

Stylistic fronting as remnant movement

Dennis Ott, Harvard University

In this paper, I discuss a peculiar movement type found in Icelandic, known since the seminal work of Maling (1980) as *stylistic fronting* (SF). SF shifts a postverbal constituent to the left of the finite verb:

- (1) tilboð [_{CP} sem **ekki**_i er *t_i* hægt að hafna]
 an offer that not is possible to reject

SF poses nontrivial problems for syntactic theory, as it appears to contradict a number of widely-held theoretical assumptions (cf. Holmberg, 2006); in particular, it appears to move heads (adverbs, participles, particles) into a specifier position (Spec-T), which in addition should be occupied by a trace/copy. SF only applies in clauses with a “subject gap” (basically, embedded clauses with relativized/extracted subjects and impersonal constructions); it is semantico-pragmatically vacuous, optional and in complementary distribution with expletive-insertion. I will show that my account can derive all of these properties while relying on a minimal set of assumptions.

Previously, SF in Icelandic has been analyzed as head movement (Jónsson, 1991), as a subcase of topicalization (Rögvaldsson and Thráinsson, 1990), or as movement of phonological features (Holmberg, 2000). I argue that these approaches are empirically problematic and propose instead to analyze SF as EPP-driven phrasal A-movement of a (potentially remnant) XP to Spec-T. Consider the fact that NPs and PPs can undergo SF:

- (2) a. Þeir sem [_{PP} í **Óslo**]_i hafa búið *t_i*
 those that in Oslo have lived
 b. Hver heldur þú að [_{NP} þessa erfiðu ákvörðun]_i verði að taka *t_i*
 who think you that this difficult decision has to take

Since it can be shown that such cases are distinct from embedded topicalization, they effectively undermine any uniform analysis of SF as head movement. I will argue that SF is phrasal movement in *all* cases. For the case of adverbs and negation, I will follow Cinque (1999) in assuming that these are actually phrasal elements; other categories (adjectives, participles and particles) undergo SF as remnant XPs, i.e. phrases that contain traces of “evacuated” constituents. This theory correctly predicts, among other things, that modifiers cannot be stranded by SF, and that nonfinite verbs and their complements are equally accessible for SF:

- (3) a. fundurinn sem **fram**_i hefur farið *t_i*
 the meeting that forth has gone
 b. fundurinn sem **farið**_i hefur *t_i* fram
 the meeting that gone has forth
 (4) a. Þeir sem **búið** hafa *t_i* í þessari borg
 those who lived have in this town
 b. Þeir sem í **þessari borg**_i hafa búið *t_i*
 those who in this town have lived

My account of these cases relies on *vP* (taken to be a *phase*) attracting complements of *V* to its edge, from where they can undergo further movement. As I will show, the optionality then follows naturally from the two “candidate” XPs being equidistant from *T*. For this and all other cases, my phrasal-movement approach has the advantage of allowing for the reduction of specific locality conditions on SF (stipulated in an “accessibility hierarchy” by Maling 1980) to the general principle *Attract Closest* – essentially, Relativized Minimality. Furthermore, I show that only a phrasal-movement analysis can account for locality conditions on SF and the complementarity of SF and expletive-insertion (I argue that SF is one of several EPP-strategies available in Icelandic, incorporating the “EPP parameter” of Biberauer and Roberts 2005).

Prima facie, the fact that SF is “meaningless” seems problematic for my account, since A-movement is generally assumed not to reconstruct. Following Boeckx (2001), I argue that SF nevertheless fully reconstructs since no Case-feature on the fronted XP is deleted in the derived position (according to Boeckx, A-moved elements are interpreted in their “Case-checking” position). This correctly predicts an asymmetry between SF and object shift: the former is never Case-driven, hence reconstructs; the latter is movement to a Case-position (Vikner, 1994), hence affects interpretation/scope.

Overall, then, my novel approach to Icelandic SF not only allows for a unified treatment of the various manifestations of SF but is also shown to make a number of desirable predictions concerning the observed properties and restrictions. Thus, SF turns out to be yet another phenomenon in Germanic syntax for which a remnant-movement analysis proves superior to alternative accounts.

References

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