Functional Categories, Structure Building and Theta Marking

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In this paper, we attempt to provide an insight into the nature of functional categories, structure building and theta marking. Through an investigation into the nature of morphology and syntax, we claim that both structure building and theta marking are, in principle, completely free, and that functional categories have significant impacts upon how structure is built up and how a predicate assigns theta roles to its arguments in the course of the computation (cf. Hale and Keyser 1993, Chomsky 1995, 1999, 2000, among others). Specifically, developing the proposals in Hoshi (2001, 2002a-c), we set forth (1a-c) and (2a-b), and defend them here.

(1) a. Theta marking is, in principle, completely free.
    b. A functional category constitutes a barrier for theta marking.
    c. Functional categories such as Case and T in Japanese do not block theta marking.

(2) a. Structure building is, in principle, completely free.
    b. A functional category is an obligatory licenser of a "phrasal/XP" domain, and a domain where there is no functional category is a "nonphrasal/X^0" domain.

To the extent that the proposed analyses based on (2a-b) are correct, they provide substantial empirical evidence for Chomsky's (1994, 1995) "bare" phrase structure theory, which claims (3).

(3)   Categorial labels such as XP and X^0 should be eliminated from C_{HL} entirely.

This is so, because (2a-b) imply that the distribution of "phrasal" domains and that of "nonphrasal" domains are strictly determined by the presence or absence of a functional category in a given configuration in the course of the computation, but crucially, NOT by their categorical labels, XP and X^0 (cf. Fabb 1984, Sells 1996, H. Tada, p.c. 2001, N. Hornstein, p.c. 2002, J. Abe, p.c. 2003).

If (1a-c) are indeed correct, they provide strong arguments against Chomsky's (1995, among others) "configurational" theta theory, because (1a-c) clearly indicate that there is no fixed structural position for each argument (cf. Bošković 1994, Saito and Hoshi 1994/2000, 1998, Bošković and Takahashi 1998, Hornstein 1999, Lasnik 1999, Saito 2001, among others). Significantly, as Kuroda (2003) points out, proposals such as (1a-c) therefore imply below:

(4)   LF provides only INSTRUCTIONS for the conceptual-intentional (C-I) system and the C-I system CALCULATES the meaning of each linguistic expression based on those INSTRUCTIONS.

Consequently, "[t]he interface C-I, i.e., LF, is not necessarily structurally in conformity with the RATIONAL analysis of meaning" (Kuroda 2003, p. 477. Emphasis provided by small capitals supplied by HH) (cf. Jackendoff 1997, 1998, Yumoto 2001, among others). Given the theoretically important conclusion in (4) together with recent INHERENT Case theories for Japanese, we speculate on the nature of the free word order phenomenon and "surprising constituents" in Japanese at the end of this paper (cf. Hale 1980, Farmer 1984, Saito 1985, 1989, 1992, 2003, Kuroda 1986/88, Fukui 1986, Gunji 1987, 1988, Yatabe 1993, Koizumi 1995, 2000, Takano 1996, Miyagawa 1997, 2001, Bošković and Takahashi 1998, Saito and Fukui 1998, Fukui and Takano 1998, Takano 2002, Abe 2003/2004, Fukui and Sakai 2003, Fukushima 2003, Kempson 2003, among others).