

## LEARNING AND UNLEARNING V2: ON THE ROBUSTNESS OF THE TRIGGERING EXPERIENCE IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this paper I consider both the acquisition and loss of V2 (verb-second) word order, focusing especially on child and adult data from present-day Norwegian dialects and historical data from English. In both cases there is optionality between V2 and non-V2 in one clause type; *wh*-questions in Norwegian and non-subject-initial declaratives in Old and Middle English (OE/ME). Furthermore, there are some clause types which do not require V2, e.g. exclamatives and declaratives with certain adverbials in Norwegian.

Optionality in syntax typically leads to a situation where the choice of word order is governed by pragmatic factors (Bresnan&Nikitina 2003). With Bech (2001) and Westergaard (2005a), I argue that in the history of English, non-V2 word order is preferred if the subject is informationally given, while V2 is used if the subject conveys new/focused information. This pattern is also found in *wh*-questions in the relevant Norwegian dialects (Westergaard 2003). Based on a comparative analysis of two different dialects, it is argued in Westergaard (2005b) that the variation represents a change in the direction of non-V2.

According to Lightfoot's (1999) theory of cue-based acquisition and change, children acquiring V2 languages are exposed to a specific cue, formulated as (1) in Lightfoot (forthcoming), and for learnability reasons there must be a UG requirement that this is obligatory. Furthermore, the cue must be robustly expressed in the primary linguistic data (PLD) for the construction to be acquired (a suggested figure is 30%) – otherwise children will ignore it and the construction will be lost from the language.

(1)  $CP[XP_cV...]$  (from Lightfoot, forthcoming, p. 103)

Questions that arise in this connection are the following: How can the word order of mixed V2 systems such as OE/ME or Norwegian dialects be learnable? And if it is, why does it change? And what is the critical level of robustness of the cue?

I present child language data from three children acquiring a dialect of Norwegian (age 1;9 to 3), showing that V2 is attested early in all relevant constructions. Investigations of some of the adult data reveal that there is massive evidence for V2 in the input (close to 70%). However, non-V2 word order is also attested early in those clause types that allow it in the target language, e.g. *wh*-questions, exclamatives, and declaratives with certain adverbials. These constructions are extremely infrequent in the input, 1-5%. Moreover, there does not seem to be any overgeneralization from one clause type to another.

Using a revised version of a Split-CP model of word order developed in Westergaard&Vangsnes (2005), I argue for a microparametric approach to V2, allowing for many different types of V2 grammars. Different clause types have different heads in the CP domain, some of which require verb movement (e.g. the Interrogative head in

Modern English), while others do not (e.g. the head involved in declaratives). Thus, there are several cues for V2, and when children scan the PLD, only the relevant clause type is considered. This means that the cues are much more robustly expressed in the input than what is indicated by a simple calculation in terms of the total number of utterances – in fact, for most clause types it will be close to 100%. Thus, mixed V2 systems are learnable, and this also explains how only one clause type may be affected by historical change (declaratives in the history of English, *wh*-questions in present-day Norwegian dialects).

But what causes development towards non-V2 in a grammar that allows optionality in a particular clause type, such as OE/ME or Norwegian dialects? The Norwegian child language studies show that the children very early distinguish between the two word orders in *wh*-questions in a target-consistent way, suggesting an early sensitivity to information structure. However, over time, these patterns will lead to an ‘information structure drift’, i.e. an increase in non-V2 word order caused by the fact that subjects generally tend to convey given information. This causes the cue for V2 to be expressed less in the PLD that children are exposed to, eventually falling below a critical level in the input. According to the Split-CP model, this must again be calculated relative to the total number of utterances of the relevant clause type only. Nevertheless, the child language data from Norwegian indicate that the critical level is considerably lower than the 30% originally suggested by Lightfoot (1999).

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