



# Topic Particles, Agreement and Movement

**Prof. Anders HOLMBERG**  
Newcastle University

**Date:** September 29, 2020 (Tuesday)  
**Time:** 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)  
**\*Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM**



**Registration Deadline:**  
12:00nn of 27 September 2020 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time, UTC +8  
The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 28 September 2020



**Prior registration is required**

## Abstract

Where do discourse-functions like Topic and Focus belong in the architecture of the grammar? One position is that they are syntactic features along with Tense, Mood, Number, etc. They would define abstract Topic and Focus heads in the left periphery that trigger movement of constituents. The alternative position is that Topic and Focus are the result of interpretation by a postsyntactic module, with no causal effect on syntactic operations. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007), representing the former view, have argued that there are three types of topics in a particular order in the left periphery of Italian and various other languages, formally described as specifiers of abstract heads. The talk is about a Saudi-Arabian dialect of Arabic which has three topic heads, exactly as predicted by F&H, which are not abstract but realized as particles. Some of these C-particles mark topics by movement to the C-domain but other particles mark topics by  $\varphi$ -feature agreement: the particle agrees with a DP within TP. We will show how agreement and movement interact among the particles and with subject and object agreement, subject to syntactic locality conditions. They provide particularly striking evidence that Topic and Focus must be syntactic features, with theoretical consequences that will be discussed.

## Speaker

Anders Holmberg's main research interests are syntactic theory and comparative syntax. He has particular expertise in Swedish and Finnish syntax (born and raised in Finland he is bilingual in these two languages), but has worked on a range of other languages, too, on a variety of topics, often to do with sentential word order and the interplay of morphology and syntax. Since his PhD in Stockholm 1986 he has held positions in Sweden, Norway, and the UK. Since 2004 he has been Professor of Theoretical Linguistics at Newcastle University, UK. In this period he has collaborated closely on various projects with colleagues in Cambridge, which has resulted in a number of co-authored works on syntactic cross-linguistic variation in a minimalist framework, including two books. Another recent work of his is a book on the syntax of answers to yes-no questions in a cross-linguistic, comparative perspective. Present projects include work on C-particles in Arabic, reduplication in Xining Chinese, and inclusive coordination in Fenno-Swedish, all in collaboration with present and former students of his.

**All are Welcome**