

Predicate fronting and Aspect in Northern Hiberno-English

It has long been established that aspectual factors such as telicity and accomplishment can act as triggers for syntactic movement of arguments. In this paper, we present novel evidence that predicate complements undergo such movement in a Germanic dialect.

The dialect in question is Northern Hiberno-English (NHIE), a variety that has received considerable previous attention in the literature (Duffield 1993, Henry 1995, McCloskey 2000, to appear). In this dialect, there exist two grammatical orders for predicates of certain verbs indicating a change of state:

- (1) a. You have got really tall.
- b. You are really tall got.
- (2) a. The leaves have turned very brown.
- b. The leaves are very brown turned.

We assume, following Larson (1988) and many others, that the notion “verb phrase” is internally complex, and that, as in the work of Travis (1992, 2000), Adger and Tsoulas (2004) and others, such internal complexity admits an aspectual projection below vP. Furthermore, as in (3) we take the accomplishment reading of arguments to be mediated by movement to the specifier of this AspP, after Travis (1992, 2000), Ritter and Rosen (1998) and Borer (forthcoming).

- (3) a. Yvonne ate the anchovy sandwich.
- b. [_{vP} ate_i [_{AspP} [the anchovy sandwich]_j Asp [_{VP} t_i t_j]]]

However, we claim that in NHIE, such movement is available not only for arguments, but also for adjectival predicates which originate within the complement of change-of-state verbs such as *grow*, *get*, and *turn*.

- (4) [_{vP} v [_{AspP} Asp [_{VP} turn [_{SC} the leaves [really brown]]]]]
- (5) a. They are all really tall got.
- b. * They are really tall all got.

Correlated with the difference in predicate position is the HAVE/BE alternation which can be observed across (a) and (b) of (1) and (2): the predicate can only precede the participle if the auxiliary is BE, not HAVE. Following Benveniste (1966), Freeze (1992) and Kayne (1992), we take HAVE to be syntactically derived, by the incorporation of an (abstract) preposition into an archiauxiliary BE. The minimalist conception of syntactic processes as entirely driven by relations between formal features of functional heads then permits an immediate account of the HAVE/BE alternation found in (1) and (2), on the reasonable assumption that this preposition is an instantiation of Asp^o. Movement of the predicate in (1)b renders Asp^o syntactically inert, so that it cannot incorporate to BE; when the predicate does not shift to Spec/AspP, Asp^o is then free to move to BE. Both of the syntactic oddities of this construction then fall out from a single explanation.

- (6) [_{vP} v [_{AspP} Asp [_{VP} turn [_{SC} the leaves [really brown]]]]]

Note that, if *all*-stranding marks the left edge of vP, then the predicate cannot move out of that, for example to a higher IP-internal focus position. Rather, it must move to a projection within vP, offering further evidence for an Asp projection below v.

- (7) a. They are all really tall got.
b. * They are really tall all got.

Note that preverbal predicates are not restricted to perfects, but also occur in the present continuous, which does not exhibit a HAVE/BE alternation:

- (8) a. You're really thin getting.
b. You're getting really thin.

In this case, the aspectual head does not contain a preposition, so regardless of whether the predicate moves, incorporation cannot take place.

However, simple tenses are barred from this construction, thus providing evidence that tensed verbs move higher than participles in English.

- (9) a. * You really thin got.
b. * She really thin gets.

This view of syntactic movement, finally, invites a re-evaluation of the triggering of movement itself. In Chomsky (1999, 2001), displacement is driven solely by the higher head – “movement” consists of Agree between two heads, followed by the satisfaction of an EPP feature on the higher head. Under our account, however, incorporation of BE depends on a feature of the lower head, Asp, and does not occur if that feature is otherwise checked. An alternative view of incorporation, which locates the trigger for movement on the lower head, is thus more consonant with the phenomena revealed.