

Why Does It Behoove the Verb *Behoove* Not to Behave in Behalf of Burzio's Generalization?

An Analogy with Weather Verbs

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1. Introduction

Burzio (1986) formulates his well-known generalization as in the following fashion:

- (1) All and only the verbs that can assign θ -role to the subject position can assign accusative Case to an object. (Burzio 1986: 178)

In this squib, contrary to this original formulation of Burzio's generalization, it will be shown that some of the verbs that assign no θ -role to their subject position can assign accusative Case to the object position. The aim of this squib, therefore, is to present a more appropriate formulation of Burzio's generalization.

2. Dethematized Subjects

In English, dethematized subjects (i.e., subjects without a θ -role) in active can be found in examples such as in (2).

- (2) a. *There* is a book on the desk. (existential)
 b. *It* seems [that John loves Mary]. (raising)
 c. *It* rained/snowed yesterday. (weather Vs)

It is obvious, from the semantic characteristics of these verbs, that their subjects have no θ -role. Moreover, Chomsky (1981), introducing a syntactic criterion for examining whether a verb assigns θ -role to its subject position, shows that the verbs whose subject position is dethematized cannot be embedded by a control predicate in non-pro-drop languages like English. Now consider (3).

- (3) a.* I want [PRO to be a book on the desk].
 (cf. I want [there to be a book on the desk].)
 b.* I want [PRO to seem that John is smart].
 (cf. I want [it to seem that John is smart].)
 c.* I want [PRO to rain/snow].
 (cf. I want [it to rain/snow].)

The ill-formedness of (3), therefore, syntactically confirms the semantic observation that the subject positions of the examples in (2) are all dethematized. The conclusion is that the existential verbs, the raising verbs, and the weather verbs do not assign any θ -role to their subject positions.

3. Superfluous Objects and Burzio's Generalization

Before entering into the discussion on the problems of the original formulation of Burzio's generalization stated in (1) above, it is worth while observing a marvelous prediction borne out by Burzio's generalization. It has sometimes been pointed out (cf. Burzio 1986 and Ura 2000) that there are cases where intransitive verbs can assign accusative Case in English. Consider (4) and (5).

- (4) a. John laughed/danced himself *(tired).
 b. John cried his eyes *(out).
 (5) a. John sang a song.

- b. John smiled a charming smile

The intransitive verbs illustrated in these examples, if accompanied with an object DP, are unacceptable except when the object DP is modified by a resultative predicate or it is a cognate object. Here it is interesting to note that the intransitive verbs that are allowed in those contexts are all unergative. Intransitive unaccusative verbs cannot be accompanied with any object DP.

- (6) a.* John arrived himself breathless.

- b.* John arrived a glamorous arrival.

One of the most remarkable applications of Burzio's generalization is to attribute the above difference between unergative and unaccusative verbs to their ability to assign Case: Given the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978 and Burzio 1986), which states that unergative verbs do, but unaccusative ones do not, assign θ -role to their external argument, Burzio's generalization enables us to give a straightforward account to the aforementioned difference between intransitive verbs: Unergative verbs can assign Case to its following position, so that the examples in (4) and (5) are ruled in, whereas unaccusative ones cannot; as a result, the examples in (6) are ruled out.

4. Weather Verbs

Keeping in mind the above application of Burzio's generalization to the constructions with superfluous objects, let us examine some peculiar behaviors of weather verbs. First, as we observed in (3c) above, it is evident that the subject position of the weather verbs is dethematized. This leads us to predict that weather verbs cannot sanction any superfluous object owing to its inability to assign external θ -role. Surprisingly enough,

however, there are a few pieces of evidence which show that they can assign structural Case to their object position. First, as the well-formedness of (7) below shows, they can sanction a resultative construction.

- (7) a. It rains itself *(out).
 b. It rained the road *(slippery).

The fact that the undeletability of the bracketed secondary predicates in (7) shows that these sentences, indeed, count as a resultative construction just as the ones in (4) do. Secondly, weather verbs can take a cognate object.

- (8) a. It snowed an artificial kind of snow.
 b. It rained acid rain.

As long as the well-formedness of (4) and (5) is to be explained with Burzio's generalization, the facts shown in (7) and (8) lead us to conclude that weather verbs can assign Case to their object position.

It should be noted, again, that it is empirically evident from the ill-formedness of the example in (3c) above that weather verbs do not assign *-role* to their subject position. Thus, this is clearly conflicting with the formulation of Burzio's generalization, which is stated in (1) above.

5. Weather Verbs and Quasi-arguments

Now it is noteworthy that it is a well-known fact that existential *be* and raising verbs cannot assign Case to the object position, which results in the A-movement of the following NP to the subject position. Since these verbs do not assign an external *-role*, which is evident from the ill-formedness of (3a, b) above, they are pertinent to Burzio's generalization.

Thus, trying to find out what makes weather verbs different from existential *be* and raising verbs is a cue to solve the mystery concerning the

peculiar deviation of weather verbs from Burzio's generalization.

As a matter of fact, Chomsky (1981) has already hinted that weather verbs differ from the other types of verbs with a dethematized subject: The pleonastic element at the subject position of the former verbs can control the missing subject of an adverbial clause, while that of the latter cannot.

(9) a. It sometimes snows while PRO raining.

b.* There is a book on the desk while PRO being a dictionary on the floor.

c.* It seems that Chomsky is right while PRO seeming that Lakoff is wrong.

Chomsky calls a pleonastic element that can act as the controller of the missing subject of an adverbial clause "quasi-argument", and one that cannot is called "(true) expletive".

From this observation, it is natural to hypothesize that verbs with a quasi-argument as its subject can assign Case to their subject position, even if that position is dethematized. Before considering the implications of this hypothesis, let us examine this hypothesis with another type of empirical data from English.

6. *Behoove*

The English verb *behoove* behaves the same as weather verbs do in the relevant contexts. First, its subject position is dethematized as is evident from the ill-formedness of (10).

(10) *I want [PRO to behoove us to know about this fact].

(cf. I want [it to behoove us to know about this fact].)

Next, let us examine whether it is true that the verb *behoove* assigns

structural Case. Consider the examples in (11).

- (11) a. It behooves [there to be many warriors in the castle].
 b. It behooves [the cat to be out of the bag].

Note that the expletive *there* can appear at the subject position of the infinitival clause selected by *behoove*, and that (11b) retains the idiomatic reading that the fixed expression *the cat is out of the bag* has. These facts clearly show that the accusative marked DP at the position that follows *behoove* in (12) below is not an argument that *behoove* takes, but an argument (subject) in the infinitival clause embedded under *behoove*.

- (12) It behooves [*us* to know about this problem].

Now that *us* in (12) is not an argument of *behoove*, it turns out that the Case of *us* is not an inherent one which is assigned by *behoove*. This is because, by definition, an element cannot be assigned any inherent Case by a head H without being assigned a θ -role by H (see Chomsky 1986 and Baker 1988). Since it turns out that *us* in (12) is not an argument of *behoove*, it must be the external argument of *know*. Notice, moreover, that no inherent Case is assigned to any external argument (see, again, Chomsky 1986 and Baker 1988). It therefore follows that the Case of *us* in (12) is not an inherent one; consequently, it must be the case that it is assigned a structural Case.

There are two conceivable sources for the structural Case of *us* in (12): (A) It is assigned/checked by *behoove*; or (B) it is assigned by the prepositional complementizer *for*, which happens to be phonologically null just like in the infinitival complement clause of *want*. But the latter possibility vanishes immediately when we compare the ill-formedness of (13) with the well-formedness of (14).

- (13) *It behooves very much [for us to know about this problem].
 (14) He wants very much [for us to win].

(cf. *He wants very much [us to win].)

It is a well-known fact that the prepositional complementizer *for* inevitably emerges when an adverbial comes in between *want* and the subject of the infinitival clause. The fact that (13) cannot be salvaged even though *for* is inserted shows that the prepositional complementizer is not involved at all in the infinitival complement clause of *behoove*. Thus, the infinitival complement of *behoove* resembles the one of ECM verbs (as shown in (15)).

- (15) *He believes/considers sincerely [for us to know about this problem].

Now it is concluded that the verb *behoove* assigns/checks the structural Case of *us* in (12), just like the ECM verbs assigns/checks the structural Case of the subject DPs of their infinitival complement clauses.

Returning to our main concern, it now turns out that the verb *behoove* has the same peculiarity as weather verbs do; that is, it can assign Case to the object position even if it assigns no θ -role to the subject position. Again, this peculiar behavior of *behoove* is apparently inconsistent with the original formulation of Burzio's generalization stated in (1) above.

If our hypothesis that verbs with a quasi-argument as its subject can assign Case to their object position is correct, then it leads us to predict that *behoove* also takes a quasi-argument as weather verbs do. This prediction is, indeed, borne out. As the well-formedness of (16) shows, the pleonastic element at the subject position of *behoove* can control the missing subject of an adverbial clause.

- (16) It behooves me to know the fact while PRO behooving him to ignore it.

This, in turn, indicates that our hypothesis is empirically supported.

7. Theoretical Implications

The discussion made so far reveals that Burzio's generalization as it is stated in (1) is inadequate to capture the peculiar behavior of weather verbs and *behoove*. Burzio's generalization, as its names clearly represents, is merely a generalization that is induced from empirical observations, so that no empirical exception should be allowed. Hence, it behooves us to extend Burzio's generalization so as to capture the peculiarity of *behoove* and weather verbs in English. I therefore propose to revise Burzio's (1986) original statement in (1) into the new form stated in (17):

(17) Neo Burzio's Generalization

All and only the verbs that can take an external argument (whether it is assigned a *-role* or not) can assign accusative Case to an object.

Since this new statement logically implies the old one stated in (1), all that were captured by the old one are also captured by the new one. As a consequence, the empirical coverage of the old one remains intact.

Although this squib is too short to explore the implications and the consequences of the newly formulated Burzio's generalization, a comment on one of its theoretically welcome consequences is in order. Under the theory of passive proposed in Roberts (1987), Baker (1988), and Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989), it is hypothesized that the passive morpheme absorbs the external *-role* of the verb to which it attaches. Then, it follows from the old version of Burzio's generalization that the verb with the passive morpheme cannot assign Case. According to these authors, this causes the syntactic process of passive.

One of the technical problems with this theory is that an ad hoc

mechanism has to be devised in order to explain where the Agent-role of the argument that is introduced by the preposition *by* comes from. Consider (18).

- (18) a. John kissed Mary.
 b. Mary was kiss-*ed* by John.

It is evident that *John* in (18b) has the same Agent-role that *John* in (18a) has. If the passive morpheme *-ed* is assigned the Agent-role of *kiss* in (18b), the sentence obviously would violate Theta-Criterion without being provided an ad hoc mechanism that would transmit the θ -role from one argument to another (cf. Roberts 1987). Such an device is highly ad hoc because no other phenomena that demand it are yet to be known in natural language.

Suppose, now, that the passive morpheme is an argument (which is the same as in Baker-Robert's hypothesis about passive), and suppose, contrary to their hypothesis, that it is allowed not to absorb any θ -role. Put differently, the passive morpheme is allowed to appear as the external argument of the verb to which it attaches but it is allowed to manifest itself either as a real argument with θ -role or as a quasi-argument with no θ -role. It should be noted, here, that Neo Burzio's generalization guarantees that the verb to which the passive morpheme attaches cannot assign Case, as required, regardless of whether the passive morpheme acts as a real argument or as a quasi-argument. When it appears as a quasi-argument, it does not absorb the external θ -role of the verb and it is properly assigned to the argument introduced by *by*. When the passive morpheme appears as a real argument, it absorbs the external θ -role and the Agent-role never appears in the sentence. This produces a passive sentence without the *by*-phrase in English.

8. Conclusion

This squib examined Burzio's generalization through investigations into two peculiar types of verb in English. It was shown that several tests reveal that the verb *behoove* and weather verbs are excepted from Burzio's (1986) original formulation of his generalization. Finally, an empirically more adequate formulation of Burzio's generalization was proposed and one of its theoretical consequences was explored.

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