

# Shifting Objects and Procrastinating Subjects\*

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## 0. Introduction

We claim that the Minimalist framework of Chomsky (1993) predicts VSO to be the unmarked word order in a language which has both verb raising and Object Shift (in the sense of Holmberg (1986)). This paper has two sections: In section 1, we will show that object shift entails a subject position lower than the specifier of AgrS. Thus, in a language with verb raising to AgrS, VSO order would be derived trivially. In section 2, we will show how this works in Irish, a language with both overt object shift and VSO matrix ordering.

The basic clause structure we assume is (1) after Chomsky (1993):

- (1) [AgrSP AgrS [TP T [AgrOP AgrO [VP subj. [ V obj.]]]]]

## 1. Object Shift and Subject Positions

There has been much attention paid to the phenomenon of object shift in the Germanic languages within the framework adopted here<sup>1</sup>. In particular, the raising of an object across the (trace of) the subject in its base position, the specifier of VP, would appear to be in violation of some version of Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990). The solution proposed by Chomsky (1993) is that Minimality is expressed as an Economy condition on movement. This condition holds that the target of movement must be the closest possible landing site. The notion of closest, however, is mediated by a notion of *Equidistance* whereby more than one position may count as the closest position. In (2), ZP (the specifier of the Head X) and

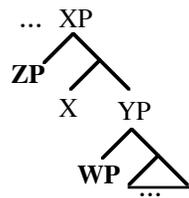
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<sup>1</sup> In addition to remarks in Chomsky (1993) and Bobaljik & Jonas (forthcoming) and the works cited therein

WP (the specifier of the complement of X) must be taken to be equidistant at least from elements c-commanded by x. Chomsky (1993) attempts to derive this from X-bar theoretic relations, specifically from the specifier-head relations. He suggests that after adjunction of  $Y^{\circ}$  to  $X^{\circ}$ , ZP and WP are both in a specifier head relationship to the chain  $[Y^{\circ}-tY^{\circ}]$ . There are empirical reasons to believe that the link between overt verb-raising and Equidistance is too strong; we refer the reader to Bobaljik (1994) and Watanabe (1993) for discussion and suggestions. Without further comment on how these relations are derived, we will simply assume these two positions (ZP and WP) are equidistant, provided the head  $Y^{\circ}$  adjoins to the head  $X^{\circ}$ .

(2)



The effect of this is that NP movement may (although need not) “skip” at most one specifier position, but only if the target is the specifier of the next higher phrase. For the case of object shift, this entails that the object may skip the subject in the specifier of VP without violating Relativized Minimality *qua* Shortest Movement if and only if it raises to specifier of AgrOP. On the assumption that movement is further constrained by some version of the Strict Cycle Condition, "Object Shift" will have to precede raising of the subject. After the object has raised to the specifier of AgrO, the subject will then have to skip this raised object. Examining the structure in (3), we see that the subject cannot raise directly to specifier of AgrSP, as this position is not equidistant to the specifier of AgrOP, the closest landing site for the subject..

(3) [agrsp AgrS [tp T [agrop AgrO [vp subj. [ V obj.]]]]]

Even with the effects of *Equidistance*, the subject may only skip the filled specifier of AgrO if it raises at least to the next higher specifier, i.e. the specifier of TP. Even if the specifier of TP were not available<sup>2</sup>, the specifiers of AgrSP and AgrOP would never stand in the relevant relation of ZP-WP in (2) (in other words, the relation of the specifier of and the specifier of the complement of X). The two are thus never equidistant from, for example, the base position of the subject.<sup>3</sup>

In an interesting way, then, overt NP object shift can be taken as a diagnostic for the overt licensing of the specifier of TP as a subject position in a given language. As will be seen below, Irish has overt raising of (at least some) objects to specifier of AgrOP, hence Irish must license the specifier of TP at Spell-Out as an A-position to (or through) which the subject may raise.

Now, we have determined that when a language has overt object shift, the subject's first landing site is TP. Still, we have to ask why, in VSO language like Irish, by hypothesis, the subject does not (and cannot) raise further to the specifier of AgrS. The answer is not complex. Recall that an assumption of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1993), is that overt movement is legitimate only in case that without such movement, morphological features would not be checked and there would be no legitimate interpretation at PF or at LF. This is the Economy principle of *Procrastinate* (Chomsky 1993). It is a simple move to assume since the subject must move through specifier of TP at least in some clauses in Irish, and since n

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<sup>2</sup>We are using "not available" here in the sense of Chomsky (1993), who uses the lack of a TP specifier position to explain why subjects raise to the specifier of AgrS in English.

<sup>3</sup> The specifier of TP is not necessary if object shift is not overt. Presumably, specifiers are generated during the course of a derivation as they are targeted for movement or by virtue of material being base-generated in them. Thus, if Spec,AgrO is not filled, it is not present and does not count as the closest position. There is no contradiction here: only filled specifiers count for determining which specifier must count as the closest position, hence the subject may raise as far as it pleases if there are no intervening filled specifiers, while *Equidistance* is defined structurally in terms of heads, and only two consecutive specifier positions (present or potential) will ever be in the relevant configuration. See Bobaljik & Jonas (forthcoming).

ominative case features are a reflex of T<sup>4</sup>, then further (overt) raising to the specifier of AgrS would be superfluous<sup>5</sup>. Overt raising of the subject further to the specifier of AgrS, as is found in French and English is thus not the null option and will require some extra motivation, such as the proposals in Chomsky (1993)<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Object Shift: Evidence from Non-Finite Clauses<sup>7</sup>

Finite clauses in Modern Irish display the basic order (Comp)-Verb-Subject-Object followed by any obliques and adverbs (4)<sup>8</sup>. In particular, the sequence of VSO may not be interrupted by any elements, including adverbials<sup>9</sup>. This order is generally taken to reflect an underlying SVO order (cf. progressive sentences in (5)) with raising of at least the verb to some VP-external functional projection (McCloskey 1983, 1992; Sproat 1985, Guilfoyle 1990, 1993; Bobaljik & Carnie, forthcoming; Duffield 1990a,b, 1991).

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<sup>4</sup>This claim is based on the observation that nominative case is linked to the tense of a clause, infinitival clauses-- which presumably lack tense -- do not allow nominative case assignment in languages like English.

<sup>5</sup> A similar scenario has been proposed for the Germanic languages which allow object shift by Bobaljik & Jonas (forthcoming). Following Diesing (1990 et seq.), it is observed that the Germanic languages which allow overt raising of object NPs to the specifier of AgrO also have two overt positions in which subjects may occur. Contra Diesing, it is shown that both of these subject positions are external to the VP, i.e. the specifier of TP and the specifier of AgrS. Further, it is definite and specific NPs which raise to the higher position, presumably due to some further morphological requirement that definiteness induces. Indefinites in Icelandic, German and other such languages, like all subjects in Irish, remain in the specifier of TP at s-structure, and are prohibited from moving farther by the principle of Procrastinate.

<sup>6</sup>For example, these languages could lack the specifier of TP altogether, hence if the subject were to raise, it would have to raise to the specifier of AgrS. Note that the lack of a TP specifier would prevent Overt Object shift of full NPs. See references from the previous footnote, and references cited therein.

<sup>7</sup> This section has benefited significantly from ideas of Guilfoyle (1993). With certain abstractions, such as the labels of the nodes and the position of the subject, we are very much in agreement with her on the main points of section 2.

<sup>8</sup> We ignore the process known as Narrative Inversion (McCloskey 1992) found only in the Narrative Register, which fronts some constituent to clause-initial position. We also ignore the postponing of object pronouns in tensed clauses. While these add complications to any analysis, neither process contradicts anything said in the text. See McCloskey (1992) for an analysis of the former process.

<sup>9</sup>A few exceptions such as *cinnte* "certainly" and *ar ndoigh* "of course" aside. There is also a limited set of adverbs that appear after the subject and before the object, These adverbs are not inconsistent with the analysis provided here, see McCloskey (forthcoming) for more discussion

- (4) Leanann an t-ainmní an briathar i nGaeilge  
 follow.pres the subject the verb in Irish  
 ‘The subject follows the verb in Irish’
- (5) Tá na teangeolaí ag ól an beorach  
 be.pres the linguist prog drink.dvn the beer  
 ‘The linguist is drinking the beer’

There is strong evidence for object raising in Irish, at least in non-finite clauses. In all dialects an OV order is available. In the northern dialects (Ulster and Connacht), and the standard dialect, the only order of a non-finite transitive clause is SOV<sup>10</sup> (6). When there is an overt object NP or pronoun, the non-finite verb is preceded by the transitive particle *a<sup>l</sup>*<sup>11</sup>. Note that both the subject and object are marked accusative<sup>12</sup>.

- (6) Ba mhaith liom [cp Seán an abairt a<sup>L</sup> scríobh] **S O V**  
 cop good with.1.s John.acc the sentence.acc tran write  
 ‘I want John to write the sentence’

In the southern dialect (Munster), however, there are two options for transitive clauses with overt objects. In general, the subject is PRO, and the object occurs preverbally with accusative case (7a). A more marked option, found mainly in formal dialects, is for the object to appear postverbally in the genitive case (7b), this option is available only with an overt subject. (which takes accusative case) In either case, the “transitive” particle *a* is present also.

- (7). Southern: Munster
- a. Ba mhaith liom<sub>i</sub> [ PRO<sub>i</sub> an abairt a<sup>L</sup> scríobh] **PRO O V**  
 cop good with.1.s the sentence.acc tran write  
 ‘I want to write the sentence’
- b. Ba mhaith liom [cp Seán a<sup>L</sup> scríobh na habairte] **S V O<sub>gen</sub>**  
 cop good with.1.s John.acc tran write the sentence.gen  
 ‘I want John to write the sentence’ [formal]

Given the SOV orderings in (6) and (7), Irish must make use of a structural position to the left of the non-finite verb in which accusative case features are checked. If Irish is underlyingly

<sup>10</sup> The verb in a non-finite clause is called in traditional grammars a “Verbal Noun”. Morphologically, it has both nominal and verbal properties, much as gerunds or participles cross-linguistically. We will have nothing to say about it here. See, among others, Guilfoyle (1993, 1990). Duffield (1990a, 1990b, 1991).

<sup>11</sup>This particle also surfaces as *do* in some dialects and registers.

<sup>12</sup>Full NPs, like those in the examples below, do not show a morphological distinction between nominative and accusative cases, however, pronouns do.

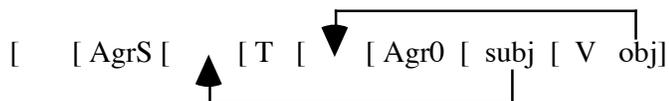
gly SVO then this position must be a chained position, one to which the object has shifted<sup>13</sup>. After Duffield (1990), we will assume that this position is the specifier of AgrO (the AgrO head being realized as the particle *a<sup>L</sup>* 'tran' in the above examples)<sup>14</sup>. Note that since the subject occurs to the left of these shifted objects, it must, in turn, be higher than AgrOP. In this way, then, we see that Irish has overt object shift. Since Irish has object shift, it must therefore license the specifier of TP as a subject position. Let us assume then that Irish follows the unmarked case and does not have further motivation for NP movement to the specifier of AgrS. If the verb raises to AgrS, then VSO word order is derived as follows<sup>15</sup>.

(8)



NP movement is:

(9)



Without further comment, this accounts for the word order in tensed transitive clauses of Modern Irish (10).

<sup>13</sup>See Guilfoyle (1993) also Ramchand (1993) for Scots Gaelic. They propose that the derived position is the specifier of AspectP.

<sup>14</sup>It is interesting to note that this characterization of the transitive particle as AgrO allows an account of a puzzling feature of pronouns in non-finite clauses. The standard dialect allows paradigms where an overt pronoun and transitive particle can be replaced with the genitive pronoun:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| i) Ba mhaith le Seán tú a bhualadh<br>cop good with John you tran hit<br>John wants to hit you | ii) Ba mhaith le Seán do bhualadh<br>cop good with John your hit<br>John wants to hit you |
|--|---|

Given McCloskey and Hale's (1984) characterization of strong and weak agreement for pro-drop in Irish, these facts follow directly. The AgrO (transitive) morpheme will surface with defective morphology (third person masculine singular possessive pronoun: *a<sup>L</sup>*) when an overt noun or pronoun is present. When a null pronominal object (pronoun) is present, however, the appropriate features of gender and number appear on the AgrO morpheme. See Carnie (1995) for more discussion.

<sup>15</sup>Following McCloskey (1992) we assume that the verb does not raise to Comp.

(10) [<sub>agrsp</sub> [<sub>agrs</sub>'[AgrS+T+Agr0+V]<sub>i</sub>] [<sub>tp</sub> **subj**<sub>k</sub> [<sub>t'</sub> <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub>] [<sub>agrop</sub> **obj**<sub>m</sub> [<sub>agro</sub>' <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub>] [<sub>vp</sub> <sub>t<sub>k</sub></sub> [<sub>v'</sub> <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> <sub>t<sub>m</sub></sub>]]]]]]]

### 3. Conclusion

To summarize then, we claim that VSO order follows directly when a language has overt verb raising to the highest inflectional projection and has object shift. Under the Minimalist framework, the specifier of TP must be licensed as a position in which to check nominative case in all languages which have object shift, due to the economy principle of shortest movement. When the subject is in the specifier of TP, and the verb is incorporated into the AgrS head, then VSO order trivially follows. Languages with both object shift and verb movement that show SVO order must require some additional movement to the specifier of AgrS for the subject<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup>See McCloskey (forthcoming) for speculations that such further movement is forced by EPP considerations, which are lacking in VSO languages like Irish.

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