



snippets

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A puzzle on auxiliary omission and focalization in English: evidence for cartography

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In the terms of Rizzi (1997), contrastive focalization involves movement to the specifier of a dedicated functional projection in the left periphery. On the other hand, contrastive focalization in English is often observed in situ. Take the following paradigm (I owe these data to Justin Fitzpatrick):

- (1) (Have) you given John his grade yet?
- (2) Have YOU given John his grade yet?
- (3) (Have) you given JOHN his grade yet?
- (4) (Have) you given John HIS GRADE yet?
- (5) *(Have) YOU given John his grade yet?

Sentences (3-4) show that auxiliary omission can occur in sentences with a focalized direct or indirect object, but (5) makes clear that the same does not hold for sentences with a focalized subject. This asymmetry is at first sight unexpected, but it can be derived by a few assumptions presently entertained in the cartographic literature.

Assume for auxiliary omission an explanation along the lines of Fitzpatrick (2006): the omitted auxiliary has moved to the edge of the root phase, and hence it is left unpronounced because of a phase-theoretic spell-out mechanism. According to Rizzi (2005a,b), every head in the left periphery is a plausible candidate for root phase head cross-linguistically:

- (6) [_{Force} Force [_{Top} Top [_{Foc} Foc [_{Top} Top [_{Fin} Fin IP]]]]]

As is well known, contrastive focalization is believed to require movement of the focalized constituent to the Spec of FocP in Italian. My hypothesis is the following: the same left-peripheral projection is involved in English as well. The difference would be that agreement is not forced to occur in a Spec-Head configuration, but long-distance Agree under c-command is available.

Suppose e.g. that in (2) YOU gets the focal interpretation from the left peripheral Foc head via Agree. An explanation of the ungrammaticality of (5) now suggests itself. From Fitzpatrick's analysis, it follows that in (5) *have* must be in the root-phase edge. In Rizzi's cartography, inverted auxiliaries are in Fin. So, in (5) FinP is expected to be the root. On the other hand, by hypothesis the focalization of the subject YOU requires

a FocP to be present in the left periphery. FocP is structurally higher than FinP, so a sentence that includes both cannot have FinP as its root. In brief, (5) is ungrammatical because it should satisfy two contradictory requirements (having and not having FinP as root).

This leaves the subject/ non-subject asymmetry in (5) vs (3-4) unexplained. A chance of explanation comes from Belletti (2004), who isolates a focus-related projection right above vP. My speculation is that this FocP, just like the left-peripheral one, can induce long-distance agreement with a focalized constituent in English.

The availability of these two different FocP projections would explain the asymmetry. In (3-4) direct and indirect object can be focalized in spite of auxiliary deletion, because the lower FocP can agree with them under c-command. Compare (5): there, in absence of the higher FocP, *you* cannot be focalized at all, because the lower FocP does not c-command it.

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