Information structure and syntactic variation in root declaratives in Middle Low German

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The paper deals with structural variation in root declarative clauses in Middle Low German (MLG) which is the predecessor of the modern Low German dialects, attested in much written records from the period between 13th and 16th century. Completely disregarded in previous research on variation and change in Germanic, this corpus is special among all Germanic dialects of the period in that it displays all canonical properties of asymmetric OV/V2 but at the same time allows for considerable variation in root declaratives. E.g., we find substantial evidence for matrix clauses that violate the V2-condition because the pre-finite domain hosts more than one XP. Apart from a high number of structurally ambiguous cases in which no safe evidence for determining the position of the verb is available, we are able to discern two major types of violations of V2 in MLG, which are derived by applying well-known diagnostics like the position the verb relative to verbal particles, pronouns and light adverbs. First, there are clauses in which the verb remains in situ, i.e. no verb fronting takes place. This means that leftward movement of the verb as a constitutive feature of the V2-rule fails to apply in such cases. Second, we find root clauses in which the verb is moved across typical VP-internal elements, i.e. is moved to the left periphery of the clause, but is preceded by more than one XP. This case will be referred to as multiple XP-fronting. The question arises whether the two classes of V2-violations can be subsumed under a common function related to information structure. The answer to this question is negative, i.e. both relate to information structure and discourse but in a different way. While we can identify some context conditions triggering verb-final declratives, multiple XP-fronting seems to be a phenomenon of a different kind. The analysis of the information structural features of XPs in complex left peripheries shows some very robust ordering principles of categories which support an analysis in line with the Split-CP model proposed by Rizzi (1997).