A different perspective on embedded V2: Unifying embedded root phenomena

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The distribution and effects of embedded V2 (EV2) have been long debated. The analysis attracting the most support in recent times in that EV2 is conditioned by and marks assertion; it only appears under matrix predicates compatible with assertion, hence is blocked under negation and factives. However, as Wiklund (2010) notes, there are reasons to doubt that this is the whole story; some speakers allow EV2 under predicates which are not typically assertive such as semifactives and negation and EV2 is not essential in order to include other root phenomena such as speech act adverbs in the embedded clause.

This paper supports Wiklund (2010) by looking to unify Germanic EV2 with a parallel embedded root phenomenon in English: embedded questions with subject-auxiliary inversion (EIQs) such as (1).

(1) I asked him please would he cook dinner for me (North West English, UK)

EIQs are only available under interrogative predicates, including negated, modalised and questioned factive predicates, but are parallel to EV2 in being blocked under simple factives such as know and find out. EIQs are clearly not asserted but also like EV2 as they are islands for extraction, cannot appear in sentence-initial position, and license other root phenomena such as speech act adverbs. They also both disambiguate between competing perspectives: unlike unmarked embedded clauses, they are not ambiguous between reporting speaker and original speaker orientation. This will be argued to be the key effect of embedded verb movement.

Interestingly, the perspective marked by embedded verb movement differs from language to language; a fact noted with respect to embedded imperatives by Kaufmann (2015). In English EIQs, subject-auxiliary inversion gives rise to a quasi-quotational environment in which the perspective of the original speaker (the matrix subject) takes precedence. The embedded clause is clearly subordinate to the matrix clause as shown by indexicality and sequence of tense, as well as the (occasional) occurrence of the complementiser under the right syntactic conditions. However, expressive elements, speech act adverbs and discourse particles orient to the matrix arguments, i.e. the original speakers. The original discourse is also privileged in terms of the availability of de re and de dicto readings (only the latter are available, even if the reporting speaker has de re knowledge), and the fact that the matrix subject is understood to have a close relationship with or interest in the arguments of the embedded clause. The original discourse is also privileged in this way in the related Romance phenomenon of recomplementation (the presence of multiple complementisers). These facts
also hold in English embedded imperatives, whose subject must be the original addressee. Finally, the use of an EIQ presupposes that the EIQ was a question-under-discussion in the original discourse context, whereas use of an indirect question does not:

(2) a. Everyone wanted to know was Jack coming to the party = Jack’s coming was discussed  
    b. Everyone wanted to know if Jack was coming to the party = does not entail a discussion

In EV2, by contrast, movement of the verb in the embedded clause promotes the perspective of the reporting speaker over that of the original speaker; Wiklund (2010) claims that expressive elements in Swedish EV2 clauses orient solely to the reporting speaker, while the same elements in non-V2 clauses can orient either to the reporting or original speaker. This fits Kaufmann’s (2015) claims that the subject of embedded imperatives in German must be the addressee in the reporting context.

It is proposed that these effects are brought about by the differences in the syntax between clauses with verb movement/markered root phenomena and non-marked clauses. It is claimed that marked clauses contain extra structure, namely a nominalising Illocutionary Act (IA) head (cf. Potts 2002, Lahiri 2002) and a variable denoting the Centre of Evaluation (CoE) – the coordinates of the relevant discourse and the relationship between the relevant discourse participants. Evidence for the nominalising head includes the islandhood of the IAP and the fact that IAP clauses can directly modify overt content nouns. There is also cross-linguistic evidence (from Mupun, Frajzyngier 1985) for the overt spell-out of the CoE. In English, the CoE encodes the original discourse; in Swedish and German, the reporting discourse. This structure renders the EIQ/EV2 clause specific, picking it out in the relevant discourse and leading to the interpretations outlined above.

(3) I asked him [IAP [C or E] [IA n] [ForceP [Force would] [IP [DP he] [I ] [VP [v cook] [DP dinner]]]]].

This analysis contributes to the wider discussion of the syntactisation of perspectives and the embeddability of perspectives in language. It builds on Cook’s (2014) work on Plains Cree to show that overt marking of perspective can be embedded, helping work towards a better understanding of how languages and language families vary in this respect, and some of the micro-differences involved.