

Where θ -roles are not determined by GF- θ s

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First, observe the following :

- (1)a. John gave a book to Mary.
- b. John gave Mary a book.
- (2)a. John bought a book for Mary.
- b. John bought Mary a book.

Each pair of sentences above are considered to share the same cognitive meaning and to be related by Dative Movement in a movement analysis. Let us call these sentences *dative constructions* to use the term in a wide sense.

Chomsky (1965, 1981, etc.) assumes that the GF- θ (grammatical function in D-structure) of a given NP is determined according to the structural configuration in which it occurs, and that its θ -role (thematic relation) is according to that GF- θ . Call these the *Assumption A* and the *Assumption B*, respectively.

Roughly, Chomsky's (1965, 71) notion [B, A] refers to the grammatical function borne by a category labeled *B*, if it is directly dominated by a node labeled *A*. Thus, *a book* in (1)a is the Direct-Object-of the VP, i. e., it bears the relation [NP, VP]. *Mary* in (1)a, on the other hand, is the Direct-Object-of the PP, i. e., it bears the relation [NP, PP]. In the case of (1)b, however, *Mary* and *a book* would end up being assigned the same relation [NP, VP].¹ Without referring to, for instance, word order, it seems to be impossible to distinguish the GF- θ of *Mary* from that of *a book* in (1)b. Hence, an obstacle to the Assumption A.

Under the Assumption B, furthermore, *Mary* and *a book* in (1)b, if assigned the GF- θ , would be assigned the same θ -role. Actually, their θ -roles are distinct: *Mary* as "goal" and *a book* as "theme" (cf. Jackendoff (1972), etc.). Hence, the Assumption A causes the Assumption B to make a wrong prediction.

To be fair to Chomsky, let us now assume that it is possible to determine somehow the GF- θ of *Mary* differently from that of *a book* in (1)b. Even if this is assumed, in order to account for the fact that *Mary* and *a book*, are assigned "goal" and "theme", respectively, in both of the sentences in (1), one must have a recourse to two different, unrelated, statements, one for (1)a and

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the other for (1)b, for assigning θ -roles in the case where the verb *give* is involved. Otherwise, *Mary* would bear the relation [NP, PP] (or *to Mary* would bear the relation [PP, VP], which may be called an Oblique-of the VP) in (1)a, and something else in (1)b, thus receiving different θ -roles in (1)a and (1)b.² Here is a complication caused by the Assumption B (originally by the Assumption A).

As for (2), in which the verb in question is *buy*, instead of *give*, the same line of argument holds.

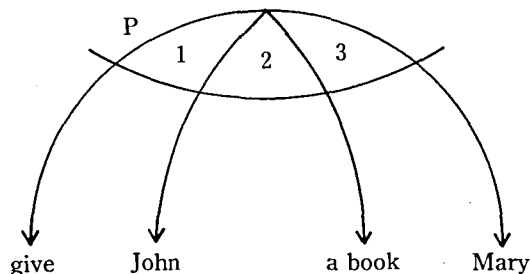
It has been shown here that there are serious, but long-unquestioned, problems in the Assumptions A and B i.e. the determination of GF- θ s and the assignment of θ -roles concerning dative constructions in English, respectively. Consideration of VSO languages would no doubt lead the Assumption A and, ultimately, the Assumption B to a number of problems. Thus, it appears plausible to say that the Assumptions A and B are at best inadequate, and that an alternative should be sought for.

Footnotes

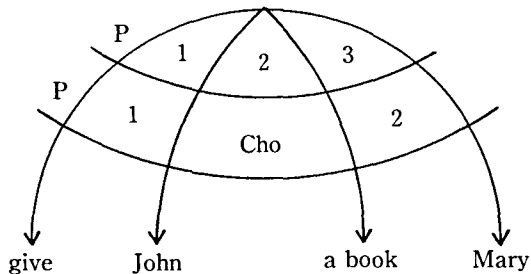
¹ In Relational Grammar, for example, the Stratal Uniqueness Law, roughly speaking, precludes a clause in which more than one NP bears the same grammatical relation (=GF- θ). See Perlmutter (1980) for details.

² In Relational Grammar, the observed difficulty does not arise because, roughly, the grammatical relation of a given NP is determined according to the semantic roles it has with respect to the verb of the relevant clause. The fact that each of *Mary* and *a book* plays the same semantic role both in (1)a and (1)b is carried over to (i), the relational network of (1)a, and to (ii), that of (1)b, respectively. That is, they involve the same initial stratum, which can be said to be the projection of the relevant semantic information of the clause.

(i)



(ii)



With details aside, “1”, “2”, “3”, and “Cho” stand for the “subject” relation, the “direct object” relation, the “indirect object” relation, and the “chômeur” relation, respectively.

References

- Chomsky, N. (1965) *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
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