

Split DP Topicalization and the role of interfaces

I want to argue that the puzzling properties of the structure traditionally called “split NP topicalization” (which in present-day terms would be called “split DP topicalization” – henceforward SDT) can be explained as a result of the interplay of conditions from both interfaces (semantic-pragmatic and PF).

SDT, found in languages such as German, Romanian, Italian or Hungarian, looks as a DP with the determiner (usually an indefinite or quantifier) stranded in the base position and its nominal complement fronted to a sentence-initial position, with topic interpretation. This structure is problematic because it seems both to require and to exclude an analysis by movement. I will show that the movement analysis is correct, and all the properties which seem to plead against it result from PF processes.

The evidence for movement is the following: (i) DST obeys locality constraints. Unlike the English topics introduced by *as for*, DST is sensitive to islands (ex. 1). (ii) If the topic NP were base generated, we would expect to also find overt complements after the determiner, which however is impossible or at best marginal (ex. 2). (iii) DST shows reconstruction effects (ex. 3).

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|-----|---|----------|
| (1) | a. Doctori am consultat mulți / *mulți au venit / *am vorbit cu mulți | Romanian |
| | doctors have.I consulted many/many have come/have.I talked with many | |
| | b. Bücher will er viele lesen/*will er wissen wer viele gelesen hat | German |
| | books wants he many read/wants he know who many read has | |
| (2) | a. ?? Fete au venit Maria și Cristina | Romanian |
| | girls have come M. and C. | |
| (3) | Bücher über einander hatten die Männer keine geschrieben | German |
| | books about each-other had the men no written | |

The manifold evidence against movement can be subsumed under the following generalization: the two elements behave as independent elements as far as forms are concerned. Thus, (i) the determiner left in place has all the properties of a determiner taking an empty N (see (4)-(6)), (ii) the topical NP has the forms that a bare N(um)P would adopt in this position (this is seen in the adjectival inflection in German - ex. (7) - and in the lack of *de* in Romanian in (6)), and (iii) number mismatch is possible between the two elements (ex.(8)).

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|------|---|----------|
| (4) | a. Ich habe kein Geld. | German |
| | I have no money | |
| | b. Ich habe keines | |
| | c. Geld habe Ich keines | |
| (4)' | a. Am cumpărat un disc | Romanian |
| | have.I bought a/one CD | |
| | b. Am cumpărat unul | |
| | have.I bought one.pre-[_{NE}] | |
| | c. Discuri am cumpărat unul | |
| | CDs have.I bought one.pre-[_{NE}] | |
| (5) | a. Am întâlnit câțiva/zece/niște studenți | Romanian |
| | have.I met a few/ten/some students | |
| | b. Am întâlnit cîțiva/zece/*niște | |
| | c. Studenți am întâlnit cîțiva/zece/*niște | |
| (6) | a. Au venit douăzeci de copii | Romanian |
| | have come twenty of children | |
| | b. (Copii) au venit douăzeci | |

- children have come twenty
- (7) Er hat keine polnischen Gänse/Polnische Gänse hat er (keine) German
 he has no Polish geese Polish geese has he no
- (8) a. Kinder hat er nur eines German
 children has he only one
 b. Cărți am numai una Romanian
 books have.I only one

I argue that all these mismatches arise at PF. For (i), I assume that *the morphological component treats traces of movement and base generated empty pro-Ns as the same element*, namely [NE]. According to current minimalist assumptions, traces are not syntactic objects, but arise by deletion at PF. The property of being unpronounced, which characterizes the empty pro-N, is also a property which shouldn't involve the syntax, but only PF. Thus, all rules sensitive to a [NE] environment should apply at PF (as proposed by Neeleman and Weerman 1999 for empty categories in general).

The adjectival inflection mismatch in German follows if agreement inside the DP obtains at PF (Bobaljik 2005), adjectival agreement being what is called a “dissociated morpheme” in Distributed Morphology (see Embick 1997). The lack of *de-* insertion in Romanian (ex. 6) can be explained starting from the observation that *de* appears only after complex numerals which have their own ϕ -features: this indicates that they bear a +N feature, thus they absorb the case and the NumP complement needs the dummy preposition *de* as a case marker. When extracted, the NumP is structurally licensed in its landing position (presumably SpecTopP), receiving, let's say, a “peripheral” case: then, *de-* insertion is superfluous and therefore forbidden.

For (iii) I assume *post-syntactic insertion or valuation of Num in structures with quantifiers*. More precisely, the following assumptions suffice to derive number mismatch: (i) the topical position in which the NP lands requires a Num projection; (ii) in a construction with overt quantifiers, Num need not be specified in syntax; at PF Num inherits a value from the quantifier which immediately dominates it (in many languages, plural morphology appears only when the noun doesn't combine with a plural quantifier); (iii) an unspecified Num with no governing quantifier will be realized at PF as the morphologically lightest Num head, which in Romanian is +plural for count nouns and \emptyset for mass nouns (for German, the possibility of spelling it out as the indefinite article *ein* for singular count nouns is also attested, in which case I assume that Num is valued already in the syntax). This explanation is supported by the semantics of the structure: the topical element is the entire NP class (the property), not some group or individual. Thus, number on it is “expletive”. The number specification is part of the new information, so it must stay in the base position (see the translation: “as for books, I bought one/several/twenty/none”).

In conclusion, the contrasting properties of SDT arise from the interplay of interface constraints: it is obvious that the establishment of a chain is a solution to the conflict between semantic interpretation, which requires a local relationship between D and NP, and the opposite pragmatic values of the two parts (Topic for the NP, new information Focus for the D). On the other hand, all mismatches between the two parts of the split are the result of the way in which the PF component operates, providing another piece of evidence in favor of an elaborated PF derivation.

References Bobaljik (2005) “Where's ϕ ?”, *Leiden Papers in Linguistics XX*, ed. van Koppen; Embick (1997) *Voice and the Interfaces of Syntax*, Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania; Fanselow (1993) “The return to base generators”, *GAGL* 36, 1-74; Neeleman & Weerman (1999) *Flexible Syntax*, Dordrecht, Kluwer; Van Riemsdijk (1989), “Movement and regeneration”, in Benincà (ed). *Dialectal variation and the Theory of Grammar*, Dordrecht, Foris, 105-136.