This talk will argue for a relationally determined asymmetry between elements in lexical vs. functional projections that predicts systematic asymmetries between OV and VO languages with regard to which phrases are transparent for sub-extraction. When the head of a phrase is in a linear relation with respect to its complements and adjuncts in syntax proper via symmetric Merge (Janke & Neeleman, 2012) or directional selection (Haider, 2010; Sheehan, 2013), the lexical domain of the VP is preverbal in OV languages (1a), while it is postverbal in VO languages (1b).

(1)  
\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{a. } & \ldots \underbrace{XP\ YP\ ZP\ V}\ & \text{b. } \underbrace{XP\ V\ YP\ ZP\ \ldots}\ \\
\text{VP domain} & \text{VP domain}
\end{array}
\]

Given that functional Specs are not transparent for extraction, this theory predicts that preverbal phrases in VO languages (1b) should be islands since they are in functional Specs (Haider, 2010: 79ff.), whereas preverbal phrases in OV languages (1a) can potentially be transparent for sub-extraction. This account would also explain why some OV languages do not exhibit subject islands (cf. Sheehan, 2013) and why postverbal subjects in Romance languages are transparent (Bianci & Chesi, 2014).

Finnish and Estonian are ideal for testing the predictions of the theory presented above because Finnish is a VO language that allows for OV order, and Estonian is an OV language that allows for VO order. The data from these languages are as predicted: preverbal phrases in Finnish are not transparent, while both preverbal and postverbal phrases are transparent for sub-extraction in Estonian. The result in Estonian can be understood as the result of optional verb raising that strands the originally preverbal elements in a postverbal, VP-internal position.

References: