Contents

1. Elissa Flagg. Questioning innovative quotatives.
3. Heidi Harley and Jason D. Haugen. Are there really two different classes of instrumental denominal verbs in English?
4. Mikko Kupula. A visible trace of movement?
5. Go Mizumoto. On the relationship between children’s working memory capacity and their use of contextual information in sentence comprehension.
7. Yosuke Sato. P-stranding generalization and Bahasa Indonesia: a myth?
4.

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*A visible trace of movement?*

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In Modern Greek, adnominal possessors are realized either as genitive DPs, as in *to fustáni tis Mariás* ‘the dress Mary.GEN’ or as possessive pronouns, as in *to fustáni tis* ‘the dress her.CL’. The possessive pronouns are enclitic and, accordingly, usually post-nominal. However, the possessive pronouns can also surface pre-nominally when the possessum is modified by an adjective. In these cases the possessive pronoun is sandwiched in a pre-nominal position between the adjective and the noun where it takes the preceding adjective as its phonological host.

Now, given that also adjectives can occur either pre- or post-nominally in Greek, the co-occurrence of possessive clitics and adjectives potentially gives rise to the possibilities in (1). Observe the ungrammaticality of (1d). Given that this construction in fact becomes well-formed when the possessive clitic is absent (as in *éna spíti meγálo* ‘a big house’), the ungrammaticality of (1d) seems to be linked to the presence of this clitic.

(1)  

a. *éna spíti meγálo mu*  
b. *éna meγálo spíti*  
c. *éna spíti meγálo*  
d. *éna spíti meγálo mu*

I assume for the purposes of this snippet that possessors in Greek are complements to the possessum (Horrocks and Stavrou 1987) -- or alternatively complements to a functional relator projecting a Small Clause structure between the possessor and the possessum (cf. den Dikken 1998, 2006). As the structures I give in (1’) make clear, (1d) is arguably the only case where an extraction site precedes the possessive clitic. I thus propose the following hypothesis: (1d) is ungrammatical because the possessive clitic fails to be properly licensed due to N-movement (the landing site of which is possibly D). Movement of the noun *spíti* ‘house’ leaves behind a trace that blocks the enclitic *mu* ‘my’ from cliticizing to the adjective *meγálo* ‘big’ in the post-movement configuration:
If my proposal is on the right track, ill-formed constructions like (1d) / (2) should be remedied with an XP-level possessor. After all, XPs are phonologically independent and therefore do not require a phonological host. The trace produced by N-movement as in (2) should therefore not be an offending one; in fact, as illustrated in (3), this prediction is borne out:

(3)  

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<td>a.</td>
<td>èna [spiti, [meγálo, [t, tu proθipury, [NP]]]</td>
<td>a house  big Prime Minister.GEN</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>*èna [spiti, [meγálo, [t, tu [NP]]]</td>
<td>a house  big his.CL</td>
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In sum, the facts presented above are compatible with the following assumptions: (i) DP-internal N-movement occurs in Greek and, in particular, the N>A sequence can be derived by movement, contrary to some recent proposals (Alexiadou 2001, 2003); (ii) traces have phonetic content (cf. Lightfoot 1976 and Jaeggli 1980) for wanna-contraction in English).

References