
*The Morphosyntax of Verb Movement* is an account of Dutch clause structure syntax in a particularly clean Minimalist framework. It is heavily built on ideas in chapter 4 of Chomsky’s (1995) *Minimalist Program*; it is one of the most extended analyses of a single language derived from those ideas and will serve as a model for such work. Where it deviates from chapter 4, it does so in the direction of even further theoretical simplicity and so deserves particular attention.

One striking way in which Zwart’s (henceforth Z) work is not typical of Minimalist work is that it makes no use of the weak/strong feature distinction in characterizing the differences between the several dialects and languages it analyzes. (In Chomsky 1995 strong features trigger overt movement and weak features trigger covert (or LF) movement.) In every analysis that Z develops of what might have been called a weak feature, the analysis he adopts turn out to be a case of overt feature movement, that is, movement of the features of an item but without the lexical content of the item. Overt feature movement resembles covert movement in not being detectable in the word order at PF. The difference is not simply terminological. A much richer notion of syntactic variation is implied by the feature movement theory.

Whether or not bare feature movement is accompanied by pied-piping of lexical content is determined by factors more complex than could be described by any set of binary features. It is determined at least in part by what features complexes given lexical items can realize. Z’s analyses shows this clearly. I do not raise this against Z’s work, as in fact I think the conclusion is correct independent of the adopted framework. But Z’s introductory chapter is misleading on this point, as it emphasizes the strong/weak distinction as the locus of syntactic variation.1

In general, Minimalism will suffer from granting bare feature movement and covert movement equal standing. Z’s dismissal of certain counterexamples to Holmberg’s generalization (p. 242) as involving bare feature move-
ment show this all too well: a widely documented generalization is rendered
toothless.

Z takes as its foremost empirical task to account for the main/embedded
asymmetry of verb movement in Germanic. Because the account of this
asymmetry is crucial to evaluating whether Z in the end achieves an empirical
success for a very elegant theory, I will take pains here to examine the analysis
in detail and its relation to the fundamental concepts of Minimalism.

The longstanding generalization about Germanic V movement is that pres-
ence of the complementizer always entails the absence of V movement. Den
Besten (1978), who first proposed that V moved to C, proposed further that
movement was blocked when C was lexically filled, that is, in embedded
clauses. Z seeks a somewhat tighter explanation, one that incorporates in fact
an explanation of why the complementizer does not appear in main clauses
in the first place.

Z uses a Minimalist idea about phrase structure to account for the absence
of the complementizer in ordinary SVO main clauses: “project only what you
need”. But if there is no CP structure in SVO main clauses, then it cannot
be that the subject is in SpecC; hence, he concludes that it must be in AgrS.
The question then arises why V does not move to AgrS in embedded clauses.
He argues in fact that in a sense it does but that only its “formal features”
move, and in fact move on to CP, where they are lexicalized as part of
the complementizer. The reason this derivation is not possible for SVO main
clauses is that there is no Complementizer; so V moves to AgrS but no further.
The movement to AgrS is again movement of formal features, but in this case,
the whole V must be pied piped as well, as there is no means of lexicalizing the
formal features in AgrS apart from V itself, presumably a language-particular
feature of Germanic. Thus Z derives the main/subordinate asymmetry of
Germanic from Minimalist assumptions. The Minimalist assumptions that he
uses are: minimal projection and pied piping as a last resort. The language-
particular features of the analysis are strong attraction of T by C and the facts
about lexicalizability just mentioned.

(1)   main clauses: [IP NP V [VP tv]]
embedded clauses: [CP dat [IP . . . [VP V]]]

The direct relation between the facts to be explained and the very basic
principle of minimal projection makes the account attractive. But I believe
that it is fundamentally flawed in the way that it treats V2. A striking and
long known property of V2 clauses is that the verb is always in absolute
second position. Z’s approach fragments this generalization and in the end
only accounts for one of the fragments.

To appreciate this point we first consider how Z treats the manifestation of
V2 in the following: