Features and Movement*

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1. Introduction

Syntactic representations contain features. I will call them syntactic features. A restrictive theory would treat all syntactic features on a par, i.e., the same conditions should apply to all features. In the minimalist framework (cf. Chomsky (1992, 1995)) additional functional structure has to be assumed to guarantee equal treatment for all syntactic features. These additional functional projections are problematic and, in some cases, not very plausible.

In this article, I suggest that the set of syntactic features be split up into two sub-sets: (i) morphosyntactic features and (ii) information-structure features, the pragmatically determined [TOP] and [FOC] features that assign a constituent the discourse function (communicative weight) of topic and focus, respectively. The two kinds of features are similar in that they both contribute to the formation of a clause's surface by allowing, forcing, or excluding overt movement. But whereas – in the course of the derivation – morphosyntactic features are checked, i.e., they need to find appropriate counterparts in some functional projection, information-structure features are not. Thus, morphosyntactic features are basically different from information-structure features.

Morphosyntactic features are doubly represented – they appear on syntactic constituents that correspond to the lexical items entering the derivation as well as on functional heads. An information-structure feature shows up in the syntax only once, *viz.* on the constituent that carries the corresponding communicative weight. Therefore, I claim, we can do without special functional projections like TopP and FocP and, consequently, build the structure of the clause more economically.

The structure of the present paper is as follows: Section 2 contains a brief outline of Checking Theory and the problems resulting from its application. Sections 3 and 4 investigate the various syntactic features, with the main emphasis on information-structure features and the way they are represented in the syntax. I will discuss cases that support my view that checking is not plausible or even excluded for the purposes of information structuring. Section 5 characterizes the possible solution, *viz.* a strict differentiation between morphological and information-structure features. Section 6 concludes the paper.

Russian serves as the main object language although the argumentation is not specifically meant for this particular language.

2. Checking Theory

The following is one version of Checking Theory:

- (1) Checking Theory
 - (i) A syntactic feature F must be checked in the course of the derivation.
 - (ii) Checking operates in special phrases using Spec-Head Agreement (SHAGR) or Head-Head Agreement (HHAGR), respectively.

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(2) illustrates the two configurations for feature checking:

(a) SHAGR e.g. XP Agr_OP X' DP YP Agr_O' [+ACC] [F] $\mathbf{X}^{\mathbf{0}}$ Agro⁰ . . . [+ACC] [F] (b) HHAGR e.g. \mathbf{X}^0 Asp⁰ \mathbf{v}^0 **Y**0 $\mathbf{X}^{\mathbf{0}}$ Asp⁰ [F] [F] [+pf] [+pf]

(2) Checking configurations:

The requirement to check features is the reason why syntactic movement occurs. There is general agreement that features may be strong or weak. The standard assumption is that strong features induce overt movement whereas weak features do not allow constituents to move overtly, giving rise to covert (LF-) movement. This causes the split of syntax into a visible and an invisible part.

Checking Theory is designed to account for two disparate assumptions:

- (i) Certain properties of syntactic constituents like, e.g., the specifications of grammatical features¹ are represented in the syntax by means of abstract features F that are involved in an appropriate feature-checking mechanism. Cf. Junghanns (1995).
- (ii) The surface form of a clause is the result of movement driven by the necessity to check strong features overtly. Cf. Pollock (1989), Chomsky (1992).

Assumption (i) has a conceptual motivation – grammatical features need interpreting. At the basis of assumption (ii) lie empirical observations like the movement vs. non-movement facts cited from Pollock (1989). Some strong feature requires the finite verb to move overtly in French. In English, the corresponding feature is weak. Compare (3a, b) and (3c, d).

(3)	(a)	Jean embrasse _i souvent t _i Marie.	(c)	*	John kissesi often ti Mary

(b) * Jean souvent embrasse Marie. (d) John often kisses Mary.

The strict application of Checking Theory means that the specific surface order of clausal elements exclusively depends on strong features.

However, this strong assumption turns out to be a Procrustean bed when it comes to analyzing particular language facts. For example, there are attempts to explain the surface positions of Russian finite verbs on the basis of strong and weak features. King (1995) claims that the Russian verb always undergoes overt movement to a functional head and that this movement is triggered by a strong feature. But King's account is inadequate. Sometimes the Russian verb moves, sometimes it does not, as demonstrated in Junghanns & Zybatow (1995) and Bailyn (1995). Compare the relative positions of verb and subject in (4a) and (4b):

¹ Cf., for example, tense, mood, and aspect of verbs or person, gender, and number of nouns, among others.

- (4) (a) Prislal_i muž [V' t_i den'gi].
 sent husband-NOM money-ACC
 'The husband sent (the) money.'
 - (b) Muž srazu že [VP[V' prislal den'gi]].
 husband-NOM immediately sent ptcl money-ACC
 'The husband immediately sent (the) money.'

Therefore, it cannot be that the crucial factor for the surface position of the finite verb in Russian is checking a strong feature to satisfy Checking Theory.²

Checking Theory as it stands tries to reduce variation between languages to variation in morphological properties. Hence, it presupposes a conception of morphology covering both morphological features proper and features like, e.g., [FOC] that *prima facie* are of a different nature.

In the face of the various shortcomings of previous attempts to give an explicit description of how the surface of a clause is derived I will have another look at syntactic features.

3. Features in syntactic representations

The features that occur in syntactic representations comprise morphosyntactic features, on the one hand, and information-structure features, on the other hand.

I do not intend to add much to what has been said about morphosyntactic features in the literature. Verbal features like (non-) finiteness, agreement, structural case features and nominal features like agreement and case belong in the realm of morphosyntax.

For each language, consistent specifications of the morphosyntactic features must be established so that applying Checking Theory would yield correct results, i.e. grammatical sentences.

For Russian it has been suggested that the major morphosyntactic features are all weak. Hence, a constituent can stay in situ unless some non-morphological factor forces it to move, cf. Junghanns & Zybatow (1997).

I claim that the non-morphological factors driving overt movement are requirements of information structuring.

4. Information-structure features

I assume two types of information structure to be of primary linguistic relevance: (i) focusbackground structure (FBS) and (ii) topic-comment structure (TCS).³ This allows us to assume features for focus and topic. More specifically, I suggest that the following features underlie the process of information structuring:

(5) Information-structure features:

- (i) [FOC] the feature assigned to a non-contrastively focused constituent;
- (ii) $[FOC_c]$ the feature assigned to a contrastively focused constituent;
- (iii) [TOP] the topic feature.

² Kondrashova (1996) goes so far as to postulate different specifications for the tense feature in the various tenses of Russian – strong [past] and [future] vs. weak [present] – in order to find an explanation for the distribution of the copula, which is overt in the preterite and future and covert or absent in the present. This account is a mere stipulation and descriptively inadequate. Cf. Junghanns (1997a).

³ For characterization of the two types see Junghanns (1996) and Junghanns & Zybatow (1997).

Notice that it is not necessary to assume a background and a comment feature in addition to the focus and topic features, since the material functioning as background and comment, respectively, can be established subtractively once the focus and the topic of the clause are given.

The information structure can be read off the distribution and phonological shape of the clausal constituents at the surface.

Russian has the option of re-ordering clausal constituents overtly; obviously in order to satisfy requirements of information structuring (cf. Junghanns (1996)). Can this kind of overt movement be subsumed under Checking Theory? I will try to find an answer to this question in the remainder of section 4.

4.1. Focus features

Drubig (1996) proposes that focus should be licensed as follows:

- (6) Focus Licensing:
 - Focus can be licensed through embedding (integration into a wider focus domain) or the creation of an operator-variable structure (long dependency). (Drubig (1996); my translation; U.J.)

Adopting these two ways of focus licensing leads to a strange asymmetry in the formal treatment of the syntactic focus feature – a potential domain extension (focus projection) legitimates non-contrastive focus⁴, while contrastive focus requires – overt or non-overt – movement of the focused XP to the specifier position of FocP, which results in a SHAGR configuration. The two possiblities are illustrated in (7):

- (7) (a) Licensing of non-contrastive focus through a potential domain extension:
 ... [... [FOC][...]...]...]...
 - (b) Licensing of contrastive focus through SHAGR in FocP:
 - $\dots [F_{ocP} [F_{OC}] XP_i [F_{oc'} [F_{OC}] F_{oc}^0 [\dots t_i \dots]]] \dots$

In the case of non-contrastive focus (cf. (7a)), the focus feature need not be checked. However, checking takes place, if there is contrastive focus (cf. (7b)).

But why assume a FocP in the structure of the clause at all, if it applies only to a subset of the focus phenomena?

⁴ The focus relevant here has been given various names: new-information focus, natural focus, neutral focus, non-contrastive focus. I have chosen the last term for the purposes of the present paper.

4.1.1. Contrastive focus

Many researchers assume a FocP above IP and below C^0 . Cf., e.g., Rizzi (1995) and Drubig (1996).



 α = derived position of the focused constituent

This clause structure seems to be appropriate for languages with overt focus movement (e.g., Hungarian), where the focused constituent can or must appear in a particular structural position at the surface.

In Russian, contrastive focus has an unambiguous phonological encoding so that the focused constituent is not confined to a special position.⁵ The opposite is the case – contrastive focus can affect a constituent either in situ or after movement (possibly also triggered by discourse considerations).

(9) Realizing contrastive focus in Russian:⁶
 Anton kupil knigu.
 Anton-NOM bought book-ACC

- (a) Anton kupil [FOCc][DP <u>KNIgu</u>].
- (b) Anton $[FOCc][DP KNIgu]_i kupil t_i$.
- (c) [FOCc][DP <u>KNIgu]</u>i Anton kupil t_i.
 'It was a book that Anton bought.'

Such positional freedom can hardly be reconciled with the necessity to check a focus feature in a special phrase. The only way out would be to assume that overt checking of $[Foc_c]$ is optional in Russian. But then we might just as well abandon FocP.

Since contrastive focus is unambiguously encoded in Russian, the corresponding constituent is free to appear anywhere in the sentence. It need not move to a special position.

4.1.2. Non-contrastive focus

Non-contrastive focus in Russian also has a phonological reflex that one can assume is the phonological consequence of the placement of a syntactic focus feature. The phonological reflex is a falling accent on the syllable carrying the main stress of the sentence. The non-contrastive focus accent differs from the contrastive one, the latter starting off higher so that

⁵ King's (1995) claim that a contrastively focused constituent must move to a preverbal position is empirically wrong.

⁶ The syllable realizing the contrastive accent is marked by underlined capital letters.

its range is wider. So, it is easy to perceive a non-contrastive accent. It corresponds to a drop of the fundamental frequency (F0), as shown in diagrams (10) and (11a, b).

In a categorial sentence⁷ of Russian, we find the focus exponent at the right periphery of the clause. A thetic sentence allows both a pre- and a postverbal position of the prosodically prominent subject.⁸

(10)

F0 contour of a categorical sentence/Russian:^{9, 10} Zavxoz zavëz zaKAZ.

manager-NOM brought order-ACC 'The manager brought the order.'



(11) F0 contours of thetic sentences/Russian:

- (a) Postverbal subject:
 - Utonula staRUxa.

drowned old-woman-NOM 'An/the old woman drowned.'



⁷ For the distinction between categorical and thetic sentences see Sasse (1987) and Junghanns (in prep.).

⁸ For the nature of this variation see Junghanns & Zybatow (1997).

⁹ I am indebted to Ljubov' Vladimirovna Zlatoustova (Moscow State University Moscow) for the recordings and to Kai Alter (Research Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Vienna/Max Planck Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, Leipzig) for the digitalization and the graphics..

¹⁰ The syllable realizing the non-contrastive accent is indicated by non-underlined capital letters.

(b) Preverbal subject:

StaRUxa utonula.

old-woman-NOM drowned; same gloss



If there is a syntactic focus feature in the case of non-contrastive focus too, the question is why it should be exempt from checking (cf. (7a)). The answer is quite simple: There are cases where checking would be technically impossible.

One reading of sentences that display a potential focus ambiguity – see examples (12) (a)-(c) – corresponds to the CP's being assigned the syntactic focus feature (maximal focus). Movement of the CP to SpecFocP is trivially excluded – cf. the structure in (8).

(12) Focus ambiguity in Russian:

Anton pišet pis'MO. Anton-NOM writes letter-ACC 'Anton is writing a letter.'

- minimal non-contrastive focus (non-contrastive focus on the object), as in (a);
- intermediary non-contrastive focus (VP focus), as in (b);
- maximal non-contrastive focus (CP focus), as in (c)
- (a) Čto Anton pišet? Anton pišet [FOC][DP pis'MO].
 'What is Anton writing?' 'Anton is writing a letter.'
- (b) Čto Anton delaet? Anton [FOC][VP pišet pis'MO].
 'What is Anton doing?' 'Anton is writing a letter.'
- (c) V čem delo? [FOC][CP Anton pišet pis'MO].
 'What is the matter?' 'Anton is writing a letter.'

Note that even if we abolish the necessity that every syntactic focus feature undergoes checking, problems will remain. Russian has the option of rightward movement for constituents to receive minimal non-contrastive focus.¹¹ If, for example, some constituent moves to the right periphery, then a domain extension as required by (7a) is not possible:

¹¹ Rightward movement occurs if this is the most economic way of realizing non-contrastive focus. Cf. Junghanns (1996).

(13) [TOP][DP Ženščina]i [VP ti podarila tj jabloko] [FOC][DP MAL'čiku]j.
 woman-NOM gave apple-ACC boy-DAT
 'The woman gave the apple to a boy.'

Both ways of focus licensing meet with difficulties. Therefore, I suggest that the syntactic feature of non-contrastive focus is best treated as one that is freely assigned to the relevant constituent. This feature – similar to the contrastive-focus feature – is not subject to checking.

Sometimes it is necessary to re-order items in the Russian clause in order for non-contrastive focus to be realized in the canonical right-peripheral surface position. Either the constituent to be focused moves to the right – cf. ex. (13), or material not belonging in the focus domain undergoes leftward movement – cf. ex. (21b). However, this kind of movement is different from the one that results in checking configurations.

I conclude the discussion of the syntactic focus features by stating that there is no reason to assume a FocP in the Russian clause. It turns out that [FOC] and [FOC_c] are different from the morphosyntactic features.

4.2. Topic features

A TopP and/or a [TOP] feature have been suggested for the description of quite a number of languages. Müller/Sternefeld (1993) and Müller (1993) posit a TopP in the structure of the German clause. Wilder (1995) uses a strong [TOP] feature to explain overt XP-movement in German leading to V/2-clauses.¹² Rizzi (1995) assumes that a TopP, or even TopPs, can be found in the clause structure universally. This, then, would be the prerequisite for checking the [TOP] feature.

What do we need for the description of topics in Russian?

4.2.1. The internal topic

Example (14) contains a clause-internal topic. It gets its case and theta role from the verb.

(14) [TOP][DP Jabloko]i [AgrSP ženščina podarila MAL'čiku ti].
 apple-ACC woman-NOM gave boy-DAT
 'The woman gave the apple (= topic) to a boy.'

The Russian clause could contain a TopP between C^0 and IP (= Agr_SP) where the [TOP] feature would be checked.

¹² Notice that the term "topicalization" introduced for the description of XP-preposing in a language like German differs from what I call topicalization. In the former case, any constituent preceding the finite verb in a German V/2-clause as a result of what is called topicalization movement is considered a topic. It should be emphasized that this is a topic in a special, technical, sense only. In the theory of information structure, not all clause-initial constituents qualify as topics. See Zybatow & Junghanns (in prep.) for more details.

(15)



I will now argue why this is not the right approach to topic, as we have seen it isn't for focus either.

Russian realizes topics which cannot be made compatible with a TopP without recourse to artificial solutions – external topics and abstract topics.

4.2.2. The external topic

In Standard Russian, a nominative DP can appear in clause-initial position. This is an external topic if the DP and the rest of the clause are separated prosodically. Also, as a rule, the clause contains a resumptive pronoun. This coreferential element may be an argument or adjunct and has the corresponding morphosyntactic shape. The clause-initial DP has received an analysis as base-generated adjunct to CP.¹³





(Zemskaja (1973, 243))

The DP cannot check its [TOP] feature in a higher phrase because there is none. If checking is impossible for an external topic it should be unnecessary for an internal topic too. (17) illustrates the analysis for clause-internal topics that I claim is the correct one:

(17) Internal topic:



13 Cf. King (1995), Bailyn (1995), Junghanns (1997b), Zybatow & Junghanns (in prep.).

Unlike in (15), the structure does not contain a TopP. The constituent that is chosen as topic receives the syntactic [TOP] feature and must adjoin to Agr_SP in overt syntax.¹⁴ Cf. Zybatow & Junghanns (in prep.).

4.2.3. Abstract topics

In Russian, the finite verb usually stays in situ (see section 3). However, one can observe a particular kind of clauses with obvious verb movement. These are maximally focused clauses used in special narrative/descriptive contexts.

In order to explain overt raising by the verb, I make the assumption that, in these cases, it is the functional head T(ense) in the verb's extended projection that receives the [TOP] feature, which results in an abstract topic, cf. Zybatow & Junghanns (in prep.). The abstract topic induces a search for a starting point of the sentence. Potential candidates include the time and place of the situation described by the verb. Overt raising of the verb to the T(ense) head marks the abstract topic.

Abstract topics occur in thetic and in categorical sentences, examples in (18) and (19), respectively.

King (1995) claims that Russian has multiple internal topics:

(i) [Staruju lodku] [my] prodali.
 old boat we sold
 'We-TOP sold the old boat-TOP.'

(King (1995, 107))

King describes topicalization in Russian as recursive adjunction to IP. However, only the hierarchically highest constituent can have the discourse function of topic. Movement by other constituents may be analyzed as movement to background positions below the internal topic, possibly including further adjunction to IP (= AgrsP). This is just preposing, not topicalization in the sense assumed here.

¹⁴ The topic-comment structure (TCS) presupposed here allows only one internal topic. It serves as the starting point so that a clause having a TCS renders an aboutness relation. In this sense, a topic must be a referring expression or at least allow one to infer such an expression.

- (18) Abstract topic/thetic sentence/unergative verb
- (a) Zagremeli CEpi. started-rattling chains-NOM 'Chains started to rattle.'

•



- (19) Abstract topic/categorical sentence/transitive verb
- (a) Uvidela devočka VOLka. saw girl-NOM wolf-ACC '(And then,) the girl saw the/a wolf.'



It is unclear why the complex $[T_0 V^0 T^0]$ should undergo further movement to a topic head, which would have to be posited in the structure. For a correct interpretation of clauses that have a TCS, Russian requires either the appearance of a concrete topical XP in clause-initial position or overt verb raising to T marking an abstract topic, and nothing else.

The analysis of abstract topics also shows that we do not need a TopP.

5. The solution

If not all syntactic features can be checked and if the non-checkable features are of a particular kind, then the solution is obvious. We have to split up the set of syntactic features into subsets. This is what I propose.

The set of syntactic features comprises two subsets: (i) morphosyntactic features and (ii) information-structure features. The two subsets must be clearly distinguished.

Morphosyntactic features correspond to grammatical properties of the lexical items involved in the syntactic derivations. They conform to Checking Theory. A strong feature induces overt movement, a weak feature does not. Nevertheless, an item with a weak morphosyntactic feature may move overtly, for either of two reasons: (i) another strong feature of this item is checked in the same position that the weak feature is checked or a higher one; (ii) the necessity to fulfill a particular discourse function.

Information-structure features enter syntax by virtue of the communicative weight which the constituents are intended to carry. Therefore, these features are pragmatically determined. They are freely assigned to the corresponding constituents and need not be checked. Movement can, but need not, occur with information-structure features. An internal topic usually moves to the topic position - ex. (14). The external topic stays in situ - ex. (16). Focus can be realized in situ or after movement. See examples (9a-c), (12a-c), (13). Background material undergoes leftward movement so as not to interfere with canonical non-contrastive focusing at the right periphery of the clause (see example (21b)).

The assignment of information-structure features determines both the phonology (place and shape of accents) and interpretation (determining discourse functions) of the clause.

Ill-formed structures are the result of incorrect placement of information-structure features and/or the absence of the structural preconditions for the correct interpretation of topic and focus.

Notice that I do not posit an additional level of Information Structure in the model of grammar. The structuring of information uses configurations of overt syntax. Movement for purposes of feature checking and information-structure movement go hand in hand in shaping the surface form of a clause.

Checking movement and information-structure movement can override each other's requirements, which indicates that they are, in fact, distinct phenomena. Checking movement can blur the clause's information structure. Information-structure movement can force a weak morphosyntactic feature to be checked early. Both cases are illustrated below.

- (20) context: a conversation between two members of the university choir before a rehearsal A: Die Chorprobe findet in Hörsaal 17 statt.
 - 'The rehearsal will be in room 17.'
 - B: Wieso? Wir proben doch immer in Hörsaal 13. 'Why? We usually rehearse in room 13.'
 - A: Ja schon. Aber der ist heute belegt.

'Well, yes. But it is occupied today.'

- (a) Wir haben eine Mitteilung bekommen, daβ heute in Hörsaal 13 eine amerikanische Linguistin einen Vortrag hält.
 'We were told that today an American linguist would give a talk in room 13.'
- (b) Wir haben von der Raumplanung eine entsprechende Mitteilung bekommen. Heute hält in Hörsaal 13 eine amerikanische Linguistin einen Vortrag.
 'That's what we've been told by scheduling. Today an American linguist will give a talk in room 13.'



In the relevant part of the German dialogue in (20) speaker A can utter either a complex sentence containing a subordinate clause or a non-embedded sentence. The focus intended is the same in both cases, VP focus, although the finite verb is inside the focus domain only in the case of the V-final subordinate clause. If the speaker chooses to utter a main clause, the verb undergoes overt raising in order to satisfy the V/2-requirement. Thus, a purely grammatical requirement interferes with the clause's information structure. Some kind of reconstruction has to be assumed. Steube (1997) proposes to use indices that show whether a trace is focus-relevant or not. In the main-clause case, the trace of the finite verb would carry the index [+FOC], which lets the verb count for focusing just as if it had not moved.

In the Slavic languages, the direct object and the subject need not move overtly to check their morphosyntactic features. However, their discourse functions can force early checking. A direct object belonging to the background moves to its checking position overtly. The surface subject leaves its base-position and moves through its checking position if it is made the topic of the clause.

Russian/neutral word order

J

- (21) (a) Żenščina podarila mal'čiku JAbloko.
 woman-NOM gave boy-DAT apple-ACC
 'A woman gave a boy an apple.'
 - (b) context: Komu ženščina podarila jabloko? 'To whom did the woman give the apple?' [TOP][DP Ženščina]_i [AgrOP [DP jabloko]_j ... t_i podarila [FOC][DP MAL'čiku] t_j]. woman-NOM apple-ACC gave boy-DAT 'The woman gave the apple to a boy.'

Czech/unaccusative verb/neutral word order

- 22) (a) Včera přijeli HOsté. yesterday arrived guests-NOM 'Yesterday, guests arrived.'
 - (b) context: *Kdy přijeli hosté?* when arrived guests 'When did the guests arrive?'

 $[TOP][DP Hosté]_i [AgrSP t_i' ... [VP přijeli t_i] [FOC][VČEra]].$

guests-NOM arrived yesterday

'The guests arrived yesterday.'

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that morphosyntactic and information-structure features should be strictly distinguished. The former, but not the latter, are subject to the requirements of Checking Theory. This makes it possible to do without phrases such as TopP and FocP in a language like, e.g., Russian. It may well be that other languages – especially those that are said to be topic-prominent or have overt focus movement – do have a TopP and/or FocP without movement into these phrases necessarily constituting instances that fall under Checking Theory.

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