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A Preference for Move over
Merge

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1 Introduction

Chomsky (1995, 1998) claims that Merge is preferred over Move
and gives both conceptual and empirical arguments for this claim. A
conceptual argument is this: Move (a) establishes agreement between
a lexical item α and a feature F, (b) selects P(F), and then (c) merges
P(F) to αP, where P(F) is a phrase determined by F and αP is a
projection headed by α. Since Move involves the extra step of selecting
P(F), Move is more complex than its subcomponents Merge and Agree,
or even the combination of the two. Given that simple operations
preempt complicated ones, Merge is preferred to Move. Chomsky
argues that the preference for Merge over Move is empirically sup-
ported by the contrast in (1).

(1) a. There seems to be someone in the room.
    b. *There seems someone to be in the room.

Suppose that the computational system C_{HL} constructs the following
structure:

(2) [$_{TP}$ to [$_{VP}$ be someone in the room]]

The next step is to fill the specifier position (Spec) of the nonfinite
T^0. Given the initial numeration with *there,* there are two possibilities:

C_{HL} can raise *someone* or insert *there.* The preference for Merge over Move selects insertion, so that the following structure is derived:

(3) [$_{TP}$ there to [$_{VP}$ be someone in the room]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} yields sentence (1a). As for (1b), it is derived if *someone* fills [Spec, T^0] in (2), which is disallowed by the preference for Merge over Move.

   In this squib, contrary to Chomsky's claim, I will propose that Move is selected over Merge. I question Chomsky's conceptual argument for preferring Merge over Move. Applications of Merge also involve an extra step (a step not involved in applications of Move): the operation of selecting a lexical item from the initial numeration and introducing it into the derivation, that is, the operation Select (Chomsky 1995:226). For example, in the derivation from (2) to (3), the insertion of *there* into [Spec, TP] involves three subcomponents: (a) selection of *there* from the numeration and its introduction into the derivation, (b) merger of *there* and TP, and (c) agreement between a feature of *there* and the corresponding feature of T^0. The raising of *someone* also involves three subcomponents: (a) agreement between a feature of *someone* and the corresponding feature of T^0, (b) pied-piping of *someone,* and (c) merger of *someone* and TP.

   Thus, comparing Merge and Move in terms of the number of their subcomponents is a dubious approach. Rather, the crucial difference between the two operations lies in the number of phrase structures on which they operate: Merge forms the new object by concatenating two objects that are separate phrase structures; Move forms the new object by concatenating two objects that are in a single phrase structure. In the process of forming phrase structures, it is more economical to look only at an already formed structure than to look at, not only an existing structure, but also lexical items in the numeration, or at an independent syntactic object. Hence, I assume that Move is conceptually preferred to Merge.

   In the following sections I will provide two empirical arguments for preferring Move over Merge. I will also give a Case-based account for the contrast in (1) without resorting to Chomsky's condition selecting Merge over Move.

2 Locality of A-Movement

The first empirical argument for preferring Move over Merge comes from locality of A-movement. Look at superraising in (4).

(4) *John seems that it is likely t$_{John}$ to win.

(4) has the following structure at some stage of its derivation:

(5) [$_{TP}$ T^0 [$_{VP}$ is likely John to win]]

The next operation is to fill [Spec, TP]. There are two ways to fill this position: by insertion of *it* and by raising of *John.* Chomsky's prefer-

ence for Merge over Move selects insertion over raising to yield the following structure:

(6) $[_{TP}$ it $[_{T'}$ T^0 $[_{VP}$ is likely John to win]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} constructs the following structure:

(7) $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{VP}$ seems $[_{CP}$ that it is likely John to win]]]

The next operation is to fill Spec of the matrix TP. The structural Case feature of *it* has been checked in Spec of the embedded TP so that *it* is inactive. However, its φ-features remain visible and hence block association of the matrix T^0 to *John* (defective intervention constraints). Accordingly, Chomsky argues that the superraising example (4) is not derived.

However, Chomsky's analysis is dubious. Consider the following sentence:

(8) They seem to him to like John.

(8) has structure (9) at some stage of its derivation.

(9) $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{vP}[v^0 + $ seem$]$ $[_{VP}[_{PP}$ to him$]$ $[_{V'}$ t_{seem} $[_{TP}$ they $[_{T'}$ to like John]]]]]]

The next step is to fill Spec of the matrix TP. *Him,* which is closest to the matrix T^0, has its Case feature checked within PP, but its φ-features remain visible. Thus, defective intervention constraints would require *him* to block association of the matrix T^0 to *they,* contrary to fact.[1] Thus, the grammaticality of (8) shows that defective intervention constraints are incorrect. Instead of defective intervention constraints, I assume the following condition:

(10) [Spec, TP] can be filled only by a DP with structural Case.

In (9) the preposition *to* assigns *him* oblique Case, which is an inherent Case. Hence, (10) allows Spec of the matrix TP to be filled by *John* with nominative Case rather than by *him.* Thus, unlike defective intervention constraints, condition (10) provides an account of (8).[2]

With condition (10) in mind, let us consider structure (7) again.

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[1] The same problem arises in sentence (ia), which has structure (ib) at some point in its derivation.

(i) a. This claim strikes me as correct.
   b. $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{vP}[v^0 + $ strikes$]$ $[_{VP}$ me $[_{V'}$ $t_{strikes}$ $[_{SC}$ this claim as correct]]]]]

[2] The French counterpart of (8) is ungrammatical, as illustrated in (i).

(i) *Jean semble a Marie $[t_{Jean}$ avoir du talent].
   Jean seems to Marie to have talent
   'Jean seems to Marie to have talent.'

This fact might be accounted for by assuming that (10) is a parameter: in French [Spec, TP] can be filled by a DP without a structural Case. Under this assumption, *Marie* can fill Spec of the matrix T^0 and is required to raise to [Spec, TP].

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Since *it* has its nominative Case feature checked in Spec of the embedded TP, (10) allows Spec of the matrix TP to be filled by *John* with nominative Case rather than *it*. Therefore, preference for Merge over Move coupled with condition (10) fails to exclude superraising as in (4).

On the other hand, my proposal to select Move over Merge blocks superraising as in (4). Let us consider structure (5) again. In (5) the preference for Move over Merge requires [Spec, TP] to be filled by raising *John* rather than by inserting *it*.

(11) $[_{TP}$ John $[_{T'}$ T^0 $[_{VP}$ is likely t_{John} to win]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} yields the following structure:

(12) $[_{TP}$ T^0 seems $[_{CP}$ that $[_{TP}$ John $[_{T'}$ T^0 is likely t_{John} to win]]]]

The next step is to fill the matrix T^0. Condition (10) does not require this position to be filled by raising *John* since its nominative Case feature has been checked in Spec of the embedded TP. Thus, *it* is inserted into Spec of the matrix T^0, as illustrated in (13).

(13) $[_{TP}$ it $[_{T'}$ T^0 seems $[_{CP}$ that John is likely t_{John} to win]]]

Hence, the preference for Move over Merge excludes superraising as in (4).

My analysis also accounts for the ungrammaticality of the following sentence:[3]

(14) *John is asked $[_{CP}$[how likely t_{John} to win]$_1$ it is t_1].

(14) has the following structure at some point of its derivation:

(15) $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{VP}$ is [how likely John to win]]]

The next step is to fill [Spec, T^0]. There are two options: insertion of *it* in the initial numeration and raising of *John*. Chomsky's preference for Merge over Move selects insertion, which yields the following structure:

(16) $[_{TP}$ it $[_{VP}$ is [how likely John to win]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} yields the following structure:

(17) $[_{TP}$ T^0 is asked $[_{CP}$[how likely John to win]$_1$ $[_{C'}$ $C^0\langle$wh$\rangle$ $[_{TP}$ it is t_1]]]]

In (17) *John* can move to Spec of the matrix T^0, as illustrated in (18).

(18) $[_{TP}$ John is asked $[_{CP}$[how likely t_{John} to win]$_1$ $[_{C'}$ $C^0\langle$wh$\rangle$ $[_{TP}$ it is t_1]]]]

In (18) all formal features are checked so that this derivation should

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[3] I assume that in (14) the verb *asked* takes as its complement the interrogative clause *how likely to win it is*. For another economy-based analysis of (14), see Sakai 1994.

be convergent, contrary to fact. Thus, preferring Merge to Move incorrectly predicts that (14) is legitimate.[4]

On the other hand, my proposal to select Move over Merge can rule out sentence (14). Let us consider structure (15) again. In (15) the preference for Move over Merge requires [Spec, TP] to be filled by raising of *John* but not by insertion of *it.*

(19) $[_{TP}$ John $[_{T'}$ T^0 $[_{VP}$ is [how likely t_{John} to win]]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} constructs the following structure:

(20) $[_{TP}$ T^0 is asked $[_{CP}$[how likely t_{John} to win]$_1$ $[_{C'}$ $C^0\langle$wh$\rangle$ $[_{TP}$ John is t_1]]]]

The next step is to fill Spec of the matrix T^0. Condition (10) does not allow Spec of the matrix TP to be filled by raising of *John* because *John* has already had its Case feature checked by the embedded T^0 and hence does not have any structural Case. Therefore, Spec of the matrix T^0 is filled by insertion of *it,* which yields (21).

(21) $[_{TP}$ it is asked $[_{CP}$[how likely t_{John} to win]$_1$ $[_{C'}$ $C^0\langle$wh$\rangle$ $[_{TP}$ John is t_1]]]]

This approach blocks the derivation of (14): (14) is derived only if *it* fills [Spec, T^0] in (15), which is barred by the preference for Move over Merge.

Furthermore, unlike Chomsky's approach, mine accounts for the ungrammaticality of the following sentence as well:

(22) *Who$_1$ was questioned $[_{CP}$ t'_1 $[_{C'}$ $C^0\langle$wh$\rangle$ $[_{IP}$ it was told t_1 that Mary left]]]?

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[4] An anonymous reviewer points out that (14) might be blocked by the Condition on Extraction Domain (CED) (Huang 1982): *how likely to win,* which is in [Spec, CP], should be a barrier to movement of *John* since extraction of *wh*-phrases from elements in CP results in marginal grammaticality, as pointed out by Lasnik and Saito (1992:102).

(i) ??Who$_1$ do you wonder [which picture of t_1]$_2$ Mary bought t_2?

However, this objection does not carry much weight. Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) assume that XP is not a barrier if it is the complement of a head H or the Spec of the complement of H. Under this assumption, *how likely to win* in (14) is not a barrier since it is the Spec of the complement of the verb *asked.* Furthermore, the ungrammaticality of (14) is much worse than that of (i), which indicates that (i) and (14) must be excluded by different principles. The ungrammaticality of extraction out of elements in [Spec, CP] might be reduced to the Minimal Link Condition (Chomsky 1995:296) without resorting to barriers: since *which picture of who* is closer to the matrix C^0 than *who, who* cannot move to Spec of the matrix CP. Thus, the ungrammaticality of (i) cannot count as an independent argument for [Spec, CP] barriers. Since there is no theoretical reason to assume [Spec, CP] barriers, accounts that are not based upon them should be preferred.

This sentence has the following structure at some stage of its derivation:

(23) $[_{TP} T^0$ was told who $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]

The next step is to fill [Spec, TP]. There are two ways to do so: by insertion of *it* and by raising of *who*. Chomsky's preference for Merge over Move selects insertion over raising, which yields the following structure:

(24) $[_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told who $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} constructs the following structure:

(25) $[_{CP} C^0\langle wh\rangle [_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told who $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]

The next operation is to check the strong *wh*-feature of C^0. The only element that can check this feature is *who*. Thus, *who* moves to [Spec, CP], as illustrated in (26).

(26) $[_{CP}$ who$_1$ $[_{C'} C^0\langle wh\rangle [_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told t$_1$ $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]

At some point of this derivation, C_{HL} constructs the following structure:

(27) $[_{TP} T^0$ was questioned $[_{CP}$ who$_1$ $[_{C'} C^0\langle wh\rangle [_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told t$_1$ $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]]

The next operation is to fill Spec of the matrix T^0. Since *who* is closer to Spec of the matrix TP than *it, who* moves to Spec of the matrix TP, as follows:

(28) $[_{TP}$ who$_1$ $[_{T'} T^0$ was questioned $[_{CP}$ t$'_1$ $[_{C'} C^0\langle wh\rangle [_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told t$_1$ $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]]]

Since all formal features in (28) are checked, it should be convergent, contrary to fact.[5]

One might argue that (28) is uninterpretable for the reason that a *wh*-phrase does not provide [Spec, C^0] with a *wh*-feature, and that this LF uninterpretability makes the derivation crash. However, this argument is dubious because under copy theory, which assumes that an element leaves a copy when it moves, [Spec, CP] is filled by *who* at LF, as follows:

(29) $[_{TP}$ who$_1$ $[_{T'} T^0$ was questioned $[_{CP}$ who$_1$ $[_{C'} C^0\langle wh\rangle [_{TP}$ it $[_{T'} T^0$ was told who$_1$ $[_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]]]

Thus, Chomsky's analysis incorrectly allows the ungrammatical sentence (22).

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[5] Notice that moving a *wh*-phrase out of [Spec, $C^0\langle wh\rangle$] is not barred by Last Resort only if that operation leads to establishing a checking relation (Chomsky 1995:280).

On the other hand, my analysis correctly excludes sentence (22). The preference for Move over Merge requires [Spec, TP] in (23) to be filled by raising of *who* instead of *it.*

(30) [$_{TP}$ who$_1$ [$_{T'}$ T^0 was told t$_1$ [$_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C$_{HL}$ constructs the following structure:

(31) [$_{TP}$ T^0 was questioned [$_{CP}$ who$_1$ [$_{C'}$ C^0⟨wh⟩ [$_{TP}$ t'$_1$ [$_{T'}$ T^0 was told t$_1$ [$_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]]

In (31) condition (10) precludes Spec of the matrix TP from being filled by raising of *who* because *who* has already had its Case feature checked by the embedded T^0 and hence does not have any structural Case. Thus, Spec of the matrix TP is filled by insertion of *it.*

(32) [$_{TP}$ it [$_{T'}$ T^0 was questioned [$_{CP}$ who$_1$ [$_{C'}$ C^0⟨wh⟩ [$_{TP}$ t'$_1$ [$_{T'}$ T^0 was told t$_1$ [$_{CP}$ that Mary left]]]]]]]

The ungrammatical sentence (22) is derived if [Spec, TP] in (23) is filled by insertion of *it,* which violates the preference for Move over Merge.

3 "Strict Cyclicity" Property of Movement

The second empirical argument for preferring Move over Merge concerns the "strict cyclicity" property of movement. Within the Minimalist Program, S-Structure is eliminated as a level of representation, and linguistic filters on LF representation are excluded in favor of bare output conditions. Thus, we are back to a "rule-based" derivational system with constraints on syntactic operations and derivations, not constraints on derived representations. In this framework something like strict cyclicity is necessary.[6] For example, let us consider the Subject Condition violation in (33).

(33) ??Who$_2$ did you say that [pictures of t$_2$]$_1$ were stolen t$_1$?

Consider the following cyclic derivation of (33):

(34) a. [$_{TP}$[pictures of who]$_1$ [$_{T'}$ T^0 [$_{vP}$ were stolen t$_1$]]]
b. [$_{CP}$ who$_2$ [$_{C'}$ C^0⟨wh⟩ [$_{TP}$ you say [$_{CP}$ that [$_{TP}$[pictures of t$_2$]$_1$ [$_{T'}$ T^0 [$_{vP}$ were stolen t$_1$]]]]]]]

In the cyclic derivation (34), the raising of the embedded object to Spec of the embedded TP precedes the extraction of *who. Who* is extracted out of the embedded subject, which is a barrier since it is neither the complement of a verb nor the Spec of the complement of

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[6] Freidin (1978) notes that cyclicity can be eliminated if a locality condition on movement (Subjacency) is a constraint on representation rather than on the operation of Move itself. See also Kawashima and Kitahara 1995, Watanabe 1995, Bobaljik and Brown 1997, Collins 1997, and Kitahara 1997 for recent proposals on cyclicity.

a verb (see footnote 4). Thus, this extraction violates the Condition on Extraction Domain (CED).[7] Now, consider the relevant aspect of the noncyclic derivation of (33), given in (35).

(35) a. $[_{CP}$ who$_2$ $[_{C'}$ C^0⟨wh⟩ $[_{TP}$ you say $[_{CP}$ that $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{vP}$ were stolen pictures of t$_2$]]]]]]

      b. $[_{CP}$ who$_2$ $[_{C'}$ C^0⟨wh⟩ $[_{TP}$ you say $[_{CP}$ that $[_{TP}$[pictures of t$_2$]$_1$ $[_{T'}$ T^0 $[_{vP}$ were stolen t$_1$]]]]]]]]

In the noncyclic derivation (35), extraction of *who* precedes raising of the embedded object to Spec of the embedded TP. Thus, *who* is extracted out of the embedded object, which is not a barrier since it is the complement of the verb *steal*. This extraction should be legitimate, as in (36).

(36) Who$_1$ did you steal a picture of t$_1$?

The problem with derivation (35) lies in the raising of the embedded object. This movement violates strict cyclicity. Thus, strict cyclicity is necessary to exclude sentence (33).

Notice that the strict cyclicity property of movement follows from my proposal to select Move over Merge. Let us consider the following stage:

(37) $[_{TP}$ T^0 $[_{vP}$ were stolen [pictures of who]]]

There are two possible continuations from (37): merger of C in the numeration and TP and raising of the embedded object to [Spec, TP]. Preference for Move over Merge selects raising over merger, which yields (34a). Thus, this preference guarantees the cyclic derivation in (34), where extraction of *who* violates the CED. In this way, preference for Move over Merge captures the strict cyclic property of movement.

4 Existential Constructions

In the previous sections I have provided two empirical arguments for preferring Move over Merge. The proposed analysis leads us to reconsider the contrast in (1). In this section, without resorting to Chomsky's condition preferring Merge to Move, I will give a Case-based account for (1) founded on these assumptions:

(38) a. The expletive *there* has a Case feature, and a postcopular DP is optionally assigned partitive Case by a copular. (Belletti 1988, Lasnik 1995a,b)

      b. The expletive *there* has a formal feature to be checked by that of a DP with partitive Case. (Lasnik 1995a,b)

Assumption (38a) accounts for the following sentences:

(39) a. There is a man in the room.

      b. A man is in the room.

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[7] For a recent proposal regarding the CED within the Minimalist Program, see Toyoshima 1996.

In (39a) nominative Case of T^0 is checked by that of the expletive *there* and *a man* is assigned partitive Case by the copular *is*. On the other hand, in (39b) *a man* does not have partitive Case; instead, it has nominative Case, which checks that of T^0. In other words, the copular *is* in (39a) assigns partitive Case, whereas the one in (39b) does not. Thus, under assumption (38a), there are two *be*s, one with and one without the Case feature. Notice that assumption (38a) is contrary to Chomsky's (1995:272) assumption that the expletive *there* lacks a Case feature. Chomsky argues that his assumption is motivated by the following sentence:

(40) *There seem that a lot of people are intelligent.

Under Chomsky's analysis, in (40) a nominative Case feature of the matrix T^0 is not checked by *there* and remains at LF, which makes the derivation crash. By contrast, under my analysis sentence (40) is excluded by assumption (38b) because there is no DP with partitive Case having a formal feature to check the feature of *there*.

Given the assumptions in (38), let us consider structure (2), repeated here as (41).

(41) [$_{TP}$ to [$_{VP}$ be someone in the room]]

Suppose that *someone* in (41) has partitive Case assigned by *be* (assumption (38a)). Since this Case is an inherent Case, condition (10) does not allow *someone* to fill [Spec, TP]. Its only checker is *there* with nominative Case in the numeration. So, *there* is inserted into [Spec, T^0] in (41).

(42) [$_{TP}$ there [$_{T'}$ to [$_{VP}$ be someone in the room]]]

At a later stage of this derivation, C_{HL} yields sentence (1a). As for sentence (1b), it is derived if [Spec, TP] in (41) is filled by *someone* with an inherent Case, which violates condition (10).

Next, consider the case in which *someone* in (41) has nominative Case (assumption (38a)). Condition (10) and the preference for Move over Merge require *someone* to move to Spec of the embedded T^0.

(43) [$_{TP}$ someone$_1$ [$_{T'}$ to [$_{VP}$ be t$_1$ in the room]]]

At a later stage of the derivation, C_{HL} constructs the following structure:

(44) [$_{TP}$ T^0 [$_{VP}$ seems [$_{TP}$ someone$_1$ [$_{T'}$ to [$_{VP}$ be t$_1$ in the room]]]]]

The next step is to fill Spec of the matrix TP. Condition (10) allows *someone* to move to Spec of the matrix TP because *someone* has structural Case. Thus, there are two options for filling Spec of the matrix TP: raising of *a man* and insertion of *there*. The preference for Move over Merge requires Spec of the matrix TP to be filled by raising rather than insertion. The movement of *someone* to Spec of the matrix TP leaves *there* in the initial numeration and hence does not produce a single syntactic object, which makes the derivation crash (Chomsky

1995:226). Thus, the assumptions in (38) do not allow any derivation of sentence (1b). In this way, the contrast in (1) receives a Case-based account.[8]

5 Summary

In this squib I have proposed that Move be preferred over Merge. I have provided two empirical arguments for my proposal, based on locality of A-movement and the ''strict cyclicity'' property of movement. Furthermore, I have provided a Case-based analysis of existential constructions in English, without resorting to Chomsky's preference for Merge over Move.

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[8] An anonymous reviewer points out that a problem with my Case-based analysis of existential constructions comes from the following contrast:

(i) a. It seems that there is someone in the room.
    b. *There seems that it is someone in the room.

The preference for Move over Merge has nothing to do with the choice between *it*-insertion and *there*-insertion, and *it,* with no partitive Case, does not block association of *someone,* with partitive Case, to *there.* At present I cannot offer a solution to this problem. I tentatively speculate that [Spec, T^0], which selects the copular *be* with partitive Case, must be filled by *there* rather than *it,* but otherwise I leave this problem open.

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