

Focus movement

Looking at some of the word order effects that focus can have.

1 Basque

1.1 Basque is SOV, departures from SOV yield “focus”

Point one: Basque is an SOV language—meaning that the “neutral” word order is SOV. But like most SOV languages with which I am familiar, the word order is also fairly free. However, reordering the words also usually goes with a difference in interpretation. The glosses below indicate that (1a) can be interpreted “neutrally” (meaning, essentially, all-new), or with object focus (as indicated by the captials), whereas (1b) can only be interpreted with subject focus. The examples in (1) come from Arregi (2001), and those in (2) come from Ortiz de Urbina (1999). They make the same point. The sentence in (2c) shows an additional word order, which, like (2b) and (1b), also can only be interpreted as having subject focus. Ortiz de Urbina (1999) notes, about (2c), that “where... any element precedes the focus, it is intonationally separated from the latter by a pause and interpreted as a topic...”

- (1) a. Jonek Miren ikusi rau.
Jon-ERG Miren-ABS seen has
'Jon saw Miren.' ~ 'Jon saw MIREN.' ~ '*JON saw Miren.'
- b. Miren Jonek ikusi rau.
Miren-ABS Jon-ERG seen has
'*Jon saw Miren.' ~ '*Jon saw MIREN.' ~ 'JON saw Miren.'
- (2) a. Jonek eskutitza irakurri du.
Jon letter read has
'Jon has read the letter.'
- b. Jonek irakurri du eskutitza.
Jon read has letter
'It is Jon that read the letter.'
- c. Eskutitza, Jonek irakurri du.
letter Jon read has
'As for the letter, JON has read it.'

The generalization seems to be that **the focus must be left-adjacent to the verb**. While the previous examples might not show this conclusively, it is at least consistent—

where there is “narrow focus,” or focus on something smaller than the whole sentence, the thing that is focused is the thing that immediately precedes the verb. And, when there is “wide focus” (or perhaps *no* focus—we need to decide what we mean by “focus” here), the word order must be SOV. Deviating from that word order triggers a narrow focus interpretation.

1.2 *Wh*-words act like focus, also must immediately precede the verb

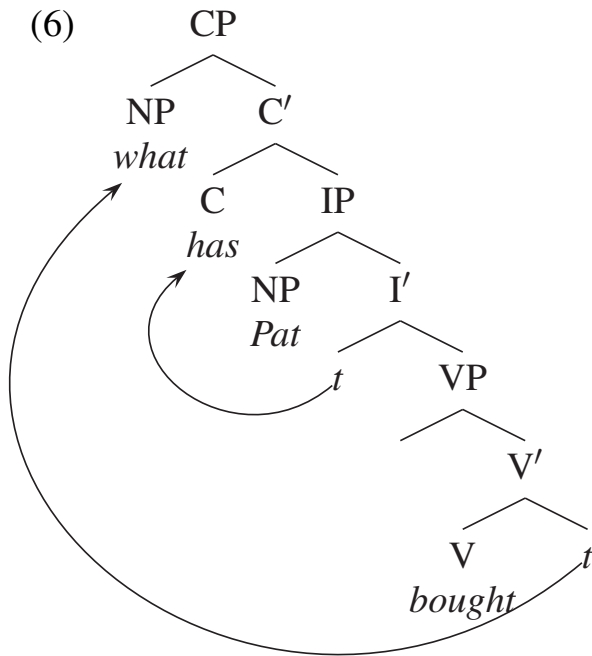
Point two: *Wh*-words act like focus. They have the same property of needing to be left-adjacent to the verb. Here are some examples, these are drawn from Arregi (2001). These are grammatical when the *wh*-word precedes the verb, ungrammatical otherwise.

- (3) a. Jonek sein ikusi rau?
Jon-ERG who-ABS seen has
'Who did Jon see?'
- b. *Sein Jonek ikusi rau?
who-ABS Jon-ERG seen has
(‘Who did Jon see?’)
- (4) a. *Señek Miren ikusi rau.
who-ERG Miren-ABS seen has
(‘Who saw Miren?’)
- b. Miren señek ikusi rau.
Miren-ABS who-ERG seen has
'Who saw Miren?'

1.3 Focus-verb adjacency requirement as being like English *wh*-questions

Point three: We can make sense of this requirement that the *wh*-word or the focus be left-adjacent to the verb in much the same way we understand the requirement that a *wh*-word be immediately to the left of a tensed auxiliary in English—where the *wh*-word is assumed to move into a high specifier (e.g., SpecCP) and the auxiliary is taken to move to the associated head (e.g., C). Also: this means that in something like (4b), there must be another movement, that moves the object into a position even higher (thus to the left) of the subject.

- (5) a. What has Pat bought?
b. *What Pat has bought?
c. *Pat has bought what?



1.4 Focus and *wh*-words can't co-occur within a clause

Point four: Focus and *wh*-words both need to move to the same place. And only one can get there. So, we expect that you can't have both a focus and a *wh*-word (in the same clause).

- (7) *Nork ikusi du MIREN antzoki-an?
 who see AUX Mary theater-at
 ('Who saw MARY at the theater?')

It *is* possible to have two *wh*-words, so the “immediately-before-the-tensed-verb” requirement only seems to hold for one *wh*-word. Others can remain wherever they start.

- (8) Nork ikusi du nor antzoki-an?
 who see AUX who theater-at
 'Who saw whom at the theater?'

1.5 Successive-cyclic movement

There are good reasons to think that when you have one sentence embedded within another sentence, as (9) is embedded within (10), moving a *wh*-word out of the inner clause all the way to the front of the outer clause, as in (11) actually takes place in multiple steps—first the *wh*-word moves to the edge of the inner clause (12), and then it moves on from there to the edge of the next higher clause (13). This is known as “successive-cyclic movement.”

- (9) Mary likes cake.

- (10) John said that Mary likes cake.
- (11) What did John say that Mary likes ___?
- (12) ___ did John say *what* that Mary likes ___?
- (13) What did John say ___ that Mary likes ___?

Here's a brief explanation of one reason to believe this, from English. The basic idea is that if we fill that middle position with something, then we won't be able to perform a step like (12) and so the sentence becomes ungrammatical. The setup: (14) is a regular sentence, which we can make into a question (15). We can embed the first sentence (14) inside a larger sentence to get (16)—the verb *say* expects a statement. The verb *ask* expects a question, and we can take the question from (15) and embed it inside a larger sentence with *ask* to get (17). Now: that “middle position” at the edge of the embedded question is occupied by *what*. This means that we should not be able to move a *wh*-word from inside the embedded question all the way to the edge of the outer question, because the *wh*-word we are trying to move won't be able to stop off in the middle position. And, indeed, we can't (18) (this is usually referred to as a “*wh*-island” because it also forms a kind of island like those discussed in section 1.8—filling that intermediate landing site with a *wh*-word causes the inner clause to block further movements out of the inner clause.)

- (14) Mary gave *something* to Bill.
- (15) What did Mary give ___ to Bill?
- (16) John said Mary gave *something* to *someone*.
- (17) John asked what Mary gave ___ to *someone*.
- (18) * Who did John ask what Mary gave ___ to ___?

The facts from Basque support this—both for *wh*-words like in English above, and for foci. If we suppose that the place where *what* in sitting (12) is the same place that both focus and *wh*-words want to go (in order to derive the fact that each needs to be immediately preverbal), and that this is why (7) was bad (they couldn't both occupy the same place), then this would explain why, although (19) is fine (despite having both a *wh*-word and focus), (20) is not (because the focus is sitting in that middle position, where the *wh*-word needs to stop off before moving up to the edge of the outer clause). *Wh*-words will also block this position, as in (21). This is basically the same fact as (18).

- (19) Nork esan du MIREN topatu du-ela antzoki-an?
 who said AUX Miren meet AUX-that theater-at
 ‘Who said that it was Mary (s)he met at the theater?’

- (20) ?? Zer uste du Mikelek ETXEAN aurkitu du-ela Jonek?
 what think AUX Mikel home-at find AUX-that Jon
 ('What does Mikel think that Jon has found AT HOME')
- (21) ?* Zer galdetu du Mikelek NON aurkitu du-en Jonek?
 what ask AUX Mikel where find AUX-that Jon
 ('What has Mikel asked where Jon has found?')

1.6 Basque has “pied-piping” options with *wh*-words

A much-discussed fact about Basque is the fact that *wh*-words can, in the basic case, either move alone or move with a larger constituent containing them (“pied piping” them). First, the English cases of pied piping. In (22a), no pied piping occurs—the *wh*-word moves to first position. In (22b), the *wh*-word is really *who*; it is the identity of the person with the friend that the asker is after. But, you can’t move the *wh*-word by itself, instead you have to move the whole NP *whose friend* (22c). The “optionality” that Basque shows is probably most parallel to the cases in (22d) and (22e), which allow either the option of moving the *wh*-word by itself, or moving the whole PP containing the *wh*-word. Probably the simplest way to think about the pied-piping cases is that the slightly larger constituent containing the *wh*-word becomes an “honorary *wh*-word” as a whole, and moves as if it were a *wh*-word.

- (22) a. Who did John meet?
 b. Whose friend did John meet?
 c. * Who did John meet ___’s friend?
 d. With whom did John arrive ___?
 e. Who did John arrive with ___?

Here, then, are the Basque cases. In (23), the *wh*-word has moved out of the inner clause alone, up to the edge of the outer clause. In (24), the same thing has happened, except that there are three clauses, and the *wh*-word has moved out of both inner clauses. In these cases, the verb has to be first in each of the inner clauses (which we can understand, since the verb had to be right next to the *wh*-word when it stopped off in each of the middle positions.)

- (23) Se_i pentzate su [t_i idatzi rabela Jonek]?
 what you think written has Jon-ERG
 ‘What do you think Jon wrote?’
- (24) Se_i pentzate su [esan dabela Mirenek [t_i idatzi rabela Jonek]]?
 what you think said has Miren-ERG written has Jon-ERG
 ‘What do you think Miren said Jon wrote?’

But Basque also has the option (more freely than in English) of pied piping the whole embedded clause. Notice that the *wh*-word is at the left edge of the clause that is being pied-piped; I won't provide the evidence here, but the *wh*-word has to be there in order for pied-piping to happen. We might think of this as a prerequisite for turning the embedded clause into an "honorary *wh*-word."

- (25) [Se idztazi rabela Jonek]_i pentzate su *t_i*?
 what written has Jon-ERG you think
 'What do you think Jon wrote?'
- (26) [Se idztazi rabela Jonek]_i pentzate su [esan dabela Mirenek *t_i*]?
 what written has Jon-ERG you think said has Miren-ERG
 'What do you think Miren said Jon wrote?'

1.7 Basque has "pied-piping" options with focus as well

The examples here come from Ortiz de Urbina (1999), and he doesn't really provide the whole paradigm. But the assumption will have to be that without pied piping, these would have been bad. (27a) is good, and (27b) is not (where the focus is not adjacent to the verb). The focus itself is inside the larger NP. Same goes for (28a) vs. (28b).

- (27) a. JONEN lagunek idatzi zuten eskutitza.
 Jon's friends write AUX letter
 'JON's friends wrote the letter.'
- b. *JONEN lagunek eskutitza idatzi zuten.
 Jon's friends letter write AUX
 ('JON's friends wrote the letter.')
- (28) a. JONEN idatzi du-en liburuak izan ditu salmenta onak.
 Jon write AUX-COMP book have AUX sale good
 'The book that JON has written sold well.'
- b. *JONEN idatzi du-en liburuak izan ditu salmenta onak.
 Jon write AUX-COMP book have AUX sale good
 'The book that JON has written sold well.'

Here are some examples showing that focus can move to the edge of the inner clause (29) or to the edge of the outer clause (30). Or move out of two embedded clauses (31).

- (29) Nik uste dut MIKELEK idatzi du-ela eskutitza.
 I think AUX Mikel write AUX-that letter
 'I think that it is Mikel that has written the letter.'

- (30) MIKELEK uste dut MIKELEK idatzi du-ela eskutitza.
 Mikel think AUX write AUX-that letter
 ‘It is Mikel that I think has written the letter.’
- (31) JONEK uste dut esan du-ela Mikelek idatzi du-ela eskutitza.
 Jon think AUX say AUX-that Mikel write AUX-that letter
 ‘It is Jon that I think Mikel has said has written the letter.’

1.8 *Wh*-words cannot move out of islands

Now, on to islands. *This* is really what people have been most interested in. An “island” is something out of which *wh*-movement cannot occur (pretty much cross-linguistically). English examples are like these below. You can’t move a *wh*-word out of a “complex noun phrase” or an adjunct (like a *after*-clause).

- (32) a. Moe blames this on [_{NP} the breakdown of *something*].
 b. *What does Moe blame this on [_{NP} the breakdown of ___]?
- (33) a. Dr. Hibbert giggled [_{Adjunct} after Homer lost *something*].
 b. *What did Dr. Hibbert giggle [_{Adjunct} after Homer lost ___]?

In Basque, you can’t either—in (34) and (35), there was an attempt to move the *wh*-word out of a complex noun phrase, and in (36), there was an attempt to move the *wh*-word out of an adjunct clause.

- (34) *Se_i ikusi su [[t_i idatzi raben] gixona]?
 what seen you have written has man-ABS
 (‘What did you see the man who wrote?’)
- (35) *Nori_i irakurri duzu [Mikelek t_i eman dio-n] liburua?
 who-DAT read have Mikel-ERG given AUX-COMP man-ABS
 (‘To whom have you read the book that Mikel gave?’)
- (36) *Zer_i joan ziren heme-dik ikusi onderen t_i?
 what go AUX here-from see after
 (‘What did they leave after seeing?’)

But Basque has another option: it can pied-pipe the whole island. And these, are fine—as we might expect, because they don’t involve a movement of a *wh*-word out of an island.

- (37) [[Nork barreiatu du-en] zurrumurra] entzun duzu?
 who spread has-COMP rumor heard have
 ‘The rumor that who spread have you heard?’

- (38) ? [Zer ikusi onderen]_i joan ziren heme-dik *t_i*?
 what see after go AUX here-from
 ‘What did they leave after seeing?’

2 Some further discussions about Basque and about accent

According to Arregi (2000), citing Hualde (1999), there is a lot of dialectal variation in Basque in terms of prosodic organization. We’ll focus here (for the purpose of looking at stress) on the Ondarroa dialect, as does Arregi (2001). This discussion primarily follows Arregi (2000) and Arregi (2001).

2.1 Cinque (1993) and the “null theory” of stress

Cinque (1993) makes a strong proposal about how the nuclear stress of a sentence is computed—the basic idea is that sentence stress goes on the most embedded constituent. So, it will go on the object in a simple transitive sentence (and it seems generally to go there, regardless of whether a language is SOV or SVO).

2.2 Applying this to Basque

In Basque, there are two kinds of tenses—simple and compound.

- (39) Jonek Miren ikusi rau.
 Jon-ERG Miren-ABS seen has
 ‘Jon saw Miren.’

- (40) Jonek diru rakar.
 Jon-ERG money-ABS has
 ‘Jon has money.’

The stress in compound tenses goes on the object. In simple tenses, it goes on the penultimate syllable of the combination of the verb and object. Arregi’s (2001) idea is that the auxiliary fuses together with the thing on its left to form a prosodic domain. In the compound cases, this doesn’t change the fact that the object is still more embedded, and so the object gets the stress. In the simple cases, the object becomes part of the prosodic domain with the verb, and so the verb is included in the most embedded domain and so can get the stress.

- (41) a. Jonek **Míren** ikusí rau.
 Jon-ERG Miren-ABS seen has
 ‘Jon saw Miren.’

- b. * **Jónek** Míren ikusí rau.
- (42) a. Jonek **diru** **rákar**.
Jon-ERG money-ABS has
'Jon has money.'
- b. Jon **Mutrikukú** re.
Jon-ABS Motriko-GEN is
'Jon is from Motriko.'

Arregi's (2001) proposal is that (43) is a requirement on the pronunciation. So, the main sentence stress goes to the most embedded constituent, but when it does, it has to also find itself on the *wh*/focus-phrase, if there is one.

- (43) A *wh*/focus-phrase must contain main sentence stress.

In cases where the stress wouldn't "naturally" land on the focused phrase, things are moved around. The idea is that if you move, say, the object to the left, then it winds up higher and is no longer the most embedded constituent.

- (44) Jonek **Míren** ikusí rau.
Jon-ERG Míren-ABS seen has
'Jon saw Míren.' ~ 'Jon saw MIREN.' ~ '*JON saw Míren.'
- (45) Míren **Jónek** ikusí rau.
Míren-ABS Jon-ERG seen has
'*Jon saw Míren.' ~ '*Jon saw MIREN.' ~ 'JON saw Míren.'

One prediction this makes is that in (45), the focus could also be understood to be on the subject + verb, because that is now a constituent and would contain the sentence stress. And it can: (45) can answer the question *What happened to Míren?*. It is not obvious that this is expected on the "move the focus" analysis we were considering before.

2.3 What happens to the things that are moved left?

Here's an interesting observation:

- (46) a. Jonek seoser irakurri ban.
Jon-ERG something-ABS read had
'Jon read something.'
- b. * Seoser Jonek irakurri ban.
- (47) a. Jonek danak irakurri ban.
Jon-ERG all-ABS read had
'Jon read all of them.'

- b. * Danak Jonek irakurri ban.
- (48) a. Jonek liburu asko irakurri ban.
Jon-ERG book many-ABS read had
'Jon read many (of the) books.'
- b. Liburu asko Jonek irakurri ban.
book many-ABS Jon-ERG read had
'JON read many of the books.'

The point here: for *seoser* 'something' and *danak* 'all', we don't seem to be able to move them out of the way in an attempt to achieve focus on the subject. But we can do that with *liburu asko*. Why?

We can relate that to this fact in English.

- (49) As for many of the books, Jon read them.
- (50) * As for something, Jon read it.
- (51) * As for all of them, Jon read them.

Right, *something* and *all of them* make bad topics. So, what this suggests is that in the cases where we've moved something left in Basque, it has become a topic. (So far, though, this is compatible with the analysis in which the verb moves up to C and the focus moves into SpecCP—anything that appears to the left of that would have to be even higher in the tree, something we might expect of topics.)

This isn't just about being to the left of the focus, either—in the neutral word order, there is no problem with *something* or *all of them* to the left of the focus.

- (52) a. Seoseñek auxe liburu irakurri ban.
someone-ERG this book-ABS read had
'Someone read THIS BOOK.'
- b. Danak auxe liburu irakurri ban.
all-ERG this book-ABS read had
'Everyone read THIS BOOK.'
- c. Mutil askorek Jon ikusi ben.
boy many-ERG Jon-ABS seen had
'Many (of the) boys saw JON.'

2.4 It works to the right, too

Just like moving things off to the left seems to get them higher in the structure (and therefore render them ineligible to receive the sentence stress), moving things off to the

right does as well.¹

- (53) **Jónek** ikusí rau Míren.
Jon-ERG seen has Miren-ABS
'JON saw Miren.'
- (54) **Míren** ikusí rau Jonek.
Miren-ABS seen has Jon-ERG
'JON saw Miren.'
- (55) **Ikusí rau** Míren Jonek.
seen has Miren-ABS Jon-ERG
'Jon DID SO see Miren.'
- (56) **Ikusí rau** Jonek Míren.
seen has Jon-ERG Miren-ABS
'Jon DID SO see Miren.'

2.5 Reconciling the prosodic account with “long-distance” focus movement

Given everything we've seen so far, though this leaves a case like the following as kind of a mystery:

- (57) **Jón** pentsaten dot Mirének ikusi rabela.
Jon-ABS I-think Miren-ERG seen has.COMP
'I think Miren saw JON.'

Clearly, here *Jon* is not the most embedded thing. We would not have expected that it would be possible, in cases where one clause is embedded within another, to focus anything outside of the embedded clause. Unless...

- (58) a. [Mirenek Jon ikusi rabela] pentsaten dot.
b. Jon [Mirenek ___ ikusi rabela] pentsaten dot.
c. Jon ___ pentsaten dot [Mirenek ___ ikusi rabela].

But maybe that's not so crazy, we've seen whole clauses moving around before. For cases like this, it doesn't seem like the most *obvious* analysis, but it can be made to work, basically.

¹Arregi (2001) goes on to talk at some length about the differing properties of leftward and rightward movement with respect to semantics facts about quantifier scope—his conclusion is that rightward movement is basically invisible to the semantics, whereas leftward movement is visible.

References

- Arregi, Karlos. 2000. Tense in Basque. Ms., Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Arregi, Karlos. 2001. Focus and word order in Basque. Ms., Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1993. A null theory of phrase and compound stress. *Linguistic Inquiry* 24: 239–298.
- Hualde, J. I. 1999. Basque accentuation. In Harry van der Hulst (ed.) *Word prosodic systems in the languages of Europe*, 947–993. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ortiz de Urbina, Jon. 1999. Focus in Basque. In Georges Rebuschi & Laurice Tuller (eds.) *The grammar of focus*, 311–333. *Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.