

German V2-Argument Clauses from a Diachronic Perspective

This study investigates argument realizing verb-second clauses (arg.V2) in the Early New High German period (ENHG) on the basis of a corpus of narrative texts from the 15th and 16th c. (Pontus und Sidonia (1450), Melusine (1456), Wigalois (1472), Wilhelm von Österreich (1481), Tristrant und Isalde (1484), Huce Scheppel (1500), Fortunatus (1509), Schöne Magelone (1527), and Goldener Esel (1538)). I will argue that arg.V2 are licensed by two different pragmatic factors independently: *at-issueness* (Simons et al. 2010) and *mediated assertivity* (Reis 1997).

In ENHG (as well as in Present Day German (PDG)), argument clauses of verbs that denote an act of assertion can either be realized as asyndetic V2 clauses (a.) or as syndetic verb-end clauses (VE) (b.), b. being the canonical structure of subordinate clauses.

- a. sy sagten all [sy **wißten** es nit] (Fortunatus)
they said all they KNEW it NEG
'They all said they didn't know it'
- b. der schray (...) [das Fortunatus nit umb die ding **wißt**] (Fortunatus)
he screamed (...) that Fortunatus NEG about the things KNEW
'He screamed (...) that Fortunatus didn't know about these things'

The V2-structure is assumed to be a main clause phenomenon in German and cross-Germanic (Holmberg 2015), hence arg.V2 are often argued to come close to main clauses (Reis 1997, Gärtner 2002, Truckenbrodt 2006). Although the PDG counterparts of arg.V2 have been thoroughly investigated, their licensing conditions are still a matter of debate (Jacobs 2020, Djärv 2022). There are at least two theoretical approaches to the pragmatic licensing conditions of arg.V2 in German. Firstly, arg.V2 are claimed to be *mediated assertions* (Reis 1997, Gärtner 2002), as the truth value of the proposition is usually asserted by a matrix subject. Secondly, arg.V2 are assumed to mark *at-issue-content* (in the sense of Simons et al. 2010), that is, assertions that are relevant for the *Question under Discussion* (in the sense of Klein & von Steutterheim 1992) of a discourse (Antomo 2015).

The diachronic perspective on the licensing conditions of arg.V2 is often unconsidered. Since the formal distinction between dependent and independent clauses had already developed in the Old High German period (Axel 2007), former studies have primarily focused on arg.V2 in the Old and Middle High German period. Petrova (2020) has shown that there are noticeable parallels in the typology of matrix verbs of arg.V2 between these periods and PDG. However, diachronic frequency changes indicate that there is a stronger association between the discourse pragmatic status of a clause and the V2-structure in ENHG: In our corpus of ENHG narratives, argument clauses of verbs of saying have V2 in 48,8 % of cases, whereas narratives from the 18th and 19th c. (Deutsches Textarchiv) show arg.V2 in 34,78 % of cases.

In fact, the corpus data provide evidence that the different structures of argument clauses followed rather strict discourse-pragmatic principles after verbs of saying in ENHG – this is especially prominent in the *Fortunatus*, which is the only non-translated text in the corpus. I will show that VE is very much restricted to propositions that have a discourse antecedent and that are therefore presupposed (which is the case in b.). The function of V2 is twofold: On the one hand, V2 is accessible for *mediated assertions*, whereby it is not relevant if the narrator is committed towards the truth of the proposition or not (for example, in a., the proposition of the argument clause can immediately be identified as a lie). On the other hand, V2 marks argument clauses with *at-issue-content* that independently adds to the discourse. The proposition may even be presupposed in such contexts. These two factors can, but do not necessarily have to interact. The pragmatic two-sidedness suggests that the V2-structure can hardly be ascribed to one particular pragmatic function and the existing theories do not necessarily oppose one another.

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