert for government) because it cannot θ -mark the subject trace. But if the overt complementizer in Denya did not licence the subject trace, its absence would not have made a difference in (2c, 4b). We cannot argue convincingly that because Denya is a pro-drop language, the subject trace must have been licenced by I, for the reasons detailed above. For these reasons, I conclude that C as a lexical head licenses the subject trace.

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