Abstract

In this talk we will present a novel analysis of the discourse properties of the phenomenon called “Stylistic Fronting” (SF). The widely held view according to which Stylistic Fronting has no discourse-semantic effects in Icelandic, but is related to topic or focus interpretation in Romance, is challenged. The cross-linguistic analysis of SF at the interface of Narrow Syntax and Discourse Interpretation proposed in this talk will show that SF is not simply triggered by formal features but has relevance for information structure (IS) in both Romance and Scandinavian. The impact of SF on discourse interpretation is, however, dependent on the type of syntactic derivation.

SF is defined as a leftward movement of different types of elements (often an adverb, a participle, a verb particle but also phrase etc.) in finite sentences into a position that precedes the finite verb. SF is typically present in those sentences where the position in front of the verb is not occupied by an overt subject DP (cf. “subject gap”) and is documented in Scandinavian languages (“Insular” and “Mainland” Scandinavian) and Romance languages and dialects (Italian, Sardian, Old-French and Old-Catalan). There is, however, a considerable variation in SF between the different Scandinavian and Romance languages, in that SF is restricted in different ways in Romance and Scandinavian: concerning its appearance in clause types (main vs. subordinated clauses), the choice of the SF-moved categories, the possible target positions, the subject gap-condition and last but not least its discourse effects.

An important aspect of the presented comparative approach is that the differences in the discourse function of SF within and between languages (and developmental stages) are attributed to syntactic differences. Concerning Icelandic it will be argued that the “stylistic” movement can be either a locally (and information-structurally) restricted “formal movement” (STYL-Inversion) into the subject gap without changing the IS-properties of the moved constituent or a “genuine” discourse-triggered movement (STYL-Preposing) with an obligatory contrastive effect. Since SF also seems to vary with respect to syntactic properties and discourse interpretation in Romance, the triggers and interpretive properties of SF in Scandinavian seem not to be as different from those in Romance as generally suggested in the literature. According to our claim, SF can have different discourse effects within both language groups, despite significant parametric differences between Romance and Scandinavian with respect to the Verb-Second Parameter, basic word order and pro-drop property.
Selected References


