Severing pro from its Silence

CONTROL : PRONOMINALS : SUBJUNCTIVE CLAUSES : MIXTEC

SETTING THE STAGE:

A long tradition, from Chomsky (1981)'s 'Avoid Pronoun' to Wurmbrand (1998) and more recent work like Livitz (2014), links the anaphoric properties of PRO in Obligatory Control (OC) constructions with the fact of its silence in English and other closely studied languages. The paper presents novel data from San Martín Peras (SMP) Mixtec, an Oto-Manguean language spoken by about 10,000 people along the western boarder of Oaxaca. SMP Mixtec lacks nonfinite clauses. Instead, a subjunctive clause in which the verb is marked in irrealis morphological tense is used in OC constructions. Interestingly, these subjunctive clauses obligatorily take overt pronominal subjects (see also Macaulay 1996, 2005).

(1)   a.   Kìxaá   sútú [kuchi   { **rà** / *∅ }].
           start.PAST priest bathe.IRREAL   he
           'The priest started to bathe.'
      b.   Kóni   kìnì [kuxi   { **rí**   / *∅ } ndúchi].
           want.PRES pig   eat.IRREAL   it.ANIMAL   beans
           'The pigs wants to eat beans.'

This paper probes the behavior of pronominal subjects in these constructions. If they pattern like PRO in languages like English, then we have reason to consider the lack of an overt subject in these languages to be epiphenomenal.

As in Bulgarian, Greek (Krapova 1998, 2001), and Hebrew (Landau 2004), subjunctives in SMP Mixtec come in two syntactically and semantically distinct varieties. The first are subjunctives with independent tense values, which occur as complements of desiderative verbs like *koni* 'want' (2a). The second are subjunctives with no independent tense value. These are interpreted with anaphoric tense (Stowell 1982), and occur in the complements of aspectual predicates like *santsi'i* 'finish' (2b). The two may be distinguished by whether they are compatible with adjuncts which require a tense referent distinct from the matrix clause, like *itsyá* 'tomorrow.'

(2)   a.   Kòni   rà doktór$_i$ [tsii   rà$_i$ rà Macario **itsyá**   ].
           want.PAST   doctor   catch.IRREAL he   M.   tomorrow
           'The doctor wanted to arrest Macario tomorrow.'
      b.   *Sàntsi'i   ñá Maria$_i$ [kuchi   ñá$_i$ **itsyá**   ].
           start.PAST   M.   bathe.IRREAL she tomorrow
           Intended: 'Maria started to bathe tomorrow.'

Landau (2000, 2004, 2013) proposes that OC is possible only into clauses without a distinct tense value. If this work is on the right track, then we expect only (2b) to involve OC, because the subjunctive clause in (2a) has an independent tense referent.

DATA:

This prediction pans out: only the pronominal subject of untensed subjunctives like (2b) patterns with PRO. First, pronominal subjects in tensed subjunctives support both strict and sloppy readings under ellipsis (3a), while those of untensed subjunctives only support sloppy readings (3b).

(3)   a.   Kóni   rà doktór$_i$ [tsii   rà$_i$ kìnì], sa =ti   nà   kan ba.
           want.PRES   doctor   catch.IRREAL he pig   so =also they that EMPH
           'The doctor wants to catch the pig, and they do too.' (✓strict, ✓sloppy)

b. Nàntoso   rà doktór$_i$ [nakatsya   rà$_i$ tsyàà   ], sa =ti   ñá kan ba.
   forget.PAST   doctor   wash.IRREAL he clothes   so =also she that EMPH
   'The doctor forgot to wash the clothes, and she did too.' (*strict, ✓ sloppy)

Second, the subjects in untensed subjunctives require *de se* interpretations (4a), while those in tensed subjunctives support either *de se* or *de re* readings (4b). The contexts which led to these judgments are redacted for space.

(4) a. Kàchi   rà Julio$_i$ nàntoso   rà$_i$ nakatsya   rà$_i$ tsyàà.
        say.PAST   J.   forget.PAST he wash.IRREAL he clothes
        'Julio said that he forgot to wash the clothes.' (*de re*, ✓ *de se*)
     b. Kàchi   rà Juan$_i$ kòni   rà$_i$ [kuxi   cháaga rà$_i$ ndúchi].
        say.PAST   J.   want.PAST he   eat.IRREAL more   he beans
        'Juan said that he wanted to eat more beans.' (✓ *de re*, ✓ *de se*)

Third, subjects of tensed subjunctives need not be locally bound. Subject obviation is possible by adding the morpheme *ná* (5a-b). In contrast, untensed subjunctive complements may not occur with *ná* and their subjects must be locally bound (5c-d).

(5) a. Kòni   ñá Maria$_i$ [keva'a   ñá$_{i/*j}$].
        want.PAST   M.   win.IRREAL she
        'Maria wanted to win.'
     b. Kòni   ñá Maria$_i$ [**ná** keva'a   ñá$_{*i/j}$].
        want.PAST   M.   NÁ win.IRREAL she
        'Maria wants her to win.'
     c. Sàntsí'i   rà abogado$_i$ [ka'avi   rà$_{i/ *j}$ líbro yo'o].
        finish.PAST   lawyer   read.IRREAL he   book this
        'The lawyer finished reading this book.'
     d. *Sàntsí'i rà abogado$_i$ [**ná** ka'avi rà$_j$ líbro yo'o].

DISCUSSION:

This constellation of properties suggests that subjects in OC constructions in SMP Mixtec are obligatorily overt. This fills a gap in the literature, where overt subjects in OC clauses are usually restricted to marginal constructions like 'Backward Control' (Polinsky & Potsdam 2002) or to environments which are semantically marked (Szabolcsi 2009). Alternatively, they are either full copies as in San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec (Lee 2003) or distinct elements like Korean (Yang 1985, et sequitur). If we are right in identifying overt pronominal subjects in SMP Mixtec untensed subjunctives as bound variables, we are left with a fuller picture of the possible exponents of subjects in OC contexts beyond silence.

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