

## Object Shift

The term OBJECT SHIFT is seen a lot in syntactic theory, but here we are going to use it to mean something the more specific definition originally found in [Holmberg's \(1986\)](#) dissertation.

- (1) *Holmberg's Generalization:*  
Object shift of an element  $\alpha$  from the complement domain of a verb  $\beta$  occurs only if  $\beta$  has moved out of VP.

[Holmberg 1986:176](#)

h Today I will cover the following topics:

1. What is object shift?
2. Object shift *vs* scrambling
3. Why does it happen?

Much of this discussion is drawn from [Vikner 2005](#).

### 1 What is object shift?

Object shift has two main variants:

- i. Movement of (definite) DP objects (Icelandic)
  - ii. Movement of (definite) pronominal objects (Danish, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish)
- Object shift does not shift material of other categories.
  - As indicated in (1), it is conditioned by movement of the *main verb* out of VP. Movement of an auxiliary does not trigger object shift.
  - It is distinct from object scrambling (for instance, in German) in several ways.

This would seem to indicate that object shift is triggered by (head) movement of a particular element, not just any movement.

#### 1.1 Icelandic: Full DP shift

- Icelandic, unlike the other North Germanic languages, permits object shift of full DPs. Object shift of full DPs is optional.
- It is possible to tell when object shift has occurred since the object will appear to the left of negation or a *vP* adverb like *aldrei*, 'never'.

Throughout, I have italicized *objects* and underlined main verbs.

- (2) *Optional full DP shift:*

- a. Af hverju las<sub>V</sub> Pétur aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> þessa bók ]?  
 why read Peter never this book
- b. Af hverju las<sub>V</sub> Pétur þessa bók<sub>i</sub> aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why read Peter this book never

- Importantly, while full DP object shift is optional in Icelandic, pronouns must undergo object shift:

(3) *Obligatory pronominal shift:*

- a. \* Af hverju las<sub>V</sub> Pétur aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> hana ]?  
 why read Peter never it
- b. Af hverju las<sub>V</sub> Pétur hana<sub>i</sub> aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why read Peter it never

- Critically, movement of an auxiliary verb does not trigger/permit object shift:

This is also true of full DP objects.

- (4) a. Af hverju hefur<sub>aux</sub> Pétur aldrei t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> las hana ]?  
 why has Peter never read it
- b. \* Af hverju hefur<sub>aux</sub> Pétur hana<sub>i</sub> aldrei t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> las t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why has Peter it never read

## 1.2 Danish: Pronominal shift

Danish, like the rest of the Mainland Scandinavian languages and Faroese, only permits pronominal objects to undergo object shift. Full DPs may not shift:

This is generally true of unstressed definite pronouns. Stressed pronouns need not shift, and indefinite pronouns do not shift. Object shift of pronouns is optional in Swedish.

(5) *No full DP shift:*

- a. Hvorfor læste<sub>V</sub> Peter aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> den her bog ]?  
 why read Peter never this book
- b. \* Hvorfor læste<sub>V</sub> Peter den her bog<sub>i</sub> aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why read Peter this book never

(6) *Obligatory pronominal shift:*

- a. \* Hvorfor læste<sub>V</sub> Peter aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> den ]?  
 why read Peter never it
- b. Hvorfor læste<sub>V</sub> Peter den<sub>i</sub> aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why read Peter it never

Again, object shift only occurs when main verbs undergo verb movement. It does not occur with auxiliary verb movement.

- (7) a. Hvorfor har<sub>aux</sub> Peter aldrig t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> læst den ]?  
 why has Peter never read it
- b. \* Hvorfor har<sub>aux</sub> Peter den<sub>i</sub> aldrig t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> læste t<sub>i</sub>]?  
 why has Peter it never read

### 1.3 Object shift in embedded clauses

- Recall that while Danish embedded clauses are not typically verb-second clauses, Icelandic embedded clauses are.
- The reason for this is that verbs appear to the left of adverbs in all embedded clauses in Icelandic, but not in Danish:

See the [lecture notes on V2](#) from 1 February.

(8) *Icelandic:*

Vikner 1995:145

- Ég spurði [af hverju Pétur hafði oft lesið hana].  
I asked why Peter had often read it.
- \*Ég spurði [af hverju Pétur oft hafði lesið hana].  
I asked why Peter often had read it.

(9) *Danish:*

Vikner 1995:145

- \*Jeg spurgte [hvorför Peter havde ofte læst den].  
I asked why Peter had often read it.
- Jeg spurgte [hvorför Peter ofte havde læst den].  
I asked why Peter often had read it.

- The general assumption, then, is that Icelandic always have V<sup>o</sup>-to-T<sup>o</sup> movement, where as Danish lacks it.
- This makes the prediction that there should be object shift in Icelandic embedded clauses but not Danish ones.
- Indeed, this is exactly what we find:

(10) *Icelandic:*

Vikner 2005:396, (13)

- \*Ég spurði [<sub>CP</sub> af hverju Pétur læsi aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> tv *hana* ] ].  
I asked why Peter read never it
- Ég spurði [<sub>CP</sub> af hverju Pétur læsi *hana*<sub>i</sub> aldrei [<sub>VP</sub> tv *t<sub>i</sub>* ] ].  
I asked why Peter read it never

(11) *Danish:*

Vikner 2005:396, (15)

- Jeg spurgte [<sub>CP</sub> hvorför Peter ofte [<sub>VP</sub> læste *den* ] ].  
I asked why Peter had often read it.
- \*Jeg spurgte [<sub>CP</sub> hvorför Peter *den*<sub>i</sub> ofte [<sub>VP</sub> læste *t<sub>i</sub>* ] ].  
I asked why Peter had often read it.

### 1.4 Intervening material precludes object shift

- It is not possible to object shift out of a PP.

(12) *Danish*

- Hvorför læste Peter aldrig i den?  
Why read Peter never in it
- Hvorför læste Peter *den*<sub>i</sub> aldrig i *t<sub>i</sub>*?  
Why read Peter it never in

- Intervening particles block object shift. In Swedish, particles (like *bort*, ‘away’, below) must always precede objects, and this blocks movement:

(13) *Swedish*:

- Peter kastade inte bort den.  
Peter threw not away it
- \*Peter kastade inte den bort.  
Peter threw not it away
- \*Peter kaste den inte bort.  
Peter threw it not away

Icelandic and Norwegian are more like English: Particles may come to either side of a DP object, but must follow pronouns.

- In Danish, particles (like *ud*, ‘out, away’, below) must typically follow objects, and object shift is obligatory:

- (14)
- \*Peter smed ikke ud det.  
Peter threw not away it
  - \*Peter smed ikke det ud.  
Peter threw not it away
  - Peter smed det ikke ud.  
Peter threw it not away

- Finally, indirect objects block object shift of direct objects (15b).
- It is possible to shift both an indirect object and a direct object (15c) or just an indirect object (15d).

- (15)
- Jeg låner ikke Maria bøgerne.  
I lend not Maria books.DEF
  - \*Jeg låner dem<sub>i</sub> ikke Maria t<sub>i</sub>.  
I lend them not Maria
  - Jeg låner hende<sub>k</sub> dem<sub>j</sub> ikke t<sub>k</sub> t<sub>i</sub>  
I lend her them not
  - Jeg låner hende<sub>k</sub> ikke t<sub>k</sub> bøgerne.  
I lend her not books.DEF

## 2 Object shift vs. Scrambling

- German has scrambling, and on the surface this looks a lot like Icelandic object shift if you look at a carefully selected set of examples:

(16) *German*:

- Peter hat<sub>aux</sub> ohne Zweifel nie [<sub>VP</sub> Bücher gelesen] t<sub>aux</sub>  
Peter has without doubt never books read
- Peter las<sub>V</sub> die Bücher<sub>i</sub> ohne Zweifel nie [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>V</sub>]  
Peter read the books without doubt never

- c. Peter las<sub>V</sub> sie<sub>i</sub> ohne Zweifel nie [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>V</sub>]  
Peter read them without doubt never

- However, object shift is more restricted than scrambling.

### 2.1 Scrambling occurs with auxiliary verbs

- unlike true object shift, verb movement is not a prerequisite for scrambling in German. Objects may move regardless of whether the main verb does.

(17) *German scrambling with and without an auxiliary:*

- a. Warum liest<sub>V</sub> Peter dieses Buch<sub>i</sub> oft [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>V</sub>]?  
why reads peter this book often
- b. Warum hat<sub>aux</sub> Peter dieses Buch<sub>i</sub> oft [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> gelesen]<sub>t<sub>aux</sub></sub>?  
why has Peter this book often read

(18) *Yiddish scrambling with an auxiliary:*

- a. Far vos hot<sub>aux</sub> Moyshe nit t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> geleyent dos dozike bukh]?  
why has Moses not read this book
- b. Far vos hot<sub>aux</sub> Moyshe dos dozike bukh<sub>i</sub> nit t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> geleyent t<sub>i</sub>]?  
why has Moses this book not read

The idea that German has object shift is pervasive: I have seen it claimed that German must have V-to-I movement in embedded clauses because it has object shift. This is not a valid inference.

Some categorizations of object shift claim that objects cannot cross a finite verb, a definition with which German could be consistent. Yiddish shows that this cannot be the right characterization.

### 2.2 Object shift is restricted to DPs

- In German, PPs can be scrambled:

- (19) a. Ich habe nicht [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> für das Buch] bezahlt].  
I have not for the book paid.
- b. Ich habe [<sub>PP</sub> für das Buch]<sub>i</sub> nicht [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> bezahlt].  
I have for the book not paid.

- In Icelandic, PPs may not undergo object shift:

- (20) Ég borgaði<sub>V</sub> ekki [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> fyrir bókina] ].  
I paid not for book.DEF
- (21) \*Ég borgaði<sub>V</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> fyrir bókina]<sub>i</sub> ekki [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>].  
I paid for book.DEF not

- The same is true of Danish, which is slightly less surprising since full DPs cannot even undergo object shift.

One exception is the adverb 'there' (Danish *der*; Icelandic *þar*), which does undergo object shift.

### 2.3 Object shift does not license parasitic gaps

- In German, scrambled objects can licence parasitic gaps in adjunct clauses.

- (22) a. ..., daß alle dieses Buch<sub>i</sub> [ohne e<sub>i</sub> zu lesen]<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> ins  
that everyone this book without to read into.the  
Regal gestellt haben.  
bookcase put have  
'that everybody put this book on the shelf without reading (it).'

- b. \* ..., daß alle [ohne  $e_i$  zu lesen] dieses Buch <sub>$i$</sub>  ins Regal  
 that everyone without to read this book into.the bookcase  
 gestellt haben.  
 put have

- Object shift cannot licence such a parasitic gap.

- (23) Alle stillede den straks  $t_i$  hen på reolen [uden at læse  $e_i$   
 all put it at once onto bookcase.DEF without to read  
 først].  
 first

- This has been used as evidence to suggest that scrambling is A'-movement in German and that object shift is A-movement.

### 3 Why?

Here I will discuss a few of the possibilities for why object shift occurs. Vikner discusses a few more and gets into a bit more detail, but these are some of the most straightforward to explain.

#### 3.1 Case?

(It's important to note that Vikner (2005) writes from the point of view that material must move to case-marked positions to receive case, which colors this discussion.)

- Holmberg (1986) proposes that the trace of a verb optionally assigns case to its complement. Consequently, if a verb moves, it is possible for its object to move to be assigned case elsewhere.
- Furthermore, as we saw in the contrast between scrambling and object shift, only DPs shift; PPs cannot. If PPs don't receive case, then there is no reason for them to move, but if DPs have to get case, then they might have to move.
- Another reason for thinking that this has to do with case assignment comes from morphological differences between DPs in Icelandic and Mainland Scandinavian.
  - In Icelandic, full DPs and pronouns all show morphological case differences.
  - In Mainland Scandinavian, only pronouns exhibit morphological case. Full DPs do not.
  - Thus, in Mainland Scandinavian, full DPs don't shift because they don't have to receive morphological case, but pronouns shift because they must (Holmberg 1986).
- One issue with this view comes from Faroese. Faroese has case-marked full DPs, but they may not undergo object shift. Pronouns must:

- (24) *No full DP object shift in Faroese:*

This is related to the observation that object shift behaves like A-movement re: parasitic gaps. Movement for case was considered to be A-movement.

- a. Jógvan keypti<sub>V</sub> ikki [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>V</sub>* *bókina*].  
 Jógvan bought not book.DEF.ACC
- b. \*Jógvan keypti<sub>V</sub> *bókina*<sub>i</sub> ikki [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>V</sub>* *t<sub>i</sub>*].  
 Jógvan bought book.DEF.ACC not

(25) *Pronouns must undergo object shift:*

- a. \*Jógvan keypti<sub>V</sub> ikki [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>V</sub>* *hana*].  
 Jógvan bought not it.ACC
- b. Jógvan keypti<sub>V</sub> *hana*<sub>i</sub> ikki [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>V</sub>* *t<sub>i</sub>*].  
 Jógvan bought it.ACC not

- Furthermore, Icelandic does not always assign accusative to its objects. Different verbs assign different cases, yet these objects do undergo object shift:

- (26) a. Í gær leitaði<sub>V</sub> Pétur *þessarar bókar*<sub>i</sub> sennilega ekki  
 Yesterday looked.for Peter.NOM this book.GEN probably not  
*t<sub>V</sub>* *t<sub>i</sub>*.

‘Yesterday, Peter probably did not look for this book.’

- b. Í dag þykir<sub>V</sub> þér *þessi bók*<sub>i</sub> sennilega ekki  
 today thinks.3.SG you.SG.DAT this book.NOM probably not  
 skemmtileg.  
 interesting.NOM  
 ‘Today you probably do not find this book amusing.’

- If this were about moving objects to case-marked positions, it is hard to understand why non-accusative objects shift.
- Oblique cases (like dative) are thought to be lexical or inherent cases assigned when the verb merges, so they shouldn’t need to move.
- Nominative is thought to be assigned from T<sup>o</sup>, and nowadays we think that happens under Agree.

### 3.2 Cliticization?

- One idea that was discussed in the mid 90s was that object shift was actually similar to object clitics in Romance.
- This made it easy to explain why one language had full DP object shift while the others lacked it: In Icelandic, I<sup>o</sup> would carry strong features, driving V<sup>o</sup>-to-I<sup>o</sup> movement and full DP object shift.
- The trouble with this view is that it’s very difficult to understand why Romance cliticization behaves differently from object shift. Why is Romance not subject to Holmberg’s Generalization?
- Furthermore, cliticization to the verb predicts that the shifted object should move along with the verb in I<sup>o</sup>-to-C<sup>o</sup> movement over a subject, which it does not as shown in (27a).

By ‘Romance’, Vikner seems to really mean ‘French’.

- Some sort of excorporation of the verb would be necessary to get the right word order, as in (27b).

- (27) a. \*Hvorfor [<sub>C°</sub> læste *den*] Peter [<sub>I°</sub> t<sub>V</sub>] aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
           why      read =it Peter      never
- b. \*Hvorfor [<sub>C°</sub> læste] Peter [<sub>I°</sub> t<sub>V</sub> *den*] aldrig [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>V</sub> t<sub>i</sub>]?  
           why      read Peter      =it never

Notice too that these examples show us that it's not just adjacency that matters here; the subject can intervene between the verb and the object.

- This is not what is seen in, e.g., French T°-to-C° movement. The clitic seems to move with the verb to C°. If excorporation were possible in Danish, why is it impossible in French?

- (28) a. Où [<sub>C°</sub> l'<sub>i</sub> avait<sub>aux</sub>] -il [<sub>I°</sub> t<sub>aux</sub>] t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> acheté t<sub>i</sub>]?  
           where it= had he bought
- b. \*Où [<sub>C°</sub> avait<sub>aux</sub>] -il [<sub>I°</sub> le<sub>i</sub> t<sub>aux</sub>] t<sub>aux</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> acheté t<sub>i</sub>]?  
           where had he it= bought

### 3.3 Interpretation?

- The characterization of full DP object shift in Icelandic as being optional is actually somewhat misleading.
- As shown by Diesing (1996), full DP shift in Icelandic results in the DP taking scope over an adverb:

- (29) a. Hann les<sub>V</sub> sjaldan lengstu bókina  
           He read rarely longest book.DEF
- b. Hann les<sub>V</sub> lengstu bókina<sub>i</sub> sjaldan t<sub>i</sub>  
           He read longest book.DEF rarely

- Example (29a) means that regardless of the set of books he is put in front of, he rarely reads the longest of those books.
- Example (29b) means that there is some longest book that is longer than all others that he rarely reads.

- Similar facts are attested from object scrambling in German.
- Diesing ties this can be derived from her (1992) mapping hypothesis.
- Additionally, as mentioned above, indefinite pronouns do not shift.

- (30) a. Jeg har ikke nogen paraply, har du ikke en?  
           I have not any umbrella, have you not one?
- b. \*Jeg har ikke nogen paraply, har du en ikke?  
           I have not any umbrella, have you en not?

- Again, indefinites may not be scrambled in German
- So it seems interpretation plays some key role in the phenomenon, though it is unclear how it meshes with all the other facts.

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