Why there is no verb-stranding in Scandinavian

**Keywords:** Scandinavian, Romance, ellipsis, verb phrase topicalization

**Problem:** Current theories of verb-stranding predict that it should occur in Scandinavian matrix clauses since they contain verb movement out of vP. Other languages with verb movement, such as the Romance languages, display verb-stranding in VP ellipsis (VPE) and VP fronting (VPF) contexts (Goldberg 2005, Vicente 2007); for example, Portuguese has verb-stranding VPE (1). A full verb is left stranded adjacent to an ellipsis site:

(1) A María não lavou o carro, mas o João lavou +P.
   the María not wash.pst.3sg the car, but the João wash.pst.3sg

   ‘Maria washed didn’t wash the car, but John did.’
   Portuguese

In languages where no verb movement occurs, like English, there is no verb-stranding. Instead the default verb do appears:

(2) Mary didn’t wash the car, but John did +P.
    English

It is well known that Scandinavian has V-to-C movement in matrix clauses (Vikner 1995), but verb-stranding does not occur in these languages. For instance, in Danish the default verb gøre, ‘do’, appears. Verb-stranding is ungrammatical:

(3) * Mona vaskede ikke bilen, men Jasper gjorde / *vaskede +P.
    vask.pst not car.def, but Jasper do.pst, wash.pst

    ‘Mona didn’t wash the car but Jasper did.’
    Danish

In embedded clauses, there is no verb movement, just as in English. Consequently, we do not expect verb stranding to occur in embedded clauses in Scandinavian. But why does Scandinavian pattern with English in matrix clauses and not Romance?

**Hypothesis:** Different positions of the trigger for verb movement in Romance and Scandinavian result in the differences in verb-stranding behavior. In Romance, T° attracts the verb, but in Scandinavian the verb is attracted to the left periphery. Since T° is lower than the left periphery, there is a timing difference between the two families that interacts with ellipsis and topicalization.

**Theoretical assumptions:** I adopt the clausal architecture in (4). Following Merchant (2013), I adopt a split-vP model. Further, I assume an articulated CP layer after Rizzi (1997).

(4) \[[\text{ForceP} [\text{TopP} [\text{FinP} [\text{TP} [\text{VoIP} [\text{vP} [\text{VP}]]]]]]]]

Following Westergaard (2009:38), Force° is responsible for attracting the verb in Scandinavian matrix clauses. When not attracted into the left periphery (in embedded clauses), the verb stays in vP. In Romance the verb is always attracted to T° (Vicente 2007). Following Hartman (2011), I assume that head movement occurs in the syntax and not at PF (as claimed in Chomsky 2000).

**VPE:** Verb-stranding VPE happens when a verb moves out of a verb phrase that is deleted (Goldberg 2005). The difference between Scandinavian and Romance can be cashed out straightforwardly in Aelbrecht’s (2010) derivational theory of ellipsis. Under her theory, when an ellipsis-licensing head merges, it freezes the elided element for further syntactic operations. Ellipsis is licensed by Agree; the elided element need not be immediately adjacent to the licensor. Following Merchant (2013) and Aelbrecht, T° is the licensor of VPE, and the target is vP.

Under this analysis, when an ellipsis-licensing T° merges in Scandinavian, it becomes impossible to move the verb out of vP because it gets frozen. Thus, when Force° merges, it cannot attract a verb since vP is already frozen. I argue that instead gøre is inserted to spell out features on VoI°, similar to Platzack 2012. This moves to Force°. In Romance, on the other hand, the verb is attracted to T° as soon as T° merges. Although T° freezes vP, the verb is still permitted to escape assuming that all operations triggered by a head occur simultaneously when it is merged.

**VPF:** Stranding in VPF contexts comes about in a similar way. In Spanish and Portuguese, a verb moves to T° and the vP fronts, leaving a copy of the verb behind (Vicente 2007):
Wash the car, João did.

Just as in VPE, Scandinavian does not show verb-stranding in VPF contexts.

Wash the car, Jasper did.

Other analyses: There are other approaches to this problem. Houser et al. (2011) argue that gore is an auxiliary that selects pronominal complements, so there are no verbs in complement of gore to strand, and gore is the only thing that can move. However, they must stipulate that VPE and VPF involve null pronouns. For VPF, they argue that the fronted vP adjoins to the clause and that a null operator moves from the complement of gore. Facts about verbal morphology make this untenable, since the fronted vP may bear tense morphology (Mikkelsen 2011). This, I argue, is a connectivity effect and shows that the vP must originate as the complement to gore. VPE, on the other hand, shows traits of deletion in Scandinavian. It is possible to A′-extract out of missing vPs (Bentzen et al. 2013). This is not compatible with a pronominal account:

Which cakes do you want to bake, and which cakes don't you?

Other arguments for gore being a special auxiliary are thin, and I argue that Platzack's (2012) approach is more adequate, only that Voi° receives support rather than V°. A possible objection to the theory I outline above is that separate approaches to VPE and VPF are necessary. If VPE were licensed by VPF (Johnson 2001), it might be possible to collapse both analyses. However, it has been shown that VPE and VPF are only related insofar as they target similar, though slightly different, pieces of structure; VPE cannot be derived from VPF (Aelbrecht and Haegeman 2012).

References


