

VP- and vP-fronting inside the Germanic *Mittelfeld*: Word order and information structure

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1 Introduction Verb-phrase fronting is familiar from the left periphery (or *Vorfeld*). This paper argues that both VP- and vP-fronting also exist in the *Mittelfeld*, the former active in OV order and the latter in object extraposition. VP/vP-fronting, object shift and scrambling interact with information structure in ways that the syntactic derivations in this paper predict with precision.

2 OV~VO, OPrt~PrtO, OP~PO In Old English, VO orders are not information-structurally earmarked, but preverbal objects are overwhelmingly given ([Struik & van Kemenade 2020](#)), suggesting that OV order is the product of leftward object movement ('object shift') marking givenness. English has arguably preserved object shift: though no longer producing OV order (as the verb is consistently raised higher than the landing-site of the leftward-moved object; [Pesetsky 1989](#)), object shift in V–Prt constructions is still linked to givenness, particularly in the case of weak pronouns ([Johnson 1991](#); *I put <down> the book <down> ~ I put <*down> it <down>*). But word order variation in transitive PPs is *not* correlated with givenness: in Dutch *ik klom <op> de heuvel <op>* 'I climbed up the hill', O is either given or new regardless of its position relative to P.

3 West-Germanic OV In the West-Germanic OV languages, *all* VP-internal material (not just the nominal object) surfaces *en bloc* to the left of V, with the subconstituents of the VP linearized in relation to one another in the same way as in the Germanic VO languages. Material placed in the preverbal *Mittelfeld* is not necessarily given. The West-Germanic OV languages do have information-structural leftward movement ('scrambling') — but scrambling is not responsible for producing OV order; rather, it results in the surface separation of the object from the verb within the *Mittelfeld*, as in (1b), where *mijn glas* 'my glass' is discourse-anaphoric. Placement of all VP-internal material *en bloc* to the left of V, with preservation of the relative order of constituents, is argued here to be derived by shifting the entire VP, *minus* its head, to the edge of vP, as in (2). (2) is the *Mittelfeld*-internal cousin of the [Massam \(2000\)](#) derivation of Niuean word order at TP (except that Niuean VP-fronting to SpecTP pied-pipes the verb while (2) strands V at v; cf. §4).

- (1) a. dat ik voorzichtig mijn glas in de afwasmachine zet (Dutch)
that I carefully my glass in the dishwasher put
b. dat ik mijn glas voorzichtig in de afwasmachine zet → 'scrambled' order
that I my glass carefully in the dishwasher put
both: 'I carefully put my glass in the dishwasher'

- (2) $[_{vP} [_{VP} \text{voorzichtig} [_{VP} \text{mijn glas} [_{V'} \forall \text{in de afwasmachine}]]]] [_{vP} \theta_{\text{ext}} [_{v'} v+V \forall \text{P}]]]$

4 North-Germanic VO In the Scandinavian languages, the single object of a transitive clause can shift leftward by itself to SpecvP. But it is also possible for both objects of the double object construction to shift in tandem, with preservation of their order relative to each other (IO before DO) and to V. [Vikner \(1989\)](#) already suggests that the shifting of both objects may involve movement of a single constituent containing the two objects together. Viewed against the background of (2), this suggestion is recast here as movement of the remnant-VP to the outer specifier of vP.

- (3) jeg lånte hende dem ikke (Danish)
I lent her them not

- (4) $[_{vP} [_{VP} \text{hende} [_{V'} \forall \text{dem}]]] [_{vP} \theta_{\text{ext}} [_{v'} \text{ikke} [_{v'} v+V \forall \text{P}]]]]]$

5 Constraining remnant-VP movement to the *Mittelfeld* For (2) and (4) to succeed, remnant-VPs from which the V-head has been extracted must be candidates for fronting within the *Mittelfeld*. But beheaded remnant-VP fronting into the left periphery is ungrammatical, as shown in (5).

- (5) *voorzichtig mijn glas in de afwasmachine zet ik *hende dem lånte jeg
carefully my glass in the dishwasher put I her them lent I

The silent copy of the moved verb must have a c-commanding antecedent by the end of the syntactic derivation. In (2) and (4), $v+V$ raises out of vP (covertly in subordinate clauses, overtly in the root), gaining c-command over the silent V-copy; but remnant-VP fronting into the *Vorfeld* (5), higher than any verbal head can reach, fails to get the silent V-copy c-commanded by the verb.

6 Word order and information structure Placement of VP-internal material to the left of V/Prt/P is not in itself a marker of topicality, nor is placement to the right of V/Prt/P a marker of focality. The information-structural effect of word order manipulation is a function of the relation between the leftward-shifted material and what follows it: the leftward-shifted material in the *Mittelfeld* can be a topic only if what follows it is a suitable comment for it (cf. [Neeleman & van de Koot 2008](#)). The core vP , which contains VP and the base position of the subject, can serve in principle as a comment for a topic, so object shift to the outer Spec vP can deliver a topic–comment information structure. But placement outside the core vP does *not automatically* lead to a topic–comment articulation. (2) gives a topic reading for the VP-internal material only if $v+V$ is contrastively focused (‘put, not lay or shove’); likewise, postpositional *de heuvel op* ‘up the hill’ (§2) marks the P-object as a topic only if *op* is contrastive (‘up, not down’). Absent a contrastive reading for it, the verb is not a suitable comment, so (2) is usually information-structurally neutral.

7 Object extraposition as intraposition *cum* leftward vP -shift Within Germanic, scrambling (a topicalization strategy in the *Mittelfeld*) and heavy NP shift are in complementary distribution: the former is found in the OV languages, the latter in the VO languages. This complementarity motivates an integrated approach to the two phenomena. The [Kayne \(1994\)](#)-inspired approach to heavy NP shift schematized in (6a) posits leftward remnant- vP movement around the *Mittelfeld*-internal position of the object (cf. [den Dikken 1995](#)). (6) identifies as the difference between the West-Germanic scrambling and heavy NP shift languages the (un)availability of remnant- vP movement inside the *Mittelfeld* (‘ μ ’) — English has it, Dutch and German do not. This inversely correlates the distribution of scrambling and heavy NP shift in West-Germanic to another mirror-image word-order difference between Dutch and German, on the one hand, and English, on the other: the former have remnant- vP fronting into the left periphery (as in Dutch (7b) with *dat theekopje* left behind) but English does not: (7a) is grammatical only if *that teacup* is pied-piped.

- (6) a. $[she\ T\ [_\mu\ [_{vP}\ put\ \bar{D}P\ in\ the\ dishwasher]\ [_{DP}\ her\ favorite\ teacup\ from\ China]\ [_{vP}]]]$
 b. $*[ze\ T\ [_\mu\ [_{vP}\ [_{VP}\ \bar{D}P\ [_{V'}\ \forall\ PP]]]\ [_{vP}\ \theta_{ext}\ [_{v'}\ v+V\ \forall\ PP]]]\ [_{DP}\ \dots\ theekopje\ 'teacup'\ \dots]\ [_{vP}]]]$
- (7) a. $[_{vP}\ put\ \langle that\ teacup \rangle\ in\ the\ dishwasher],\ she\ wouldn't\ \langle *that\ teacup \rangle$
 b. $[_{vP}\ \langle dat\ theekopje \rangle\ in\ de\ afwasmachine\ zetten]\ zou\ ze\ \langle dat\ theekopje \rangle\ niet\ that\ teacup.DIM\ in\ the\ dishwasher\ put\ would\ she\ that\ teacup.DIM\ not$

8 Remnant- vP fronting: *Mittelfeld* versus left periphery At the completion of the *Mittelfeld* (‘ μ ’ in (6)), instructions are given to the interpretive components regarding linearization ([Fox & Pesetsky 2005](#)) and information structure. In (6a), DP is linearized to the right of *put in the dishwasher*, and focused. Fronting of the remnant- vP into the left periphery, as in (7a) with *that teacup* in clause-final position, would preserve this linearization instruction, but would contravene the information-structural profile assigned to the DP at μ : at the CP phase of the clause, vP -topicalisation puts focus on *wouldn't*, not *teacup*. This information-structural clash rules out the remnant- vP version of (7a). In Dutch, (6b) is impossible: remnant-VP fronting delivers a linearization instruction saying that all material inside the remnant-VP must be spelled out to the left of the verb (see (2)); subsequent scrambling of the object *cum* intraposition of the remnant- vP , as in (6b), upsets this linearization, making extraposition illicit. What is possible is to mark the entire vP as silent at μ , and to pronounce vP in the left periphery: then no linearization instruction for the object and verb is given at μ ; the object can be pronounced either inside in the spelled-out copy of vP in the left periphery or not, delivering the variability of object placement seen in (7b).