

On the Syntactic Representation of Discourse-Configurational Principles
in Finnish and Estonian from a Microcomparative Perspective

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Finnish and Estonian share the same basic word order, SVO. At the same time, word order is not strictly rigid in both languages. The syntactic slots available for linear ordering, however, are not identical. For example, the following two sentences are Finnish and Estonian translations of Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. In the Finnish sentence (1), the negative verb *ei* 'not' comes immediately after the conjunction *jos* 'if', while in the Estonian sentence (2), the negative verb *ei* 'not' appears immediately before the verbal base *anna*.

(1) *Jos ei tuo tappi vieläkään heltiä, isken sitä vasaralla.*

if not that bolt still loosen hit it hammer

If this bolt still won't turn, I am going to knock it out with the hammer.

(2) *Kui see mutter nüüd järele ei anna, siis löön ta haamriga puruks.*

if that bolt now (loosen) not loosen then smash it hammer (smash)

In Finnish, there are two syntactic slots before a verb, and the topic of a sentence (e.g. *tuo tappi* in (1)) is placed in the second slot. This slot is referred to as 'teemapaiikka' in Hakulinen et al. (2004) and as 'T' in Vilkuna (1989). In contrast, various elements can occupy the first slot, which in sentence (1) is taken by the negative verb *ei*. Notably, the first slot can be filled not only by a complement or a modifier but also by a predicate, including a finite verb. This first slot is called 'esikenttä' in Hakulinen et al. (2004), while Vilkuna (1989) called it 'K', as elements in K are generally assumed to express some kind of contextual contrast.

Estonian, on the other hand, is basically a V2 language and is said to have only one syntactic slot before a verb. However, as seen in sentence (2), a verbal base along with a negative verb can often appear in the sentence-final position (cf. Lindström 2006). Moreover, in (2), two elements appear before the negative verb and the verbal base, which is also the case in sentence (3).

(3) *Odav töö suurt jõukust ei loo.*

cheap labour big wealth not create

Cheap labour does not bring wealth. (Tamm 2015: 419)

In this sentence *odav töö* tend to be interpreted as a topic, but it can also function

as a focus if it carries strong accentuation and a distinctive intonation pattern.

Thus, in both languages, word order is largely regulated by discourse-configurational principles (*cf.* Vilkuna 1998, Lindström 2017). However, the discourse function of word order in each language remains to be further examined. Following previous studies, one can argue that the first slot in Finnish serves to transform contextual flow, whereas the second slot serves to maintain it. But the distinction between the two preverbal slots in Finnish is not always clear-cut. Moreover, while discourse-configurational principles may be universal, their syntactic representation varies across languages.

Analyzing the discourse function of word order is further complicated by the fact that contextual contrast can be marked not only through word order but also through accentuation and intonation (*cf.* Tamm 2015, Vilkuna 2015). As a result, actual ordering of words and phrases does not always align with discourse-configurational principles when other competing factors are at play.

This paper, therefore, aims to re-examine the syntactic representation of discourse-configurational principles in both languages and to further clarify how actual word order is determined from a microcomparative perspective, using Finnish and Estonian parallel corpora.

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