

Verb-Third effects in Early Old High German

In Present-Day Standard German (PDG), matrix declarative clauses generally exhibit a clause-type marking V2 arrangement resulting from V-to-Fin movement. In some cases, however, the preverbal left-peripheral area may host more than one element, giving rise to so-called multiply-filled prefield (or ‘Verb-Third’ word order; cf., among many others, Müller 2005, Speyer 2008, Bildhauer 2011, Winkler 2014), as in (1):

(1) [Alle Träume] [gleichzeitig] lassen sich nur selten verwirklichen. (Müller 2005: 3)
 all dream.NOM.PL at-once let REFL only rarely realize
 ‘Only rarely can you realize all your dreams at once.’

This phenomenon, which subsumes a wide range of sub-phenomena (e.g. different types of left dislocations with resuming pronouns and adverbs occurring in the pre-finite area of the CP, post-initial topic particles associated with a fronted XP, multiple full XPs with framing function), shows historical continuity in that it has been attested since Old High German, as illustrated in (2), although the set of information-structural conditions licensing it has undergone diachronic alteration (for instance, the pre-finite sequence personal pronoun > temporal adverb in (2a) is not licit in PDG):

(2) a. Early Old High German (9th c.)
 [sie] [thô] brâhtun Imo phending (T. 207, 15-16)
 they then brought him silver-coin
 ‘Then they brought him a silver coin.’

b. Middle High German (12th c.)
 [Indemo gelôb] [so] pigí ih. dem allemahtigen got. unt difene
 in-the.DAT.M.SG faith so confess I the.DAT.SG almighty God and this.DAT.PL
 heiligen. unt dir priest aller mîner funton (GB II 143a, 22-23)
 holy.DAT.PL and you.DAT.SG priest all.GEN.PL my.GEN.PL sin.GEN.PL
 ‘In faith, I confess my sins to almighty God, to the Holy and to you, priest.’

c. Early New High German (1545)
 [Jm 6886. Jar] [der Großfu^{er}st DEMETRI] hat den ma^echtigen Tatarischen
 in-the 6886th year the grand-duke Demetri has the mighty Tatarian
 Khu^{er}nig MAMAI geschlagen (Herb. B1, 11-12, in Speyer 2008: 482-483)
 king Mamai overcome
 ‘In the 6886th year the Grand Duke Demetri overcame the mighty Tartarian king Mamai.’

Given that in the surface syntax of Historical German, especially as it is attested in prose texts at least up to Early New High German, the structural position of the finite verb (viz. whether it has moved to Fin° or has remained in some low head position, say in T°) is not necessarily ‘visible’ without any further assumptions, it is not always possible to discern a genuine multiply-filled prefield. Moreover, there does not seem to be any compelling evidence for an intermediate (i.e., for a middle-field) position optionally hosting the finite verb in matrix structures. As a consequence, many clauses in which the finite verb formally occupies a non-sentence-final position (cf. (3)) are ambiguous between a verb-movement and a verb-last configuration, the latter implying extraposition of one or more constituents:

(3) Ther heilant nalles ofano gieng mit then iudeon (T. 234, 24-25) (9th c.)
 The Savior however-not openly went with the.DAT.PL Jew.DAT.PL
 ‘The Savior, however, did not openly go with the Jews.’

In order to get a realistic picture of the distribution and licensing conditions of the phenomenon at stake in older stages of German, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the data by means of diagnostic tests for verb movement and only consider those cases in which the verb is unambiguously located in Fin° and the preverbal area hosts multiple (head or non-head) elements (cf. the examples in (2)). In recent years, Axel(-Tober) (2005, 2007) has proposed a panel of syntactic probes to disambiguate clauses with genuine V-to-C movement in OHG, e.g. on the basis of the fact that: (i) some elements ('light' personal pronouns, clause adverbs, discourse particles, etc.) may not be extraposed; their linearization after the finite verb thus unambiguously indicates movement of the verb to C° ; (ii) null subjects are licensed by verb movement, V_{fin} c-commanding a *pro* appearing in some middle-field position; (iii) if a separable verb particle occurs in clause-last position and the corresponding finite verb surfaces in some higher site, then the latter must have moved to the CP. An additional criterion playing a fundamental role in the categorization of diagnostic data is, in the case of translations, the deviance of the OHG from the original (generally, Latin) clause structure: if a verb-final Latin clause is translated into a verb-late construction of OHG, that clause will most plausibly reproduce a system-internal pattern of the translator's native grammar.

In this presentation, I will mainly address multiply-filled prefields in the Early Old High German (EOHG, approximately 8th-9th century) prose texts, thereby providing novel quantitative data on the incidence of this phenomenon, on a typology of possible multiple fronting structures, as well as on the conditions their licensing is subject to as opposed to PDG. In particular, it will be shown that: (a) 'diagnostic' Verb-Third word orders (i.e. multiply-filled prefield arrangements in which the finite verb can be ascertained to have moved to Fin° and the syntax of the EOHG clause is independent of the Latin source) are attested in all prose texts and amount to approximately 2-5% of all main clauses, depending on the specific text/dialect; (b) if we exclusively consider those structures that differ from Latin and are, thus, to be ascribed to the translator's native grammar, the range of possible prefield combinations (viz. of grammatical sequences linearized in matrix clauses with diagnostic verb movement) is rather limited, and some of these orders are still part of the syntactic inventory of PDG; other configurations (e.g. the prefield occurrence of sequences of the type *Dem Saft eine kräftigere Farbe geben Blutorangen*, lit. 'the juice.DAT a stronger color.ACC give blood-oranges.NOM' cf. Winkler 2017: 154), instead, are not attested in OHG and must have emerged at a later stage; (c) the data can be modeled by means of Rizzi's (1997) information-structurally-oriented Split-CP system: the main difference between the left periphery in EOHG and in PDG consists in the availability of multiple positions hosting frame-setting topics arguably base-generated in the CP area in the older stage, which is considerably reduced in the subsequent periods of the language.

References

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