

[Research Note]

Ambiguous Labeling and Non-Agreeing Subjects*

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1. Introduction

Chomsky (2013) proposes that syntactic objects (SOs) built by Merge must be labeled by the Labeling Algorithm (LA) for externalization and interpretation at the Conceptual-Intentional (CI) interface. Taking the LA to be a special case of minimal search, Chomsky (2013: 43) assumes that the LA selects the closest head H as the label within its search domain (cf. Rizzi 2015). In this approach, a label ambiguity in the {XP, YP} structure is resolved by raising XP or YP out of {XP, YP} or by sharing a feature between the heads of XP and YP (i.e., X and Y). In this paper, I examine the behavior of non-agreeing subjects from a labeling perspective. My empirical focus is on subject-*because* construction and predicational *wh*-pseudocleft,¹ exemplified in (1).

- (1) a. Just because I'm here now doesn't mean that I didn't go.
b. What you have bought are fake jewels. (Declerck 1988: 80)

The subject-*because* in (1a) and the *wh*-clause in (1b) behave as subjects in the external distribution, but they do not display agreement with the (auxiliary)

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verb following them, as shown below. I show that the labels of these subjects are not identified under the LA theory because of the absence of φ -features shared between the subjects and Tense (T). Instead, based on Mizuguchi's (2019) idea that the ambiguous labeling of either $\langle X \rangle$ or $\langle Y \rangle$ is tolerated in syntax, I argue that the $\{XP, YP\}$ structure yielded by these subjects is labeled through conditions at the CI interface.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines Chomsky's (2013) LA theory. Section 3 reconsiders Matsuyama's (2001) analysis of the subject-*because* construction and seeks an alternative analysis of the construction, considering the LA theory. Section 4 motivates the derivation of the subject-*because* construction, based on Mizuguchi's labeling theory. Section 5 extends the analysis to predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. The Labeling Algorithm

Chomsky (2013: 43) takes the LA to be a minimal search that selects the closest head as the label (Rizzi 2015: 321). In the case of $\alpha = \{H, XP\}$, where H is a head and XP is a phrase, the LA selects H as the label because H is the closest head to α . The interesting case is $\alpha = \{XP, YP\}$, where XP and YP are phrases. Here, the LA cannot determine the label of α because the heads of XP and YP are equally close to α . Two solutions are proposed to resolve this ambiguity. One solution is to raise either XP or YP out of $\{XP, YP\}$, as in (2a). Given that copies are invisible to the LA, the head Y of the remaining YP is the closest head to α ; thus, α receives Y's label.

- (2) a. $\{XP \dots \{\alpha \langle XP \rangle, YP\}\}$, where $\langle XP \rangle$ is XP's copy
 b. $\{\beta XP_{[F]}, YP_{[F]}\}$

The other solution is feature-sharing in (2b). The LA finds a feature shared between XP's head and YP's, as indicated by [F]. Chomsky assumes that in this case, the pair of the shared feature [F] between X and Y becomes β 's label.

For illustration, consider the derivation of a transitive sentence. Suppose the derivation reaches a stage where the subject DP merges with ν P, as in (3a). This configuration induces labeling failure since the heads of DP and ν P are equidistant from α . The movement solution in (2a) overcomes this problem: DP raises out of $\{DP, \nu P\}$ so that α receives the label of the remaining ν P. Next, DP internally merges with TP, creating the $\{DP, TP\}$ configuration, as in (3b). Here, the LA seeks a feature shared between D and T so that the pair of the shared φ -features becomes β 's label.

- (3) a. [$\alpha_{=\nu P}$ [DP D], [νP ν [VP V [DP]]]]
 b. [$\beta_{=<\varphi, \varphi>}$ [DP D[φ]], [TP T[φ] [νP ...]]]

One advantage of this approach is that, unlike traditional approaches to subject movement, it does not rely on an EPP feature. The labeling ambiguity between the DP and ν P, illustrated in (3a), forces subjects to move to Spec-T. There is no need to postulate an EPP feature that attracts subjects to Spec-T.

The LA approach, outlined above, makes the following prediction for non-agreeing subjects: when such subjects merge in Spec-T, they cannot be labeled through feature-sharing and should move from Spec-T to a higher structural position. In what follows, I examine the prediction for a non-agreeing subject in the subject-*because* construction.

3. The Labeling Algorithm and Subject-*Because* Construction

Matsuyama (2001) argues that, like nominal subjects, the subject-*because* occupies Spec-T. One piece of evidence for this comes from the fact that the subject-*because* moves out of infinitival complements to raising verbs ((4)).

- (4) Just because there's a word for beauty seems to be no reason to argue that there's such a thing as beauty. (Matsuyama 2001: 333)

Subjects originating in Spec-T are the exclusive preserve for raising out of

infinitival complements to *seem*. The grammaticality of (4) proves that the subject-*because* occupies Spec-T at some point in the derivation.

While the subject-*because* appears to be an adverbial, Matsuyama (2001) argues that it is a nominal category because the subject-*because* acts as a nominal in the external distribution. It can undergo subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) (see (5)) and occupy the subject position of an ECM complement (see (6)).

- (5) Doesn't just because there's a word for beauty mean that there's such a thing as beauty? (Matsuyama 2001: 334)
- (6) I believe just because the car is made in Japan to be no reason to argue that it is wholly reliable. (Matsuyama 2001: 335)

These positions are where nominal categories are restricted to appearing, as shown by the grammaticality of (7) and (8).

- (7) a. Does *(the fact) that John smokes stogies bother you? (Abney 1987: 172)
- b. *Was among the ruins found a skeleton? (Bresnan 1994: 108)
- (8) a. I expect *(the fact) that John smokes stogies to bother everyone. (Abney 1987: 172)
- b. *I expect on this wall to be hung a portrait of our founder. (Bresnan 1994: 109)

Parallel behavior between (5)–(6) and (7)–(8) thus proves that the subject-*because* is a nominal category. From this, Matsuyama concludes that the subject-*because* bears a [N] feature that deletes T's EPP feature.

A crucial property differentiates between the subject-*because* and canonical subjects. When two subject NPs are coordinated, the (auxiliary) verb displays a plural form for agreement, but when two subject-*because* clauses are coordinated, the auxiliary verb shows a singular form for agreement (see (9)). This fact proves that the subject-*because* lacks its ϕ -features.

- (9) Just because North Korea is a communist society and just because (South) Korea is a democratic society {doesn't/*don't} mean that they will remain separated forever. (Matsuyama 2001: 346)

Based on the discussions above, Matsuyama assumes that the subject-*because* has no ϕ -features and externally merges in Spec-T. If so, no ϕ -features serve to delete T's ϕ -feature. To solve this, he assumes that Spec-*v* is occupied by an empty subject, indicated by *pro*, whose ϕ -features Agree with T's ϕ -features,² as indicated by the dotted line in (10).

- (10) [_{TP} [_{NP} just because...]_i T-doesn't [_{vP} *pro*_i mean that I didn't go]]
- $\underbrace{\{N\}}_{\text{Delete}} \quad \underbrace{\{EPP, \mu\phi\}}_{\text{Agree}} \quad \underbrace{\{\phi, \text{Case}\}}_{\text{Agree}}$

Pro's Case is valued as a byproduct of the ϕ -agreement. With subsequent merging of the subject-*because* in Spec-T, T's EPP feature is deleted by the subject's [N] feature. All the uninterpretable features are deleted, so the derivation converges.

This analysis, however, is incompatible with the LA approach in some respects. First, the analysis relies on an EPP feature that requires Spec-T to be filled by a nominal category, but the LA theory does without it, as mentioned above. Second, since there is no agreement between the subject-*because* and T, labeling through feature-sharing cannot be taken. Thus, the only option for the subject is to raise from Spec-T to a higher position. With these issues in mind, I will explore a possible derivation of the construction that accords with the LA theory.

One might assume that the subject-*because* undergoes topicalization to a left-peripheral position. Following Rizzi's (1997) split CP hypothesis, CP is divided into separate peripheral functional projections, as shown in a schematic representation in (11).

- (11) [_{ForceP} Force [_{TopP} Top [_{FocP} Foc [_{FinP} Fin ...

Given this hypothesis, I can motivate one derivation for the subject-*because*. Rather than the subject-*because* externally merging in Spec-T, I assume that the subject-*because* initially merges in Spec-*v* and raises directly to Spec-Top as in (12), where the subject shares a topic feature with TopP.

- (12) [_{TopP} [_{FinP} Fin [_{TP} T [_{uφ}] doesn't [_{vP} [_{NP} just because ...] mean that]]]]
-

Each labeling step obeys the LA. At the point that the subject-*because* merges in *vP*, the LA makes the NP raise out of {NP, *vP*} so that the remaining *vP* becomes the label. The subject-*because* merges with TopP to yield the {NP, TopP} structure, to which feature-sharing applies. The LA seeks for a feature shared between NP and TopP so that the pair of the shared Top (<Top, Top>) provides the label of the subject-*because* construction.

While this analysis gains initial plausibility, it runs into several difficulties. As is well-known, topicalized elements block an auxiliary from undergoing SAI (see (13)), and they do not occur in ECM complements ((14) is taken from Haegeman (2012: 67, fn.20)).

- (13) *Does *to Imogen*, Brian ever give presents? (Den Dikken 2006a: 99)
 (14) *Police believe, *the London area*, the suspect to have left.

If the subject-*because* undergoes topicalization, as in (12), the analysis predicts that the subject can neither undergo SAI nor occur in the subject position of the ECM complement. This prediction is not fulfilled, as seen in (5) and (6).

Recall that the subject-*because* lacks ϕ -features (see (9)). If so, a question will remain as to how T's ϕ -features are valued. Otherwise, the derivation will crash because of violating the Full Interpretation at the CI interface.

In summary, I showed that the standard LA approach to the subject-*because* encounters difficulties: (i) it wrongly predicts that the subject is capable of neither undergoing SAI nor appearing in the ECM subject position, and (ii) T's ϕ -features remain unvalued, crashing the derivation. Based on Mizuguchi's

labeling ambiguity, I will present an alternative analysis of the subject-*because* that overcomes the two difficulties.

4. An Alternative Analysis Based on Labeling Ambiguity

4.1. Mizuguchi (2019)

Contrary to the standard view that SOs must have a unique label, Mizuguchi (2019) argues that SOs do not need to be uniquely identified; labeling ambiguities in {XP, YP} can be tolerated in syntax without labeling failure. It is argued that {XP, YP} configurations are labeled either <X> or <Y> and that the label of either <X> or <Y> is determined by conditions at the CI interface. Mizuguchi presents XP-YP configurations in which neither movement nor feature-sharing applies to solve labeling ambiguity. These include the partial *wh*-movement in German, object shift and in-situ subject constructions in German and Japanese, and non-nominal subjects in English. For illustration, consider how prepositional subjects are licensed under Mizuguchi's theory.

(15) [Under the chair] is a nice place for the cat to sleep.

Suppose that *under the chair* in (15) initially occupies Spec-*v*. This yields the {*p*P, *v*P} structure. The LA theory dictates that *p*P move away, allowing the remaining *v*P to determine the label. For Mizuguchi, the {*p*P, *v*P} configuration does not incur labeling failure. The {*p*P, *v*P} structure can be labeled <*p*> or <*v*>. The well-formedness of labels is attributed to interface conditions. When the {*p*P, *v*P} structure, marked as β , merges with T as in (16), the CI interface will require that β be labeled <*v*> because T only selects *v*P. If β is labeled <*p*>, this will violate a selectional relation of T: T selects *v*P, not *p*P. Labeling β as <*p*> will disrupt the C-T-*v* sequence, so clausal interpretation will fail.

(16) [T [β [*p*P *p*], [*v*P *v* [*v*P]]]]

Note that Mizuguchi’s theory does not force one of the two phrases to move away. This predicts that the subject will stay in Spec- vP . To eschew this problem, Mizuguchi (2019: 579) assumes, following Chomsky (2015), that the English T is too “weak” to label on its own and hence requires a Spec to project. This forces the prepositional subject to move to Spec-T, yielding the $\{pP, TP\}$ configuration. No feature-sharing applies in the resultant $\{pP, TP\}$ structure because prepositional subjects do not Agree with T. Thus, the structure is labeled as either $\langle p \rangle$ or $\langle T \rangle$ and is evaluated at the CI interface. When the pP -TP structure, marked as γ , merges with C as in (17), the CI interface will require that γ be labeled $\langle T \rangle$ because C only selects TP. If γ is labeled $\langle p \rangle$, this will violate a selectional relation of C: C selects TP, not pP , disrupting the C-T- v relationship.

(17) [C [γ [pP p], [TP T [vP]]]]

In summary, contrary to the standard LA theory, Mizuguchi’s labeling theory predicts that non-agreeing XPs can occupy Spec-T and do not have to raise to a higher structural position. The CI interface dictates that the XP-YP structure must be labeled $\langle Y \rangle$; otherwise, interpretative deviance will occur. There is no need to postulate ϕ -feature-sharing for labeling subjects. The next section presents an alternative analysis of the subject-*because* construction based on Mizuguchi’s theory and discusses empirical and theoretical issues that will arise from the analysis.

4.2. An Alternative Analysis

As we have seen in (10), Matsuyama’s analysis of the subject-*because* construction is based on two assumptions: (i) the subject-*because* is a nominal category without ϕ -features and (ii) an empty subject, *pro*, resides in Spec- v , which deletes T’s ϕ -features. I adopt the first one because it is empirically motivated as seen in (5), (6) and (9), but the other needs to be reconsidered because *pro*’s identity is unclear.

In the literature, two types of the *pro* are attested in English: root null subjects which are only attested in root clauses (Rizzi 1992) and null

resumptive pronouns which can only be attested in island-violation contexts (Cinque 1990). The *pro* in question may be either a root null subject or a null resumptive pronoun. The first option is not taken because unlike root null subjects, the subject-*because* occurs in complement clauses, as evident in (6). The second one seems implausible, as the Spec-*v*, where the *pro* is assumed to exist, does not yield an island-violation context. For these reasons, it is difficult to clarify *pro*'s identity; thus, I do not assume that the *pro* is involved in the derivation of the construction. Instead, I assume that the subject-*because* initially merges in Spec-*v* and subsequently moves to Spec-T.

- (18) a. [α [nP just because ...], [vP mean [VP that...]]]
 b. [C [β [nP just because ...], [TP T $_{[u\phi]}$ [vP v]]]]
-

In (18a), the subject-*because* merges with *vP*, creating the $\{nP, vP\}$ configuration,³ conveniently marked α . Suppose α is labeled $\langle n \rangle$, this outcome will interrupt the C-T-*v* structure, as in (16). This instead allows α to receive *v*'s label. Subsequently, the subject moves to Spec-T since the English T is too “weak” to label (Chomsky 2015). This creates the $\{nP, TP\}$ configuration, to which no feature-sharing applies because the subject-*because* does not Agree with T (see (9)). The *nP*-TP structure can be labeled as either $\langle n \rangle$ or $\langle T \rangle$; the well-formedness of the outcome is evaluated at the CI interface. When the *nP*-TP structure, marked as β , merges with C as in (18b), β must be labeled $\langle T \rangle$ because C only selects TP. If β is labeled $\langle n \rangle$, this will violate the selection relations between C and T: C selects TP, not *nP*.

The remaining question is how T's ϕ -features are valued in (18b). I assume that the lack of agreement in the subject-*because* construction ((9)) is a reflex of a default third-person singular agreement in English. Thus, in (9), the subject-*because* and T do not Agree in the ϕ -features; the verb is spelled out in the default third-person singular form. This being the case, a question will arise as to how the default values are assigned to T's ϕ -features. Abe (2018) proposes that the default values are given to T through the last resort rule that operates

just before the transfer operation applies.

- (19) Unvalued ϕ -features may be supplied with default values that are specified in a given language. (Abe 2018: 105)

The precise spell-out of the default agreement values differs from one language to another; in English, it is the third-person singular form. Thus, T's ϕ -features are valued as [3rd, sg] by the rule (19), and the verb is spelled out as *does* or *is* in the PF component. All the unvalued features that require convergence are properly valued, and the derivation converges.

In summary, contrary to the standard LA theory, Mizuguchi's theory correctly predicts that the subject-*because* occupies Spec-T though it lacks ϕ -features. The same analysis will be applied to predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts, as shown in Section 5.

5. Predicational *Wh*-Pseudoclefts

Many generative scholars (Higgins 1979; Williams 1983; Bošković 1997) assume that the *wh*-clause of predicational pseudoclefts is a free relative clause, the category of which is a nominal. One support for this comes from the fact that the *wh*-clause in question acts as a nominal in the external distribution. It can undergo SAI and occupy the subject position of an ECM complement.

- (20) a. Is *what John is* important? (Higgins 1979: 302)
b. We consider *what John is* to be important. (Higgins 1979: 316)

The grammaticality of the examples in (20) thus proves that the *wh*-clause is a nominal category that occupies Spec-T.

Like the subject-*because*, the *wh*-clause raises out of an infinitival complement to raising predicates ((21)), indicating that it is a subject at some point of the derivation.

- (21) *What John is* tends to be boring. (Higgins 1979: 305)

Notably, the *wh*-clause of the pseudocleft does not display a number agreement to which little attention has been paid in the literature. Declerck (1988: 80) observes that in predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts such as (22), the copula agrees in number with the postcopular nominals rather than the *wh*-clause itself.

- (22) a. What you have bought are fake jewels. (=1b)
 b. What she wants are expensive things.

These sentences will have a specificational reading if the singular form of the copula is used. This suggests that there is no number agreement between the copula and the *wh*-clause on the predicational reading.

Declerck (1988) also observes that when the postcopular constituent of a predicational *wh*-pseudocleft is not a nominal, the copula must display a third-person singular concord whether the *wh*-clause refers to a single thing or multiple things.

- (23) What you have bought is fake. (Declerck 1988: 80)

The copula in (23) is the third-person singular form even if “what you have bought” refers to plural entities. I assume that this is a default singular agreement in English (cf. (19)).

Given the properties described above, I can initiate an analysis of predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts based on Mizuguchi’s labeling theory. With Williams (1983) and Bošković (1997: 260), I assume that the *wh*-clause is a referential argument and the postcopular constituent is a predicate of the *wh*-clause. I further assume that the copula *be* takes a small clause headed by a functional head, Pred, whose function is to mediate a predication relation between the *wh*-clause and the postcopular constituent (Bowers 1993). With these assumptions in place, consider how predicational pseudoclefts with postcopular APs are derived. For example, (23) is assigned a representation like that in (24),

where the *wh*-clause is generated in Spec-Pred and the postcopular AP is in the complement.

(24) [be [α [nP *wh*-clause] , [$PredP$ Pred [AP fake]]]]

Suppose that the *wh*-clause merges with $PredP$, forming the $\{nP, PredP\}$ structure. This yields the ambiguous labeling of $\langle n \rangle$ or $\langle Pred \rangle$. If the $PredP$ raises out of the structure, α will be labeled $\langle n \rangle$. This will violate the selectional relation between the copula *be* and its complement. As I assumed, the copula *be* takes $PredP$ as its complement, not nP . The only option is to raise nP : the remaining $PredP$ becomes α 's label. Here, there is no violation of the selectional relation between the copula and its complement.

The merging of the *wh*-clause with TP yields the $\{nP, TP\}$ structure in (25).

(25) [C [β [nP *wh*-clause] , [TP T $_{[u\phi]}$] [VP be [$PredP$ Pred [AP fake]]]]]]

As in (18b), the well-formedness of the nP -TP structure is evaluated at the CI interface. When the structure merges with C, as in (25), β must be labeled $\langle T \rangle$ because C only selects TP. If β is labeled $\langle n \rangle$, this will violate a selectional relation between C and T. Finally, T's ϕ -features are identified as [3rd, sg] using the default rule (19): the copula is spelled out as *is* in the PF component. Recall that when the postcopular elements are nominals, the copula agrees with the nominals, as in (22a, b). Here, T's ϕ -features are assigned by Agreeing with the nominals' ϕ -features rather than by the default rule.

6. Conclusion

From a labeling perspective, this paper considered the derivations of constructions with non-agreeing subjects: the subject-*because* construction and predicational *wh*-pseudocleft. The two constructions raise problems for standard LA theory because the XP-YP structure yielded by such subjects is not labeled by movement or feature-sharing. Using Mizuguchi's (2019) idea

of ambiguous labeling, I proposed that the XP-YP configuration created by the subjects is ambiguously labeled in syntax, and the result of labeling is determined by selectional relations at the CI interface. This analysis of non-agreeing subjects is valid only if ambiguous labeling is tolerated in the syntax. Thus, it provides empirical support for Mizuguchi's ambiguous labeling.

Notes

1. In addition to predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts, there are specificational ones (Higgins 1979; Declerck 1988). For illustration, observe the *wh*-pseudocleft in (i), which is ambiguous between predicational and specificational reading.

(i) What John is is silly. (Higgins 1979: 17)

On the predicational reading, (i) says nothing about *John* directly but some unstated property that is ascribed to John. If the relevant property is some job or position that John holds, (i) says that it is silly. On the specificational reading, the *wh*-phrase in (i) is understood as introducing a variable, the *x*, such that John is *x*, and *silly* provides a value for that variable. My attention is limited to predicational *wh*-pseudoclefts. For the overview of distinctions between the two readings of pseudoclefts, see Den Dikken (2006b).
2. I capitalize "Agree" when referring to the syntactic operation, but not when referring to the phenomenon.
3. I assume here that the subject-*because* is mediated by a little *n* (a semi-functional head such as *v*) which takes an NP as its complement as follows: [_{NP} *n* [_{NP} *because...*]].

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