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ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF ADJUNCT ISLANDS: EVIDENCE FROM MALAYALAM

BACKGROUND
- Malayalam (Dravidian)
  - Wh-in situ, but fronting is also possible
  - Appears not to observe adjunct islands (Yoshida 2006)
  - Adjunct island violations are observed in everyday speech and seem acceptable to native speakers in isolation

MALAYALAM SEEMS TO VIOLATE ADJUNCT ISLAND CONSTRAINTS. HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?
- Whether adjunct islands result from grammar (a constraint on wh-movement) or processor (difficulty in resolving filler-gap dependency), we expect them to occur in all languages.

STIMULI

‘What did Ammu say after Unni went home?’

| MATRIX | FRONTED IN SITU | 1a | amu [Unni home went after]Adj what said |
| ADJUNCT | FRONTED IN SITU | 1b | enta [Unni home went after]Adj what Ammu ___ said |

‘What did Ammu go home after saying yesterday?’

| MATRIX | FRONTED IN SITU | 2a | Ammu [Unni home went after]Adj what Ammu [say after]Adj home went yesterday |
| ADJUNCT | FRONTED IN SITU | 2b | enta [Unni home went after]Adj what Ammu [ ___ say after]Adj home went yesterday |

RESULTS
- There was no significant difference between 2b and the matrix sentences, indicating that island extracted sentences are relatively acceptable.
- Responses were transformed to z-scores prior to statistical analysis, and the interaction between factors was significant (p=0.0039), indicating an island effect.

There is a significant difference in mean raw score between the in situ and fronted conditions for both the matrix and adjunct sentences. The mean raw score for the in situ condition is higher than that of the fronted condition in both contexts, indicating a preference for in situ structures in Malayalam.

MALAYALAM OBEYS ADJUNCT ISLAND CONSTRAINTS, DESPITE INITIAL APPEARANCES.

DISCUSSION
- Highlights the importance of careful formal experimentation to evaluate claims about (non)universality.
- In line with other experimental work showing that island violations are sometimes relatively acceptable, but remain island violations nonetheless. (Almeida 2014, Kush et al. 2015, Sprouse et al. 2014, Goodall 2015)
- Predicts comparable results for cases where adjunct island violations are relatively acceptable in English (Truswell 2007, Michel & Goodall 2012):
  3a The man that I went to England [after Mary spoke to e].
  3b The man that I went to England [after speaking to e].

- Despite the amelioration seen in (3b), we would expect an island violation to still be detectable.

REMAINING QUESTIONS
- Exactly what causes the relative acceptability of adjunct island violations in Malayalam?
- Language contact effects: Might more contact with English increase the island effect?

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

experimentalsyntax.blogspot.com