



A feature-inheritance approach to root phenomena and parametric variation

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Abstract

This work concerns itself with Root Transformations (RT), specifically discussing the RT/non-RT nature of topic fronting in English, Japanese, and Spanish. We claim that this fronting is in principle compatible with all types of embedded clauses regardless of whether the selecting predicate is factive/non-factive, or whether the selected proposition is asserted/non-asserted. Languages vary on how freely they allow topic preposing in various types of complements. Adapting an intervention account of RTs in which an event operator moving to Spec,CP intervenes with other types of operations, we claim that two A'-movements compete for the same syntactic position in certain types of clauses. We account for the variation in the distribution of RTs and non-RTs across languages by the options made possible by inheritance of discourse features. In Japanese and Spanish, the topic feature may be inherited by T from C, so that some instances of topic fronting are to Spec,TP. This movement does not compete with the operator that has moved to Spec,CP, so no competition arises. In contrast, the topic feature stays in C in English, so that topic fronting and the operator movement to CP vie for the same position. This then triggers a competition effect in many constructions such as factives where operator movement has occurred.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we explore the syntax of different types of topics in subordinate clauses and the reasons why topic fronting is a root phenomenon in languages like English, whereas it is not in languages like Spanish and Japanese. It is generally assumed that English topic fronting exhibits root effects and hence it is available only in those clauses which have root properties, as shown by examples in (1), partially adapted from [Emonds \(1969:24\)](#):

- (1) a. Each part John examined carefully.
b. Mary said that each part John examined carefully.
c. *The fact that each part John examined carefully is well-known.

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However, Cinque (1990:58) argues that in Romance topic fronting in the form of Clitic left Dislocation (CLLD) is not subject to the root constraints, as illustrated in (2) for Spanish:

- (2) a. Es probable que ese coche lo haya conducido Juan sólo una vez.
 be-PRES.3SG probable that that car CL have-PRES.3SG driven Juan only one time
 'It's probable that Juan has driven that car just once.'
- b. Ángela estaba sorprendida de que los regalos los hubieran dejado los Reyes Magos
 Angela be-PAST.3SG surprised of that the presents CL have-PAST.3PL left the Kings Magic
 debajo del árbol.
 under of.the tree
 'Angela was surprised that the three Wise Men had left the present under the Christmas tree.'

On a par with Spanish, Japanese also shows no restriction with respect to scrambled topics:

- (3) John-wa [kono hon-o zibun-no-kodomo-ga yonda koto]-o kookaisita.
 John-TOP this book-ACC self's child-NOM read C_{FACT}-ACC regret
 'John regrets that this book, his child read.' (Maki et al. (12b))

We will analyze the contrasts attested in English vs. Spanish/Japanese and propose that the root/non-root distinction derives from the availability of feature inheritance in the relevant language.

1.1. A brief overview of root phenomena

Emonds (1969) observed that certain transformations can only apply in root environments.

... a root will mean either the highest S in a tree, an S immediately dominated by the highest S or the reported S in indirect discourse.

Emonds (1969:6)

A root transformation such as English topicalization, which Emonds (1976) characterizes as non-structure preserving, is said only to apply in these contexts. Examples in (1) above demonstrate this for the two environments: "highest S" (1a) and "reported S in indirect discourse" (1b).

In a later work, Emonds (2004) responds to criticism that root transformations apply in more constructions than he originally specified by extending his notion of 'root'. He argues that the so-called Root Transformations (RTs) apply in "root-like indirect discourse embeddings" (or "RIDEs"), which are defined as finite complement clauses of a governing V or A. The following are two examples of RIDEs from Emonds (2004):

- (4) a. Bill warned us that [_{RIDE} flights to Chicago we should try to avoid].
 b. John said that [_{RIDE} his mother the children often helped].²

In contrast, following are non-RIDEs.

- (5) a. *Bill warned us [flights to Chicago to try to avoid].
 b. *Mary used another company since/until [flights to Chicago they could avoid].
 c. *A warning that [flights to Chicago travelers should avoid] will soon be posted.

(5a) is an instance of non-reported speech, while (5b) is a case of an adjunct clause, and (5c) involves the complement of N. Emonds (2004, 2012) offers a large inventory of root transformations, including topicalization, VP-preposing, preposed

² According to Emonds (2004:77), the clausal complements in (4) are sisters of V. However, when these clauses are sisters of N, he claims that they are not root-like, as in (i). On the other hand, when the syntactic dependency between the governing N and the clause is obtained via extraposition RTs are allowed, as in (ii).

(i) *A promise that [_{IP} defective sets the company will fix] has been made by John.
 (ii) A promise has been made by John that [_{IP} defective sets the company will fix].

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