

Periodic style and the syntax of aboutness topics in Early New High German and Early Modern Danish

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While most core morphosyntactic features of Present-Day Standard Germanic languages were already in place in the written varieties of the late 16th century, written discourse in the early modern languages of Western and Northern Europe were all under the influence of a rhetorical writing code often glossed as “periodic style” (which I take to be a discourse tradition; see the general disc. in Siouffi, 2019). In this kind of writing, the core syntactic units of written language are not the clause and the utterance, but the period and its components, the *protasis* and the *apodosis* (and an optional constituent, the *clausula*). The aim of the talk is to investigate the link between the syntactic organization of the period and the behavioural properties of aboutness topics (Reinhart 1981) in Early New High German (ENHG) and Early Modern Danish (EMD), using a 1587 ENHG chapbook, the *Historia of Dr. Fausten*, and its EMD translation (1588).

In **part 1**, I present the **major features of periodic writing in both subcorpora**, and the differences that can be observed pertaining at subordination and correlative structures. I show that the clause is a more consistent and compact unit in written EMD than in written ENHG, where (multiple) left-dislocation appears to be a crucial feature of periodic constructions (which is not the case in the EMD subcorpus). The ENHG corpus also displays more periods where both the protasis and the apodosis can be composed of a binary structure (with a sub-apodosis and a sub-protasis inside of each of the two major components; cf. Lefèvre, 2017 and Rinas, 2019).

In **part 2**, I introduce the **panchronic spectrum of aboutness topic properties in Germanic** gained from the broader corpus-based diachronic research program from which this contribution is an excerpt. The major three stages of the spectrum are the regulation of topicality effects at the level of text and discourse structure (incl. argumentation); the syntacticization of a topical field within the structure of the clause and the emergence of additional constraints on anaphora and ellipsis; the merger of non-contrastive aboutness topicality with the subject function. The various stages of the spectrum can be identified through a series of tests, which are applied to the corpus.

In **part 3**, I present the **results of the corpus-based investigation** of these tests in both languages:

ENHG is located in the vicinity of the first pole. Ellipsis and anaphora are dependent on topic accessibility within a thematically and argumentatively consistent discourse movement. Old/New and definite/indefinite are not decisive criteria (case-marking is not relevant, either). Contrastive aboutness topics (Molnár 1998) are marked by dislocated constructions that can trespass the limits of the clause, included of embedded clauses.

EMD displays a much higher degree of clause-level syntacticization of topic properties. Ellipsis is possible only under the double condition of topical accessibility and congruent argumental status. However, pronominal anaphora (vs. full NP repetition) follows the same rules as in ENHG. Non-contrastive topics have to be arguments of the verb and are most often syntactically integrated within the VP. They cannot be extracted from embedded clauses. But just like in ENHG, new framesetting topics (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007) are isolated via correlative constructions.

The difference between ENHG and EMD is confirmed by the fact that EMD requests additional grammatical marking in clauses lacking an aboutness topic : the empty pronoun *der* (< *der*, “there”) systematically shows up in immediate post-verbal position or after the complementizer.

In the **conclusion**, I claim that the properties of aboutness topics are tightly dependent on how relevant the clause is as a syntactic unit in the corpus at hand. “Periodic style” and the various types of grammatical strategies involved in the *Ausbau* of the corresponding rhetorical discourse tradition, including clause-linkage but not restricted to it, played a major in the syntacticization of information structure in Early Modern Germanic and in the emergence of clause-level topicality effects that were not reducible to discourse mechanisms. This claim is corroborated by converging corpus data from Early Modern Dutch and Early Modern English.

Keywords: syntax, dislocation, topic, subject, clause structure

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