

On a selective “violation” of the Complex NP Constraint*

Guglielmo Cinque

Violations of the Complex NP Constraint (CNPC, Ross 1967) are occasionally reported in the literature. Although one perhaps would not expect (the principles underlying) the constraint to be subject to cross-linguistic variation, some authors have actually suggested that the CNPC may hold in some languages but not others (see Allwood 1976,1982; Maxwell 1979; Hawkins 2007, §7.4.1, among others).

Setting aside arguably spurious cases (e.g. the CNPC violations originally noted in Kuno 1973,239f for Japanese (and similarly Korean), which Han and Kim 2004 show to be only apparent; or the Akan cases discussed in Saah and Goodluck 1995, which involve covert resumptive pronouns), in some languages there appear to be some genuine violations; for example the extractions from CNPs in Scandinavian documented in work of the ‘70s and early ‘80s (See Erteschik-Shir 1973, chapter 2, 1982, for Danish; Andersson 1974,1982, Engdahl 1980,1982, Allwood 1976, 1982, for Swedish; Engdahl 1980, Taraldsen 1978,fn6,1981,1982 for Norwegian; and Engdahl 1997 for a more recent general discussion):¹

*To Jan, for his inspiring work on the theory of locality. Thanks to Richard Kayne for helpful comments on a previous draft.

¹Although Maling and Zaenen (1982,232) say that “in Icelandic such extractions seem to be impossible”, they also add that one of their informants accepted an example like (i) (see their fn.6):

- (i) Kaffi þekki ég engan á Íslandi, sem ekki drekkur

Coffee know I no one in Iceland that not drinks

‘Coffee, I know no one in Iceland who doesn’t drink’

Engdahl (1997, fn.28) also reports that her informants found at least some of the corresponding extractions from CNPs in Icelandic and Faroese acceptable.

(1)a Suppe kender jeg mange der kan lide (Danish - Erteschik-Shir 1973,67)

soup know I many who like

‘Soup, I know many people who like’

b Johan känner jag ingen som tycker om (Swedish - Engdahl 1980,95)

Johan know I no one that likes

‘I do not know anyone who likes Johan’

c Her er en bok som jeg ikke har møtt noen som har lest (Norwegian – Taraldsen 1982,205)

Here is a book that I not have met anybody that has read

Such violations are apparently possible under rather stringent conditions: the Head of the relative clause must be indefinite and non specific; the verb of which the Head is an argument must be an existential verb, or a verb like “know”, “see”, “meet”, “look for” “have”, etc.; and the position relativized in the relative clause from which a constituent is extracted must be the subject (cf. Erteschik 1973, chapter 2; Taraldsen 1978,fn6; Engdahl 1980,95; 1997, passim; Kluender 1992,243ff).²

While it is generally assumed in the literature that such violations are present in Scandinavian and absent from Romance and English (Engdahl 1997,§7), in the present squib evidence is presented that they also found, under comparable conditions, in these languages, thus raising the question whether the CNPC can really be the locus of independent parametric variation.³

² But see Engdahl (1997,§2) for one example from Norwegian where the subject is extracted from a (free) relative clause on the object, and (i) of fn.4 below. Engdahl (1980) argues that cases such as (1) involve movement rather than base generation of a *pro*, and that their acceptability is not due to the fact that they comply with subadjacency because extraction occurs from an extraposed clause. The Italian cases discussed below show it even more clearly.

³ Some minor differences remain among the languages having to do with what type of extraction gives the best result (Topicalization, Clitic Left Dislocation, *wh*-relative or interrogative movement) and with what counts as the best non-specific indefinite relative clause Head (bare negative quantifiers like *nobody*, *nothing*, non-negative quantified phrase, like *some*, *many XP*, etc.), but hopefully these differences will turn out to be related to independent differences among

Consider the following grammatical Italian sentences, similar to the Scandinavian examples in (1):⁴

(2)a Giorgio, al quale non conosco nessuno che sarebbe disposto ad affidare i propri risparmi,..

‘Giorgio, whom I don’t know anybody that would be ready to entrust with their savings,..’

b Ida, di cui non c’è nessuno che sia mai stato innamorato,..

‘Ida, whom there is nobody that was ever in love with,..’

c Gianni, al quale non c’è nessuno che sia in grado di resistere,..

‘Gianni, whom there is nobody that is able to resist,..’

These cases are bona fide cases of extractions as they involve PPs rather than DPs (which could also be base generated A-bar bound *pro*’s - Cinque 1990, chapter 3).

the languages in question. For relevant observations, see Engdahl (1997,§7). Allwood (1982,32) also mentions the existence of dialect differences in Swedish to the effect that “eastern dialects are more restrictive than western ones” in their extractions from CNPs.

⁴ Extraction from (at least some) relative clauses that relativize the direct object is also possible in Italian:

(i) Gianni, a cui_k non c’è proprio niente che_j potremmo far avere t_j t_k in giornata,..

‘Gianni, whom there is really nothing that we could provide him with in one day,..’

I thank Paola Beninca’ and Alessio Muro for checking my judgments on (i) and the sentences in (2).

Given that Clitic Left Dislocation also shows sensitivity to the CNPC (Cinque 1977, 1990, chapter 2), the sentences in

(ii) are even closer analogues to some of the Swedish *satsflätor* discussed in the literature on Scandinavian:

(ii)a **A Giorgio**, non c’è niente che **gli** interessi veramente.

To Giorgio, there is nothing that to-him interests really

‘Giorgio, there is nothing that really interests him.’

b **Di questo argomento**, conosco/ci sono molte persone che **ne** saprebbero parlare molto meglio di me.

of this topic, I know/there are many people that of-it could talk much better than me

‘This topic, I know/ there are many people who could speak about much better than me.’

Their acceptability cannot simply be attributed to the possible extraposition of the relative CP, to the effect that extraction would then only cross a single bounding node (CP). Relative clauses relativizing an oblique argument can also be extraposed ((3)); yet, they resist extraction ((4)):

(3)a Niénte ha fatto finora di cui potersi vantare con i suoi superiori

‘Nothing he did so far about which to boast with his bosses.’

b Non conosco nessuno in questa città con cui potrei parlare di questi argomenti

‘I know nobody in this town with whom I could talk about these topics.’

(4)a *I suoi superiori, con i quali_k non ha fatto niente finora [di cui potersi vantare t_k],...

‘His bosses, with whom he did nothing so far about which to boast,...’

b *Sono argomenti di cui_k non conosco nessuno in questa città [con cui potrei parlare t_k]

‘These are topics about which I know nobody in this town with whom I could talk.’

Examples similar to (2) are also apparently possible in French ((5)) and in Spanish ((6)):⁵

(5)a Jean, à qui il n'y a personne qui puisse s'opposer,...

‘Jean, whom there is nobody that could oppose,...’

b (?)C'est un endroit où il n'y a personne qui voudrait vivre.

‘It's a place where there is no one that would like to live.’

c (?)Jean, à qui je ne connais personne qui soit prêt à confier ses secrets,...

‘Jean, to whom I don't know anybody that would be ready to confide their secrets,...’

(6)a Ida, de quien no hay nadie que se haya enamorado alguna vez,...

⁵ I thank Vincent Homer, Marie Claude Paris, and Dominique Sportiche for the French data and María Martínez-Atienza for the Spanish data.

‘Ida, whom there is nobody that was ever in love with,...’

b Juan, al que no hay nadie que sea capaz de soportar,...

Juan, whom there is nobody that can stand,...

c Ese es un sitio en el que no hay nadie que querría vivir.

‘This is a place where there is no one that would like to live.’

Although it is generally assumed that English disallows extractions from CNPs entirely, one finds that similar examples are acceptable (to varying degrees to at least some native speakers). See (7).⁶

(7)a Then you look at what happens in languages that you know and languages that you have a friend who knows (Charles Ferguson, lecture at the University of Chicago, May 1971; cited in Kuno 1976,423)

b Isn’t that the song that Paul and Stevie were the only ones who wanted to record (Chung and McCloskey 1983,708)

c This is the kind of weather that there are many people who like (Erteschik-Shir 2007,163)⁷

d This is the child who there is nobody who is willing to accept (cf. Kuno 1976,423)

e This is a paper that we really need to find someone to intimidate with. (Kluender 1992,243)

⁶ Thanks to David Pesetsky, Megan Rae, and Peter Svenonius for sharing their judgments with me. Even though examples such as those in (7) and (i) are given as possible in the literature, some of my informants found them either ungrammatical or highly marginal, saying that they become better if *that* replaces *who*. Also relevant in this connection are Kayne’s (2008a) notes 30 and 38.

(i)a Violence is something that there are many Americans who condone. (McCawley 1981,108)

b This is the one that Bob Wall was the only person who hadn’t read. (McCawley 1981,108)

c This is a paper that we really need to find someone who understands (Chung and McCloskey 1983,708)

d That’s one trick that I’ve known a lot of people who’ve been taken in by (Chung and McCloskey 1983,708)

e This is a paper that we really need to find someone who understands (Noam Chomsky, cited in Koster 1986,169)

⁷ The example is originally from Erteschik-Shir and Lappin (1979).

Comparable examples in German ((8), Josef Bayer, p.c.; Kvam 1983,124,fn34; Andersson and Kvam 1984,46), and in Bulgarian ((9), Iliyana Krapova, p.c.) are on the other hand apparently ungrammatical.

(8)a *Diese Schrift gibt es niemand, der gelesen hat.

This writing there is nobody who has read.

b *Johann, dem es keinen Freund gibt, der helfen kann,...

‘Johann, whom (dat.) there is no friend who can help, ...’

c *Dies habe ich nie jemand getroffen, der getan hat (Kvam 1983,124,fn.34)

‘This, I have never met anyone who has done’

(9)a *Ivan, na kojto njama nikoj, kojto/deto može da mu kaže novinata.

Ivan, to whom there-isn’t nobody who/that can-3sg him-Cl.dat tell-3sg news-the

b *Ivan, na kojto njama nito edin prijatel, kojto/deto iska da mu pomaga.

Ivan, to whom there-isn’t not one friend who/that wants to him help

The languages that appear not to allow for the selective extraction from CNPs discussed here seem to involve relative clauses introduced by “ordinary” relative pronouns (*der*, etc. and *welcher*, etc., in German), or by either “ordinary” relative pronouns or an exclusively relative “complementizer” (*kojto*, etc., and *deto*, respectively, in Bulgarian).⁸ The languages that instead appear to allow for the selective extraction in question utilize a relative clause introducer which is also used in constructions other than “ordinary” relative clauses (*som/sem* in Scandinavian; *che/que* in Italian,

⁸ For evidence that the *deto* which introduces emotive factive clauses is the same *deto* which introduces relative clauses (in that the former are in fact hidden relative clauses), see Krapova (2009).

French and Spanish).⁹ Putting this together with the fact that in English such extractions appear to be possible (or at least more acceptable) if the relative clause is introduced by *that* (or \emptyset in infinitival and reduced relatives) rather than by “ordinary” relative pronouns like *who*¹⁰, it becomes tempting to think that extraction is really not out of an “ordinary” relative clause.

Thinking of languages/dialects that allow “ordinary” relative pronouns to co-occur with *that* or *che/que*, in the order relative pronoun > *that/che/que* (e.g., Middle English, and various Romance dialects), the fact that extraction is more readily available with *that/che/que* than with “ordinary” relative pronouns can perhaps be understood in terms of movement through the higher Spec of Comp; the one which hosts “ordinary” relative pronouns, and which is presumably not filled when the “weak” relative pronouns *that/che/que* are used.¹¹ The additional fact that extraction is available

⁹ If English *that* and French *que* are a variety of relative pronouns (Kayne 2008a,b, and Sportiche 2008), then the distinction should be thought of in terms of different types of relative pronouns (see the text below).

¹⁰ Goodluck, Foley and Sedivy (1992,191fn11) report a similar contrast in Swedish clauses introduced by *som* and by *vilken* (example provided by Christer Platzack):

- (i) Blommor känner jag till en affär som/??vilken säljer

Flowers know I (particle) a shop that/which sells

The same contrast is found in Italian

- (ii) Il premier, a cui/al quale non sono molti i giornalisti che/*?i quali oserebbero porre una simile domanda...

‘The prime minister to whom the journalists that/who would dare put such a question are not many,...’

(cf. *Non sono molti i giornalisti i quali oserebbero porre una simile domanda al premier* ‘the journalists who would dare put such a question to the prime minister are not many’, possible in the marked restrictive construction discussed in Cinque 1995,§1.5).

Those English speakers that do not make a difference between *who* and *that* in (7) and (i) of fn. 6 perhaps allow *who* to be in the same class as *that*.

¹¹ If “ordinary” and “weak” relative pronouns are featurally distinct, and a “weak” relative pronoun is allowed to pass through the Spec of the higher Comp acquiring its features, then no Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 2004) violation should be triggered. The fact that *deto* in Bulgarian (perhaps also a “weak” relative pronoun) blocks extraction perhaps indicates the necessary presence of an operator filling the Spec of the higher Comp.

only in the presence of indefinite non-specific relative clause Heads may possibly be understood in terms of the absence of a DP initial (silent) demonstrative/operator that would independently block the extraction (cf. Kayne 2008a, end of §10). As complements, but not adjuncts, can be extracted from these CNPs (see the contrast between (2) and (10a) in Italian, and that between (7b) and (10b) in English), such CNPs seem to qualify as weak islands:

(10)a *E' un modo in cui non conosco nessuno che si sia mai comportato.

‘It’s a manner in which I don’t know anybody who ever behaved’

b *Isn’t that the color which Paul and Stevie were the only ones who painted their yacht?

(Postal 1998,170)

For a different idea (according to which such extractions are out of a complement small clause rather than out of a CNP), see Kush, Omaki and Hornstein (2009), which is otherwise quite similar in spirit to the present analysis in doubting, for example, that the CNPC could be parameterized differently in different languages.

A potential counterexample to the idea that extraction is blocked out of CNPs introduced by “ordinary” relative pronouns is represented by Romanian, which apparently allows extractions from CNPs introduced by the relative pronoun *care* (‘who,which’). See the examples in (i), kindly provided by Alexandra Cornilescu and Iulia Zegrean:

(i)a Ion, pe care nu cunosc pe nimeni care să-l aprecieze pentru ceea ce a făcut,...

‘Ion, who (Acc.) I do not know anybody who appreciates him for what he did,...’

b Ion, căruia nu este nimeni care poate să-i reziste,...

‘Ion, who (Dat.) there is nobody who can resist,...’

There is however evidence that *care* in colloquial Romanian has (also) been reanalyzed as a “complementizer” (or “weak” relative pronoun) (see Grosu 1994,212). This is clearly shown by examples such as (ii), from Gheorghe (2004,279):

(ii) A venit la noi un elvețian, care proiectul lui l-a interesat per director

‘A Swiss came to us, who his project interested the director’

References

- Andersson, Sven-Gunnar and S.Kvam (1984) *Satzverschränkung im heutigen Deutsch*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Allwood, Jens S. 1976. The complex np constraint as a non-universal rule and some semantic factors influencing the acceptability of swedish sentences which violate the cnpc. In J.Stillings, ed., *University of Massachusetts Occasional Papers in Linguistics* 2.1-20 (reprinted with a postscript as Allwood 1982: <http://www.ling.gu.se/~jens/publications/docs001-050/028a.pdf>).
- Allwood, Jens S. 1982. The Complex Noun Phrase Constraint in Swedish. In Engdahl & Ejerhed (eds), pp.15-32.
- Andersson, Lars-Gunnar. 1974. Topicalization and relative clause formation. *Gothenburg Papers in Theoretical Linguistics* 25.
- Andersson, Lars-Gunnar. 1982. What is Swedish an Exception to? Extractions and Island Constraints. In Engdahl & Ejerhed (eds), pp.33-45
- Chung, Sandra and James McCloskey. 1983. On the Interpretation of Certain Island Facts in GPSG. *Linguistic Inquiry* 14.704-713
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1977. The Movement Nature of Left Dislocation. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8,397-412
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1990. *Types of A-bar Dependencies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1995. On the theory of relative clauses and markedness. In Id. *Italian Syntax and Universal Grammar*. 54-103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Engdahl, Elisabet. 1980. *Wh*-constructions in Swedish and the relevance of subjacency. In J. T. Jensen (ed.), *Cahiers Linguistiques D'Ottawa: Proceedings of the Tenth Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society*. Pp. 89-108. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Department of Linguistics.
- Engdahl, Elisabet. 1982. Restrictions on Unbounded Dependencies in Swedish. In Engdahl and Ejerhed (eds.) pp. 151-174.
- Engdahl, Elisabet. 1997. Relative Clause Extractions in Context. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 60, 51-79 (<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.44.8093>).
- Engdahl, Elisabet and Eva Ejerhed. 1982. *Readings on Unbounded Dependencies in Scandinavian Languages*, Umeå: University of Umeå (distributed by Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm).
- Erteschik-Shir, Nomi. 1973. *On the Nature of Island Constraints*. Ph.D. Dissertation, MIT.
- Erteschik-Shir, Nomi. 1982. Extractability in Danish and the Pragmatic Principle of Dominance. In Engdahl and Ejerhed (eds.) pp. 175-191.
- Erteschik-Shir, Nomi. 2007. *Information Structure. The Syntax-Discourse Interface*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Erteschik-Shir and Shalom Lappin. 1979. Dominance and the functional explanation of island phenomena. *Theoretical Linguistics* 6.41-85
- Gheorghe, Mihaela. 2004. *Propoziția relativă*. Pitești: Editura Paralela 45
- Goodluck, Helen, Michele Foley and Julie Sedivy. 1992. Adjunct Islands and Acquisition. In Goodluck and Rochemont, eds., *Island Constraints. Theory, Acquisition and Processing*. 181-194. Dordrecht: Kluwer
- Goodluck, Helen and Michael Rochemont. 1992. Island Constraints: An Introduction. In H. Goodluck and M. Rochemont, eds., *Island Constraints. Theory, Acquisition and Processing*. 1-33. Dordrecht: Kluwer
- Grosu, Alexander. 1994. *Three Studies in Locality and Case*. London: Routledge
- Han, Chung-hye and Jong-Bok Kim. 2004. Are There “Double Relative Clauses” in Korean? *Linguistic Inquiry* 35, 315-337.

- Hawkins, John A. 2007. *Efficiency and Complexity in Grammars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kayne, Richard S. 2008a. Antisymmetry and the lexicon. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 8.1-32
- Kayne, Richard S. 2008b. Why Isn't *This* a Complementizer. Forthcoming in P.Svenonius, ed., *Functional Structure from Top to Toe*. New York: Oxford University Press (available online at: <http://ling.auf.net/lingBuzz/000726>).
- Kluender, Robert. 1992. Deriving Island Constraints from Principles of Predication. In H.Goodluck and M.Rochemont, eds., *Island Constraints. Theory, Acquisition and Processing*. 223-258. Dordrecht: Kluwer
- Koster, Jan. 1986. *Domains and Dynasties. The Radical Autonomy of Syntax*. Dordrecht: Foris
- Krapova, Iliyana. 2009. Bulgarian relative and factive clauses with an invariant complementizer. To appear in *Lingua*.
- Kuno, Susumu.1973. *The Structure of the Japanese Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Kuno, Susumu.1976. Subject, Theme, and the Speaker's empathy: a re-examination of relativization phenomena. In C.Li (ed.) *Subject and Topic*. 417-444. New York, Academic Press.
- Kush, Dave, Akira Omaki, and Norbert Hornstein. 2009. Reanalysing Relative Clause Island Effects. Paper presented at 32nd GLOW, Nantes, France) (power point available at: http://ling.umd.edu/~omaki/Research/GLOW_Final.pdf).
- Kvam, S. 1983. *Linksverschachtelung im Deutschen und Norwegischen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Maling, Joan and Annie Zaenen. 1982. A Phrase Structure Account of Scandinavian Extraction Phenomena. In P.Jacobson and G.K.Pullum, eds., *The Nature of Syntactic Representation*. 229-282. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Maxwell, D.N. 1979. Strategies of Relativization and NP Accessibility. *Language* 55.352-371
- McCawley, James. 1974. Toward a coherent account of relative (and relative-like) clauses. Presented at the Harvard Linguistics Circle Colloquium, Cambridge, Mass., November 1974.
- McCawley, James. 1981. The Syntax and Semantics of English Relative Clauses. *Lingua* 53.99-149
- Postal, Paul M. 1998. *Three Investigations of Extraction*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

- Rizzi, Luigi. 2004. Locality and Left Periphery. In A. Belletti, ed., *Structures and Beyond. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, vol. 3*. 223-251. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, John Robert. 1967. *Constraints on Variables in Syntax*. Ph.D. Diss. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Saah, Kofi K. and Helen Goodluck. 1995. Island Effects in Parsing and Grammar: Evidence from Akan. *The Linguistic Review* 12, 381-409.
- Sportiche, Dominique. 2008. Inward Bound: splitting the *wh*-paradigm and French relative *qui*. Ms., UCLA (available online at: <http://ling.auf.net/lingBuzz/000623>).
- Taraldsen, Knut Tarald. 1978. The Scope of *Wh* Movement in Norwegian. *Linguistic Inquiry* 9, 623-640.
- Taraldsen, Knut Tarald. 1981. The Theoretical Interpretation of a Class of "Marked" Extractions. In A. Belletti, L. Brandi & L. Rizzi (eds) *The Theory of Markedness in Generative Grammar*. 475-516. Scuola Normale Superiore: Pisa.
- Taraldsen, Knut Tarald. 1982. Extraction from relative clauses in Norwegian. In Engdahl & Ejerhed (eds), pp.205-221.