

Discourse properties and the structure of the left periphery in Old High German

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The verb-second rule (V2) is a prominent topic in the research on Early Germanic. It has been claimed that OE displays residual V2 in clauses with syntactic operators in SpecC (wh- and negation words, sentence adverbials like *þa/þonne*) which trigger regular movement of Vf to the head C° of CP (v. Kemenade 1987 among others). In OHG, V2 is said to appear more generally, e.g. in sentences opened by an element lacking one of the operator features listed above. Axel (to app.) claims that in OHG, such major properties of V2 like operator fronting and formal movement already apply while only the property of merging expletive 'es' in SpecC was not established yet. Thus, clauses requiring the expletive 'es' in modern German appear as V1 with Vf moved to C° but SpecC remaining empty in OHG.

Earlier works point to the fact that V1 is typical for sentences with impersonal intransitive predicates as those in existential constructions and presentational sentences containing only rhematic, i.e. new material. In the subsequent consolidation of the V2-rule, they establish the expletive 'es' as a Vorfeld-Platzhalter (Lenerz 1992). However, this talk addresses a large sample of V1-clauses in OHG which clearly involve pre-mentioned, even pronominal arguments as given in (1):

- (1) Intfiengun sie tho thes heilantes lichamon (T 321, 29)
took they then the body of Jesus
lat. Acceperunt autem corpus ihesu

The aim of the talk will be to analyse the conditions blocking movement to SpecC in OHG as outlined in Hinterhölzl and Petrova (to app.). Two major categories of V1 in OHG are distinguished: i) episode onsets and ii) predicate groups including motion verbs, verbs of saying, as well as verbs of sensual or cognitive perception (next to the already mentioned impersonal intransitives). In line with discourse-analytic approaches like Brinton (1996), it will be claimed that the predicate groups distinguished in ii) behave as inherent markers of episode boundaries. This fact allows for a unified account of all V1-clauses with respect to text structure and discourse organization. To explain this issue, I invoke the distinction between coordination vs. subordination as the two major types of rhetorical relations in the model of Asher & Lascarides (2003). From the perspective of their position in the discourse, V1-clauses signal coordination in discourse by establishing the main line of narration viewed as a chronologically related sequence of discourse segments. V1 either provides the basis for subsequent elaboration, or signals that a previous sequence of elaboration is suspended and discourse proceeds from a lower to a higher level of text structure. By contrast, V2 typically occurs in contexts providing additional, e.g. explanatory or descriptive information and therefore constitutes parts that are subordinated in text structure. These aspects of the function of V1 and V2 in early Germanic give rise to assume that the form of the left periphery in OHG is sensitive to the creation of a dynamic, hierarchical discourse structure.

Reference

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