

Syntactic variation in Faroese

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Faroese, the language spoken in the Faroe Islands, is a Nordic language, historically most closely related to Icelandic and some West Norwegian dialects. Through the centuries, however, Faroese has been in close contact with Danish in particular.

Recent research has given evidence that the syntax of Faroese is somewhat complex. In some respect Faroese is on the same track as Icelandic but in other respects it is more in line with the mainland Scandinavian languages, or appears to vary between the two. One important instance of this concerns the position of the finite verb in subordinate clauses. Icelandic preserves what appears to be the original pattern where the verb occurs relatively “high” in the structure, to the left of negation and other adverbs. All the standard mainland Scandinavian languages, on the other hand, have changed over time to a modern form in which the verb occurs “low”, to the right of negation and adverbs. In studies by Petersen (2000) and Jonas (2003) evidence has been given that e.g. in embedded clauses Faroese allows both word orders: adverb + (infinite) verb and (infinite) verb + adverb, though the preferred word order seems to be the first one and especially preferred by younger people. However, we have only limited information about the process of this change.

One claim made (e.g. referred to in Thráinsson 2001: 109, Petersen 2000, and Jonas 2003) is that the word order verb-adverb occurring in embedded clauses is dependent on people belonging to a certain age group or possibly depends on dialectal difference. Thráinsson 2001 has made a small survey on this, but it would be desirable to do this on a broader basis and with a historical dimension.

Some preliminary data collected from the first newspaper to be published in Faroese, *Føringatíðindi* (‘Faroese news’), 1890 will be presented. In this data the position of adverbs of different kind and degree is investigated and the results will be compared to findings in Thráinsson 2001.

References

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