Agrammatism and the Lexicon-Syntax Interface: Dutch Aphasics’ Performance on Saturated Experiencer Verbs

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Grodzinsky’s (1995) Trace Based Account (TBA) has been one of the most influential accounts of agrammatic’s interpretation of semantically reversible passive sentences. It states that syntactic movement is hampered: the traces of moved nominals are deleted so that the theta role cannot be transmitted to the NP, which is assigned a role by a non-linguistic strategy by virtue of its lineal position.

Besides empirical problems (Piñango 2000; Beretta and Munn 1998; among others), the TBA encounters important theoretical shortcomings. The Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) proposes to eliminate the notion of trace due to the Inclusiveness Condition, so that the TBA no longer makes any sense within this framework. Moreover, other authors claim that the damage in agrammatism is not due to damage in the core of the syntax but due to a processing limitation at the interface levels, such as syntax-discourse (Avrutin 2000).

The proposal defended here follows the latter line of thought. Not only the syntax-discourse but also the lexicon-syntax interface is affected in agrammatism. Following Reinhart’s (2002) operationalization of this interface, I put forward the hypothesis that some operations on the lexical entries of the verbs are impaired. An experiment is carried out, which provides empirical data that show that the problem in agrammatism cannot be movement, as the TBA states, but that the impairment is located at the interface between the lexicon and the syntax.

References