

Repairing the *that*-trace configuration in Igbo

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In Igbo (Benue-Congo, Nigeria) embedded clauses (with an overt complementizer) are islands for long extraction of their subject, though not for the extraction of non-subjects such as the embedded direct object. Compare the declarative baseline in (1-a) with long object focus fronting in (1-b) vs. long subject focus fronting in (1-c):

(1) Long focus fronting – subject/non-subject asymmetry:

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|----|---|----------------------|
| a. | Úchè ch̀è-ré nà Ézè h̀ù-r̀ù Àdá n' -áhíá
Uche think-rVC Eze see-rV Ada P-market
“Uche thinks that Eze saw Ada at the market.” | <i>declarative</i> |
| b. | Àdá kà Úché ch̀è-ré nà Ézé h̀ù-r̀ù _ n' -áhíá
Ada FOC Uche think-rVC Eze see-rV P-market
“Uche thinks that Eze saw ADA at the market.” | <i>long DO focus</i> |
| c. | *Ézè kà Úché ch̀è-ré nà _ h̀ù-r̀ù Àdá n' -áhíá
Eze FOC Uche think-rVC see-rV Ada P-market
“Uche thinks that EZE saw Ada at the market.” | <i>long SU focus</i> |

This phenomenon, attested in many unrelated languages, is known as the Comp- or *that*-trace effect (Perlmutter 1971; Bresnan 1977; Pesetsky 2017), but its source is still debated. Our aim is to gain insights into the reason behind the selective opacity of embedded clauses by studying the various repair strategies available in Igbo: Extraction of the embedded subject becomes possible if (a) the subordinating complementizer *nà* is deleted (as in English, see (2-a)), or (b) if the complementizer remains but is followed by a resumptive pronoun instead of a gap (see (2-b)), or (c) if the *nà*-complementizer is replaced by the element *si* (see (2-c)).

(2) Repairs for long subject extraction:

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|----|---|-------------------|
| a. | Ézè kà Úché ch̀è-ré Ø _ ¹ h̀ù-r̀ù Àdá n' -áhíá
Eze FOC Uche think-rV see-rV Ada P-market
“Uche thinks that EZE saw Ada at the market.” | <i>C-deletion</i> |
| b. | Ézè kà Úchè ch̀è-ré nà ɔ h̀ù-r̀ù Àdá n' -áhíá
Eze FOC Uche think-rVC 3SG.NOM see-rV Ada P-market
“Uche thinks that EZE saw Ada at the market.” | <i>C + RP</i> |
| c. | Ézè kà Úché ch̀è-ré si _ ¹ h̀ù-r̀ù Àdá n' -áhíá
Eze FOC Uche think-rV si see-rV Ada P-market
“Uche thinks that EZE saw Ada at the market.” | <i>special C</i> |

By applying various movement diagnostics we will show that long non-subject extraction as well as the repairs for long subject focus in (2-a) and (2-c) are derived by movement, whereas the strategy in (2-b) with resumption is the result of base-generation. Moreover, we will show that the strategy in (2-c) is an instance of *say*-complementation (see, e.g., Driemel and Kouneli 2022) because the special element *si* corresponds to the Igbo verb ‘to say’. We will further investigate the size of the embedded clauses in all cases to verify the hypothesis that it is indeed the (syntactic or morphological) presence of a complementizer that causes the opacity, and speculate on potential reasons behind its blocking effect.

References

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