Embedded Verb Second in Faroese

The Scandinavian languages are uniformly verb-second (V2). However, it is a well-studied fact that they differ with respect to embedded clause word order. In subject initial embedded clauses, the following contrast obtains: In Icelandic (1a), the finite verb occurs to the left of the negative element whereas in Danish (1b, representative of Mainland Scandinavian (MSc)) the finite verb follows the negative element. Faroese appears to allow both orders (1c).

(1) a. Ég spurði af hverju Jón hefði ekki leisið þessa bók.
   I asked why John had not read that book [Ice]

   b. Jeg spurgte hvorfor Jon ikke havde læst bogen.
   I asked why John not had read book-the [Da]

   c. Hann spyr, hví tað eru íkki / íkki eru fleiri tilíkar samkomur.
   he asks why there are not / not are more such gatherings [Fa]

The embedded indirect questions in (1) resist non-subject initial V2 and are therefore taken as diagnostic that Icelandic has verb raising to INFL/T(ense) independent of V2 whereas Mainland Scandinavian does not (Vikner 1995). The observed variation in Faroese has been described as residual or diachronic end-stage verb raising to INFL/T independent of V2 (Jonas 1996, 2002; Heycock et. al. 2010, 2011). However, Julien (2007, 2010) has shown that embedded subject initial V2 where the finite verb appears to the left of negation is found in corpora of spoken Swedish and Norwegian in many embedded clause types contrary to expectation for these MSc languages. Thus, the modern MSc languages appear to exhibit a similar type of embedded word order variation that is observed in Faroese.

When older texts are examined (Rafn 1982), it is clear that the same type of embedded word order variation holds. Here, I analyze translations of The Faroe Islanders Saga (Old Icelandic) into Faroese (1832, 1884, 1962), Danish (1832), and Norwegian (1901). While all texts show embedded V2, the frequency is much less in Danish and Norwegian. Comparison of the Faroese texts across time allows a fine-grained approach similar to that of Julien (2010) where embedded V2 is examined in context together with analysis of the accompanying main clause predicate types.

Further, based on Platzack (1986), it is clear that the position of the negative element taken to indicate verb raising varies across the Scandinavian languages. In Faroese, negation appears to the left of the infinitival marker in PRO-infinitivals unlike in Icelandic where negation follows the infinitival marker showing that Faroese negation is adjoined at least to INFL/T and when the finite verb occurs to the left of negation in embedded clauses, it has raised to the C-domain. Thus, such subject-initial embedded clauses are true V2 clauses and not indicative of verb raising to INFL/T. This analysis gives us a way of approaching the observed variation in embedded clause word order in Faroese in terms of properties of the embedded clause/matrix predicate rather than postulating optional/residual verb movement to INFL/T.
REFERENCES


Julien, Marit. 2010. Embedded clauses with main clause word order in Mainland Scandinavian. Published on LingBuzz: (http://ling.auf.net/lingBuzz/000475)


