

Are Exceptional Case Marking Verbs (ECMVs) Truly Exceptional: A Minimalist Approach

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Abstract. We try in this paper an analysis of the traditionally known exceptional case marking verbs in the minimalist approach. The analysis shows quite clearly that this kind of verbs can be considered as one type of control verbs in the sense that they check an accusative object followed by a null case PRO in the subject position of the infinitival complement IP. More evidence is drawn from Modern Standard Arabic and French.

I. Traditional/Current Analysis

Exceptional Case Marking is quite documented in the literature, see amongst others in recent literature N. Chomsky,⁽¹⁾ J. Uriagereka,⁽²⁾ A. Radford,⁽³⁾ L. Haegeman,⁽⁴⁾ and A. Radford.⁽⁵⁾ Most of the time *exceptional case marking verbs* are studied in comparison with what is known as *control verbs* just to show how they are different from other verbs. The main properties of ECMVs are the following: “Since it is exceptional for a subject to have its case checked from outside its containing IP, the relevant phenomenon is generally known as exceptional case-marking (conventionally abbreviated to ECM): hence an infinitive complement with an objective subject is referred to as an ECM complement, and a verb which selects an infinitive complement with an objective subject is referred to as an ECM verb. As we shall see, the different ways in which the case properties of null and objective subjects are checked are reflected in systematic asymmetries between control infinitives with PRO subjects and ECM infinitives with objective subjects.”⁽⁶⁾

⁽¹⁾ N. Chomsky, *The Minimalist Program* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 112.

⁽²⁾ J. Uriagereka, *Rhyme and Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 293.

⁽³⁾ A. Radford, *Transformational Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), 1988, 317.

⁽⁴⁾ L. Haegeman, L. *Introduction to Government and Binding Theory* (Blackwell, Oxford, U.K. 1993), 158.

⁽⁵⁾ A. Radford, A., *Syntax: A Minimalist Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 86.

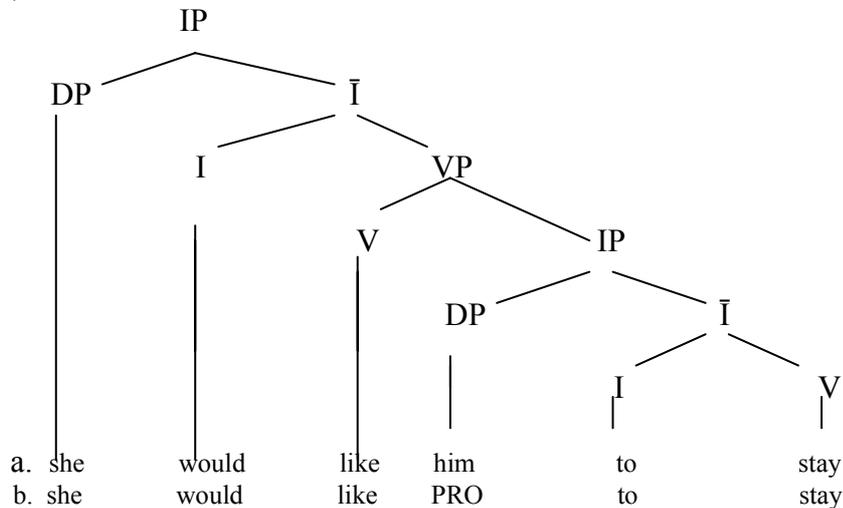
⁽⁶⁾ Radford, *Syntax*, 86.

Let us have some examples:

- (1) a. She would like him to stay.
b. She would like to stay.

The tree structure of (1) is as follows:

(2)



The argument goes as follows: the null-case subject *PRO* in (2.b) is checked for case by the infinitival *to* which carries a null-case specifier-feature (indicating that it requires a *PRO* subject with null case) which is checked against the null-case head-feature of *PRO*⁽⁷⁾ and it is controlled by the subject *she* of the matrix clause for its reference. Verbs such as *like*, *want*, *decide* etc., are referred to in the literature as control verbs. But what about *him* in (2.a)? How does it receive its case and how is it checked? The current assumption is that *him* is checked “by the immediately preceding verb *like*. For one thing, the verb *like* is transitive... and objective case can only be checked by a transitive item. Secondly, such an analysis would correctly predict that infinitive subjects can only be used as the complement of an “immediately preceding transitive verb or an immediately preceding transitive complementizer like *for*.”⁽⁸⁾

II. An Alternative Analysis

As it is outlined in (1) the main point in the ECMVs is that they check an accusative subject in the following IP. Another requirement for the appearance of the objective subject in the embedded IP is that it should be immediately preceded by a transitive verb,

⁽⁷⁾ N. Chomsky, and H. Lasnik, “The Theory of Principles and Parameters,” in N. Chomsky, *The Minimalist Program*, 119-20.

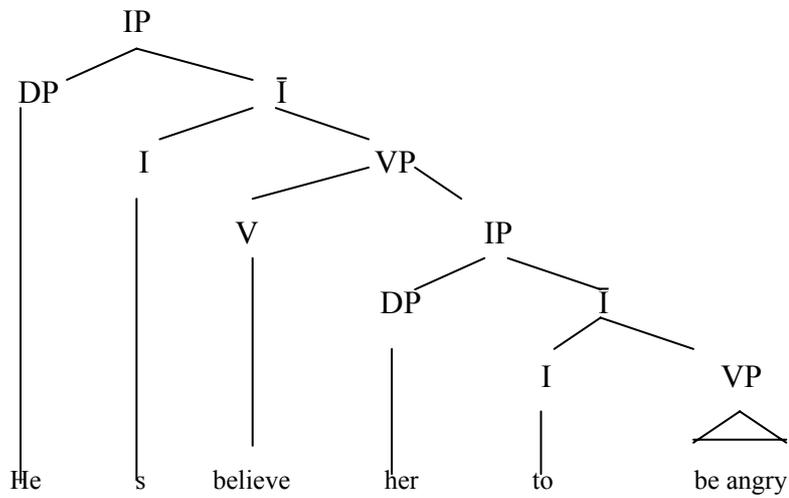
⁽⁸⁾ Radford, *Syntax*, 86.

e.g.:

(3) He believes her to be angry.

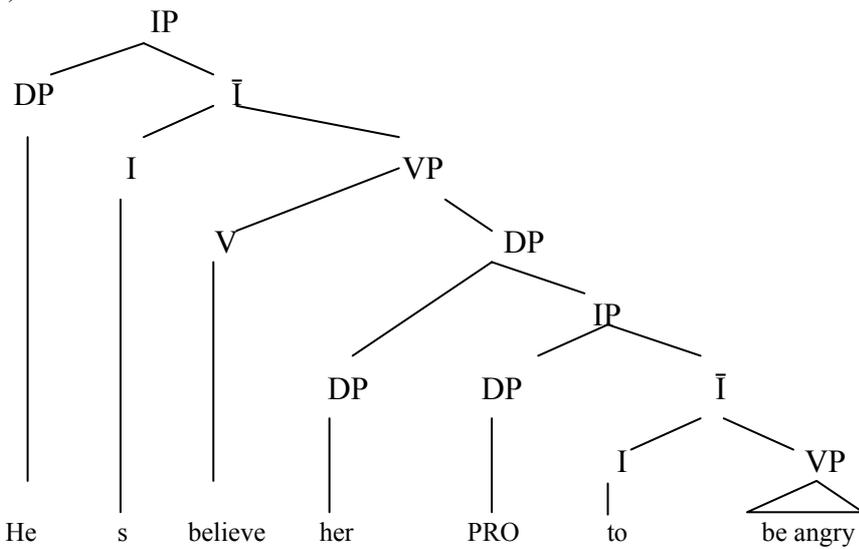
The tree Structure of (3) is as follows:

(4)



In (4), the verb *believe* exceptionally case marks the DP *her* which appears as the subject of the embedded IP *her to be angry*. An alternative analysis would be to assign (3) the following tree structure:

(5)



In (5) the DP *her* is not any longer an objective subject of the embedded IP but rather the direct object of the verb *believe*. Its accusative case is checked by the transitive verb. The question now is how do we interpret *her* as the subject of the following IP. It is through PRO which is now the subject of the embedded clause. PRO in (5) is checked for case by the infinitival *to* which carries a null-case specifier feature which is checked against the null-case head feature of PRO. As for interpretation, PRO is controlled by the DP *her* according to the notion of C-Command which is needed for the interpretation of PRO in control verbs which can be stated as the following:

(6) A bound constituent must be c-commanded by an appropriate antecedent.⁽⁹⁾

The notion of c-command is simplified by Radford as follows: “We can say that a node X c-commands another node Y if you can get from X to Y by catching a northbound train, getting off at the first station and then catching a southbound train on a different line (i.e. you can not travel south on the line you traveled north on).⁽¹⁰⁾

More than that the IP is not a barrier for binding relations. This means that PRO can be bound properly by the appropriate controller (antecedent) *her*. This analysis does not break any previous rules nor does it beg any additional explanatory burden or justification. On the contrary, it simplifies the syntactic analysis and reduces the burden of acquiring the syntactic structures on the mind of the child. It could be said now that a verb such as *believe* is one kind of control verbs in the sense that its direct object controls a PRO subject in the embedded complement clause.

However, there are supposed to be some asymmetries between control verbs and exceptionally case mark verbs. Let us discuss them in the light of the suggested analysis to see whether they still hold. Radford⁽¹¹⁾ states: “ One such asymmetry relates to the behavior of the relevant complements in active and passive structure. A verb like *decide* (when used as a control verb) allows an infinitival IP complement with a PRO subject irrespective of whether as in (11a, 7a in this paper) below) it is used as an active verb or (as in (11b, 7b in this paper) below) as a passive participle:

- (7) (a) They had decided [PRO to postpone the meeting]
 (b) It had been decided [PRO to postpone the meting]

By contrast, a verb like *believe* can function as an ECM verb taking an infinitive complement with an objective subject only when used actively (as in (12a, 8a in this paper) below), not when used passively (as in (12b, 8b in this paper) below):

- (8) (a) People genuinely believed [him to be innocent]

⁽⁹⁾ Radford, *Syntax*, 75.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹¹⁾ Ibid, 86-87.

*(b) It was genuinely believed [him to be innocent]”

According to the above suggested argument, the structure of (8.a) is rather as the following:

(9) People genuinely believed him [to be innocent]

In (9) *him* is the direct object of the verb rather than the objective subject of the embedded clause. However, we believe that (8b) is ungrammatical because the verb *believe* can not undergo passivization with extraposition if the embedded clause is infinitival, Compare:

(10) (a) people genuinely believed [that he was innocent]
 (b) It was genuinely believed [that he was innocent]

Or even:

(11)[That he was innocent] was genuinely believed by them.

Even more, the so called subject of the embedded IP can undergo passivization like the object of a typical verb:

(12) (a) She is believed [---to be right]
 (b) He has never been known [---to lie]
 (c) She was reported [---to be in great joy]
 (d) She is considered [---to be conscientious]

So we see that the first asymmetry seems to be rather a symmetry between control verbs and ECM verbs if we assume that what is known to be ECM verbs check an accusative DP followed by an infinitival IP.

The second asymmetry is supposed to relate to adverb position. Radford⁽¹²⁾ states: “An adverb modifying a control verb can be positioned between the control verb and its IP complement, as we see from (13) below (where the adverb *hard* modifies the verb tried):

(13) He tried *hard* [PRO to convince her]

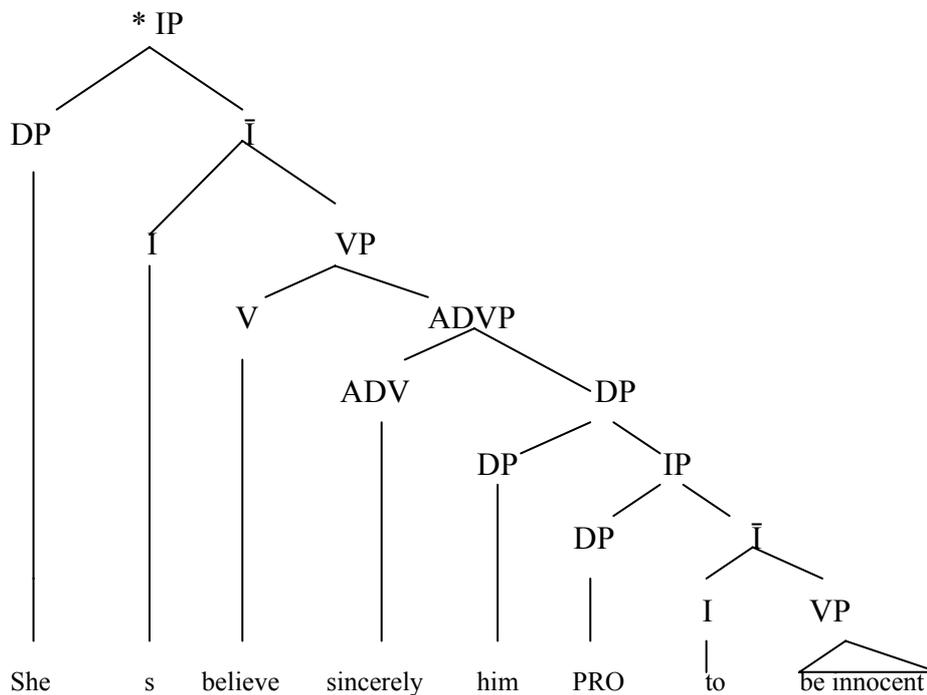
By contrast, an adverb modifying an ECM verb cannot be positioned between the ECM verb and its IP complement, as we see from (14) below (where the adverb *sincerely* modifies the verb believes):

(14) * She believes *sincerely* [him to be innocent]. “

⁽¹²⁾ Ibid., 87.

According to the suggested analysis, the structure of Radford's (14) is as follows:

(15)



The reason that (15) is ungrammatical is the intervening of the adverb *sincerely* between the verb and its object *him* and not because PRO is not checked for case. Adjacency is a prior condition for case checking and marking. “The *adjacency requirement* predicts that case assigners must not be separated from the NPs which they case-mark by intervening material.”⁽¹³⁾

So far it seems that the alternative analysis has survived the two tests which are crucial to differentiate between control verbs and ECM verbs traditionally.

It seems to me that traditionally known ECM verbs can be considered control verbs but their complement should be an accusative DP followed by an infinitive IP.

III. More Evidence

The evidence includes the analysis of the equivalent structures of English ECM verbs in Modern Standard Arabic, henceforth, MSA. Let us have the following examples

⁽¹³⁾ J. Haegeman, *Rhyme and Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1998), 167.

from Radford⁽¹⁴⁾ with their equivalents in MSA:

- (16) (a) I believe [the president to be right]
 (b) I've never known [the Prime Minister to lie]
 (c) They reported [the patient to be in great pain]
 (d) I consider [my students to be conscientious]

The equivalents of (16 a-d) are the following in MSA:

- (17) (a) ?a° taqid-u ?al-ra?iisa-a [musiiib-aan]
 I-nom believe-nom the president-acc right-acc
 I believe the president to be right
- (b) lam ?a°ref qat ?al ra?iisa-acc [kaaDib-aan]
 Not know ever the president-acc a liar-acc
 I've never known the President to lie.
- (c) ?afad-uu ?al-mariid-a [ta°ib-aan jiddaan]
 Report-past-they nom the patient-acc to be suffering greatly
 They reported the patient to be in great pain.
- (d) ?a°tabiru tullaabii [mujtahidiina]
 I-nom consider-nom students-acc-my conscientious-acc
 I consider my students to be conscientious.

Or even in:

- (18) Ya°tabiruna-hu [mujrimaan]
 Consider-they-him a criminal
 They consider him to be a criminal

All the phrases in square brackets are in the accusative case and are considered to be objective complements (a kind of modifying adjective) of the immediately preceding DPs which are the direct objects of the preceding transitive verbs. (17 b, c) could have another form in Arabic as in:

- (19) (a) lam ?a°ref qat [?anna [?al-ra?iisa yakðibu]]
 Not know-nom ever [that [the president-acc lies-nom]]
 I've never known the president to lie.
- (b) ?afad-uu [?anna [?al-mariida ta°ibun jiddaan]]
 Report-past-they-nom [that [the patient-acc to be suffering greatly]]
 They said the patient to be in great pain.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Radford, *Transformational Grammar*, 317

However, the clauses in brackets are considered to be objects of the main verb in the main clause, i.e., we reach the same conclusion. But then the back translations into English would be subordinate clauses which start with “that.” See (21) forthcoming.

This conclusion is quite striking and illuminating because it shows quite clearly that the infinitive complements of the supposed objective subjects in (16) are in fact just objective complements of the preceding objects. In other words what is considered to be an objective subject is in fact a direct object, and what is considered to be an infinitival complement is in fact just a modifying complement which takes the same case of the preceding object in MSA.

Now if we compare the finite complements of this type of verbs i.e., ECM in English and MSA we find identical structures, e.g.:

- (20) (a) I believe CP[that IP[the president is right]]
 (b) I’ve never known CP [that IP[the president is a liar]]
 (c) They reported CP[that IP[the patient is in great pain]]
 (e) I consider CP [that IP [my students are conscientious]]

The equivalents of (20 a-d) would be in MSA as (21a-d)

- (21) (a) ?a° taqidu CP[?anna IP [?al ra?iisa musiibun]]
 I-nom believe-nom [that [the president-acc right-nom]]
 I believe that the president is right.
- (b) lam ?a°rif qat CP[?anna IP[?al-ra?iisa kaaDibun]]
 Not I-nom know-nom ever [that[the president-acc is a liar]]
 I’ve never known that the president is a liar.
- (c) ?afad-uu CP [?anna IP[?al mariida mut°abun jidaan]]
 Reported they-nom [that the patient-acc pain-nom great]]
 They reported that the patient is in great pain.
- (d) ?a°tabiru CP [?anna IP [tullaabii mujtahiduuna]]
 I-nom consider-nom [that students-acc-my conscientious-nom]]
 I consider that my students are conscientious.

The structures in (21) show that MSA and English are identical. Even more, the French equivalents of (16) and (20) are the same as follows:

- (22) (a) Je pense CP que IP[le président a raison].
 (b) Je ne savais pas CP [que IP [le président était menteur].
 (c) Ils ont déclaré CP [que IP[l’ état du malade était sérieux].
 (d) J’ estime CP [que IP[mes étudiants sont consciencieux].

This can lend more support to the suggestion that what is claimed to be ECM are in fact just one type of control verbs but they check an accusative DP followed by an infinitival IP in one of their uses whereas they check a CP in other uses.

The notion that a PRO should be preceded by an accusative NP for its interpretation in ECM structures can be captured by an alternative assumption required by the *Principle of Economy* of derivation or *minimal link condition*, e.g:

- (23) (a) We believe him [PRO to be right].
(b) We tried [PRO to be helpful].

Suppose that PRO will check the nearest appropriate antecedent for interpretation. In (23-a), PRO will find *him* as the nearest appropriate antecedent, while in (23-b), the only appropriate antecedent will be *we*. So then, in ECM structures, PRO will look for the object of the matrix transitive IP as an appropriate antecedent while in control structures the only appropriate antecedent will be the subject of the matrix clause.

IV. Conclusion

The previous analysis has shown that what is known to be ECM verbs may not in fact be exceptional in the sense that they check an objective subject in their complements. Rather they can be considered as a class of control verbs in the sense that they check an accusative objective DP like any other transitive verbs but this objective DP must control a null case PRO in the infinitive IP complement clause. This analysis, we believe, reduces the burden of acquiring the syntactic structures on the mind of the child. What he needs to know now is that these verbs are like other control verbs with just one exception which is the controlling of a null case PRO in the subject position of the infinitival IP by the preceding DP object of the main verb.

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