

## BOOK REVIEW

**Pauli Brattico: Word Order and Adjunction in Finnish.**  
(Beder: Aquila & Celik, 2018, 140 pages)

Urpo Nikanne

### 1 The starting point

Pauli Brattico's book *Word Order and Adjunction in Finnish* discusses the so-called free word order in Finnish. In his book Brattico's starting point is Holmberg & Nikanne's (2002) paper on the word order in Finnish finite sentences. The syntactic model Brattico is following in his analysis is Chomskyan minimalist theory.

The theory by Holmberg and Nikanne was based on Maria Vilkuna's (1989) theory on Finnish word order, in which the positions for information structure categories topic and contrastive focus play a central role in determining the word order in the left periphery of a Finnish finite sentence. On the other hand, Holmberg and Nikanne base their theory on the developments of generative syntax in the late 1980s (Pollock 1989, Baker 1988). Particularly Baker's theory on languages with rich finite morphology was an inspiration for the analysis of Finnish in Holmberg et al. (1993) and other works by Holmberg and Nikanne, including Holmberg & Nikanne (2002).

Brattico's goal is to fix the flaws of this theory and push the analysis of the word order in Finnish further from what has been assumed so far. In his theory building, Brattico takes into account the new literature on Finnish syntax that has been published after 2002. Thus, Brattico's book serves as a good introduction to the development of Chomskyan minimalist syntax in the 21st century.

Brattico's inspiration has been particularly one property in the theory by Holmberg & Nikanne (2002): according to that theory the movement to the topic position (i.e. the position right before the finite verb) is A-movement when the subject of the sentence is moved to the topic position (1a), and A-bar movement if the object is moved to the topic position (1b).<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. [Graham Greene]<sub>i</sub> [VP kirjoitti t<sub>i</sub> tämän kirjan].  
Graham Greene wrote this.ACC book.ACC  
'Graham Greene wrote this book.'
- b. [Tämän kirjan]<sub>i</sub> [VP Graham Greene kirjoitti t<sub>i</sub>].

Brattico, quite correctly, sees this solution as problematic, and his goal is to find a better one.

---

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations used in the glosses in this review are the following: NOM = nominative, ACC = accusative, PAR = partitive, GEN = genitive, PL = plural, SG = singular, ALL = allative, INE = inessive, RELPR = relative pronoun.

## 2 The theory

According to Brattico's working hypothesis (pp. 34–36), there are three conditions that apply in the following order:

- (2) *The Subject Condition*  
The grammatical subject has the “right of way” to move to the topic position if it is a potential topic (cf. Vilkkuna 1989).
- (3) *The Topic Condition*  
If the subject is not a potential topic, then some other potential topic may move to the topic position.
- (4) *The Non-Topic Condition*  
If there is no potential topic available, the topic position may stay empty.

Above and in what follows, I try to avoid technical terminology. I hope that I do not make too much violence to Brattico's ideas.

In his book Brattico elaborates on the conditions described above. He assumes that there are three phases. Phase 1 is the phase in which the event structure plays the central role: the (syntactic) argument structure (subject, object) is checked in phase 1. Phase 2 concentrates on information structure. The information structure features (topic, focus) are checked in this phase. Phase 3 is the phase in which stylistic movements based on operator-variable constructions can take place. Syntactic operations of phase 1 are applied first, then those of phase 2, and the operations of phase 3 after that.

I would like to make a point that seems to me to be important: I would not say that phase 1 deals with event structure (having to do with change, causation, etc.), since the categories we are dealing with in this phase are subject and object, which are syntactic arguments and not semantic ones (see e.g. Nikanne 2018). The syntactic arguments subject and object are in turn linked on the one hand to event structure arguments such as causer, theme, goal, patient etc. and to the lexically determined “logical subject and object” on the other. The point goes beyond terminology; if I am right, we can characterize phase 1 as a strictly syntactic one.

Event structure and information structure are crucial for Brattico's theory because phase 1 is an interface to event structure and phase 2 is an interface to the information structure. It is excellent that Brattico's theory explicitly assumes links between formal syntactic structure on the one hand, and semantics and information structure on the other. The next step in his analysis would be a strict formal analysis of the interfaces: the formation of event and information structures as well as the formal links between them and syntactic structure. I am inclined to see this as Brattico taking the minimalist syntax closer, for instance, to the framework of Conceptual Semantics (see Jackendoff 1983 etc.; Nikanne 2018), in which such work has been done.

Brattico does a thorough job in arguing for his theory. In chapters 3 and 4 he thoroughly discusses the possibility that the movement to the preverbal position is A-bar movement. He concludes that it is not. In chapter 5, he discusses the possibility that it is A-movement. It is concluded (pp. 84–85) that the movement of the *subject argument* to the preverbal position is A-movement but not topicalization. If the subject is not moved to the preverbal position, then some other element may move there, and that movement is topicalization.

In chapter 6, Brattico elaborates further on the nature of placing an element (subject or other element) in the preverbal position, (i.e. what the formal definition and description of his term ‘topic dislocation’ is). In this chapter not only the left edge of the Finnish finite sentence is discussed, but briefly also the right edge. The left edge has so far received more attention, so it is most welcome that Brattico’s analysis covers both edges (despite the fact that the discussion of the right edge is brief). For Brattico’s theory it is important to understand the nature of the sentence final positions, as they are focus positions of some kind and play an essential role in the information structural interpretation of the sentence.

Chapter 7 is the one in which Brattico goes through his theory of the word order in the Finnish finite sentence. The theory is based on adjunction and movements. It is assumed that in those cases in which the subject of the sentence is not in the preverbal (topic) position (but the verb still agrees with the subject), the subject argument first (A-)moves to the preverbal position for feature checking and it is then adjoined to the right end of the sentence. The following sentence illustrates the system. The example is my own, but I have used Brattico’s examples on pages 90–91 as models. The subject is in the plural in order to make the agreement explicit and the object is in the partitive in order to avoid ambiguous structures. In phase 1, the subject argument moves to the preverbal position in order to check  $\phi$ -features in the specifier position of T/Fin:

- (5) a.  $[_{T/Fin}$  *palauttavat* [*pojat* *kuvakirjoja* *kirjastoon huomenna*]]  
           return.3PL boy.3PL picture.book.PL.PAR library.ILL tomorrow  $\Rightarrow$   
       b.  $[_{T/Fin}$  *Pojat* *palauttavat* [  $\_\_\_$  *kuvakirjoja* *kirjastoon huomenna*]]  
           boy.3PL return.3PL picture.book.PL.PAR library.ILL tomorrow

According to Brattico’s theory the EPP requirement is divided into two: EPP1 requires that the  $\phi$ -features of the relevant head (here T/Fin) are checked in its specifier position. Therefore the movement of the subject to the specifier position of T/Fin (i.e. the preverbal position) is A-movement. In phase 2, the subject argument adjoins to the end of the sentence because of information structural properties:

- (6)  $[_{T/Fin}$   $\_\_\_$  *palauttavat* [  $\_\_\_$  *kuvakirjoja* *kirjastoon huomenna*] *pojat*]  
       [  $\_\_\_$  return.3PL [  $\_\_\_$  picture.book.PL.PAR library.ILL tomorrow] *boy.3PL*]

If the subject of the sentence is not in the topic position (the preverbal position), some other potential topic may be adjoined there, for instance *kuvakirjoja* ‘picture books’ in our example:

- (7)  $[_{T/Fin}$  *kuvakirjoja*  $\_\_\_$  *palauttavat* [  $\_\_\_$   $\_\_\_$  *kirjastoon huomenna*] *pojat*]  
       [ *picture.book.PL.PAR*  $\_\_\_$  return.3PL [  $\_\_\_$   $\_\_\_$  library.ILL tomorrow] boy.3PL]

On the intended reading *kuvakirjoja* ‘picture books’ is the topic and *pojat* ‘boys’ is focused. The targeted meaning of the final sentence is, thus, ‘The picture books will be returned to the library tomorrow by the boys (and not e.g. by the girls).’ The movement of another potential topic to adjoin to the Spec of T/Fin position falls in the scope of the EPP2 condition: an argument is needed in the specifier position.

### 3 Minor comments

It is inevitable in this kind of work that the reader sometimes disagrees with the author about the grammaticality judgments of the example sentences. I will not go through all of my disagreements because it is not essential for the value of Brattico's book or the theory developed in it. However, I would like to take up for discussion a couple of smaller details that seem to me to have more general significance.

Brattico has marked sentence (8) (his (20a) on page 20) as ungrammatical.

- (8) *On joku siellä oven takana.*  
is someone there door.GEN behind

For me the sentence is fine in a situation in which it confirms the claim that someone is behind the door. The predicate *on* 'is' is in the contrast position (Vilkuna's 1989 K-position) and the word *joku* 'someone' is the topic of the sentence. Even though *joku* is not specific and does not refer to any known person, it may still be the topic: the sentence claims that someone (an unidentified person) is behind the door. This is important for two reasons: Brattico builds some of his argumentation on the ungrammaticality of sentences like (8), and it is not clear to me why a non-specific pronoun like 'someone,' 'something,' etc. could not be a topic.

An example of a non-specific topic is found in (9) (his example (34) on page 33) (I have corrected the agreement: *jotain kiinteitä ruokia* > *joitain kiinteitä ruokia*):

- (9) *Nykyään joitain kiinteitä ruokia syö vauva.*  
nowadays some.PL.PAR solid.PL.PAR food.PL.PAR eat.3SG baby.NOM

Brattico's judgment is that the sentence is ungrammatical. For me the sentence is fine, but it requires some imagination. The sentence means 'The situation of solid foods is nowadays such that they are eaten by a baby.' The sentence could be uttered for instance in a situation in which some solid foods were earlier eaten by anyone or anything but that nowadays the situation is such that a baby eats them. For me the phrase *joitain kiinteitä ruokia* 'some solid foods' is a topic even though it is non-specific.

In section 7.3 (pp. 113–114), Brattico discusses the phenomenon that the system does not like movements to the right across finite or non-finite subordinated sentences. He assumes that it is the weight of those structures that is the reason. For instance, the sentences in (10a,b) (=141a,b in the book) contain relative clauses. Sentence (10a) is clearly ungrammatical, but this is because the relative clause follows the word *tänään* 'today' and not the word *naisen* 'lady.ACC'. Sentence (10b) is grammatical only on the (absurd) meaning indicated below the example.

- (10) a. \**Taavi antoi \_\_eräälle naiselle tänään [jonka tapasi junassa] kirjan.*  
Taavi gave \_\_ a.ALL lady.ALL today [RELPR met train.INE] book  
b. *Taavi antoi \_\_eräälle naiselle tänään kirjan [jonka tapasi junassa].*  
Taavi gave \_\_ a.ALL lady.ALL today book [RELPR met train.INE]  
'Taavi met a book on the train and he gave that book to a lady.'

Sentences in which the relative clause follows the noun *naiselle* are grammatical (stylistically clumsy, though), even when the main clause object follows the relative clause:

- (11) a. *Taavi antoi* \_\_\_ *eräälle naiselle* [*jonka tapasi junassa*] *tänään* kirjan.  
 Taavi gave \_\_\_ a.ALL lady.ALL [RELPR met train.INE] today book  
 ‘Taavi gave a book to a lady he met on the train.’
- b. *Taavi antoi* \_\_\_ *tänään eräälle naiselle* [*jonka tapasi junassa*] kirjan.  
 Taavi gave \_\_\_ today a.ALL lady.ALL [RELPR met train.INE] book

If that is correct, when it comes to Finnish relative clauses, the weight plays a role as a stylistic, not as a syntactic rule. I do not think this is a problem for Brattico’s theory.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

Brattico has analyzed further Holmberg & Nikanne’s (2002) idea that the topic position (the preverbal position) is filled by an A-movement if the topic is the subject of the sentence and by A-bar movement if the topic is some other element. In brief, Brattico’s theory does not disagree with Holmberg & Nikanne (2002). According to Brattico, placing the subject in the topic position is A-movement, and placing some other element there is not. Brattico emphasizes that the latter is not movement but adjunction. For me it is difficult to see a crucial difference between these two.

The idea of three phases makes Brattico’s theory of word order an interesting one and this phase based theory is worth developing further. The phases make it possible to see the connection between different interfaces of the syntactic structure and other cognitive structures (event structure, information structure etc.). We can say without doubt that Pauli Brattico’s book has pushed the analysis of Finnish word order forward.

#### References

- Baker, Mark. 1988. *Incorporation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Holmberg, Ander & Nikanne, Urpo. 2002. Expletives, subjects, and topics in Finnish. In Peter Svenonius (ed.), *Subjects, Expletives, and the EPP*, 71–105. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holmberg, Anders, Urpo Nikanne, Irmeli Oraviita, Hannu Reime & Trond Trosterud. 1993. The structure of INFL and the finite clause in Finnish. In Anders Holmberg, & Urpo Nikanne (eds.), *Case and Other Functional Categories in Finnish Syntax*, 176–206. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110902600.177>
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1983. *Semantics and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nikanne, Urpo. 2018. *Conceptual Semantics: A micro-modular approach*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cal.23>
- Pollock, Jean-Yves. 1989. Verb movement, Universal Grammar and the structure of IP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20: 365–424.
- Vilkuna, Maria. 1989. *Free Word Order in Finnish: Its syntax and discourse functions*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Urpo Nikanne  
 Åbo Akademi University  
 urpo.nikanne@abo.fi