

An LF-driven account of infinitival clauses with a nominative subject

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Szabolcsi (2005, 2007, 2009) discusses a problem related to infinitival constructions. As attested in sentence (1), infinitival clauses can appear with what seems to be a nominative subject related to the infinitive itself.

- (1) Nem szeretnék [én is elcsúszni].
not would.like-1SG I-NOM too slip-INF
'I wouldn't like for it to be the case that I, too, slip.'

This is highly problematic from the perspective of Universal Grammar, since, according to traditional analyses, nominative case can only be assigned by finite inflection, which is not supposed to be present in an infinitival clause. As discussed by Szabolcsi (2005), the construction has the properties in (2).

- (2) Properties of constructions (seemingly?) containing nominative infinitival subjects
a) the subject of the infinitive has to be a pronoun
b) the matrix clause cannot have a subject of its own
c) the subject of the infinitive agrees with the finite verb in person and number
d) the matrix verb has to be a subject control verb or *fog* 'will do'.

Considering these properties, we can make the following observations: (2b) and (2c) would make it possible for us to claim that the nominative subject is actually the subject of the finite verb, but that leaves (2a) to account for. However, as indicated by (3), a) is not necessarily true.

- (3) Nem akartak csak a fiúk busszal menni/menni busszal.
not wanted-3PL only the boys bus-with go-INF/go-INF bus-with
'The boys did not want it to be the case that only they go by bus.'

Szabolcsi (2007, 2009) points out an additional property of the construction in question, namely considerable differences in interpretation depending on whether the nominative subject appears in a position preceding the finite verb or the infinitive (4). This is going to play a central role in the analysis proposed in my talk as well, here I only present a pair of the data.

- (4) a. Nem akar csak ő menni busszal.
not want-3SG only he/she-NOM go-INF bus-with
'He/She doesn't want to be the only one to take the bus.'
- b. Csak ő nem akar busszal menni.
only he/she not want-3SG bus-with go-INF
'It is only him who does not want to go by bus.'

Szabolcsi (2007) draws the conclusion that the constituent *nem én* 'not me' belongs to the infinitival clause. She also argues that it cannot be the result of clause union either, since not only restructuring verbs (like *want* and *seem*) but also non-restructuring ones (like *hate*

and *begin*) can participate in the construction. In her analysis it is the pro-drop property of Hungarian and other languages allowing similar patterns that accounts for the structure.

There is an important aspect of the constructions this account fails to capture: the constituents that show this behaviour (appearing in the finite or the infinitival clause depending on interpretation) are all constituents that target left-peripheral positions of the clause. This is the property that connects these constructions, and, since left peripheral positions have an obvious connection to the interpretation of the sentence, it should not be left an unexplained, accidental property of the construction in question. In the ideal case the analysis of these constructions should also account for why this should be so.

One of the reasons why it is problematic to account for the data above is to do with restructuring. In my talk, however, based on Hinterhölzl (2006), I want to argue that restructuring is not restricted to the verbs that have been assumed to undergo restructuring so far (stress-avoiding verbs in É. Kiss (1999), or the four verbs *szokott* ‘usually does’, *fog* ‘will (do)’, *talál* ‘happen to (do something)’ and *látszik* ‘seem’ in Tóth (2000)). The phenomenon of restructuring can be accounted for under a broader construal of the term. In my proposal restructuring takes place every time a predicate takes an infinitival complement due to the deficient nature of either the embedded infinitival clause or the main verb selecting it. In this approach, therefore, the problematic sentences above can (actually must) be claimed to undergo restructuring resulting in clause union. This solves the restructuring problem, and with the help of an LF-based approach to scrambling following Bobaljik and Wurmbrand (2008), making it possible for us to claim that the nominative subject actually originates in the finite clause, we can also account for the observed word order facts and differences in the interpretation of the sentences as well. One of the central conclusions is that the nominative subject belongs to the finite clause, but since the invisible PRO subject of the infinitival clause cannot make the scope properties of the sentence readable from word order (bearing in mind that Hungarian is a language that “wears its LF on its sleeve”), a reorganization takes place in the scrambling field, which I claim to be found at the bottom of the left periphery of the finite clause.

References

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