Topics and verb movement in Norwegian

In this presentation I will argue that the finite verb in Norwegian moves to FIn₂ and that apparent violations of the V2 constraint stems from the possibility of having lexical material in the specifiers of the higher heads in the left periphery. I crucially argue that movement into the Left Dislocation Phrase is subject to strong limitations, at least in dialects of South-Eastern Norway.

It is debated to what head in the left periphery (in the sense of Rizzi (1997), see ex. (1)) the finite verb moves in Modern Germanic languages. It has been suggested that the finite verb in Modern Germanic languages raises to a high head in the left periphery, presumably to Forceo (Walkden, In press; Poletto, 2002). A high landing site would account for the ‘true’ V2 nature of Modern Germanic languages. This in contrast to languages such as Old High German, Old Saxon (Walkden, In press), Old French (see among others Labelle (2007); Salvesen (2009)), and modern Rhaetoromance (Poletto, 2002), where the finite verb moves to Fino, and where V3 word orders are frequently observed.

Unlike Nilsen (2002), I take V2 to be the result of head movement rather than remnant movement. Instead I will make the claim that the finite verb only moves as high as to FIno in Norwegian, something which becomes clear if one considers constructions involving left dislocated elements (see ex. (2)). The fact that the finite verb is preceded by both an XP and a left dislocated element is a strong indication that the finite verb has moved to a lower head in the left periphery, at least a head lower than the Left Dislocation Phrase in the elaborated framework of Benincà and Poletto (2004) (see ex. (3) and (4)).

In Norwegian left dislocated topics must obligatorily be followed by its resumptive pronoun. I take this to be linked to what Engdahl describes as a continuous topic (Engdahl, 1997), which I label the topic continuity constraint. Grohmann (2000) has made a similar observation for German, and following his analysis, I propose that the left dislocated element is moved into this position, and that the subject in front of the verb is a spelled-out copy of the moved constituent. This way the apparent V3 constructions where topics are involved are realised due to PF constraints, more specifically the need to have phonetically realised material in the specifier position linked to V2. This makes topicisation a very different process from the one observed in Modern English or in Modern French.

This way, the structure of Modern Norwegian V2 does not differ from that of the Old Germanic languages. What restricts the use of left dislocated topics in Norwegian is the topic continuity constraint.
(1) ForceP ... TopP ... FocP ... (TopP) ... FinP ...

(2) Mora mi, hu gikk på skolen med Jan Terje.

“My mother, she went to school with Jan Terje.”

(3) Hanging topics ... Scene Setting ... ForceP ... Left Dislocation ... FocP ... FinP ...

(4) \[
\text{[LDP Mora mi [FinP hu [Fin\textsuperscript{e} gikk (...) på skolen med Jan Terje.]]]}
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References


