

## Minimalist Discourse: Internal Merge versus Topic-Shift

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Syntax is regarded as autonomous because it can generate nonsense, (the cheese ate the mouse), while Discourse responds to pragmatics and natural inference:

1) the lion saw the bird and he chased him. (he => lion)

2) the lion saw the bird and he flew away ( he=> bird)

Karmiloff-Smith (1981) reported that children use unintroduced pronouns to refer to context when the pragmatics invites it. (“he took my bag” Adult: “who took it”). Nevertheless in discourse if there is a null subject, then Topic-continuation is anti-pragmatically forced, giving nonsense:

3) the lion saw the bird and \_\_flew away (=lion flew away)

Evidence from Bulgarian (Kuehnast, Roeper, Bittner 2011) shows that children follow suit. If now discourse follows structural principles, independent of pragmatics, they should either represent independent interface principles or they should assimilate to sentence-grammar.

We argue that they assimilate Discourse to sentence-grammar (Roeper 2011). Evidence from acquisition of there-insertion shows that expletive-there (4) is acquired before anaphoric-locative there (5).

4) Expletive Eve 1;11 staring out of window

MOT: no more what?

EVE:there no squirrels.

5) Anaphoric Peter 3.1 “and there was a stick there”

Expletive-there is a form of Internal Merge, or movement because Phi-features move from the predicate to there.

6) there +pl verb the boys

←=====+pl

We argue, following Chomsky (2009) and (Motut (2010) and (Shima (2000) that Merge-over-move is wrong:

7) Internal Merge (move) is the Default representation

Furthermore, Anaphoric-locative-there involves External Merge of a “free” unbound index to a there pronoun.

What happens when pronouns, not null subjects appear. Again discourse grammar contains mechanisms that allow anti-pragmatic readings. We can say:

8) the man came in with a dog, but HE ate the dog food.

In (8) but HE shifts TOPIC to an implausible meaning. Without but the stressed pronoun does not shift:

9) The man came in with the dog and HE ate the dogfood.

In (9) the reading remains the dog, or feels opaque, but allows a vague notion of contrast without a required Topic Shift. Topic-Shift for but HE involves an intricate mechanism: the stressed element links, under Association with Focus (Rooth (1992), to the negation inside but. Children use general plausible pragmatics before the Topic-Shift mechanism is analyzed, delivering anti-pragmatic readings, for German aber dieser (Kuehnast et al) Technically, the default reading Topic-Continuation carries a copy index on the full or null pronoun (he) via Internal Merge. (For conjoined cases, a Multi-dominance grammar

might work). External reference is accomplished by a “free” index which is Merged on the pronoun iff no copy is available.

For acquisition, this view of discourse explains an ignored aspect of binding theory in acquisition. Children fail to get Principle B correct, and take internal reference:

10) the man washed him

More sophisticated examples from L2 learners show that Spanish speakers learning English are more likely to take an internal reference for he (=every man):

11) Every man thinks he can do it

although Spanish, contrasting with Null subjects, marks an external reading with an explicit pronoun in contrast to English speakers learning Spanish who are never tempted to give an external reading to a null pronoun (Nobody thinks\_\_can do it) (Amaral (in prep)). Thus the internal reading is the Default in both sentence and discourse grammar and discourse principles are minimalist extensions of binding theory which may then assimilate to semantic representations of discourse.