

Anderson's Revenge: V2 and Adjacency

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This paper revisits, and expands, Anderson's (1993, 2005) analysis of Verb-Second (V2) in Germanic, both from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. Accordingly, V2 was originally conditioned by a phonological constraint which was "syntacticized" in the individual Germanic language branches. The evidence for this analysis includes a number of problematic facts from old and modern Germanic languages, including Gothic, Old English, Modern Icelandic and dialectal Norwegian, where the finite verb is often, but not always, adjacent to the finite verb. The take-home message is twofold: (1) the traditional generative account equating V2 exclusively with V-to-C is a misnomer, and (2) the canonical instances of "independent" verb movement to T (or alternatively to a position in an extended CP structure) in languages like Icelandic actually involve V2. The equation of V2 with V-to-C is insufficient because there are cases in various Germanic languages (including (non-standard) varieties of Modern Icelandic) where the finite verb is demonstrably in C but certain elements can occur between the initial phrase and the verb. Conversely, there are also cases (for example, in Old Norse and Modern "standard" Icelandic) where the verb does not appear to be in C, but in a structurally lower position (T); nevertheless, V2 is strictly observed. On Anderson's analysis of V2, defended here with new arguments, the phenomenon is an adjacency constraint at the syntax-phonology interface which requires the finite verb in the highest functional head position (C or T) to occur immediately after a clause-initial phrase, disallowing any intermediate elements.

It appears that in the earliest Germanic (Gothic, early Northwest Germanic) a conspiracy of various "operators" triggered verb movement to C in certain clause types only, e.g. in questions, with a fronted negation and in focus constructions (see Kiparsky 1994, Eythórsson 1995). However, V2 in the strict sense (as defined here) was independent of this operator movement, involving instead an adjacency effect due to a phonological constraint in accordance with Wackernagel's Law (Anderson 1993, 2005, Dewey 2006). The interaction of syntax and phonology in V2 becomes particularly clear when this phenomenon is contrasted with different types of V1, which are demonstrably conditioned by syntax and information structure (e.g., Hinterhölzl and Petrova 2010). It may be that V2-clauses in Modern German have in fact been entirely syntacticized, on the model of V1, as it were (see Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007).

As stated above, V2 is generally equated with V-to-C in the generative literature. What tends to be downplayed in this respect is the fact that V2 involves a strict adjacency effect with the preceding element, which is not otherwise observed in the placement of finite verbs in functional head positions. It is also commonly assumed that Old Norse, Modern Icelandic and (a variety of) Faroese and have "independent V-to-T" movement (see Angantýsson 2011 for a comprehensive discussion). There is an ongoing debate about whether this movement to T is related to rich agreement or not (the Rich Agreement Hypothesis, existing both in a strong and a weak form) (e.g., Koenen and Zeijlstra 2014). On an alternative approach, the verb moves to a position within the CP system, not within TP (e.g., Wiklund et al. 2007). Regardless of the actual position to which the verb is said to move, what is usually lost sight of in these analyses is that, just as in main clauses, the verb also occurs in second position in embedded clauses in (standard) Icelandic, exhibiting strict adjacency with the preceding phrase. In other words, there is a generalized V2

in Icelandic. A disturbing factor which obscures the picture relates to the fact that a subset of V3/verb-late orders seem to involve TP-internal movement, occurring for example in Old Germanic (Eythórsson 1995), Northern Norwegian varieties (Bentzen 2010) and varieties of Icelandic (Angantýsson 2010). The motivation for this TP-internal movement, which is independent of V2, is largely unknown.

In view of the historical and comparative facts mentioned above, I propose that V2 is simply just that: a constraint at the syntax-phonology interface which requires the finite verb in the highest functional head position (either C or T depending on clause type) to be adjacent to the clause-initial phrase. I further argue that this constraint, having emerged first in main clauses in North-West Germanic (Old Norse and Old Continental West Germanic), was extended to embedded clauses in North Germanic (and West Germanic Yiddish), resulting in “symmetric V2”. Since the V2 constraint is “violable”, it can of course be lost eventually, as evidenced by the loss of V2 in *wh*-questions in various Norwegian dialects (e.g., Vangsnes 2004). Finally, I hypothesize that the loss of V2 in embedded clauses in Mainland Scandinavian, Faroese and in Icelandic V3 clauses, is due to a “degree 0” learnability factor (Lightfoot 1989), i.e. the acquirer’s failure to apply the V2 constraint in embedded contexts.

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