

# The features [ $\pm$ Strong]

## Linguistics 322

### Intermediate Syntax

The feature [-Strong] means that a form may lower in the syntax. Only affixes and certain operator-words such as not are marked as [-Strong]. [-Strong] is a default feature. It is normally not listed in the lexical entry of a form; it is automatically entered unless the form is marked as [+Strong]. Lowering is the least effort. The Least Effort principle, informally stated:

- (1) Principle: Least Effort  
Don't do if you don't have to.

The reason why T lowers is because it needs a host. Why not insert a dummy verb right away? Because the insertion of a dummy form belongs to Last Resort, informally stated:

- (2) Principle: Last Resort  
Do it if nothing else works.

Lowering belongs to the overall principle called 'Copy Feature' or 'Insert Feature' (formerly 'Move Alpha'):

- (3) Principle: Feature Copying  
Copy the value of the Feature if properly motivated.

A feature is copied because

- a. it is motivated by the need for a host: it is a least effort process.
- b. The blank specification of a feature must be filled.

All other words, including all lexical items are marked [+Strong]. This means that a feature can be extracted from the form.

Do-Insertion (also called Do-Support) is in example of Last Resort. For example, T requires a host. It should lower since lowering not a last resort. If it can't lower for whatever reason, then Do-Insertion applies since it is a last resort.

The feature [+Strong] is a property of operators and lexical items. It is assigned to links of a chain, and refers to which end of a chain is to be spelled out. In the vast majority of cases, one end of a chain can be marked [+Strong], though in exceptional cases both ends may be. We will cover only the default cases here .

One example of a strong operator in English is [+Q]. However, it is strong in certain contexts. It appears that the default position for strength in a link is the head of the chain:

(4) Default Rule: The head of a link is [+Strong]; the tail is [-Strong].

If a form is marked as [+Strong], it assigns the feature to the tail of the link it dominates. An example is given below. This determines that the feature is spelled out at the tail of the link rather than at the head of the link, the default position. [+Strong] is a feature

(5) [+Q] in English is [+Strong].

See question operator for more details. Basically, the feature is assigned to the tail of the link established in the head government of Prom. In this position in English, only dummy verbs may be assigned; they are spelled out before Prom:

- (6) a. John has seen an eagle.  
b. Has John seen an eagle?

Has is marked as [+Strong] from the feature inherent in [+Q] in matrix sentences except for WH-sentences with a WH-subject. In some languages the question operator may be always [-Strong], or it may be either [ $\pm$ Strong], depending on another operator which determines the strength of the operator. Another variable is the main verb. In English the main verb is marked [+Strong], which means that the verb is always spelled out in the head of VP position. In many other languages, the main verb is not marked ( i.e. [-Strong]). If the question operator is marked [+Strong], the main verb moves to the M position adjoining to [+Q]. German is such a language:

(7a) Johann sieht einen Hund. 'Johann (John) sees a dog.'

(7b) Sieht Johann einen Hund. 'Does Johann see a dog?'

In German, the main verb is copied to [+Q], since the main verb is weak, and [+Q] needs T as a host. In English, the main verb is [+Strong], which means the verb must be spelled out in V.

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