

Koffer dæm ikke sir det? [why they not say that]: Word order in wh-questions in North Norway

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In wh-questions in North Norwegian dialects, the typical situation is that long wh-elements require V2 word order, while there is variation between V2 and non-V2 in questions with the monosyllabic question words *ka*, *kor* and *kem* ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘who’ (e.g. Vangsnes 2005). This is illustrated for the Tromsø dialect in (1)-(2).

- (1) Koffør drikk du? / *Koffør du drikk? (Tromsø)
why drink you / why you drink
‘Why do you drink?’
- (2) Ka drikk du? / Ka du drikk?
what drink you / what you drink
‘What are you drinking?’

In a thesis aptly called *Koffer dæm sir det?* [Why they say that?], Nilsen (1996) discusses the dialect spoken in Nordreisa (north of Tromsø) with respect to the option of using non-V2 also in questions with long wh-elements. This feature is argued to be due to influence from Kven/Finnish at the beginning of the previous century.

The present paper provides some new data from 28 speakers from three different areas in Northern Troms (Nordreisa, Manndalen, Djupvik), consisting of grammaticality judgements as well as (semi-)spontaneous production. Surprisingly, the data show that these speakers generally do **not** produce non-V2 word order in questions with the long wh-elements, although this word order is frequent with the monosyllabic question words. On the other hand, these speakers to a large extent accept this word order in grammaticality judgement tasks. Furthermore, there is a statistically significant difference between short, long and phrasal wh-words in the acceptance of non-V2. The new data also show clear age differences, confirming the claim made by Sollid (2003) that this dialect feature is in the process of being lost.

The data from Northern Troms are compared to similar data collected at the island Senja (south of Tromsø), where speakers neither produce nor accept these sentences. The microvariation found across these dialects is discussed in terms of the different V2 grammars that are identified in Westergaard (2009). These grammars distinguish between different wh-elements, which are found to trigger a default V2 grammar (with verb movement to the Interrogative head), a default non-V2 grammar (without verb movement) or a mixed grammar dependent on information structure (with verb movement to a Topic head in the CP domain). The findings are also discussed with respect to some general issues in language acquisition and language change.

References

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