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## **The discourse functions and syntax of OSV word order in Finnish\***

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### **1 Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the discourse functions and syntax of OSV word order (ex. (2)) in Finnish, a language which is canonically SVO (ex. (1)). On the basis of a corpus study, I show that OSV order in Finnish has three discourse functions. In the second part of this paper, I explore the relation between the syntax and pragmatics of OSV order in Finnish and suggest that certain pragmatic differences are correlated with syntactic differences.

(1) **canonical SVO**

Se oli pannut rahat salkkuun.

It/he-NOM was put money-pl-ACC briefcase-ILL

'He had put the money in the briefcase.' (adapted from Tuuri: 19)

(2) **OSV**

Rahat se oli pannut salkkuun.

Money-pl-ACC it/he-NOM was put briefcase-ILL

'The money he had put in the briefcase' (Tuuri: 19)

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, I outline some of the previous research on this topic, focusing primarily on English and Finnish. In Section 3, I discuss the sources of data and the coding methods used in the corpus study. The results of the corpus study are presented in Section 4. Section 5 offers a preliminary look at the syntax of OSV word order in Finnish, and Section 6 consists of the conclusion and directions for further research.

### **2 Previous research**

Traditionally, OSV order has been described as marking the preposed object as the 'topic' (Ross 1967). However, there are a number of different views of what constitutes a 'topic.' Strawson (1964) defines the topic of an utterance as "what is of current interest or concern" (Strawson 1964:104). Reinhart (1982) follows Strawson and defines the topic of a sentence as "the expression whose referent the sentence is about" (Reinhart 1982:5). Furthermore, she argues that topics must be referential but do not need to be old information. Gundel (1985) takes a different approach and characterizes topics in terms of 'shared knowledge.' According to her, "the topic of a speech act will normally be some entity that is already familiar to both speaker and addressee" (Gundel 1982: 92). Thus, both Reinhart and Gundel agree that in OSV order with normal intonation, the preposed object is the topic, but they interpret the notion 'topic' in different ways.

## 2.1 Prince 1999

A crosslinguistic look at topicalization is provided by Prince (1999)'s corpus study of OSV order in English and Yiddish. She uses tests for topichood suggested by Gundel (1974, 1985) and Reinhart (1982) to show that the preposed constituent in OSV order is actually *not* the topic of the sentence. Prince argues that instead of marking the preposed object as the topic, OSV order in English (as well as in Yiddish) has two distinct discourse functions.<sup>1</sup> It can mark the preposed constituent as being in a salient partially-ordered set (poset) relation to entities already mentioned in the discourse (see Ward and Prince 1991), or it can mark the preposed entity as being in focus.

Let us consider each of the discourse functions in turn. First, we will look at the 'Poset' function. In some OSV sentences, the preposed object is in a salient partially-ordered set (poset) relation (defined in (3) below) to entities already mentioned in the discourse, and the rest of the sentence can be construed as a salient open proposition once the "tonically stressed constituent" (in the non-preposed subject-verb part of the sentence) is replaced with a variable (Prince 1999:7). The stressed constituent identifies "the instantiation of the variable" and is new information (Prince 1998:12). To understand this discourse function, one needs to be familiar with the definition of posets, which is given below in (3):

- (3) "Partially-ordered sets, or posets, are defined by a partial ordering **R** on some set of referents **b**, such that, for all  $b_1$ ,  $b_2$ , and  $b_3$  that are elements of **b**, **R** is either reflexive, transitive and antisymmetric ... or alternatively, irreflexive, transitive and asymmetric." (Ward and Prince 1991:173, citing Hirschberg 1985)

Some examples of relations that satisfy the definition of poset are *is-a-part-of*, *is-a-subtype-of*, *is-a-member-of*, as well as the identity relation (Ward and Prince 1991). One kind of poset relation is exemplified below in (4). The OSV sentence is given in bold, and the tonically stressed constituent (the new information) is underlined.

- (4) "She had an idea for a project. She's going to use three groups of mice. One, she'll feed mouse chow, just the regular stuff they make for mice. Another she'll feed them veggies. **And the third she'll feed junk food.**" (Prince 1999:8)
- (a) "the third": member of a salient set, namely the set of three mouse groups  
(b) Salient open proposition: She'll feed the third X  
(c) Instantiation of variable: X = junk food (Prince 1998:12-13)

In this example, the preposed constituent, the noun phrase 'the third,' is indeed in a salient poset relation to entities mentioned in the discourse: It is a member of the three mouse groups under discussion. The rest of the sentence 'she'll feed junk food' can be structured into the salient open proposition 'she'll feed X' once we

replace the new information ‘junk food’ with a variable (see Prince 1998, 1999 for more discussion and examples).

Now let us take a look at the other discourse function Prince (1999) found for OSV order in English. In ‘Focus-movement’ constructions, the preposed object is in focus and the rest of the sentence is presupposed (Prince 1999:9). The presupposition is an open proposition; the focus “identifies the instantiation of its variable” (Prince 1999:9). The open proposition signals that “a certain entity has a certain attribute,” and the value of this attribute is “not yet known to the hearer” – but the fact “that the entity in question has the attribute in question” is known to the hearer and salient (Prince 1999:9). This discourse function is exemplified below in (5), with the OSV sentence in bold and the stressed constituent underlined:

- (5) “She was here two years. [checking transcript]. **Five semesters she was here.**” (Prince 1999:9)
- (a) Presupposition: She was here a set of semesters which has the cardinality X
- (b) Focus:  $X = 5$  (Prince 1999:9)

Here, Prince notes the speaker has just said that a student was at a school for two years, and thus the open proposition ‘she was here X semesters’ is salient in the discourse. The new information in the OSV utterance is the cardinality of the semesters, namely five – thus this is the preposed constituent (see Prince 1999 for more discussion and examples).

In sum, Prince (1999) presents naturally-occurring examples which suggest that in English, OSV order has two main discourse functions, neither of which marks the preposed constituent as the most salient entity ‘under discussion.’ Now, having considered the discourse functions of OSV order in English, let us turn to Finnish, a typologically different language which also has OSV order.

## 2.2 Research on OSV word order in Finnish

Finnish, a language which is canonically SVO, has very free word order. All of the six possible permutations of the three elements SVO are grammatical in the appropriate context (Vilkuna 1995:245). Finnish nouns are case-marked, and thus the subject-object relation remains unambiguous even if the word order is changed.

There has been a considerable amount of research on the functions of OSV word order in Finnish, and a number of accounts have been proposed. It has often been noted that OSV order ‘emphasizes’ or ‘focuses’ the preposed object in some way. For example, according to Sulkala and Karjalainen (1992), OSV order indicates that the preposed object is “emphasized” (Sulkala and Karjalainen 1992:181). They further suggest that OSV constructions contain an “implicit negation,” in that the preposed object is the only entity (in the domain of the

discourse) that satisfies the ‘comment’ consisting of the subject and the verb (Sulkala and Karjalainen 1992:189).

Holmberg (1997) adopts a slightly different terminology and notes that OSV order in Finnish focuses the object. He points out that a constituent preposed to the front of the sentence is “generally contrastive, the construction being usually translatable as a cleft construction” (Holmberg 1997:560).

A more formalized account emphasizing the role of contrast is that of Vallduví and Vilkuna (1998). They suggest that preposed objects are ‘kontrastive’. ‘Kontrast’ is defined as follows: “If an expression **a** is kontrastive, a membership set  $M=\{ \dots,a,\dots\}$  is generated and becomes available to semantic computation as some sort of quantificational domain.” According to Vallduví and Vilkuna, a preposed object can be old (“thematic”) or new (“rhematic”) information, but it must always be kontrastive.

A more complex triple function is suggested by Hakulinen and Karlsson (1988). They argue that ‘topicalized’ constructions result from the speaker wanting to focus a constituent that is not canonically sentence initial. Hakulinen and Karlsson attribute a tripartite function to focusing (OSV or SOV order): It can have a corrective function, where the speaker corrects something that he thought was wrong in the preceding text, or it can serve as an indicator that some element is contrasted with something else, or it can signal that the speaker wants to emphasize a particular constituent.

A number of questions is raised by these accounts: Are preposed entities *always* contrastive in Finnish? What exactly is meant by ‘emphasis’? Does OSV order have a fairly unified function, as Vallduví and Vilkuna seem to suggest, or is it more multi-faceted, as Hakulinen and Karlsson claim? Furthermore, what about the rest of the sentence (the non-preposed part)? What kind of information structure does it have?

In this paper, I will suggest that OSV order in Finnish has three discourse functions, and is not limited to marking constituents as contrastive: (a) It can mark the preposed object as being in a salient poset relation to other entities already mentioned in the discourse (contrast is a subcase of this function); (b) it can be a means of locating salient old information sentence-initially, and (c) it can serve as a means to focus new information. Moreover, I will argue that the ‘remainder’ of the sentence often contains new information (as Prince (1998, 1999) found for English and Yiddish), but does not always do so.

### **3 Corpus study**

The data examined in this study were found in excerpts from three Finnish novels; *Myrttiseppeleet* (Myrtle wreaths) by P. Tuominen (1982), *Ameriikan Raitti* (America’s Main Street) by A. Tuuri (1986), and *Vaskilintu* (The bronze bird) by Utrio (1992). In total, I coded and analyzed 154 sentences with preposed word order.

### 3.2 Coding

The criteria that were used to code the data are discussed in this section. Both the preposed constituent and the remainder of the sentence were coded. The discourse status of the preposed constituent was coded according to the following four criteria: (a) new to the discourse (i.e. not previously mentioned and not in a poset relation to other entities), (b) discourse-new and in a salient poset relation to entities mentioned in preceding discourse, (c) discourse-old and in a salient poset relation, or (d) a discourse-old entity in the identity relation.

It should be pointed out here that, as Prince (1999:10) notes, a ‘contrastive reading’ can be derived from the notion of poset: “Contrast is *not* a primitive notion but rather arises when alternate members of some salient set are evoked and, most importantly, when there is felt to be a salient opposition in what is predicated of them.” Thus, the contrastive function of OSV order discussed in the literature is subsumed under possibilities (b) and (c) in my coding system.

The discourse status of the remainder of the sentence was coded according to the following four criteria: (a) previously mentioned, (b) not previously mentioned but known/plausible/inferable, (c) entirely new, not previously mentioned/known/inferable, or (d) partially old/known/inferable, but containing some new information.

In addition, the category of the preposed element was recorded for each sentence. Finnish permits other categories besides direct objects to be preposed, including adjectives, oblique objects, locative phrases, etc. Sentences with a canonically postverbal element in a sentence initial-position were included in the counts, and thus in this paper, the term ‘OSV order’ refers to a wide range of preposed constituents, not just objects.

Only sentences with overt subjects were included in the analysis. Written Finnish permits subject prodrop of the first and second persons, but sentences where the subject had been dropped were not counted. They were omitted because both SOV and OSV order are possible in Finnish, and thus sentences with null subjects (denoted with  $\emptyset$ ) are, in theory, ambiguous. The string OV could be interpreted as  $\emptyset$ OV (SOV) or O $\emptyset$ V (OSV), although it is usually clear from the pragmatics that the underlying order is in fact OSV. To avoid complications, however, these types of sentences were not included in the analysis.

## 4 Results

The corpus analysis shows that OSV order in Finnish has three discourse functions: First, it can mark the preposed object as being in a poset relation to other entities already mentioned in the discourse; second, it can function as means of placing salient old information in a sentence-initial position, and third, it serve as a way to focus a new entity. The set-marking function appears to be the most common; 85 sentences out of 154 have this function (55.19%). The second most common function is the sentence-initial placement of old information (55/154, 35.71%). The third function, focusing new information, is by far the least frequent. It only occurred in 14 out of the 154 sentences (9.09%). The

frequencies of the three functions are illustrated in Table 1 and Chart 1 (below). The semantic and pragmatic details of the functions are discussed in the rest of this section.

**Table 1: Discourse Functions of OSV order in Finnish texts**

|                     | <b>Set</b>  | <b>Old</b>  | <b>Focus</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| All XP's            | 85 (55.19%) | 55 (35.71%) | 14 (9.09%)   | <b>154</b>   |
| Direct objects only | 52 (57.78%) | 30 (33.33%) | 8 (8.89%)    | <b>90</b>    |

#### 4.1 Set-marking function

In over half of the sentences (85/154, 55.19%) in the corpus, OSV order signals that the entity represented by the initial element stands in a salient poset relation to some other entities already mentioned in the discourse-model. In such cases, the preposed entity is more likely to be discourse-old (55/85, 64.7%) than discourse-new (26/85, 30.59%). This is not surprising, because the objects in a control corpus of regular SVO sentences are also more likely to be discourse-old than discourse-new.

The rest of the sentence, the SV (subject-verb) constituent,<sup>2</sup> often contains some new information, and when this new information is replaced with a variable, the result is an open proposition that is previously mentioned, known or inferrable/plausible (as suggested by Prince 1999 for Yiddish).

Example (6) below exemplifies this function. Here, the preposed constituent is the noun phrase *tytärellään kuningatterelle* 'to his daughter the queen.' This constituent is in a salient poset relation to the preceding discourse, as it is a member of the set of people that Thorstein, one of the characters in the story, has gone to visit. The rest of the sentence contains some old/salient information (the fact that Thorstein was giving people presents) as well as some new information (the gift he gave his daughter was an egg-sized polished piece of mountain crystal). The remainder of the sentence can thus be structured into a salient open proposition, namely 'he gave his daughter X', if we replace the new information with a variable.

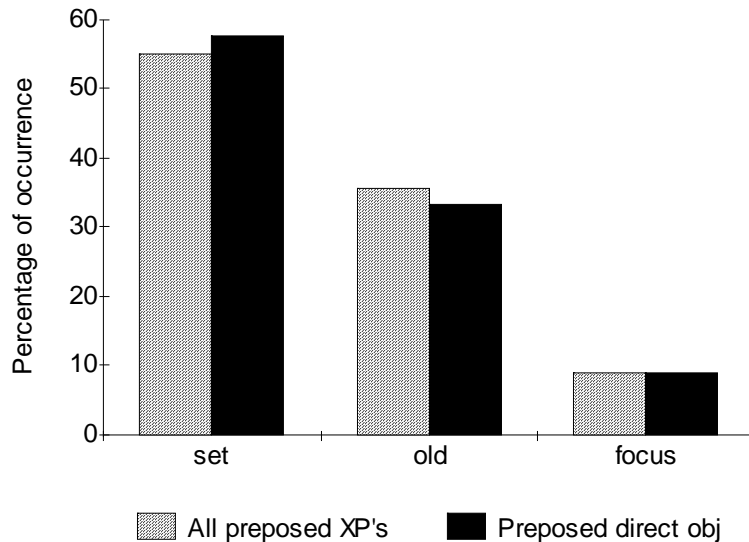
- (6) (*Context: Thorstein has come to greet the King, and his daughter, the King's wife. He gave the King a fancy goblet.*)

Tytärellään kuningatterelle hän lahjoitti kananmunan kokoisen  
 Daughter-ALL-Px3rd queen-ALL he-NOM presented egg-GEN sized

hiotun vuorikristallin.  
 polished-GEN mountain-crystal-ACC.

‘To his daughter the queen he presented a polished, egg-sized piece of mountain crystal.’ (Utrio:174)

**Chart 1: Discourse functions of OSV**



Thus, in some aspects Finnish closely resembles the characteristics of OSV in English and Yiddish as described by Prince (1999) and Ward and Prince (1991). However, the match is not perfect. In some cases, it is not clear whether there is any new info in the SV part of the clause, as illustrated by example (7) below.

- (7) (Context: Two characters are discussing Holmfrid's personality. One describes her as childish and docile. The other claims:)  
 Hullu hän on.  
 Crazy she-NOM is  
 ‘Crazy she is.’ (Utrio:168)

Here, the preposed constituent is the adjective *hullu* ‘crazy,’ which is in a poset relation to other mentioned entities, because it is a member of the set of character traits that are being attributed to Holmfrid. The remainder of the sentence is simply the phrase ‘she is,’ which is old and salient information in this context. It does not contain new information like example (6) did. This type of sentence is reminiscent of the ‘corrective’ function mentioned by Hakulinen and Karlsson (1988).

#### 4.2 ‘Old’ information sentence initially

There are a number of sentences in the corpus (55/154, 35.71%) where the preposed element is old information (previously mentioned or known), but not in

a salient poset relation with other entities in the preceding discourse. According to the mathematical definition of poset, the ‘identity relation’ is also a kind of poset relation, and so sentences with ‘old’ preposed objects can be analyzed as being part of the poset function discussed above.

However, I analyze the two types (‘old’ and ‘poset’) separately, for two main reasons. First, this type of ‘non-contrastive’ Finnish OSV order has received much less attention than the ‘contrastive’ OSV structures, and I was interested in finding out how frequent it is in naturally-occurring discourse. Second, Finnish is a language without articles and has a strong tendency to place old information preverbally and sentence-initially. Finnish tends to mark the information status of an entity by its position in the sentence, and does not have the option of using definite/indefinite articles to encode information status<sup>3</sup> – unlike English and Yiddish, for example. There is thus a possibility that OSV in Finnish could have functions different from its English and Yiddish counterparts. To see whether this is the case, I decided to code preposed entities in the identity relation separately from preposed constituents in the poset relation.

As mentioned above, approximately a third of the sentences in the corpus (55/154, 35.71%) have an ‘old’ preposed constituent. Moreover, the data shows that when the preposed object is ‘old’ information, the SV part of the sentence tends to pattern in one of two ways. In some cases, the SV part can be structured into an open proposition with a variable replacing the new information, as was the case with ‘poset’ objects (example (8) below). In other cases, the SV part contains only old/known information. Often, the information in the SV part was mentioned a while ago, i.e. it is presumably not as salient as the ‘old’ object (example (9)).

- (8) *(Context: One of the characters, Thorstein, utters this in response to a comment by another character.)*  
 Sitä minä en usko.  
 it-ACC I-NOM neg believe  
 ‘That I don’t believe.’ (Utrio:162)
- (9) *(Context: One of the characters, a viking called Eirik, is discussing what kinds of battle conditions and opponents he likes. He notes that on Sikel-island, where he hopes to go next, one can fight on foot.)*  
 Siitä minä pidän.  
 it-ELAT I-NOM like  
 ‘That’s what I like.’ (Utrio:330)

In ex. (8), the preposed constituent *sitä* ‘that’ refers to a claim made by another character. The rest of the sentence, ‘I do not believe,’ can be structured into a plausible open proposition once the new information – in this case, the negation – is replaced with a variable. It is reasonable to assume that all humans know something, and thus ‘I know X’ is a plausible inferrable open proposition (see Prince 1999 on Yiddish.). In ex. (9), the preposed entity *siitä* ‘that’ refers to



Eirik's comment that one can fight on foot on Sikel-island. The rest of the sentence, 'I like,' was mentioned earlier in the discourse by Eirik, and it is also plausibly inferrable – we can reasonably assume that everyone likes something. It is interesting to note that there does not appear to be any new information in the SV part of the sentence here.

It thus seems that in Finnish, in addition to having a set-marking function, OSV order can be a means to place more salient old information in front of less salient (or merely inferrable/plausible) old information (cf. Prince (1999) on Yiddish).

#### 4.2.1 Reverse wh-clefts

The claim that Finnish OSV order can function as a means to place salient 'old' constituents sentence initially when the rest of the sentence is also 'old' but less salient is further supported by the observation that English reverse wh-clefts (RWH clefts) are often translated into Finnish OSV sentences, as illustrated by the examples below. (As far as I know, Finnish does not have RWH clefts. Sulkala and Karjalainen (1992:182) note that structures resembling it-clefts and regular pseudoclefts are sometimes used in spoken Finnish, but these structures are not common.)

(10) *RWH in English*

'That's what I'm afraid of.'

(Crichton, original English-language version, 219)

(11) *OSV in Finnish*

Sitä minäkin pelkään. (Crichton, 255, Finnish translation)

it-PART I-NOM-CL fear.

'That I fear.'

(12) *RWH in English*

'That's what I'm trying to tell you.'

(Grafton, original English-language version, 173).

(13) *OSV in Finnish*

Sitä minä tässä yritän kertoa. (Grafton:171, Finnish translation)

it-PART I-NOM here try to-tell

'That I am trying to say here.'

To see how Finnish OSV order and English RWH clefts are related, let us briefly consider the characteristics of RWH clefts in English. Oberlander and Delin (1996) note that the clefted constituent of English RWH clefts (i.e. the constituent before the copula) is old/given/non-focal information. They add that RWH clefts are often used to 're-evoke' information that has already been mentioned, i.e. information that is "discourse-old ... but low in salience," or information that is known to the hearer but new in the discourse (Oberlander and Delin 1996:201).

In sum, English RWH clefts often have a clefted constituent that is old and salient as well as a postcopular constituent that is old but often less salient than

the clefted part. This pattern is reminiscent of Finnish OSV sentences where both the preposed constituent and the rest of the sentence are old information, with the preposed part often more salient than the rest. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that Finnish OSV order has functions which English OSV order does not, perhaps because English has other structures at its disposal, such as RWH clefts.

#### 4.3 Focusing a new entity

Now let us consider the third discourse function for OSV order in Finnish. In the preceding sections we saw that OSV order in Finnish can either mark the object as being in a salient poset relation to other entities in the discourse, or it can serve as a means of placing salient, old information sentence-initially. In addition to these functions, in a small number of sentences (14/154, 9.09%), the preposed element appears to be new information that is not in a salient poset relation to entities mentioned in the preceding discourse. In these sentences, the SV part is often discourse-old, known or plausible information, and can be construed as an open proposition with the preposed NP as the instantiation of the variable (as suggested by Prince 1999 for Yiddish).

- (14) (*Context: Johan describes the progress of train track construction by his company by saying:*)  
Sitkeää se on.  
tough it-NOM is  
'Tough it is.' (Tuominen:261)

This type is very rare compared to the two functions discussed in the preceding sections, and it seems to be a rather marked option in Finnish. It may be the case that at least some of the sentences coded as having a new preposed constituent could in fact be re-categorized as belonging to one of the other two patterns. This might be the case especially if the salience requirements concerning the other two functions are relaxed. Currently, to be categorized as belonging to the poset pattern, the preposed constituent has to be in a *salient* poset relation to already-mentioned entities. What would happen if we simply demanded that the preposed entity be in *some* kind of poset relation to already mentioned entities, i.e. if we extended the definition to cover inferrable posets, for example? I leave this as a question for future research.

#### 4.4 Summary of the discourse functions of OSV order

A corpus study has shown that Finnish OSV word order has multiple discourse functions, and that the functions are not all equally frequent. By considering not only the status of the preposed element but also the characteristics of the remainder of the sentence, we noticed that there are different types of 'SV remainders': Some contain new information, others do not.

In the following section, we will consider the implications of these findings for the syntax of OSV order in Finnish.

## 5 Preliminary remarks on the syntax of Finnish OSV word order

Having looked at the pragmatics of OSV order, let us now consider its syntactic structure. In OSV word order, where does the object land? Work by Rizzi (1997) raises the question of whether a preposed constituent always lands in the same position, or whether its landing site depends on the discourse function of the construction. In this section I will present some preliminary data which suggests that in Finnish, preposed objects which are old information are syntactically different from preposed objects which are in a certain kind of poset relation to other entities that have already been mentioned.

### 5.1 Additional ‘landing site’ between the subject and the complementizer

First, let us take a look at some evidence from Vainikka (1989) and Kenesei (1992) which indicates that, in Finnish, there is at least one additional landing site (XP) between the position of the complementizer and the subject, as illustrated schematically in (15).

(15) [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>C</sub> *complementizer* [<sub>XP</sub> .... [<sub>X</sub> .... [<sub>AGR<sub>SP</sub></sub> *subject* [<sub>AGR<sub>s</sub></sub> ] ] ] ] ]

#### 5.1.1 Complementizers and questions

In embedded wh-questions, the complementizer is optionally present. This creates the order complementizer+wh-word+subject.

- (16) *complementizer + wh-word + subject*  
Pekka kysyi, **että mitä** [Liisa] teki.  
Pekka-NOM asked, **that what-ACC** [Liisa-NOM] did.  
‘Pekka asked what Liisa did.’  
(adapted from Vainikka 1989:85)

It is also possible for the complementizer to be followed by a subject (or some other element) bearing the question marker –ko. It is widely assumed that –ko only attaches to elements in the ‘wh-position.’

- (17) *complementizer + subject marked with question morpheme*  
Pekka kysyi, **että** [kirjanko] Jukka oli hukannut  
Pekka-NOM asked **that** [book-ACC-Q] Jukka-NOM had lost.  
‘Pekka asked whether it was a book that Jukka had lost.’  
(adapted from Vainikka 1989:85)

As noted by Kenesei (1992), these data suggest that there is a position between the complementizer and the subject. If we assume that wh-words land in the spec of a head bearing a [+wh] feature, and that complementizers are heads, then it

seems reasonable to accept Kenesei's claim that there exists a functional projection between the complementizer and the subject.<sup>4</sup>

- (18) [CP että [XP mitä [X [+wh] ] [AGR<sub>SP</sub> subject ..... ] ] ]  
(19) [CP että [XP NP+ko [X [+wh] ] [AGR<sub>SP</sub> subject ..... ] ] ]

### 5.1.2 What kind of a position? More than one type of position?

In light of the data presented above, the question arises: In OSV sentences, does the preposed constituent move to the spec of the 'additional projection' that we have posited? Moreover, is it the case that there exists just one additional landing site that the preposed constituent always lands in, regardless of its discourse function?

Before considering these questions in more detail, it is useful to briefly consider the analysis presented in Rizzi (1997) for preposed structures. On the basis of evidence from a number of languages – with an emphasis on Italian – Rizzi claims that topicalization constructions and focus constructions have different syntactic structures.<sup>5</sup> According to his analysis, topicalized ('old') constituents are located in the spec of a TopP, and focalized ('new') constituents in the spec of FocP, as illustrated below in (20). (The star '\*' marks a head as being possibly recursive). The actual heads Foc and Top are phonologically null in languages such as Italian and English.

- (20) [ForceP .... [TopP\* .... [FocP .... [TopP\* .... [FinP .... ] ] ] ] ]

It is important to note that Rizzi's use of the terms topic and focus is not quite the same as Prince's or Ward's. In Rizzi's analysis, a preposed entity that is a focus "introduces new information," whereas a preposed topic is "old information, somehow available and salient in previous discourse" (Rizzi 1997:285). He further notes that a preposed focus position is limited to 'contrastive focus' in some languages, but not in others (Rizzi 1997:285). It is not clear how Rizzi would treat a 'contrastive topic' – he might treat it like a regular topic.

How do his notions of topic (old) and focus (new) correspond to the notions of poset and focus as used by Prince and Ward, considering that an element in a poset relation can be discourse-old or discourse-new, as long as it is "related to prior discourse by a salient poset relation" (Ward and Prince 1991:176)? It is not immediately clear how to bring together these two research directions, and many questions remain open in this area.

### 5.2 Some preliminary data

My corpus study suggests that Finnish OSV order has multiple discourse functions. In light of Rizzi's analysis, one might ask, Are these different discourse functions associated with different syntactic structures? If so, does Finnish assign a different structure to a sentence on the basis of the old/new distinction, *or* on the basis of the poset/focus distinction – or neither? In this

section I provide some preliminary evidence which suggests that Finnish structurally differentiates elements that are in a poset relation from elements which are simply discourse-old.

In the following sections, I focus on a particular kind of poset interpretation, namely contrast, even though contrast is not “a primitive notion” and can be derived from the poset relation, as discussed in section 3.2 (Prince 1999:10). However, most of the examples in the syntactic literature (including the ones I will present, which are mainly from Heinämäki 1982) have involved contrastive interpretations. For this reason, and also because contrastive interpretations are easy to grasp even out of context, I will use examples involving contrast in the following sections. The contrastive reading is intended to serve as an example of a particular kind of poset interpretation.

### 5.2.1 ‘Contrasting’ the object when the subject is ‘topical/old’ info

In Finnish, contrastive objects occur *in situ*, as illustrated by ex. (21) or at the leftmost periphery, as shown in (22). Any other location in the sentence is ungrammatical (ex. (23)). (Capital letters in the examples indicate a contrastive interpretation.)

- (21)  $\sqrt{\text{svO}}$   
Jussi osti HEVOSEN (eikä lehmää)  
Jussi-NOM bought HORSE-ACC (and-not cow-PART)  
‘Jussi bought a HORSE (not a cow)’
- (22)  $\sqrt{\text{Osv}}$   
HEVOSEN Jussi osti.
- (23) \*sOv  
Jussi HEVOSEN osti.

### 5.2.2 ‘Contrasting’ the subject when the object is ‘old’ info (‘topic’)

The following examples show that contrastive subjects occur *in situ* (ex. 24)) or at the leftmost periphery (ex. (25)), but not in any other location (ex. (26)).

- (24)  $\sqrt{\text{Svo}}$   
JUSSI osti hevosen.
- (25)  $\sqrt{\text{Sov}}$   
JUSSI hevosen osti.
- (26) \*oSv  
Hevosen JUSSI osti.

## 5.3 Structural inference

The fact that Sov order is grammatical while oSv and sOv are ungrammatical, suggests that an ‘old’ object can be preposed in front of the verb ( $\sqrt{\text{Sov}}$ ) but cannot precede a contrastive element (\*oSv). When the object is contrastive, it

cannot be preceded by a preposed ‘old’ subject (\*sOv). These restrictions can be explained if we posit the following structure:

(27) [ContrastP/PosetP ..... [‘Old’P ..... [AGRsP ..... ] ] ]

According to the structure given above, when contrastive objects occur at the left periphery, they are located in the spec of ContrastP/PosetP. This projection dominates another function projection, ‘Old’P. Preposed ‘old’ constituents that are not in a poset relation to other entities are presumably located in the spec of ‘Old’P. The assumption that ContrastP/PosetP dominates ‘Old’P predicts that preposed elements which are contrastive must always precede preposed elements which are simply ‘old’ information.

In sum, these data suggest that Finnish syntactically distinguishes entities that are in (a certain kind of) poset relation to other entities already mentioned, from entities which are simply old information. It thus seems that the identity relation, which mathematically is a part of the poset relation, patterns differently from other kinds of poset relations in Finnish syntax. However, much more research in this area is needed in order to assess the validity of these claims.

## 6. Conclusions and directions for future research

A corpus-based analysis of Finnish texts suggests that Finnish OSV word order has three discourse functions, which occur with varying degrees of frequency. OSV order can have a set-marking function, it can function as a means to place salient old information sentence-initially, or it can serve to focus new information. Moreover, a preliminary syntactic analysis suggests that Finnish distinguishes the landing sites of ‘old’ objects from those of a ‘contrastive/poset’ objects. However, more extensive and detailed syntactic analyses need to be done to test this claim in more depth, and the landing site of *new*, non-poset objects also needs to be explored.

On a more general level, to learn more about the nature of preposing in Finnish, it would be useful to look at spoken language in order to analyze the contexts in which OSV order occurs in spoken Finnish. Moreover, the role of intonation in encoding discourse function needs to be examined. In addition, when studying OSV order, one should also analyze the discourse functions and syntactic characteristics of SOV order in Finnish, in which, presumably, both the subject and the object have been preposed.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Prince (1999) discusses the discourse functions of OSV order in Yiddish as well as English. For reasons of space, I will not discuss her analysis of Yiddish here. However, it is interesting to note that, in many ways, the requirements for felicitous preposing in Yiddish are less 'strict' than the requirements in English, and Finnish seems to pattern a lot like Yiddish. It would be very interesting to look at how preposing patterns in other languages as well, to see if they are more/less strict in what they permit.

<sup>2</sup> The rest of the sentence often consists of more than just the subject and the verb, but for reasons of simplicity I will refer to this part as the 'SV part.'

<sup>3</sup> Laury (1997) suggests that the demonstrative pronoun *se* ('it') is evolving into a definite article in colloquial, spoken Finnish. However, this phenomenon has not (yet) occurred in standard written Finnish.

<sup>4</sup> However, the question of whether the preposed constituent in OSV order moves to the spec of a separate functional head or adjoins to a pre-existing head is not crucial to the present discussion.

<sup>5</sup> The reader is referred to Rizzi (1997) for the details of the analysis.

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