A case for Voice

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Overview

We propose that the cross-linguistic similarities and differences illustrated in (1)-(5) are best captured in an approach that combines aspects of Sailor & Ahn’s (2010) analysis of passives with ergative-like case marking and case-driven DP-movement.

(1) [This cake] was cut by me.
(2) [kue ini] dipotong oleh saya. (Indonesian di-passive)
(3) [zhe he dangao] bei wo qie le. (Chinese passive)
(4) [kono keeki-ga] watashi ni yotte kirareta. (Japanese direct passive)
(5) [kue ini] saya potong. (Indonesian inverse)

Following Sailor & Ahn, we assume that external arguments are merged in SpecVoiceP, due to a [uDP*] feature on Voice. The voice marker is merged in Voice, but moves to the head of a higher functional projection in (1)-(3). To account for the position of the verb, we assume with Sailor & Ahn that Voice also has a [uP] feature, which attracts the vP to the Spec of the higher functional projection when it is strong, and thus moves the verb across the external argument (1)-(2). In (3)-(5), this feature is weak and the vP remains in final position. In order to account for the movement of the internal argument to initial position regardless of whether the vP moves (1)-(2) or not (3)-(5), we follow Béjar & Rezac (2009:68) in assuming that the EPP (=uDP*) feature on T is linked to the operation Agree, more specifically, the checking and valuing of φ- and case-features. We propose that passivisation not only suppresses the structural [acc] case on Voice, but also endows Voice with the ability to assign an oblique inherent case to the external argument in its specifier (cf. Woolford 2006). This means that T will Agree with the internal argument, and as a result the EPP feature on T, which is strong in all four languages, will attract the internal argument to SpecTP.

References