

ACQUISITION AND CREOLIZATION OF CONDITION C “VIOLATIONS”
IN KADIWÉU AND PORTUGUESE¹

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A Condição C, a qual proíbe coindexação de uma expressão R com um elemento pronominal que a c-comande, é considerada parte do componente inato da gramática. Mas, ser inato significa não necessitar de um mecanismo detalhado de aquisição? Uma situação problemática é apresentada por línguas que parecem violar a Condição C. As línguas polissintéticas são caracterizadas por um apagamento intensivo de sintagmas nominais (SN), deixando estruturas nas quais categorias vazias podem ser coindexadas com SNs em estruturas subjacentes (e.g. (1) $\langle \rangle_i$ disse que João_i lavou os pratos). Note que em uma língua *pro-drop*, como português, isto não é permitido. Baker 1995 propõe que SNs são adjuntos em línguas polissintéticas e portanto a Condição C não é verdadeiramente violada. Entretanto, mesmo que a Condição C não seja realmente violada, ela certamente parece ser para quem ouve (1). A cultura bilingue kadiwéu-português apresenta um cenário interessante para a investigação sobre aquisição da Condição C, pois estruturas idênticas em português e kadiwéu apresentam possibilidades bastante distintas para coindexação. Testamos 31 crianças falantes de kadiwéu e 18 crianças falantes de português entre 4 e 14 anos dentro da aldeia kadiwéu. Os resultados mostram que 77% das crianças falantes de kadiwéu permitem coindexação entre o sujeito vazio da oração principal com um SN na encaixada quando este sintagma é sujeito, e 35% quando objeto. Surpreendentemente, obtivemos o mesmo resultado entre as crianças kadiwéu que adquiriram português como primeira língua (67% e 30% respectivamente). Testamos também 30 crianças, entre 9 e 10 anos, monolíngues em português em São Paulo. Estas crianças não apresentam liberdade em coindexação e nem mesmo uma assimetria entre sujeito e objeto (20% e 24% respectivamente). Este trabalho discute os mecanismos relevantes para a aquisição da condição C sob a luz destes resultados.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the principles and parameters approach to language acquisition, the focus of much research is on how and when children develop the relevant principles that constrain the possible structures and interpretations in the language they are acquiring. The acquisition of constraints is generally considered to be underdetermined by the language input that children experience. Since constraints are negative in nature and the child receives little or no negative evidence that would be sufficient to specify the form of such constraints, they are considered to be a prime candidates for the innate component of the grammar.

Empirical research in this area has tended to take one of two paths. In some cases, researchers have demonstrated that constraints are present in children who are at the very beginning of acquiring the relevant structures, hence indicating the innateness of those constraints (Crain, 1991; Gordon, 1985). Alternatively, it might be found that such constraints are not present early on, and it is therefore necessary to develop accounts based on learning, maturation or the resetting of parameters.

In the present paper, we want to consider the issue of how constraints, whether acquired or innate, interact with the structures that undergird them. In particular, we will report on a study of children who are acquiring two languages, Kadiwéu and Portuguese, which differ fundamentally in the structures that specify the conditions for constraints on binding. In particular, while one of the languages, Portuguese, follows the universal constraint based on Condition C, Kadiwéu, on the other hand, shows apparent violations of this constraint. In this case, then, children are acquiring two languages that differ fundamentally in the interpretation of coreference constraints. In the present paper, we will present evidence that the Portuguese acquired by Kadiwéu children is creolized with respect to condition C. That is, they show judgments in Portuguese that reflect Kadiwéu binding conditions. If this is an accurate characterization, then it represents a significant insight that relatively covert properties can be infected from one language to another.

Condition C prohibits coreference of an R-expression with a c-commanding nominal element, thus prohibiting coreference of *he* and *John* in sentences like:

(1) *He_i said that John_i washed the dishes

Notice that when a language allows pro-drop, as in Portuguese, the empty category <e> still obeys condition C in prohibiting the coreference of the empty category with the R-expression (*John*):

(2) *<e_i> falou que Joao_i lavou os pratos

Kadiwéu is typical of certain “polysynthetic” languages which are characterized by extensive dropping of nominal phrases leaving structures in which empty categories

can be coreferent with nominal phrases in lower clauses in apparent violation of condition C, as in (3) and (4).

(3) me: Joao me iwilegi Ginodi.
y-me:n *Joao* *me* *y-wilegi* *Gino-di*
 3sg.SUBJ-say John COMP 3sg.SUBJ-wash plate-pl
 ‘<e>_i said that the John_i washed the dishes.’

(4) yowo:Godi me yema: Joao.
y-owo:-God *me* *y-ema:n* *Joao*
 3sg.SUBJ-think-think COMP 3sg.SUBJ-want John
 ‘<e>_i knows that e_j loves John_i.’

The questions that we will address in this paper are:

- Is condition C actually violated in Kadiwéu?
- How do children acquire the appropriate structures to determine binding conditions?
- Are there default parameters for binding?
- How do Kadiwéu children acquire Portuguese binding?
- How do Portuguese and Kadiwéu affect each other in this environment?
- How does Kadiwéu children’s Portuguese differ from Brazilian children’s Portuguese for binding?
- Are there asymmetries between Subject and Object?

2. BINDING IN POLYSYNTHETIC LANGUAGES

The first attempt to account for polysynthetic languages within the framework of generative theory was Hale’s (1983) classification of these languages as “nonconfigurational”, having the properties: free constituent order, pervasive dropping of NPs, and the existence of discontinuous constituents. Let us consider three proposals that attempt to explain why such languages might allow condition C violations.

Jelinek (1984) explains the properties of nonconfigurational languages by proposing that pronominal clitics and affixes are arguments; NPs are adjuncts, and therefore they can assume free order or be omitted. In the case of (3), for *y-wilegi* (*wash*), the clitic *y-* would be the subject, whereas the NP *Joao* would be an adjunct, and not part of the argument structure of the verb. Since *Joao* is not an argument and is not c-commanded by the Subject inflection of the matrix verb, it can be coreferent with that subject without violating Condition C. This proposal has not been universally accepted, primarily because the existence of inflectional morphemes functioning as arguments challenges the idea of a fixed phrase structure over which syntactic relationships such as subject and object can be defined.

An alternative analysis is presented by Baker (1995), who argues that polysynthetic languages are obligatory pro-drop languages, where empty *pro* occupies

the structural argument positions of the verb. Again, the Condition C “violations” that characterize polysynthetic languages follow from the fact that NPs are adjuncts. If an NP is an adjunct, the empty *pro* in argument position does not c-command it and Condition C again is not violated. This proposal, however, makes wrong predictions for Kadiwéu. If the verbal arguments were *pro* in Kadiwéu, one would expect that coreference between a main-clause argument and a nominal phrase in the complement clause would be impossible, since *pro* c-commands any of the NPs inside that complement clause. This is not the case. A pronominal subject in the main clause can be coreferent with a NP inside a complement clause in Kadiwéu, as in (3) and (4).

One could question whether the embedded clauses in (3) and (4) are indeed complement clauses. If they were adjunct clauses, Baker’s analysis could be maintained for Kadiwéu because the coindexation of an argument in a main clause with a noun phrase in an adjunct clause does not violate Condition C (e.g. *I saw her before Mary died*). However, the analysis of the embedded sentences above as complement clauses is supported by the fact extraction from inside these sentence is allowed, as shown in 5. Example 6 shows that extraction from adjunct clauses is impossible.

- (5) igamei me yema: me
 wh-place COMP 3sg.SUBJ-want COMP

 Inoqe Joao lod:a:jo?
 3sg.SUBJ-break-valency John 3POSS-knife
 ‘Where_i does he want to break John’s knife t_i?’

- (6) *igamei dapa:we le:Godi Maria
 wh-place 3sg.SUBJ-theme-scream because Mary

 yaqadi NapalwaGa?
 3SUBJ-find Clay-pl
 *’Where_i did he scream because Mary found clay t_i?’

Furthermore, there are certain asymmetries between transitive subjects, intransitive subjects, and objects that cannot be accounted for in a theory that postulates that all nominal phrases are equally adjuncts. For instance, a transitive subject cannot be relativized, whereas intransitive subjects and objects can. If all nominal phrases were adjuncts they should not behave differently regarding operations involving extraction

- (7) José ane Yema: Maria.
 Joseph relativo 3SUBJ-love Mary
 *’It is Joseph that loves Mary.’
 ‘It is Joseph that Mary loves.’

In a third proposal, Chomsky (1995) suggests that NPs in polysynthetic languages are arguments of the verb, but that they are obligatorily moved into non-argument

(A-bar) specifier positions of CP, thus leaving traces in argument positions. Kadiwéu appears to support this third position. Sandalo 1997, on the basis of the Empty Category Principle, presents evidence that traces occupy arguments positions, whereas NPs occupy CP positions in embedded clauses in Kadiwéu. Moreover, Sandalo (1998) notes that an apparent Condition C violation is allowed in Kadiwéu only when the verb and the complementizer are adjacent. According to Sandalo, Kadiwéu appears to support Chomsky's position because this restriction on Condition C violation suggests that, when a verb is adjoined to C°, the embedded NP arguments can undergo long distance extraction to positions inside of the main clause CP (at LF), and hence Condition C is not actually violated.

In the present study we were interested in whether Kadiwéu children show evidence of condition C violations in Kadiwéu and Portuguese. There are approximately 1,500 speakers of Kadiwéu living in the state of Matto Grosso do Sul in the southwest of Brazil. They occupy a large reservation of 500,000 hectares primarily raising cattle. There is a central village containing a school with small dispersed communities throughout the reservation. A history of violent conflicts with outsiders has led to some isolation. It is only in the last 15 years that there has been extensive contact with Brazilian culture. In this time, there have been several outside marriages, and some Kadiwéus have received higher education outside of the reservation. In the case of mixed marriages to non-Kadiwéu women, the language of the household is Portuguese. Children speak Kadiwéu to each other, and Portuguese is a second language to all adult native Kadiwéus.

3. THE EXPERIMENT

Within the Kadiwéu tribe, we tested 31 Kadiwéu-speaking, and 18 Portuguese-speaking children. They ranged in age from 4 to 14 years. In addition, we tested 30 monolingual Brazilian children near Sao Paulo, aged 9 to 10. This age group was equivalent to the older Kadiwéu children with whom comparisons will be made in the analyses. Children were shown a picture and told a short story providing the context for sentences (7) (Subject coreference) and (8) (Object coreference). In each picture, there was a boy who was mentioned in the sentence, and another person, who could be the referent for the empty subject of the main verb "said". After hearing either (7) or (8), children were asked who said it?

Story 1

Elyodo Joao owidi libaqetedi. Oda domaGa yema: Joao iwilegi lanodi. Oda me:ta Joao iwilegi GoniGinodi. NiGidiaGidi oda nGajo elyodo Joao jGigo iwi dantaGa igodi me iwilegi Ginodi.

'John's mother had a lot of work. She wanted to ask John to do the dishes. Then she said: John, wash our dishes. Later John's mother came to see whether he had already washed the dishes.'

- (8) me: Joao me iwilegi. Ginodi.
 3sg.SUBJ-say John COMP 3sg.SUBJ-wash plate-pl
 ‘<e> said that the John washed the dishes.’

Story 2:

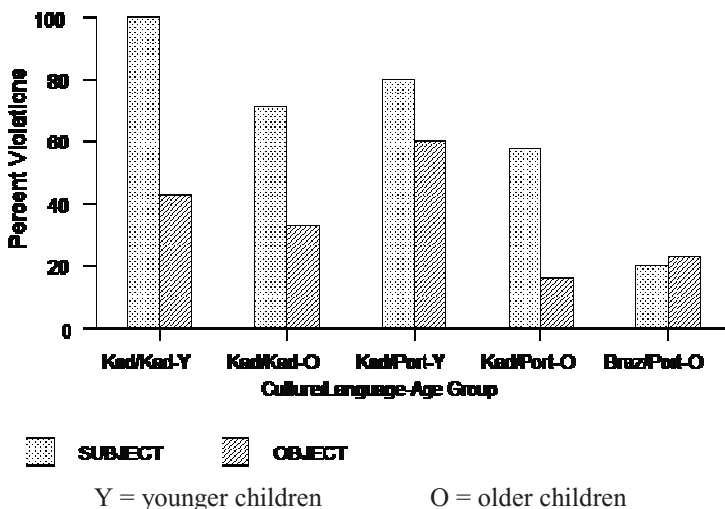
Ika noqo ika Paulo yawaligeGe aka dom:o:jya, niGin:a naGa n:ad:i Jose me icomaGatike ika lad:igod:i. NGaka laqata oda Paulo ja niqoGeti nidom:ojya. Jose enitini.

‘One day Paul was driving a car, when he saw Joseph crossing the street. At this moment, Paul stopped the car. Joseph fell.’

- (9) me: Me yamaGati dom:ojia Jose.
 3sg.SUBJ-say COMP 3sg.SUBJ-hit-valency Car Joseph
 ‘<e> said that the car hit Joseph.’

The data are summarized in Figure 1 separating the data for Younger (Age 4 to 7) and Older (Age 8 to 14) children. The graphs indicate the percentage of children who showed condition C violations (coindexing the subject of *said* with the proper name) for the Subject and Object conditions. The first striking fact about these data is that there is a clear subject-object Asymmetry. 77% of the Kadiwéu-speaking children allowed coreference with the embedded NP when it was the subject, and only 35% when it was the object. Surprisingly, this pattern also held for the Kadiwéu children who spoke Portuguese (67% subject, 30% object). Note that younger children allowed 100% of Condition C violations with subjects. The monolingual children showed no such asymmetry between subject and object for Portuguese (20% subject, 24% object).

Figure 1. SUBJ vs. OBJ Condition C Violations



These results suggest that children do readily allow apparent violations of condition C in Kadiwéu. However, it also appears that the pattern of binding generalizes to the dialect of Portuguese spoken by the children in the tribe, suggesting a creolization of Portuguese with respect to binding constraints.

4. DISCUSSION

How do children acquire the appropriate structures to determine binding conditions? An assumption made by many researchers is that the child assumes a default setting for a parameter with triggering data available to reset the parameter if necessary (Gibson and Wexler, 1994). According to this account (along with the subset principle), the child should assume a default parameter, namely, Condition C prohibits <e> binding into embedded clauses. This would require that the child, at some point, encounter a situation where his parse of a sentence such as (3) or (4) did not match the situation, and this would trigger a resetting of the parameter.

There are two problems with this account. First, it predicts that Kadiwéu-speaking children should start out with the default value (prohibiting Condition C violations) and only later reset the parameter to allow violations. Contrary to this prediction, our data show that younger children allow more condition C violations than older children (for Subject), whereas the Brazilian children show almost no such violations. Of course, it is possible that the default parameter could be set to the Kadiwéu value, but that also seems unlikely given the fact that children as young as 2 years of age obey condition C in English (Crain & McKee (1985).

Another possible problem with the parameter-resetting account is that it leads to the possibility that the child would abandon Condition C altogether, thus allowing <e> to bind freely with any argument. This would lead to the wrong outcome for Kadiwéu, where condition C does hold for certain non-embedded structures as in (10) and (11).

(10) * inoqe Joao nod:a:jo.
 3sg.SUBJ-break John 3POSS-knife
 *’<e>_i broke John’s_i knife.’

(11) *yema Joao
 3sg.SUBJ-love John
 *’<e>_i loves John_i.’

A Cue-Based Approach

Another possibility is that the child does not start out with a particular parameter setting for condition C, *per se*, but rather the binding constraints captured by condition C follow from other aspects of the language being acquired. Hence the child must look for cues in the linguistic structure to indicate whether or not the language allows <e> binding into embedded clauses. The following cues could be used by children to

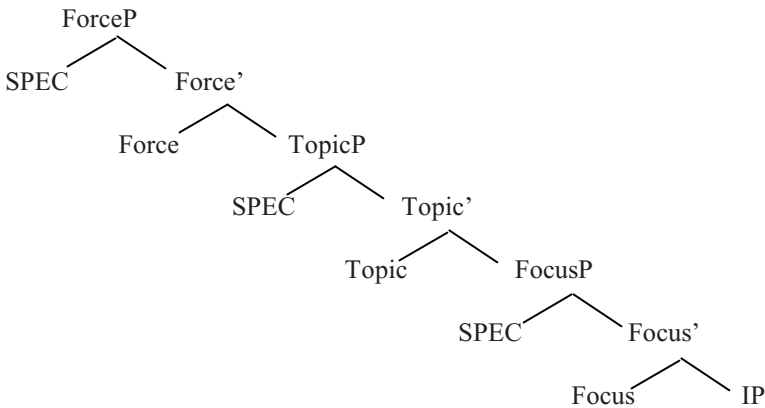
determine that the language they are exposed to is polysynthetic hence allowing binding into embedded clauses. In each case, such cues might be either necessary or sufficient or both.

1. Word order. Kadiwéu allows six constituent orders in main clauses, which interact with Topic (old information) and Focus (new information):

S_TVO_F VO_TS_F S_TO_FV O_TS_FV O_TVS_F VS_FO_T

This interaction of word order with Topic/Focus in the main clause indicates that there is NP dislocation into an A-bar position. According to Rizzi's (1996) analysis, Topics are located inside of CP. Support for the claim that topics are inside of CP in Kadiwéu comes from embedded clauses. Topics must precede the complementizer *naGa* in subordinate clauses.

Rizzi (1996)



Who is building this house? (i.e. talking about the house; that is, *house* is old information)²

- (12) Maria yatemati di:m:igi naGa Pedro yoe.
 Mary 3SUBJ-say House COMP Peter 3SUBJ-make
 ‘Mary said that Peter is building the house.’

What is Peter building? (i.e. talking about Peter; that is, *Peter* is old information)

- (13) Maria yatemati Pedro NaGa yoe di:m:igi.
 Mary 3SUBJ-say Peter COMP 3SUBJ-make house
 ‘Mary said that Peter is building the house.’

² The data collected up to this point of the research show that an object can occupy the [SPEC, TOP] position in embedded clauses only if it is inanimate. When both the subject and the object are animate, the NP that occupies this position is interpreted as the subject.

(see Sandalo 1997 for further discussion and evidence that focus NPs are also inside of CP).

2. Verb Morphology. Verbs are very highly inflected in polysynthetic languages. In Kadiwéu, there are 15 positions in the verb structure including morphemes for quantifiers, anaphors, and internal argument licensers (semantic role markers).

3. Absence of non-referential quantified NPs. Polysynthetic languages are characterized by lacking anaphoric nouns and quantifiers. According to Baker (1995, the proposal that NPs are always outside of IP correctly predicts that anaphoric expressions such as *himself/herself/themselves* and referential quantifiers such as *each other* should be nonexistent in polysynthetic languages. This is because their presence in such languages would lead to a violation of Condition A of the Binding Theory, which states that an anaphoric element must be bound by a c-commanding antecedent in argument position. If there are no NPs in argument position, then Condition cannot be met. Reflexives and reciprocals are thus expressed by verbal morphology. Baker also notes that the proposal that NPs are never inside of the IP predicts that polysynthetic languages should lack nonreferential quantified NPs (e.g. *everyone, everything, nobody, nothing*). Rizzi (1986) observes that quantified NPs cannot be dislocated in Italian (e.g. **Nessuno, lo conosco in questa città*) because pronominal clitics in the domain of a quantifier can only be interpreted as variables bound by that quantifier. But when a pronominal element is treated as a variable, the sentence is ruled out as an instance of vacuous quantification. If every NP is outside of IP, it follows that quantifiers must be impossible in polysynthetic languages because the verb is obligatorily marked by pronominal clitics. In Kadiwéu quantifier notions are also expressed via verbal morphology.

4. Verbs are derived. In order to license grammatical internal arguments (i.e. transitive, ditransitive, and unaccusative clauses), Kadiwéu predicates require the presence of semantic role morphemes. Kadiwéu has six semantic role markers: *-d:* ‘theme’, *-gi* ‘goal’, *-wa ~ -ma* ‘dative’, *-dom ~ -ma ~ -lo* ‘benefactive’, *-k* ‘allative’, and *lokom* ‘adessive’. Examples (14) and (15) show that a stem functions as a noun or a transitive verb depending on whether the semantic role markers are present or not. In (14) they are not present and the stems function as a noun; that is, syntactic arguments cannot be added in spite of the fact that the valency suffix *-Gen:* ‘[+ internal argument]’ is present and in spite of the fact that a Kadiwéu speaker understands that somebody is pierced. In (15), however, the semantic role *-d:* ‘theme’ is present and the stems functions as a transitive clause; that is, there is a grammatical internal argument, ‘1pl.OBJ’.

- (14) LapwaGen:ig:i
l:-apwa-Gen:-nig:i
 3POSS-hole-[+ internal argument]-m.dim
 ‘His bodyguard.’ (the one who becomes pierced)
- (15) God:apwaGe
Go-d:-apwa-Gen:
 1pl.OBJ-theme-hole-[+ internal argument]
 ‘We are challenged.’

Grimshaw (1990) proposes that verbs in English have an argument structure and are theta-markers. Eventive nominals in English have an argument structure as well, but they cannot assign theta-roles. Therefore, in order to have grammatical arguments, eventive nouns need a theta-assigner. Thus, eventive nouns appear with a preposition in English (e.g. *The donation of money to hospitals*) and with a light verb in some constructions of Japanese. Our proposal is that Kadiwéu does not have any lexical category that is able to theta-assign. The elements that we classify as verbs in Kadiwéu are similar to eventive nominals of better known languages: they have an argument structure but they are not able to license grammatical arguments. In order to take grammatical arguments, they need the mediation of elements able to assign theta-roles (see Sandalo 1997 for discussion and see Jelinek & Demers 1994 for arguments that transitive predicates are derived in some Salish languages, which are also polysynthetic).

5. Absence of determiners. Polysynthetic languages have no determiners, and the absence of determiners seems to be correlated with a greater freedom of syntactic movement.

In summary, we propose that these and possibly other facts about the structure of Kadiwéu would cue the child into the fact that the language is polysynthetic. This conclusion should be sufficient to allow the child to deduce that Kadiwéu allows <e> binding into embedded clauses. This account has the advantage of not requiring that the child assume one default parameter setting from the start, nor that there be any specific situation required to trigger a resetting of that parameter. In this sense, the deduction of binding conditions is overdetermined by cues in the language on the assumption that the child’s deductions follow a particular line and make critical assumptions about the interaction of structure and binding.

5. CREOLIZATION OF PORTUGUESE

Why does Portuguese assimilate to Kadiwéu? That is, why do Kadiwéu children acquiring Portuguese as their first language have the same judgments for binding as do

the Kadiwéu children acquiring Kadiwéu as their first language? The hypothesis that we entertain is that the Portuguese acquired by the Kadiwéu children is creolized with Kadiwéu. The Kadiwéus have been undergoing a transition from being mainly dependent upon hunting and fishing to cattle-farming and crop-growing. Although many Kadiwéus support themselves by renting part of their land to local farmers, they are increasingly taking over the management of their own land, helped by an economic development project supported by the Inter American Development Bank. The economic integration which has been happening in the past 15 years impacts in the tribe's language maintenance and marital arrangements. There are several men in the community who have married Portuguese speaker women. The children born from these marriages acquire Portuguese as first language. These are the first children in the reservation to acquire Portuguese, instead of Kadiwéu, as their native language. Thus, in the Kadiwéu tribe, most children learn Kadiwéu as their first language, although some learn Portuguese. Kadiwéu, however, is the language used predominantly by all children, and Portuguese is a second language by all the adults in the tribe. Adults' Portuguese (L2) provides an unsystematic and impoverished model, and children may assimilate Portuguese to Kadiwéu spoken with other children

Evidence for Portuguese creolization comes from comments from Brazilian teachers on "crazy word order" in children's Portuguese texts such as the following:

- (20) Who washed the dishes?
 *pratos lavou Joao.
 dishes washed John

The sentence in (20) is ungrammatical in Portuguese, but it follows the normal $O_T V S_F$ order in Kadiwéu.

If it is true that Portuguese is being creolized into a Kadiwéu structure, then this presents an intriguing and potentially important insight into the nature of language interaction in such situations. At the very least, it suggests that quite covert, subtle constraints can be part of the process by which one language infects another in this situation. Assuming that the Portuguese spoken by the children's mothers is not infected in this manner, this also suggests some interesting possibilities concerning the source of children's inductions about linguistic structure. It should be noted that the Portuguese spoken by the Kadiwéu fathers is generally defective in being a second language, and therefore may trigger the assimilation to Kadiwéu structure.

6. PARALLEL FUNCTION

One very strong finding in our data concerns the asymmetry between Subject and Object in allowing condition C "violations". That is, Kadiwéu children were much more likely to allow binding of the <e> subject into the embedded clause when the NP in that clause was also the Subject. This kind of parallel function is common in grammar such as in the case of interpreting missing arguments in conjoined clauses (e.g, *John saw*

Mary and <e> left). Parallel function has been also implicated in parsing strategies (Sheldon, 1974) and in accounting for children's errors in interpreting embedded clauses (Tavakolian, 1981).

Speas (1990) observes that the same kinds of restrictions on the interpretation of null categories apply in Navajo. According to Speas, "[in Navajo] a matrix null object is permitted only if it is coreferent with the embedded object, and a matrix null subject may...bind only the embedded subject. In addition, an embedded null subject must be coreferent with the matrix subject, and an embedded null object is ruled out altogether" (p.226). In order to account for these facts, Speas proposes the following constraint:

(21) **Parallel Function Constraint** (Speas 1990:232)

"In a construction in which an embedded clause is dislocated and adjoined to the matrix clause, interpret *pro* in a given clause as coreferent with the NP which bears the same GF in the other clause."

Kadiwéu requires the following Parallel Function Constraint:

(22) Coindex an empty element with the closest overt nominal that bears the same GF. If it does not qualify (e.g., inanimate or empty), then coindex with the next closest qualifying overt nominal.

(23) yowo:Godi Maria me yema: Joao.
 3sg.SUBJ-think-valency Mary COMP 3sg.SUBJ-want John
 '<e>_{i/*j} knows that Mary_i loves John_j.'

(24) yowo:Godi me yema: Joao.
 3sg.SUBJ-think-valency COMP 3sg.SUBJ-want John
 '<e>_{i/*j} knows that <e>_j loves John_i.'

In our Object test sentence (8), *the car* is disqualified as a coreferent for main clause subject <e>, and this privilege is passed down to *Paulo*. It is possible that children initially fail to allow this secondary option requiring a stricter form of parallelism. Of course, it could be that this is simply a preference and might also be exhibited to some extent by adults if one were to test them on the same structures.

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