Selectional Properties of Adjectives and Their Clausal Complements

Chomsky (2006) claimed that lexical items have an edge-feature which makes it possible for them to merge with another category. Furthermore, he claimed that C has both an edge-feature and an Agree-feature and that a *wh*-phrase moves to the Spec of CP due to the edge-feature of C. This claim makes it possible to explain such an example as (1a) straightforwardly. However, it faces a problem in accounting for the ungrammaticality of such a *wh*-question as (1b). Why isn't *wh*-extraction possible from the clausal complement of *probable* while it is possible from that of *likely*?

(1) a.Who is it likely that Susan will marry?
b.*Who is it probable that Susan will marry?

Also, the claim that C has an edge-feature can't explain why such a sentence as (3a) cannot be transformed like (3b) while such a sentence as (2a) can like (2b).

(2) a. It is tough to read this book.
b. This book is tough to read.

(3) a. It is essential to read this book.
b.*This book is essential to read.

Chomsky (1981) argued that *tough*-movement constructions can be explained in terms of a complex predicate formation following the null operator movement from the embedded object position to the Spec of the intermediate CP. Hicks (2009) argued that *tough*-movement can be explained in terms of a smuggling approach under which the matrix subject is smuggled by the null operator from the embedded object position to the Spec of the intermediate CP and then raises to the Spec of the matrix TP. However, these accounts provide no answer to the question of why the *tough*-movement of the semantic object is not allowed in (3b). If every C has an edge-feature, it will remain as a question why such a sentence as (3b) is ungrammatical.

To account for these problems we argue that not every C has an edge-feature. We propose that the C selected by such adjectives as *probable* and *essential* has no edge-feature unlike the C selected by such adjectives as *likely* and *tough*. If *probable* selects a CP headed by C with no edge-feature, the *wh*-phrase is not allowed to move from the embedded object position to the Spec of the intermediate CP in (1b). Then it is not accessible to the probe of the C in the matrix clause because of the phase impenetrability condition (Chomsky 2006). Also, if *essential* selects a CP headed by C with no edge-feature, then the null-operator is not allowed to move from the embedded object position to the Spec of the intermediate CP in (3b). Then neither a complex predicate formation nor the smuggling of the semantic object of the embedded clause is possible. Thus we can explain why (1b) and (3b) are ungrammatical.

This proposal is applicable to accounting for other cases where *wh*- or null operator movement is not allowed. For example, it can be extended to accounting for the ungrammaticality of such sentences as (4).

(4) *Who do you quip that Mary saw in New York?

References

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