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Subject-object asymmetries: history and current ideas.

Perlmutter (1970) observed that languages like French (and English) ban extraction of the subject from an embedded clause, while permitting object extraction. He proposed to capture such a subject-object asymmetry through a surface constraint filtering out sentences lacking an overt surface subject. He also observed that no asymmetry is found in null subject languages like Spanish or Italian, which do not specify the overt subject filter.

The GB framework (Chomsky 1981) captured Perlmutter's insight through the Empty Category Principle (ECP), requiring proper government for traces, a requirement satisfied by lexically governed objects but not by subjects. Perlmutter's typological generalization was deduced from the availability of null expletives in null subject languages, which legitimately fill the obligatory subject position, thus permitting extraction of the thematic subject from a lower position (Rizzi 1982).

If subject-object asymmetries were at the core of theoretical reflections in GB, ECP-based approaches ran into various conceptual and formal difficulties in minimalism, which led classical minimalism to demote the phenomenon from center stage (Chomsky 1995). Nevertheless, the effects are cross-linguistically robust, as is Perlmutter's typological generalization, which clearly holds outside Indo-European: for instance, if we look at African languages, Kwa languages, which do not admit null subjects, are strongly sensitive to *that*-trace effects, whereas null subject languages of the Bantu family are insensitive to the asymmetries (Salulessa 2004).

Such considerations led to the exploration of alternative analytic paths. I would like to discuss here the approach based on Criterial freezing (Rizzi 2006 and much subsequent work), which rests upon the following ingredients:

- Criterial freezing: an element satisfying a criterion is frozen in the criterial position, and cannot undergo further movement.
- The Subject Criterion: the canonical subject position in the higher part of the IP structure is a criterial position expressing the "aboutness" property.

The filler of the canonical subject position thus satisfies the Subject Criterion, and as such it is unmovable under Criterial Freezing. In the paper to be presented at SLE I would like to develop these ideas building on Rizzi (2020), and compare them to alternative approaches to the asymmetries.