The information structure of subject extraposition in Early New High German

Caitlin Light

This paper investigates the information-structural characteristics of extraposed subjects in Early New High German (ENHG), using data from a parsed corpus of Martin Luther's first translation of the New Testament, the *Septembertestament*, 1522. Relevant examples have been extracted from this corpus and coded for information including the focus structure of the clause and the discourse status of (potentially) extracted subjects. Subject extraposition in ENHG follows the same pattern demonstrated for object extraposition in Bies (1996), although it occurs at a lower frequency, demonstrating a more general phenomenon of DP extraposition in ENHG.

Bies (1996) provides a detailed analysis of the information structure of DP extraposition, based on a corpus of examples collected from ENHG texts. She considers two possible motivations for extraposition, discourse newness and narrow focus on the DP, and concludes that the latter is a better fit for the data. However, her analysis does not include extraposed subjects. There is reason to question whether subjects will pattern like object DPs in this regard. Prince (1989) demostrates that there is a unique phenomenon of 'subject postposition' in Yiddish, which (unlike DP extraposition in ENHG) specifically targets discourse-new DPs. My goal in this study is to determine whether ENHG had a single general rule of DP extraposition, or whether subject extraposition demonstrates a unique information-structural pattern.

From the *Septembertestament* corpus, I extracted all unambiguous examples of extraposed subjects, using clause-final verbs and verbal particles as diagnostics. I found 58 such examples, 41 in matrix clauses and 17 in subordinate clauses. These were compared to 498 examples of subjects that could have been extraposed but were not. In addition, a random sample of 60 tokens with non-extraposed subjects was selected for a detailed comparison. The subject in each clause was coded for discourse status (new, inferrable, or old), syntactic weight, and definiteness (quantified, indefinite, or definite). Finally, each clause was coded for presence or absence of narrow focus on the subject. Clauses with ambiguous focus structures were coded separately.

In the sample collected, subject extraposition occurs at an overall rate of 10.27%. Object extraposition in Bies (1996) occurred at a rate of 13.2%. Because subject free relatives extrapose at an extremely high rate (38.46%), I removed them from the sample, resulting in an adjusted rate of 7.72%. This shows that subjects extrapose at a lower frequency than objects in ENHG. Discourse status seems to influence subject extraposition, as newer elements extrapose at a higher rate; the opposite trend is visible with non-extraposed subjects (Table 1). However, I will follow Bies in araguing that discourse status alone is not the primary phenomenon being observed, but rather a side effect of the real information-structural motivation for subject extraposition.

Examples of extraposed subjects coded for narrow focus are given in (1) through (3). Context is provided, and the relevant tokens are shown in bold. In the sample of tokens with an extraposed subject, 82.35% of the examples with unambiguous focus patterns showed narrow focus on the subject. Only 8.89% of the sample set of non-extraposed subjects had narrow focus. This is a much stronger tendency than the one demonstrated for discourse status, as only 46.34% of extraposed subjects are discourse new. As argued in Bies (1996), I propose that the tendency for extraposed subjects to be discourse-new is simply due to the fact that discourse-new DPs are more likely to be narrowly focused. Narrow focus, and not discourse status, triggers extraposition of the subject.

As this study demonstrates, all DP extraposition in ENHG shares a single information-structural motivation, allowing us to account for the phenomenon with a single general analysis. ENHG does not exhibit the separate 'subject postposition' phenomenon seen in Yiddish, a closely related language, as described by Prince (1989). This study contributes an additional case study to our understanding of crosslinguistic variation in the realization of focus.

Table 1. Discourse status of extraposed and non-extraposed subjects.

	New	Evoked/Inferred	Given	Total
Extraposed	19 (46.34%)	12 (29.27%)	10 (24.39%)	41
Non-extraposed	5 (8.47%)	21 (35.59%)	33 (55.93%)	59

(1) Aber die kinder des   reychs   werden außgestossen ynn die außersten finsternisß,
     but   the children of-the kingdom will-be cast-out   in   the outermost darkness
     da   wirt seyn weynen vnd tzeen klappen.
     there will be   weeping and teeth gnashing
     'But the children of the kingdom will be cast out into the outermost darkness. In that
     place there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.'
     (*Septembertestament*, Matthew 8:12)

(2) denn ich sage euch warlich, bis   das hymel vnd erden zurgehe, **wirt nicht zur gehen,**
     for I   tell you truly   until the heaven and earth dwindle will not   PRT dwindle
     der kleynist buchstab, noch eyn tittle vom   gesetz, bis   das es alles geschehe.
     the smallest letter   nor a   title from-the law   until that it all   occurs
     'For I tell you truly, until the heaven and the earth dwindle, neither the smallest letter, nor
     a single title will dwindle from the law, until it all takes place.'
     (*Septembertestament*, Matthew 5:18)

(3) denn es werden falsche Christi, vnd falsche propheten auff stehen, vnd grosse tzeychen
     for it will   false   Christs and false   prophets up   stand   and great signs
     vnd wunder thun **das verfuret werden, yhn denn yrthum   wo   es muglich**
     and wonders do   that misled   will-be in   the   confusion where it possible
     were   auch die auserweleten.
     would-be also the chosen
     'For false Christs and false prophets will come forward and perform great signs and won-
     ders, so that in the confusion, where possible, even the chosen will be misled.'
     (*Septembertestament*, Matthew 24:24)

———————

Bies, Ann. 1996. Syntax and discourse factors in Early New High German: Evidence for verb-final word order. Master's thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Prince, Ellen. 1989. Yiddish Wh-clauses, subject-postposing, and topicalization. In *ESCOL '88*, ed. J. Powers and K. de Jong, 403–15. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University.