

‘Default’ case in gapping reconsidered

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Draft – Comments welcome!

Abstract

In this squib, I argue that what Schütze (2001) identifies as ‘Default Case’ on pronominal subjects in English gapping constructions can simply be analyzed as standard Dependent Case assignment (e.g. Marantz 1991; McFadden 2004; Baker 2015). Given independent diagnostics showing that the subject in the first conjunct c-commands the subject of the second (e.g. Johnson 2009), it is not necessary to appeal to Default Case if raising can feed case assignment (cf. Baker & Vinokurova 2010).

1 Introduction

Schütze (2001) discusses the following constructions in which English subject pronouns unexpectedly surface in their accusative/objective form:

- (1) a. We can’t eat beans and *him* caviar. (Gapping)
- b. *Him* and *me* are gonna rumble tonight. (Coordination)
- c. The real *me* is finally emerging. (Modified pronouns)
- d. *Him*, he is my brother. (Left dislocation)
- e. A: Who brought these books?
 B: *Me*. (Fragment answers)

Schütze argues that what these examples have in common is that they are in syntactic environments in which, for various reasons, the relevant DPs cannot receive (nominative) case. As a result, each of the subject pronouns surfaces in a default accusative form, providing a strong argument for some mechanism of default case assignment. For Schütze, this is a postsyntactic process that applies to DPs with unchecked case features (also cf. McFadden 2004).

In this squib, I argue that there is a far simpler explanation for the form of the pronoun in (1a) in terms of Dependent Case, which is supported by independent observations about the syntax of gapping.

2 Case and gapping

Schütze (2001) discusses the distribution of case in English gapping constructions on the basis of

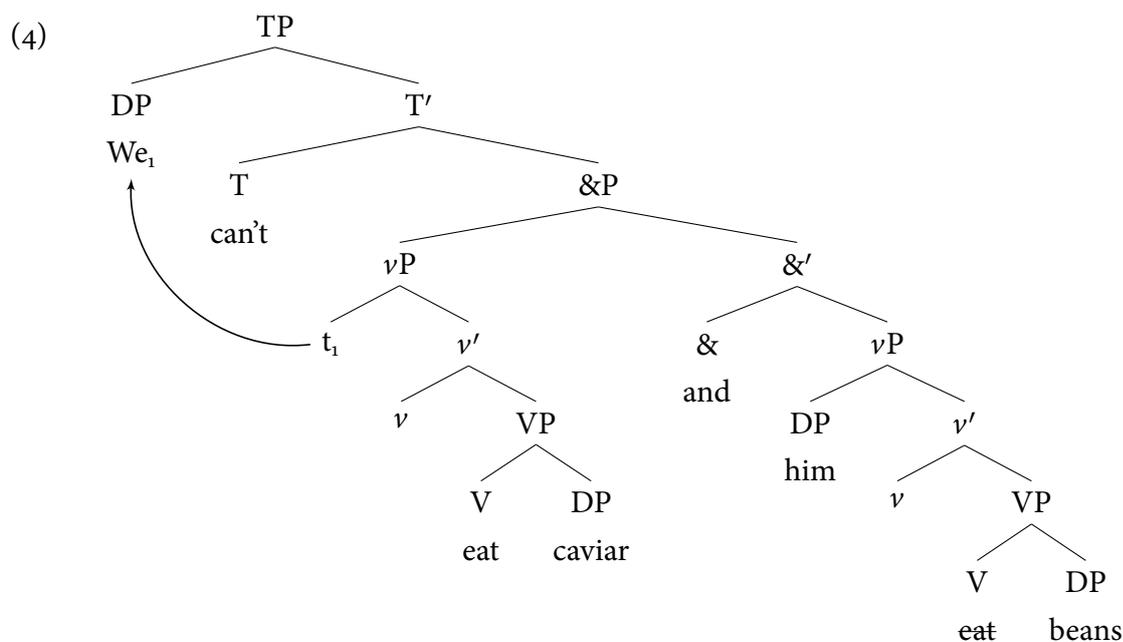
the examples in (2). We observe that the subject of the second conjunct does not bear nominative, but rather accusative if the verb is elided.¹

- (2) a. We can't eat caviar and *him*/**he* / eat beans.
 b. She grew up in Jacksonville, *me*/?*I* grew up in Tallahassee. (Schütze 2001:212)

This is in contrast to pseudogapping, where the lexical verb is also elided, but an auxiliary or modal remains. In (3), accusative subjects are impossible.

- (3) a. We can't eat caviar, but *he*/**him* can eat beans.
 b. She grew up in Jacksonville at the same *I*/**me* did grow up in Tallahassee.

Schütze (2001:213) suggests that in (2a) 'Infl is missing from the second clause in some deeper sense'. Although he does not elaborate on this further, the standard way to capture this would be to adopt a 'low coordination' analysis of gapping in which *v*Ps are coordinated below a single T head (e.g. Siegel 1984, 1987; Coppock 2001; Johnson 1996/2003, 2009, 2014; Toosarvandani 2016). The relevant structure for (2a) on this analysis is given in (4).²



Since there is only a single T head, nominative is assigned to the first conjunct only, which also

¹It is sometimes claimed that nominative is also possible (e.g. Chao 1987:20f.; Johnson 1996/2003:44). However, this is not uncontroversially the case. For example, Agbayani & Zoerner (2004:189) claim that 'for our consultants (though apparently not for all speakers), the accusative form is more natural than the nominative form'. What I suspect is at work here is the same confound that also exists for most environments for 'default case' in (1), namely that there are prescriptive pressures that lead speakers to actively control the forms of pronouns in these constructions (see Emonds 1986; Sobin 1997; Schütze 2001:214,fn.10). Interestingly, the majority of gapping examples with nominative subjects in the second conjunct cited by Quinn (2005:272ff.) come from 20th century texts (or earlier), further suggesting that this is an artificially-preserved prestige construction.

This aside, the present analysis would still be able to derive nominative forms by assuming variability in the timing of raising and Dependent Case assignment. An alternative would be to assume that gapping structures are actually sometimes bi-clausal (Potter et al. to appear; see Section 5 for discussion).

²Note that I remain agnostic about how deletion of the verb is actually derived. Johnson (2009) assumes that it involves ATB-movement, but see Vicente (2010) for critical discussion. For alternative approaches, see Hartmann (2000); Coppock (2001); Agbayani & Zoerner (2004); Hernández (2007); Murphy (2016), among many others.

raises to Spec-TP (see discussion below). Thus, the second conjunct must receive case by some different means. One option is that it is the & head itself that assigns accusative case (cf. Zoerner 1995; Johannessen 1998), however there is little independent motivation for this, as pointed out by Schütze (2001:214). Instead, Schütze (2001) assumes that the second DP remains caseless and receives default case values at Spell-Out (this of course presupposes that T cannot assign nominative to both subjects via Multiple Agree; cf. Hiraiwa 2001).

There is, however, an alternative way to derive the occurrence of accusative case in second conjunct, which does not require default case. This capitalizes on the structure in (4) where the subject of the first conjunct raises to Spec-TP and thereby to a position where it asymmetrically c-commands the subject of the second conjunct.³ Given a theory of Dependent Case assignment in which accusative is usually assigned to a direct object in the presence of a higher subject DP, the structure in (4) will also allow us to treat 'default' case in the second conjunct as standard case assignment. As the following section will illustrate, independent diagnostics confirm that the subject of the first conjunct does indeed c-command the subject in the second.

3 C-command diagnostics

As discovered by Oehrle (1987) and McCawley (1993:248), the subject of the first conjunct in a gapping structure can bind a variable in the second clause (5a). In pseudogapping constructions, however, binding a variable proves impossible (5b).

- (5) a. No girl_i can join the army and her_i girlfriend the navy.
 b. *No girl_i can join the army and her_i girlfriend can the navy. (Johnson 2009:293)

Given that c-command is a necessary requirement for variable binding, raising of the first conjunct as in (4) creates this configuration, i.e. raising to Spec-TP feeds binding. As suggested by the presence of a modal or auxiliary in the second conjunct, pseudogapping does not involve low coordination of VPs but rather coordination of TPs (e.g. Johnson 2009:298). Consequently, the subject *no girl* does not c-command anything outside of the first conjunct and variable binding is impossible. Further evidence for asymmetric raising in gapping structures comes from the fact that variable binding into the second conjunct is blocked if an expletive is merged (6).

- (6) a. No boy_i is in THIS ROOM and his_i mother in THE OTHER.
 b. *There is no boy_i in THIS ROOM and his_i mother in THE OTHER.
 (Johnson 1996/2003:42)

In (6b), asymmetric raising of the subject in the first conjunct to Spec-TP is blocked and it remains in Spec-*v*P of the first conjunct. As a result, the requisite c-command relation for variable binding between *no boy* and *his mother* is not given.

Now, let us consider some other binding-theoretic diagnostics. For Condition B, we also

³Although this may seem to violate the Coordinate Structure Constraint (Ross 1967), there is empirical support for it (see Section 3). Lin (2002, 2001) provides an analysis where this asymmetric raising does not violate the CSC. The idea is that the CSC is a constraint on LF representations and does not hold for A-movement.

see that the subject in the first conjunct may not bind a pronoun in the second conjunct (7a). This then conforms to the ν P-coordination hypothesis for gapping since, if we assume that the minimal TP constitutes the relevant binding domain (e.g. Truswell 2014:217), then (7a) is simply a Condition B violation. It is important to note that this coreference is unproblematic in non-gapping structures such as (7b) since these are assumed to involve coordination of at least TPs.

- (7) a. *Pat_i loves mysteries and she_i/her_i ⟨loves⟩ romances.
 b. Pat_i loves mysteries and she_i loves romances (too).

(Agbayani & Zoerner 2004:188)

Condition C effects also obtain between the subjects of the first and second conjuncts. Consider the following example, in which, given a wide scope construal of negation (indicating low coordination), co-reference between *he* and *John* triggers a Condition C violation (also see Frazier 2015; Potter et al. to appear):

- (8) *He_i can’t eat caviar and John’s_i brother ⟨eat⟩ chili. (Potter 2014:350)

Finally, let us consider licensing of negative polarity items. To my knowledge, this diagnostic has not been reported previously, but it seems to conform to our expectations.⁴ Example (9a) shows that a negative quantifier subject can license an NPI subject in the second clause. As we would expect, this is not possible in pseudogapping constructions (10a) due to lack of c-command.

- (9) a. Nobody will buy John’s book, (n)or anyone ⟨buy⟩ his CD, for that matter.
 b. Mary will buy John’s book, and Jane ⟨buy⟩ his CD.
 (10) a. *Nobody will buy John’s book after anyone has ⟨bought⟩ his CD.
 b. Mary will only buy John’s book after Jane has ⟨bought⟩ his CD.

In sum, we have seen that all relevant c-command diagnostics seem to support the asymmetric raising of the first conjunct in (4). Given this state of affairs, the fact that the subject of the second conjunct is c-commanded by another DP in gapping constructions can be used as the explanation of how it is assigned accusative case.

⁴Repp (2009:178) discusses examples such as (i) showing that NPIs are only licit with a distributed reading of negation and the concomitant intonation.

- (i) a. *Oh come on, John DIDN’T ever touch snails and Mary slugs.
 b. JOHN didn’t ever touch SNAILS and MARY ⟨didn’t ever touch⟩ SLUGS.

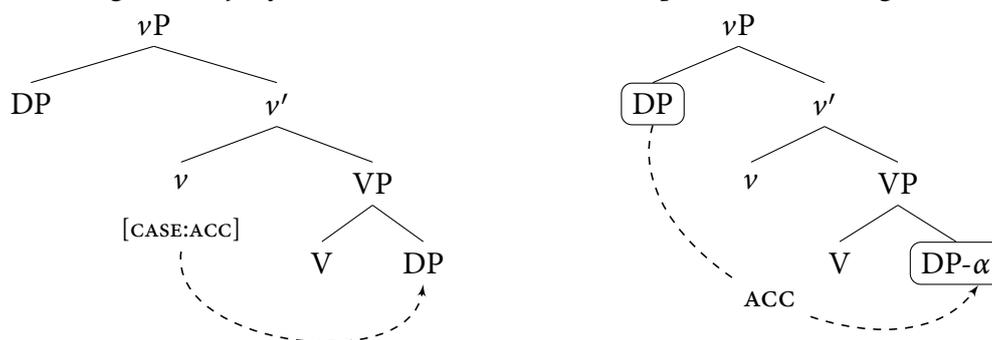
Furthermore, López & Winkler (2003:241) provide the example in (ii), which they argue shows that topicalization targets the ν P edge. If CPs were coordinated, then the negation would not be able to c-command the NPI adverbial.

- (ii) During dinner, he didn’t [[ν P address his colleagues from Stuttgart] or [ν P at any time [ν P his boss]]] for that matter.

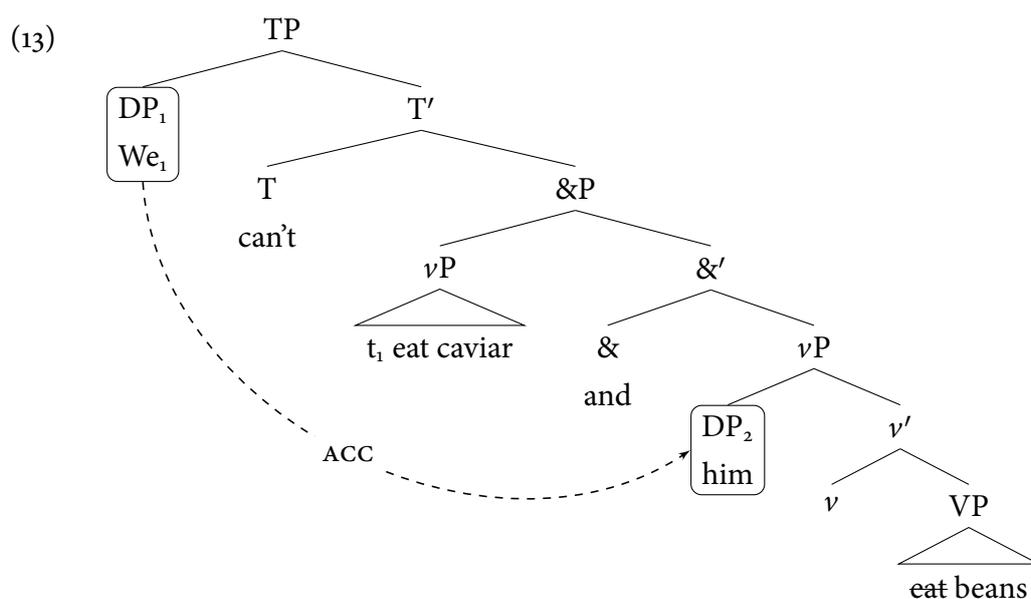
4 Raising and Dependent Case

The standard Minimalist approach to case involves assignment by a functional head, e.g. v or T, under Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001) as shown in (11). An alternative view is taken by *Dependent Case Theory* (e.g. Marantz 1991; Bittner & Hale 1996; McFadden 2004; Bobaljik 2008; Baker & Vinokurova 2010; Preminger 2014; Baker 2015; Levin 2015; Levin & Preminger 2015; Poole 2015; also cf. Yip et al. 1987; Wunderlich 1997 as theoretical antecedents). In this approach, case is assignment is configurational, i.e. case is assigned to one of two DPs in a c-command relation. In (12), case marking on the lower DP (indicated by α) is not licensed by a functional head v , but rather by the presence of a higher, c-commanding DP.⁵

- (11) Case assignment by a functional head: (12) 'Dependent' case assignment:



The independently motivated assumption of asymmetric raising can be exploited in a Dependent Case approach, where accusative is assigned to a DP in the presence of a higher c-commanding DP. Therefore, when the subject of the first conjunct raises to Spec-TP, this creates a configuration in which DP₁ now c-commands DP₂ within TP. As a result dependent accusative case can be assigned to the subject of the second conjunct of two coordinated vPs under the same conditions as case assignment to the direct object of a transitive clause (i.e. local c-command) (13).



⁵ There are few different ways to implement case assignment in this system. Assignment of Dependent Case can either involve the addition of a feature such as [+inferior] (McFadden 2004:212), a case projection (KP) (Richards 2010:131) or by checking/valuation of case features (Preminger 2014; Levin 2015).

ported by independent diagnostics suggesting that the subject of the first conjunct does in fact asymmetrically c-command the second.

However, we have not discussed the observation that examples such as (17) are reported to allow a both reading where the negation takes wide scope, but also a reading where the negation scopes below the coordination (see Siegel 1984, 1987; Oehrle 1987; Repp 2009; Centeno 2012).

(17) Ward can’t eat caviar and Sue, beans. (Siegel 1984:524)

In order to account for this variability, a number of authors pursue a hybrid approach in which gapping can also sometimes involve ‘high’ coordination of CPs (Centeno 2012; Potter 2014; Frazier 2015; Kubota & Levine 2016; Potter et al. to appear):

(18) a. $[_{CP}$ Ward can’t eat caviar] and $[_{CP}$ Sue ⟨can’t eat⟩ beans] $(\wedge > \neg \diamond)$
 b. $[_{TP}$ Ward_i can’t $[_{vP}$ t_i eat caviar] and $[_{vP}$ Sue ⟨eat⟩ beans] $(\neg \diamond > \wedge)$

The analysis proposed here is only compatible with the low-coordination analysis in (18b). For the structure in (18a), a Dependent Case approach would predict that the subject of the second conjunct surfaces in nominative case. It would therefore seem that this makes the strong prediction that, if both the ‘two-source hypothesis’ and this analysis of gapping are correct, then accusative-marked subjects in the second conjunct should only be compatible with a wide scope interpretation of negation.

However, the results of this prediction are inconclusive since, as mentioned in footnote 1, it is unclear how natural nominative subjects in the second conjunct of gapped clauses are to begin with. It seems there is a ultimately trade-off between the two approaches: whereas the CP coordination can derive distributed scope, it does not provide an adequate explanation for accusative case on subject pronouns (even under the ‘default case’ approach). The opposite is true of the vP coordination analysis, which can derive low scope readings and the occurrence of accusative pronouns, but has greater difficulty accounting for distributed scope. It therefore remains to be seen to whether a hybrid approach to gapping can successfully provide a unified account of both the scope and the case facts.

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