Spec-CP as an A-position: an argument from hyperraising in Mongolian

1. Overview

In Mongolian, the subject of embedded finite clauses can bear nominative or accusative case.

(1) Bat [ margaaš Dulmaa / Dulmaa-g nom unsh-n gej ]
Bat [ tomorrow Dulmaa.NOM / Dulmaa-ACC book read-N.PST COMP ]
khel-sen.
say-PST
‘Bat said that Dulmaa will read a book tomorrow.’

Proposal: the ACC version is derived by movement of the embedded subject to Spec-CP. From that position, the embedded subject can receive ACC from the matrix v without violating the PIC.

Movement to Spec-CP explains why the ACC can hyperraise into the matrix clause: Spec-CP may act as an escape hatch into the matrix clause.

Bat dog-ACC loud-INTR [ a wonder-with COMP ] say-PST
‘Bat said that dogs are wonderful.’

Relevance: if this analysis is correct, the relevance of Mongolian ACC subjects is that movement through Spec-CP may feed the creation of new antecedents for binding.

(3) a. Öör-in-ku n’siya bagsh oyuantun bür-sig, sain self-GEN-EPTh-Poss.3 teacher student every-ACC(ACC) good oyuantun gej khel-sen.
student COMP say-PST
‘Hey/His teacher said that every student is a good student.’

b. Oyuantun bür-sig, öör-in-ku n’siya bagsh [ a sind student every-ACC self-GEN-EPTh-Poss.3 teacher [ a good oyuantun gej ] khel-sen.]
student COMP say-PST
‘For every student, x’s teacher said that x is a good student.’

This is a signature property of A-movement. Spec-CP would have to be an A-position, contrary to the assumption that it is inherently an X-position.

2. ACC subjects are embedded arguments

There are several arguments in favor of the claim that the ACC DP in (1) is the embedded subject (and not an instance of prolepsis, Salzmann:2017).

(i) Idiom preservation:

(4) Dorj chang-aar Bat-inän niid-iig ore-deer-e gar-san Dorj loud-INTR Bat-GEN eye(ACC) top on-REFL.Poss climb-PST gej khel-sen.
COMP say-PST
‘Dorj said loudly that Bat was very surprised.’

(ii) Non-referential ACC subject under the scope of matrix verb:

(5) Luusun dagina bodhiedtai bai-dee-gi ch, Navchaa [ Luusun dagina-iig ]
mermaid real in-life COP-HAB-NOM CH Navchaa [ mermaid-ACC ich ]
bai-gej khel-sen.
COMP-PST AUX-N.PST COMP say-PST
‘Although mermaids don’t exist, Navchaa said that a mermaid is coming.’

(iii) NPI ACC subject licensed by embedded negation

(6) Nara khen ch / khen-iig ch iree-gi gej khel-sen.
Nara who-NOM CH / who-ACC CH come-PST-NEG COMP say-PST
‘Nara said that nobody came.’

3. ACC is higher than NOM

Even though ACC subjects are base-generated inside the embedded clause, they occupy a higher position than NOM subjects, which are presumably in Spec-TP.

(i) Binding of reflexive possessive -AA attached to embedded subject:

(7) Bat [ margaaš egech-(iig)-ee / egech-iig-öö ]
Bat [ tomorrow sister*(ACC)-REFL.Poss come-N.PST COMP ]
khel-sen.
say-PST
‘Bat said that his/sister is coming tomorrow.’

(ii) Anaphoric subject:

(8) Tuya [ margaaš öör-öö / öör-iig-öö ]
Tuya [ tomorrow self-REFL.Poss / self-ACC-REFL Mongol ruu ]
göy-n-PST COMP say-PST
‘Tuya said that she is going to Mongolia tomorrow.’

(iii) Condition B:

Odgerel [ tomorrow 3SG.NOM / 3SG-ACC come-N.PST COMP ] say-PST
‘Odgerel said that (he) (Odgerel or someone else) is coming tomorrow.’

4. Analysis: movement to Spec-CP


This allows the subject to receive ACC from the matrix v and for it to extend its binding domain.

I also propose that this movement is triggered by φ-features in COMP (see Takeshima and Wurmbrand 2017; 2018; see also Shlosnisky:1992).

(10) [ tvarg … VACC … [ TP DACC [ t COMP ] ]]

5. Hyperraising (HR)

ACC subjects can also hyperraise into the matrix clause:

Bat Dorj(-ACC) loud-INTR [ a good noble ] COMP say-PST
‘Bat said loudly that Dorj is good and noble.’

(12) Dulmaa-g Bat [ nom unsh-n gej ] khel-sen.
Dulmaa-ACC Bat [ a book read-PST COMP ] say-PST
‘Bat said that Dulmaa will read a book.’

HR in Mongolian involves movement: island-sensitivity, i.a.

(13) ‘Nokhöör-g Nara [ muur bömöög-ör toglo-dog baa t dog-ACC Nara [ cat-ACC ball-INTR play-HAB CONJ ]
yas-aar toglo-dog gej ] khel-sen.
bone-INSTR play-HAB COMP say-PST
‘Bat said that Dulmaa will read a book.’

The analysis in (10) is consistent with these data: the phase edge acts as an escape hatch into the matrix clause, making room for hyperraising.

(14) [ tvarg … DACC … VACC … [ TP t [ c COMP ] ]]

6. Spec-CP as an A-position

Mongolian is a type of A-movement.

(i) When moved to a position before the matrix subject, a HR subject does not induce a weak crossover (WCO) violation:

(15) [ Dorj-(iig) ] tünii-gi eej margaaš [ Dorj-(iig) ] ir-ne
[Dorj-ACC 3SG-GEN mother tomorrow [ Dorj-(ACC) ] come-N.PST gej khel-sen.
COMP say-PST
‘His/Her mother said that Dorj is coming tomorrow.’

(ii) A HR subject does not reconstruct obligatorily for Condition C

(16) a. Bi Bat-(iig), sain khin gej tüni-d-iig khel-sen.
Bat-ACC good person COMP 3SG-DAT say-PST
‘I told her/him that Bat is a good person.’

b. Bat-in, eej-iig bi [ t sain khin gej ]
Bat-GEN mother-ACC 3SG.NOM [ a good person COMP ]
tüni-d-iig khel-sen.
3SG-DAT say-PST
‘I told her/him that Bat’s mother is a good person.’

If ACC subjects required movement to Spec-CP, we could conclude that this can be an A-position, otherwise we would make wrong predictions about (3b) and (15).

Formalization: assume a featural definition of syntactic positions. Under this view, syntactic positions are not A or X intrinsically; they are defined by the features that create them.

(17) An A-position is a category bearing φ-features, whereas an X-position is a category lacking φ-features. (Obata & Epstein:2011)

7. A vs. X: a comparison between HR and Wh-movement

Mongolian is a Wh-in situ language, but it can be shown that constituent questions involve covert movement, e.g. with island sensitivity, scope, i.a.

(18) ‘Nara [ muur bömöög-ör toglo-dog baa nokhöör Nara [ calnom ball-INTR play-HAB CONJ dog.NOM
‘Who did their mother say did the homework?’

Covert Wh-movement in Mongolian has properties of X-movement.

(i) It induces a WCO violation:

(19) Tüünii-(iig) eej khen-(iig), gerin daalgagar-aa khii-iin gej
3SG-GEN mother who(-ACC) homework-REFL.Poss do-PST COMP
khel-sen be?
say-PST q
‘Who did their mother say did the homework?’ (cf. (15))

(ii) It obligatorily reconstructs for Condition C too:

(20) Ter(ü) [ Bold khen-iiu, zurg-iig shataa-san gej ]
3SG-NOM [ Bold.NOM who-GEN picture-ACC burn-PST COMP ]
khel-sen?
say-PST q
‘Whose picture did he/she say that Bold burned?’

Wh-movement is a type of movement through Spec-CP that has X-properties. These data provide a contrast with HR in Mongolian, which is analyzed here as involving movement to Spec-CP, but of the A-type.