

On subject positions and specifiers more generally

Željko Bošković

University of Connecticut

The talk will re-examine the status of specifiers, with special attention paid to two areas: the loss of specifiers and subject positions.

A number of authors have observed that specifiers are often lost in diachronic language change (see e.g. Dadan 2019, van Gelderen 2011, Roberts 2013; thus, Dadan observes that the direction of diachronic change with *wh*-dependencies is always from *wh*-movement to *wh*-in-situ, not the other way round). Dadan (2019) also observes that specifiers are avoided in language acquisition. The talk will provide an account of this based on a more general property of the language faculty which will unify the diachronic loss of specifiers and their avoidance in language acquisition with Kayne's (1994) LCA, the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), the no-Spec-without-complement aspect of Bare Phrase Structure, the rarity of multiple Spec construction (as with, e.g. multiple *wh*-fronting), and the *who left* effect (where subject *wh*-movement cannot proceed through SpecTP, see McCloskey 2000). Regarding the PIC, it will be argued that the PIC changes the status of a specifier derivationally in a way that leads to the loss of the specifier (see also Takita, Goto, and Shibata 2016). From this perspective, both the diachronic loss of phrasal movement and the PIC involve a loss of Specs. The loss of Specs is thus manifested not only diachronically and acquisitionally, but also (broadly) synchronically, through the PIC, which changes the status of a Spec derivationally.

From this perspective, the talk will re-examine the status of the subject Spec position, arguing for a return to split IP (see also Cardinaletti 2004). One argument for split IP is provided by coordinations (see Bošković 2018). It is well-known that English modals undergo movement (to T). Still, a modal can occur inside a conjunct, with the subject outside of the conjunct, as in (1). Assuming that bar-level coordination is disallowed, examples like (1), where the subject is outside of the coordination but the modal is not, provide evidence that the subject and the modal are not located in the same projection, the modal being lower than the phrase whose Spec the subject occupies.

(1) John [travels to Rome tomorrow] and [will fly for Paris on Sunday].

The talk will also examine the availability of quirky subject constructions. Languages differ regarding the availability of quirky subjects like (2). English, e.g., disallows them.

(2) Mér er kalt
me(D) is cold
'I am cold'

(Icelandic)

This crosslinguistic difference is poorly understood. The talk will provide a new generalization regarding the availability of quirky subject constructions crosslinguistically, which establishes a clear prerequisite for the availability of such constructions in a language. A deduction of the generalization in question will also be provided which will be shown to provide an argument for split IP.

The talk will also examine Locative Inversion and expletive *there* constructions from the perspective of the approach to subject positions argued for in the talk, where nominative and non-nominative subjects are located in different positions, as well as the relevance of that approach for the traditional EPP requirement. Regarding *there* constructions, it will be argued that there are two distinct *there* constructions regarding the structural position of the expletive.

References: Bošković (2018) On The Coordinate Structure Constraint, Across-the-Board-Movement, Phases, and Labeling. Cardinaletti (2004) Towards a cartography of subject positions. Dadan (2019) Movement that is kept and movement that is lost. Presented at LSA 93. van Gelderen (2011) *The Linguistic Cycle*. Kayne (1994) *The antisymmetry of syntax*. McCloskey (2000) Quantifier float and *wh*-movement in an Irish English. *Linguistic Inquiry*. Roberts (2013) *Verbs and Diachronic Syntax* Takita, Goto, and Shibata (2016) Labeling through Spell-Out. *The Linguistic Review*.