

On island effects in Romanian – the view from relative clause dependencies

Irina Stoica – University of Bucharest

Background. Relative clause dependencies (henceforth RC-dependencies) have long been a matter of debate in the literature on extraction. While initially it was claimed that *wh*-dependencies and RC-dependencies are similar in nature, an increasing body of literature seems to indicate that there is a contrast between the two, the latter allowing extraction more readily than the former, at least in Romance languages (Rizzi 1990, Abeillé et al. 2020).

Aim. Looking at data coming from Romanian, I aim to investigate to what extent RC-dependencies hold in four constructions which are traditionally claimed to be islands for extraction: *wh*-islands, subject-islands, complex-NP-islands and adjunct-islands. Moreover, I will draw a preliminary comparison between the magnitude of island effects across-dependency-type in these four constructions (RC-dependencies vs. *wh*-dependencies).

Method/materials. I conducted two sub-experiments: one testing the availability of extraction out of *wh*-islands and subject-islands, and one testing the availability of extraction out of adjunct-islands and complex-NP-islands. For each sub-experiment, I crossed two within-subject factors: distance (long-distance movement vs. short-distance movement) and construction (non-island/island), thus following a design popularized in the literature on islands by Sprouse (2007). Sample items for the *wh*-island and the complex-NP-island are given in the appendix.

Procedure. Participants were asked to evaluate a series of sentences, based on how “natural” they sound, on a 7-point Likert scale. 12 items per island type were distributed over four lists for both experiments (eight lists in total). 24 (un)grammatical filler items were added to each list, and each list started with 2 practice items.

Participants. 70 native speakers of Romanian took part in one of the two sub-experiments (mean age 20.37; SD 4.16, range 18 – 36): data from 33 participants were collected for the adjunct/CNP-island task and data from 37 participants were collected for the subject/*wh*-island task and run into statistical analysis.

Results. Significant interaction (island) effects were found in three out of the four constructions under investigation (adjuncts: $\beta = 1.53$, $SE = 0.27$, $t = 5.69$, $p < .05$; CNP: $\beta = 0.84$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = 5.58$, $p < .05$; *wh*-islands: $\beta = 0.53$, $SE = 0.20$, $t = 2.61$, $p < .05$). However, no island effects arise with respect to extraction out of subjects: $\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.19$, $t = 0.23$, $p = .81$. The data are visualized in Figure 1.

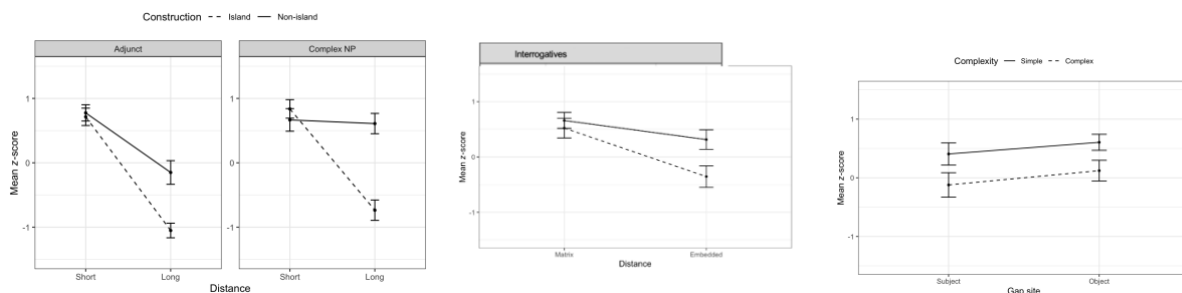


Figure 1: Romanian RC-dependencies, interaction plots for each island type (error bars represent 95% CIs)

Discussion. A preliminary comparison between the magnitude of island effects with respect to RC-dependencies and *wh*-dependencies (AUTHOR 2024) seems to indicate that, as seen for other Romance languages as well, extraction is more readily acceptable with respect to the former, rather than the latter.

Appendix:

1. Sample item from the wh-island test

- (1) a. El e antrenorul care crede că Tudor îl va învinge pe tenismen. (non-island/short)
This is the coach who believes that Tudor will defeat the tennis player.
- b. El e tenismenul pe care antrenorul crede că Tudor îl va învinge. (non-island/long)
This is the tennis player whom the coach believes that Tudor will defeat.
- c. El e antrenorul care se întreabă dacă Tudor îl va învinge pe tenismen. (island/short)
This is the coach who wonders whether Tudor will defeat the tennis player.
- d. El e tenismenul pe care antrenorul se întreabă dacă Tudor îl va învinge. (island/long)
This is the tennis player whom the coach wonders whether Tudor will defeat.

2. Sample item from the complex-NP island test

- (2) a. Ea e cântăreața care a spus că Mihai a ajutat-o pe actriță. (non-island/short)
This is the singer who said that Mihai helped the actress.
- b. Ea e actrița pe care cântăreața a spus că Mihai a ajutat-o. (non-island/long)
This is the actress whom the singer said that Mihai helped.
- c. Ea e cântăreața care a auzit zvonul că Mihai a ajutat-o pe actriță. (island/short)
This is the singer who heard the rumor that Mihai helped the actress.
- d. Ea e actrița pe care cântăreața a auzit zvonul că Mihai a ajutat-o. (island/long)
This is the actress whom the singer heard the rumor that Mihai helped.

Selected references:

- Abeillé, A. & Hemforth, B. & Winckel, E. & Gibson, E. (2020). Extraction from subjects: Differences in acceptability depend on the discourse function of the construction. *Cognition* 204. Article 104293. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2020.104293>
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