Information-structure driven word order variation in Old Norwegian

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Old Norwegian (ON) is considered to be a VO-language with a strong V2-rule (cf. Faarlund 2004, Aamodt Nielsen 2013), as is his modern counterpart. However, in ON we also find OV-patterns, as shown in (1), as well as VAux word order patterns, although not all equally common. Assuming an underlying AuxVO base, this alternation can be explained as information-structurally driven in line with Hinterhölzl/Petrova (2018) (for OHG), Pintzuk/Taylor (2015) (for OE) or Hroársdóttir (2010) (for OI), e.g. in order to focalize or background complements.

(1) OV-pattern in ON
   þvi at   [til þæss]ₒ [væliaz]ᵥ opt   [hiner bæztu mænn]ₛ
   because to this   choose   often the   best   men
   'because often the best of men are chosen for this' (KS, 2r; col.a 4-5)

In this talk I will present a new corpus study for ON, identifying relational and referential structures, and examining the interplay between IS, syntax, and prosody. The loss of OV in Modern Norwegian will thus be explained as a change in the way IS categories are displayed in the grammar. In the example above, both IS and prosodic factors seems to play a role in determining the OV word order, as well as for the positioning of the subject. The corpus data also shows the tendency that old information precedes new information with 34.89% for previously mentioned objects in OV order, compared to OV order affiliated with new information by 22.29%. These numbers include all phrase types and heaviness categories. As for prosodic factors, it seems that light DPs (including pronouns) are generally preferred in preverbal position whereas heavier entities appear more often in postverbal position (cf. Hróarsdóttir 2010). I will give a more detailed analysis with the exact nature of the clauses and the categories involved in these contexts for ON.

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