Focus Structure in Modern Standard Estonian

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1. Overview

Modern Standard Estonian (MSE) is a Finnic language in the Finno-Ugric family with approximately 1.1 million native speakers, the majority of whom live in the Republic of Estonia. MSE is a morphologically complex language with free word order (Erelt, 2003). It is generally agreed that MSE exhibits V2 ordering with a frequent surface order of SVO, though other orders are also possible. As many subordinate clauses show verb-final ordering, Ehala (2006) suggests that MSE's underlying D-structure order is SIOV. In line with this hypothesis I further outline a transformational generative syntactic analysis (Carnie, 2013) to account for the discourse-configurational transformations present in MSE that produce V2 and other possible orders.

To begin I give a summary in Part 2 of Ehala's argument for SIOV, using the evidence of main clauses (2.1), subordinate clauses and verbal particles (2.2), followed by a general evaluation (2.3) of the theory. In Part 3 I propose an analysis that modifies Ehala's hypothesis by introducing focus discourse configurationality and the notion of focus structure according to generative theories presented by Kiss et al (1995) (3.1), give an argument for FP within a generative theory of MSE syntax (3.2), review additional data to support this analysis (3.3), and provide some examples (3.4). Finally I conclude in Part 4 with a discussion of the possible predictions and limitations of this model with respect primarily to negative scope and verbal clusters. (All examples are MSE unless otherwise noted).

2. MSE as SIOV

2.1 The Main Clause

Similar to Germanic languages, MSE exhibits V2 ordering in main declarative clauses.

(1)	a.	Laps-ed	söö-vad	täna	suppi
		children-PL	eat-3PL	today	soup.PART
	b.	Täna	söö-vad	laps-ed	suppi
		today	eat-3PL	children-PL	soup.PART
	c.	Suppi	söö-vad	lapse-d	täna
		soup.PART	eat-3PL	children-PL	today

'Today the children eat soup" (Ehala, 2006)

The addition of an auxiliary verb suggests that V2 is actually a form of discourse configurational movement. Notice the ungramaticality of (2b) if the participle follows the auxilary; if the underlying order were SVO, we would not expect (2b) to be ungrammatical, thus the auxiliary in (2a) would move to V2 position similar to (1).

(2)	a.	Lapse-d	on	täna	suppi	söönud.
		child-PL	have	today	soup.PART	eaten
	b.	*Lapse-d	on	söönud	suppi	täna
		child-PL	have	eaten	soup.PART	today

'The children have been eating soup today' (Ehala, 2006)

2.2 Verbal Particles and Subordinate Clauses (SC)

As Ehala points out, infinite verbal phrases tend to group with OV patterns (2006). Similarly, verbal particles are typically ordered particle initial when infinitive, but often remain

in the sentence final position as a trace in finite constructions such as (3a).

(3) a. Lapse-d värvi-vad$_i$ täna maja üle t_i
child-PL paint-3PL today house.GEN over
'The children will overpaint the house today" (Ehala, 2006)

Thus, the auxiliary should move to the head of TP to form V2, which is fronted by a focused constituent (Ehala, 2006). Interestingly, there is a discrepency between types of subordinate clauses and allowance of this movement. Citing Remmal (1963), Ehala claims that only "main-clause functioning" subordinate clauses (those that present new information as a simple declerative sentence such as 3a) allow V2, while "ordinary" suobrdinate clauses (those that do not present new information such as 4b) do not.

(4) a. ...et jaan on pida-nud seda töö-d teha tahtma
that jaan has had-PPL this.PART job-PART do.INF want-INF
'...that Jaan must have wanted to do this job' (Ehala, 2006)

b. ...kui valitsus eesti-s palju töö-d oli teinud
when government Estonia-INESS much work-PART has done
'...after the government has done much work in Estonia' (Ehala, 2006)

Generally, only when there is a single verb is the auxiliary allowed in the unmarked final position; verbal clusters of two or more verbs must order the auxiliary after the subject. Thus, (4a) is ungrammatical with the auxiliary and participle in sentence final positions such as the ordering of (4b.) Ehala concludes that this also is V2 movement (2006).

2.3 Evaluation

From the above, we can clearly conclude that MSE is not underlying SVO. From the ordering of objects in V2 clauses such as those in (1) and (4), Ehala suggests that the verb moves from the final position rather than simply the object of SVO, which would fail to account for the patterning of auxiliaries such as those in (2) as well as finite verb final clauses. However, the details of the discourse configurational rules which might effect these movements remain unclear. Notably, V2 as a form of movement to the TP does not clearly account for (4a) in which the participle also moves, and neither does it fully account for (4b) in which the auxiliary precedes the participle in the sentence final position.

As well, how do we account for sentences such as (5a) with verb initial order or declarative clauses with verb final order such as (8a)?

(5) a. Lahku-n ma hommik-ul
leave-1SIG.IND I morning-LOC
"I leave in the morning." (Erelt, 2003)

For the first case, we cannot merely use V2 if a focus position is obligatory or simply a form of V to T movement. For the second we must explain why V2 might *not* apply. This also begs the question about the motivation for V2 within generative theory, and what sort of transformational rules apply in the grammar of a flexible word order language such as MSE. While Ehala's theory accounts for a basic word order in comparing MSE to related languages such as Finnish and V2 ordering languages such as Dutch and West Flemish, the exact details of these transformations on the base-generated order are only suggested but not illustrated.

3. MSE as a Discourse Configurational Language

3.1 Focus Structure

Sentence focus can be described simply as "the part of the sentence carrying new information" (Kiss, 1995). In many discourse configurational languages, focused constituents are ordered in a regular way to express identification or contrast. Consider the following Hungarian example from Horvath (1995). The positioning of the newspaper as a focus in (6b) conveys a new subject in discourse, namely the newspaper, answering the question "What was it you threw away?"

(6) a. Eldobtam az újságot.
away-threw-I the newspaper+acc
"I threw away the newspaper"

b. AZ újságot. dobtam el.
THE NEWSPAPER-ACC threw-I away
"Its the newspaper I threw away"

Citing Lambrecht (1994), Lindström differentiates between two types of focus in MSE: marked and unmarked narrow focus (2005). Unmarked narrow focus is at the end of the clause for both English and MSE, while the contrastive focus (marked narrow focus) is at the beginning of the clause in MSE. Accordingly, contrastive focus as in (6b) brings new information - as opposed to other related information - into light, while unmarked narrow focus does not hold such contrast, but does present new information. As in example (7a), the first clause shows contrastive focus on *see pilt* "this photo," and in the second clause unmarked narrow focus is on *ära viima* "take away." Note the use of the pronoun as a subject in the second clause as it is the narrow focus which focuses new information in the sentence.

(7). a. nh see 'pilt mis ma seal tegin
PART this-NOM photo-NOM what I-NOM there do-IPF-SGI

'see peaks ära viima

this-GEN must-CND-SG3 away take

"well this photo that I made there, this should be taken away" (Lindström, 2005)

According to Lindström, the discrepancy between subordinate clausal ordering in MSE depends on the focus of the subordinate clause: clauses such as constituent interrogatives (8a) generally focus the interrogative phrase, while other subordinate clauses such as relative clauses tend not to focus the relative word at the beginning of the phrase (2005).

(8.) a. Kes meile täna külla tuleb?

who-NOM we-ALL today village-ILL come-PR-SG3

"Who is going to visit us today?" (Lindström, 2005)

Thus the patterning that we see in (4) between ordinary and main clause functioning subordinate clauses is caused by the focusing of the conjunction in the first, which bars verb and other focus based movement, and the lack of conjunction focusing in the second, allowing for main-clause like movement. Overall, similar to V2 ordering as presented by Ehala, contrastive focus occurs in the sentence initial position not merely for V2 but all clause types. Thus, if the variation in subclausal verb order is accounted for with focus movement we should expect to account for this movement through focus movement in generative theory.

3.2 Transformations and Focus Structure in MSE

Similar to the minimalist arguments presented by Kiss et all (1995) I argue that MSE expressly uses a universal Focus Phrase in its PF, for which a focus feature - generated on the contrastively focused constituent - checks at the spec. In line with generative theories of Germanic V2 presented by Holmberg (2015) in which the head of the CP takes the verb while

the focus constituent moves to the CP spec, I argue additionally that in MSE the verb in V2 clauses moves to the head of FP while *only* checking tense at the head of TP. Focus features also check at the spec of CP for focused conjunctions such as those in ordinary clauses. Narrow focus such as that in (8a) is thematic to the last constituent in the sentence.

As Mitchell (2006) argues, examples such as (9a) where the finite verb follows negation demonstrate that in MSE the NegP precedes the TP, from which I conclude the following phrase order: CP > FP > (NegP) > TP > VP. Additionally, the parameters for MSE I conclude as follows:

VP	XP--> (YP) X'	Elsewhere	XP --> (YP) X'
	X' --> (ZP) X'		X' --> (ZP) X'
	X --> (WP) X		X --> X (WP)

While somewhat problematic, the rightward branching of V heads accounts for the special ordering of verbal constituents as discussed in section 2.2. Other phrases such as CPs are demonstrably left headed - note the leftward most C head in the question in (8a). However, this exception does create a violation of X-bar theory if subordinate clauses branch over final constituents in the matrix clause. An alternative analysis of MSE as SVO would bypass this difficulty but leave the special ordering of verbal constituents such as those in (4) up to unnecessary movement unless base generated in reverse order (that is, finite verb at the bottom). For our purposes I will argue for the former, though Lindström suggests generally that such verbal organization is the product of continuing language change from SOV to SVO (2005).

3.3 Additional Data

Erelt (2003) gives a general overview of MSE clause ordering, from which I take additional data not covered in Ehala's analysis. Non-negated declarative main clauses (1a-c) tend to V2, with the focused constituent preceding the verb and the object often following it. These as well as non-focused subordinate clauses undergo both focus based movement to the spec of the FP and V2 movement of the verb to the head of FP.

Verb final structures (such as that in 9a) occur in questions with fronted question words such as *kuidas* "how," most sub-clauses, relative clauses, and negative clauses that begin with an object, adverb, or negation (Erelt, 2003). These sentences all commonly share a constituent in the CP: in questions it is the question marker or a constituent moved to check [Q] feature or emphasis. In non-negated sentences, focused C-heads move to the spec of CP, which creates the disjunction between verb ordering in subclauses discussed in the final part of 3.1. In order to preserve narrow focus the focused verb (such as the copula in 9a) remains in final position and other constituents undergo upward scrambling, possibly also to FP spec (In example 4b the auxiliary is the focused verb).

(9) a. Ega ma rumal ei ole

NEG I fool not be.3SG.IND

"I'm not a fool after all" (Erelt, 2003).

Finally, verb initial clauses such as (5a) occur in questions lacking the question particle *kas*, imperative clauses, exclamatory clauses lacking the initial exclamatory particle *küll*. In these cases the verb moves to fulfill a missing feature in the CP.

(10) a. ostis siis viimase suure triikimislaua

buy-PST then last-GEN big-GEN ironing board-GEN

"then she bought the last ironing board" (Lindström, 2005)

For pro-drop narrative V-initial sentences (10a) movement is instead to the spec of FP, characteristic as they are of foregrounded information and emphases on action (Lindström, 2005).

3.4 Examples

The examples illustrated in the appendix (Part 6) illustrate the deep structure, transformations, and discourse configurational movement for sentences with V2 ordering (2a), verb initial ordering (5a), and CP focus / narrow focus scrambling (9a) respectively.

4. Conclusion

In keeping with Ehala's hypothesis, Estonian is an underlying SOV language despite a statistically common word order of SVO, less perhaps a basic word order than the product of a focus-based structure that, depending on the relevance of the arguments to the ever changing discourse situation, orders them in such a frame. Using the FP and the focus feature we can account generally for most of such focus-based movement, including V2. If narrow focus and its relation to contrastive focus is taken into consideration, we can also account for the disjunction between so-called ordinary and main-clause functioning sub-clauses.

This theory should accurately predict negative scope in MSE, as in (11). When the object moves to the FP head in (11b), it is no longer C-commanded by the NegP, and thus the sentence interpretation is ambiguous. (Typically the NP would be a constituent of a negative phrase *mitte midagi* "not anything").

(11.)	a.	Mina	ei	ole	midagi	näinud
		I	not	have	something	seen
		"I haven't seen anything."				

b. Mina midagi ei ole näinud

I something not have seen

"I haven't seen something"/"I haven't seen anything."

However, problems with this analysis still remain, such as the discrepancy between the VP and other X-Bar parameters I proposed, the historical development of subordinate clause types, and the ordering of verbal clusters in sentences like (4a). For the former Lindström suggests that Estonian had patterned with Proto-Finno-Ugric as an SOV language that encoded subordinate phrases through verbal constructions, only to develop main-clause subordinate phrases through contact with Indo-European languages (2005).

As for verbal clusters such as those in (4a), both the auxiliary and the participle are required after the subject and before the object. It is possible that the verbal cluster "want to do this job" is - as a total constituent - the narrow focus of the sentence, from which the finite verb and participle scramble upwards. However, this does not fully explain the preference for the neat SV order of (4a) which, apart from the participle, resembles V2 ordering. Further research as to the general types of infinite verbal constructions and their syntactic use in MSE is another outstanding project of research in generative syntax.

5. Works Cited

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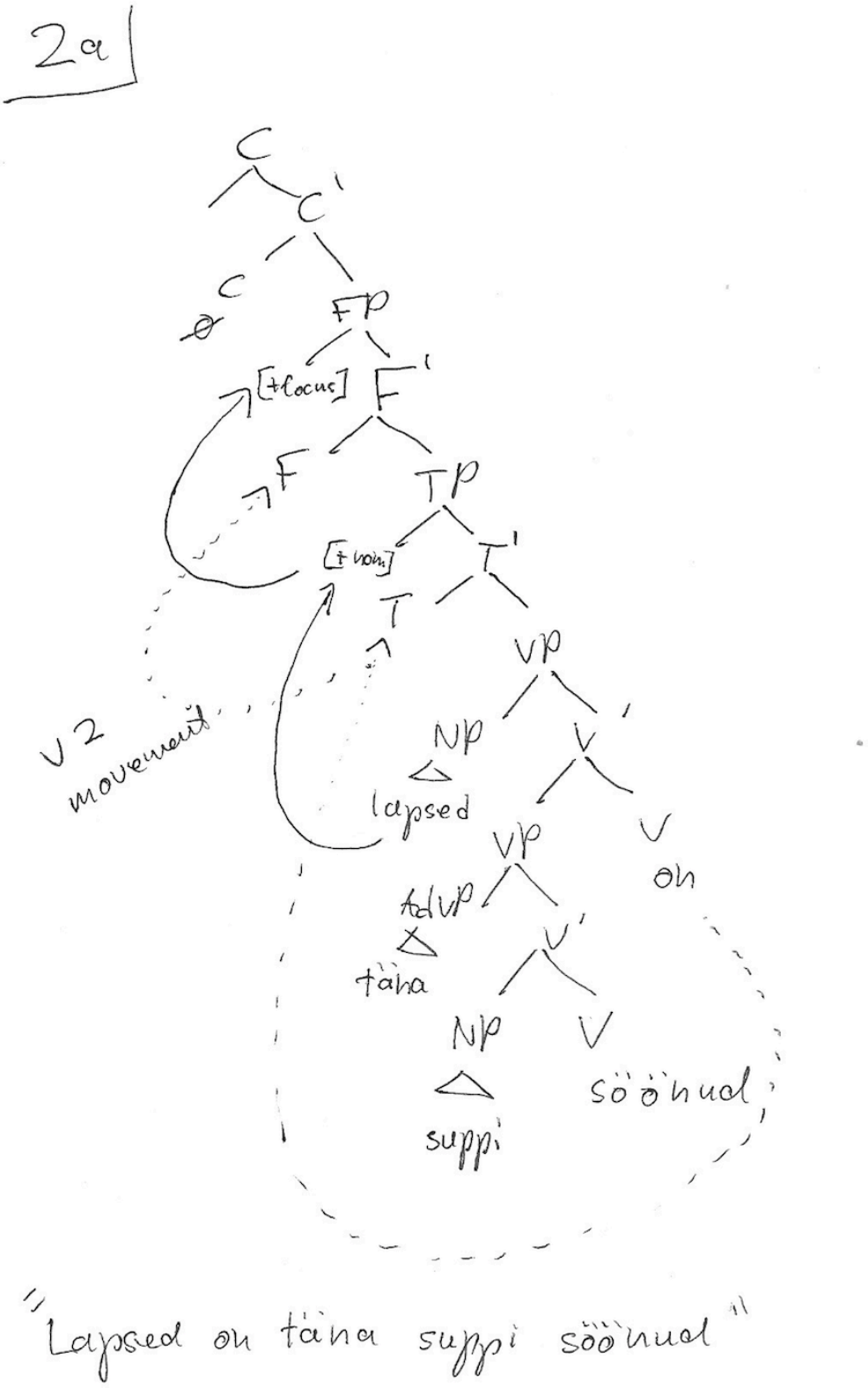
6. Appendix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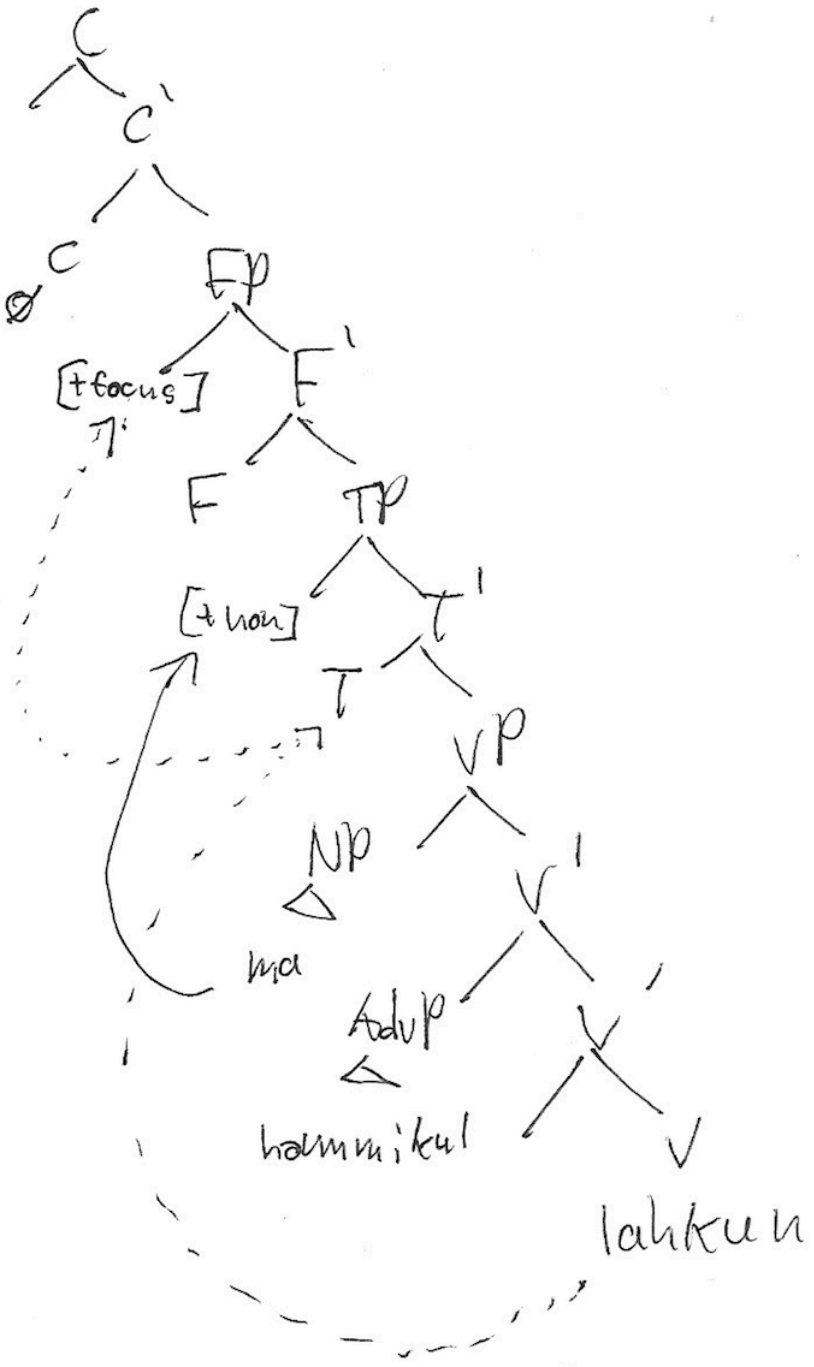
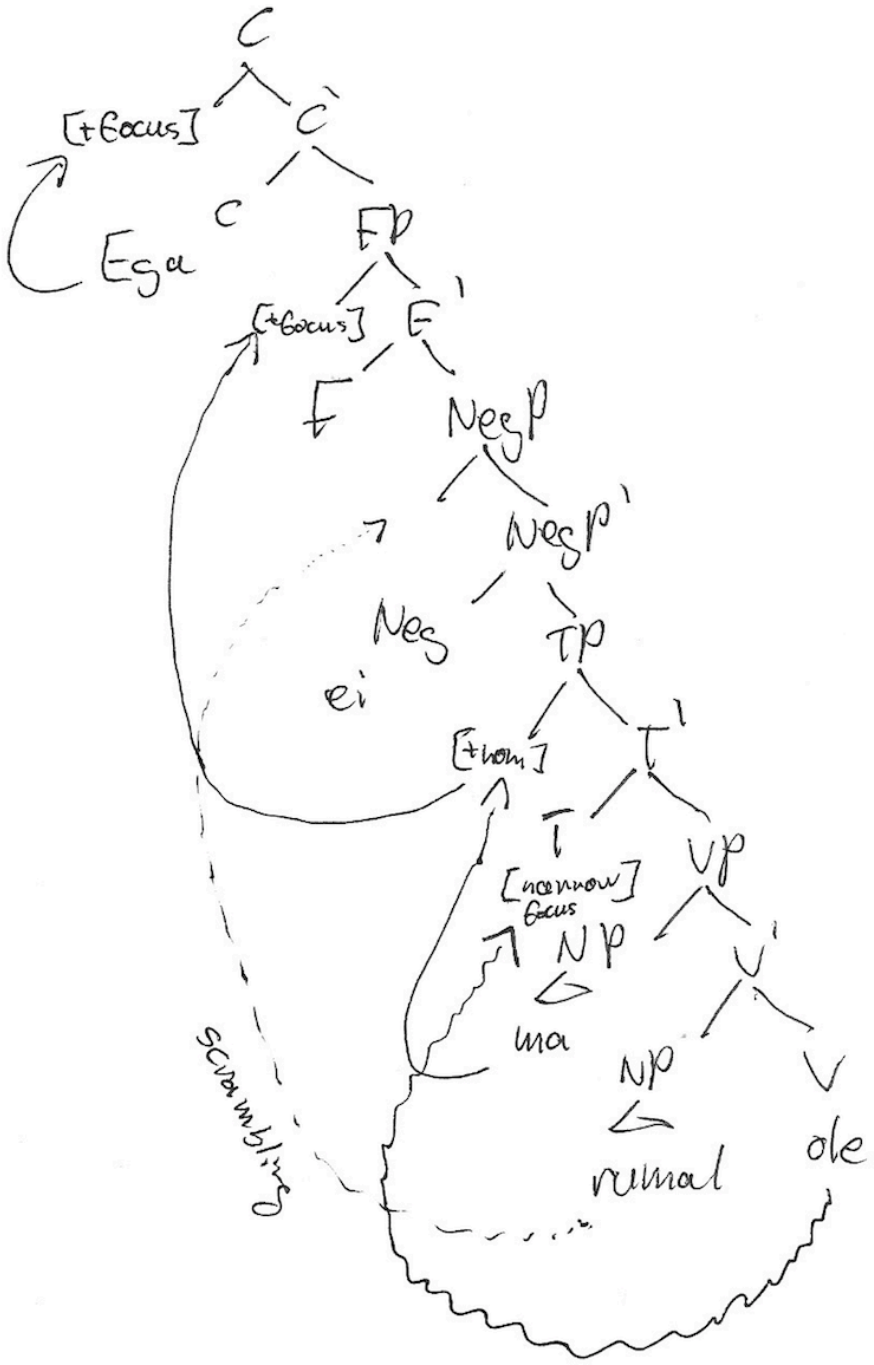
"Lapsed on täna suppi söönud"

5a



"Lahkun ma hammikul."

9a



"Ega ma rumal ei ole"