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Left Branch Extraction and nominal structure in Polish – conclusions on an experimental study

Although the internal structure of DP has been studied extensively (Szabolcsi 1983; Abney 1987; Grimshaw 1991; Longobardi 1994, to name but a few), the late minimalist rethinking of the most significant computational issues (e.g. intervention effects, economy, cyclicity, etc.) naturally forces much of the KP-related analytical work to be reconsidered (cf. Gavrusheva 2000; Boškovič 2005; Pereltsvaig 2007, among others). Specifically, the phasehood of the DP remains a controversial issue in terms of its syntactic behaviour and the LF-nature (cf. Matushansky 2005; Marušič 2009; Citko 2014).

Thus, the aim of this experimental study was to test the status of the DP/TNP (Topmost Nominal Phrase) in Polish by using the selected syntactic, phase-sensitive tests (Boškovič 2014), i.e., Left Branch Extraction (wh-, adjectives, demonstratives), deep extraction (extraction out of a complement of a noun), extraction of nominal complements, extraction of AP across another AP (cf. McGinnis 1998), extraction across a numeral, and ‘extraordinary’ LBE.

The experiment was carried out online with the use of a specially designed questionnaire. 183 subjects were asked to judge the grammaticality / acceptability of the sets of examples, which were grouped into 8 sets (each set comprising 5 sentences) and 10 distractors (20% of the overall input). The sentences were randomised using an automatic randomiser (www.randomorg.com) and tested on a pilot group. In order to evaluate the grammaticality of the sentences, the subjects used a 5-degree (Likert-type) scale.

The results of the study reveal that these types of extraction are generally less acceptable in Polish than in other Slavic languages (cf. Boškovič 2014). The responses seem to indicate that LBE is to a large extent discourse-driven (cf. Fanselow and Lenertová 2011), which explains the relatively high scores of LBE-ing constructions with wh- and adjectives. At the same time though, a marked discrepancy between the results obtained by adjectives and demonstratives may indicate that the two should indeed not be placed in the same category (cf. Zlatić 1998). Additionally, problems with double AP-LBE seem to call for a more complex structure (and, generally, a more sophisticated account) than the recently postulated ‘*topmost-phrase-is a-phase*’ account (Boškovič 2014).

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