

## Decomposing V2

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### Abstract

The paper outlines a new approach to the phenomenon of Verb Second (V2) in West Germanic that does better justice to the historical facts and also accounts for the variation between V2 and V3 orders in modern varieties like Kiezdeutsch and West Flemish. The account proposes a decomposition of the V2 rule, the core of which consists of (i) the Phase Condition, a lexicalization requirement on the phase head, and (ii) an interface condition that fixes the phase head in languages that allow for a flexible phase edge.

**Keywords:** verb-second (V2), phase condition, EPP, V3 order, frame adverbials, interface conditions

### 1. Introduction

In this short paper, I will outline the tenets of a new approach to the phenomenon of Verb Second (V2). This takes into account the fact that, at many historic stages of the Germanic languages as well as in many Germanic dialects, violations of a plain V2 rule are found, i.e. the co-occurrence of V1 and V3 orders in parallel with clear cases of V2 orders.

Let us see what is at stake. The first property that I will argue against is the so-called *EPP-property* of V2. It is standardly assumed that V2 involves movement of the verb to a (high) position in the C-domain that exhibits the EPP property, attracting another XP into its specifier (see Roberts & Roussou 2002 for detailed discussion of precisely this perspective). That is to say, movement of the verb to a specific high position is fundamental and, in most accounts, verb movement is taken to be triggered by clause typing - cf. movement to ForceP in the extended C-domain along the lines of Rizzi (1997); see also (11) below.

Furthermore, it is assumed that German exhibits a syntactically generalized form of V2, while Modern English is assumed to have residual V2. Certain other varieties, in turn, are assumed to exhibit mixed V2 and V3 phenomena: Kiezdeutsch, Middle Low German and West Flemish are all said to display what is called a *relaxed V2* system (see Cognola 2014). As an alternative, I will devise a uniform account of mixed V2 and V3 phenomena that does better justice to the historical developments in German and English and its varieties. I will argue that German V2

should be decomposed into a syntactic core rule – shared with English – and a peripheral prosodic condition, which accounts for the differences between German and English, and also for the absence of certain V3 orders in German. The account is crucially based on diachronic and cross-linguistic data, to which we turn next.

## 2. The diachronic issue: V1, V2 and V3 in Older Germanic

Looking at historical data raises the question of how the V2 property can be characterized in Old English (OE) and Old High German (OHG), that is, in systems that allow for V1, V2 and V3 orders in the same functional domain. This is illustrated in (1) for OE (the data in (1b,c) are taken from Haerberli (2002:248)):

- (1) a. *Com þa to lande lid-manna helm.* V1  
 came then to land sailors<sub>Gen</sub> protector  
 “Then the protector of the sailors came to the shore.” (Beowulf 1623)
- b. *Him geaf þa se cync twa hund gildenra paeninga.* V2  
 him gave then the king two hundred golden pennies  
 “Then the king gave him two hundred golden pennies.”
- c. *Hiora umtrymnesse he sceal ðrowian on his heortan .* V3  
 their weakness he shall atone in his heart  
 “He shall atone their weakness in his heart.”

Similar facts have been reported for Old Romance. For Rhaetoromance, the reader is referred to Benincà (2006) and Poletto (2002), who reach similar conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Walkden (2007) presents a careful comparative study of V3 orders in OHG, OE and Old Saxon (OS).

The standard answer given to the problem surrounding the availability of not only V2, but also V1 and V3 word orders in a single system is the assumption that the V2 rule was not completely grammaticalized for declarative sentences at the relevant language stages. It is, however, clear that this answer masks rather than solves the problem: what precisely is ‘incomplete grammaticalization’? Importantly, it also leads to the, in my opinion, erroneous question of why and how German developed a generalized V2 system while English did not.

German did not in fact develop a generalized V2 system directly. Speyer (2008) argues that V3 order was common in early New High German (eNHG) in cases in which a frame adverbial opens the clause. This is illustrated in (2).

- (2) *[Dar nach] [die edel kungin] fuer enhalb Ofen auf des Laslaes Wans gueeter*  
 after that the noble queen went beyond Ofen to the Laslae Wan properties
- mit grossem kummer*  
 with great concern (113.10.16; Speyer 2008, 481)  
 “Thereafter the noble queen went, with great concern, beyond Ofen to the properties of Laslae Wan.”

<sup>1</sup> Benincà (2006: 80) states that in a V2 language with a split CP system, not all constituents count in the same way for V2. In particular, left-dislocated constituents associated with pronominal doubling do not count for V2.

A similar observation is made by Petrova (2012) for Middle Low German (MLG), which is illustrated in (3). Again, it is frame adverbials that give rise to V3 orders in this variety.

- (3) [An den selven tiden], [Dyocletianus] buwede den palas to Rome das  
 in the same days, Diocletian built the palace in Rome that  
 gehetan is Terme Dyocletiani.  
 called is Baths of Diocletian  
 “In the same days, D. built in Rome the palace that is called Baths of Diocletian.”  
 (Petrova 2012; 60) (SW 113, 17)

In light of these empirical facts, I argue that it is desirable to design a theoretical account that explains why V3 orders show up in varieties which can otherwise be described as exhibiting a fully grammaticalized form of V2. They are found at various stages of older Germanic under the condition that the initial element represents a frame adverbial. Taking up now the cross-linguistic perspective, we will see that this is not an accident, which therefore calls for a genuine explanation.

### 3 V3 in West Flemish and Kiezdeutsch

In this context, it is interesting to note that the pattern frame adverbial > subject > V<sub>fin</sub> springs up in various contemporary varieties as well. Greco & Haegeman (2017) observe that temporal adverbials allow for a V2 or a V3 pattern in West Flemish. This is illustrated in (4):

- (4) a. Oan- k toekwamen was den eletriek utgevallen.  
 when-I arrived was the electricity out.fallen  
 “When I arrived there had been/was a power failure.”
- b. Oan- k toekwamen, den eletriek was utgevallen.  
 when-I arrived the electricity was out.fallen  
 “When I arrived there had been a power failure.”

The crucial difference between (4a) and (4b) lies in the fact that the temporal adverbial in the V3 pattern does not allow for a reading in which the adverbial specifies the event time of the matrix verb; it can only be understood as specifying the reference time with respect to which the event time is situated. In other words, (4b) can only mean “when I arrived, there had been a power failure (prior to my arrival)”, while (4a) is ambiguous between this reading and the reading “when I arrived, there was a power failure underway (at that point in time)”.<sup>2</sup> One way to explain this difference is to assume that the temporal clause is base-generated in the C-domain in (4b), with the result that it has access only to the higher reference time in T, but not to the lower event time of *v*. By contrast, the temporal adverbial in (4a) can be analysed as having been fronted from an IP-internal position, from which it may also have access to the event time of the verb. If this analysis is on the right track, it would suggest that strict V2 in this variety is triggered by movement of an IP-internal constituent into the C-domain, but that

<sup>2</sup> As Theresa Biberauer points out, the same interpretative effect is found in the variation between V2 and V3 orders in colloquial Afrikaans. The interested reader is referred to Botha and Oosthuizen (2009) for further discussion. A special thanks goes to Theresa for the great number of helpful comments and suggestions on a previous version of this paper.

it fails to be triggered by an element that is base-generated in the C-domain, as has been argued is the case with frame adverbials.

V3 orders are also typical of contemporary Kiezdeutsch, a variety used by young speakers in Berlin (see Wiese 2009, 2017). Here too it is observed that V3 orders involve a first-position adverbial element that can be analysed as a frame adverbial. This is illustrated in (5).

- (5) *Heute ich geh Aldi.*  
 today I go Aldi (a supermarket)  
 “Today I will go to Aldi.”

Summarizing we therefore have converging evidence pointing to the value of constructing an account of V2 which is sensitive to whether a constituent found in the left-periphery of the clause is externally or internally merged there. In the following section, we will look at the V2 system in Cimbrian, which will provide us with the crucial evidence for the alternative account to be introduced here. In particular, we will see that movement of IP-internal constituents into a position in the C-domain that is higher than the position that the finite verb targets in the left periphery is restricted to one constituent.

#### 4 The V2 system in Cimbrian

Cimbrina is a modern language that exhibits relaxed V2 and is also relatively well described and understood (cf. Bidese & Tomaselli 2005, Bidese, Padovan & Tomaselli 2012, Grewendorf & Poletto 2015, Kolmer 2005; cf. also Cognola 2013 for discussion of the V2 system in Mòcheno).

What does it mean to say that a language displays a relaxed V2 system? It means that there is clear evidence for V2, as illustrated in (6) and (7), but that the language also allows for V3 orders under various conditions, as illustrated in (8) and (9). Let us consider each of these examples in turn. (6) indicates that subject-verb inversion is obligatory with pronouns. All the Cimbrian examples in this section are taken from Cognola and Hinterhölzl (2016).

- (6) a. *Gestarn hatt-se gekhoaft in libar.* Cimbrian  
 yesterday has- she bought the.ACC book  
 “Yesterday she bought the book.”
- b. *\*Gestarn se- hatt gekhoaft in libar.* Cimbrian  
 yesterday she-has bought the.ACC book  
 “Yesterday she bought the book.”

(7a), in turn, shows that V1 declaratives are ungrammatical; as (7b) shows, an expletive is required to produce a V2 structure wherever an alternative first-position element is lacking. Subject-verb inversion and the use of a C-expletive (see Boeckx 2002) are clear indications that V2 has been grammaticalized in a language system.

- (7) a. *\*Hatt-se gekhoaft in libar?* Cimbrian  
 has -she bought the.ACC book  
 “Has she bought the book?”



I will argue below that this effect is typical of what I will call *low V2 languages* (see section 4.2). In other work (Hinterhölzl 2017), I have argued that a discourse anaphoric subject serves to anchor the predicate with respect to a topical event, the Reference Time in the system of Reichenbach (1947). To achieve this temporal anchoring, the event argument of the subject in [Spec,TP] is identified with the reference time of the predicate and then the subject is moved into [Spec,FinP] (see (11) below), where its event argument is assigned a value for the topic event in the discourse.

If the subject cannot serve as a referential anchor for either syntactic or semantic reasons, a locative element is inserted in [Spec,TP] and this is then moved up to FinP to be assigned a value for its event argument (cf. Cognola & Hinterhölzl 2016 for more details). In the following section, we will see that movement of an IP-internal constituent into a higher position in the C-domain is blocked in a low V2 system just in case [Spec,FinP] is occupied by the subject. We will see that this is the reason why the subject has to stay in a low position in *wh*-questions and temporal anchoring has to make use of an alternative anchor, a clitic pronoun or *da* ('here'), which can be taken to undergo head movement to Fin<sup>0</sup>, leaving [Spec,FinP] open as an escape hatch for *wh*-movement.

#### 4.2 V2, phase edges and the phase condition

I assume the split-CP structure proposed in Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl's (2007) elaboration of Rizzi's (1997) original proposal. To this structure, Frame topics (F-Topics) are added above the position of Aboutness topics (A-topics), as has been proposed by Speyer (2008). The resultant structure is given in (11) below.

(11) [ForceP ... [F-Topic [A-Topic [C-Topic .....[FocusP ... FamP\* .....[FinP ....[TP .....]]]]]]

*Wh*-movement in Cimbrian is assumed to target FocP, placing a focussed or *wh*-moved element in between the topics in FamP and the higher Topic field. Furthermore, I assume that Cimbrian is a low V2 language, meaning that it is FinP that serves as the phase edge of the C-domain in this language.

We have observed in (10) above that high subjects interfere with *wh*-movement into the C-domain. The relevant data is given in (12).

- |         |   |          |
|---------|---|----------|
| (12) a. | * <i>Dar Mario bas hat-ta/ hat gakhoaft?</i><br>the Mario what has-there has bought<br>“As for Mario, what did he buy?” | Cimbrian |
| b.      | * <i>Bas dar Mario hat-ta/ hat gakhoaft?</i><br>what the Mario has-there has bought<br>“What did Mario buy?”            | Cimbrian |
| c.      | <i>Dar Mario; bas hat-ar; gakhoaft?</i><br>the Mario what has-he bought<br>“What did Mario buy?”                        | Cimbrian |

We will focus on the ungrammaticality of (12b) here, which raises the question of why *wh*-movement should be blocked by a preverbal referential subject, arguably occupying [Spec,FinP], when this presumably counts as an A-position (Rizzi 2005, 2006). Note in particular that the utterance is anchored by a discourse-given subject in [Spec,FinP] in (12b) and that nothing in the theory rules out A'-movement of an object across the subject in an A-position into a higher position, arguably [Spec,FocP], in the C-domain.

We observed above that the subject has to stay in a low position to allow for *wh*-movement into the C-domain (see (10b) above). In this case a subject clitic (*ar*) or a locative element (*da*) is inserted in [Spec,TP] instead, which then undergoes head movement to FinP so as to temporally anchor the predicate (in Bare Phrase Structure terms, clitics may “count” as heads or XPs, depending on their relational context). This leaves [Spec,FinP] open in non-subject *wh*-structures, thereby creating the possibility for another element to move into the higher C-domain.

To account for this effect, I would like to propose that FinP counts as the phase-edge in the C-domain in Cimbrian, implying via the Phase Impenetrability Condition (Chomsky 2000, 2001) that all movement operations targeting higher positions in the C-domain must go through [Spec,FinP]. Given that V2 means, first of all, that the finite verb moves into the C-domain and given that Cimbrian is a low V2 language, this implies that only one IP-internal constituent may follow the verb into the C-domain. This derives the linear V2 constraint in most cases, but leaves space for the derivation of V3 orders. In the present account, V3 orders – or, in other words, exceptions from the strict linear V2 rule – are expected in cases where the left edge of the sentence contains constituents that, like (certain) topics, can be taken to be base-generated in the C-domain.

The prediction of the present account would thus be that topics above FocP are base-generated, but topics below FocP are derived by movement from an IP-internal position and would thus interfere with Focus- and *wh*-movement. I have to leave the investigation of whether this is the correct prediction for Cimbrian to further research. In the same vein, however, the proposed account predicts that a language that has (re-)analysed base-generated topics as being derived by movement from an IP-internal position should exhibit a more generalized form of V2. This was arguably the case in the history of German, Dutch and West Flemish, but not the case in Romance languages, where base-generated topics are in an Agree-relation with an IP-internal *pro* (cf. Frascarelli 2007 for Italian) .

To summarize, if we assume that frame adverbials are base-generated in West Flemish and in Kiezdeutsch, the respective V3 orders follow in this account without further ado. It remains to explain why the verb in West Flemish moves to ForceP in case a clause-internal constituent is moved into a position above FinP. This is an option that is not available in Cimbrian. I will thus characterize Cimbrian as a rigid low V2-language. In the following section, I will argue that movement of the finite verb to ForceP is indicative of a grammar that allows for flexible phase edges. Furthermore, I will explain why standard Dutch and standard German do not allow for V3 orders with base-generated topics.

### 4.3 V2 in a language with a flexible phase edge

In the present account, the lack of V3 orders with frame adverbials in standard German could in principle be explained by the assumption that frame adverbials are derived via movement from a clause-internal position into a high position in the C-domain. Note also that we have to account for the fact that in German, Dutch and West Flemish, differently from Cimbrian, high referential subjects do not interfere with *wh*-movement. Assuming that the subject or a correlate of the subject occupies [Spec,FinP] for anchoring purposes, this can be accounted for by the assumption that German is a *high V2 language*, implying in the present account that ForceP serves as the phase edge.<sup>3</sup> Thus various elements can move into the C-domain into positions below ForceP, but only one element can move into higher positions. Nevertheless, I will argue that German is not a rigid high V2 language, but a language with a flexible phase edge in which the phase edge is determined by syntactic and prosodic conditions.

The main argument for this proposal comes from the observation that frame adverbials in German do not show any reconstruction effects. This seems to indicate that frame adverbials are base-generated in the German CP, as they seem to be in West Flemish. The lack of Principle C effects and the failure to bind a pronoun within the adverbial clause illustrated in (13a,b) indicate that these clauses are best analysed as not having been moved into the C-domain from an IP-internal position. Crucially, the bound variable interpretation of the pronoun in the adverbial clause is out if the latter is interpreted as a topical frame that temporally restricts what is asserted by the main clause, as in (13b).

- (13) a. *Als Peter<sub>1</sub> nach Hause kam, hat er<sub>1</sub> seine Freundin angerufen.*  
 when Peter to home came has he his girlfriend up.called  
 “When Peter arrived home, he called up his girlfriend.”
- b. *\*Als er<sub>1</sub> Maria traf, war fast jeder Student<sub>1</sub> schon nach Hause gefahren.*  
 when he Mary met was almost every student already to home  
 driven  
 “When he met Mary, almost every student had already gone home.”

Therefore we have to look for another explanation for the contrast between colloquial West Flemish and standard German and standard Dutch. An account is needed in which the positioning of the verb in the C-domain may be determined by the Phase Impenetrability Condition alone or by an additional interface condition. In the following, I will argue that we do indeed require an additional condition, and that this additional condition is prosodic in nature.

In particular, I argue that the V2 parameter represents a complex condition, consisting of four components.

(A) The core of the V2 rule is the condition that the finite verb moves into the C-domain. The verb in a V2 language must thus raise to at least FinP.

<sup>3</sup> That German is a ForceP V2 language has been independently proposed by Biberauer and Roberts (2015, 2016). The relevant distinction between low and high V2 languages has then also been applied to Romance languages by Wolfe (2015).

(B) FinP or a projection above it counts as a phase head. This means that constituents that move from an IP-internal position into a position in the C-domain must move through the phase edge, which limits the number of constituents that can appear in positions above the phase edge to one. For reasons of simplicity, I will assume in this paper that only FinP and ForceP can constitute a phase edge.

(C) The phase edge may be fixed or flexible. Languages with a flexible phase edge indicate the phase edge via verb movement into the relevant phase head.

(D) The phase head is determined by syntactic and optionally also by prosodic conditions.

These assumptions have the following consequences: first, *wh*-movement in a language with a flexible phase edge - such as that which we assume for German - will trigger obligatory verb movement to ForceP (given that Spec,FinP is occupied by a high subject or by a possibly silent correlate). Second, the reanalysis of a base-generated topic as derived by movement from a clause-internal position will also trigger verb movement to ForceP. Arguably, this has happened in the history of German for Aboutness Topics and Contrastive Topics (cf. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007), but not for Frame Topics.

Note, however, that Standard German never shows V3 orders, not even with (base-generated) frame adverbials which typically give rise to V3 orders in languages with a low V2 system. Thus, I propose that the superficial appearance of uniform high V2 in standard German (and standard Dutch) is due to a prosodic condition that forces verb movement into ForceP even in the absence of movement of a clause internal constituent into the C-domain. The condition is given in (14) and rests on the observation that both topics and adjuncts are mapped onto separate phonological phrases from the verb, while arguments are mapped into the phonological phrase of the verb (cf. Hinterhölzl 2016).

- (14) Interface condition on the determination of the phase edge (ICPE):  
V<sub>fin</sub> must occupy a left-peripheral position in its prosodic phrase in the phase head.

The workings of this condition are illustrated in (15) and (16), in which square brackets indicate syntactic constituents, as usual, and round brackets indicate prosodic constituents.

- (15) [ForceP (Frame) [FinP ((Subj) V<sub>fin</sub>) .....]]  
(16) [ForceP (Subj / Frame) (V<sub>fin</sub>) [FinP ...]]

(15) shows the initial prosodic structure of a clause containing a frame adverbial and a subject in the C-domain. Since frame adverbials are base-generated in the C-domain and since German is a flexible V2 language, there is no syntactic requirement for the verb to move into the head of ForceP. Note, however, that the prosodic phrases in (15) violate the interface condition in (14), since if the finite verb is in FinP and FinP counts as the phase edge, the verb is not mapped into a left-peripheral position in its prosodic phrase in the phase edge. This problem can be solved in the following way. The subject or the adverbial is analysed as discourse linker, i.e. a topic of the kind introduced in section 4.2. This element is located in Spec,ForceP and V<sub>fin</sub> moves to Force to respect (14), as is indicated in (16). Since the subject *qua* topic and the frame adverbial (*qua* topic and adjunct) are mapped onto a separate

phonological phrase from the verb in (16), the verb occupies a peripheral position in its prosodic phrase in the phase edge.

From this, it follows that dialects like Kiezdeutsch and West Flemish and language-stages like MHG and eNHG that have not incorporated the prosodic condition in (14) will allow for V3 orders in clauses with material that can be taken to be base generated in the C-domain in the first position.

## 5 Conclusion

In the present account, the V2 systems of modern standard English and German are not as different as usually assumed. The English system corresponds to the syntactic core of the German system, which is, in turn, very close to the core system of V2 across languages: operator movement of a clause-internal constituent into the left peripheral domain triggers verb movement into the C-domain. German and English differ in the fact that German has reanalysed topics as being derived via movement from a clause-internal position, while English arguably has not done so. For independent reasons, operator movement triggering V2 in English has been restricted to those cases which triggered *do*-support at the language stage when verb movement was lost. Apart from this restriction on verb movement in English, the distinction between base-generated topics (17a) and movement-derived operator constituents (17b) with respect to verb movement remains visible in Modern English.

- (17) a. *With no job John would be happy.*  
i.e. if John had no job he would (still) be happy
- b. *With no job would John be happy.*  
i.e. John would not be happy with any job

If the proposals in this short paper are on the right track, a decompositional approach to V2 may deliver important new insights into this phenomenon and its crosslinguistic instantiation.

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