

# Fanselow (2003): Münchhausen-Style Head Movement and the Analysis of Verb Second

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the Münchhausen-style head movement proposed by Fanselow (2003, 2004), especially regarding its application to German verb second (V2) order. I will concentrate on two major issues: how the proposal can account for German V2 in particular and in what way it successfully avoids problems posed by previous approaches to head movement. Apart from summarising the key findings of Fanselow (2003, 2004) in these respects, the present article also seeks to evaluate the relevance of the proposal in the linguistic landscape 20 years later and how the insights can be transferred to other constructions as well.

## 1. Introduction

The core issues addressed by Fanselow (2003, 2004), to be dealt with in the present paper, are on the one hand a general theory of head movement and on the other hand the analysis of (German) verb second (V2).

Head movement is considered to be problematic for syntax, and it has been “accused of being incompatible with fundamental laws of movement theory” (Fanselow 2004: 9). For this reason, previous models trying to explain head movement were also reductionist, either banishing head movement to phonology (Chomsky 2000) or assuming head movement to be remnant movement and thus falling under the constraints of ordinary phrasal movement (e.g. Müller 2003). These models are, however, not without problems; for this reason, Fanselow (2003, 2004) proposed a new, restrictive and reductionist theory of head movement. The present paper aims to evaluate this model.

This article is structured as follows. Section 2 summarises the key insights of the proposal in comparison with the models put forward for head movement in the previous literature. Section 3 presents the analysis for verb movement in

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\*For their helpful comments and questions at the workshop, I owe many thanks to Ellen Brandner and Radek Šimík, as well as Andreas Pregla and Andreas Blümel for discussion. The greatest thanks, for everything, are of course due to Gisbert.

particular. In section 4, I will evaluate the key findings of the proposal and suggest some possible extensions of the model.

## 2. A Restrictive Theory of Head Movement

The problematic case that Fanselow (2003, 2004) deals with in particular is V-to-C (and V-to-I) movement: This movement operation creates the impression that the moved verb substitutes the original C (or I) head, which is problematic inasmuch as substitution does not exist in a restrictive theory of movement (Chomsky 1993, 1995). Consider the following example illustrating verb second in German:

- (1) er **hat**<sub>i</sub> ihn gesehen t<sub>i</sub>  
 he has him seen  
 'He saw him.' (Fanselow 2004: 10)

In this case, the finite verb *hat* is base-generated in a lower position (V) and apparently moves to the C position (the second position). The [Spec,CP] position is the first position hosting a constituent (in this case the subject *er*); I will return to this issue in section 3.

One possibility to overcome the substitution problem is to assume that the verb attaches via head adjunction to a null complementiser (van Riemsdijk 1998). This seems to be a viable option as head adjunction is also attested in V-V contexts, referred to as restructuring, which creates a syntactic constituent (a verbal complex, see Rizzi 1982, Wurmbrand 2017):

- (2) dass er [sie t<sub>i</sub> [v [v **zu küssen**]<sub>i</sub> wagt]]  
 that he her to kiss dares  
 'that he dares to kiss her' (Fanselow 2004: 10)

However, there are problems with head adjunction as well. On the one hand, this analysis violates the extension requirement (Chomsky 1995) as the moved element attaches to the daughter of the root, not the root itself. On the other hand, it violates Chain Uniformity (Chomsky 1995) as the moved element does not project further (i.e. it behaves like a phrase).

Both problems can be avoided by the remnant phrasal movement approach (e.g. Koopman and Szabolcsi 2000, Mahajan 2001, Fanselow and Ćavar 2001, Müller 2003). There is indeed evidence for remnant phrasal movement in other contexts:

- (3) a. [gestern hier dem Kind den Stern **gezeigt**] hatte sie  
 yesterday here the child the star shown had she  
 ‘she had shown the the star to the child here yesterday’  
 (Fanselow 2004: 12)
- b. [hier dem Kind den Stern **gezeigt**] hatte sie gestern  
 here the child the star shown had she yesterday  
 ‘she had shown the the star to the child here yesterday’  
 (Fanselow 2004: 12)
- c. [dem Kind den Stern **gezeigt**] hatte sie gestern hier  
 the child the star shown had she yesterday here  
 ‘she had shown the the star to the child here yesterday’  
 (Fanselow 2004: 12)
- d. [den Stern **gezeigt**] hatte sie gestern hier dem Kind  
 the star shown had she yesterday here the child  
 ‘she had shown the the star to the child here yesterday’  
 (Fanselow 2004: 12)
- e. [**gezeigt**] hatte sie gestern hier dem Kind den Stern  
 shown had she yesterday here the child the star  
 ‘she had shown the the star to the child here yesterday’  
 (Fanselow 2004: 12)

In (3-a), the entire VP moves to the first position, namely [Spec,CP], which can host only a single constituent in German. In (3-b), the temporal adjunct *gestern* undergoes scrambling and is moved out of the VP prior to VP-fronting, so that not the entire VP but only its remnant is fronted. In (3-c), the locative adjunct *hier* is also evacuated from the VP, and in (3-d) the indirect object DP *dem Kind* is likewise moved out prior to VP-fronting. Finally, in (3-e) also the direct object DP *den Stern* is moved out, leading to the VP-remnant consisting only of the verb *gezeigt*: This creates the impression that the verb was fronted while in fact it is a VP.

It seems to be a viable option to extend this analysis to V2 contexts as well. However, there is no evidence for a phrasal counterpart of V2 and it is worth highlighting that scrambling is not always an option either. Consider the following examples:

- (4) a. dass der Zug pünktlich **ankommt**  
 that the train punctually at.comes  
 ‘that the train arrives on time’ (Fanselow 2004: 21)

- b. der Zug **kommt** pünktlich an  
 the train comes punctually at  
 ‘the train arrives on time’ (Fanselow 2004: 21)
- c. \*der Zug **ankommt** pünktlich  
 the train at.comes punctually  
 ‘the train arrives on time’

If (4-b) were the result of VP-fronting, the string in (4-c) should be grammatical as well, as the particle and the verb form a constituent underlyingly, as evidenced by (4-a). Apart from the fact that this prediction is evidently not borne out, there is also no independent motivation for scrambling the particle *an*.

In order to avoid these problems, Fanselow (2003, 2004) proposes a novel approach to projection that does not require additional assumptions regarding the movement operation itself. The core of the proposal is as follows:

- (5) After the attraction of  $\alpha$  to the root of  $\Sigma$ , either  $\alpha$  or  $\Sigma$  may project.  
 (Fanselow 2004: 23)

This leads to two constellations (Fanselow 2004: 24):

- (6) a. [ $\Sigma$   $\alpha$   $\Sigma$ ]  
 b. [ $\alpha$   $\alpha$   $\Sigma$ ]

The configuration in (6-a) corresponds to what is traditionally known as phrasal movement and (6-b) corresponds to what is referred to as head movement. As can be seen, the only difference lies in the labelling of the projection resulting from merge.

The analysis raises a question regarding feature checking, though. The general assumption is that strong uninterpretable features in an XP must be checked before the XP merges with another element that projects (YP). This means that (6-b) constitutes a problem as head movement is apparently unmotivated. In order to overcome this problem, Fanselow (2003, 2004) proposes that the moved head possesses the checking feature and the feature to be checked at the same time: This is referred to as Münchhausen-style movement.<sup>1</sup> The relevant configuration can be represented as follows (Fanselow 2004: 26):

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<sup>1</sup>The name refers to the legendary character of Baron Münchhausen, who once saved himself from drowning in a damp by pulling his own hair.

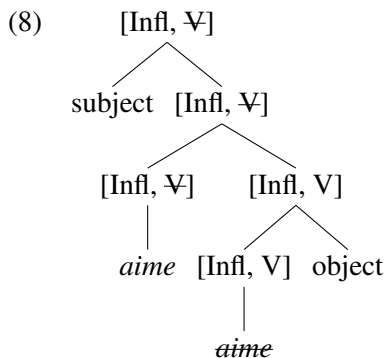
(7) [XP ... X ... ] → X [XP ... t<sub>X</sub> ... ]

Given this, it follows that movement is local and limited to certain contexts only: In this way, the analysis can avoid overgeneralisation.

### 3. Verb Second Movement

In the analysis of Fanselow (2003, 2004), verb movement is primarily related to the underlying features specified in the lexicon. Which features are lexically encoded for a verb can differ across languages.

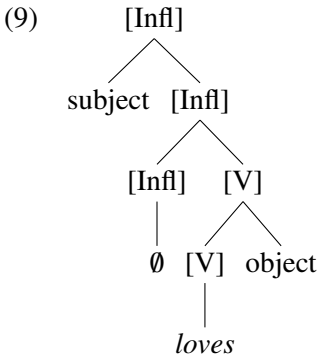
The French verb *aime* is, for instance, categorised as V and Infl, so that Münchhausen-style movement from V to Infl takes place (Fanselow 2004: 28):



The analysis presupposes that verbs like *aime* enter fully specified in the derivation and are not composed in the syntax.<sup>2</sup> As such, the verb contains both the categorial feature [V] and the inflectional feature [Infl]. The “V feature of the Infl aspect of *aime*” needs to be checked off and this can take place only by the upward movement (re-merge) of *aime*, as there is no other element with a [V] feature in the derivation (Fanselow 2004: 28).

By contrast, the English verb *loves* is categorised only as V, so that no movement from V to Infl takes place (Fanselow 2004: 29):

<sup>2</sup>This assumption makes use of the idea of the numeration, going back to Chomsky (1995), and its later version called the lexical array, going back to Chomsky (1998). The idea of fully specified lexical units is not tied to these notions, though, and can be found in minimalist approaches more generally, including the paradigms of Minimalist Morphology (see Wunderlich and Fabri 1995, Wunderlich 1996).



V2 movement in German (and Dutch) requires an additional [fin] feature. The advantage of this kind of analysis for V2 is that verb fronting and inserting a complementiser are in complementary distribution only in terms of checking off [fin] but not on a pre-theoretical assumption of competing for the same Comp “position”, as there is no such predefined position. The two configurations are illustrated below:

- (10) a. **dass** der Mann den Wagen sah  
 that the man the car saw  
 ‘that the man saw the car’ (Fanselow 2004: 30)
- b. der Mann **sah** den Wagen  
 the man saw the car  
 ‘the man saw the car’ (Fanselow 2004: 30)

At this point, one might wonder why verb movement is not attested in cases like (10-a) since there is, in principle, nothing that speaks against verb movement in syntax. The assumption here is that inserting a complementiser is more economical than movement (Fanselow 2004: 32). This can effectively block movement but note that this is not necessarily so: in certain languages, embedded V2 patterns are attested (cf. Vikner 1995), as is the case in Yiddish:

- (11) Jonas bedoyert **az** dos bukh **hob** ikh geleyent  
 Jonas regrets that this book have I read  
 ‘Jonas regrets that I have read this book’ (Fanselow 2004: 32)

A further question regarding V2 concerns the first position. By definition, the [Spec,CP] position is an operator position: This means that hosting *wh*-

elements and foci here can be accounted for in a straightforward way. However, German and Dutch also show fronting of topics and sentential adverbs:

- (12) a. **Vielleicht** hat der Schauspieler seinen Text vergessen.  
perhaps has the actor his text forgotten  
'Perhaps, the actor has forgotten his text.' (Fanselow 2004: 36)
- b. **Waarschijnlijk** is hij ziek.  
probably is he sick  
'He is probably sick.' (Fanselow 2004: 37)

The question arises whether movement to the first position is directly linked to verb movement. The answer is negative: Scrambling is possible also in non-V2 contexts:

- (13) a. den Fritz mag niemand  
the.ACC Fritz likes nobody  
'nobody likes Fritz' (Fanselow 2004: 40)
- b. dass den Fritz niemand mag  
that the.ACC Fritz nobody likes  
'that nobody likes Fritz' (Fanselow 2004: 40)

In these cases, the object (*den Fritz*) precedes the subject, changing the base-generated order: The underlying assumption is that this is possible because the object scrambles over the subject already in the VP-domain, so that the feature triggering the movement of the highest XP in this case finds the object. However, scrambling is attested not only in the V2 main clause but also in the embedded *dass*-clause. In other words, scrambling is independent of verb movement.

This assumption of course leaves the 'second' property unaccounted for, so that V1 and V3 could also arise in an unconstrained way. Fanselow (2003, 2004) therefore proposes that features to be checked come in structured bundles: In the particular case, [fin] is higher than and checked prior to the feature triggering the movement of the first constituent (identified as [edge] by Fanselow and Lenertová 2011).

#### 4. Outlook

Apart from providing insights on the nature of V2, a key contribution of Fanselow (2003, 2004) is that this analysis offers a novel view on feature

checking: Rather than stipulating empty [u-F] and/or [i-F] elements, checking off a feature involves the generation of structure. This is schematically represented below:

- (14) a. [fin]  
 b. [fin] ... [fin]

The configuration in (14-a) contains an unchecked [fin] feature; by moving the element equipped with this feature, [fin] is doubled in the structure and checks off itself. In other words, what is needed for checking off a feature is a second instance of the same feature in a local configuration: Whether this is achieved by external or internal merge is secondary. This also means that Münchhausen-style movement is compatible with the extension requirement; further, this analysis assumes that features are essential in generating syntactic structure.

Given this, the question arises whether and to what extent these insights can lead to further extensions of the movement operation proposed by Fanselow (2003, 2004). Regarding verb movement specifically, the proposal eliminates the necessity of a null C head so that encoding finiteness does not necessarily involve a CP proper. This can also be seen in terms of clause typing proper: In embedded interrogatives, for instance, the *wh*-element equipped with a [wh] feature may merge directly with the TP so that no C head proper is present in the structure. For reasons of space, this issue cannot be discussed here in detail but the reader is kindly referred to Bacskai-Atkari (2020, 2023), building on the insights of Bayer and Brandner (2008).

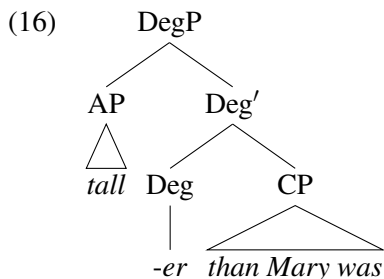
What is somewhat unexpected at first sight is that movement within the degree expression also shows Münchhausen-style movement (Bacskai-Atkari 2019, 2023). Degree expressions are illustrated below:

- (15) a. taller (than Mary was)  
 b. more intelligent (than Mary was)  
 c. as intelligent (as Mary was)

The basic analysis of degree expressions for morphological comparatives like (15-a) is illustrated as follows (Bacskai-Atkari 2014, 2018, following Lechner 1999, 2004):<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Contrary to the assumptions of Corver (1997: 120–123), for instance, the AP is not in a complement position. Among other reasons, this is because the degree head imposes selectional

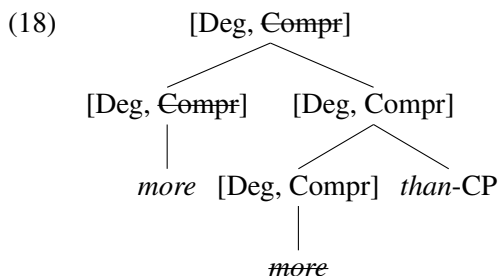




This structure is, however, not straightforward for cases like (15-b) and (15-c): The order of the degree element and the adjective is exactly the opposite. This can be solved by assuming that elements like *more* move up to a higher projection (Bacskai-Atkari 2014, 2018, following Lechner 1999):

(17) [intelligent more] → [more<sub>i</sub> [intelligent t<sub>i</sub>]]

While this can undoubtedly account for the right word order, this movement operation seems to be unmotivated independently of word order. Assuming the Münchhausen-style movement of degree elements, however, solves the problem (Bacskai-Atkari 2019, 2023):



Under this analysis, elements are lexically specified either as both [Deg] and [Compr], leading to degree comparison, or just as [Compr], leading to non-degree comparison: This is reminiscent of the differences in verb features between French and English. This extension of the Münchhausen-style movement proposed by Fanselow (2003, 2004) shows that the implications go well beyond the particular configuration of (German) V2.

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restrictions on the complement CP so that the *than*-CP, expressing the standard value of comparison, is an argument of the degree head. Analyses like that of Corver (1997) do not account for these restrictions.

## 5. Conclusion

We can conclude that Fanselow (2003, 2004) provides an attractive solution to the head movement problem, avoiding the pitfalls of previous analyses: Under this view, head movement is not substitution and it is not phrasal movement either. Münchhausen-style movement is not unconstrained as it is restricted to certain contexts (there being a strict locality condition on it): However, it is certainly not only found in V2 patterns. In addition, it is worth highlighting that Münchhausen-style movement offers a true structure building mechanism that provides insights on basic mechanisms of core syntax – which are, 20 years later, still relevant for generative grammar.

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