Stylistic Fronting in Old Swedish

John Ankarström

Stylistic Fronting (SF) is a V2-like phenomenon in Old Swedish whereby a more or less arbitrary element is moved to the left of the finite verb in T, but only if the subject position (SpecTP) is phonologically empty:

(1) a. som   han skapade ey
       COMP he   created not
       'which He did not create'   (filled SpecTP → no SF; MB I B:26)

    b. som   ey thiænar ~~ey~~ honum
       COMP not serves   him
       'who does not serve him'   (empty SpecTP → SF; MB I B:8)

Whereas in Swedish SF disappears in the 17th century (Platzack 1987:398), it is retained in Modern Icelandic, where it differs from topicalization in two important ways (Maling 1980): it seems to be able to move both phrasal and non-phrasal elements (i.e. heads), and it seems not to have any semantic or pragmatic motivation, while nevertheless being completely optional.

In an investigation of the historical development and eventual disappearance of SF in Swedish, I take a closer look at these two properties of SF, i.e. non-phrasal movement and semantic/pragmatic vacuity: Do they hold in Old Swedish, and what do they tell us about the nature of SF and the subject position in North Germanic languages? I will present new data and argue that SF is syntactic and not phonological movement. I will also discuss methodological questions unique to diachronic generative grammar, showing how computer-based tools may help to study specific word orders in a language with great synchronic and diachronic word order variation.

CITED OLD SWEDISH TEXTS

MB I B = *Pentateukparafrasen* (Pentateuch Paraphrase), 1526. In: Thorell, Olof (1959). Fem Moseböcker på fornsvenska enligt Cod. Holm. A 1. *SFSS* 60.

REFERENCES

Maling, Joan (1980). Inversion in embedded clauses in Modern Icelandic. In: *Íslenskt mál og almenn málfræði* 2. Ed. by Höskuldur Þráinsson, pp. 175–193.
Platzack, Christer (Aug. 1987). The Scandinavian languages and the null-subject parameter. In: *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 5.3, pp. 377–401.