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The Syntax of Nuclear Stress in Eastern Armenian

Introduction. This paper examines the role of syntax in nuclear stress **(NS)** assignment and its interaction with focus in Eastern Armenian(EA).The language exhibits a sharp stress-focus asymmetry: bare objects, bare subjects, and manner/measure adverbials are obligatorily stressed in out-of-the-blue contexts and allow ambiguous focus interpretations, whereas definite subjects and temporal adverbials are never stressed in neutral contexts and, when stressed, are consistent only with contrastive focus. I argue that the distinct movement profiles of bare vs. definite XPs in EA underlie these patterns. I adopt a Y-model architecture in which PF and LF operate independently: stress cannot determine focus in the sense of Chomsky 1971; Reinhart 1995, and no syntactic movement can be prosodically triggered (contra Zubizarreta 1998). Following Chomsky (2001) on cyclic spell-out and building on Kahnemuyipour (2009), I propose that NS is assigned to the highest XP inside the vP phase that does not move out for independent reasons, and that LF interprets this XP as the focus of the clause. F-marked constituents move to Spec–FocP in the middle field. F-marking is interpreted at LF as an instruction to shift the default focus and at PF as an instruction to shift the default stress. In the absence of F-marking, syntactic containment visible at LF determines the available focus set: it consists of all constituents containing the highest element in vP. This derives the observed ambiguities.

Data. <u>Bare subjects (1), bare objects (2), and manner/measure adverbials (3)</u> are obligatorily stressed in out-of-the-blue contexts. The auxiliary *e* is a prosodic enclitic that tracks stress and spells out tense, person, and number. Brackets indicate the available focus set.

(1) [[YEREKHA e]   girk-ə   kard-um]]
     CHILD   Aux.3.PR book-ACC read-IMPRF
     'A child is reading/reads the book/it is a child (and not an adult) that is reading the book'

(2) [Aram-ə   [[GIRK e]   kard-um]]
     Aram-NOM BOOK   Aux.3.PR read-IMPRF
     'Aram is reading/reads a book./It is a book (and not a journal) that Aram is reading.'

(3) [Aram-ə   [[HACHAKH e]   girk kard-um]]
     Aram-NOM OFTEN   Aux.3.PR book read-IMPRF
     'Aram reads a book often./Aram reads a book OFTEN (and not rarely)'

(1)-(3) are all compatible with wide-focus interpretations in neutral contexts: all three are felicitous as answers to *What happened?*, yet each also permits a new-information or contrastive focus reading. Crucially, manner/measure adverbs merge inside vP (Kahnemuyipour & Megerdomian 2011). Because of space, the data is omitted but the placement of definite and bare subjects relative to wh-words shows that the former obligatorily move out of vP, whereas the latter remain in situ: definite subjects precede wh-words at Spec-FocP (above vP, below TP), but bare subjects obligatorily follow them. Likewise, bare objects must occur to the right of manner/measure adverbials that mark the left edge of vP, confirming their vP-internal position.**<u>Definite subjects (4), temporal (5) and locative (6) adverbials</u>** are not stressed in out-of-the-blue contexts. If stressed, they are consistent only with contrastive focus interpretation.

(4) [ARAM-N e]   Ani-in   tes-el
     Aram-NOM Aux.3.PR Ani-ACC see-IMPRF
     'It is Aram who has seen Ani.'

(5) Aram-ə   [YEREK e]   Ani-in   tes-el
     Aram-NOM yesterday Aux.3.PR Ani-ACC see-IMPRF
     'Aram saw Ani YESTERDAY/It was yesterday that Aram saw Ani'

(6) Aram-ə   [AYG-UM e]   Ani-in   tes-el
     Aram-NOM park-LOC   Aux.3.PR Ani-ACC see-IMPRF
     'Aram has seen Ani in the PARK/It was in the park that Aram saw Ani'

Aygum in (4) can only receive a contrastive-focus interpretation. Similarly, (5) permits only a narrow, cleft-like reading of the temporal adverbial, and the same holds for the locative adverbial in (6). Crucially, temporal and locative adverbials are merged pre-verbally but outside of vP. A further asymmetry concerns the behavior of **definite subjects vs. definite objects**. Definite subjects are never stressed in out-of-the-blue contexts, whereas definite objects, may be stressed when they remain inside vP. In such cases they pattern like the bare object in (2), allowing ambiguous focus interpretations.

(7) [Aram-ə   [[ANI-IN e]   sir-um]].
     Aram-NOM Ani-ACC Aux.3.PR love-IMPR
     'Aram loves Ani.'

(7) is both felicitous as an answer to *What happened?* and to *Who does Aram like*.Definite objects, unlike bare objects, can occur either pre- or postverbally without interpretational effects (8), and they may optionally move out of vP. The latter pattern differently: when stressed, they are consistent only with contrastive focus reading (10). In (9), the position of the object relative to the measure adverbial shows that the object scrambled out of vP, but it is not stressed. In (10), the object has moved out of vP and is stressed. It has only contrastive focus reading.

(8) Aram-ə   Ani-in   sir-um   e   / sir-um   e   Ani-in
     Aram-NOM Ani-ACC love-IMPR Aux.3.PR / love-IMPR Aux.3.PR Ani-ACC

     'Aram loves Ani.'

(9) Aram-ə   Ani-in SHAT e   sirum
     Aram-NOM Ani-ACC much Aux love

     'Aram loves Ani much.'

(10) Aram-ə   ANI-IN e   shat sirum
     Aram-NOM Ani-ACC Aux much love

     'It is Ani that Aram loves much.'

Analysis. The data raise several questions: (i) how is NS assigned in Armenian; (ii) how does it interact with focus; (iii) how can this interaction be derived; (iv) why do we observe focus ambiguity in some cases but not in others; and (v) why do correlations between stress and focus appear sensitive to syntactic movement. Following Kayne (1994), I assume surface SOV order is derived: both bare and definite objects are base-generated postverbally, but bare objects obligatorily move to low Spec-AspP for licensing, whereas definite objects may optionally move to a preverbal position. Building on Kahnemuyipour (2009), I propose that NS targets the highest XP within vP, while the highest XP in CP (typically the subject) receives secondary stress. Adopting Chomsky's (2000, 2001) phase-based spell-out and Bošković's (2016) reformulation that the entire phase spells out, I argue that only elements at the vP edge are eligible for NS.

(11) [CP C [TP DP$_{subj}$ T [FocP (F-marked XP) Foc[vP v [AdvP Adv *manner/measure* [AspP DP$_{obj}$ Asp [VP V *t*]]]]]]]

<div align="center">*spell-out*</div>

Manner/measure adverbs merge below Spec-vP. When the subject moves out, they become the highest element in the phase and are assigned NS. Bare subjects never move out of vP, thus receiving NS. Definite subjects obligatorily move out, and the bare object at Spec-AspP gets stress as the highest in the phase. Definite objects likewise receive NS when they scramble to the vP edge. At LF, the highest XP is interpreted as the focus.The resulting focus ambiguity follows if syntactic constituency is visible at LF: the focus set includes all constituents containing the highest XP in vP; e.g. if the highest element is the object, the focus set is {O, vP, TP}. No F-marking is involved here: the element is interpreted as focus by virtue of its phase-edge position. F-marked constituents move to Spec-FocP; F-marking is interpreted at PF as an instruction to shift the default stress and at LF as an instruction to shift the default focus, yielding exclusively contrastive focus. Definite subjects and temporal/locative adverbials that merge outside vP never receive default focus, and, when F-marked, are interpreted as contrastively focused.

Selected References:

Bošković, Z. (2016). What is sent to spell-out is phases, not phasal complements. *Linguistica*, 56(1), 25–66.

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