

On the universality of adjunct islands: Evidence from Malayalam

Savithry Namboodiripad & Grant Goodall (UC San Diego)

snambood@ucsd.edu

The fact that adjunct clauses behave as islands for filler-gap dependencies is well known, but there is no consensus as to why this behavior occurs (see, e.g., Huang 1982, Nunes & Uriagereka 2000, Rackowski & Richards 2005, Truswell 2007). One complicating factor is that adjunct clauses do not seem to be islands in all languages. We examine one such language, Malayalam, for which extraction out of a temporal adjunct clause yields relatively acceptable results in isolation, making it appear that adjuncts are not islands. However, by means of a formal acceptability experiment, we show that such extraction shows the hallmarks of an island effect: it is significantly less acceptable than its counterpart without extraction, while similar degradation does not occur with extraction otherwise.

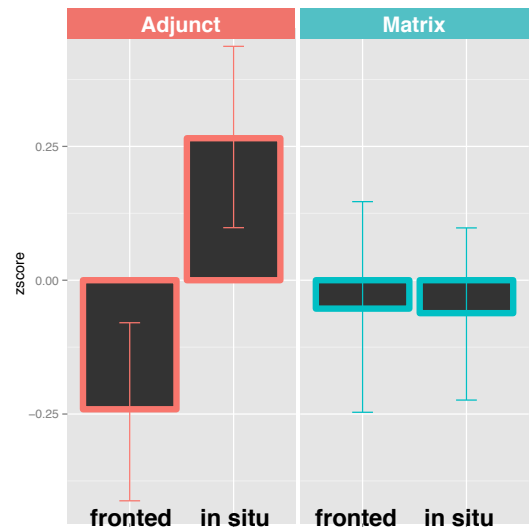
Experiment: All experimental stimuli were *wh*-questions containing an adjunct clause, varying by the CLAUSE with which the *wh*-word is associated (matrix or adjunct clause) and by the POSITION of the *wh*-word (fronted or in situ). Sample stimuli are in (1) – (2). Stimuli were distributed among lists using a Latin Square and were randomized. Each participant saw 5 tokens of each condition, as well as 50 filler items. 18 participants (all native speakers residing in a Malayalam-speaking region of India) rated these sentences using a 7-point scale.

(1) Adjunct

- a. Ammu [eṅṅə ɕaitəkaɪɳatə]_{ADJ} vi:ṭilek:yə pojiṭə?
 Ammu [what doing.after]_{ADJ} home went
 Ammu went home after doing what?
- b. eṅṅə Ammu [ɕaitəkaɪɳatə]_{ADJ} vi:ṭilek:yə pojiṭə?
 what Ammu [doing.after]_{ADJ} home went
 What did Ammu go home after doing?

(2) Matrix

- a. Ammu [Unni vi:ṭilek:yə pojikaɪɳatə]_{ADJ} eṅṅə ɕaitətə?
 Ammu [Unni home going.after]_{ADJ} what did
 Ammu did what after Unni went home?
- b. eṅṅə Ammu [Unni vi:ṭilek:yə pojikaɪɳatə]_{ADJ} ɕaitətə?
 what Ammu [Unni home going.after]_{ADJ} did
 What did Ammu do after Unni went home?



Results: Results were converted to z-scores and are presented in the figure (error bars = SE). Crucially, there is a significant interaction between clause and position ($p=0.0039$), reflecting the fact that *wh*-words associated with adjunct clauses are significantly worse when they are fronted ($p<0.001$), while there is no such degradation with matrix clauses.

Discussion: The above results show that there is an adjunct island effect in Malayalam. Methodologically, this highlights the importance of a full factorial design in studying island effects. In isolation, the adjunct island violation condition (e.g. (1b)) is not very low in acceptability (avg. raw score=3.1; c.f. 3.4 for (2a)), which aligns with previous non-experimental work, but the island effect becomes visible when compared to the corresponding baseline condition without fronting of the *wh*-word (e.g. (1a)). The discovery of an island effect in Malayalam suggests that we should not be too quick to assume that languages may vary as to whether adjunct clauses are islands without the use of careful experimental methods. Many difficult questions remain about the varying acceptability of adjunct island violations both within and across languages – we need to be able to extricate island effects from low acceptability, for example – but it may turn out that adjunct islands are universal after all.