Adverbials at the Left Periphery:
Syntax and Information Structure in the History of German
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It is widely known that in modern German the following word order patterns are distinguished for adverbial clauses at the left periphery: (i) non-integrated, (ii) resumptive and (iii) integrated. The non-integrated pattern in (1-a) is considered to be the oldest attested pattern, whereas the integrated pattern in (1-c) is taken to be much younger (Hammarström 1923, König & van der Auwera 1988, Kappel 2014). The latter is the unmarked word order in modern German.

(1) a. [Wenn du bleiben möchtest], ich habe nichts dagegen.
   'if you want to stay on, I don't mind'
 b. [Wenn er krank ist], dann bleibt er zuhause.
   'if he is sick, then he stays at home'
 c. [Wenn er krank ist], bleibt er zuhause.
   'if he is sick, he stays at home'

Cross-linguistically, changes affecting the degree of integration are often accounted for in terms of grammaticalization (Hopper & Traugott 2003). As for the development in German, Axel (2002) proposes that adverbial clauses can be embedded in their associated clause, cf. (1-c), as soon as the phrasal category of adverbial clauses is reanalyzed from CP to PP in Early New High German. According to Lötscher (2005), the patterns in (1) are all available already in Old High German. He claims that the change rather concerns the ranking of two principles governing the use of the individual word order patterns: In Old High German, processing ease is higher ranked than grammatical coherence, hence the preponderance of the non-integrated pattern. In my view, previous accounts of the increasing morpho-syntactic integration of adverbial clauses fail because they consider changes affecting adverbial clauses in the history of German as an isolated change. So far overlooked are data like (2), exhibiting instances of adverbs preceding either a resumptive pronoun (2-a) or a full DP (2-b):

(2) a. Agley, die weinet und erseüffczet offt, so sy sich selbs nicht überhaben mocht, von grossem laide, das sy an irem herczen trüg. [Doch] so dorft sy das niemand o:effnen.
   'Agley, who often wept and sighed, for she could not stand herself anymore, because of great harm that she bore in her heart. But she was not allowed to tell anybody'
 b. [Zehand darnach] alle manlehen, so der künig gehebt hat, wurden auffgeschreiben unnd im die bey seinem leben geben
   'Immediately thereafter, every hereditary fief of the king was written down and given to him for all his life'

Data like (2) provide evidence for a clausal organization in older stages of German that is discourse-oriented rather than syntax-oriented as suggested by Speyer (2008). In this respect, German obviously behaves as Old English (Bech & Salvesen 2014). Further support for a clause structure determined by information structure constraints in the history of German comes from hanging topic and left dislocation constructions including DPs at the left periphery. In this much broader context, changes with respect to adverbial clauses at the left periphery are taken to be the result of a strengthening V2 grammar throughout Early New High German (discourse-oriented > syntax-oriented). Non-integrated adverbial clauses in modern German as in (1-a) become a marked word order pattern with a fairly restricted distribution.
References


