

DPs are selected, not licensed: evidence from Tamil and other languages

This talk presents an alternative account of DP distribution that is based on DPs being selected rather than being Case-theoretically licensed. We argue that the fundamental prediction made by Case theory, namely that obligatorily controlled PRO and overt DPs are in complementary distribution, is not empirically justified. To this end, we provide data from nonfinite clausal adjuncts, complements and nominalizations in Tamil where subject controlled PRO and overt subject DPs seem to alternate in free variation. We further show that this type of problematic alternation is not a language-specific quirk but a widely attested crosslinguistic phenomenon with supporting evidence from Malayalam, Sinhala, Latin, Irish, Middle English as well as the Present-Day English gerundival construction. While standard Case theories are equipped to handle either the occurrence of PRO or that of an overt subject, they are unable to consistently handle the alternation between both types of elements described here.