Locating finite verbs in Faroese: a problem for linguists (and children?)

Caroline Heycock
University of Edinburgh

_in collaboration with_
Zakaris Hansen (Edinburgh, Faroe Islands),
Antonella Sorace (Edinburgh)

heycock@ling.ed.ac.uk, zhansen@staffmail.ed.ac.uk, antonell@ling.ed.ac.uk,

Locating finite verbs in Faroese

• What is the question?
• What are possible sources of data?
  – Language output
    • Written
    • Spoken
  – Judgments
• What have we found so far?
• How do children manage?
Does Faroese still have V-to-I?

That is the book that Elin has not read

**Icelandic:**
Þetta er breifið sem Elín (hefur) ekki (*hefur) leið

**Danish:**
Dette er brevet, som Tove (*har) ikke (har) læst

**Faroese:**
Hetta er brævið, sum Elin (hefur) ikki (hefur) lisið

What is the nature of the variability in Faroese?

**Theoretical** questions include:

- Is there optionality within a single grammar?
- Is there competition between two “equal” grammars?
- Is there a single, invariant competence grammar, perhaps with an overlay of familiarity with a learned register that is not truly “acquired”?
What is the nature of the variability in Faroese?

**Empirical** questions include:

- Is there dialectal variation?
- Do speakers judgments match their production?
- Do judgments change with exposure to the written language, and more formal styles?

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Verb - Adverb order in texts (Thráinsson 2003)

Verb-Adverb order in texts
(from Thráinsson 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clause type</th>
<th>3, pre-1900</th>
<th>5, 1900-1939</th>
<th>3, 1940-1950</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+Bridge</td>
<td>18(62%)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29(97%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Bridge</td>
<td>4(33%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10(45%)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv clause</td>
<td>17(55%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36(59%)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind qu</td>
<td>3(60%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3(38%)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>1(14%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5(45%)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issues:
What are the relevant clause types?

- The basic question here is: what is the distribution of “embedded Verb Second”?
  - Do we know what “bridge verbs” are?
  - Are all adverbial clauses equal?

Clause types: some detail from one C21st text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of clause</th>
<th>Verb - Neg</th>
<th>Neg - Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ bridge complement</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- bridge complement</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective complement</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons. of degree clause</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“because” clause (nī)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other adverbial clause</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect question</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not categorised</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Issues:
Are all adverbs equal?

- Bentzen 2007: In Regional Northern Norwegian, finite verbs may optionally precede various adverbs, but may not precede negation.

Issues:
Are all verbs equal?

- Is there any trace of the distinction between main verbs and auxiliaries found in English, and reported in the process of acquisition of Swedish in Håkansson & Collberg 1994?
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### Judgment data

Thráinsson 2003, Petersen 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>V-Adv</th>
<th>Adv-V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+bridge compl</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-bridge compl</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect question</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial clause</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Magnitude Estimation

- Subjects assign a number:
  - to an initial sentence to reflect their judgment of its acceptability
  - to each successive sentence to indicate acceptability relative to the first (or to the previous sentence)
- This is not that different from traditional methods for gathering judgments, except that
  - Judgments are explicitly relative
  - There is no imposed scale: no absolute endpoints, and no fixed degree of discrimination
- These differences allow for the use of parametric statistics

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How “generalized” is V2 in Faroese?

We looked at the effect of two variables and their interaction (2 within-subjects variables, 2 and 5 levels):

• Order
  – Subject-Initial
  – Adjunct-Initial

• Clause type
  – Main clause
  – “Bridge verb” complement
  – Nonbridge verb A complement
  – Nonbridge verb B complement
  – Indirect question

Some comments on “clause type”

• We took “say” as the exemplar of a V2-permitting verb
• Vikner 1995 classifies “regret,” “admit,” “deny,” “doubt,” and “(be) proud” as disallowing embedded V2 in Danish (among others). However, Bentzen et al 2007 argue that
  – true factives (under which they include “proud”) do not allow embedded root phenomena, including V2, but “admit” is a semi-factive, and this class does allow V2
  – “regret” (at least its Icelandic translation harma), although a factive, for some reason exceptionally allows V2
• For this reason we split up the examples of Vikner’s class of “nonbridge” verbs into two
  – NonBridge A: regret, admit
  – NonBridge B: deny, doubt, be proud
Examples

• Clause Type: Bridge Order: Subject-Initial
Liv segði, at hon kom seint til arbeidis í gjár
Liv said that she came late to work yesterday

• Clause Type: Bridge Order: Adjunct-Initial
Beinir segði, at í morgin kemur hann seint til arbeidis
Beinir said that tomorrow comes he late to work

• Clause Type: NonBridge B Order: Subject-Initial
Sámal noktaði, at hann hevði verið alla nátta í bærinu í fleiri fórum
Sámal denied that he had been all night in bar-def frequently

• Clause Type: NonBridge B Order: Adjunct-Initial
Einar noktaði, at í fleiri fórum hevði hann drukkið alla nátta í bærinu
Einar denied that frequently he had drunk all night in bar-def

How acceptable is V-I in Faroese?

Again, we looked at the effect of two variables and their interaction (2 within-subjects variables, 2 and 3 levels):

• Order
  – Verb-Adverb
  – Adverb-Verb

• Type of “adverb”
  – Negation (ikki)
  – “High” adverb (kanska)
  – “Low” adverb (ofta)

These orders were all contained in relative clauses.
Examples

• Adverb: Negation Order: V-Adv
  Hatta er filmurin, sum Hanus hefur íkkisæð
  That is film-def that Hanus has neg seen

• Adverb: Negation Order: Adv-V
  Hetta er brevið, sum Elin íkkishefur lisðið
  That is letter-def that Elin neg has read

• Adverb: Low Adv Order: V-Adv
  Hetta er lagið, sum Teitur hefur ofta spaðt
  That is piece-the that Teitur has often played

• Adverb: Low Adv Order: Adv-V
  Hatta er sangurin, sum Eivør ofta hefur sungið
  That is song-def that Eivør often has sung

Faroese 1 vs Faroese 2: geographic?

• In Jonas 1996 it is argued that there are two distinct “dialects” in Faroese:
  – Faroese 1, which optionally allows V-to-I
  – Faroese 2, which does not allow V-to-I

• Jonas suggests that these two dialects may correlate both with age and with dialect area: Faroese 1 more common in the southern islands, and among older speakers.

• We investigated the geographic dialect suggestion by collecting data from 25 subjects from Tórshavn (North) and 22 subjects from Suðuroy (South). Subjects were, as much as possible, matched for age.
The main effect of dialect group was not significant: $F(2, 45) = .002, p = .97$.
There was no significant interaction between language group and position of verb, or between language group and type of adverb.
We did not find any evidence for a geographic dialect difference with respect to V-to-I in our subjects.

No geographic dialect difference

- The main effect of dialect group was not significant: $F(2, 45) = .002, p = .97$
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- We did not find any evidence for a geographic dialect difference with respect to V-to-I in our subjects
Looking at the effect of V2

- Each condition (combination of values for each variable) had three sentences exemplifying it: their scores were averaged together for each subject.
- The best measure of the effect of V2 is to look at the difference between the Subject-Initial and Adjunct-Initial order, for each clause type:
The effect of V2: Danish

- In Danish there was a significant difference between the effect of V2 in a main clause and after the second category of “nonbridge” verbs (*deny, doubt, be proud*).
- There was however no significant difference between the effect of V2 in a main clause and after the first category of “nonbridge” verbs (*regret, admit*).
- Taken together, this suggests that for this language Vikner’s original categorisation of “bridge” verbs for V2 is not correct; instead these results are more consistent with the proposals in Bentzen et al (2007) or Julien (2007).

The effect of V2: Faroese and Icelandic

- In Faroese and Icelandic, however, there is no significant difference between the effect of V2 in a main clause and after the second category of “nonbridge” verbs.
- This suggests that V2 in these languages targets a different projection than in Danish (and the other mainland Scandinavian languages?)
Comparing Verb/Adverb orders

- There is a significant interaction between language and order of the verb with respect to Negation/Adverb.
- I.e. the effect of the different orders is different, depending on the language...
Comparing Verb/Adverb orders

• To see where there is any difference between the different adverbs in terms of whether or not the verb can move past them, we can look at the difference between the Verb-Adverb and Adverb-Verb orders with respect to each of the three adverbs.
• We’d expect no difference between verb movement over the three adverbs in Icelandic (all should be good) and in Danish (all should be bad).
• If Faroese is just intermediate between Icelandic and Danish, we’d also expect no effect of the different adverb types here.
Comparing Verb/Adverb orders

• Our Faroese subjects dispreferred the order Finite Verb - Negation in an unambiguously non-V2 context to the same extent that the Danish subjects did.
• However, our Faroese subjects found Verb-Adverb orders better than Verb-Negation orders (this effect was found neither in Danish nor in Icelandic).
• It is possible that to the extent that IP-internal verb movement is still grammatical in Faroese, for some speakers it is to an intermediate position.
How is verb movement acquired?

- Because it has been reported that at least some adult Faroese speakers optionally allow V-to-I (even though so far we have found that it is significantly dispreferred), we wanted to investigate whether the V-to-I option arises late, after extensive contact with the written variety.
- As part of this, we will be gathering data from children of pre-school age.
- So far we have pilot data from 9 children, aged between 4,5 and 10,6, from a guided elicitation task.

How is verb movement acquired?

- To our surprise, we have found so far that many of the pre-school children produce the Verb - Negation order in indirect questions (the test context).
- As Westergaard & Bentzen 2007 found for two children speaking Regional Northern Norwegian, who showed a similar pattern, these children are not simply taking indirect questions to have the syntax of main clause questions (with V-to-C), since they never invert the verb past the subject in these contexts.
A Neg-Verb example

INV: Nilli, minnist tú, hvør tað er? Tað er tann lítla apan, ha? Hon hjálpir Pippi at baka siropskakur, sært tú? Men hesturin sleppur ikki at hjálpa til, tí at hann býr úti á altanini, hann tímir ikki at vera inni. Tað minnast vit, men heldur tú, at Gudny minnist hví? Hví, hví sleppur hesturin ikki at hjálpa til? Spyr Gudny! Minnist tú, hví...

CHILD: Minnist tú, hví hesturin íkki sleppur inn?
A slip up by the investigator, but...

INV: Ja, hesturin tímir ikki at vera inni...heldur tú, heldur tú at mamma minnist hví...hví hesturin ikki tímir at vera inni? Spyr hana: mamma, minnist tú...
CHILD: ... um hesturin tímdi ikki at vera inni?

In conclusion

- We have as yet found no difference between dialect areas with respect to V-to-I in Faroese.
- For the subjects we have tested to date, moving the verb higher than Negation is as dispreferred in Faroese as it is in Danish.
- There is some (currently limited) evidence that some Faroese speakers may allow verb movement to a position above adverbs but below Negation.
- We have some new evidence that Icelandic and Faroese do allow V2 in more contexts than Danish.
- If further evidence from children shows the same pattern as our pilots, the diachronic loss of V-to-I may be despite an initial tendency for children to generalise V-to-I to embedded contexts.
Original experiment sites

- http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~heycock/intro-ice.shtml

- Please note that we are no longer gathering data for these experiments—but you are welcome to try them out just to see how the materials are presented.

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