

Case, Infinitives, and Diachronic Syntax : A Minimalist Approach

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Abstract

It is well known that Middle English (ME) exhibits a number of peculiar constructions in which Case-marked NPs can be found in positions where Present-day English (PE) does not allow them to appear. One such example is nominative Case-marked NPs which appear in the subject position of an infinitival construction that is itself the subject of a clause. I attempt to account for the phenomenon in terms of Chomsky's (1995, Chapter 4) minimalist approach to the theory of grammar.

Keywords : Case-checking, multiple Specs, overt verb raising,
Last Resort/Greed, Jonas's generalization

Middle English (ME) is known to have the following infinitival constructions where PRO or a nominative NP appears in the subject position of the infinitive :

- (1) a. [to beholde hyt] was gret joye (Ch BD 325)
 to behold it was great joy
- b. [thow to lye by our moder] is to moche shame for vs to
 thou to lie by our mother is too much shame for us to
 suffre (Morte Darth 453, 4)
 suffer
- c. [a man to soweyn kokyl] betoknith euelis and stryf
 a man to sow cockle means evils and strife
- d. [thou to loue that loueth not the], is but grete foly
 thou to love that loves not thee is but great folly

Compare the above examples with the following PE cases :

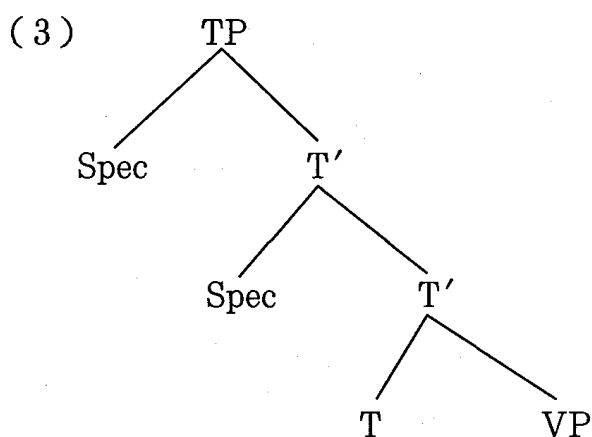
- (2) a. To go at once is important.
 b. *We to go is necessary. (cf. For us to go is necessary.)

We see from the above that infinitival constructions in which the subject is nominative Case-marked is grammatical in ME, while they are not in PE. In this paper I will try to account for this contrast between ME and PE within the framework of the Minimalist Program of Chomsky (1995, especially Chapter 4). The presence versus absence of overt verb raising in the two languages will play a crucial role in the explanation.

1. Some Assumptions

I assume the following for the purposes of the discussion in this paper :
 (a) Middle English (ME) is a verb-second and SVO language. Present-day English (PE) is an SVO language, but not a verb-second one.

(‘... V2 was lost in the 15th century...’ (Roberts (1993)) ; Early Middle English : c. 1150–1300, Late Middle English : c. 1300–1500 (Nakao (1972)).) / (b) ME infinitives (dealt with here) are TPs with *to* as their head. (‘... the *to* infinitive in ME was originally a NP and later lost its NP status...’ (Lightfoot (1979)).) / (c) *To* is basically a preposition ; that is, it has Case-checking ability. / (d) Phrase structure (‘... the change from an Agr-based to a multiple-Spec theory...’ (Chomsky (1995 : 355))) :



/ (e) Overt verb raising (V-to-T) : ME is an overt verb raising language both in matrix and embedded clauses, while PE is not.

We will then see what checks nominative Case in the relevant ME examples in (1).

2. What Checks Nominative Case ?

I assume the relevant structure of (1a) to be as in (4) :

(4) [_{TP} PRO to beholde hyt] was gret joye

In (4) the [+Tense] feature of the infinitive can check null Case, which PRO is marked for. (See Bōsković (1995) ; Chomsky (1995 : 120).)

Now let us see some definition and consequences concerning the

notion(s) of Last Resort / Greed. Chomsky (1995 : 280) defines Last Resort as follows :

(5) *Last Resort*

Move F raises F to target K only if F enters into a checking relation with a sublabel of K.

Bösković (1995 : 15) states that the Last Resort Condition forbids NP movement from Case-checking to Case-checking positions. According to Lasnik (1995), Chomsky's Greed requires that items move only to satisfy their own requirements, while his (Lasnik's) Enlightened Self-Interest states that items move either to satisfy their own requirements or those of the position they move to (see also Chomsky (1995 : 261)). Lasnik (1995) presents a number of arguments in support of his Enlightened Self-Interest, whereas part of Bösković (1995) is devoted to defending Chomsky's Greed.

Bösković (1995 : 15-16) discusses the following example :

(6) *He_i seems to t_i that Mary is ill.

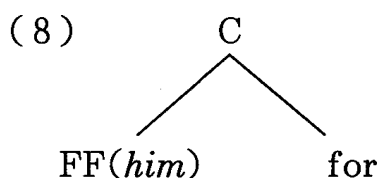
In order to account for (6), it has been observed that regardless of whether the Case features of the Case-checker and Case-checkee match, when an NP is found in a Case-checking position, a Case-checking relation is established, thus preventing the NP from moving into another Case-checking position (see also Chomsky (1995 : Chapters 1 and 3)). Bösković (1995) goes on to introduce Roger Martin's proposal to the effect that movement from Case-checking to Case-checking positions is in principle allowed... Case features of traditional Case-assigners must be

checked... if *he* (in (6)) undergoes Case-checking in the matrix SpecIP, the construction is ruled out because the Case feature of *to* remains unchecked.

Here I point out that these observations are too strong upon closer scrutiny of a relevant example.

- (7) a. [_{TP} PRO to read the book] is necessary.
 b. [_{CP} For [_{TP} him to read the book]] is necessary.

In (7a), assuming the validity of the VP-internal subject hypothesis, PRO raises to SpecTP for EPP reasons and the null Case of PRO is checked by T (*to*) as a free rider (Chomsky (1995 : 282)). In (7b) *him* raises to SpecTP for EPP, but the position of *him* at Spell-Out is a null Case position, where *him* is not Case-checked. The Case feature of *him* is checked at LF. The formal features of *him* (FF (*him*)) are adjoined to *for*, as in the following :



In (8) FF (*him*) must adjoin covertly to *for* for Case-checking. Note that the position of FF (*him*) is a Case-checking position. Then it follows that FF (*him*) moves from (null) Case-checking to Case-checking positions. And the null Case feature of the infinitive remains unchecked.

Still the construction is grammatical. It follows then that the above observation that items cannot move from Case-checking to Case-checking positions or that unchecked Case features cause ungrammaticality is too strong. We will see the same kind of situation obtain in the explanation

of (1b-d).

Chomsky (1995 : 342-343) discusses Jonas's generalization that multiple-subject constructions (MSCs) are contingent on overt V-raising. Consider the following ME example :

- (9) [a man to soweyn kokyl] betoknith euelis and stryf (= (1c))
 a man to sow cockle means evils and strife

I assume the the structure of (9) at Spell-Out to be as follows :

- (10) [_{TP1} a man_i [_{T'1} [_{TP2} t'_i [_{T'2} t_i [_{T2} to-soweyn_j] t_j
 kokyl]]] [_{T1} T-betoknith_k] t_k euelis and stryf]]

Notice that Ura (1993) discusses a similar Japanese example, as follows :

- (11) a. [_{AgrSP} [_{DP} Bunmeikoku-ga heikinjyumyoo]-ga AgrS [_{TP} T
 civilized country-NOM average life-span-NOM
 [_{AP} nagai]]]
 long
 'The average life-span of civilized countries is long.'
 b. [_{AgrSP} Bunmeikoku-ga_i [_{AgrSP} [_{DP} t'_i [_{DP} t_i heikin-
 jyumyoo]]]-ga AgrS-T_j [_{TP} t_j [_{AP} nagai]]]] (LF)

Ura (1993) assumes that Japanese T and AgrS can license multiple features and that a position adjoined to an AgrSP (i. e., a broadly L-related position of an AgrS) can count as an A-position in Japanese, a broadly L-related position of D in Japanese serving as an A-position for

A-movement (see also Chomsky (1995 : 196)).

Turning to (10), note that we have assumed that ME is an overt verb raising language both in matrix and embedded clauses, while PE is not. The position of t'_i , which I assume to be an A-position and an escape hatch, is available due to overt verb raising in the embedded clause (TP 2). The position of $a\ man_i$ is available due to overt verb raising in the matrix clause (TP1). Notice that the position of t_i is a (null) Case position, but see the discussion concerning (7b) for movement from (null) Case-checking to Case-checking positions. The position of $a\ man_i$ is a Case-checking position and the nominative Case feature of $a\ man$ is checked in the position of $a\ man_i$ by the matrix T (see Chomsky (1995 : 286, 354)). Note that the movement of $a\ man$ is overt.

In PE the position of t'_i is not available since it is not an overt verb raising language. Movement from t_i would result in a violation of factors that constrain movement : barriers, CED and ECP considerations, etc. The position of $a\ man_i$ is not available either.

3. Conclusion

ME constructions involving a nominative Case-marked NP in a position that cannot be licensed in PE have been dealt with and shown to be amenable to an analysis in terms of Chomsky's (1995, Chapter 4) minimalist approach to the theory of grammar. In the analysis I have made a crucial assumption that ME is an overt verb raising language both in matrix and embedded clauses, while PE is not. My account has also depended on Jonas's generalization that multiple-subject constructions are contingent on overt verb raising. I hope to have shown the availability of the relevant ME construction in terms of a parametric difference between ME and PE : i. e. , the presence versus absence of overt verb raising.

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