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Trace and PRO - A Spurious Distinction?

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The past few years have seen a growing interest in the empty categories on the part of linguists working in the framework of the Revised Extended Standard Theory /REST/ incorporating the Trace Theory of Movement Rules /Chomsky 1977, 1980, 1981, Kayne 1981, Koster 1981, Jaeggli 1982, Rizzi 1982/. The proposed analyses have led to the distinction of two types of the Empty Category: PRO and trace. The difference between them is summarised by Chomsky /1981:56/ as follows:

- 1/ /a/ PRO is linked to its antecedent by a control rule, trace is the result of the rule Move α
- 2/ /b/ PRO need not have an antecedent while trace always has an antecedent.
- 3/ /c/ the antecedent-PRO relation /in case PRO has an antecedent/ need not satisfy the Subadjacency Principle
- 4/ /d/ trace is governed, PRO must be ungoverned
- 5/ /e/ the antecedent of trace is not in a θ -position

Recently, however, the dichotomy between trace and PRO has come under attack from the linguists who claim that this distinction is an unnecessary complication of a grammar and should be abandoned /see, for example, Koster 1978/.

In this article we will examine this claim in detail, basing our observations on data from Polish. We will demonstrate that evidence from Polish appears to falsify the validity of the trace-PRO distinction.

We begin though by reviewing the arguments in /1/ adduced in support of this distinction. Consider /1a/ first. The relevant examples to be discussed here may be sentences like the following:

2/ I told Mary \bar{s} [PRO to go]

3/ \bar{s} are built t everywhere

4/ \bar{s} [NP[e]] are built \bar{s} everywhere

In /2/ PRO of the infinitive clause is linked to its antecedent by the rule of control. The rule in question assigns PRO the value of the antecedent of the matrix sentence. Thus, in this case, the antecedent is the object NP Mary. In contrast to the rule of PRO, the trace in /3/ is linked with its antecedent dam via the rule of Move. That is, given the D-structure /4/, the rule moves the NP dam to the subject position of the sentence, leaving a trace behind. As a result, /3/ is derived.

Consider now /1b/. The claim that PRO need not have an antecedent while trace must always have one can be illustrated by the following sentences.

5/ It does not make sense \bar{s} [PRO to go there]

6/ There seems to us \bar{s} [t to like poetry]

Clearly, there is no overt antecedent of the PRO in /5/: it can neither be sense nor it. Yet, the sentence is grammatical. Compare this with /6/, which does not contain an antecedent of t: it is precisely the lack of an antecedent that rules this sentence out.

Let us turn to /1c/. The claim made here is based on the observation that while interpretive rules of 'Construal' are not constrained by the Subjacency Principle, transformational rules are always subject to this principle. The Subjacency Principle is given in /7/.

7/ The Subjacency Principle /Chomsky 1973/

No element can be moved by a transformation over more than one bounding node, where the bounding nodes for English are stipulated to be \bar{s} and NP

The Subjacency Principle correctly rules out as ungrammatical /8/ but has nothing to say about /9/, which although violating this principle, is perfectly grammatical.

* 8/ Who \bar{s}_2 [do you believe NP [the claim] \bar{s}_1 [that t \bar{s}_1 [Mary saw t]]]

9/ John said \bar{s} [that it was a disaster \bar{s} [PRO to shave himself in cold water]]

In /8/, who, originating in the postverbal position of saw, is moved to the front of the matrix sentence. This movement, however, violates the Subjacency Principle since who has to cross two bounding nodes, \bar{s}_1 and NP₁. As a result, the sentence is filtered out as ungrammatical. In contrast to the antecedent-trace relation, which does not tolerate the violation of the principle, the antecedent-PRO relation clearly fronts it. Note that the antecedent of PRO in /9/, the NP John, is separated from it by another intervening sentence; this, however, does not result in ungrammaticality. The claim, then, made in /1c/ seems to be vindicated.

Condition /1d/ presupposes the theory of Government proposed in Chomsky /1981/, to which we turn directly. Consider the following examples:

10/ I begged \bar{s} [PRO to go]

* 11/ I talked to PRO

* 12/ I told Mary \bar{s} [John to go]

13/ Who do you say \bar{s} [that t \bar{s} [Mary saw t r]]

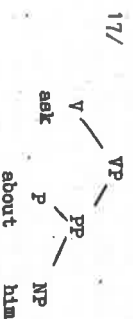
* 14/ Who do you say \bar{s} [t₂ that \bar{s} [t₁ came late]]?

The examples asterisked are those where the principle of Government has been violated. The definition of Government is given in /15/:

15/ X governs Y iff X is the minimal governing node c-commanding Y where the relation of c-command is defined as in /16/

16/ X c-commands Y iff the first branching node dominating X dominates Y and X does not dominate nor contain Y

Thus, in a configuration like /17/:



although both ask and about c-command him /because the node VP immediately dominating ask also dominates him and because the node PP which dominates about also dominates him/, it is only about that governs him because the minimal governing node is PP, and not VP.

In this formulation, a governing node is a node which acts as a governor, where the list of governors for English includes the categories \bar{V} , \bar{E} , \bar{N} , $\bar{\Delta}$ and Tense. Thus the governor of him in /17/ is the preposition about, and not the verb said.

Equipped with this theoretical apparatus, let us take now a closer look at /10/ through /14/. In /10/ PRO is ungrammatical; it cannot be governed by the category of Tense since infinitive clauses are, as a rule, tenseless. Nor can PRO here be governed by the verb beg since the g-node intervenes. We conclude then that PRO in /10/ remains ungrammatical, as desired. The situation is different in /11/: PRO here is governed by the preposition to and since PRO must remain ungrammatical, the sentence is ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality of /12/ can be explained by the theory of Government only in conjunction with the theory of Case Assignment.

It ought to be borne in mind that under FIRST all lexicalised NP's must be assigned Case by a governor. Not all governors, however, can assign Case; of the five mentioned above, only \bar{E} , \bar{V} and Tense can do this. The theory of Case Assignment is given in /18/:

18/ Case Assignment under Government /Chomsky 1981/

- a/ NP is nominative if governed by Tense
- b/ NP is objective if governed by a transitive verb
- c/ NP is assigned Oblique Case if governed by Preposition
- d/ NP_i is genitive in the structure NP NP_i --- N

The theory incorporates also the Trace Filter /19/

19/*N If N has a phonetic matrix but lacks Case

Viewed from this perspective, the subject NP John in /12/ cannot be assigned Nominative Case because it is not governed by the category Tense under the assumption that infinitive clauses are [-Tense].

Nor can this NP receive /the Objective/ Case from the verb tell because tell does not govern it either. John, then, remains ungrammatical and cannot be assigned Case. Since lexicalised NP's must receive Case, this sentence is rejected by the Case Filter /19/.

Let us turn now to sentences /13/ and /14/ involving the rule Move \bar{c} . As stipulated in /1d/ traces must always be governed. Take /13/.

Here the trace is governed by the verb saw, hence the sentence is grammatical, as desired. In contrast, the trace in the COMP of /14/ does not govern the trace in the subject position of the complement, hence the sentence is deviant.³

Finally /16/: this requirement follows from the θ -theory, a module which assigns thematic relations to arguments.⁴ The theory assigns θ -roles such as Agent, Goal, Benefactive, Theme, etc., to such expressions as Mary, the girl, she, etc. Thus in a sentence like /20/, Mary, she and herself are arguments and are assigned θ -roles

20/ Mary says that she likes herself

In contrast, expressions such as it, there are not arguments, are not in argument positions and are never assigned θ -roles. In /21/, for example, the NP John is an argument and is assigned a θ -role. No θ -role is assigned to it, however, since it is not an argument.

21/ It seems g[John to be happy]

Now, FIRST requires that movement may only take place to a non-theta/non-argument/ position. If we look at /21/ again, we notice that requirements are met for a /raising/ transformation to move the NP John from the subject position of the embedded clause to the subject position of the matrix sentence since it is not in an argument position and can be replaced by the moved NP. As a result, a sentence like /22/ is derived:

22/ John seems g[t to be happy]

So far we have been reviewing the claims arguing in favour of the trace-PRO distinction. As noted at the beginning, however, this distinction has been challenged by some authors on the grounds that it unnecessarily complicates the grammar. In arguing against this dichotomy, J. Koster /1978/ contrasts the following sentences:

23/ There₁ seems g[e₁ to be a reward] e₁ = trace

24/ The ice was likely g[e₁ to be broken e₁] e₁ = trace

25/ There₁ tries g[e₁ to be rewarded] e₁ = PRO

26/ The ice₁ was persuaded e₁ g[e₁ to be broken e₁] e₁ = PRO

These sentences, Koster maintains, do not in fact justify the dis-

inction between trace and FRO or a distinction between movement /23-24/ and semantic interpretation. Instead, he argues, there exists a co-indexing procedure that assigns to Ali /emphasis mine/ embedded subjects [a] the index of the base generated subject NP of the main clause. On this analysis, FRO would be indistinguishable from trace because both the trace-antecedent relation and the FRO-antecedent relation could be established uniformly by a semantic rule of co-indexing. The ungrammaticality of these sentences would no longer follow from the different properties of the empty elements but rather from selectional restrictions. In practical terms, this would mean that, for example, the verb try in /25/ requires an animate argument while the verb seem, on the other hand, does not select an argument subject and therefore enters in no selectional restrictions with it. As a consequence, a lexical material may be inserted in this position, like, for example, the expletive it or there /cf. 16/. A similar argument can be construed in the case of idiom chunks, illustrated by /24/ and /26/. The idiomatic reading of to break the ice presupposes the unique connection between break and its object the ice. As Koester puts it, this "unique connection" is fulfilled because the ice is related to exactly one argument position, that is, the object position of break. The ice in /26/, on the other hand, is linked to two argument positions: the first is the object position of persuade, which does not trigger the idiomatic reading /because persuade takes an animate object/ and the second is the object position of break which is responsible for the idiomatic reading. This clash results in ungrammaticality.

In what follows below we will show that Polish data appear to support Koester's argument thereby further undermining the claim about the validity of distinction between trace and FRO. Our conclusion is based on two arguments:

- a/ there are no movement rules in Polish except the Wh-movement, Clitic Movement and Quantifier Floating /see Giełgo 1981/.
- b/ the claims made in /1/ and particularly in /1d/ and /1e/ have no bearing on the rule of Move in Polish.

We will draw here basically on the insightful analyses proposed by T. Zebrocki /1981/ and J. Giełgo /1981/.

Consider first the process of passivisation. There is ample evi-

dence that passivisation in Polish is a lexical process. As Zebrocki notes, following Fedorowicz-Bacz /1977/, the Polish past participle with a prefix nie attached to it is in fact an adjective /for a discussion of relevant English data see Wasow /1977//. Thus although there are negative nie-participles in Polish, like nieoczekiwany "much lamented", nieapiśany "unwritten", nieoczekiwany "unexpected", there are no corresponding nie-verbs /i.e. *nieoczekiwac, *nieapiśac, *nieoczekiwac, etc./.

Further, in the cases where the participle is used metaphorically, the metaphor is expressed only by passive structures. Thus, as Zebrocki notes, we have a change in meaning in:

murwana pogodę means certain, fine weather although murować means to build in brick
zawzięty myśliwy = perfect hunter although zawzięć = call

The lack of correspondence then between the past participles used in passives and verbs used in active sentences, or their absence, argue for a non-transformational derivation of passives. Another piece of evidence supporting this claim might come from a structure like /27/ with the underlying structure of /27a/

- 27/ t₁ podarła przez Piotrkę wczoraj księżkę₁
 t torn by Peter yesterday a book
- 27a/ Księżka podarła przez Piotrkę wczoraj
 A book torn by Peter yesterday

In /27/ księżka has been moved to the end of the sentence allowing the past participle podarła "torn" to precede it. As a rule, all passive participles in Polish can occur in pronominal positions in which, unlike their English counterparts, they can be followed by their complements. Thus the following English example, the equivalent of /27/, is ungrammatical:

*28/ A torn by Peter yesterday a book

Clearly, podarła in /27/ behaves as a regular adjective. In the light of the discussion, then, we adopt a non-transformational approach to passivisation in Polish. Passivisation is a lexical process, where both the active and passive structures are generated as such by the rules of the base. The relation between passives and

active sentences is captured via the lexicon, the morphological redundancy rules and thematic relations /see, for example, Jackendoff 1975, Freidin 1975, Wasow 1977, Anderson 1977/.

Consider now the rule of Tough Movement. In English, this rule is claimed by Chomsky /1977/ to be subsumed under the Wh-movement rule. According to Glejgo, however, there is little evidence that such a rule exists in Polish /but see Fisiak et al. 1978/. Glejgo analyzes a sentence like /29/ and its alleged D-structure represented by /30/

29/ Argument jest zadowolony do podwazania

argument is easy to undermine
The argument is easy to undermine

30/ To jest zadowolony S[ktos podwazka argument]

it is easy S[sb undermines the argument]
It is easy for someone to undermine the argument

In arguing against a transformational analysis of Tough movement in Polish, Glejgo notes correctly that, unlike in English, there is no Tough construction with an infinitive complement in Polish. Thus /31/ is ungrammatical vis a vis the Grammatical English /32/:

*31/ Argument jest zadowolony podwazyt

32/ The argument is easy to undermine

Nor is it possible for the PP complement to contain a subject, as /33/ demonstrates. Note again that the English equivalent is perfectly grammatical:

*33/ Argument jest zadowolony pp[dlia jana N[ktos podwazanie]]

34/ This argument is easy pp[for N[ktos] John S[t to undermine]]

The only way to express the meaning of /33/ is to use an infinitive embedded under a non-finite sentence like /35/

35/ Bylo zadowolony pp[dlia jana S[PRO podwazyt argument]]

was easy pp[for John S[PRO to undermine the argument]]

It was easy for John to undermine the argument.

As matters stand, then, there would be two possible sources for Tough Movement in Polish, one with byt+Adv + Infinitive as in /35/ and the other with byt + Adj + Tensed S, as in /29/, which could not be related in a principled and unitary way. This argues against

the existence of the Tough Movement transformation in Polish.

Let us turn now to the Raising to Subject transformation. Again, in the light of evidence presented by Zabrocki and Glejgo, it appears that no such rule exists in Polish.

A typical sentence that might be brought up here is one like /36/, with the D-structure of /37/.

36/ Jan zdaje sie S[kt byt mdrzym chlopcem]

John seems S[kt to be a wise boy]

37/ [e] zdaje sie S[Jan byt mdrzym chlopcem]

The movement in /37/ is obligatory because the NP Jan can receive Case neither from the Tense of the embedded sentence /the complement is an infinitive, tenseless clause /cf. 22// nor from the verb zdawac sie "seem". Recall that KESZ requires that this NP be moved to a non-theta position. However, in Polish the class of verbs trying raising to subject, in comparison to English, is extremely small. Even this small group behaves differently from their English equivalents. Consider, for example, the verb zdawac sie "seem". Observe first that the choice of the verbs in an infinitive complement of zdaje sie is practically restricted to the verb byt "be". Out of the following sentences, only /38/ is grammatical:

38/ On zdawal sie S[PRO byt poruszony]

He seemed to be moved

*39/ On zdawal sie S[PRO malowac]

He seemed to be painting

*40/ Jan zdaje sie S[PRO wiedziac, ze czas lat]

He seems to know that the time to go has come

Further, in great majority of cases the copula byt is optional, as the following sentences show

41a/ Piotr zdaje sie byt wsciekly

b/ Piotr zdaje sie wsciekly

Peter seems /to be/ furious

42/ Joanna zdaje sie byt wniebowzleta

Joan seems /to be/ beside herself with joy

In some cases, however, the copula byt must be obligatorily deleted, as the examples given below show:

43/ Okręł zdemax nu sie /był/ malyx drowielix mlotayxa przex
fole

The ship seemed to him /to be/ a speck of wood tossed over
by the waves

Giełgo notes that the reason why /43/ containing the copula był
"be" is ungrammatical, is that the presence of an embedded clause
containing był presupposes some volition or consciousness on the
part of the subject of the higher clause. As /43/ demonstrates, only
inanimate or abstract subjects can take non-sentential complements
with zdawał się. The moral to be drawn from this discussion is that
raising with zdawał się would be highly unproductive. This verb
would have to be subcategorized to take a sentential complement and
an ad hoc mechanism postulated to specify that when this complement
is infinitival it may contain only był as its main verb. Secondly,
as zdawał się + był means "give appearance of" rather than "appear"
or "seem" and moreover presupposes an element of volition, the struc-
ture in which it appears might as well involve the rule of Control.
The rule, as indicated above, establishes the relation between PRO
and its antecedent - in this case, the subject of the main clause.
We are adopting here, then, Kotar's analysis of raising verbs /cf.
/23/ through /26//. This means that description in terms of Subject
Raising apart from being unconvincing, is superfluous in Polish.
Again, this argues against a transformational approach to Subject
Raising in this language.

We have considered here only three processes which have been tra-
ditionally held to involve an NP movement: passive, Tough Movement
and Subject Raising. For a detailed analysis of other movement
rules see Zabrocki 1981 and Giełgo 1981/. The evidence from Polish
indicates that these processes do not in fact involve any movement
at all. An attempt to capture them transformationally overlooks the
fact that such transformations would be highly unproductive. This
naturally challenges Condition /1a/: weakening it considerably.

We turn now to transformational processes in Polish. We will con-
sider here two transformations: the Wh-movement and the Clitic Move-
ment rules. As we will show below, although they are true transfor-
mations, they do not substantiate the claims made by /1/. In con-
junction with this, we will examine at length here the conditions

/1d/ and /1e/. We will present arguments for a transformational ep-
proach to Wh-phenomena and Clitic Movement in Polish. Consider Wh-
movement first. Typical sentences exemplifying this process are the
following:

- 44a/ Kto widział kogo
- b/ Kto kogo_i widział t_i
- c/ Kto kogo chciałby S t_i spotkać t_i
- d/ Kto chciałby S [kogo PRO spotkać]
- e/ Kogo komu chciałbyś S [t PRO przedstawić t_i]
- f/ Kto co komu gdzie chciałby S [t PRO dać ttt]
- g/ Kto komu gdzie chciałby S [PRO co dać tt]

In our view, these sentences argue for a transformational approach
to Wh-phenomena in Polish. For, observe that generation of Wh-words
in the base would be extremely unconvincing and miss apparent gener-
alizations. Especially important in this respect are sentences such
/44a/, /44d/ and /44g/ since they show that Wh-words in Polish can
occur inter-sententially, i.e. in COMP's of embedded clauses. They
naturally can occur at the beginning of the matrix sentences too, as
the remaining examples show. Moreover, as /44b, c, e/ and /g/ demon-
strate, all Wh-words can be fronted. This phenomenon, called COMP
proliferation, is a characteristic feature of Slavic languages /see,
for example, Roman 1981 for a discussion of Polish and Czech data/.
It seems that only a transformational approach can allow for a uni-
tary and principled account of Wh-phenomena in Polish, with movement
of Wh-words taking place from COMP₅.

Hawking opted for a transformational approach to Wh-phenomena in
Polish, let us examine now the statement /1d/. In this connection
consider the following examples:

- *45/ Kogo powiedziałeś S [PRO że widziałeś t w kinie]
- Who did you say that you saw t in the cinema?
- 46/ Kto powiedział S [że t przyszedł wieczorem]
- Who said that t came in the evening

In /45/ the trace is governed by the verb widziałeś "/you/ saw" as
required by FRSF. Yet this sentence is ruled out as ungrammatical.
Recall now that the English sentence /14/, involving movement from
the object position, is perfectly grammatical due to the fact that
the trace is governed. Evidently, it is not enough for movement out

of tense clauses in Polish to obey the principle of government to be grammatical some other mechanism is needed to rule out /45/. How about /46/? Note again that its English equivalent /14/ is ungrammatical, which is due to the violation of the principle of Government.

Under RESF, however, the Polish example should be fully grammatical. This prediction rests on the following consideration. Unlike, English, the feature AGR/ement/ on the verb in Polish has the property of governing the subject position. That is why it is possible in Polish but not in English to drop pronominal subjects. This can be illustrated by the following contrast:

47/ *Idzie do kina*

/He/ Goes to the cinema

* 48/ *Goese to the cinema*

Turning now to /46/, observe that the feature AGR /which is the 3rd pers. sg. should govern the empty subject position, thus preventing this sentence from being ungrammatical. Nothing of the sort happens, however: both /46/ and /47/ are unacceptable in Polish. This in turn weakens the argument that traces must always be governed.

The argument that traces must be distinguished from PRO is further weakened in the case of Clitic Movement in Polish. That cliticisation phenomena in Polish should be captured by transformation rather than by semantic rule can best be illustrated by the following examples:

48a/ *Diaczeko chcialas sie spotać z ze mną?*

b/ *Diaczeko sie chcialas ze mną spotać t?*

c/ *Diaczeko chcialas ze mną sie spotać t?*

d/ *Diaczeko chcialas ze mną spotać sie?*

Why did you want to see me?

Clearly a base-oriented account would be extremely complicated and uneconomical due to the remarkable mobility Polish clitics. We assume then that cliticisation in Polish is a transformational process. Bearing this in mind, consider Condition /1e/, which says that the antecedent of trace may not be in a θ -position. Assuming that clitics are generated post-verbally in Polish, *sie*, in the D-structure of /48/ follows directly the verb *widział* "see". The Move α

rule moves the clitic from this position to various places in the sentence regardless of θ -positions. Thus in /48a/, *sie* is moved to the object position of the verb *chcialas* "want", which is a θ -position /this position is assigned a θ -role of the goal /or theme//. The same is true of /48b/: *sie* is moved to an argument position, which is assigned a θ -role. Again, this is disallowed by RESF. Finally /48c/. *Sie* here has been moved to the subject position of the infinitive clause, a place that is an argument position to which a θ -role is ascribed. All this shows that Clitic Movement in Polish does not obey the requirement that an antecedent of trace may not be in a θ -position.

To sum up the discussion on the Empty Category, the Polish data do not corroborate the claim made in /1/, on the basis of which a distinction could be drawn between trace and PRO. The conclusion has been based on three types of considerations. Firstly, we argued that the Move α rule is highly unproductive in Polish. The processes such as passivisation, Subject Raising, Tough Movement, etc., which traditionally have been captured in terms of transformations, should rather be expressed via interpretive rules. A transformational approach to these processes would be too uneconomical, leading to a considerable loss in generalisation. Secondly, we maintained that such transformational processes as Wh-movement and Clitic Movement in Polish freely violate the Conditions listed in /1/. In particular, we have demonstrated that the traces left by the Wh-movement rule, although properly governed by their governors /such as the verb and the AGR/ do not confirm the claim that traces must be governed, since the sentences analysed are ungrammatical anyway. Thirdly, Clitic Movement in Polish clearly violates the condition that the antecedent of trace is not in a θ -position. All in all, given /1/, then, it appears that Polish data cast doubt on the legitimacy of the distinction between trace and PRO. We do not go as far as to claim that this dichotomy should be rejected out of hand. The inquiry into the Empty Category has just begun and it would be too soon to favour one solution over the other. Rather than press premature verdicts we have endeavoured to clarify certain points in the hope that it might contribute to a better understanding of the Empty Category.

Notes

1. These are semantic rules which apply to S-structure, converting it into the logical form /LF/. To these rules belong the rule of Co-indexing, which is responsible for establishing the relation between an anaphor /i.e. a reflexive or a trace/ and its antecedent, the Quantifier Floating rule accounting for movement of quantifiers in the sentence, the Negation rule, the rule of Control, and some others.
2. The S-bar node is an absolute barrier to Government. This means that a verb like beg cannot govern over the S-node. The subject position of the complement taken by this verb remains ungoverned and cannot be assigned Case. Hence the proper candidate for this place is naturally PRO, which is never governed.
3. This is an instance of the violation of the That-t filter /Cf. Pesetsky 1978/.
4. For a discussion of thematic relations see, for example, Jackendoff /1972/.
5. Following Chomsky /1975, 1977 and 1981/ we assume that Wh-movement in Polish is a bounded rule moving Wh-words only through COMP's. For an alternative analysis of Wh-movement see Bresnan /1977/.
6. This phenomenon is known under the term of the pro-drop parameter /Cf. Chomsky 1981, Jaeggli 1982, Rizzi 1982/.

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