

Title: Object shift in copular clauses  
Area: Syntax/syntax-phonology interface  
20-minute paper

Early work on object shift (OS; a phenomenon in Scandinavian languages whereby an object shifts leftward past negation and/or adverbials) associated it with case checking (Johnson 1991; Holmberg & Platzack 1995). More recent work has abandoned that connection and instead proposed that OS is governed by information structure (Holmberg 1999) or prosody (Ertshik-Shir 2005). Holmberg suggests that non-focussed objects shift out of the VP because that is the focus domain of the clause, whereas Ertshik-Shir argues that the motivation for OS is phonological: prosodically weak (i.e., stressless) objects must undergo prosodic incorporation, which in turn prevents an adverb from linearizing between the object and its host (typically the verb).

Given the connection between information structure and prosody, specifically the tendency for unfocussed pronouns to be prosodically weak, it is difficult to differentiate the two analyses on empirical grounds. This paper provides new evidence from Danish copular clauses that argues against a purely prosodic account of OS and in favor of Holmberg's information structural approach.

The key observation is that predicational copular clauses like (1) allow object shift, whereas specificational clauses do not (2), irrespectively of the prosody of the pronominal object (stressed pronominals are in capitals):

- (1) Chris var min kontorfælle i 2003, men nu er han **det** ikke længere (??det).  
Chris was my office-mate in last-year, but now is he it not longer it
- (2) Min kontorfælle i 2003 var Chris men min kontorfælle i 2004 var (\*ham) ikke HAM/ham.  
my office-mate in 2003 was Chris but my office-mate in 2004 was him not him
- (3) Jeg så **ham** ikke (HAM/??ham).  
I saw him not him.

The possibility of an unshifted prosodically weak pronoun in (2) is problematic for a purely phonological account; it should be as degraded as the unshifted weak pronouns in (1) and (3). Holmberg's information structural analysis, however, lets us understand this contrast in terms of another, well-known, difference between predicational and specificational clauses: the information structure of predicational clauses is free, whereas specificational clauses have a fixed topic-focus structure, one where the subject is topic and the object is focus (Higgins 1979). OS is possible in (1) because predicational clauses allow an unfocussed object (just as the non-copular (3) does). OS is systematically impossible in specificational clauses because these require the object to be focus and OS applies only to non-focussed objects.

If information structure conditions OS in a way that is not reducible to phonology, it casts doubt on the general thesis pursued by Ertshik-Shir (2005)—that the word orders traditionally attributed to syntactic movement are in fact the result of phonologically conditioned displacement—and supports the more traditional view that syntax, via features and feature checking mechanisms, mediates between form and meaning. The OS facts further indicate that those features must reference information structure (case-based analyses of OS provide no account of the contrast between (2) and (1)/(3)) and that the relationship between these features and prosody is non-trivial.