No projection, no label: The format of root declaratives – evidence from V2

Recent work in syntactic theorizing strives to rid syntactic theory of endocentricity, arguing that it can mostly be made to follow from minimal search, i.e. efficient detection of the structurally closest head (Chomsky 2008, 2013). According to Chomsky (2013), two strategies exist to render structures of the form XP-YP labelable, i.e. those structures, where detection of the closest head (as in the trivial case Head-XP) fails: First, symmetry-breaking movement turns one member into a discontinuous element such that the in-situ element provides the label. Secondly, both X and Y share a prominent feature and have undergone AGREE, so that the common feature provides the label.

This contribution considers V2-structures in (mostly) Germanic in light of the labeling theory. In V2-structures a phrase of any category must occupy the position before the finite verb in declarative root-like contexts – all examples below are ungrammatical declarative clauses without the fronted XP:

(1)  a. \[\alpha [DP Maria] hat t_{DP} \text{den Mann} \text{gestern} \text{gesehen}]\
    Mary \ has \ the \ man \ yesterday \ seen

  b. \[\alpha [AdvP \text{gestern}] \text{hat} \text{Maria \ den Mann} t_{AdvP} \text{gesehen}]\

  c. \[\alpha [VP \text{den Mann gesehen}] \text{hat} \text{Maria \ gestern} t_{VP}]

In the absence of the notion specifier, how does \(\{XP, CP_{V2}\}=\alpha\) receive a label? These structures elude both labeling strategies mentioned above: While symmetry-breaking movement is obviously no option, there appears to be no feature which V2-C and the prefield-XP have in common, and thus the shared-feature+AGREE-idea is not plausible either. I propose that V2-structures provide crucial evidence for the idea that root clauses must not receive a label at all, thus answering the question posed in a principled fashion: Merger (both internal (1) and external (2), cf. Frey 2006) of XP is a strategy to prevent labeling of root clauses by C.

(2) Kein Wunder spricht Peter so gut Französisch.
    ‘No surprise Peter speaks French so well.’

Conceptually, it appears reasonable to say that root clauses do not need a label, because they are not selected and because syntactic categories arguably serve the ongoing derivation (cf. Chomsky 2000 et seq) – hence, if the derivation terminates, labels are superfluous. The stronger claim defended here, that root clauses must not receive a label, can be justified by economy: If labeling is not needed, avoid it by any means necessary, V2 being one such means. Insertion of an it-type expletive \(3-a\) further supports the claim that prefield-occupation serves just formal purposes (cf. Fanselow & Lenertová 2011, Frey 2005).

(3) a. *(Es) haben hier viele Leute übernachtet.
    EXPL have \ here \ many \ people \ spend-the-night
    ‘Many people have spent the night here.’

b. weil *(es) \ hie\ve \ Leute übernachtet haben
    because \ EXPL \ hier \ many \ people \ spend-the-night \ have

In current terms, the contrast \(3-a)/(3-b)\) receives an explanation: only \(\{DP, CP\}\) remains labelless due to the presence of DP=ex, while \(3-b\) no such requirement holds (German plainly does not have anything like the EPP of English). The current analysis also solves the problem why at most one XP must occupy the prefield \(4\) (cf. Ott 2014 for only seeming exceptions in left dislocation in German): In \(\{ZP, \{YP, CP\}\}\) labeling by minimal search wrongly detects ZP as the label, violating the ban on labeled root clauses.

(4) *[DP Den Mann] [DP Maria] hat gestern gesehen.

The root clause needs to remain unlabeled, ensured by Merger of an arbitrary XP in those languages that have V2-C – the type of C I restrict myself to here (I follow Vikner 1995, Haegeman
1997 and Roberts 2004 in assuming that the finite verb V-to-C moves to assume the finiteness features on C). CP={C, TP} alone illicitly labels the structure, but raising of an arbitrary XP to its sister position to yield {XP, CP} makes labeling impossible, as desired. The approach offers a solution to the elusive promiscuity of the fronted category: any XP will do to prevent labeling of the root. Likewise, its obligatoriness and its uniqueness are derived by simple means and without resort to movement-inducing features such as, say, Fanselow’s (2002) EPP on C.

In Dutch (5) and German C exhibits A-properties in subject-initial V2-clauses, as e.g. no reconstruction of Condition C effects is observable (Craenenbroeck & Haegeman 2007:173):

(5) a. *Nou ein-t_s/i/j den aaijeneir van t leemeken zelf muutn doewtuun.
   "Now the owner of the lamb must himself kill"

   b. Den aaijeneir van t leemeken, ein-t_s/i/j zelf muutn doewtuun.
   "the owner of the lamb has himself must kill"

To account for such properties, I adopt Legate’s (2011) proposal that C retains its ϕ-feature set instead of inheriting it (as in English-like languages, Chomsky 2008); the subject raises to the prefield directly without stopover in SPEC-TP.

In German and Dutch, minimal search unambiguously identifies C realized by a complementizer dass ‘that’ as the label of CP, while V2-clauses selected by verbs do not exist: α, lacking a label, cannot be selected by verbs (for cases with bridge verbs I assume that the V2-clauses are juxtaposed to the main clause, not subordinate):

(6) Peter hat vergessen { CP dass Kuchen schmeckt } / *[α Kuchen schmeckt ]
   "Peter has forgotten that cake tasty-is"

Concerning the question how embedded V2-clauses in the bulk of Scandinavian come about, which are introduced by what looks like a complementizer, there is evidence for a lexical ambiguity of aðrat: one variant is not a complementizer, but a nominal element N/D which embeds a proposition (Manzini 2010 and Roussou 2010 on Italian and Greek respectively). This accounts for the islandhood of these clauses (7-a)/(7-b) insofar as they fall under the complex NP-constraint. (7-c) shows the possibility to extract from a non-V2 embedded clause, headed by a genuine complementizer homophonous to N/D (for parallel facts from Faroese, Icelandic, as well as residual V2 in English, cf. Vikner 1995:114-116):

(7) Hvilken film sagde hun . . .
   which movie said she . . .
   a. *at i skolen havde børnene allerede set?
      N/D [α in school-the had children-the already seen]
   b. *at [α børnene havde allerede set]?
   c. [CP at børnene allerede havde set]?
      "children-the already have seen"

A lexical ambiguity analysis makes the following prediction: Genuine C may manifest C-agreement (Chomsky 2008). For N/D, by contrast, agreement (with the grammatical subject of the embedded clause) is unexpected. If embedded V2 is associated with N/D but never with C, we expect that there is no language which simultaneously exhibits embedded V2 and C-agreement. In other words, C-agreement phenomena exhibit strict complementarity with V2.