

Partitive Case Theory and the Minimalist Program

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1 Introduction

In a structure such as (1), there are two competing analyses as to the dealing with the constituent status of α . One approach claims that α does not constitute one unit, and the other that α is a single constituent. The latter is what is called the “small clause” (SC) analysis:

- (1) I consider [α John honest]

Schein (1995), for example, stands by the non-constituent theory, and analyzes (1) as (2):

- (2) I [v' consider John honest]

On the other hand, Stowell (1995) argues for the small clause analysis, claiming that the category of α in (1) is a maximal projection of its predicate. (He, however, suggests a possibility that in some cases, α is a maximal projection of the functional category I(nfl).) According to him, the θ -role assignment to the subject of a small clause is performed in the strictly local domain, a clausal structure, in which a subject and a predicate combine with each other syntactically to form a clause.

Rothstein (1995) also claims that α in (1) is a small clause, and furthermore, says that one type of the copula *be* takes a small clause as its complement.¹

One property of the copula, under her theory, is that *be* is not a

Case assigner. If so, a sentence whose matrix verb is the predicational *be* will be derived from an underlying structure such as (3):

(3) [e] is [_{SC} John honest]

(4) John is [_{SC} t honest]

In (4), the matrix subject *John* has been moved from the subject position of SC, since the original position cannot be assigned Case by *is*, which is no Case assigner in Rothstein (1995). Thus, the predicational *be* resembles a raising verb like *seem* in that it takes a small clause as its complement, and does not have the ability to assign Case to the subject of the small clause complement.

Now, we have another construction in which *be* occurs as a matrix verb — *there*-construction:

(5) There is a man in the garden

If the existential copula *be* belongs to the predication type of *be* and behaves like a raising verb, then it follows that in (5), the sequence *a man in the garden* constitutes a small clause, and its subject *a man* cannot be assigned Case by *is*. But the NP in question must have Case to satisfy the Case Filter or visibility condition for θ -role assignment, if it is an argument. Notice that in Rothstein (1995), arguments must have Case while predicative NPs need not. How can the postcopular NP receive Case when its adjacent *be* is not a Case assigner?

Belletti (1988), by contrast, presents an analysis in which the copula

1. Rothstein (1995) divides the copula *be* into two types — equative and predicational. Only the latter takes a small clause complement in her framework.

assigns Case to its adjacent NP. The Case assigned by *be* is partitive, which is an inherent one, under Belletti's theory. This means that in (5), *is* takes *a man* as its complement and assigns a θ -role to it because assignment of inherent Case is closely connected with θ -marking. However, the partitive Case analysis raises several problems and will not be compatible in some ways with the Minimalist Program proposed by Chomsky (1995).

In this paper, on the assumption that the existential (and predication) copula *be* is a raising verb which takes a small clause complement, I point out the problems arising in the partitive Case theory, and draw a conclusion that *be* is not a partitive Case assigner, or more strictly, not any Case assigner.²

2 Some Problems with Belletti

Suppose that the copula *be* assigns partitive Case, which, under Belletti (1988), is inherent. This approach can take care of the problem pointed out by Chomsky (1986b):

- (6) *There seems [a unicorn to be in the garden]

Chomsky's mechanism cannot account for the ungrammaticality of (6), since he assumes that the expletive *there* and its associate conflate at LF; the NP *a unicorn* can bear Case by means of the conflation with *there*, the latter being in the position that receives nominative Case. The partitive Case theory can deal with (6) straightforwardly. Since Belletti

2. One reason for me to reject the non-constituent analysis of small clause is that its argued structure has a tripartite-branching node, [_V V NP XP], violating the binary branching condition, which I assume is correct.

does not accept the conflation device (or Case transmission system), *a unicorn* cannot inherit Case from *there*. *Be* also cannot assign Case to the subject of the embedded clause, because it is an inherent Case assigner, and its assignment is closely associated with θ -marking relation. The NP concerned is not in the position θ -marked by *be*. Notice that *seems* is not a Case assigner, either. Then, there is no possibility for *a unicorn* to get Case. Thus, we can have a natural explanation for the ungrammaticality of (6) within the partitive Case approach.

At this point, one problem arises with respect to the Case assignment by *be*. Look at the sentence in (5), repeated here as (7) below:

- (7) There is a man in the garden

Belletti (1988) argues that in (7), the NP *a man* is assigned partitive Case, so we have no violation of the Case Filter. But recall that partitive Case is inherent, and its assignment is determined by the θ -marking relation between a Case assigner and a Case assignee. Then, it must be that the postcopular NP is an argument of and θ -marked by *is*. This gives rise to a question: Whether or not is the postcopular string in *there*-construction a constituent?

Keeping this in mind, let us turn to the following sentence:

- (8) A man is in the garden

As we saw in (3) and (4), if *be* is a raising verb which takes a clausal complement (in our case, small clause), the underlying structure will be (9):

- (9) [*e*] is [_{SC} a man in the garden]

Note that in (9), the element which *is* θ -marks is the whole SC, not *a man* itself. Rather *a man* will be an (external) argument of the predicate *in*

the garden in the small clause. Therefore, at least in (9), the NP cannot be assigned Case by *is*, even though the verb has capability of assigning inherent partitive Case.

Now one important thing relevant here is that (7) and (8) have the same meaning or interpretation. Then, they appear to have a common structure at a certain stage of derivation, and I assume this is right. If so, (7) will have the following structure in which the postcopular sequence consists of one constituent, namely, a small clause:

- (10) There is [_{SC} a man in the garden]

Then, my discussion given to (8) applies to (10). In (10), the complement of *is* is not *a man* but the whole SC. Thus, the associate NP should not be assigned inherent partitive Case by *is*, contrary to Belletti's (1988) argument.

How does Belletti's theory resolve this problem? Again let us return to the sentence in (8) and its underlying structure (9). In (9), if *is* assigns partitive Case to *a man*, assuming that inherent Case can be assigned to the subject or specifier position of a small clause, as is done in the Exceptional Case Marking construction, then we will have no reason for the NP to move to a Case assigned position, since it can bear Case in situ, yielding the following sentence as grammatical:

- (11) * Is a man in the garden (a declarative reading)

Indeed this is not the case. One possible solution would be that the Case assignment by *be* is optional. Belletti (1988) suggests this possibility, based on the assumption that optionality is an idiosyncratic property of inherent Case, one of the characteristics distinguishing inherent from structural Case. If she is correct, then in (11), when *is* chooses an optional

alternative, *a man* must move to the matrix subject position to have Case, and we will have a grammatical and well-formed sentence. However, note that (10) also can employ this process. In (10), when *is* does not assign Case, which is a permissible choice, *a man* lacks Case and must raise to a Case-marked position. The matrix subject position cannot be its landing site, since it is already filled with *there*. So (7) should be ungrammatical. In fact, it is not. Summarizing so far, the optional alternative of Case assignment must be made use of in one case, while must not in another, (8) and (7) respectively. Does such a kind of optionality have theoretical justification? Even if we can incorporate optionality into the theory in some way, the kind introduced in Belletti (1988) seems ad hoc, and will have no support. Therefore, we will have evidence that the copula *be* is not an inherent Case assigner.

Suppose that *be* can assign Case optionally in accordance with Belletti's suggestion. In this case, it would be plausible that *be* retains its Case-assigning feature, even if it indeed does not exert the ability. Then, the Case feature of *be* remains at LF, checking no Case feature of its NP complement. Assuming that any Case feature of the Case-assigning category must be invisible for the satisfaction of interpretability at LF, the Case-assigning feature of *be* must be deleted (and erased) at this level, whether its Case is inherent or not. Or we will have a violation of Full Interpretation in the sense of the Minimalist Program. To avoid that, *be* necessarily has to assign Case in any construction. Then, as mentioned above, (11) will be derived incorrectly. So here again, the partitive Case theory raises another conceptual problem.

Now we have seen that Belletti's partitive Case theory does not work well because it requires unnatural optionality: we are forced not to assign Case (obligatory prohibition against the optional choice of Case

assignment procedure) on the one hand, and we must assign Case (obligatory adoption of Case assignment operation) on the other. In either case, we encounter problems when we assume the small clause analysis of the postcopular sequence. At this point, one might argue that Belletti's theory can be supportable by claiming that in fact, the copula does not take a small clause, but an NP alone, as its complement. But note that the argument could be applicable only in one case — *there*-construction. Assuming that *be* takes an NP complement in (7), *a man* is assigned partitive Case by *is*, since the verb θ -marks the NP, probably the PP *in the garden* being an adjunct dominated not by V' but some higher node. No violation of the Case Filter. So far so good. Now look at the sentence in (12):

- (12) There are some men available

Truly, we may be safe to say that a locative phrase is an adjunct, not a predicate, in *there*-construction. But this idea will not be carried over to (12), where it seems more appropriate to postulate that the adjectival phrase *available* is a predicate and the NP and AP constitute one unit — a small clause. If this line of reasoning is correct, the possibility that a locative phrase in *there*-sentence is a predicate will not be given up entirely. The approach that analyzes the constituent status of the postcopular string as different between (7) and (12) will cause us to deal with *be* as distinct in subcategorization in the same existential *there*-construction. The uniform treatment of a lexical item is obviously preferable if possible, and our small clause analysis is that one. In this theory, *be* always takes a small clause complement both in ordinary predicative sentences and *there*-constructions, allowing us to conclude that the copula *be* is not a Case assigner.

3 Lasnik's Proposal

In Section 2, we found that Belletti's (1988) partitive Case theory is inadequate and gives rise to some theoretical problems. One of them, which is serious and crucial in her framework, is that *be* takes a clausal complement and, therefore, should not be able to assign Case to the postcopular NP in the θ -marking relation. Lasnik (1992), assuming partitive Case theory, presents a solution for that difficulty by arguing that partitive Case is not inherent but structural. If he is correct, the above mentioned problems will disappear. What interests us here is that he regards the postcopular sequence as a small clause.

Now again let us consider the sentence (7) and its structure (10):

(7) There is a man in the garden

(10) There is [_{SC} a man in the garden]

Under Lasnik's analysis, the reception of Case by *a man* is straightforward. Since partitive Case is structural, it can be assigned to the NP regardless of θ -marking. But this structural partitive Case theory also raises a problem. It contradicts Belletti's observation that there is a definiteness condition between a copula and its following NP in *there*-construction. Recall that one reason for Belletti's proposal of inherent Case is that an indefinite NP always occurs with the copula in such existential sentences: that is, the fact that there is always a semantic restriction (or, in a sense, thematic relation) between them. If we give a structural rather than inherent status to partitive Case, as Lasnik does, it will follow that structural Case is also sensitive to semantic property. This implies that we must strikingly depart from a generally acknowledged assumption that structural Case assignment is irrelevant to θ -

marking relation. Lasnik (1992) says that there is strong evidence that semantic property is not limited to inherent Case.

Suppose *be* is a Case assigner, whether the Case is structural or inherent. The key point is that the NP following a copular or unaccusative verb is always assigned partitive Case only. Chomsky (1995), by the examples below, points out that this is not true:

- (13) a. There is a book on the shelf
- b. There arrived yesterday a visitor from England
- c. I expected [there to be a book on the shelf]

Chomsky argues that an associate NP must have a Case which *there* will have, since in his Minimalist Program, *there*, a pure expletive, lacks Case. Then, in (13a), *a book* will have nominative, in (13b), the associate NP will bear nominative, and in (13c), *a book* will receive accusative assigned by *expected* exceptionally. If he is correct, we cannot accept the claim that *be* assigns (structural or inherent) partitive Case uniformly. This in turn suggests a possibility of excluding the copula and unaccusative from a class of Case assigners.

Let us discuss Lasnik's (1992) analysis a little bit more. Consider the following sentences:

- (14) *We consider [there a man in the room] (Lasnik 1992, (17))
- (15) We consider [there to be a man in the room] (Lasnik 1992, (18))

Lasnik argues that Chomsky's (1986b) Case transmission wrongly allows (14) as grammatical, since *there* is exceptionally assigned Case by *consider* and through transmission, *a man* can ultimately bear that Case, satisfying the Case Filter. Under Lasnik's approach with no Case transmission, *a man* in (14) can be accessible to no Case assigner, explaining its ill-

formedness correctly. In (15), *a man* is assigned partitive Case by *be*, so we have no violation of the Case Filter. (14) and (15) raise no problem in Lasnik's partitive Case theory. Since we argue against that theory, we must give an alternative account.

How can we accommodate (14) and (15)? Note that the expletive *there* always appears in the subject position, not in any other. Based on this fact, I assume that we have a special condition that requires *there* to occur with an overt verbal element (finite or nonfinite). What this means is that on the VP-internal subject hypothesis, *there* always functions as a VP-specifier of an overt verb. If my assumption is correct, the ungrammaticality of (14) is accounted for with ease. It is ruled out because the small clause has no overt verbal item which should be needed by *there* in the minimal containing clause. Also no difficulty with (15). In (15), *there* in the subject position of the embedded clause satisfies the Extended Projection Principle (EPP); the NP *a man* raises to the specifier position of the matrix AgroP at LF, has its Case-feature checked by *consider*, and deletes. The derivation does not crash.

What about (16)? (17) is its structure assumed by Lasnik (1992):

(16) We consider there likely to be a man in the room

(17) We consider [*there*_i likely [*t*_i to be in the room]]

His Case-based theory has no trouble here. But an apparent problem concerning our present analysis is that *there* occurs in a small clause with no overt verbal item as its predicate. However, this is not qualified as a counterexample to my claim here. In (17), as the trace shows, *there* is, in fact, generated in the complement clause of *likely*, in which the overt verb *be* also appears. At LF, the associate NP raises to the specifier position of the matrix AgroP, having its Case feature checked by *consider*, the

same operation as we saw in (15). So my assumption for the idiosyncratic property of *there* needing an overt verbal element is not weakened by (16). Thus, we can have an appropriate account for (14) with no recourse to the partitive Case theory.

I continue my discussion of Lasnik (1992) further. Recall that he assumes *be* assigns partitive Case structurally. His analysis depends on his claim that *be* is no θ -role assigner. Is this theoretically supportable? As I said before, he thinks of *be* as a raising verb which takes a small clause complement. This implies that the small clause is assigned no θ -role by *be*. But it seems likely that small clauses have the same θ -role as full clauses do, such as "Proposition." Indeed, there are some statements to the effect that the former have the same structure as the latter, that is, the maximal projection of an (empty) Infl node. See Introduction. Given that *be* is not a θ -role assigner, that it takes a small clause complement, and that the small clause has some sort of thematic role, then how can the SC complement be assigned a θ -role which an argument should have? This amounts to saying that *be* subcategorizes a small clause without assigning any θ -role. By extension, it will be that we separate subcategorization from θ -role assignment or argument-taking property, a distinct process independent of each other. But if the claim that subcategorization is redundant and can be reduced to canonical realization of a semantic category (CRSC) is correct, Lasnik's approach will take an opposite stand against CRSC. Assume that CRSC is theoretically adequate. Then, under CRSC, *be* will s-select Proposition, and the thematic property will be realized as a small clause, which can be a canonical realization of "Proposition," just as a full clause can be. This, at the same time, means that *be* has a θ -role to assign in its own θ -grid. In other words, it is a θ -role assigner. Therefore, we cannot support

Lasnik's assumption that *be* is a non- θ -role assigner. At this point, one might object to my scenario, arguing that there can be a category which takes a complement but assigns no θ -role. A potential candidate is Infl, which takes a VP-complement but does not θ -mark it. Perhaps Infl could be classified as such an element. However, notice that Infl is not a lexical item but a functional category. The categorial distinction is very significant here. Even though we permit that Infl is a non- θ -role assigner, we will have no conceptual ground on which to generalize its property to lexical items, if θ -marking is primarily determined by L-marking, as is defined by Chomsky (1986a). Thus, I conclude that *be* is a θ -role assigner, keeping to the assumption that overt lexical items, when taking arguments, have θ -role assigning property, and the class of non- θ -role assigners is restricted to the functional category. If so, Lasnik's (1992) partitive Case theory can be falsified again.

4 Lasnik Revisited

So far, we have been paying attention to Lasnik's (1992) treatment of the Case assignment by the copula *be*. He argued that *be* assigns partitive Case structurally, differing Belletti's (1988) partitive Case in this respect, which she claims is inherent. Lasnik (1995), however, puts forward a system in which inherent Case can be assigned in the same manner as structural Case, maintaining Belletti's argument that partitive is inherent. He states that in *there*-construction, the postcopular NP raises to the specifier position of *AgroP* at LF, and in that position, it is assigned (inherent) partitive Case by *be*. This configuration derived after LF-movement of the NP also satisfies the configurational condition for θ -role assignment. Thus, he argues that his new approach is compatible with Belletti: partitive Case is inherent.

Let us investigate Lasnik's (1995) mechanism of partitive Case assignment. Look at the following sentence:

- (18) There has been a book put on the table (Lasnik 1995, (37))

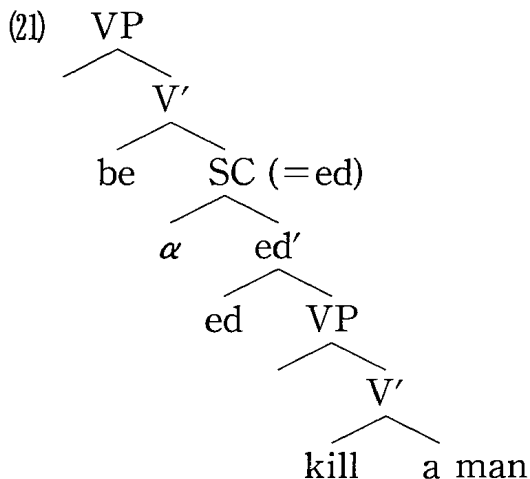
His explanation of (18) is as follows: *be* is a "light verb," which has no θ -roles of its own to assign; *put* raises to the light verb *been*, merged with it; the whole complex raises to *Agro*; and *a book* raises to [Spec, *Agro*] . The configuration is the appropriate one for Case licensing, and since the complex predicate assigns a θ -role to *a book*, it is appropriate for the licensing of inherent partitive Case. In addition, in order to account for the ill-formedness of (19), he suggests that the passive morpheme is a functional head with a strong NP feature driving the overt movement of *a book* in (18):

- (19) *There has been put a book on the table (Lasnik 1995, (26))

Furthermore, he takes the passive morpheme to head the small clause of *be*. Now, I consider what theoretical consequence his approach has for the Minimalist Program.

If the passive morpheme has a status of functional head in (18), then the concept should be extended to the normal passive construction in general — passive sentences without *there*. Assume that this is right, and every passive morpheme has a strong NP feature. The relevant substructure of the following example would be of the form (21):

(20) A man was killed



In (21), α is a [Spec, ed] position, which must be filled overtly to satisfy EPP, since *ed* has a strong NP feature to be checked and deleted. Two problems arise at this point. One is with the obligatory occupation of α by some element. The NP *a man* must move to α to check the strong feature of *ed*. At the stage of this movement, *a man* has to remain in the position if we allow no further movement, which is banned because of the obligatory occurrence of an overt item in α . The resulting derivation is ill-formed, as the next sentence shows:

(22) *Was a man killed (a declarative reading)

To derive a well-formed sentence, (20), we must move the NP *a man* to the matrix subject position. But this operation violates the strict overttness condition. One possible solution for it would be to relax “overttness” in such a manner as: a phonetically empty element can satisfy EPP. Assume this revised version is correct. And suppose that *a man* leaves a trace in the α position after its raising to the specifier position of the matrix Infl. This trace suffices to serve as a checker of the strong NP feature of *ed*.

Suppose one of the two problems could be handled by the relaxation of overttness condition along the lines above. But the solution of the other is not so straightforward. Recall that the strong feature of the matrix Infl also must be checked, or we will have a violation of EPP, and its derivation will crash. For the derivation to converge, we need two raising operations — first to the [Spec, ed] position, and second to the matrix [Spec, Infl] position.³ Putting it differently, each of the two specifier positions must have its strong feature checked. Note that a possible candidate for a checker is *a man* in (21). This implies that *a man* must have two strong features to check α and the matrix [Spec, Infl]. Do we have any justification for a claim that a single element has multiple strong features of the same category, in this case, two NP features? Assuming it is permissible, consider the next example cited from Lasnik (1995):

- (23) *There seems to [α a strange man] [that it is raining outside]

Notice that under the Minimalist Program by Chomsky (1995), the expletive *there* has no Case feature to be checked by the matrix Infl. If α in (23) has two strong Case features, we will incorrectly predict that (23) has a convergent derivation, since one of the features is checked by the preposition *to* and the other by the matrix Infl. Thus, we have strong empirical evidence that a single item cannot have multiple strong features.

Now one might argue that even if the single strong feature constraint is valid, one feature can function twice in (21). That is, a strong

3. In fact, the order of the operation is irrelevant to our discussion here, since even if the derivational process is in reverse order, the same problem cannot be escapable.

NP feature of *a man* checks the strong feature of *ed* in the first step, and remaining to the next step of the derivation, checks that of the matrix Infl, deleted there. But this approach could not be workable. Since Chomsky (1995) argues that a strong feature must be deleted (and erased) after having played its checking role, it should be consistent with the Minimalist spirit to think that in (21), the NP feature of *a man* is deleted at the stage of the first checking operation. Even though the feature in question could be carried to the second stage and available for checking there, it must be deleted after the operation anyway, or the derivation will crash at LF. A remaining strong feature causes the violation of FI in the Minimalist. If so, there is no reason to postulate that the strong NP feature of *a man* in (21) cannot be deleted at the first stage of movement but can be only at the second movement. Thus, we have no proper resolution for the second problem posited above. Then, I conclude that we have evidence to reject, rather than accept, Lasnik's (1995) analysis, and his partitive Case theory (or for that matter, Belletti's as well) can be problematic. The copula *be* is no Case assigner at all, at least in English.

5 Conclusion

In the present paper, I discussed the possibility of the copula *be* assigning Case, and found that it is not feasible to add it to the class of Case assigners, whether its partitive Case is inherent or structural. Based on the assumption that *be* is a raising verb which takes a small clause complement in *there*-construction as well as in ordinary existential predicative sentences, I pointed out that Belletti's (1988) partitive Case theory faces serious problems from a Theta- and Case-theoretical point of view. Particularly, we saw that her introduction of optionality into partitive Case assignment would be ad hoc and unsupportable in that it

requires a sort of obligatory choice of the optional alternative in one case, and obligatory choice of non-optionality in the other. We also found that Lasnik's approach would not be compatible with Chomsky's Minimalist Program, contrary to Lasnik's (1995) claim that it is. These considerations led me to draw a conclusion that the copula *be* is no Case assigner. The same will hold of unaccusative verbs.

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