Is There a Topic and Focus Position in the DP: Evidence from Turkish

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Some researchers argue that similar to the CP, the DP also possesses information structure with layers such as Topic and Focus (Giusti 1996, Aboh 2004, Haegeman 2004, among others), mainly along the lines of Rizzi (1997). I will examine whether one can trace such kind of information structure in Turkish nominal phrases. I will provide further support for the split-DP hypothesis by arguing that Turkish DPs project Topic and Focus phrases by means of moving constituents into these projections.

In this study, I assume that Turkish projects a DP layer, and demonstratives are base generated inside this projection. This is because demonstratives are in close relationship with the accusative case, which licenses definiteness and specificity (Enç 1991, Öztürk 2005), and the absence of the accusative case marking on the object when the object has a demonstrative leads to ungrammaticality.

In Turkish, although demonstratives originate inside the DP, some constituents can appear before demonstratives. In (1) when the order of the genitive-marked DP and the demonstrative is swapped, the interpretations change:

(1) a. şu   Burak-ın   şapka-sı   b. Burak-ın   ŞU   şapka-sı
       that   Burak-GEN   hat-POSS.3SG   Burak-GEN   that   hat-POSS.3SG
       "that hat of Burak"   "that hat among Burak's hats"

(1a) implies that Burak might have only one hat; it has no implication regarding Burak's possession of other hats. (1b), however, presupposes that Burak has more than one hat. In addition, the demonstrative şu "that" receives prosodic focus. Thus, I argue that (1b) is obtained through information structure-related movement. Above the DP layer, there are TopP and FocP projections in this order. The demonstrative şu "that" moves into FocP, and the DP Burak-ın "Burak-GEN" moves into TopP because this possessor DP must be familiar in the discourse. In (1a), however, the constituents stay in their base positions.

The same interpretation is obtained with respect to the position of an adjectival phrase. Moving an adjective in front of a demonstrative brings along an interpretational difference:

(2) a. şu   kırmızı şapka   b. kırmızı   ŞU   şapka
       that   red   hat   red   that hat
       "that red hat"   "that red hat among red hats"

While (2a) merely points to a red hat, (2b) presupposes that there is more than one red hat and points to a specific one among the set of red hats. The demonstrative şu "that" in (2b) must have prosodic focus, and the color of the hat, kırmızı "red", must be familiar in the context. Therefore, şu "that" moves into FocP, and the adjective kırmızı "red" moves into the TopP above the FocP.

As for the interaction between CP-level and DP-level information structure, both domains project their own topic and focus phrases, as shown in (3):

(3) Ben_{TOP} [kırmızı_{TOP}   ŞU_{FOC} elbise-yi]   ÇOK_{FOC}   beğen-di-m.
     I   red   that   dress-ACC   a.lot   like-PAST-1SG
     "I liked THAT red dress MUCH"

The bracketed DP above hosts its own topic kırmızı "red" and focus şu "that", and the CP hosts ben "I" in its TopP and çok "a lot" in its FocP. Because it is often assumed that the CP and DP comprise phase domains, it is plausible for each of these projections to host their own functional phrases.

Overall, I will show that Turkish nominal phrases bear information structure related functional categories in its left periphery, which is composed of TopP and FocP above the DP. The order alternations result from relevant information structure reflected on surface syntax.

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