

STUDENT NAME

DATE

Exercise I (taken from: Andrew Radford: *Syntax. A minimalist introduction*. Cambridge, 1997, p.24)

Has Lucy correctly set the **head parameter** (which in English is set at the value *head first*), the **wh-parameter** (meaning that in questions like “where.../who...” the wh-phrase is placed at the beginning of the sentence), and the **null subject parameter** (which means, with English being a non-null subject language, every finite verb has to have a subject? When dealing with the item of null subject parameter, we have to decide whether Lucy has simply produced a *truncated sentence*, i.e. left out the subject of the sentence which is placed at the beginning of the sentence, or actually set the parameter wrong.

To answer the questions, I used the “Helpful hints” Radford provides on p.25ff.

1. What Daddy making?

The wh-parameter is set correctly, the sentence contains the subject “Daddy”, and although Lucy left out the auxiliary verb “is” (“What is Daddy making?”), the word order is correct (head parameter), taking into account that in this case the wh-parameter over-rides the head parameter.

2. Want bye-byes.

This is a truncated sentence, the subject “I” (=Lucy) is left out, and the head parameter is used correctly.¹

3. Mummy go shops.

Both the head parameter and the null subject parameter are set correctly.²

4. Me have yoghurt?

The sentence contains the subject “me” (subject parameter). Lucy does not use the auxiliary “can” to express the question, but I am not sure whether this is a truncated sentence or not, because Lucy never seems to use any auxiliary verbs with the participle (“-ing”-form), and I do not know when children start to use auxiliary constructions.

5. Daddy doing?

Lucy omitted the first word of the sentence (“what”), but nevertheless the wh-parameter is set correctly. Subject of the sentence is “Daddy” (null subject parameter is correct).

6. Think Teddy sleeping.

In this case, the subject “I”, which is head of the phrase “Think” is left out (truncation; null subject parameter is correct), and the complement of the verb (“Teddy sleeping”) is placed properly after the verb, too.³

¹ The wh-parameter cannot be examined here, because the sentence is not a question.

² See above.

³ See above.

7. What me having?

Subject of the sentence is “me” (subject parameter set correctly), the wh-expression is moved to the beginning of the sentence, thus the word order is changed: according to the head parameter (“head first”), the complement “what” should follow the verb, but here, too, the wh-parameter dominates the head parameter.

8. No me have fish.

According to Radford, “*no* is the kind of word which doesn’t have a subject”⁴, so the head parameter is set correctly, both in the case “no”+ complement “me have fish” and the phrase “me have fish” (“me”= subject; “fish” following the head “have”).⁵

9. Where Daddy gone?

The use of a wh-expression changes the word order (wh-parameter over-rides head parameter), Lucy correctly moves the wh-expression to the beginning of the sentence. The null subject parameter is set correctly (subject: “Daddy”).

10. Gone office

The head parameter is set correctly, the verb “gone” is followed by its complement “office”. The subject (“he”), which would be set at the beginning of the sentence, is missing, so it is a truncated subject.⁶

11. Want bickies.

The head parameter is set correctly, the verb “want” is followed by its complement “bickies”. The subject (“She”), which would be set at the beginning of the sentence, is missing, so it is a truncated subject.⁷

12. What Teddy have?

The use of a wh-expression changes the word order (wh-parameter over-rides head parameter), and the null subject parameter is set correctly, too (subject: “Teddy”).

13. Where Mummy going?

Lucy uses the subject “Mummy” (null subject parameter correct), and also moves the wh-expression to the beginning of the sentence. In this case, the wh-parameter over-rides the head parameter, but the subject “Mummy” correctly precedes the verb “going”.

14. Me go shops.

The head parameter is correct: the complement “shops” following verb “go”, and the subject (null subject parameter correct, too) “Me” is preceding the verb.⁸

15. Daddy drinking coffee.

Subject of the sentence is “Daddy” (null subject parameter correct), preceding the verb “drinking”, which is followed by its complement “coffee”. So the head parameter is correct, too.

16. What Nana eating?

The subject is “Nana”, so the null subject parameter is correct, and because the wh-expression is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the wh-parameter is used in the right way, too. In this case, the wh-parameter over-rides the head parameter, but the subject “Nana” correctly precedes the verb “eating”.

⁴ Radford, Andrew: *Syntax. A minimalist introduction*. Cambridge, 1997, p.26.

⁵ The wh-parameter cannot be examined here, because the sentence is not a question.

⁶ See above.

⁷ See above.

⁸ See above.

17. Want cho'ate

The head parameter is set correctly, the verb “want” is followed by its complement “cho'ate”. The subject (“The Teddy”), which would be set at the beginning of the sentence, is missing, so it is a truncated subject.

18. Dolly gone?

Lucy correctly changed the word order as required for the wh-parameter⁹, but then left out the wh-expression “where?”. Subject of the sentence is “Dolly” (null subject parameter correct), preceding the verb “gone”. (Head parameter correct).

19. Watch te'vision

The covert (truncated) subject of the sentence is “I” (null subject parameter correct), the head parameter is used in the right way.¹⁰

20. Me have more.

Both the null subject parameter (subject: “Me), and the head parameter (subject preceding, complement “more” following the verb) are used correctly.

21. In kitchen.

Assuming that phrases don't have subjects¹¹, the preposition “in” (head) is followed by its complement “kitchen”.¹²

22. Me play with Daddy.

The subject preceding the verb “play” is “Me” (null subject parameter is correct). The verb “play” is followed by its complement “with Daddy”, and in this phrase the preposition (head) is followed correctly by its complement “Daddy”. (Head parameter correct).¹³

The parameter-setting model of acquisition can be illustrated by the fact that children are able to set parameters at their proper value already at a very early stage, because they are endowed with a set of structural parameters (as a part of the child's language faculty). These parameters seem to have a binary character (e.g. “head first” or “head last”), and only need to be set in their proper value (e.g. English = “head first”; Korean= “head last”). This model provides an explanation for the rapid and error-free language acquisition process.¹⁴

In our example, Lucy always sets the head parameter correct, in the cases where the wh-parameter over-rides the head parameter (ex. 1), when she is omitting the subject (ex. 2), even when there is more than one head (ex. 6).

⁹ The wh-parameter in this case over-rides the head parameter.

¹⁰ The wh-parameter cannot be examined here, because the sentence is not a question.

¹¹ Radford, Andrew: *Syntax. A minimalist introduction*. Cambridge, 1997, p.27.

¹² The wh-parameter cannot be examined here, because the sentence is not a question.

¹³ See above.

¹⁴ Cf. Radford, Andrew: *Syntax. A minimalist introduction*. Cambridge, 1997, p.22.