Syntax and Information Structure: the diverse nature of V2 in early English

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It is well-known that the term ‘Verb second’ as applied to the Germanic languages, present-day as well as historical, does not represent a unified phenomenon. For instance, Westergaard and Vangsnes (2005) show that Norwegian dialects vary with respect to V2 word order in different types of wh-questions, and they argue that this variation is conditioned by both syntactic and information-structural considerations. Recent work on Old and Middle English also shows the relevance of information structure to the choice of word order options, see e.g. Bech (2001), Westergaard (2005); van Kemenade and Milicev (2005); van Kemenade and Los (2006); van Kemenade, Milicev and Baayen (2007). In this paper, we explore the interaction of syntax and information structure with respect to V2 in a selection of Old and Middle English texts. We focus on XP-initial main clauses with a finite verb and a DP-subject, taking account of the syntactic as well as information-structural properties of all three of these relevant elements.

References


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