

Is there focus-marking in the syntax?

The question Since the early 1970's, the analysis of *focus* has played a central role in discussions of the architecture of grammar. *Focus* refers to the identification of a part of the sentence as standing in contrast to contextually-determined alternatives (see e.g. Krifka, 2008). Interpretationally, changes in focus placement lead to differences in discourse congruence, as well as truth-conditional semantics in examples such as (1) (see e.g. Rooth, 1992). Morphophonologically, focus placement may affect stress placement as in (1) or result in other morphosyntactic marking.

- (1) a. Alex only gave BRIE a flower. b. Alex only gave Brie a FLOWER.

Form-meaning correspondences in focus placement (as in (1)) naturally lead to questions of modularity. Jackendoff (1972: 240) proposed the idea of *F-marking*: “a syntactic marker F which can be associated with any node...”, as in (2), which then feeds the semantics (Rooth 1985 *et seq*), morphosyntax, and prosody.

- (2) a. Alex only gave [Brie]_F a flower b. Alex only gave Brie [a flower]_F

Now, fifty years later, we revisit this question: *Is there really F-marking in the narrow syntax?*

Yes! Under the widely adopted Y-model of grammar, correspondences as in (1) require focus to be encoded in the narrow syntax, feeding both PF and LF. Jackendoff's F-marking is precisely such a device. We review proposed mechanisms for accent determination using F-marking in the debate (e.g. Kratzer and Selkirk 2020).

Focused phrases are also often targets for movement and (φ -)agreement. These operations (Agree etc.) must target a syntactically visible feature. F-marking in the narrow syntax again supplies such a syntactically visible annotation. The same can be said of fragment-forming ellipsis, which may involve movement of the focus followed by deletion (Merchant, 1999 a.m.o.) or non-constituent deletion leaving the in-situ focus (see e.g. Abe, 2015).

Additionally, we review an argument that F-marking can be copied under the Copy Theory of movement. Erlewine 2014 argues that in examples such as (3), where *even* associates with a focus which has moved out of its scope, *even* actually associates with the focus in a lower copy of movement (4), without reconstruction.

- (3) The STUDENTS will even be at the meeting.
(4) Narrow syntax: [the [students]_F]_i will *even* [[the [students]_F]_i be at the meeting]

No! We observe and defend the empirical conjecture in (5):

(5) **Conjecture:** There are no morphosyntactic processes which make reference to F-marking.

In cases where the syntax appears to target focused phrases, what is actually being targeted is a *particle phrase*, headed by an adjoined particle (PRT; focus particles or *Q-particles* of Cable 2010; see also Horvath 2007). To wit, to our knowledge, *there are no instances of movement/agreement targeting focused constituents that are not subject to pied-piping mismatches*. PRT must then be in a local relationship with the interpreted focus, forming these syntactic targets.

We provide further arguments from *pied-piping with secondary fronting*. We demonstrate that in many languages, *wh* pied-piping triggers secondary fronting — the *wh*-word/phrase moves to the edge of the pied-piping constituent — but there is no equivalent secondary fronting with focus pied-piping. This is explained by (5): unlike *wh*-words/phrases, which have lexical features that the syntax can reference ([WH]), F-marking does not exist and thus cannot be targeted for movement within the particle phrase.

We also review conceptual arguments:

- Szendrői 2001: F-marking violates the Inclusiveness Condition;
- Reinhart 2006: appeal to the Y-model for the analysis of focus, above, is circular.

Relevance for linguistic theory The placement of abstract F-marking in the narrow syntax, which then feeds both surface form and interpretation (Jackendoff, 1972), has been a core motivation for the syntax-centric (Y-model) view of grammatical architecture. Central to our debate is the conjecture in (5) — that no syntactic processes make reference directly to F-marking — which to our knowledge has never before been discussed. This conjecture forms a strong, empirical argument against the *Yes* position, which is widely assumed and adopted in contemporary work on syntax, semantics, and prosody. At the same time, the *No* position is not without its own challenges: for the F-less view of grammar to succeed, we must explain the correspondences between interpreted focus position and stress placement (1) and particle placement, without reference to F-marking, which in turn may require direct consideration of ⟨LF, PF⟩ pairs (as per discussion in Reinhart, 2006: ch. 3) or similar (e.g. Büring 2015), and also to explain patterns of focus association as in (3). We discuss these challenges and sketch possible responses in the debate.

References

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