Blocking Effects of Long-distance Reflexives (LDRs) Revisited

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Summary

- This poster proposes a unified derivational account on cross-linguistic blocking effects of LDRs within the Minimalist Program (MP) framework.
- The account lends support to the current assumptions that underly the MP, i.e., languages do not differ in narrow syntax and variations lie in the lexicon of individual languages.

1. Background & Data

- LDRs: reflexive pronouns that can take an antecedent in a higher clause, e.g., *zìjǐ* in Mandarin, *proprie* in Italian, *sig* in Icelandic.
- Two Types of Blocking: *nominal blocking effects* in Mandarin *vs. verbal blocking effects* in Italian and Icelandic (Giorgi 2006).
- Mandarin: 1st/2nd person pronouns block LDRs

(1) Zhāngsān$_1$ rènwéi tā$_2$ qīpiàn le zìjǐ$_{1/2}$
Zhangsan think he cheat PERF self
a. 'Zhangsan$_1$ thinks that he$_2$ cheated himself$_2$'
b. 'Zhangsan$_1$ thinks that he$_2$ cheated him$_1$'

(2) Zhāngsān$_1$ rènwéi wǒ/nǐ$_2$ pīpíng le zìjǐ$_{2/*1}$
Zhangsan think I/you criticize PERF self
a. *'Zhangsan$_1$ thought that I/you$_2$ criticized him$_1$.'
b. 'Zhangsan$_1$ thought that I/you$_2$ criticized myself/yourself.'

- Italian: indicative verbal morphemes block LDRs

(3) Quel dittatore$_1$ spera che i notiziari televisivi parlino
That dictator hopes that the TV news programs will talk(SUBJ.)
a lungo delle proprie$_1$ gesta.
for a long time about self's deeds.
(Giorgi 2006: ex. 25)

(4) *Quel dittatore$_1$ ha detto che i notiziari televisivi hanno parlato
That dictator said that the TV news programs talked(IND.)
a lungo delle proprie$_1$ gesta.
for a long time about self's deeds.
(Giorgi 2006: ex. 23)

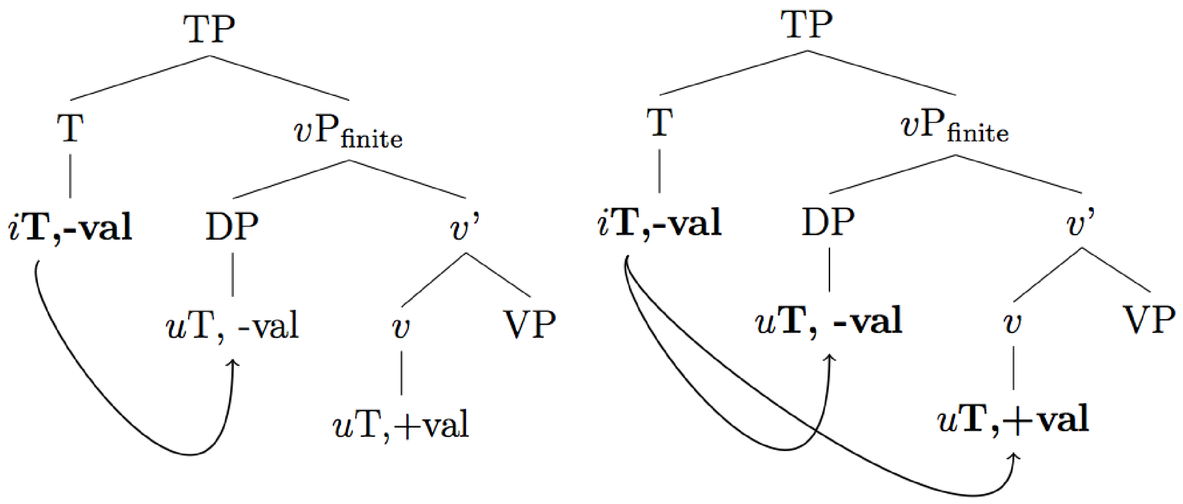
- Icelandic: indicative verbal morphemes block LDRs

(5) Jòn$_1$ segir að María elski sig$_1$.
John says that Maria loves(SUBJ.) self
(Maling 1984: ex.2b)

(6) *Jòn$_1$ veit að María elskar sig$_1$.
John knows that Maria loves(IND.) self
(Maling 1984: ex.2a)

2. Pesetsky and Torrego 2007 on Feature Valuations

- In English, Tense-node (T) has an interpretable (***i*T**) but unvalued (**-val**) **tense feature** that acts as Probe;
- This feature Agrees with a valued (**+val**) tense feature on verbs;
- As a result, the feature **[*i*T, -val]** on T gets a value and the uninterpretable tense feature ***u*T** on ***v*** and ***DP*** become interpretable.

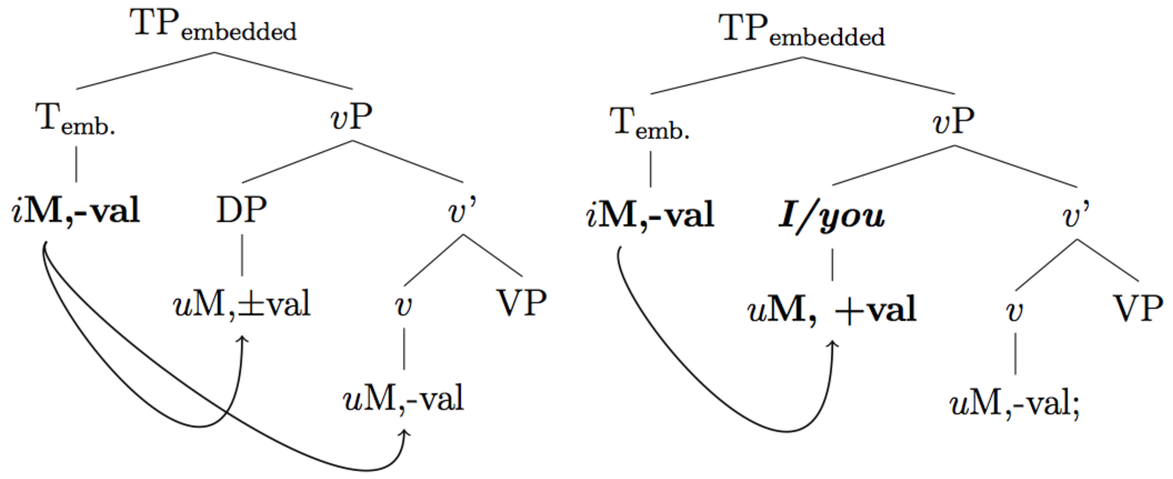


3. Extension of Pesetsky and Torrego 2007

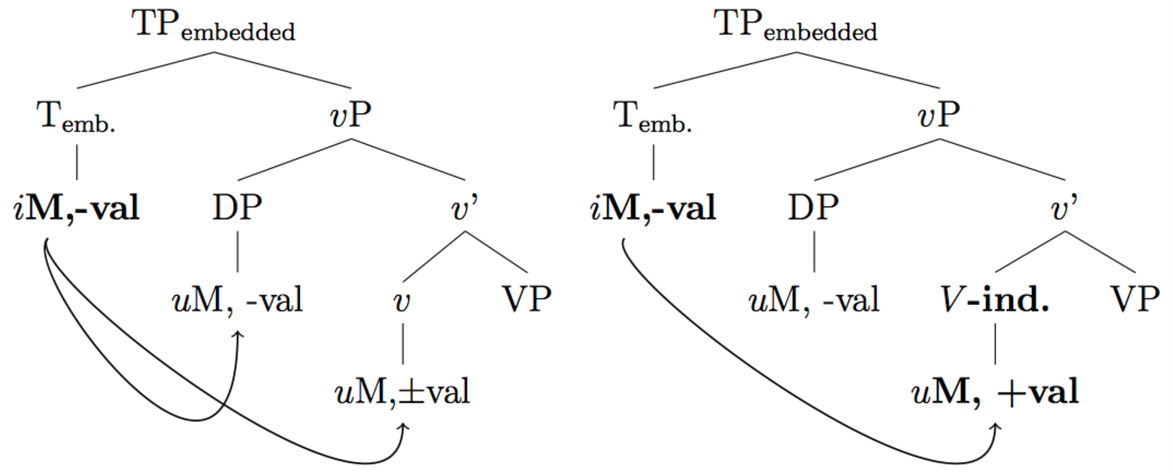
- T-node in Mandarin and Italian/Icelandic also has an interpretable (***i*M**) but unvalued (**-val**) **mood feature** that acts as Probe;
- It searches down the derivation for a valued (**+val**) mood feature;
- A mood feature is valued when it has the value **[+ real world]**; otherwise, it is unvalued.

4. Accounting for Cross-linguistic Blocking Effects

- Mandarin
  - verbs do not have tense/mood inflections
  - T can Agree with nominals in Spec ***v*P** position to get its mood feature values
  - 1st/2nd person pronouns are indexicals which always refer to the speaker/addressee of an utterance in the real world (Kaplan 1977)
  - 1st/2nd person pronouns have valued mood feature, i.e., **[+ real world]**
  - T in the embedded clause in (2) Agrees with *I/you* to get its [+real world] mood value.



- Italian/Icelandic
  - verbs inflect for mood features
  - T Agrees with verbs for its mood feature values
  - indicative morphemes on verbs have **[+ real world]** mood feature
  - embedded T in (4) or (6) Agrees with verbs with indicative morphemes



- Explaining blocking effects by phases
  - a phase: a 'feature-complete' unit in a syntactic derivation, the complement of whose head cannot be altered in further derivation;
  - 'feature-complete': all the features are valued/interpretable via Probe-Agree
  - the whole embedded TP in (2)/(4)/(6) is the complement of a phase, i.e., the embedded CP, because
    - the embedded T-node gets its mood features valued by [+ real world]
    - the whole embedded TP no longer has unvalued/uninterpretable features
  - as a result, the reflexive pronoun in (2)/(4)/(6) can only take the subject in the embedded clause as its antecedent
  - This gives rise to the observed blocking effects.

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Selected References

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