

WE NEED (SOME KIND OF) A RULE OF CONJUNCTION REDUCTION

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Gazdar (1981: 155–158) proposes to eliminate from grammar the rule of conjunction reduction (CR), and to generate coordinate constituents by means of context-free phrase structure rules. To be sure, the formulation of a transformational rule of CR runs into a number of problems (see Grosu, 1981, and references cited therein) and some writers (e.g., Williams, 1978: 38) have tried to put restrictions on the application of the rule. Grosu (1981) shows Williams's restrictions to be inadequate. I do not try to make a formal statement of CR here; my purpose is only to show that some such type of rule is in fact needed, if not in English, then in general linguistic theory.

My evidence comes from Icelandic, which exhibits a number of *impersonal verbs*, that is, verbs whose only finite form is the third-person singular, irrespective of the person and number of the subject. In normal word order (Icelandic being an SVO language), these verbs are preceded by a NP in an oblique case: accusative (acc), dative (dat), or genitive (gen). Historically, at least some of these oblique NPs are topicalized objects, but Thráinsson (1979: 462–476) argues quite convincingly that, whatever their origin, they should be analyzed as subjects synchronically. A few examples are given in (1)–(3):

- (1) *Mig vantar bókina.*
me (ACC) needs (3-sg) the-book
'I need the book.'

- (2) *Mér líkar þetta.*
me (DAT) likes (3-sg) this
'I like this.'
- (3) *Vindsins gætir lítið.*
the-wind (GEN) notices (3-sg) little
'The wind is hardly noticeable.'

These verbs must presumably be specially marked in the lexicon to ensure that their subjects appear in an oblique case (cf. Andrews, 1982). One could propose that they should also be marked [3-sg] to indicate that this is their only finite form and that they never agree with their subject (unless, of course, the oblique subject is also 3-sg). However, the facts disconfirm this proposal. As Thráinsson (1979:466) has shown (see also Andrews, 1982), subject-verb agreement depends on the case of the subject; only a nominative subject triggers agreement. The third-person singular form of the impersonal verbs is therefore an automatic consequence of an oblique case subject, but it cannot be marked in the lexicon. This can be seen from the fact that a few verbs that usually take nominative (NOM) subjects sometimes change their subjects to an oblique case; when this happens, the verb ceases to agree with the subject and takes on the third-person singular form, as can be seen in examples (4)–(5):

- (4) a. *Við* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{hlökkum} \text{ (1-pl)} \\ \textit{*hlakkar} \text{ (3-sg)} \end{array} \right\}$ *til jólanna.*
'We (NOM) look forward (1-pl) to Christmas.'
- b. *Okkur* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{*hlökkum} \text{ (1-pl)} \\ \textit{hlakkar} \text{ (3-sg)} \end{array} \right\}$ *til jólanna.*
us (ACC/DAT) looks forward (3-sg) to Christmas
'We look forward to Christmas.'
- (5) a. *Ég* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{finn} \text{ (1-sg)} \\ \textit{*finnur} \text{ (3-sg)} \end{array} \right\}$ *til.*
I (NOM) feel (1-sg) (pain) (particle)
'I feel pain.'
- b. *Mér* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{*finn} \text{ (1-sg)} \\ \textit{finnur} \text{ (3-sg)} \end{array} \right\}$ *til.*
me (DAT) feels (3-sg) (pain) (particle)
'I feel pain.'

The converse also holds: when a verb that is usually impersonal takes a subject in the nominative, it agrees with this subject in person and number.

- (6) a. *Mig* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{dreymir} \text{ (3-sg)} \\ \textit{*dreymi} \text{ (1-sg)} \end{array} \right\}$ *allar nætur.*
me (ACC) dreams (3-sg) every night
'I dream every night.'

b. Ég { *dreymir (3-sg) } allar nætur.
 { dreymi (1-sg) }
 'I (NOM) dream (1-sg) every night.'

(7) a. Bátana { rekur (3-sg) } á land.
 { *reka (3-pl) }
 the-boats (ACC) drifts (3-sg) on land
 'The boats drift ashore.'

b. Bátarnir { *rekur (3-sg) } á land.
 { reka (3-pl) }
 'The boats (NOM) drift (3-pl) ashore.'

Of the "exceptional" (b) forms, those in (4b) and (7b) are quite common, while (5b) and (6b) are rare. What causes these changes is immaterial here (see Thráinsson, 1979, Ch. 7, for some discussion). We want to show simply that subject-verb agreement is apparently impossible with non-nominative subjects, and conversely, that it is obligatory with nominative subjects. This correlation seems to be quite well established.

As Kossuth (1978:453) has pointed out, it is possible to conjoin two VPs even though one of the verbs is impersonal, and the other a regular personal verb. What Kossuth has not observed, and what cannot be seen from her examples since all the verbs there (not only the impersonal ones) have the third-person singular form, are the interesting agreement facts we find in such coordination. Let us look at (8), containing two conjoined VPs. The first verb, *sjá* 'see', takes a nominative subject, whereas the second, *finnst* 'find (somebody to be something)', is impersonal and takes a dative subject.

(8) Þeir sjá stúlkuna og { *finnst (3-pl) } hún álitleg.
 { finnst (3-sg) }
 they (NOM) see (3-pl) the-girl and finds (3-sg) she attractive
 'They see the girl and find her attractive.'

In (9), on the other hand, the first verb, *líka* 'like', is impersonal and takes a subject in the dative case, while the second, *borða* 'eat', is a normal verb taking a nominative subject.

(9) Þeim líkar maturinn og { *borðar (3-sg) } mikið.
 { borða (3-pl) }
 them (DAT) likes (3-sg) the food and eat (3-pl) much
 'They like the food and eat much.'

If *þeir* 'they (NOM)' is the subject of both the VPs in (8), we would expect it to trigger agreement on both verbs. Conversely, we would *not* expect *þeim* 'they (DAT)' in (9) to trigger agreement on the second verb *borða* 'eat'. However, the facts do not seem to bear out either of these expectations. In (8), the third-person singular is the only possible form of the second verb, *finnst*, while in (9), only

the plural form of the verb *borða* is possible. Note that Gazdar could not explain this, as he (1981: 158) tries to do with an example from Williams (1978:39) by referring to a rule of gapping (whatever kind of rule that is), because here the verb is not lacking and the conjoined sentence parts are constituents, that is, VPs. But it was exactly constituent coordination that Gazdar's (1981) rules (9) and (10) were intended to handle.

So, where are we now? It seems obvious that assuming the second VPs in (8) and (9) to have their own subjects in deep structure accounts straightforwardly for the facts. The verb *finnst* in (8) then has a dative subject that does not trigger agreement, so that it takes on the third-person singular form, while the verb *borða* in (9) has a nominative plural subject that triggers agreement. These subjects are then deleted by CR (however formulated) and the VPs conjoined; the result is the surface forms (8) and (9).

As a last resort, proponents of the base-generated account could try to argue that the subject only triggers verb agreement in the first of coordinated VPs; hence, the second verb in (8) is in fact subjectless and therefore takes on the third-person singular form (just like the "weather verbs," which also have no deep structure subject). However, such an account breaks down immediately when we consider (9), where the third-person singular form is impossible in the second VP; and when two (or more) VPs having only personal verbs are coordinated, both (or all) verbs agree with the subject of the sentence in person and number.

It appears, then, that no explanation is available for the agreement facts in (8) and (9) unless we assume that CR is a rule of Icelandic syntax, and accordingly of syntactic theory.

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