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Where does Idiom Interpretation Apply?*

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1. Introduction

Chomsky (1993) shows that certain reconstruction effects can be straightforwardly explained if we assume the copy theory of movement. He proposes that ungrammatical examples like the one in (1)a can be accounted for if we assume that there is a copy of the *wh*-phrase in the object position of *like* as in (1)b. Thus, (1)a is ruled out as a condition C violation because in (1)b the second instance of *John* is bound by *he*.

- (1) a. *Which picture of John does he like
b. [Which picture of John_i] does he_j like [which picture of John_i]

Chomsky (1993) also notes the facts in (2) where a surprising relationship between Idiom Interpretation (hereafter, IdInt) and anaphor binding is found.

- (2) a. John wonders which picture of herself Mary took with a good camera
b. *John wonders which picture of himself Mary took with a good camera
c. John wonders which picture of herself Mary stole
d. John wonders which picture of himself Mary stole

In order to account for the facts in (2) Chomsky (1993) proposes an analysis (to be reviewed in more detail in the next section) based on Condition A and IdInt taking place at LF.

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In this paper I will consider related and problematic examples for Chomsky's analysis and propose an explanation that will be based on the possibility of applying IdInt at a post-syntactic level. The syntactic effects detectable in (2) will be attributed to a condition on theta role assignment to the subject of *take pictures*. In particular, I will propose that the ungrammaticality of (2)b can be explained if we assume that in order for *Mary* to receive the theta role of the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures* (the only possible interpretation in (2)b due to the continuation ...with a good camera) there has to be a PRO in *pictures* (which needs to be controlled by the subject of *take pictures*). It is the presence of PRO in the subject of *pictures* that blocks the binding relation between *John* and *himself*, along the lines of Brody's (1995) proposal.¹

2. Chomsky (1993)

Chomsky's explanation of the facts in (2) is based on the assumptions in (3).

- (3)
- a. Copy Theory of Movement.
 - b. BT applies at LF where LF anaphor movement applies.
 - c. IdInt applies at LF under adjacency.
 - e. There is an Operator making rule (Make-Op) that involves:
 - Self adjunction
 - Complementary deletion
 - f. Make-Op is subject to the Preference Principle (Chomsky 1993:209):
 - Try to minimize the restriction in the operator position.

The Operator making rule ("Make-Op") applies at LF and turns the elements (copies) in a chain into operator-variable configurations in the following way. In the head and the tail of an A'-chain, part of (or the entire) wh-phrase self adjoins. Then, complementary deletion takes place: what is deleted in the tail is left in the head. This operator making process is subject to the *Preference Principle* that states that the restriction in the operator must be as small as possible.

Consider (2c) under the set of assumptions in (3). Under the copy theory of movement we have the representation in (4)a. In (4)a we apply anaphor movement obtaining (4)b, and then Make-Op.

- (4)
- a. John wonders [which picture of herself] Mary stole [which picture of herself] Anaphor movement →
 - b. John wonders [which picture of herself] Mary self-stole [which picture of t_{self}] Make-Op; → Self-adjunction →
 - c. John wonders [which [t picture of herself]] Mary self-stole [which [t picture of t_{self}]] Complementary deletion →
 - d. John wonders [which [~~t picture of herself~~] Mary self-stole [which-[t picture of t_{self}]] Semantic Interpretation →

¹ The empirical evidence that I will consider is admittedly scarce since the only idiom I will be considering is *take pictures*.

- e. John wonders [which x] Mary self-stole [x picture of t_{self}]

Now consider (2d), whose derivation appears in (5). In the derivation in (5), the Make-Op rule cannot minimize the restriction in the operator because that would delete the trace of *self*.

- (5) a. John wonders [which picture of himself] Mary stole [which picture of himself] Anaphor movement →
 b. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}] Mary stole [which picture of himself] Make-Op: Self-adjunction →
 c. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}][t] Mary stole [which picture of himself][t] Complementary deletion →
 d. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}][t] Mary stole [~~which picture of himself~~][t] Semantic Interpretation →
 e. John self-wonders [which x: x a picture of t_{self}] Mary stole [x]

The sentence in (2)a receives the same analysis as (2c). The derivation for (2)a appears in (6). Importantly, in (2)a the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures* is possible because *take* and *pictures* are adjacent at LF.

- (6) a. John wonders [which picture of herself] Mary took [which picture of herself] Anaphor movement →
 b. John wonders [which picture of herself] Mary self-took [which picture of t_{self}] Make-Op: → Self-adjunction →
 c. John wonders [which [t picture of herself]] Mary self-took [which [t picture of t_{self}]] Complementary deletion →
 d. John wonders [which [~~t picture of herself~~]] Mary self-took [~~which~~–[t picture of t_{self}]] Semantic Interpretation →
 e. John wonders [which x] Mary self-took [x picture of t_{self}] idiom interpretation possible

Now consider the crucial, ungrammatical (2)b, whose derivation appears in (7). As in (5), the restriction in the operator cannot be minimized because of the presence of the trace of *self*. Therefore, *picture* is going to be deleted from the tail of the chain. As a consequence of this, at LF *took* and *picture* are not going to be adjacent and the idiom interpretation is not going to be possible. Thus, the ungrammaticality of (2)b is explained because the presence of *with a good camera* requires the idiom interpretation.

- (7) a. John wonders [which picture of himself] Mary took [which picture of himself] Anaphor movement →
 b. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}] Mary took [which picture of himself] Make-Op: Self-adjunction →
 c. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}][t] Mary took [which picture of himself][t] Complementary deletion →

- d. John self-wonders [which picture of t_{self}][~~t~~] Mary took [~~which picture of~~
~~himself~~][t] Semantic Interpretation →
- e. John self-wonders [which x: x a picture of t_{self}] Mary took [x]
 idiom interpretation impossible

There are at least two conceptual reasons to believe that Chomsky's proposal is not correct. First, it is not clear what the status of LF anaphor movement is. It seems that it should be some kind of feature movement. However, according to Chomsky (1998) there seem to be several reasons to doubt the existence of feature movement. Furthermore, the reasoning behind LF anaphor movement (cliticization, in Chomsky's terminology) was never clear. Chomsky claimed that it was the LF counterpart of clitic movement that some anaphors show in languages like Spanish. However, this proposal misses the point that clitic movement in languages like Spanish is a property of clitics not just of anaphors; that is, clitic movement takes place with any type of clitic both pronominal and anaphoric as shown in the examples in (8).²

- (8) a. Juan se mira
 'Juan is looking at himself'
- b. Juan le mira
 'Juan is looking at him'

And second, Chomsky's (1993) proposal relies on the Preference Principle which does not seem to be compatible with most semantics treatments of operators. Normally, the operator restriction is maximized whereas the Preference Principle tries to minimize the operator restriction.

3. Brody (1995)

Brody (1995) offers a different solution for the facts in (2). Brody claims that none of Chomsky's assumptions to deal with (2) are necessary. He argues that the crucial, ungrammatical example in (2)b can be explained if we assume that in the idiomatic interpretation, the presence of the implicit (agent) argument in *pictures* blocks anaphor binding between *John* and *himself*. In Brody's words:

- (9) No strong argument can be based on [the ungrammaticality of (2)b], (...) since we can assume that anaphoric connection between *John* and *himself* is prevented by the understood subject of the noun *pictures*, which on the idiomatic interpretation must be coreferential with the subject of the [embedded] verb. (Brody (1995:136))

Brody's proposal has the interesting consequence that some of the assumptions that Chomsky made to explain the facts in (2) can be eliminated. In particular, under Brody's proposal we don't need to assume LF anaphor movement or the Make-Op

² My criticism of the LF anaphor movement of Chomsky (1993) raises the question of how Condition A is fulfilled. I don't have an answer for that question, but for my purposes it is enough to assume that there is some component that license antecedent-anaphor relationships.

operation (and the Preference Principle). (At least we can say that the operation that creates operator variable configurations out of identical copies has no impact on syntax). Furthermore, a simpler account of the reconstruction effects can be obtained.

4. Some More Facts and a Proposal

Earlier we saw some conceptual problems for Chomsky's (1993) account of the facts in (2). Now I will show that there seems to be empirical evidence to reject Chomsky's analysis. This empirical evidence is shown in (10). Chomsky's proposal predicts that (10) should be ungrammatical, incorrectly. This is so because in (10), since the anaphor is bound by the matrix subject, LF anaphor movement is required and "reconstruction" is not possible. Therefore, it is predicted that the idiom interpretation of *take pictures* should not be available, contrary to facts, as shown by the possibility of having the disambiguating continuation *with a good camera*.

(10) John wonders which picture of himself Mary said was taken with a good camera

Brody's proposal does not fare a lot better than Chomsky's with examples like (10). In fact, Brody's proposal seems to have problems with even simpler examples like (11).

- (11) a. John wonders which picture of himself was taken with a good camera
 b. John believes several pictures of himself to have been taken with a good camera
 c. Several pictures were taken with a good camera

According to Brody, in order to obtain the idiomatic interpretation, the subject of *take* needs to be coindexed with the implicit argument of *pictures*. Since in the examples in (10-11), the subject of *take* is not present, coindexation between the subject of *take* and the implicit argument of *pictures* is not possible. Therefore, we would expect the idiomatic interpretation not to be possible, contrary to facts.

There is a potential way to explain (11c) within Brody's framework. One could think that in (11c) the implicit argument of *pictures* is coindexed with the implicit argument of *taken*, thus allowing the idiomatic interpretation. However this proposal cannot be extended to (11)a,b and (10). This is so because under this proposal, both (10) and (11)a,b would be expected to be ungrammatical because the implicit argument in *pictures* should block the anaphoric relationship between *John* and *himself*.³

³ One could interpret Brody's words in a different way. One could say that the coindexation requirement applies only when there is a subject. In other words, in examples like (10) and (11) the coindexation requirement would apply vacuously because there is no subject for *take*, therefore, no coindexation would take place and in examples like (10) and (11)a,b the anaphoric relation between *John* and *himself* would not be affected by the coindexed implicit argument of *pictures*. However, it seems to me that Brody did not intend this interpretation.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that a modification of Brody's proposal can explain the facts that we are considering. I would like to propose that in order for the subject of *take pictures* to be assigned the agent theta role of the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures*, there needs to be a PRO in the "subject position" of *pictures*. I will further propose that this PRO is an instance of obligatorily controlled PRO and needs to be controlled by the subject of *take pictures*. As will become clear later, it is important to note that the proposal that I am making requires the presence of PRO for the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures* only when the agent of *take pictures* is being assigned a theta role.

Thus, according to my proposal, a sentence like (12)a will have the idiomatic interpretation if it has the structure in (12)b. Furthermore, a sentence like (12)c will be ruled out because there is no appropriate antecedent for PRO.

- (12) a. John took a picture of Mary
 b. John_i took a PRO_i picture of Mary
 c. John_k took a PRO_i picture of Mary

I will propose no other principle constraining the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures*. In particular, I will not adopt Chomsky's proposal that IdInt requires some type of LF adjacency. Furthermore, I will adopt the idea that IdInt can take place at some post-syntactic level independently of the presence of PRO in the subject position of *pictures*. My proposal appears summarized in (13)-(14).

- (13) Agent theta role assignment by *take pictures* is sensitive to the presence of PRO in *pictures*.
 a. If *pictures* has a PRO subject then the subject of *take pictures* will be assigned the "idiomatic" agent theta role and will control PRO in *pictures*.
 b. If *pictures* does not have a PRO subject then the subject of *take pictures* cannot be assigned the agent theta role of the idiomatic interpretation.
 (14) Idiom Interpretation can take place at a post-syntactic level and it is independent of the argument structure of *pictures*.

The line of reasoning behind (13) is that if we want to assign the agent theta role of the idiomatic interpretation to the subject of *take pictures* the agent theta role of the idiomatic interpretation, we need to have an agent/maker in the argument structure of *pictures*. If the agent/maker argument is missing, then the subject of *take pictures* could only be assigned the theta role of the non-idiomatic *take pictures*. Furthermore, if the agent/maker is present and it is PRO, it needs to be controlled (by the subject of *take pictures*).

Now let's see how my proposal can explain the contrast in (2)a,b, repeated here.

- (2) a. John wonders which picture of herself Mary took with a good camera
 b. *John wonders which picture of himself Mary took with a good camera

Since in both (2)a,b *take pictures* has an idiomatic interpretation (as required by the continuation ... *with a good camera*), it must be the case that there is a PRO subject in *pictures*. That is, assuming the copy theory of movement, the representation of (2)a,b would be as in (15).

- (15) a. John wonders [which PRO_i picture of herself]_i Mary_i took [which PRO_i picture of herself] with a good camera
 b. *John_k wonders [which PRO_i picture of himself]_k Mary took [which PRO_i picture of himself] with a good camera

According to these representations, it is expected that (2)a is grammatical but (2)b is not. In (2)a/(15)a the anaphor is bound by the closest antecedent, namely PRO. However, in (2)b/(15)b the anaphor is not bound by the closest antecedent: PRO blocks the binding relationship between *John* and *himself*.

This account of the contrast in (2)a,b is reminiscent of Brody's but does not have the problems that Brody's does with sentences like (10) and (11), repeated here.

- (10) John wonders which picture of himself Mary said was taken with a good camera
 (11) a. John wonders which picture of himself was taken with a good camera
 b. John believes several pictures of himself to have been taken with a good camera
 c. Several pictures were taken with a good camera

Since in these examples the agent of *take pictures* is not present, the agent theta role is not being assigned and therefore, according to my proposal, no PRO needs to appear in the subject position of *pictures*. For instance, the structure of (10) would be the one that appears in (16). In (16), as opposed to what happens in (2)a/(15)a, the binding relation between *John* and *himself* is not affected by the presence of the PRO subject in *pictures*.

- (16) John_i wonders [which picture of himself]_i Mary said [which picture of himself] was taken with a good camera

Note that according to my proposal we do not need to have any type of LF adjacency between *take* and *pictures* to get the idiomatic interpretation. Additional evidence for this comes from examples like the one on (17).

- (17) I took it

If the reference of *it* in (17) is a picture, (17) can be assigned the interpretation of *photograph*. This clearly shows that in order to get the idiomatic interpretation we do not need LF adjacency. In (17) we can have the idiomatic interpretation even though at no syntactic level *take* is adjacent to *pictures*.⁴

⁴ Provided that we reject the possibility of a syntactic rule that turns *pictures* into *it* or viceversa, as seems reasonable.

My proposal regarding IdInt for *take pictures* has the virtue that it can give a straightforward account of all the passive cases without the need of A-movement reconstruction. In Chomsky (1993) it is proposed that in order to explain the idiomatic interpretation in examples like (11)c, A-movement reconstruction needs to take place, that is, at LF the expression *pictures of himself* would be interpreted in its “D-structure” position. However, there seem to be enough reasons to doubt the existence of A-movement reconstruction. Chomsky (1995) and Lasnik (to appear) show that reconstruction is not possible with A-movement. Chomsky’s proposal to explain this fact is that reconstruction is limited to A’-chains. Lasnik’s proposal is that A-movement leaves no traces. Under either approach, the possibility of the idiomatic interpretation in examples like (11)c is problematic if the idiomatic interpretation requires some type of LF adjacency.

Under my approach, since LF adjacency is not required for the idiomatic interpretation to be obtained, the passive examples are easily accounted for even if A-movement leaves no trace (as in Lasnik (to appear) or reconstruction is limited to A-bar chains (as in Chomsky (1995)): the examples like (10)-(11) can be assigned the idiomatic interpretation at a post-syntactic level.

If IdInt can take place after Syntax and does not require the presence of PRO in *pictures*, the question arises about why it is not possible to have a derivation of (2)b in which there is no implicit argument in *pictures* (thus allowing the anaphoric relation between *John* and *himself*), and IdInt applies to obtain the idiomatic reading “after Syntax.” In order to rule out this derivation I will propose that IdInt cannot change the theta role assignment that has already taken place. If no PRO is present in *pictures* then the subject will be assigned the theta role of the non idiomatic interpretation and this cannot be changed at any later point.

5. Two Potential Problems

5.1. Implicit External Arguments

The first potential problem is related to implicit external arguments. If for the idiomatic interpretation to obtain, agent theta role assignment to “normal” subjects in *take pictures* sentences requires the presence of PRO in *pictures*, the question arises whether the same happens with the implicit external arguments that are claimed to exist in passives. In other words, if in examples like the one in (10) there is an implicit external argument that is being assigned the agent theta role of *take pictures*, then we would expect that under the idiomatic interpretation we would need PRO in the subject position of *pictures*. If so, we would predict that in a sentence like (10) the binding relationship between *John* and *himself* should be blocked by the presence of PRO and that (10) would be ungrammatical, contrary to facts.

In order to solve these problems I will reject the existence of external implicit arguments. The evidence that is normally used to support the existence of this argument is

control sentences like the one in (18), where it seems as if there existed a PRO in the purpose clause that is being controlled by an implicit argument in the matrix clause:

- (18) The boat was sunk to collect the insurance (Roeper (1987))

However, as Lasnik (1988) shows there are strong reasons to believe that in sentences like (18), there is no control by an (implicit) argument. The empirical evidence that Lasnik (1988) uses is the following:

- (19) a. The ship was sunk by a torpedo [PRO to prove a point]
 b. *The ship was sunk [PRO to become a hero]

The sentences in (19) are problematic for the implicit argument proposal. In (19)a there is no possible argument slot in the matrix sentence that can control PRO in the purpose clause but still the sentence is grammatical. On the other hand, in (19)b it is unexpected that PRO cannot be controlled by the implicit argument. I will take the sentences in (19) as evidence that the implicit external argument proposal for passive sentences is not correct. Thus, in sentences like (10) and (11) the agent theta role is not assigned, and therefore, no PRO is required in the subject position of *pictures*.

5.2 *By-phrases*

A similar problem is raised by *by-phrases*. If theta role assignment to the *by-phrase* requires the presence of PRO in *pictures*, we would expect the sentences in (20) to be ungrammatical, contrary to facts. This is so because under the idiomatic interpretation the theta role assignment of the *by-phrase* would require the presence of PRO in *pictures* and that PRO would block the binding relationship between *John* and the anaphor.

- (20) a. John wonders which picture of himself was taken by Mary
 b. John believes several pictures of himself to have been taken by Mary

In order to solve this problem I would like to suggest that the theta-role assignment of the *by-phrase* and of the subject in Spec,VP is different. The difference status is corroborated by their different status in terms of obligatoriness: whereas subjects (in active sentences) are obligatory, *by-phrases* are optional (as expected, due to its adjunct character).

6. Extensions

6.1 Idiom Interpretation and Relative Clauses

There is an ongoing debate regarding the derivation of relative clauses like *The book that John wrote* (see for instance Bhatt (1999) and Cresti (1999)). Under the null operator analysis, a null operator moves from the thematic position to the Spec,CP position of the relative clause. Under the raising analysis, the head of the relative clause is generated in the thematic position inside the relative clause and then moves to the position external to

the relative clause. The facts concerning idiom interpretation in relative clauses shed some light on this debate. Consider an example like the one that appears in (21).

(21) John bought several pictures of himself that Mary took with Peter's camera

The grammaticality of this example contrasts with the ungrammaticality of (2)b. I take this contrast to indicate two things. First, that the head internal analysis of relative clauses cannot be correct because under that analysis we would not expect any contrast between (21) and (2)b.

Second, the availability of the idiomatic interpretation in (21) provides additional evidence for my proposal that IdInt in the case of *take pictures* can take place after syntax, since under the null operator analysis (the only one that can expect the contrast between (21) and (2)b) *pictures* and *take* are never adjacent. Remember that under my proposal adjacency between *take* and *pictures* is not necessary: It is possible to get the idiom interpretation after the value of the operator variable is recovered from the antecedent.⁵

6.2 On Reconstruction

One of the advantages of my approach is that a simpler view on reconstruction is obtained. Note that under my approach, as well as under Brody's, neither the Preference Principle nor the operator formation rule is necessary. Thus, a sentence like (1)a is ruled out under the LF representation of (1)b, both repeated here. The preference principle is not needed to guarantee that the lower copy of *picture of John* is kept.

- (1) a. *Which picture of John does he like
 b. [Which picture of John_i] does he_i like [which picture of John_j]

As discussed in Brody (1995:134), rejecting the preference principle and the Make-Op rule has the welcoming result that the contrast in (23) can be explained. (See Epstein et al. (1998) for a different approach to (23)).

(23) Mary_i wondered [which claim [that pictures of herself_i disturbed Bill_j]] he_k_j made

Under Chomsky's (1993) approach we would expect (23) to be grammatical even in the coreferential reading of *Bill* and *he*, contrary to facts. This is so because binding *herself* by *Mary* should prevent reconstruction and no Condition C violation should arise. If Make-Op does not apply (at any syntactic level), then the LF of (23) would be the one in (24), which would be correctly ruled out as a Condition C violation.

⁵ I am ignoring the possibility of assigning (21) the LF in (i) with partial reconstruction within the relative clause. If (i) were a possible LF representation, then the grammaticality of (21) would be neither evidence for my proposal nor evidence against the head internal analysis of relative clauses.

(i) John bought ~~several pictures of himself~~ that Mary took several pictures of himself with Peter's camera

- (24) Mary_i wondered [which claim [that pictures of herself_i disturbed Bill_j]] he_k made [which claim [that pictures of herself_i disturbed Bill_j]]

7. Runner (1998)

Runner (1998) presents a different analysis of the facts in (2) within a different framework. His approach is based on the idea that *take pictures* under the idiomatic interpretation is a predicate, that anaphoric relations are established at the Argument Structure level (roughly Deep Structure), and that there are two types of anaphors: True anaphors and 'exempt' anaphors. True anaphors have a co-argument as a potential antecedent and are subject to the Binding Theory principles whereas exempt anaphors do not have a co-argument as a potential antecedent and are not subject to the principles of Binding Theory. (See Runner (1998) and references therein.) Thus, according to Runner (1998) the difference between (2)b and (2)d is explained because in (2)b *Mary* and *himself* are co-arguments, but not in (2)d. According to Runner, in (2)a,b *himself* is a true anaphor whereas in (2)c,d *himself* is an exempt anaphor.

- (2) a. John wonders which picture of herself Mary took with a good camera
 b. *John wonders which picture of himself Mary took with a good camera
 c. John wonders which picture of herself Mary stole
 d. John wonders which picture of himself Mary stole

Direct comparison of my proposal and Runner's is difficult since they are made under very different frameworks. However it seems to me that the two proposals have certain characteristics in common. In particular, in both proposals the subject of *take pictures* is singled out: in Runner's proposal it is a co-argument of the object of (*take pictures*). In my proposal, it obligatory controls a PRO in the subject position of *pictures*.

At any rate there seem to be reasons that indicate that Runner's general approach is not correct. Consider the examples in (24).

- (24) a. *John believes pictures of him to have been stolen
 b. John_i wondered [which picture of him_i] Bill_j saw t

If binding relations only govern the relations between co-arguments, it seems difficult to provide an explanation for the grammaticality contrast that we find in (24) since the object of *pictures* is not a co-argument of anything in (24).

8. Conclusions

The relationship between idiom interpretation and anaphor interpretation in sentences with *take pictures* has been used to support important claims regarding the structure of the grammar. In this paper I have discussed some additional examples, shown how they are problematic for Chomsky's (1993) analysis, and made a proposal to account for the additional data. Under my proposal, the operator making rule as formulated in Chomsky (1993) is not necessary (nor the Preference Principle that governs its application). In a

nutshell, under my proposal, Idiom Interpretation takes place “after Syntax.” The expression *take pictures* can be assigned an idiomatic interpretation at a post-syntactic level. The only syntactic constraint that governs the idiomatic interpretation of *take pictures* is that if the agent theta role is to be assigned to the subject of *take pictures*, the idiomatic interpretation will be possible if and only if there is a PRO in the subject position of *pictures*. This very simple proposal explains the facts in (2) without any additional complications in the architecture of the grammar.

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