

Elsi Kaiser: The syntax-pragmatics interface and Finnish ditransitive verbs

In this paper I present an analysis of the syntax and pragmatics of Finnish ditransitive verbs. Finnish, an SVO language with flexible word order, permits both the direct object-indirect object (DO-IO) order (ex. (1)) and the indirect object-direct object (IO-DO) order (ex. (2)). According to my analysis, the base-generated order of Finnish ditransitives is DO-IO, and IO-DO order is derived by discourse-driven scrambling of the IO to a position above the DO. Thus, I argue that in addition to the more 'visible' types of subject-object word order variation discussed in the literature, Finnish also permits short-distance scrambling. My claim is supported by evidence from reciprocal binding patterns, pragmatic word order constraints, and scope asymmetries.

(1) IO-DO order

Min annoin miehelle kirjan.

I-NOM gave man-ALLATIVE book-ACC

Ňgave a/the man a/the book.ŀ

(2) DO-IO order

Min annoin kirjan miehelle.

I-NOM gave book-ACC man-ALLATIVE

Ňgave a/the book to a/the man.ŀ

First, let us consider the evidence from binding asymmetries. As illustrated in ex. (3), when the order of arguments is DO-IO, the DO can bind a reciprocal anaphor in the IO. Example (4) shows that when the order is IO-DO, and the IO binds a reciprocal in the DO, the sentence is more marked, but still grammatical.

(3) DO-IO(reciprocal)

Min esittelin Liisan ja Marin toisilleen.

I-NOM introduced Liisa-ACC and Mari-ACC each-other-ALLATIVE

Ňintroduced Liisa and Mari to each other.ŀ

(4) IO-DO(reciprocal)

? Min esittelin Liisalle ja Marille toisensa.

I-NOM introduced Liisa-ALLATIVE and Mari-ALLATIVE each-other-ACC

Ňintroduced to Liisa and Mari each other.ŀ

Interestingly, in the IO-DO order, the DO *can* bind a reciprocal in the IO (ex. (5)). In contrast, when the order is DO-IO, the IO cannot bind a reciprocal anaphor in the DO (ex. (6)).

(5) IO(reciprocal)-DO

? Min esittelin toisilleen Liisan ja Marin.

I-NOM introduced each-other-ALLATIVE Liisa-ACC and Mari-ACC

Ňintroduced to each other Liisa and Mari.ŀ

(6) DO(reciprocal)-IO

* Min esittelin toisensa Liisalle ja Marille.

I-NOM introduced each-other-ACC Liisa-ALLATIVE and Mari-ALLATIVE
Ö introduced each other Liisa and Mari.Ö

This asymmetry is straightforwardly captured if we assume that DO-IO is the basic order. The examples in (4) and (5) are grammatical but marked, because they involve binding via scrambling and reconstruction, respectively. Example (6) is ungrammatical because the DO, the reciprocal pronoun, is base-generated above the IO, the antecedent, and no scrambling has occurred. Crucially, these binding asymmetries cannot be explained as straightforwardly if we assume the underlying order to be IO-DO or both orders to be base-generated.

The claim that DO-IO is the base-generated order receives further support from the interaction of word order and information status in Finnish ditransitives. Because Finnish has no definite or indefinite article, word order plays an important role in encoding the distinction between old and new information (e.g. Vilkuna 1989, Chesterman 1991). In the Finnish double object construction, when both postverbal arguments have the same information status (both old or both new information), the most felicitous order is DO-IO. The DO-IO order also occurs when the DO is old information and the IO is new information. Crucially, the only time when IO-DO order is more felicitous than DO-IO order is when the IO is old and the DO is new information. In other words, when the order of arguments is IO-DO, the IO is interpreted as referring to a particular entity that is linked to the preceding discourse.

The different information structures exhibited by IO-DO and DO-IO orders can be captured if we posit that DO-IO is the basic order, and discourse-old elements scramble to a higher position (above the base position of the DO). According to this approach, IO-DO order is generated from DO-IO order by scrambling the ÖldÖ indirect object to the special Öld informationÖ position on top of the DO. The ÖnewÖ DO remains low. The resulting order is: IO... DO...trace-of-IO. Moreover, if both arguments are new, neither one scrambles to the special Öld informationÖ position, and the order remains DO-IO. If both arguments are old information, then -- in accordance with locality -- the closest/highest one (i.e. the direct object) scrambles string-vacuously to the special position. This generates the order DO-IO (actually: DO...trace-of-DO...IO). This also happens when DO is old and IO is new. In addition, when both arguments are old, it could also be the case that both of them scramble. One might hypothesize that this movement patterns like multiple wh-movement: An element that moves later is Öticked inÖ below the one that moved first (see Richards 1997).

Before we move on to consider evidence from scope asymmetries, it is important to note that treating IO-DO or both orders as base-generated fails to explain the pragmatic word order patterns satisfactorily. For example, if IO-DO is the base-generated order, why should the order of arguments be DO-IO whenever they have the same information status? Treating DO-IO as the base order gives the most satisfactory account of the pragmatic word order constraints.

Having considered reciprocal binding data and word order patterns, let us now turn to data from scope asymmetries to see how they provide further support for the claim that DO-IO order is base-generated, and IO-DO order derived via discourse-driven scrambling. In the DO-IO order, both surface and inverse scope are possible (ex. (7)), but the IO-DO order only permits the surface scope reading (ex. (8)).

(7) DO-IO

Pekka antoi jonkun kirjan jokaiselle tyt lle.

Pekka-NOM gave some-ACC book-ACC every-ALLATIVE girl-ALLATIVE

Ėekka gave some book to every girl.Ė

Ambiguous: ok Existential>Universal, ok Universal>Existential

(8) IO-DO

Pekka antoi jollekin tyt lle jokaisen kirjan.

Pekka-NOM gave some-ALL girl-ALL every-ACC book-ACC

Ėekka gave some girl every book.Ė

Unambiguous: ok Existential>Universal, * Universal>Existential

At first glance, the lack of inverse scope in (8) is surprising, given the fact that Finnish permits Quantifier Raising (as shown by scopal ambiguities in transitive sentences and the grammaticality of inverse linking sentences). We would expect both orders to show scope ambiguity as a result of QR. According to my analysis, however, the lack of inverse scope with IO-DO order follows from the fact that, in IO-DO order, the IO must be interpreted as being old information. In other words, it is assumed that an indirect object such as Ėome girlĖ in (8) refers to some particular girl. This, in turn, means that a distributed (inverse) scopal interpretation is impossible: it is not possible to distribute over a particular individual. Thus, the scopal asymmetry can be derived from the pragmatic differences between the two orders (see Brandt 1999 for a similar analysis using evidence from German, English and Russian ditransitives). It is also worth noting that my analysis is compatible with Bayer & Kornfilt (1994)'s claim that 'Scrambling bleeds LF movement', i.e. that QR cannot occur after scrambling because it would destroy the effects of scrambling.

In conclusion, I argue that the Finnish ditransitive construction, which permits both DO-IO order and IO-DO order, has DO-IO as its base-generated order. According to my analysis, IO-DO order is derived from DO-IO order by means of pragmatically-motivated short-distance scrambling. My claims are supported by data from reciprocal binding, pragmatic word order patterns and scopal asymmetries.

Selected references:

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