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Verb movement: Its nature, triggers, and effects
University of Amsterdam, December 2010

Differentiating verb placements – the case of Scandinavian

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In our (mostly) empirically oriented talk, we will present an overview of recent facts relating to verb placement in Scandinavian, which may be helpful to consider in the theorizing on verb movement. In particular, we will revisit verb placement in Icelandic and the alleged semantic effects of V2 verb movement. Icelandic is important because it has been used in comparison with Mainland Scandinavian (MSc) to hypothesize a relation between rich verbal morphology and verb movement to the middle field of the clause; a movement that is proposed to be devoid of semantics in contrast to the verb movement seen in V2 clauses, which has been argued to yield semantic effects in terms of illocutionary force (and related notions).

We wish to draw attention to two properties that reduce evidence in favor of V-to-I movement in Icelandic quite drastically: (i) The extended verb second property (xV2) and (ii) subject-verb adjacency in the screening environments. If we recognize that Icelandic is more liberal than MSc with regard to fronting of non-subjects in embedded clauses (*general embedded verb second* in Vikner 1995) and that the word order seen in the remaining embedded clauses is indistinguishable from subject-initial V2, there is little – if anything – that distinguishes V-to-I from V2 in Icelandic. We will (again) propose that Icelandic is not a V-to-I moving language (cf. Wiklund et al. 2007) but a language displaying V2 verb movement only.

What is xV2? Because main/embedded asymmetries can be identified, the general embedded verb second property in the sense first intended by the term is a misnomer. We present some evidence suggesting that xV2 targets the lower part of the C system, triggered by features of Fin. The same features are proposedly responsible for the cluster effects listed in Holmberg (2010). The addition of xV2 to this list has the effect of reintroducing verb movement (removed by Holmberg) to the list in terms of low verb second (cf. Hrafnbjargarson & Wiklund 2010). Given xV2, the rich agreement hypothesis may be reformulated to involve a relation between rich agreement and low verb second rather than between rich agreement and V-to-I, making the putative counterexamples posed by Northern Norwegian and Fenno-Swedish verb movement (Bentzen 2007) irrelevant, as they do not involve xV2. Although the details need to be fleshed out concerning the relation between rich agreement and xV2, new data from Övdalian seem supportive of such a relation.

Finally, we show that *point of view* may distinguish V2 from non-V2 word order in some cases. This alone, however, does not enable us to draw any conclusions about semantic effects of V2 verb movement independent of the position of the XP preceding the verb.