Control across languages

Mihaela Marchis

Hamburg University

(joint work with Mariana Bandeira and Elena Kireva)

Obligatory control is a core topic of investigation in the early generative syntactic theories (the PRO-based approaches) and in current minimalist approach, e.g. the Movement Theory of Control (MTC) (cf. Hornstein 1999 & subsequent work). The major interest in this topic is related to the syntactic status of the unpronounced subject known as PRO in control infinitives, inflected infinitives and subjunctives. The Movement Theory of Control proposes a novel analysis of control that completely eliminates PRO and, hence, reduces the internal modularity of the grammar to a single basic operation: Internal Merge.

In this talk based on Marchis, Bandeira & Kireva (2011) we provide a typology of control constructions. More precisely, we show that the variation in obligatory control in several languages such as Brazilian Portuguese, Bulgarian, Romanian and Spanish poses several problems to the MTC which can be handled, however, without abandoning the Internal Merge. A first challenge is linked to the distinct syntactic realizations of deficient clauses wrt. tense and phi-features across languages. We will account for this by proposing a unified phase-based analysis as a reflex of Internal Merge: subject obligatory control verbs always subcategorize deficient TPs (+/- phi, – tense) that are not phases while non-obligatory subject control ones are CPs (phases) (+ phi , + tense). A second challenge for the MTC is the asymmetry between backward subject control in Bulgarian, Romanian and Spanish and backward object control in Brazilian Portuguese. However, we show that backward control is triggered by different parametric properties: backward object control is available in Brazilian Portuguese only with those verbs which guarantee recoverability in case chains facilitated in this language by the strict SVO order, the gradual loss of nominative/accusative distinction and the availability of null objects. Backward subject control, on the other hand, is triggered by VSO order (cf. Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2001) and EPP checking via V movement (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998) and null subjects (see also Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou, Iordachioaia & Marchis 2010).

In theoretical terms this work aims at contributing to a general theory of Internal Merge by extending the phase-based analysis proposed for control to other similar phenomena such as the clitic climbing (see Marchis, Fischer & Andrade in preparation) and the inflected infinitive in Brazilian Portuguese (Marchis in preparation).