

V2 languages

I will present a theory of V2 languages, Germanic and other. The claim is that they have a feature in C which, in the absence of a complementizer, attracts I, usually containing the finite verb, to C, and another independent feature attracting a category to specCP. This is more or less standard ‘symmetrical V2 theory’. V2 languages vary with regard to which category is attracted to specCP in the unmarked case, that is when neither topic nor focus nor wh-movement applies: Some languages pick the subject, others pick some other sentential category, still others pick vP, or maybe IP. Another alternative is merge of a special expletive. The hypothesis is that each language picks the closest visible category as default filler of specCP. The cross-linguistic differences then follow from those properties of the grammars which determine which category ends up as the one closest to C. Default filling of specCP is a phonological process, with no effect on LF. This neutralizes some of the arguments that have been levelled against symmetrical V2 theories, in particular those based on differences between initial subjects and initial objects in Germanic languages.

The languages I will discuss are Berber, Swedish, Icelandic, Breton, and Basque. Tamazight Berber is briefly presented as an illustration of a language where C is either a complementizer or attracts a verbal head, but does not have a feature obligatorily attracting a category to specCP—which shows that the two features are independent. Swedish is an example of a language where specIP is always filled in the course of the derivation by the subject (thematic or a nominal expletive). Hence the subject will always be the category which is closest to C, and therefore moves to specCP in the unmarked case. Icelandic is a language where specIP is not necessarily filled by a nominal subject. When it isn’t, another category, for instance a participle or a verb particle is attracted to specCP as a default option (this is known as main clause stylistic fronting). Alternatively (and more commonly in Modern Icelandic) the expletive *það* is merged in specCP.

- (1) a. Tekin hefur verið t_v erfið ákvörðun.
taken has been difficult decision
‘A difficult decision has been taken.’
b. Það hefur verið tekin erfið ákvörðun.

Breton is another language which has a feature attracting a finite verb or auxiliary to C, and a feature obligatorily attracting a category to specCP, but where specIP is never filled by the subject. The default option is movement of the negation, if there is one, or the nonfinite verb.

- (2) Kredin ran [en deus aret Yann e bark]. (Schafer 1995)
believe do.1SG PRT has.3M plowed Yann his field

It is conceivable that there are V2 languages where the category which moves to specCP in the unmarked case is IP; after all IP is really the closest category to C. Such languages would then be SOV in the unmarked case, but XVS when some marked process, for instance wh-movement, has fronted a category. A possible candidate is Basque, characterized by Ortiz de Urbina 1994 as “an SOV language with some V2 structures”. One V2-like property that Basque has, reminiscent of Breton and Icelandic, is that the

finite auxiliary (or verb in the case of the synthetic verbs) cannot be sentence-initial, but must be preceded by the negation, the affirmation particle *ba*, or the main verb, among other possibilities.

- (3) a. *Du Jonek liburua erosi.
 has John book bought
 b. Ez du Jonek liburua erosi.
 NEG has Jon book bought
 c. Erosi du Jonek liburua?
 “Has John bought the book?”

Ortiz de Urbina’s 1989, 1994 (whence the examples) proposal is that Basque is a kind of residual V2 language: In connection with focus or *wh*-movement the finite auxiliary/verb undergoes movement to C, with obligatory adjunction of another head to C. If there is no negation or other C-type head drawn from the lexicon, the nonfinite verb can be adjoined to C. *Wh*-phrases and focused phrases move to specCP.

- (4) Zer irakurri du Jonek?
 what read has John

The unmarked order is SOV:

- (5) Jonek liburua erosi du.
 Jon book bought has

My suggestion is that Basque is more of a general V2 language: In (4) specCP is filled by *vP*, in this case containing the subject and the object. This would be the default option in Basque. The structure of (5) would thus be (6) (for reasons which will be discussed I assume that the finite auxiliary does not move to C in Basque).

- (6) [_{CP} [_{vP} Jonek t_{-v} liburua] [_C [_C erosi] [_{IP} du t_{-v} t_{-vp}]]]

An answer to why the closest category in this case is *vP* rather than the subject, is provided by phase theory (Chomsky 1999): *vP* is a phase, which means that it is spelled out when the next higher phase is complete, that is when C is merged. After that the subject is not accessible for movement. The entire spelled-out *vP* can, however, be moved.

The theory will be refined in terms of Rizzi’s articulated theory of the C-domain.

References

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