# Word Order and Focus in Finnish Finite Clauses.
# An Overview of Syntactic Theories from a Formal Perspective

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*Abstract*

This article presents the different discourse-functional and syntactic properties that trigger core constituent order permutations in a finite clause in Finnish. The aim is to provide an overview of the major information-structural properties and of the formal syntactic theories accounting for the complex and thorny word order phenomenon at clause-level. In this respect, relevant Focus strategies employed through word order alternation in Finnish will be considered.

*Keywords*

contrast; discourse; Focus; new information; word order

## 1. The 'flexible' word order in Finnish*

The rich inflectional system of Finnish, i.e., case morphology and Subject–Verb agreement, allows for a relatively 'flexible' word order at clause-level compared to many Indo-European languages, like Italian, English or Swedish[1].

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[1] The term 'word order' is used here to indicate the order of the core constituents as they appear in the surface of a finite clause. It is worth mentioning that in most of the phrase-level constructions (including noun phrases, adpositional phrases, numeral phrases and, to a great extent, non-finite clauses) the word order is typically fixed and does not allow flexibility. However, the internal constituent order of such constructions is irrelevant to discourse-functional considerations which are central in this work and, thus, will not be discussed further.

Although the Finnish word order is flexible, and traditionally referred to as 'free' in literature, meaning that all word order permutations are grammatical in most sentences, the choice of a specific order is *not arbitrary*. In fact, it is strongly conditioned by discourse factors along with grammatical constraints (cf. e.g., ISK § 1367). The word order permutations induce different interpretive effects, which will be illustrated in the sample sentences below. The aim of the present article is to give an overview of the Finnish word order phenomenon at clause-level and relevant Focus strategies employed through word order permutations by illustrating the main discourse-functional and syntactic aspects and central theories on both phenomena presented and discussed in formal syntactic studies and, in particular, within the framework of Generative Grammar[2].

Although word order does not have the primary function of reflecting the syntactic relations between constituents in most clauses in Finnish (nor the subordination of a clause with respect to another, like in Swedish) (Hakulinen 1976), it is possible to identify a canonical, or unmarked, word order SV(X), where X can be an Object, a Predicative or an Adverbial constituent. In the extensive textual corpus study of Hakulinen *et al.* (1980), SVX is observed as the most common order (49 %), followed by XVS (11 %)[3].

The possible permutations of a simple transitive sentence are illustrated below. The translations are only indicative and are used to illustrate that

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[2] As most of the theories on word order presented in this article fall under the formal framework of Generative Grammar, the term 'formal syntactic studies' is intended to cover all the structural approaches discussed. Studies within cognitive- and functional-oriented research models of linguistics would deserve a separate review and, consequently, are not discussed in this article. In this respect, the interested reader is referred, among others, to Helasvuo (2001); Larjavaara (2007); Shore (2008, 2020); Huumo, Helasvuo (2015); and references therein.

[3] The abbreviations used in this article are the following: ACC (accusative case), ADE (adessive case), ALL (allative case), EPP (Extended Projection Principle), $F^0$ (Subject Agreement + passive 'agreement' head), FP (Subject Agreement Phrase + passive 'agreement'), $Fin^0$ (Finiteness head), FinP (Finiteness Phrase), Foc (Focus), FocusP (Focus Phrase), $Force^0$ (Force head), ForceP (Forse Phrase), GEN (genitive case), ILL (illative case), INE (inessive case), INF (infinitive), NEG (negation), NOM (nominative case), NP (Noun Phrase), O (Object), OBJ (objective case (=accusative or partitive)), PART (partitive case), PL (plural), PRS (present tense), PST (past tense), PTC (participle), S (Subject), SG (singular), $T^0$ (Tense head), TP (Tense Phrase), TopicP (Topic Phrase), V (verb), $V^0$ (Verb head), VP (Verb Phrase).

each sentence has a different interpretation. In particular, the boldfaced words bear the salient information.

(1)  a. *Liisa*          *rakasta-a*        *Martti-a.*                              (SVO)
        Liisa.NOM    love-3SG          Martti-PART
        'Liisa loves Martti.'

     b. *Martti-a*     *rakasta-a*        ***Liisa****.*                           (OVS)
        Martti-PART love-3SG          Liisa
        '**Liisa** loves Martti.'

     c. ***Liisa***      *Martti-a*        *rakasta-a.*                            (SOV)
        Liisa.NOM    Martti-PART   love-3SG
        'It is **Liisa** who loves Martti.'

     d. ***Martti-a***  *Liisa*            *rakasta-a.*                            (OSV)
         Martti-PART Liisa.NOM     love-3SG
         'It is **Martti** who Liisa loves.'

     e. ***Rakasta-a***  *Liisa*           *Martti-a.*                            (VSO)
        love-3SG        Liisa.NOM     Martti-PART
        'Liisa **does** love Martti.'

     f. ***Rakasta-a***  *Martti-a*       *Liisa.*                                (VOS)
        love-3SG        Martti-PART   Liisa.NOM
        lit. Loves Martti Liisa.

The first sentence (1a) represents the canonical order that could be uttered in an 'all new' situation as an answer to a question like «What's new?». On the other hand, the sentences (1b-f) represent non-canonical word orders and require specific discourse contexts in order to be pragmatically acceptable and functional, and, tendentially, would not be felicitous in an 'all new' context. However, the syntactic functions of Subject and Object can be easily identified through morphology with any word order: the Subject *Liisa* in the nominative case shows no case-marking and the Object *Martti* has the partitive case ending *-a* in each sentence[4].

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[4] Partitive case is one of the two objective cases in Finnish, the other one being the accusative case, and its use in these examples is conditioned by the aspectual character of the verb. The partitive-accusative case alternation goes beyond the purpose of the present article and

Since the present discussion will concentrate on nominal discourse categories, and especially on Focus, verb-initial clauses such as (1e), or unusual orders such as (1f), used in poetry or other artistic expressions that are very marginal in everyday communication, will not be discussed in detail here.

For a typological comparison, let us see briefly below how the variation in the nominal constituents' position leads to different interpretations of the syntactic functions in Swedish and in Italian, as illustrated in (2a-b) and (3a-b), respectively.

(2)   Swedish:
      a. *Lisa*       *älska-r*              *Mårten.*                    (SVO)
         Lisa.NOM     love-PRS[5]            Mårten.ACC
         'Lisa loves Mårten.'
      b. *Mårten*                  *älska-r*             *Lisa.*          (SVO)
         Mårten.NOM                love-PRS             Lisa.ACC
         'Mårten loves Lisa.'

(3)   Italian:
      a. *Lisa*       *am-a*                *Martino.*                   (SVO)
         Lisa.NOM     love-3SG              Martino.ACC
         'Lisa loves Martino.'
      b. *Martino*                  *am-a*              *Lisa.*          (SVO)
         Martino.NOM                love-3SG            Lisa.ACC
         'Martino loves Lisa.'

In these examples, the word order and positions determine unequivocably the interpretation of syntactic functions. For the same reason, the permutations in (1c-f), that are grammatical in Finnish, are ruled out in Swedish or in Italian, at least in an unmarked prosodic context.

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is irrelevant to our discussion. For further reading, the interested reader is referred, e.g., to Kiparsky (1998); ISK (§ 1234); Larjavaara (2019).

[5] Swedish does not inflect for person, number or gender, and hence, there is only one present tense finite form.

(4)     Swedish:
        a. *Lisa Mårten älskar.
        b. *Mårten Lisa älskar.
        c. *Älskar Lisa Mårten.
        d. *Älskar Mårten Lisa.

(5)     Italian:
        a. ?Lisa Martino ama.
        b. ?Martino Lisa ama.
        c. ?Ama Lisa Martino.
        d. ?Ama Martino Lisa.

## 2. When word order matters: grammatical restrictions

Sometimes morphology does not help to distinguish syntactic relations in a clause. One of these cases is the co-occurrence of the plural nominative Subject and plural accusative Object marks since they are morphologically identical. In such cases the word order clearly plays a crucial role in distinguishing the relevant syntactic functions, and does not allow permutations without affecting the meaning, as illustrated in (7a-b).

(7)     a. *Poja-t*      *kutsu-i-vat*      *tytö-t*      *juhl-iin.*
           boy-PL.NOM invite-PST-3PL   girl-PL.ACC   party-PL.ILL
           'The boys invited the girls to the party.'
        b. *Tytö-t*      *kutsu-i-vat*      *poja-t*      *juhl-iin.*
           girl-PL.NOM invite-PST-3PL   boy-PL.ACC   party-PL.ILL
           'The girls invited the boys to the party.'

In both sentences, the preverbal NP is interpreted unequivocally as the Subject and the postverbal one as the Object.

Another case in which a rigid word order is determined by morphological homonymy concerns non-finite constructions where the 'Logical

Subject'[6] of the embedded non-finite construction shows genitive case (which is morphologically identical to the accusative case). Hence, the word order has a crucial role in determining syntactic relations in the following sentences, adapted from Hakulinen (1976, XX):

(8)   a. *Isäntä*       *käsk-i*        *vieraa-n*      *syö-dä.*
         host.NOM    order-PST.3SG   guest-GEN       eat-INF
         'The host ordered the guest to eat.'
      b. *Isäntä*       *käsk-i*        *syö-dä*        *vieraa-n.*
          host.NOM    order-PST.3SG   eat-INF         guest-ACC
         'The host ordered to eat the guest.'

As is shown, the genitive and accusative case forms of *vieras* 'guest' are morphologically identical: *vieraa-n* 'guest-GEN/ACC'. Specifically, sentences (8a-b) illustrate the two different syntactic functions of the NP *vieraan*: in (8a) it is the logical Subject of the non-finite construction, marked with genitive case, while in (8b) it is the object, marked with the morphologically identical accusative case.

For the same reasons, (9a) and (9b) cannot be interpreted as permutations, but as two independent sentences, in which the preverbal NP is the Subject and the postverbal NP is the object of each sentence. The examples are adapted from Hakulinen (1976, 94).

(9)   a. *Mies*       *toivo-i*        *poja-n*       *huomaa-va-n*  *tytö-n.*
         man.NOM    hope-PST.3SG     boy-GEN       notice-PTC-OBJ  girl-ACC
         'The man hoped the boy to notice the girl.'

      b. *Mies*       *toivo-i*        *tytö-n*  *huomaa-va-n*   *poja-n.*
         man.NOM    hope-PST.3SG     girl-GEN  notice-PTC-OBJ  boy-ACC
         'The man hoped the girl to notice the boy.'

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[6] The term 'Logical Subject' refers to a non-nominative Subject and is used here to distinguish it from a nominative Subject that agrees with the verb. For further reading on nominative vs. non-nominative Subjects in Finnish, the reader is referred to Ylinärä, Frascarelli (2021).

It should be noted at this point that, from a syntactic point of view, embedded constructions and subordinate clauses are also characterized by a reduced left periphery, which limits the possibility of permutations and may, consequently, create ambiguous readings where syntactic functions are misinterpreted (cf. e.g., Brattico *et al.* 2013; Ylinärä 2018)[7].

## 3. Discourse categories

The information structure of a clause is traditionally divided into two distinct components: what is known/given (topic, theme, presupposition) and what is new (focus, rheme, comment) in a linguistic context. In Finnish, the given information, known as Topic or Theme, is located in the immediately preverbal position, while postverbal position is associated to new information. Furthermore, the preverbal position on the left side of the Topic seems to be generally accepted as the locus where the constituent receives a contrastive interpretation (cf. e.g., Vilkuna 1989). In the present discussion, the elements sitting in the postverbal and in the pre-Topic position will be considered as (different types of) Foci.

As mentioned above, the notion of Topic has no explicit relevance in this article, but whenever needed, the discourse category will be mentioned to indicate what the sentence is about (for a definition and relevant discussion on Topic, cf. Reinhart 1981; Givón 1983; Büring 1999, 2003; Krifka 2007; Puglielli, Frascarelli 2008, among others). On the other hand, we will concentrate here on Focus in Finnish, which can be realized by prosodic means and through word order permutation[8]. Nevertheless, only the latter strategy will be considered in this article (the interested reader can refer, among others, to Arnhold 2016; and Vainio, Järvikivi 2007 for an analysis of the prosody of Focus in Finnish).

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[7] It should be noted that, in addition to the word order restrictions illustrated above, predicative, possessive and existential constructions also implement a relatively rigid word order. Especially predicative sentences of the type 'X is Y' reflect directly the syntactic functions of the constituents and therefore do not allow permutations.

[8] The neutral prosodic pattern of declarative and interrogative clauses is descendent in Finnish, cf. e.g., Välimaa-Blum 1993.

The definition of Focus is not univocal in the literature on Finnish word order and discourse categories. In Hakulinen and Karlsson, focalizing is intended as «giving contrastive or emphatic salience to a constituent, which can contain either given or new information» (1979, 300; cf. also Koskinen 1998). Vilkuna defines Focus as the 'new information' of a sentence and considers contrast as an independent feature (1995, 250; cf. also Neeleman *et al.* 2007). In the same spirit, Holmberg and Nikanne identify Focus as the new information constituent that bears [+Foc] feature and can be realized as Information Focus or Contrastive Focus, while [−Foc] is associated to given information (2002, 79, 97).

4. Previous studies on word order

As said above, the preverbal area in Finnish sentences is traditionally divided in two distinct positions, each dedicated to a specific discourse category: the leftmost for contrastive constituents and the immediately preverbal position for topical constituents. On the other hand, the postverbal constituent triggers Focus reading (cf. Hakulinen 1976; Vilkuna 1989, 1995; Holmberg, Nikanne 2002; Brattico 2018, among others). Therefore, the Focus position in Finnish is not 'fixed' in one position. Consistently, Vilkuna argues that «Finnish … does not have a particular Focus position. Rather, Foci are placed either first … or late in the sentence according to their discourse-based status» (1995, 250; cf. also Vallduvì, Vilkuna 1998)[9].

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[9] Holmberg and Nikanne share the view of a structurally undefined Focus position, at least as far as the preverbal Focus in TP (Tense Phrase, cf. Rizzi 1997) is concerned, and argue that «the position of the focused preverbal argument relative to the other preverbal constituents is essentially free between F and V» and «there is not a structurally defined focus-position to the right of F in Finnish; instead there appears to be a focus domain, stretching from F down to the bottom of VP» (2002, 97-98), illustrating the Focus position alternatives through a series of examples which contain Multiple Subject Constructions. Brattico also observes that the postverbal Focus element may occur in various positions towards the right end of the clause (2018, 93).

4.1 The early studies and the movement rules

The early studies of the Finnish word order were mostly focused on singular phenomena, such as postverbal Subjects or verb-final clauses (Setälä 1880; Lindén 1947 and her later works). In the 1970s, the studies on word order in relation to syntactic functions were implemented by discourse-functional considerations and concepts. In this line of analysis, the most comprehensive contribution came from Auli Hakulinen (1974, 1975, 1976; cf. also Hakulinen, Karlsson 1979) who treated the word order permutations as derivations from an underlying order and suggested a set of «thematic movement rules», i.e., movement rules based on discourse-functional requirements, following the functional notions of the Prague School (Sgall *et al.* 1973; Daneš 1974; Firbas 1974, among others) and Halliday (1967). In particular, Hakulinen proposes seven movement rules, which are triggered by external, 'non-grammatical' requirements: (i) adverbial word fronting; (ii) complement fronting; (iii) verb dislocation to the rightmost position; (iv) quantifier dislocation to the rightmost position; (v) verb fronting; (vi) NP-'split' in two parts, NP and a referential pronoun, through A) left-dislocation and B) right-dislocation (1976, 105-115).

Hakulinen refers to the notion Focus as the *emphazised* or *contrastive* constituent of the sentence (cf. also Hakulinen, Karlsson 1979, 300). The Focus fronting of the Object is explained through a movement to the leftmost position in the sentence when the verb remains in its position as the last word: **O**SV. Using Halliday's terminology, Hakulinen defines this as *Contrastive* Focus, which differs from the rightmost *unmarked* Focus in that it is «more clearly contrastive» (1976, 108). The following examples illustrate a Contrastive Focus and an unmarked Focus, respectively.

(10)   a. ***Omena-t***      *Kalle*      *pes-i*         *(ei*        *luumu-j-a).* (OSV)
             apple-PL.ACC  Kalle.NOM   wash-PST.3SG NEG.3SG prunes-PL-PART
             lit. 'The **apples** Kalle washed (not the prunes).'
             (adapted from Hakulinen 1976, 108-109)
       b. *Kalle*        *pes-i*              ***omena-t***.                    (SVO)
             Kalle.NOM    wash-PST.3SG       apple-PL.ACC
             'Kalle washed the **apples**.'

Furthermore, the example (10a) shows that, if applied to simple transitive sentence, there is partial overlapping of the Complement fronting and the 'verb dislocation' rules, both leading to a 'verb-last' construction.

Let us now see, through another example of Hakulinen's movement rules, what happens with the OVS order, where the Object is given information (Theme, using Hakulinen's terminology) and the Subject is new information. This order is obtained through movement of the relevant constituents; in particular, the Object moves from the clause-final position to the left of the verb and the Subject from the preverbal position to the clause-final position:

(11)   a. *Omena-t*           *pes-i*           *Kalle.*
          apple-PL.ACC        wash-PST.3SG      Kalle.NOM
          lit. 'The apples washed Kalle.'
       b. *Nuor-ta*    *runoilija-a*    *kalva-a*      *epäily.*
          young-PART poet-PART       trouble-3SG    suspicion.NOM
          'The young poet is troubled by suspicion.'

## 4.2 Discourse-configurational accounts

Following the basic ideas developed in Carlson (1983 and his later works; cf. also Karttunen, Kay 1985), Vilkuna proposes a non-transformational, descriptive model of Finnish word order, based on 'discourse configuration' for the discourse-syntactic functions K, T and V-field (where K=Contrast, T=Topic, V=verbal) (1989, 37-38), in the order K > T > V-field. Vilkuna underlines that K, T and V-field are not to be intended literally as Contrast, Topic and Verb as 'words'; rather, K and T are positions that encode discourse functions that are «in part syntactically motivated»; and the V-field is not to be considered exclusively verbal, as it «need not contain any verbal material […] as the only verb may happen to be located in K» (1995, 244). The two preverbal constituents receive an 'old information' interpretation. The K-position can also be occupied by contrastive phrases, phrases with discourse particles (with a contrastive reading), interrogatives and relative pronouns, but it can also be empty. The T-position can only host nominal elements: Subjects (default), expletives, Objects and other complements and adjuncts, which can also be non-topical. It is assumed

that the T-position is filled in because the verb is endowed with a 'T-feature' which must be checked in T.

Let us briefly see the main discourse-functional interpretations that a K-positioned constituent can convey:

i) A Topic reading, characterized by 'thematic ambivalence', where the word contains 'new-old' information, which is a partial answer to a previous question. This type of fronted element is also referred to as Contrastive Topic (cf. Büring 1999, 2003; Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl 2007). Holmberg and Nikanne also note that contrastiveness is not necessarily [+Foc], as it is a different feature (2002, n. 7). The following sentences are adapted from Vilkuna (1989, 90).

(12)  A: *Mi-tä*          *sinä*              *ost-i-t*              *vanhemm-i-lle-si?*
         what-PART   you.NOM       buy-PST-2SG    parent-PL-ALL-2SG
         'What did you buy for your parents?'
      B: *Äidi-lle*       *ost-i-n*          *tohveli-t.*
         mother-ALL  buy-PST-1SG    slipper-PL.ACC
         'For mother, I bought slippers.'

ii) A 'FOCTOP' reading, when the K-position hosts elements that contain 'old-new' information, that is, elements that are known, but at the same time convey the informative part of the sentence. One of the major implemetations of the FOCTOP reading is *correction*, as illustrated in the example (13), adapted from Vilkuna (106).

(13)  A: *Sinä*          *ot-i-t*            *tämä-n.*                    (SVO)
          you.NOM   take-PST-2SG  this-ACC
         'You took this.'
      B: **Tämä-n**   *minä*           *ot-i-n.*                       (OSV)
         this-ACC   I.NOM          take-PST-1SG
         lit. '**This** I took.'

As mentioned before, the K-position can also be empty. Let us now observe an instance of a K-less sentence, i.e., an OVS sentence. Vilkuna considers OVS sentences «K-less, but textually marked», and distinguishes

between focusing and non-focusing OVS constructions. The example (14) illustrates the Subject-focusing OVS order, where markedness is clearly induced by the context, and the postverbal Subject is new information Focus.

> (14)   Subject-focusing OVS:
>        A: *Kuka kirjoitt-i artikkeli-n?*
>           'Who wrote the article?'
>        B: *Artikkeli-n   kirjoitt-i        **Tommi.***
>           article-ACC write-PST.3SG    Tommi.NOM
>           '**Tommi** wrote the article.', lit. 'The article wrote Tommi.'

Vilkuna observes that OVS sentences can also convey an unmarked reading when the Object of the sentence has the 'experiencer' theta-role and, consequently, the Subject cannot have an 'agent' role. This is the case of verbs that denote emotions and feelings (illustrated in 15a) and physical contact (15b). The relevant sentences are adapted below from Vilkuna (178-180).

> (15)   a. *Isoäiti-ä*              *vaiva-a*           *nivelreuma.*
>           grandmother-PART    suffer-3SG        arthritis.NOM
>           'Grandmother suffers from (=is troubled by) arthritis.'
>        b. *Puutarha-a*            *ympärö-i*          *pensasaita.*
>           garden-PART             surround-3SG     fence.NOM
>           'The garden is surrounded by a fence.'

The sentences in (15) are suitable replies to «Tell me about X», where X is the Object, which, serving as given information, is located in the T-position in the answer. According to Vilkuna's definition, sentence (15a) is an 'experiencer transitive' type of sentence, while sentence (15b) belongs to the category of 'locative transitives', which, according to Vilkuna, implement the same information structure of existential sentences, as in a sentence like: *Puutarhan ympärillä on pensasaita* (lit. 'Around the garden is a fence'). It should be noted that, in this case, Finnish sentences are better translated in English as passive constructions, since in this case the 'experiencer' plays a Subject function. The sentences (15a-b) would also be suitable answers to the questions «What bothers the grandmother?» and «What surrounds

the garden?», respectively, which would naturally induce a Focus reading of the clause-final element in the relevant answer[10].

## 4.3 Generative Grammar studies

Within the generative framework, Vainikka assumes that the movement to Spec,FinP (Vilkuna's T) is required by the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), and is assumed to be independent of discourse factors (cf. Vilkuna's T-feature) (1989). Also Vilkuna's descriptive analysis is updated subsequently by assuming a grammatical movement into two syntactic positions, namely Spec,IP and Spec,CP (1995, 246).

In Koskinen's analysis, movement is explained by relying on discourse properties of the expressions, assuming that the left edge of the Finnish finite clause contains an immediately preverbal TopicP, preceded by FocusP, which hosts wh-elements and contrasted constituents (1998, 54-55). Focused Subject can also remain *in situ*, and it bears contrastive stress in either position.

Along the same lines, Holmberg and Nikanne propose a discourse-driven formal account of the Finnish finite sentence divided in three domains, namely the operator domain, located in CP, the presupposition (or Topic) domain in FinP (FP in Holmberg, Nikanne 2002, 73-74) and the Information Focus domain in TP, based on the cartographic representation proposed in Holmberg *et al.* (1993), inspired by the latest developments of the generative theory (especially Baker 1988).

(16) $[_{CP} [_{C'} C^0 [_{FP} +EPP [_{Fin'} Fin^0 [_{NegP} [_{Neg'} Neg^0 [_{TP} [_{T'} T^0 \ldots ]]]]]]]]]$

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[10] These theoretical concepts are updated in Vallduví and Vilkuna, where two distinct interpretive categories are proposed to account for different types of Focus, namely, *kontrast* and *rhemacity*. In particular, «Kontrast is the necessary condition for any phrase [theme or rheme; old or new] to appear in the K-field», while «rhemacity is needed to account for the distribution of nonkontrastive phrases (rhemes in V-field and themes in T-field)» (1998, 101). In other words, Contrastive Foci are located in clause-initial while non-contrastive Foci are realized *in situ*, in clause-final position.

These three domains correspond roughly to Vilkuna's K, T and V-field positions mentioned above. The basic assumption is that all arguments are provided with a [±Foc] feature, either inherently or structurally. The (only) argument that bears the [+Foc] feature is interpreted as the Information Focus while the [−Foc] argument(s) encode(s) the presupposition, in terms of Vallduví and Engdahl (1996). In this framework, movements are motivated by formal feature checking, following Chomsky's Minimalist Theory (1995), where the [−Foc] is considered an uninterpretable syntactic feature that must be checked and deleted along the syntactic derivation. Arguments bearing the uninterpretable [−Foc] feature are not part of the Information Focus and therefore must move out of the Focus domain to FinP, where they are checked in accordance with the EPP[11].

Holmberg and Nikanne argue that the movement of a constituent to a preverbal Focus position is optional in Finnish and it appears to be motivated by the constraint that «the argument in Spec,TP must be focused, either by Contrastive Focus or by virtue of being Information Focus, with or without focus particles» (2002, 97)[12]. Holmberg also argues that «a subject marked [−Foc] must always move to Spec,FP, while an object marked [−Foc] has the option of staying *in situ*» (1999, 36; cf. also Holmberg, Nikanne 2002, n. 28), which accounts for the possibility of an unmarked or Subject-focused SVO order. Dal Pozzo provides empirical evidence that the preferred answering strategy to Subject-targeting questions in an oral testing context is interestingly the canonical SV(O) order (2012, 74-77). She assumes that the new information Subject is focalized *in situ* in Spec,FinP[13].

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[11] Holmberg and Nikanne assume that the EPP-feature is optional, and if there is no potential Topic available, then the EPP-mechanism is not activated (2002, 83).

[12] 'Focus particles', *-kin, - hAn, -pA, -s*, are discourse particles (among others) that can encode discourse features in the left edge of a clause. The particle can be attached to the first constituent of a clause and can convey different pragmatic informations according to context. Particularly interesting is the particle *-hAn*, whose basic function is traditionally considered to be marking a sentence as a reminder of *familiar* information (Hakulinen 1976, 58), but it can also be combined with a Contrastive Focus interpretation.

[13] It is interesting to observe that 2,3-3,9% (according to clause types examined, i.e., transitive, unaccusative and unergative) of the answers to Subject-target questions were realized by means of clefts, which are rarely addressed as Focus strategies in Finnish.

Huhmarniemi (2019, 87) puts forth a hypothesis according to which Subject movement to Spec,FinP in Finnish is seen as an instance of discourse-neutral EPP movement that obeys a locality condition, while Object movement involves two steps: scrambling to the edge of vP triggered by discourse anaphoricity, past the Subject, and consecutive EPP movement to Spec,FinP (cf. also Kaiser 2006; Boef, Dal Pozzo 2012; Jokilehto 2017).

Brattico *et al.* propose a generative analysis of the Finnish left periphery that builds on the formal and descriptive studies presented above. In their view, the syntactic position right before the verb is dedicated to a Topic constituent (in Spec,FinP) and the leftmost position is for operators, which inherit their features from the Force head (in ForceP). In particular, the Force head hosts clause type features and optional discourse features, i.e., particles and morphologically covert Contrastive Focus feature. Brattico *et al.* argue that the Contrastive Focus can be expressed by two syntactic means: by movement to the operator position or by prosodic emphasis *in situ* (2013, 89; cf. Identificational vs. Information Focus in É. Kiss 1998). In the latter case, the Focus feature is assumed to be weak and, as such, targeted by EPP *optionally.* Thus, it is checked at the left edge through the operator position by means of a probe-goal relation. The authors assume the following syntactic structure of the Finnish left edge, originally proposed by Huhmarniemi (2012).

(17)    $[_{ForceP} [_{Force'} Force^0 [_{FocusP} [_{Focus'} Focus^0_{[+Foc]} [_{FinP} [_{Fin'} Fin^0_{[+Top]} \ldots ]]]]]]$

A novel account of the Topic/Focus dislocation is put forth in Brattico (2018). Brattico's analysis is particularly inspired by Holmberg and Nikanne's theory (2002) according to which the movement of an argument to the immediately preverbal Topic position can be of two types: A-movement in case the Subject moves, A'-movement if the Object or some other element moves. Brattico provides evidence that the operations of Topic/Focus dislocation are neither A-movement nor A'-movement. He also investigates and rejects the possibility that the word order phenomenon can derive from stylistic phonological rules or from non-configurationality (i.e., the lack of phrase stucture). His novel proposal for 'free' word order is that the Topic/Focus dislocation is «a form of *syntactic adjunction*», in which elements «are floated and remerged to the structure as adjuncts» (2018, 97, 123), a theory

inspired by the analyses of Jelinek (1984) and Baker (1996) for polysynthetic languages. Brattico postulates a finite clause derivation theory which involves three linearly ordered phases. In the I phase, the event structure and the morphosyntax of the clause (Merge, theta-assignment, Agree and A-movement) are defined; the II phase is dedicated to information structural interpretation, involving 'adjunction operation', which is reflected through word order permutation; finally, the III phase constitutes an input for spell-out (Phonetic Form) and semantic interpretation (Logical Form) through the implementation of A'/operator constructions and the merging of the operator head (124-125).

5. Summarizing the focalization in Finnish finite clause

To conclude the present overview, let us summarize the discourse-functional interpretations triggered by different word orders in a finite clause, as synthetically illustrated in this article through simple transitive sentences.

a) SVO: neutral order

If considered without context and intonation, SVO represents the canonical word order in Finnish.

(18)   *Ville*          *näk-i*          *Maija-n.*
       Ville.NOM         see-PST.3SG      Maija-ACC
       'Ville saw Maija.' (answer to: «What's new?»)[14]

In case of a neutral interpretation, the sentence could be preceded by a question like «What's new?». However, also the following question/answer pairs are possible if the constituents are uttered with a particular stress on the constituent marked in boldface:

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[14] Notice that in this sentence, *Ville* could also be interpreted as a Topic, if preceded by a question like «What about Ville?». However, in the most neutral case is be expressed with a pronoun (*hän* 'he') and not with an NP.

   i)  Target question on the Subject: «Who saw Maija?»
      *Ville näki Maijan.*
      '**Ville** saw Maija.'
  ii)  Target question on the Object: «Who did Ville see?»
      *Ville näki **Maijan**.*
      'Ville saw **Maija**.'

b) OVS: Subject-Focus

(19)  *Maija-n      näk-i       **Ville**.*
      Maija-ACC   see-PST.3SG   Ville.NOM
      i) '**Ville** saw Maija.' (reply to: «Who saw Maija?»)
      iia) 'Maija was seen by **Ville**.' (contrast to: «X (not Ville) saw Maija.»)
      iib) 'It was **Ville** who saw Maija.' (contrast to: «X (not Ville) saw Maija.»)

This sentence could be preceded by two types of contexts: without a special prosodic emphasis, namely (i) the question «Who saw Maija?», corresponding to the reply (i) in English; or (ii) an assertion that is constrasted in, e.g., «Matti saw Maija», and would correspond to a passive construction (iia) or to a cleft construction (iib) in English, and would most probably need a special stress on the postverbal Subject *Ville*. The different translation alternatives imply that the postverbal Focus can receive (at least) two different Focus interpretations: Information and Constrastive[15].

c) SOV: Subject-Focus

(20)  ***Ville**    Maija-n    näk-i      (, ei   Matti).*
      Ville.NOM Maija-ACC see-PST.3SG   NEG.3SG Matti-NOM
      'It was **Ville** who saw Maija(, not Matti).'
      (contrast to: «Matti saw Maija.»)

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[15] The examples (19)-(21) could be considered as *corrections* to previous assertions, but for simplicity's sake, we have adapted the term 'Contrastive Focus' to refer to the relative salient constituents. We will not enter into a detailed analysis of Focus types, but it should be noted that Corrective Focus is considered to be a subcategory of Contrastive Focus, cf. Bianchi, Bocci (2012).

The English translation of this sentence comes out best with a cleft construction, and the Subject in the leftmost position receives a contrastive interpretation with respect to the Subject of the previous assertion.

d) OSV: Object-Focus

(21)  ***Maija-n*** *Ville*          *näk-i*              *(, ei*      *Liisa-a).*
      Maija-ACC Ville.NOM   see-PST.3SG        NEG.3SG  Liisa-PART
      'It was **Maija** that Ville saw(, not Liisa).'
      (constrast to: «Matti saw Liisa.»)

Similary to the SOV order, the Object preceding the Subject in the pre-verbal area receives a contrastive interpretation.

e) VSO: Verb-Focus

Finally, although the verb-initial orders have been left aside in this article, let us consider a single case so as to illustrate briefly what discourse-functional interpretation this word order induces.

(22)  ***Näk-i***        *Ville*         *Maija-n*.
      see-PST.3SG   Ville.NOM   Maija-ACC
      'Ville **did** see Maija.'
      (constrast to: «Ville did not see Maija.»)

This example shows that the Verb-Focus order induces a polarity shift correction, rejecting the negation in a previous assertion or question.

6. Final remarks

In this article, the most relevant and influential studies on Finnish word order phenomenon from a formal syntax perspective have been presented. We have observed that the word order alternation is generally considered to be driven by both discourse-functional and grammatical factors. The left edge

of the clause is typically dedicated to contrastive and topical elements, in this order, while the constituents in the postverbal area are interpreted as new information and can be interpreted contrastively. The canonical and, at the same time, the most common order is SVX, probably because of its versatile nature, i.e., different discourse-functional interpretations, such as corrective Subject and Object readings, are available with appropriate prosody. Two main types of Focus have been observed, namely Information and Contrastive Focus. In the leftmost clausal position, the Focus element receives a contrastive reading, i.e., it rejects or contrasts a previous assertion, if it is followed by a Topic (in the immediately preverbal position). This is the case of the verb-final orders OSV and SOV. It has also been observed that the postverbal constituents in the OVS order can receive either Information or Contrastive Focus reading.

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