Locality Restrictions on N-Word Licensing

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to consider the locality restrictions that hold between Negation and N(egative)-words within the framework of the Minimalist Program. The discussions are based on data from Amazigh, in particular the Tashelhit variety spoken in the Southwest of Morocco. By N-words, I intend elements like 'ħtta+NP' (no-one) which are licensed by the negative head 'ur'. In the suggested analysis, I show that certain tense-related restrictions as well as island-like locality constraints affect the surface distribution of N-words. I also argue that sensitivity to such locality constraints cannot be accounted for in terms of constraints on movement; rather, it is a property of the chain formed by the negative head and the N-word in- situ.

Keywords: Minimalist program, Amazigh, Negation, N(egative)- words, Locality conditions

1. Introduction

In this paper, I consider the locality restrictions that hold between Negation (Neg) and N-words within the framework of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1992, 1995). The discussions are based on data from Amazigh, in particular the Tashelhit variety spoken in the Southwest of Morocco. This term 'N-words' has been employed by various linguists (following Laka, 1990) to refer to certain elements in various languages that co-occur with and are licensed by Neg (Zanuttini, 1991, 1997; Benmamoun, 1995, 1997; Ouali, 2001; Progovac, 1992, among others). The proposed analysis shows that certain tense-related restrictions as well as island-like locality constraints affect N-word licensing. The paper is organized as follows. In section 1, I present the syntactic distribution of N-words in Amazigh. In section 2, I discuss the locality restrictions that hold between Neg and the N-word.

2. The Basic Distribution of N-Words

In this section, I provide an overview of the syntactic distribution of N-words in Amazigh. In the course of the discussion, I highlight some of the issues that will be addressed in the subsequent section.

The N-word ħtta+NP displays the same distribution as any other argument NP. It can appear in subject position (1), in object position (3), or as the complement of a noun (3) or of a preposition (4):

(1)   ur   i -   fti   ħtta- yan.

          Neg   he - leave+ Perf(ective) no- one

        "Noone left."

(2)   ur   maggar - h   htta-yan

          Neg   meet -   I + Perf   no- one

        "I did not meet anyone".

(3)   ur   ufi -   -ħ [NP t- swwira   n   ħtta - yan].

          Neg   find + Perf+ Neg - I   the- book   of   no - one

        "I saw nobody's picture."

(4)   ur   i -   mmuddi   [PP d   ħtta - yan].

          Neg he - travel+ Perf   with no - one

        "He did not travel with anyone."

Note that in all these contexts, the N-words have no autonomous negative force and must co-occur with the negative head 'ur'. I take this fact to indicate that these elements enter into a licensing relation with the negative head. There are, however, a number of contexts in which NPs but not the N-word 'ħtta+NP' may occur. In particular, the distribution of 'ħtta+NP' is sensitive to strong islands ((5) and (6)) as well as to tensed embedded clauses (7) :

(5) a. zri   - ħ   [NP argaz   [CP lli   i– ħml -n   Fatima]].

see+ Perf + Neg- I   the- man   who   he - like +Perf   Fatima

"I saw the man who likes Fatima."

 b.*ur   zri   - ħ   [NP argaz   [CP lli   i - ħml - n   ħtta - yan]].

Neg   see + Perf+ Neg- I   the - man   who   he - like+ Perf   no - one

"I did not see the man who likes anyone."

(6) a. i-fta   s   l- xdmt   [CP baŝ   ad   i-mmaggar   ħmad].

he- go+ Perf+ Neg to the- work   so that that he- meet+ Perf   ħmad

"He went to work to meet Hmad."

 b. *ur   i - fti   s l - xdmt   [CP baŝ   ad   i - mmaggar   ħtta-yan].

Neg he- go+ Perf+ Neg to the - work   so that   that   he –meet + Perf   no- one

"He did not go to work to meet anyone."

(7) a. * γal   -ħ [CP is   i - zra   ħmad].

think+ Perf- I   that   he - see+ Perf ħmad

"I thought that he saw Hmad."

 b. * ur   γal   -ħ [CP is   i - zra   ħtta-yan].

Neg   think+ Perf -I   that   he -see+ Perf   no- one

"I do not think that he saw anyone."

In what follows, I will provide an account for the fact that N-word licensing displays some locality effects.

3. Locality Restrictions on N-Word Licensing

In this section, I deal with some locality restrictions on N-word licensing. More specifically, I show that certain tense-related restrictions as well as island-like locality constraints affect the surface distribution of N-words.

3.1 Tense-Related Restrictions

N-word licensing displays some locality effects (Progovac, 1992; Simpson, 1996; Omari, 2001; Haegman and Zanuttini, 1996; Kuno and Takani, 1997). In particular, certain tensed-related restrictions are shown to affect the surface distribution of N-words, as shown in (8):

(8) *ur   γal-   ħ   [CP is i- zra   ħtta-yan]. [+Tns]

Neg   think+ Perf- I   that he- see+ Perf no - one

"I don't think that he has seen anyone."

(9)   ur   rri-   ħ   [CP ad   i- ffγ   ħtta-yan].   [-Tns]

Neg   want+ Perf- I   that   he- leave+ A(orist)   no -one

"I don't want anyone to leave."

If we look at the contexts where the N-words in Amazigh fail to be licensed, they all seem to be [+Tense] embedded clauses (selected by non-volitional verbs like think (8)). This generalization is supported by the fact that N-words in [-Tense] embedded clauses (selected by volitional verbs like want (9)) can be licensed by the matrix negative. Following Jamari (1992), we assume that [+Tns] specification means that the complement clause has a time frame that is independent of that of the matrix. On the other hand, [-Tns] specification is anaphoric, which means that the temporal interpretation of the embedded clause is inferred from that of the matrix.

The obvious question is how to explain this descriptive generalization. Progovac (1992) provides a binding analysis for similar facts in Serbian/Croatian. She treats N-words as A'-anaphors which have to be bound by Neg in their governing category. Their governing category is defined on the basis of the first potential antecedent. A potential antecedent for N-words is Neg in Infl. If this projection contains an anaphoric T in subjunctive clauses selected by volitional verbs, the next potential antecedent will be an Infl in the superordinate clause, thus predicting licensing by superordinate Neg. This Infl transparency is required for the domain extension. Moreover, the domain of N-words extends only with volitional subjunctive since they carry no truth value. In this way, the semantic categories of tense and truth influence the binding domain.This explains why the domain remains local with non-volitional subjunctive, for example complements of factive verbs, which are assumed to carry an independent tense specification as well as a Truth value index in their head.

The spirit of this analysis can be extended to Neg-N-word relation in Amazigh: N-words require feature-checking by the functional head Neg ° and this is possible when the N-words occur in the same tense domain as the licensing Neg. The tense specification of the embedded clause in (9) is anaphoric. Co ïndexing of the embedded [-Tns] with the superordinate [+Tns] can be argued to automatically extend the domain to include the superordinate clause. As such, the N-word is within the tense domain of the potential checking head Neg °. Consequently the N-word will not undergo any movement, but due to the position it occupies within the tense-domain of Neg, its Neg-features will be successfully licensed.

By contrast, (8) contains [+Tns] specification in the embedded clause. As can be predicted, the domain of the N-word does not extend since the independently tensed clause clearly does block the licensing of the N-word by Neg in the higher clause. The N-word in (8) will therefore remain stranded in the lower clause throughout the derivation, its Neg-features unchecked, hence causing the derivation to crash.

In sum, we can deduce that N-word licensing in Amazigh is sensitive to whether the N-word is within the same tensed clause as the Negative head that licenses it.

3.2 Island-Like Locality Restrictions

In addition to the tense domain restrictions on Neg-feature checking, there are certain island-effects which also block N-word licensing in Amazigh. Consider (10):

(10) * ur   ssen-   ħ   argaz   lli   i- ħml- n   ħtta-yan.

     Neg know+ Perf- I   the-man   who he- like+ Perf   no- one

   "I don't know the man who likes anyone."

In (10) the N-word 'ħttayan' in the relative clause appears within a tensed CP. We could argue that the [+Tense] value of the relative clause blocks licensing of the N-word by the functional head Neg°, regardless of the islandhood of the Complex NP. In Amazigh, we cannot form non-tensed Complex NPs; hence the validity of the claim that the [+Tns] value in the relative clause does block the licensing of the N-word cannot be tested in this way. However, it is in fact possible to control the tense factor by introducing additional data from Iraqi Arabic concerning wh-constructions (Simpson, 1996).

Simpson (ibid) notes that the use of wh-question particle 'sh' clause-initially has the effect of overcoming the noted opacity effect induced by tense on wh in- situ. That is, when such a QP appears clause-initially, a wh-phrase may licitly occur in situ in an embedded tensed CP licensed by the +Q Comp. Thus, compare (11) with (12) below:

(11) *Mona   tsawwarat   [$_{cp}$ Ali   ištara   šeno]?

     Mona   thought   Ali   bought   what

   "What did Mona think Ali bought ?"

                (Simpson 1996: 6)

(12)   š- tsawwarit   Mona   [Ali   raaħ   weyn] ?

     QP-thought   Mona   Ali   went   where

   "Where did Mona think that Ali went?"

                        (Simpson 1996: 11)

However, if we attempt to use this QP-strategy to overcome the possible interfering tense effects with wh-in situ in Complex NPs, the resulting questions are still unacceptable:

(13) a. *Mona   εurfit   [il-bint$_i$ [illi$_i$ t$_i$ ištarat   šeno]]?

       Mona   knew   the-girl   who   bought   what

   "What$_i$ did Mona know the girl who bought t$_i$?"

   b. *š- εurfut   Mona [il-bint$_i$ [illi$_i$ t$_i$ ištarat   šeno]]?

     QP- knew   Mona the-girl   who   bought   what

   "What did Mona know the girl who bought?"

(Simpson 1996: 11)

Therefore, we can deduce that it is not the [+Tns] value of the CP containing the N-word which blocks N-word licensing. Rather, it seems that there are island restrictions on N-word licensing.

This conclusion is also evident from structures involving Adjunct Condition violation in Amazigh. If the adjunct CP in (14), for example, is [-Tns], and if we assume that [-Tns] embedded clauses do not block N-word licensing by Neg in the matrix clause, then we would predict that the N-word 'ħtta+NP' be licensed by Neg°. However, this prediction is not correct: (14) is unacceptable, indicating that it is the adjunct CP which is blocking N-word licensing:

(14) *ur   i-fti   s lxdmt   baš   ad   i-mmaggar   ħtta-yan.

   Neg he-go+ Perf+ Neg to the- work   so that   that   he-meet+ A   no- one

   "He did not go to work to meet anyone."

An LF movement analysis of the syntax of N-words in-situ might then claim that sentences such as (8) and (9) are unacceptable because the N-word must undergo LF movement to Neg and that this movement is blocked by the barrierhood of the Complex NP and the adjunct CP. However, it can be argued that this is not an appropriate analysis for (8) and (9). Independent evidence for this claim comes from other syntactic processes in Iraqi Arabic. For example, Simpson (1996), reporting Ouhalla (1994), shows that there is a significant difference in acceptability between extraction and the illicit unlicensed occurrence of wh-elements in situ in the island. If the wh-element in (11) is overtly extracted from its containing island environment, the resulting question is markedly less unacceptable than when the wh-phrase remains in situ in the island:

(15) ?? $\check{s}eno_i$ ɛurfut Mona [ilbint   illi   ištarat t_i]?

      what   knew Mona   the-girl   who   bought

   ''What did Mona know the girl who bought?''

(Simpson (1996): 12)

The licensing of an N-word in a Complex NP-island by a higher +Q Comp is not permitted as an operation. However, this does not relate to the impossibility of movement. In (15) the wh-phrase 'šeno' is extracted from within an island to the matrix clause. This does result in a coherent interpretation of the wh-phrase as being directly questioned, hence licensed by the matrix +Q Comp. The sentence is not fully acceptable because a constraint on movement is violated (subjacency), resulting from the illicit extraction of an element from within an island configuration. If wh-licensing were always to involve movement and could be effected by LF raising of the wh-phrase 'šeno' to the matrix +Q Comp in (11), we would expect both (11) and (15) to be equally (un)accaptable. The movement necessary to form an LF equivalent of (15) from (11) should violate (only) those same locality constraints which also are violated when overt movement takes place in (15). However, (11) is markedly worse, a fact which

entails that it is not a locality restriction on LF movement which is responsible for the contrast.

Following this line of reasoning, if no LF movement takes place in (10), then the unacceptability of N-words in situ in Complex NPs cannot be accounted for in terms of constraints on movement. Rather, it can be suggested that, in addition to tense-related constraints, a locality constraint on purely non-movement (licensing) relation is at work. Sensitivity to such locality constraints as well as to tense restrictions can then be viewed in terms of a condition constraining the formation of a chain between Neg ° and the N-word. Accordingly, the condition can be formulated as in (16):

(16)   *[ur_i…[$α$…[…ħtta+NP $_i$…]],

where $α$ is an island or a [+Tns] embedded clause.

This is in line with Cinque's (1990) analysis of clitic cleft dislocation (ClLD). He argues that sensitivity to island constraints in such constructions should be viewed not necessarily as a property of movement, but as a property of chains. This is illustrated by (17), where the pronoun cannot occur inside a complex NP:

(17) * [pp A carlo],   ti   parlero   solo   del   [NP le   personne

          to Carlo   I   will talk to you   only   about   the people

      [CP che   gli   piacciono]]

         that   to him   appeal

                          (Cinque 1990: 59)

Eventhough (17) exhibits a property that is normally considered diagnostic of a wh-movement construction (namely, sensitivity to strong islands), Cinque rejects an analysis of ClLD that would involve both movement and the presence of a resumptive pronoun in the extraction site. Instead, he interprets sensitivity to Islands as a property of the chain formed by the dislocated XP and the clitic.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented some of the locality restrictions on N- word licensing in Amazigh. I have shown that certain tense- related restrictions as well as island-like locality constraints affect the surface distribution of N-words. I have first argued that N-words require feature-checking by the functional head Neg and that this is possible only when the N-words occur in the same tense domain as the licensing Neg. I have then argued that the unacceptability of N- words in situ in complex NPs cannot be accounted for in terms of constraints on movement; rather, sensitivity to such locality constraint is a property of the chain formed by Neg and the N- word.

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