

Embedded V2 in Faroese

The topic of this paper is the status of Faroese among the Scandinavian languages, in particular with respect to verb placement in embedded clauses. V3 is the default word order in all types of embedded clauses in Faroese. In this respect Faroese is very different from Icelandic, where V2 (meaning simply ‘the finite verb in second position’) is always the default order in subject-initial embedded clauses. But it is also different from Danish, where V2 is always heavily marked in all types of embedded clauses.

- (1) *Eg haldi, at Jógvan hefur ongantíð / onganíð hefur lisið bókina.* V2/V3
I think that Jógvan has never / never has read book-the
‘I think that Jógvan has never read the book’

There has been considerable controversy in the linguistic literature about the nature of the V2-order in Faroese embedded clauses: Is it the result of a V-to-T movement (as is typically assumed for Icelandic) or is it a root phenomenon, i.e. movement to the CP-domain (commonly referred to as V-to-C). This paper argues that both kinds of V2-order can be found in Faroese embedded clauses. On the one hand there is V-to-C and hence there is very clear evidence that assertion plays a role in the distribution of V2-order in subject-initial complement clauses in Faroese: If the complement proposition can be interpreted as the main assertion of the utterance then V2 is usually fine, but if the matrix predicate expresses the main assertion then V2 is heavily degraded in most cases. Here there are some similarities to Embedded topicalization (ET): ET gets positive judgments in the assertive complements of *sigja* ‘say’ and *halda* ‘believe’, as well as in the complement of the semi-factive predicate *finna útav* ‘discover’, but almost nobody fully accepts it in other types of embedded clauses. These results are even clearer with respect to Hooper & Thompson’s (1973) classification of predicates than comparable results for ET in Icelandic, where the acceptance rate of ET in complements of predicates of classes C and D was much higher.

But embedded V2-orders in Faroese cannot all be attributed to V-to-C since they are also accepted, by some speakers at least, in clauses where ET is completely impossible, such as relative clauses and indirect questions (clauses that have no root properties). This suggests that V-to-T is also a possibility in Faroese. Some versions of the so-called Rich Agreement Hypothesis (e.g. Bobaljik and Thráinsson 1998) would then predict that transitive expletives should also be possible in Faroese and this prediction is borne out. It is demonstrated, however, that speakers who distinguish tense and agreement morphemes most clearly in their speech are neither more likely to accept transitive expletives nor V2-orders in various types of embedded clauses than speakers who do not distinguish tense and agreement morphemes as clearly. The relevance of this for different versions of the Rich Agreement Hypothesis is discussed in the paper and a possible scenario for the historical development of embedded clause word order in Faroese is presented. In short, it is maintained that while the V2-order in embedded clauses is on its way out in Faroese, presumably because of diminishing morphological support and partially ambiguous syntactic evidence, the language has not yet reached the Mainland Scandinavian state in this respect and has developed a system of its own. Interestingly, Heycock et al. (2012) have come to a somewhat similar conclusion on the basis of partially different types of evidence.

References

- Hooper, J., & S. Thompson. 1973. On the Applicability of Root Transformations. *Linguistic Inquiry* 4: 465–497.
Bobaljik, J.D., & H. Thráinsson. 1998. Two Heads Aren’t Always Better than One. *Syntax* 1: 37–71.
Heycock, C., A. Sorace, Z.S. Hansen, F. Wilson, & S. Vikner. 2012. Detecting the Late Stages of Syntactic Change: The Loss of V-to-T in Faroese. *Language* 88 (3):558–600.