

Prosody a source of crosslinguistic variation in OS

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Abstract

The problem addressed in this paper is the case of word order microvariation in Mainland Scandinavian: optional vs. obligatory Object Shift (OS). Following standard assumptions (see Selkirk 1996), weak object pronouns are assumed to be affixal clitics which do not themselves have the status of prosodic words. Since adverbs are unsuitable as hosts, weak object pronouns may undergo OS, in other words precede adverbs, ending up encliticized onto the preceding verb or subject. In standard Danish, OS is obligatory; the order adverb+weak pronoun is blocked. However, in Swedish, OS is optional, as is the case for some Danish dialects, spoken in the southeastern island area. In our paper we explain the distribution of optional vs. obligatory OS by the phonological properties of the two varieties. What “optional OS” in Swedish and varieties of Danish have in common is the occurrence of a tonal accent, which creates a larger phonological unit than the minimal prosodic word, a “maximal prosodic word” (Myrberg & Riad 2013) or a “prosodic word group, PWG” (Vigario 2010). We propose that the mechanism that allows a weak pronoun to remain in its base position in the string in Swedish and the southeastern island dialects in Danish, is the availability of tonal accent which enables the inclusion of the pronoun in such a maximal prosodic word. Standard Danish, on the other hand, lacks tonal accent altogether which is why OS is obligatory in this dialect.