

Is Finnish topic prominent?

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Abstract: Finnish finite clause exhibits topic prominence in the sense that the preverbal subject position is occupied by the topic (for example, by the direct object topic), not necessarily by the grammatical subject. Three currently unexplained facts concerning the Finnish free word order phenomenon and topicalization are noted in this paper: subject-verb agreement interacts with word order; the preverbal “topic” position is not reserved exclusively for topics; and noun phrase (DP) arguments are also able to dislocate to the right edge of a (potentially very long) finite clause. A generalized morphosyntactic agreement mechanism that requires the presence of nominal phi-features inside the highest finite projection of a clause is posited to explain the link between agreement and word order. The problem with topicality is accounted for by assuming that the topic-focus mechanism operates outside of narrow syntax. Free word order and non-configurationality are argued to result from argument adjunction, not from movement. Finally, it is concluded that the Finnish EPP is connected neither to morphosyntax nor to discourse.

Keywords: topic; agreement; EPP; configurationality; Finnish; information structure

1. Introduction

Beginning with Vilkuna (1989), it has been well-known that Finnish exhibits topic prominence. The preverbal subject position is occupied by the topic, not necessarily by (nominative and agreeing) grammatical subject. If something else than the grammatical subject constitutes the topic of the clause, that element, say the direct object, will be fronted while the grammatical subject remains in its post verbal position (1).¹ This leads into considerable freedom in word order.

¹ Abbreviations: 0 = zero agreement or default 3SG agreement; ALL = allative case; GEN = genitive; IMPASS = impersonal verb (see note 3); NOM = nominative case; PAR = partitive case (the default object/complement case in Finnish); SG/PL = singular/plural. The Finnish direct object case for singular full DPs could be glossed either as accusative or genitive; I will gloss these direct objects as ‘ACC/GEN’, thus ignoring the controversy. ACC/NOM is used for the nominative-looking direct object case. For a recent analysis of the ACC/GEN and ACC/NOM phenomenon, see Vainikka & Brattico (2014). There exist separate genitive (GEN) and accusative (ACC) forms. Finnish has extensive case concord, which I will ignore in the glosses

- (1) a. Pekka rakastaa nopeita autoja. (SVO)
 Pekka.NOM loves.3SG fast cars.PAR
 ‘Pekka loves fast cars.’ (‘Pekka’ = topic, ‘fast cars’ = new information).
- b. Nopeita autoja rakastaa Pekka. (OVS)
 fast cars.PAR loves.3SG Pekka.NOM
 ‘Pekka loves fast cars.’ (‘fast cars’ = topic, ‘Pekka’ = new information)
 ‘What comes to fast cars, it is Pekka who loves them.’

The topic constituent is presupposed to be known from the previous discourse, while the focus need not be. Thus, sentence (1b) constitutes a felicitous answer to the question such as ‘Who loves fast cars?’, for example. On the other hand, Finnish also exhibits something resembling the English EPP property: verb initial sentences tend to be ungrammatical in and itself. For example, the preverbal position, if otherwise left empty, can and often must be filled by an expletive (2).²

- (2) a. Sitä varastelivat naapurin lapset taas meidän omenoita.
 expl stole.3PL neighbor children again our apples.PAR
 ‘The neighbor children again stole our apples.’
- b. *Varastelivat naapurin lapset taas meidän omenoita.
 stole.3PL neighbors children again our apples.PAR

Holmberg and Nikanne (2002) propose that Finnish exhibits a “topic EPP”: the preverbal position must probe and check a topic feature (more specifically, a nonfocus [–foc] feature) if such is present. If it is not found, an expletive can, and in many cases must, take its place to prevent the verb to take the first position in the clause. There are further twists in this story, but Holmberg and Nikanne’s (H&N for now) analysis is, in my view, a successful elaboration of the basic principles of Finnish finite clause’s left periphery established by Vilkkuna (1989).³

In this paper, I would like to draw attention to certain facts concerning the Finnish finite clause that have not been fully documented to date, and which I believe might constitute a problem for H&N’s analysis and thus for the overall architecture of the Finnish finite clause. First, I will

² (2b) has a reading in which the initial verb has a contrastive and/or focus interpretation. It can be shown that, under such interpretation, the verb has raised to the C-domain (T-to-C movement) to check the focus feature.

³ To my knowledge, Vainikka (1989) was the first to capture Vilkkuna’s hypothesis within a rigorous X-bar theory, proposing that the two preverbal positions are Spec,IP and Spec,CP.

argue that the discourse-motivated word order manipulations, of which the topic fronting discussed earlier is but one example, are possible only if there is overt subject–verb agreement. There is nothing in the H&N’s analysis (or in any analysis of Finnish finite clause I am aware of) which explains why agreement is relevant to word order in Finnish. The second problem concerns the phenomenon I call long distance right dislocation. I use this descriptive term to refer to the fact that the subject can appear at the “right edge” of a very long clause. This fact creates a number of problems, not only for H&N’s analysis, but for the syntactic theory at large. The third problem of the H&N approach is that, as is well-known, the subject position of the Finnish finite clause is not tied exclusively to topics. The topic interpretation is the “default” interpretation at best, and this warrants an explanation. These problems are explained in detail in section 2. Section 3 presents a solution to the problem of agreement and word order, section 4 addresses the problem with the preverbal topic, section 5 examines long distance right dislocation, and section 6 revisits the problem of the Finnish EPP. Section 7 concludes the paper.

Before proceeding with the main agenda, I mention few things about Finnish syntax to aid the reader through the text. The grammatical subject in Finnish normally agrees in phi-features with the finite element of the clause and is assigned the nominative case. When a direct object, say, occupies the topic position of a finite clause, there is normally a grammatical subject elsewhere in the clause that manifests morphosyntactic subjecthood (nominative case and phi-agreement). It is not the case that the fronted/topicalized direct object would agree with the verb and/or get nominative case; in Finnish, direct objects never agree with the verb in phi-features. This means that the notion of grammatical subject, which can be used in Finnish either for the preverbal topic constituent or for the nominative/agreeing phrase, is ambiguous. When the distinction is crucial, the term “morphosyntactic or grammatical subject” will be used to refer to the argument that agrees and bears the nominative case; the term “preverbal subject” will be used to refer to the constituent that is located in the preverbal subject position.

There are only two phrasal positions to the left of the finite element (finite verb/auxiliary/negation) in a Finnish finite clause (3).

- (3) $\{\text{ForceP Force}^0 \{\text{OpP ketä} \{\text{Op}^0 \{\text{TP/FinP Merja} \{\text{rakastaa ...}\}\}\}\}$
 that who Merja.NOM loves.3SG
 <Operator field> ←———— Finite portion —————>
 (Several overt suffix features (e.g., *-hAn*, *-pA*, *-pAs*, *-kO*))

The first position, just left of the finite element – the preverbal subject position – is the topic/EPP position discussed by H&N. This position belongs to the finite portion of the clause and is not inside the C-domain. There is currently no solid evidence for the existence of other preverbal positions between the finite element and the C-domain. For example, when focus interpretation is created by A-bar movement, the moved phrases go to the operator position inside the C-domain that is situated to the left of the topic position. Therefore, the Finnish preverbal topic position is much like the English preverbal subject position, with the exception, of course, that in Finnish the position need not be occupied by the grammatical subject. The C-domain, in turn, has only one full phrasal position that I call the “operator position” because it hosts various operator-like elements (*wh*-pronouns, relative pronouns, focus elements and the like). The fact that just these two positions and nothing more exists was established by Vilkuna (1989) and has been assumed ever since, to my knowledge. There is, in other words, currently no solid evidence of anything more complex. Even if in some languages, for example, in Italian and Hungarian, the C-domain appears to involve more syntactic apparatus, for example, iterated high topic and/or operator positions, such claims cannot be generalized to Finnish without empirical justification; instead, as we argue in Brattico et al. (2014), the left edge discourse effects (topic, focus, etc.) are implemented in Finnish in an agglutinative fashion by means of left edge suffixes and their various iterative combinations, not by means of multiplying syntactic positions/projections.

2. Three problems in H&N's analysis

2.1. The problem with agreement

According to H&N's analysis, a nonfocus (\sim topic) discourse feature at the left edge of the finite portion of the finite clause – I will call it the T/Fin-projection or “finite tense projection” in this paper – attracts and checks a constituent with the same feature and, if no such constituent is present, summons an expletive. Think of the topic feature as performing the duty of the English-type EPP. Koskinen (1998) proposes a similar analysis, but assumes a separate Topic projection. I call the operation that moves a constituent to the topic position “topic fronting”. The term is descriptive.

Current linguistic theorizing acknowledges several types of topics and several designated syntactic topic positions at the finite clause left edge (see, for example, Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010). There is currently empirical

evidence only for one such topic position at the Finnish left edge. The position is best described as the “presupposed” or “given” topic, a topic whose existence is assumed in the discourse, is well-known by the discourse participants, is referential, and definite.

Returning to the issue of Finnish topic fronting, there are finite sentences in which this operation is not available or it feels quite marginal. One example is provided by a modal construction illustrated by (4). In these examples, I have shifted the position of the subject and object so that the object is fronted (topic fronting) while the subject is in a remote postverbal position. I start with these examples since the data is particularly clear.

- (4) a. Pekan täytyy lainata Merjalle auto.
 Pekka.GEN must.0 borrow to.Merja car.ACC/NOM
 ‘Pekka must borrow a car to Merja.’
- b. *Auto täytyy lainata Merjalle Pekan.
 car.ACC/NOM must.0 borrow to.Merja Pekka.GEN
 Intended: ‘What comes to the cars, it is Pekka who must borrow them to Merja.’
- c. *Auto täytyy lainata Pekan Merjalle.
 car.ACC/NOM must.0 borrow Pekka.GEN to.Merja

This construction is headed by a modal verb *täytyy* ‘must’ that agrees neither with the thematic subject nor with the preverbal subject (hence the .0 in the gloss). If we substitute the non-agreeing modal verb with a semantically similar verb that does show agreement, topic fronting becomes more acceptable (5). Notice the predictable shift in semantic interpretation.

- (5) a. Pekka saa lainata Merjalle auton.
 Pekka.NOM may.3SG to.borrow to.Merja car.ACC/GEN
 ‘Pekka (= topic) may borrow Merja a/the car (= focus).’
- b. Auton saa lainata Merjalle Pekka.
 car.ACC/GEN may.3SG to.borrow to.Merja Pekka.NOM
 ‘What comes to the car, it is Pekka who can borrow it to Merja.’

To test this contrast in a context that makes topic fronting pragmatically felicitous, we can use, for example, interrogatives (6).

- (6) a. Question: *Kuka saa lainata Merjalle auton?* ‘Who can borrow to Merja the car?’
 Auton saa lainata Merjalle Pekka.
 car.ACC/GEN may.3sg borrow to.Merja Pekka.NOM
 ‘Pekka (=focus) may borrow Merja a/the car (=topic).’
 ‘What comes to the car, it is Pekka who can borrow it to Merja.’

- b. Question: *Kenen täytyy lainata Merjalle auto?* ‘Who must borrow Merja the car?’
 *Auto täytyy lainata Merjalle Pekan.
 car.ACC/NOM must.0 to.borrow to.Merja Pekka.GEN

The contrast between (4) and (5)/(6) leads one to suspect that the problem with topic fronting in (4) might be due to morphosyntax, possibly due to agreement. Indeed, topic fronting is ungrammatical or marginal in various constructions in Finnish that lack agreement (7).

(7) Psych-verb construction

- a. Huomenna meitä pelottaa mennä tenttiin.
 tomorrow we.PAR fear.0 to.go to.exam
 ‘We are frightened to go to the exam tomorrow.’
- b. ?*Huomenna tenttiin pelottaa meitä mennä.
 tomorrow to.exam fear.0 we.PAR to.go
- c. *Huomenna tenttiin pelottaa mennä meitä.
 huomenna to.exam fear.0 to.go we.PAR

The transitive variant of the Finnish impersonal passive construction provides another possible case to examine. By taking advantage of this construction, it is possible to construct minimal pairs in which one transitive clause exhibits agreement (9) while the other does not (8).⁴

(8) Active variant of the impersonal agreementless passive, topic fronting not possible

- a. Me itse haluttiin valita meidän uusi talo.
 we self.NOM wanted.IMPASS to.select our.GEN new home.ACC/NOM
 ‘We ourselves wanted to select our new house.’
- b. ?Meidän uusi talo haluttiin valita me itse.
 our new home.ACC/NOM want.IMPASS select we self.NOM

⁴ The Finnish impersonal passive construction has evoked considerable literature (see Manninen & Nelson 2004). Most of this literature concentrates on the construction that lacks the overt subject (e.g., *televisiota katsottiin joka ilta* ‘television.PAR watched.IMPASS every evening’). This variant is not relevant here, because we are examining topic fronting in transitive clauses. There is a transitive variant of the same construction that is discussed in the main text. This variant is used in spoken language and is synonymous with an active transitive sentence, but exhibits different syntactic and morphosyntactic properties (see Vainikka & Brattico 2014). The crucial fact for present purposes is that this is basically an active transitive clause that lacks agreement, and thus makes it possible to test the effects of agreement.

- (9) Corresponding active clause with agreement
- a. Me itse halusimme valita meidän uuden talon.
 We self.NOM wanted.1PL select our new home.ACC/GEN
 ‘We ourselves wanted to select our new home, not the real estate agent.’
- b. Meidän uuden talon halusimme valitsimme me itse.
 Our new home.ACC/GEN wanted.1PL select we self.NOM
 ‘We ourselves wanted to select our new home.’

In the examples cited above I have moved the direct object to the preverbal subject position while the thematic subject has been dislocated towards the end of the clause. These manipulations provide the clearest contrasts between clauses that show agreement and those which do not. If the thematic subject remains at its first-merge position Spec,*v*P, close to the main verb, the contrast still exists but it is weaker according to my judgment (10).

- (10) a. Pekan täytyy lainata auto Merjalta.
 Pekka.GEN must.0 to.borrow car.ACC/NOM from.Merja
 ‘Pekka must borrow a/the car from Merja.’
- b. ?Auto täytyy Pekan lainata Merjalta.
 car.ACC/NOM must.0 Pekka.GEN to.borrow from.Merja
 ‘Pekka must borrow a/the car from Merja.’
- c. Auton saa Pekka lainata Merjalta.
 car.ACC/GEN may.3SG Pekka.NOM to.borrow from.Merja
 ‘Pekka may borrow a/the car from Merja.’

In fact, in (10)(b) the subject might still be ‘close enough’ to the main verb to render agreement irrelevant. There is, in addition, no clear topic-focus contrast between ‘car’ and ‘Pekka’ in (10)(b). The ungrammaticality, furthermore, becomes stronger if the clause is embedded inside a relative clause, and thus if the possible C-domain effects are controlled for (11).

- (11) a. Tyttö jolle₁ Pekan täytyy lainata auto —₁
 girl to.whom Pekka.GEN must.0 borrow car.ACC/NOM
 ‘A girl to whom Pekka must borrow the car.’
- b. *Tyttö jolle₁ auto täytyy Pekan lainata —₁
 girl to.whom car must.0 Pekka.GEN borrow
- c. *Tyttö jolle₁ auto täytyy lainata Pekan —₁
 girl to.whom car must.0 to.borrow Pekka.GEN

Thus, it is possible that in a simple OVS sentence, in which the subject comes right after the main verb, the object can be interpreted as being in

the operator field inside the C-domain where it receives the focus (non-topic) interpretation, and the subject that is close to the verb is still interpreted as checking the topic feature. It is important, though, to control for possible C-domain effects when experimenting with finite word order.

2.2. Problems with long distance right dislocation: agreement problem revisited

Next we examine another problem raised by H&N's hypothesis. H&N claim that once the preverbal position is reserved by the topic, say the direct object topic, the postverbal grammatical subject will remain at Spec,*v*P. Yet, it is possible to move the grammatical subject to the **right edge** of the clause, where it receives a strong focus interpretation (12).⁵

- (12) Tätä kirjaa toivoi voivansa suositella Liisalle Pekka.
 this book.PAR hoped.3SG could to.recommend to.Liisa Pekka.NOM
 'What comes to this book, it was Pekka who hoped to be able to recommend it to Merja.'

Since the thematic and morphosyntactic subject *Pekka* has agreed with the verb (i.e., there is agreement between *Pekka* and the matrix verb) and has the nominative case assigned, and it is marked by the agent thematic role, we have to assume that either the subject is dislocated to the right edge from the Spec,*v*P position or, else, it visits the Spec,T/FinP and then leaves to the outer right edge. Either way, we have a process depicted in (13).

- (13) Tätä kirjaa toivoi voivansa suositella Liisalle Pekka.
 this book.PAR hoped could recommend to.Liisa Pekka.NOM
 ——— Long distance right dislocation ———>

As much as the direct object can move upwards to the preverbal topic position, the thematic agent can move "backwards" to the far right edge position. This construction raises a number of questions. From the point of view of H&N's analysis, however, we must ask what guarantee do we have that the topic shift, in which the subject appears in the postverbal position,

⁵ The category of linguistic focus is not monochromatic. I will leave this problem largely unaddressed in this article. To me, long distance right dislocation is associated with a strong 'new information' interpretation. When the same phrase is moved to the operator field inside the C-domain, and suffixed with a focus clitic and/or prosodic emphasis, it obtains a contrastive tone in addition.

is not produced by right dislocation? If it were, then the grammatical subject could have been in the subject position before jumping to the right edge, and we could posit an English-type EPP-mechanism in which the preverbal subject position checks grammatical subjects (14).

- (14) Nopeita autoja ___ rakastaa ___ Pekka.
 new cars.PAR love Pekka.NOM
 ← Move →
 ← Right dislocate →

There is indeed a similarity between (13) and the topic shift: in both cases, the morphosyntactic subject has focus interpretation. (This derivation could also explain why the OVS order without subject–verb agreement feels only marginal in the absence of C-material: according to this hypothesis, the direct object is inside the C-domain while the thematic subject visits the preverbal subject position and then moves back.) We could in fact go as far as to assume that the Indo-European morphosyntactic A-movement/EPP system is universal, and that the topic/focus layer exhibited by Finnish and other Finno-Ugric languages is produced by further back-and-forth movement. This could also lead one to posit the existence of further syntactic positions inside the Finnish left periphery, for example, a topic position above the preverbal subject position in (14). I do not champion this analysis,⁶ but this possibility has to be controlled for. But the more important reason I mention this here is that once we see that there exists right dislocation, whatever it might be (I will return to its precise analysis in a later section), we have to find a way to block it. For example, we have to explain why (15) are all ungrammatical.

- (15) a. *Uusi talo täytyy rakentaa Pekan/meidän.
 new house.ACC/NOM must.0 build Pekka.GEN/we.GEN
 Intended: 'What comes to the new home, it is Pekka/us who must build it.'
- b. *Tenttiin pelottaa mennä meitä.
 to.exam fear.0 to.go we.PAR
- c. *Meidän uusi talo haluttiin valita me itse.
 Our new home.ACC/NOM want.IMPASS select we self.NOM

⁶ This idea was part of our earlier analysis of the Finnish EPP (Brattico & Huhmarniemi 2006), in which the English-type morphosyntactic EPP mechanisms was assumed to be universal. We maintained that the discourse motivated (or “stylistic”) movement is applied after a universal morphosyntactic system had finished off its own operations (EPP/agreement/A-movement). I think this approach is misguided, but due to existence of right dislocation the issue is hard to solve conclusively.

In addition, compare (12) with (16). Example (16) is not only marginal but gibberish.

- (16) *Tätä kirjaa täytyy voida suositella Liisalle meidän/Pekan.
 this book.PAR must.0 can recommend to.Liisa we.GEN/pekka.GEN

————— Right dislocation? —————>

‘What comes to this book, it was us/Pekka who must be able to recommend it to Liisa.’

Putting this problem aside for a while, right dislocation can help us look another set of data: non-finite constructions. Namely, we can attempt to move non-agreeing subjects out of their nonfinite subject/specifier positions to the main clause right edge by using long distance right dislocation. It turns out that such operation is impossible (17)–(19):

- (17) A-infinitival⁷

- a. Minä käskin Merjan syödä kaikki leivät.
 I asked Merja.GEN to.eat all bread.ACC
 ‘I asked Merja to eat all of the bread.’
- b. *Minä käskin kaikki leivät syödä Merjan.
 I asked all bread.ACC to.eat Merja.GEN

- (18) VA-infinitival

- a. Minä näin Merjan syövän karkkeja.
 I saw Merja.GEN to.eat candy.PAR
 ‘I saw Merja eating (the) candy.’
- b. *Minä näin karkkeja syövän Merjan.
 I saw candy.PAR to.eat Merja.GEN
 Intended: ‘I saw Merja eating the candy’⁸

- (19) TUA-adverbial

- a. Minä nukahdin isän luettua kirjan.
 I.NOM fell.asleep father.GEN read.TUA book.GEN
 ‘I fell asleep after the father read a/the book.’
- b. *Minä nukahdin kirjan luettua isän.
 I.NOM fell.asleep book.GEN read.TUA father.GEN

⁷ For Finnish non-finite constructions, see Koskinen (1998).

⁸ This is grammatical if the latter portion is analyzed as a noun phrase containing a participle adjective phrase, but this is not the intended reading here.

Data in (20) shows that these problems are not due to the position of the direct object. Here we only move the subject; the direct object remains in situ. These are equally ungrammatical.

- (20) a. *Pekka käski — ostaa talon Merjan.
 Pekka asked to.buv house Merja.GEN
 └ Right dislocation →
- b. *Pekka uskoi — ostavan talon Merjan.
 Pekka believed buv.va house Merja.GEN
 └ Right dislocation →

H&N would have no problem explaining the data in (17)–(19) were they interested in extending their finite clause analysis to nonfinite domains. They could say that these non-finite constructions are not headed by the Fin-head, and thus they would not have the topic feature to attract topic arguments. But why is long distance right dislocation not possible? In addition, even if H&N could assume that there is no topic mechanism inside non-finite clauses, the data in (17)–(19) suggest that there might be an EPP-mechanism that we must account for. That EPP mechanism cannot be based on the topic feature, so their topic-EPP hypothesis cannot presumably work here. There is much evidence, discussed later in this paper, which suggests that several nonfinite domains in Finnish, such as noun phrases and adposition phrases, do exhibit phrase-internal EPP. For example, in (21b), the VA-infinitival argumentless weather verb requires something to fill in the preverbal position, much like finite verbs do.

- (21) a. Minä uskon huomenna satavan.
 I.NOM believe tomorrow to.rain
 ‘I believe that it will rain tomorrow.’
- b. *Minä uskon satavan.
 I.NOM believe to.rain
 Intended: ‘I believe it will rain.’
- c. *Minä uskon satavan huomenna.
 I.NOM believe to.rain tomorrow
 Intended: ‘I believe it will rain tomorrow.’

The idea that non-finite verb complement causes are headed by an EPP mechanisms is, therefore, a possibility; but if so, whatever this more general EPP is, it isn't topic checking. To me, however, the interesting thing about these observations is that these nonfinite domains do not exhibit agreement with their thematic subject and, therefore, once again it could be missing

agreement that prevents the subject to participate in the topic/focus hopping.⁹

This observation has at least some cross-linguistic appeal. In English, a language with very little agreement, there is a strict grammatical EPP that requires by default the grammatical subject to occupy the preverbal subject position. In Italian, with strong and more productive agreement, the subject can dislocate to the right edge (22).

- (22) a. Giovanni telefona a Marco. / A Marco telefona Giovanni.
 ‘Giovanni calls to Marco.’ ‘Giovanni calls to Marco.’
- b. A Marco — spera di poter telefonare Givoanni.
 to Marco hopes to.be.able to.call Giovanni
 (*Giovanni* = focus)
- c. *To Marco hopes to be able to call Giovanni.

I have not been able to verify whether Italian long distance right dislocation is conditioned by agreement, but properties of Hungarian support the link between agreement and right dislocation. First, in Hungarian right dislocation is possible in agreement environments, as it is in Finnish:

- (23) Hungarian
- a. Pekka akarja kölcsönkérni ezt a könyvet Merjától.
 Pekka.NOM wants to.borrow thisACC the book.ACC from.Merja
 ‘Pekka wants to borrow this book from Merja (= information focus).’
- b. Ezt a könyvet akarja kölcsönkérni Merjától Pekka.
 thisACC the book.ACC wants to.borrow from.Merja Pekka.NOM
 ‘Pekka (= information focus) wants to borrow this book from Merja.’

Hungarian has also non-agreeing finite verbs which make it possible to examine if right dislocation disappears when agreement disappears. This turns out to be the case:

- (24) a. Pekkának meg kell próbálni kölcsönkérni ezt a könyvet Merjától.
 P.GEN/DAT prt. must.0 to.try to.borrow thisACC the book.ACC from.Merja
 ‘Pekka must want to try to borrow this book from Merja.’
- b. *Ezt a könyvet kell megpróbálni kölcsönkérni Merjától Pekkának.
 thisACC the book.ACC must.0 prt.to.try to.borrow from.Merja P.GEN/DAT

⁹ A-bar movement can move subjects out of these subject positions, even from the subject positions of non-finite verbs (*kenen Pekka küski — lähteä?* ‘who.GEN Pekka asked — to.leave?’). I will later argue that the operation that produces long distance right dislocation is not A-bar movement.

These data suggest that we are not dealing with a Finnish-specific phenomenon.¹⁰ In sum, then, long distance right dislocation, a problem in its own right, reinforce the conclusion that the lack of agreement has a blocking effect in at least some discourse motivated dislocation operations.

2.3. The problem with preverbal topics

In this section we take notice of a third problem in H&N's analysis of the Finnish finite clause. The puzzle (well-known from previous research) is that the preverbal subject position in Finnish need not be the topic. It can be a non-topic quantifier such as 'nobody' or a variable bound by such quantifier (25a), while it is also possible to establish, via context, that the topic is stationed elsewhere (examples (25c–e) are from Saara Huhmarniemi, personal communication, and her paper "Finnish subject position" at finnishsyntax.wordpress.com).

- (25) a. Kukaan₁ ei usko että (juuri) hän₁ voittaa kilpailun.
 nobody not believe that exactly him wins competition
 'Nobody believes that he will win the competition.'
- b. Mitä tulee Pekkaan₁, kuka tahansa voi voittaa hänet₁.
 what comes to.Pekka anybody can beat him
 'What comes to Pekka, anybody can beat him.'
- c. Kuka tahansa voi saada sellaisen työpaikan.
 anybody can obtain such job
 'Anybody can get a job like that.'
- d. Puhutaanpa Liisasta! Joku säätiö antaa hänelle varmasti apurahan.
 'Let's talk about Liisa! Some foundation will surely give her a grant.'
- e. Kukaan ei väitä, että (pro) pystyy juoksemaan maratonin alle
 nobody not claim that can run marathon less
 kahdessa tunnissa.
 two hours
 'Nobody is claiming that s/he can run the marathon in less than two hours.'

In these examples there is a nontopic at the designated 'topic position'. There is no meaningful controversy over the fact that the Finnish preverbal subject need not be the topic. It is true, however, that indefinite/nontopical

¹⁰ Properties of Estonian might constitute a counterexample to this generalization. This interesting fact was brought to my attention too late, and I was not able to examine the matter in detail.

direct objects that occur at the preverbal subject position are quite ungrammatical:¹¹

- (26) a. ²*Kenet tahansa voittaa Pekka.
anybody.ACC win.3SG Pekka.NOM
- b. ²*Jonkun tapasi Liisa.
somebody.ACC/GEN met Liisa.NOM
- c. ²*Yhden opiskelijan tapasi professori.
a/one student.ACC/GEN met professor.NOM
- d. *Kenelle tahansa puhuu Aila (Holmberg 2010, 213)
who ever speaks Aila.NOM
'Aila speaks to anybody.'

But here too the facts call for an amendment. While I agree that the fronted direct objects require definite/topical interpretation, no such requirement is present if there is no overt thematic subject (27):

- (27) a. Ketä tahansa voidaan kiusata koulussa.
who ever.PAR can.IMPASS bully in.school
'Anybody can be teased in the school.'
- b. Ketä tahansa voi pelottaa yöllä.
who ever.PAR can fear at.night
'Anybody can feel frightened at night.'

These facts suggest that the problem might not be the "topic feature at the preverbal subject position". The ungrammaticality, whatever it is ultimately, is greatly emphasized when the indefinite object occurs together with a postverbal definite topic subject. My own analysis of this phenomenon, detailed later in this paper, is that the problem indeed concerns the combination of the indefinite direct object topic and the definite postverbal subject.

In addition, context can play a role in circumventing even the "indefinite direct object subject" problem. There are Fregean logic textbook clauses (28) in which, while one interpretation requires that the indefinite fronted direct object receives a more definite/topical interpretation (wide scope interpretation in this context), also the narrow scope/indefinite reading is available (for some speakers, this is even the preferred reading).

¹¹ Examples (26a–c) are from Saara Huhmarniemi, personal communication.

(28) “Logic textbook sentences”

- a. Jotain naista rakastaa jokainen mies.
 some woman.PAR loves.3SG every man.NOM
 Interpretation 1: ‘for some woman *y*: for all men *x*: *x* loves *y*’.
 Interpretation 2: ‘for all men *x*: there is a woman *y* such that: *x* loves *y*’.
- b. (Vain) yhtä taloa kävi katsomassa jokainen ostaja.
 only one house.PAR went.3SG to.see every buyer.NOM
 Interpretation 1: ‘for (only) one house *y*: every buyer *x*: *x* went to see *y*’.
 Interpretation 2 (marginally possible): ‘every buyer *x*: for (only) one house *y*: *x* went to see *y*’.
- c. Jotain lauluja laulaa joku naapuri täällä öisin.
 some songs.PAR sing.3SG some neighbour here at.nights
 ‘Some neighbor sings some songs here during the night.’

In Fregean sentences such as these there is no requirement that the indefinite preverbal object must trigger the topic interpretation. In addition, by manipulating the context, it is possible to make a postverbal subject the topic (29):

- (29) Pekka, Jukka ja Raine lähtivät lappiin hiihtolomalle. Ilmeisesti jotain talviurheilulajia harrastaa heistä jokainen.
 Pekka, Jukka and Raine left to Lapland for a ski vacation. Apparently some winter sport.PAR does of.them each
 ‘... Apparently, each of them does some winter sports.’

Below (30) are other possible examples demonstrating the same phenomenon. Each sentence can be used in a context in which the postverbal thematic subject is the topic.

- (30) a. Ilmeisesti jotain pahaa oli Merja tehnyt.
 apparently some bad.PAR had Merja.NOM done
 ‘Apparently, Merja had done something bad.’
- b. Jotain tietoja taisi Snowden vuotaa myös Venäläisille.
 some information.PAR did Snowden.NOM leak also to.Russians
 ‘Snowden leaked some information also to the Russians.’
 ‘It was also to the Russians that Snowden leaked some information.’
- c. Yhden virheen myönsi Pekka.
 one mistake.ACC/GEN admitted Pekka.NOM
 ‘Pekka admitted one mistake.’

To summarize, while the object topicalization is ungrammatical unless accompanied by a corresponding topic-shift to the fronted object, context

can ease this effect. Furthermore, indefinite thematic subjects can occupy the preverbal position, while indefinite direct objects require, when in the preverbal position, that there is no definite postverbal subject. These facts suggest to me that the topic-EPP hypothesis, although able to capture many of the core cases, still lacks something important. The observations are also indicative of the fact that topic **is** involved in the construction of Finnish finite clauses and is not completely irrelevant; what is less clear at this point is the exact way discourse and syntactic structure interact with each other in the Finnish finite clause.

To sum up, we have looked at three issues that might require attention in the light of H&N's analysis, and indeed in the light of much previous literature on the Finnish finite clause. A solution to each problem will be developed in the forthcoming sections.

3. Agreement

We begin with the agreement problem. The relationship between agreement and word order in Finnish suggests that there is a condition which requires that a subject occurs at Spec,HP (H = relevant head, such as T/Fin) or that phi-features occur at H (phi-agreement). Once phi-agreement is present, the subject noun phrase itself, the carrier of the phi-features, is free to displace itself; but if phi-agreement were absent, the subject noun phrase is required to occupy the Spec position. If so, then movement of the carrier DP and phi-agreement with that DP are two sides of the same coin: get nominal features, phi-features in particular, inside the finite verb's projection (31).

(31) Generalized Agreement

A head with a **generalized phi-probe** seeks (by definition) nominal phi-features from a local carrier phrase, either by means of phi-agreement, movement of the carrier phrase, or by means of both. The possessed phi-features (or a copy thereof) must, after the operation, occur inside that head's projection.

Condition (31) explains why subjects that occur together with agreeing verbs do not need to vacate the projection of that verb, and why subjects which occur together with agreementless verbs (finite and non-finite) are frozen in place. In both cases, property (31) is satisfied: phi-features occur inside verb's projection. This condition also explains how indefinite QPs and other non-topics can occupy the subject position. These are subjects which satisfy (31) but have no necessary relation with topic interpretation. Furthermore, the idea that the finite head requires some nominal fea-

tures to occur inside its own projection is a recurrent theme in generative theorizing and therefore has independent support. According to Holmberg (2000), for example, who in turn follows Chomsky (1995) and many others, the finite head/projection is looking for nominal D-features specifically.¹² I propose, based on the agreement facts reviewed in the previous two sections, that the relevant nominal features are phi-features. Furthermore, the claim that the relevant condition of accumulating nominal features inside the finite projection can be satisfied by several mechanisms (phrasal movement, head movement and/or agreement) is not novel; see Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998).

Condition (31) tries to capture the difference between English/Mainland Scandinavian and Italian/Finnish/Hungarian by saying that the English subject-oriented behavior is a result of lack of productive agreement, and that it contrasts with rich agreement in the latter languages resulting in a more relaxed attitude concerning the position of the subject, the phi-carrier itself. Thus, condition (31) is part of the UG, not a condition of Finnish. Accordingly, there might be no “topic prominent languages” or a “topic-prominence parameter” in UG; instead, the free word order phenomenon results from an abundance of agreement. Indeed, we have seen that Finnish is not topic prominent, and behaves rather like English or many other Germanic languages what comes to constructions that lack agreement. Condition (31) further predicts that in languages with very little or no agreement, word order should be frozen to the extent that phi-probing itself is universal. I leave the examination of this claim for future.

H&N discuss many apparently subjectless clauses in Finnish in which something else than the thematic argument or an expletive satisfies (their) EPP. The following examples are from H&N’s paper (their example 7, p. 81).

- (32) a. Tänään leikkii lapsia kadulla.
 today plays.0 children.PAR in.street
 b. Tromssassa leikkii lapsia kadulla.
 in.Tromssa play.0 children.PAR in.street

¹² The D-feature assumption is supported by the fact that indefinite (D-less) noun phrases are not moved to Spec,IP. Similar definiteness effects do exist in Finnish, at least in some constructions (Välímää-Blum 1988). But these effects are not regulated by strict syntactic conditions. Given appropriate context, the preverbal subject can be indefinite.

- c. Kirveen avulla murtautuu helposti taloon.
 axe.GEN with.help break.0 easily into.house
 ‘One can easily break into the house with the help of an axe.’
- d. *Ehkä leikkii lapsia kadulla.
 perhaps play.0 children..PAR in.street
- e. *Helposti murtautuu taloon kirveen avulla.
 easily break into.house axe.GEN with.help

They observe that for a phrase to be able to fill in the Spec,T/FinP position, it has to be “referential in a broad sense, including locative and temporal adverbials but excluding sentence adverbials and manner adverbials” (H&N, 81). The moved phrases in (32) all carry phi-features, so one can claim that condition (31) also explains (32).

Without productive subject–verb agreement (31) behaves much like the original English-type EPP requiring a (nominative) noun phrase to occupy the preverbal subject position. Why not to say that it is the EPP? The reason is because in Finnish verb initial clauses are ungrammatical with or without agreement. I think, and will later argue, that the agreement condition is something else than the ban of verb-initial clauses. Holmberg (2000) arrives at what is essentially the same result for Icelandic. He argues that the requirement to have nominal features inside Spec,Fin/TP is different from still another requirement to fill in the Spec,Fin/TP with almost anything. I will return to this hypothesis, which I accept basically as is, in the last section of the present paper.

Condition (31) says that the phi-carrier that is used to obtain phi-features must be “local”. This is because phi-agreement in Finnish is established locally by the agreeing head and a local argument. The direct object never phi-agrees with the finite verb. In addition, it seems that in Finnish the agreement condition cannot be satisfied by moving the direct object in the presence of a more local subject.¹³ The direct object can perform topic fronting only if the subject has first agreed with the verb. Finally, there are situations in which nothing is able or will satisfy condition (31). This occurs if no local subject argument is present and no other phi-carrier is

¹³ If this condition applies in Finnish, then it is predicted that simple OVS clauses must be ungrammatical in the absence of agreement. The data is not completely clear, in part due to the structural peculiarities of many possible agreementless OVS sentences (e.g., psych-verbs, impersonal passive construction, various partitive subject constructions). To me, many agreementless OVS sentences are marginal or ungrammatical when the C-domain effects are controlled for, for example, when the clause is embedded inside a relative clause.

present or will not move (or will not topicalize) to Spec,T/FinP. In finite domains this situation is avoided by creating a pronominal expletive (*sitä* ‘it.PAR’) and/or by generating default agreement features, both operations that can satisfy (31).¹⁴

It is well-known that agreement can also freeze A-bar movement, which is the opposite of what condition (31) says. Huhmarniemi (2012) shows that agreement has a freezing effect on A-bar movement in Finnish. Thus, condition (31) is not meant to regulate A-bar movement. I will later discuss evidence which suggests that topic fronting is not A-bar movement.

4. Topic and discourse

I will now turn to the problem of topic. I will disperse the discussion into two sections, this and the next. In this section certain simplifications are made. In the next section, I take long distance right dislocation into account and formulate my final analysis.

I will first assume, adopting and developing H&N and especially Holmberg (2000), that the preverbal head Fin/T has two features. One feature is the (cause of the) morphosyntactic agreement system discussed in the

¹⁴ Ignoring the default agreement in these domains will always lead into ungrammaticality; ignoring the expletive strategy will typically do the same by generating a verb initial clause. After this, there exists a residuum of verb initial cases that satisfy condition (31) by means of default agreement but do not require an (overt) phrase to occur at Spec,Fin/TP. I will conclude at the end of the present article that the EPP condition indeed is a separate matter, but leave the problem of verb initial clauses for future. Expletives and default agreement cannot be generated inside non-finite domains; hence they require a subject (overt or covert) at Spec.

A further thing to note, as pointed out by a reviewer, is that it is unclear if (31) applies to a type of non-finite agreement implemented by the Finnish possessive suffix (see Huhmarniemi & Brattico 2015 and Brattico & Huhmarniemi 2016 for an up-to-date review and an analysis of the possessive suffix as agreement). The reviewer notes that inside a variety of nonfinite phrases exhibiting possessive agreement, adverbial clauses in particular, the subject has to occur in the prehead position with or without agreement. This is one reason I say in (31) that it is possible that the generalized agreement requirement itself is satisfied by agreement and movement or by both. In addition, the status of the possessive agreement and the EPP itself are subject to controversy (EPP will be discussed in Section 6 of the present paper). Most important, though, is the fact that these nonfinite phrases, adverbials, are islands for movement and therefore examination of long distance right dislocation is not trivial, perhaps impossible. Due to these concerns, condition (31) as stated here is taken to generalize over standard agreement and non-agreement environments; possessive suffix agreement requires separate examination.

previous section. My analysis, formulated in section 3, was that nominal phi-features (and not D-features) must occur inside verb's projection. This means that, to discuss the topic mechanism, we will assume throughout the discussion that the generalized agreement condition is satisfied. We therefore assume for the purposes of the forthcoming discussion that phi-features appear inside the projection of the verb; only then does the "topic feature" activate (e.g., in Finnish, agreement > topic).¹⁵ If the main verb exhibits no agreement with the subject, then the agreement condition requires the presence of that constituent at the preverbal position, topic or not. This is also important when preparing data for experimentation, in that we have to control for agreement. We will then assume that the second feature is the topic feature, following H&N, an assumption that I will revise in the next section but wish to adopt here to keep the discussion simple.

Recall that a phrase that sits in the preverbal specifier position needs not be the topic. If supported by context, possibly any other constituent can be the topic (33).

- (33) Mitä tulee Pekkaan₁, kuka tahansa voi voittaa hänet₁.
 what comes to.Pekka anyone can beat him
 'As for Pekka, anyone can beat him.'

It cannot then be that whatever occurs at Spec,Fin/TP must be the topic. What happens here is that the direct object is established as the topic by the context 'as for Pekka'. This suggests that the topic feature at T/Fin is able to check an *in situ* topic as long as the operation is supported by context:

- (34) Mitä tulee Pekkaan₁, | kuka tahansa Fin/T voi voittaa hänet₁.
 what comes to.Pekka anyone can beat him
 ─────────────────────────── Context effect ───────────────────────────→ 'topic'
 'topic' 'topic'
 ─────────── Check ───────────→

I therefore propose, still following and modifying H&N's work, that Finnish is subject to the topic condition (35).

¹⁵ Saara Huhmarniemi has proposed a similar hypothesis independently; see her article "Finnish subject position" at finnishsyntax.wordpress.com.

(35) Topic condition (revised in the next section)

The topic feature at T/Fin requires checking either by a topic constituent in situ, such that T/Fin c-commands that constituent, and/or by movement of the topic constituent to Spec,T/Fin.

Keep in mind again that for this condition to work in tandem with the empirical facts the generalized agreement condition has to be satisfied first (agreement > topic). But this modification – the agreement system proposed in the previous section and the simple assumption that the topic feature can be checked without movement once agreement is taken care of – can cover much of the ground discussed thus far. One further detail requires attention, though. The *in situ* topic strategy requires strong contextual support, while the movement strategy does not. That is, when the topic appears in the preverbal Spec,Fin/TP position it is analyzed without further ado as the topic; when the topic is elsewhere, contextual support is required. This suggests that there exists a “default” system according to which, unless something intervenes, topics appear in the early portion of the finite clause while focus elements in Finnish prefer more posterior positions (36).

- (36) Tätä kirjaa suositteli Liisalle Pekka
 this book.PAR recommend to.Liisa Pekka.NOM
 Topics ←————→ Focus elements

This hypothesis, by no means a novel one, will be made more rigorous in the next section; for now, it is important to add a default interpretation mechanism to the revised H&N analysis of the Finnish topics to explain why preverbal topics are the norm in Finnish. According to this default mechanism, the feature ‘topic’ is assigned to a constituent at Spec,T/FinP unless context dictates otherwise. For example, suppose that a noun phrase is moved to Spec,T/FinP due to the agreement mechanism. According to the default topic rule, it will then receive the topic interpretation (37a) unless context dictates otherwise (b).

- (37) a. Pekan täytyy ostaa uusi auto.
 Pekka.GEN must.0 to.buy new car.ACC/NOM
 ‘Pekka (= default topic) must buy a new car.’
 b. Mitä tulee Pekkaan, jonkun täytyy hakea hänet töistä.
 what comes to.Pekka somebody must.0 pick him from.work
 ‘What comes to Pekka, somebody (= grammatical subject) must pick him (= topic) up from work.’

This analysis, however, still makes a wrong prediction. It predicts that contextual topic support could render verb initial sentences grammatical when the verb also agrees with a subject *in situ*. The construction is shown in (38). According to my analysis, under these circumstances no element is required to move to Spec,T/FinP because both features can be checked *in situ*.

- (38) {create topic from context} ... Fin/Topic ... Subj ... Topic
 ← Agree →
 ← Topic check →

I think this prediction is not borne out after all. Context manipulation does not make verb initial clauses any better:

- (39) a. [?]Mitä tulee Pekkaan, (ilmeisesti) voittaa kuka tahansa hänet.
 what comes to Pekka, apparently wins who ever him
 b. [?]Mitä tulee Pekkaan, (ilmeisesti) voittaa Merja hänet.
 what comes to Pekka, apparently wins Merja him
 (40) *Puhutaanpa Pekasta. (Ilmeisesti) Voittaa Merja hänet.
 lets.talk Pekka apparently wins Merja him
 ‘Let’s talk about Pekka. Merja will win him.’

We therefore still have an unsolved problem: why verb initial sentences are ungrammatical. Also the long distance right dislocation remains unaccounted for. I will now turn to these.

5. Right dislocation and the topic/focus system

In long distance right dislocation the agreeing nominative subject, which also represents the agent, is dislocated to the right edge of the clause (41).

- (41) Tätä kirjaa halusi suositella Liisalle Pekka.
 this book.PAR wanted recommend to.Liisa Pekka.NOM
 ‘Pekka wanted to recommend this book to Liisa.’

What is the position of the dislocated argument, and which operation is responsible for dislocating it? Putting the question this way could be misleading, however. It is not true that the subject can dislocate only to the right edge. It can dislocate to many other places as well, as shown in (42)/(43).

- (42) a. Tätä kirjaa halusi **Pekka** suositella Liisalle.
 this book wanted Pekka.NOM recommend to.Liisa
- b. Tätä kirjaa halusi suositella **Pekka** Liisalle.
 this book wanted recommend Pekka.NOM to.Liisa
- c. Tätä kirjaa halusi suositella Liisalle **Pekka**.
 this book wanted recommend to.Liisa Pekka.NOM
- (43) Tätä kirjaa (Pekka) halusi (Pekka) pyytää (Pekka) lainaksi (Pekka) Liisalta (Pekka).
 this book wanted to.ask for.borrowing from.Liisa Pekka
 ‘Pekka wanted to ask Liisa to borrow this book.’

Long distance right dislocation is a special case of something more profound: “non-configurationality”. In fact, simple testing shows that the subject has the same range of options here as do adverbs and adverbials (44a). Example in (44b) illustrates a badly placed adverbial; similar rules apply across the board to the floating subject:

- (44) a. (Eilen) Pekka (eilen) suositteli (eilen) Liisalle (eilen) tätä kirjaa (eilen).
 yesterday Pekka recommend to.Liisa this book
 ‘Pekka recommend this book to Liisa yesterday.’
- b. *Pekka suositteli tätä kirjaa meidän hyville **eilen** ystävillemme.
 Pekka recommend this book our good yesterday friends

Hence the simplest and most non-controversial syntactic theory I can think of says that the subject is adjoined to these positions, much like adverbs are. I call this phenomenon **argument float**. Adjuncts and adverbs have properties illustrated by the facts just reviewed: they are optional, have considerable freedom of ordering, and tend to orbit in the phrase/clause without interacting much with the rest of its constituents.

Because the floating subject argument has to agree with the finite verb, it must be detached from its first-merge position Spec,*v*P, where morphosyntactic agreements and theta-role assignment are performed, and then it must be positioned (ajoined, merged) into that sentence’s many adjunction junctures. The operation is therefore not A-bar movement; it does not exhibit properties of A-bar movement (see below). This structure then serves as the input for the topic/focus interpretation, in which the topics are, by default, represented hierarchically in more prominent positions, while focus elements are represented hierarchically in less prominent positions (again with some amount of freedom due to semantic reconstruction

and context manipulation, and ignoring operator effects arising from the C-domain and/or prosody).¹⁶ The analysis is illustrated in (45).

- (45) Tämän kirjan on kirjoittanut Graham Greene { }
 this book.ACC has written Graham Greene.NOM
 { } ← Adjunction → Extract
 ‘What comes to this book, it was written by Graham Greene.’

The hypothesis that the operation is adjunction and not A-bar movement makes a number of predictions. For example, it predicts that the subject can move backwards, which is what I originally diagnosed as “long distance right dislocation”. If the direct object is adjoined instead of the subject, it should be possible to sandwich the direct object between the operator position and the preverbal subject position or between the subject and the verb (this phenomenon was called “secondary movement” by Vainikka 1989, who might be the first to note its existence). This prediction is borne out. To me the SOV order is possibly slightly odd (46b), while the OSV order is marginal (46a). Some speakers accept both constructions.

- (46) a. [?]Huomenna-ko tätä autoa Pekka täytyy maalata?
 tomorrow-Q this car.PAR Pekka.GEN must.0 to.paint
 ‘Is it tomorrow that Pekka has to paint this car?’
 (‘this car’ = topic)
- b. [?]Huomenna-ko Pekka tätä autoa täytyy maalata?
 tomorrow-Q Pekka.GEN this car.PAR must.0 to.paint
 ‘Is it tomorrow that Pekka has to paint this car?’
 (‘Pekka’, ‘this car’ = topics?)

Another prediction is based on the fact that argument (and adverb) float is restricted to finite clauses. It is not possible to float an adverb out of an embedded finite clause. A-bar movement is not limited in the same way: both direct objects and to some extent also subjects can be fronted out of finite clauses. The present hypothesis makes the prediction that it should be impossible to float a topic argument out of an embedded finite clause,

¹⁶ In addition, once we let the adverb to take different positions in the clause, it, too, obtains various topic/focus interpretations according to its position. For example, in (44a), an adverb at the end of the clause most naturally implies that ‘yesterday’ is new information, while putting the same adverb to the front suggests that it is presupposed knowledge. While the matter requires further examination, it is clear that adverb placement, too, affects discourse interpretation.

whereas it is possible, as shown by Huhmarniemi (2012), to A-bar move them out (but only to the operator position). These predictions are borne out (47).

- (47) a. Jukka käski Merjan kertoa Pekalle että heidän perhe
 Jukka asked Merja to.say to.Pekka that their family
 ostaa uuden lemmikin.
 buys new pet
 ‘Jukka asked Merja to say to Pekka that their family will buy a new pet.’
- b. *Jukka käski {uuden lemmikin}₁ Merjan kertoa
 Jukka asked new pet.PAR Merja to.say
 Pekalle että heidän perhe ostaa —₁
 to.Pekka that their family buys
 (‘new pet’ floated out of an embedded clause)
- c. Uuden lemmikin-kö₁ Jukka käski Merjan kertoa
 new pet-Q Jukka asked Merja to.say
 Pekalle että heidän perhe ostaa —₁?
 to.Pekka that their family buys
 ‘Is it a new pet that Jukka asked Merja to say to Pekka that their family will buy?’

Suppose we try to topicalize a constituent from within an embedded clause into the matrix clause’s preverbal position just below the operator area. If topicalization indeed is adjunction, not A-bar movement, such operation ought to be impossible. To test this hypothesis, we have to make sure that (1) the operator position is filled and that (2) the generalized agreement condition is satisfied in the matrix clause via agreement. The prediction is borne out: topicalization is impossible, while A-bar movement is possible (48)/(49).

- (48) a. Milloin Jukka kertoi Pekalle että heidän perhe
 when Jukka told Pekka that their family
 ottaa yhä lisää velkaa?
 takes still more debt
 ‘When did Jukka told to Pekka that their family takes still more debt.’
- b. *Milloin {lisää velkaa}₁ kertoi Jukka Pekalle
 when more debt told Jukka to.Pekka
 että heidän perhe ottaa yhä —₁?
 that their family takes still
 (‘more debt’ topicalized out of an embedded clause)

- c. Mitä₁ Jukka kertoi Pekalle että heidän perhe ottaa yhä lisää ___₁?
 What.PAR Jukka told to.Pekka that their family takes still more
 ‘What did Jukka told to Pekka that their family still takes more?’
- (49) a. ³*Huomenna kirjan₁ uskoi Pekka että lukee ___₁.
 tomorrow book.GEN/ACC believe Pekka.NOM that reads
- b. *Eilen luultavasti₁ kertoi Pekka että lukee kirjan ___₁.
 yesterday maybe told Pekka that reads book
 Intended: ‘Yesterday Pekka told that he will probably read the book.’
- c. *Huomenna Merja₁ uskoi Pekka että ___₁ lukee kirjan.
 tomorrow Merja.NOM believe Pekka.NOM that reads book
- d. *Pekkako kirjan₁ uskoi että hän lukee ___₁?
 Pekka-Q book.ACC/GEN believed that he reads

We therefore have evidence that argument float (including our previous long distance right dislocation) is extraction plus adjunction, and is therefore clause-bound, not A-bar movement plus feature checking.¹⁷ (A-movement is ruled out by long distance right dislocation.) I theorize that the Finnish free word order phenomenon results from argument float.

If discourse interpretation of a phrase depends on its hierarchical position in the clause, and such positions are occupied by extraction and adjunction, not movement, the hypothesis that there are grammaticalized features in narrow syntax which are checked by the abovementioned operations begins to look unattractive. Such features had to be everywhere, a claim that requires extraordinary empirical justification. This argument is further supported by the observation that discourse context can override the default topic/focus rules, as if the interpretation were regulated by extrasyntactic context and not by grammatical features. I will therefore propose that the topic/focus interpretation is read off from syntactic structure and plays no causal role in the derivation. In other words, there is an interpretative mechanism, to be elaborated below, which has as one of its consequences the fact that preverbal subjects are typically interpreted as topics, and that indefinite subject arguments are odd without suitable context.

The discourse interpretation rule under discussion here cannot require definite/topical constituents to occur at Spec,T/FinP, because no such

¹⁷ É. Kiss (2009) reaches similar conclusions concerning quantifier raising and adverbial placement in Hungarian. According to her, both operations constitute adjunction, not substitution (movement plus feature checking). Here I am advancing a similar claim for floated arguments, especially morphosyntactic subjects.

requirement is observed if there is only one argument (50) or if the context dictates otherwise.

- (50) a. Ketä tahansa voi pelottaa nukkua ulkona.
 any body.PAR can fear to.sleep outside
 ‘Anybody can fear sleeping outside.’
 b. Kuka tahansa kelpaa tehtävään.
 any body.NOM is.eligible for.the.mission
 ‘Anybody is eligible for the mission.’

The clearest case of the rule violation occurs in transitive sentences that position an indefinite direct object at the preverbal subject position **and** a definite topic at the postverbal position (51).

- (51) a. *Ketä tahansa pelkää Aila.
 any body fears Aila
 ‘Aila fears everybody.’
 b. Aila pelkää ketä tahansa.
 Aila fears any body
 ‘Aila fears everybody.’

This to me suggests that the discourse interpretation system is not expecting to find a topic at Spec,Fin/TP; rather, it is trying to construct a **topic–predicate pair** and encounters a difficulty if (i) the topic is located structurally lower than the predicate and (ii) context does not support the reversal (52).

(52) Topic Interpretation

Provided no contextual support to do otherwise, the (definite) topic (argument) of a predicate cannot occur in a structurally lower position than the predicate (or inside the predicate).

Condition (52) links semantic predication with syntactic structure, which I think could underline the restrictions on the distribution of the topic argument. Clauses that have no topics are not problematic, because the rule becomes vacuous: it only concerns the relative positioning of the topic with respect to its own predicate. In addition, notice that (52) does not require that predication as such must apply to a hierarchically higher, definite topic constituent (such proposition is not supported by the fact); rather, it is concerned only with a situation (53) in which we attempt to apply a predicate to a nontopic such that the predicate also contains the topic, or in which the topic argument is in a structurally lower position.

- (53) *Argument [Pred V [...argument...]]
 ⟨nontopic⟩ ⟨topic⟩

Condition (52) is not a full theory of Finnish discourse interpretation. This is because any such endeavor would need to tackle also C-area operator effects, focus, prosody, and left edge suffixes, among other factors that interact with the topic interpretation. In addition, (52) requires a syntactic definition for the notion of ‘predicate’. Rule (52) only aims to capture the facts reported in this paper (and the papers cited here) once the “topic-EPP” mechanism is dropped out.

6. The diehard EPP

Neither the agreement mechanism nor the topic mechanism suffice to explain why verb initial sentences are ungrammatical. The agreement mechanism does not require any constituent to occur at Spec,T/FinP, because (subject-verb) agreement itself can satisfy it. Likewise, the topic mechanism does not require the topic to occur at Spec,T/FinP, because topics can be checked in situ (and because non-topics can occupy this position as well). Yet, verb initial sentences in general refuse to be grammatical in Finnish. The verb is free to use a variety of ways to satisfy its EPP: direct object topics, expletives and adverbs can all do. The phrase need not be phonologically overt: it is well known that in Finnish, null subjects can satisfy the EPP too (Vainikka & Levy 1999; Holmberg 2005; 2010). If we abstract agreement and the topic mechanism out of the EPP, what is left? The answer seems to be an abstract principle forcing configuration “{XP {H...}}” to narrow syntax, for selected heads (54).

- (54) EPP

A head H (e.g., T/Fin) that has the EPP property must (by definition) establish configuration “{XP {H...}}” in narrow syntax.

This rule resembles Chomsky’s minimalist analysis in terms of second edge feature, according to which (if I understand him correctly) the generalized EPP is a condition which requires a head to trigger second-Merge.¹⁸ It is also reminiscent of Holmberg’s (2000) P-feature EPP, a similar condition which states that virtually anything can satisfy the EPP and can thus function as an “expletive”.

¹⁸ First-merge establishes a head–complement relation {H ZP}, while the second-merge establishes a (local) specifier–adjunct–head relation {XP {H ZP}}.

The present analysis can be compared to previous accounts of the Finnish EPP and especially how the theory of Finnish EPP has evolved since the 1980s. Vainikka (1989) is the first work to note the existence of the finite EPP requirement in Finnish (see also Vainikka & Levy 1999). Vainikka's system seems to be assumed in later work such as Holmberg et al. (1993). The main proposition in these works is that the highest specifier position of the finite portion of the clause, thus Spec,T/FinP, requires filling in, typically by the subject noun phrase.

Brattico and Saikkonen (2010) observe, based on child Finnish negative clauses, that the EPP requirement appears in child Finnish if and only if the C-system is acquired and is overtly expressed. Their hypothesis was based on earlier work of Brattico & Huhmarniemi (2006), where it is hypothesized, following the feature inheritance model of Chomsky (2001), that the finite EPP phenomenon derives from the higher head C. Their main evidence comes from the negative clauses. In Finnish, Neg occurs between C and T and inherits properties of finiteness, including EPP, exactly as one would expect if these properties were inherited from C, as shown in (55).

- (55) a. C T V
 ↳Case/Phi/EPP manifested at T
- b. C Aux T V
 ↳Case/Phi/EPP manifested at Aux
- c. C Neg Aux T V
 ↳Case/Phi/EPP manifested at Neg

Tense loses these properties once it is not selected by C. This would also explain why these properties (nominative Case, full agreement and EPP) accumulate to the left edge of the finite clause: this is the only construction headed by the finite C.¹⁹ This hypothesis nevertheless requires revision if the EPP operates also in non-finite domains, as argued by Brattico and Leinonen (Brattico & Leinonen (2009)) for noun phrases, Brattico (2011) for Finnish adpositions, the latter following Manninen (2003), and by the present work for non-finite complement clauses (see especially (21)). The claim is generalized to Finnish A-bar movement in Huhmarniemi & Brattico (2013), which is based on Huhmarniemi (2012). It is argued that both

¹⁹ An alternative, championed by Holmberg et al. (1993), is to posit a separate finiteness head between C and Neg. This achieves the same effect of locating finiteness above Neg and T, but at the cost of positing another head Fin and the associated specifier position Spec,FinP for which there exists, to my knowledge, no independent evidence in Finnish.

primary and secondary A-bar movement is caused by a generalized EPP which seeks to fill in empty operator positions syntactically. In addition, I now think, as a consequence of the present work, that also adverbs and adjunction (the subject float/topicalization) can satisfy the EPP in Finnish. Taken as a whole, we have come to a point in which Chomsky's abstract second-merge proposal and Holmberg's (2000) "almost anything goes" approach starts to look promising for Finnish too: EPP requires grammar to establish "{XP {H...}}" in narrow syntax for selected heads almost entirely independent of the nature of H and XP, and independent of any other properties (H = finite, non-finite, noun/adjective/verb/adposition) or computations (e.g., agreement, discourse).²⁰

7. Conclusions

Certain problems of H&N's analysis of the Finnish topic prominence were examined. There were three problems: a relationship between topics and agreement; right dislocation; and the fact that Finnish finite clauses need not be headed by topics. I propose to solve the first problem by proposing that only after agreement has taken place can the topic mechanism arrange words into different orders. The third problem can be dealt with in one of two ways. An analysis in line with H&N's topic feature system would say that the topic feature at T/Fin can check the topic constituent either by means of moving it into Spec,T/FinP (after agreement condition is taken care of) or by means of agreeing with it via long-distance relation, in which case the topic constituent remains *in situ*. The latter construction must be supported by context. This solution to the topic question requires that the agreement mechanism is first abstracted away. Another solution to the nontopic subject problem emerges once we look into long distance right dislocation. The term right dislocation might be misleading, in that it suggests that subjects can only occur at the right edge of a clause. In reality, the subject exhibits the distribution of adverbs. I suggested that the subject is adjoined to the structure, and that the attested free word order properties of Finnish, especially what comes to subjects, are not due to movement but adjunction. In short, arguments can be adjoined to the structure after they have been first merged according to their thematic properties and after they have performed morphosyntactic duties (phi-agreement, case assignment) on the basis of their first-merge posi-

²⁰ Other researchers have advanced similar views, see Bailyn (2004); Kuroda (1988) and Miyagawa (2005).

tions. Once we take this route, then I think that discourse interpretation must be seen as a consequence of syntactic structure, not vice versa.

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