May the force be with you: A reply from the 5th floor*

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The main aim of Wiklund (2009) was to bring together the results of recent contributions to research on the difference between the verb second (1a) and verb-in-situ (1b) word orders in embedded clauses, of which the work by Marit Julien (e.g. Julien 2007) constitutes an important part, with what seems to be the common goal of understanding the difference between the two word orders.

(1) a. Olle sa att han inte hade läst boken. (non-V2)
   Olle say.Past that he not had read.Sup book.Def

   b. Olle sa att han hade inte läst boken (V2)
   Olle say.Past that he had not read.Sup book.Def

Another aim was to facilitate an identification of points of agreement and potential disagreement, a sort of state-of-the-art report. When terminological issues were cleared up, the points of disagreement between e.g. me and Julien appeared to me to reduce to grammaticality judgements. From Julien (this volume), I understand that my attempts were not successful and that misunderstandings remain, which makes it difficult to know at what level to place the discussion. I fail to see where I state that embedded V2 clauses are not asserted. My point is that certain embedded clauses with the verb in-situ also qualify as assertions, given the definitions at hand. I also fail to see where I, or my co-authors, state that V2 can be accounted for in terms of main assertion (or main point of utterance); we spent half of our paper arguing quite the opposite (Wiklund et al. 2009) and the argument is repeated in Wiklund (2009). Verb second and main assertion have the same distribution but can occur independently of one another. Therefore, this test does not single out V2 from non-V2 word orders. The swear word

*I owe many thanks to Marit Julien, whose work has inspired me in my search for the force that we both wish to identify, and to Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson for discussion of Icelandic.

test introduced by Julien (2008) is a brilliant follow-up. Only, it fails to distinguish V2 from non-V2 word orders in the varieties that I have consulted, in the very same way that our own once so hope-inducing MPU test failed. In many contexts, the non-V2 word order is even slightly more natural to my ear, such as in the examples below including the supposedly crucial swear word för fasen (other examples can be found on the internet).

(2) a. Han blir förbannad och ropar att han för fa(se)n inte alls
he gets angry and shouts that he ̄ not at-all är doktor.
is doctor
b. Han blir förbannad och ropar att han är för fa(se)n inte alls
he gets angry and shouts that he is ̄ not at-all doktor.
doctor

(3) a. Du kunde ha sagt att man för fa(se)n inte kan jämföra vin
you could have said that one ̄ not compare wine och öl.
and beer
b. Du kunde ha sagt att man kan för fa(se)n inte jämföra vin
you could have said that one can ̄ not compare wine och öl.
and beer.

Now we can either try to convince each other who has the most representative informants, or we can acknowledge variation. It is possible that the presence of för fasen has the effect of producing or identifying a “force” of some kind. But a force is also perceived in its presence with the V-in-situ word order, as is the case with the other discourse-oriented elements exemplified in Wiklund (2009: 33): “[a]lthough this fact does not preclude a difference between V2 and non-V2 word order with respect to illocutionary force in the absence of the above elements, verb movement does not appear to be obligatory in the presence of the purported illocutionary force features.” If it was not clear enough, the difference between V2 and
non-V2 in the absence of the above mentioned elements may be the presence of a (perceived) force of some kind, which seems to be in line with what Julien herself wants to argue. The perception of a similar force in the presence of discourse-oriented elements but in the absence of verb second should be an interesting fact that arguably takes us one step further. Thus, I fail to see what is debated here, if the debate is about something else than grammaticality judgements. I am ready to engage in a discussion about how the “force” perceived can be derived when we know more about it, if that is a matter of disagreement. But then the discussion must be raised to another level, one where there is at least agreement on where the points of disagreement lie and where the logics behind my argumentation are properly referred to. A constructive next step would be to pin down what is meant by force here. One immediate possibility that comes to mind is that examples like (2a) and (2b) share assertoric force but differ from each other in point of view-ness. The importance of swear words qua evaluative elements indicates that sentience/evidentiality may be relevant. To me the point of view in (2a) seems associated with either the matrix subject or with the speaker (being responsible for evaluating the truth of the embedded assertion), whereas the point of view in (2b) appears associated with only the speaker (being responsible for evaluating the truth of the embedded assertion). Swear words that prima facie seem to include reference to the speaker, such as fan i mig (devil in me) are thus compatible with both word orders in my variety:

(4)  a. Hon såg att han fan-i-mig inte hade läst brevet.  
    she saw that he devil-in-me not had read letter-the  
    b. Hon såg att han hade fan-i-mig inte läst brevet.  
    she saw that he had devil-in-me not read letter-the

Maybe there is interesting micro-variation in this respect. The swear word förfasen, in turn, can be taken to identify assertoric force from both points of view in my variant (as do other evaluative elements) but apparently
only the speaker-anchored point of view in the varieties reported on by Julien. If I am on the right track, verb second has to do with the “very fine” structure of the left periphery and encodes sentience/evidentiality, at least in declaratives. The quasi-marked (parenthetical) status of embedded verb second (vis-à-vis the canonical non-V2 word order) should then be deriveable from the interference of the speaker’s point of view in environments where the subject of a verb of speech or propositional attitude would be the most natural binder of the relevant role from a semantic point of view but where it is prevented from establishing this relation due to the V2 clause being an island for such binding. A similar difference appears to be present in Icelandic (or varieties of Icelandic) between the subject-initial and non-subject initial verb second word orders in embedded clauses. The subject-initial word order is ambiguous between the two readings, whereas the non-subject initial word order yields speaker-anchored assertoric force. All of this, of course, is the topic of a different paper.

References