

### Changes at the edge: tracking the rise of a canonical subject position in Germanic

This paper is concerned with an edge that has standardly been assumed to enjoy universally privileged status in the context of category-edges more generally: the specifier of the inflectional head which, in terms of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), obligatorily hosts the subject, i.e. Spec-IP (a.k.a. Spec-AgrSP, Spec-TP, etc.). During the minimalist era, the GB interpretation of the status of Spec-TP has become increasingly problematic, with numerous researchers arguing i.a. that T's featural requirements (i) may indeed be "D-oriented", but need not call for **subject-raising** (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998, Chomsky 2001: 38), (ii) may instead be "V-oriented" and require raising of a **verbal** category (Davies & Dubinsky 2001, Chomsky *ibid.*), or (iii) may simply not require any form of raising at all (countless proposals arguing for the non-universality of the EPP). This paper focuses specifically on Spec-TP in Germanic since this family offers a particularly illuminating perspective on the factors that may lead to the rise of the kind of dedicated subject position that was once ascribed universal status.

Comparison of the synchronic subject-related behaviour of the Germanic languages shows that only English and the Mainland Scandinavian (MSc) languages consistently exhibit EPP-style "subject effects" (e.g. "raising-to-subject", expletive insertion, etc.). The West Germanic (WGmc) languages exhibit these less exceptionlessly, "raising-to-subject" being optional in all WGmc languages barring Afrikaans, and all of these languages also sanctioning the absence of an expletive in Spec-TP – cf. (1-2):

- (1) ... *dass dem Mann das Buch geschenkt wurde* (German)  
that the-DATIVE man the-NOMINATIVE book presented became  
"... that the book was given to the man (as a present)"
- (2) *Op die tennisbaan word (daar) tans geoefen* (Afrikaans)  
on the tennis-court becomes there currently practised  
"There is practice currently underway on the tennis-court"

German in fact categorically bars "true" expletives from Spec-TP (see below on "weather" expletives). Finally, Icelandic reveals even more far-reaching aberrations from the "EPP norm": firstly, subject-raising results in specific interpretive effects (Bobaljik & Jonas 1996) and thus fits the profile of a movement operation driven by an optional EPP-feature (Chomsky 2001: 34, 2004: 113) – that it must result in "new interpretations"; secondly, "true" expletives systematically fail to surface in Spec-TP, the very position standard Chomskyan theory assumes them to be merged in; and finally, "weather" expletives differ from other subjects in never being able to raise there. Synchronically, therefore, the most conservative Germanic language (Icelandic) is most "deviant" in EPP terms, with the most conservative WGmc language, German, next in line; Dutch and (taking into account recent work by Thráinsson 2003) Faroese are slightly less aberrant, featuring optional subject-raising, but permitting the optional presence of expletives in Spec-TP; Afrikaans is even less deviant, requiring subject-raising, and only permitting expletive omission in one context, impersonal passives; and, finally, English and MSc do not deviate at all.

Diachronically, the picture that emerges is of a family whose members have undergone the same general process, but stopped at different points along the route to completion. Extant records of earlier Germanic varieties indicate these all to have been SOV varieties which permitted referential pro-drop (Ekkehard & König 1994), with V2 having been a later innovation. With V2 came the rise of clause-initial expletives, which were entirely absent during the earlier SOV stage. Other than an early loss of referential pro-drop and a gradual OV/VO change (Hróarsdóttir 2000), no further changes relevant to this paper's concerns took place in Icelandic. MSc, however, underwent morphological impoverishment, and also lost embedded V2, thus completing the OV/VO change quicker than Icelandic. Falk's (1993) study of the diachrony of Swedish expletives reveals the following sequence of events: I. loss of referential pro-drop & establishment of clause-initial expletives; II. systematic occurrence of "weather" expletives; III. ever-increasing occurrence of expletives in Spec-TP & ever-decreasing occurrence of Stylistic Fronting (SF); IV. obligatory presence of expletives in presentational structures; V. obligatory presence of expletives in impersonal passive structures & final loss of SF. Considering the WGmc languages, we see that German only went as far as II, whereas Dutch and Faroese went one step further, and Afrikaans, which "began" at stage III, yet one further (i.e. IV). Investigation of the diachrony of English reveals the same sequence of developments, with the difference that steps IV and V merge as English lacked impersonal passives (Biberauer & Roberts/B&R 2005a,b,c,d, 2006). B&R (*ibid.*) also show that the final stage coincided with the obligatorisation of raising-to-subject, which had been on the increase ever since stage III.

How might these facts be analysed? Biberauer (2003, 2004) proposes that the earliest attested Germanic varieties do not feature an EPP-style canonical subject position. Instead, she proposes that these head-final languages satisfied T's EPP-requirements via *v*P-raising, which raised into T's specifier not just an overt subject (where present), but also additional material, some of which might in fact precede the

subject (elements that have undergone movement to the  $\nu$ P-edge; adverbials, etc. merged higher than an internal argument subject; etc.). The proposal is thus that Germanic T was always “D-oriented”, bearing a D-probe associated with an EPP-feature, but that the mechanism via which this EPP<sub>D</sub>-feature was satisfied differed from that standardly assumed (cf. Richards & Biberauer/R&B 2005 for discussion of a typology of D-oriented EPP-satisfaction mechanisms). The most important consequences of a language employing  $\nu$ P- rather than DP-raising to satisfy T’s EPP-requirements are that (a) raising-to-subject is predicted to be optional: this effect only consistently falls out in languages where the element located in Spec-TP must be a subject-element; in  $\nu$ P-raising languages, it falls out wherever the outermost edge of  $\nu$ P is occupied by a subject-element and, with semantic consequences (see above), where a subject has raised to the  $\nu$ P-edge under the influence of an optional EPP-feature; and (b) expletives are not needed wherever  $\nu$ P-raising carries an appropriate D-bearing element to T’s edge (see below). These consequences are clearly realised in the early SOV Germanic varieties and, allowing for the obscuring effects of V2, also in Icelandic. Assuming the rise of “weather” expletives to follow from a lexical choice, with Icelandic, in contrast to the remaining Germanic languages, making the decision to lexicalise ‘referentially opaque entity’ only where these semantic features are accompanied by an EPP-feature, let us consider how the present proposal might account for III above. Note, firstly, that this step was never reached by German, which I analyse as retaining the original  $\nu$ P-licensing mechanism and changing only in respect of its “weather” expletive properties. The remaining Germanic languages all share a striking property: they underwent varying degrees of morphological impoverishment. Following R&B 2005, I propose that languages with impoverished agreement morphology can, with one notable exception, not target D-features on the verb to satisfy T’s EPP-requirements via  $\nu$ P-raising; they must thus probe a subject-DP in  $\nu$ P, with the consequence that an appropriate subject element must always be located in outermost Spec- $\nu$ P. The behaviour of agreementless Afrikaans and less inflectionally impoverished Dutch therefore become more comprehensible. Still requiring explanation, however, is the impersonal passive situation (cf. (2)): following B&R 2005 again, I propose that these structures may lack an expletive even in Afrikaans as passive structures contain passive participles, which have “absorbed”  $\varphi$ -features (Baker, Johnson & Roberts/BJR 1989). I also appeal to BJR to explain why impersonal passives were the last structures to obligatorise expletives in MSc and, in English, why passive structures were the last to obligatorise raising-to-subject (van Kemenade 1997). Still unexplained, though, are the SF facts and also why there would, in all the languages that ultimately developed a canonical subject position, have been an extensive period during which expletive insertion and raising-to-subject were merely optional. To account for these facts, I appeal to Biberauer & Richards’s (2005) theory of “true optionality” (TO) in terms of which a language which satisfies an EPP-requirement by piedpiping the constituent immediately containing an XP-goal also has the option of raising just the XP-goal. TO is argued to be possible because Narrow Syntax is only concerned with the goal of the relevant Agree operation undergoing EPP-driven movement; it doesn’t “mind” if a category larger than the goal is moved. Since inflectionally impoverished languages necessarily target an XP (the subject), it is, on the proposed analysis, to be expected that  $\nu$ P-raising languages of this type will exhibit TO of the kind that is indeed attested in the history of English and the MSc languages. While DP-targeting  $\nu$ P-raising alternates with DP-raising, subject-raising and expletive insertion remain optional: they are always obligatory in the DP-raising case, but  $\nu$ P-raising structures are compatible with unraised subjects (as above) and expletives are only required where the verb lacks appropriate  $\varphi$ -bearing morphology. What caused this to change? Note that English and the MSc languages are all synchronically SVO. B&R (*ibid.*) argue that the early, largely lexically-triggered loss of OV-ordering had an important consequence for the structures generated by the  $\nu$ P-fronting grammar: they became more difficult to distinguish from DP-raising structures as  $\nu$ P would, after the loss of object/VP-raising and in accordance with Chomsky’s (2000) PIC, have contained far less material than before, often just the subject. The VO change thus resulted in  $\nu$ P- and DP-raising becoming less easily distinguishable and, combined with the pressures promoting DP-raising exerted by the loss of agreement morphology, led to the rise of the modern-day canonical subject position. While  $\nu$ P-raising was available, the optionality discussed above remained and SF also remained derivable; as soon as the  $\nu$ P-raising option was lost (a consequence of the Subset Principle; B&R 2006), they disappeared (V). This proposal is argued to have several advantages over those which assume the presence of a canonical subject position throughout the history of Germanic, notably (a) that it is not necessary to postulate either *pro* or the complicated licensing mechanisms to which it would have to be subject in view of data like (2), (b) that the previously unnoticed parallel sequences of diachronic changes take on the character of a natural “domino effect”, and (c) that the existence of long periods of optionality and also the nature of that optionality emerges as unsurprising.