

Syntactic variation in Old Norwegian and the role of Information Structure

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Old Norwegian is considered a VO-language (cf. Faarlund 2004, Nygaard 1905, Aamodt Nielsen 2013), as is its modern counterpart. However, we find a noteworthy amount of OV as well as VAux word order patterns in the surface structure of clauses (both ungrammatical in Modern Norwegian), as exemplified in (1), though all are not equally common. Assuming an underlying AuxVO base, this alternation can be explained as information-structural driven variation in line with Hinterhölzl/Petrova (2018 for OHG), Pintzuk/Taylor (2012, 2015 for OE) or Hróarsdóttir (2009 for OI), e.g. in order to focalize or background complements (cf. also Hinterhölzl 2015, van Kemenade 2009, Bech 2012).

In my talk I will present a new corpus study for the text of *Konungs skuggsjá*, AM 243 b α fol., identifying relational and referential structures, and examining the interplay between IS, syntax and prosody. The loss of OV in Modern Norwegian will thus be explained as a change in the way IS categories are displayed in the grammar.

(1) Examples of OV-patterns in ON (for both main and subordinated clauses)

a) Object – (VAux) – Vmain

þvi at [til þæss]O [væliaz]Vmain opt [hiner bæztu mænn]S
because to this choose often the best men
'for often the best of men are chosen for this' (KS, 2r; col.a 4-5)

b) VAux – Object – Vmain

Oc [vil]VAux [ec]S [þæs]O [yðr]O [biðia]Vmain
and want I this you ask
'and I want to ask you this' (KS, 1r; col.a 26-27)

In these examples, both IS and prosodic factors seem to play a role in determining the OV word order pattern (as well as for the positioning of the subject in (1a)). Previously mentioned objects in OV order are represented in the corpus by 47,56%, OV order affiliated with new information by 23,85%. This correlates with a tendency of many languages: old information precedes new information. As for prosodic factors, Hróarsdóttir (2009) showed for OI that light DPs (including pronouns) are generally preferred in preverbal position whereas heavier entities appear more often in post-verbal position. In this talk, I will present an analysis of the clauses and categories involved in these contexts (VAux vs. AuxV; light vs. heavy elements; given vs. new), and compare the OI data to the ON one, outlining the differences found in these two languages.

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