The clause-medial *v*P phase is real: Evidence from Moselle Franconian

Summary. Recent work (Keine, 2017,2020; Keine & Zeijlstra, 2020) has called into question whether clause-medial *v*P constitutes a phase. We argue on the basis of novel data from Moselle Franconian, a Germanic variety spoken in the Central Franconian language area, that (transitive) *v*P is a phase. Specifically, we argue that the language doesn't permit intermediate probing by *v*, which allows us to transparently observe the otherwise veiled effects of the *v*P phase. This accounts for a range of V2 word-order facts where only high adverbs, subjects and scrambled definite objects can topicalize in transitive clauses, whereas low adverbs and indefinite objects cannot.

Background. Since Chomsky (2000,2001), it is often assumed that syntactic derivations proceed in *phases* that induce the cyclic removal of structure from the workspace. Once structure is removed, it is no longer accessible to syntactic operations, as expressed by the phase-impenetrability condition (PIC). Standard theory assumes at least two syntactic heads that demarcate phases - C and *v*. Evidence used to argue in favour of the phasality of *v* are so-called successive-cyclicity effects such as binding reconstruction effects, parasitic gap licensing, and quantifier raising (Legate, 2003). However, as Keine (2017, 2020) points out, these common arguments prove that a given syntactic object *can* move through an intermediate *v*P-phase, not that it *must* (as predicted by the PIC). Given the assumption that intermediate movement is (i) probe-driven, and (ii) subject to cross-linguistic variation (see e.g. Abels, 2012), clause-medial successive-cyclicity effects can always be attributed to intermediate probing by *v*, rather than the PIC.

Analysis. Like most other Germanic varieties, Moselle Franconian allows a range of constituent-types to precede the second-position finite verb, like subjects (1a), objects (1b), or PPs (1c).

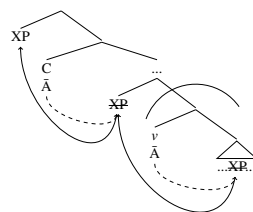(1)　a.　Den Thoemmes will　ein Auto.
　　　　　the　Thomas　　wants an　car.
　　　　　'Thomas wants a car.'

　　　b.　Dat Bähr trinkt　den Möschel.
　　　　　the　beer　drinks the　Möschel.
　　　　　'Möschel drinks the beer.'

　　　c.　Um 2 Uhr　kaehft den Thoemess ein Auto.
　　　　　at　2 hour buys　the　Thomas　a　car
　　　　　'At 2pm, Thomas is buying a car.'

(2)　a.　*Intermediate probing not possible*
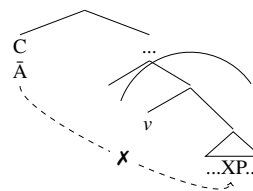
　　　b.　*Intermediate probing possible*

However, a closer look reveals an interesting contrast wherein high adverbs, subjects and scrambled definite objects can topicalize, but low adverbs and indefinite objects cannot. We argue that this provides evidence that Moselle Franconian does not allow intermediate probing by *v*, allowing the effects of the clause-medial PIC to be transparently observed (as in (2a), cf. (2b)). Constituents that can be fronted must be either base-generated above the *v*P, or be able to independently escape it given that intermediate Ā-probing is not available.

High vs. low adverb asymmetry. We follow Cinque (1999) in assuming that adverbs are introduced in a hierarchy across the clausal spine, and note that the adverbs which allow for topicalization to the preverbal position are those that Cinque isolates as appearing relatively high in the clausal spine. Adverbs that do not topicalize are associated with lower projections. (3a) shows that subjects can occupy the preverbal position, and (3b) shows the high evaluative adverb *leyda* 'unfortunately' can topicalize, but a low manner adverb *viersichtig* 'carefully' cannot.

(3)　a.　Hehn fährt　(viersichtig / leyda)
　　　　　he　　drives carefully　　unfortunately
　　　　　'He drives carefully/unfortunately.'

　　　b.　Leyda　　　/ *viersichtig fährt　hehn
　　　　　unfortunately　carefully　　drives he
　　　　　'Carefully/unfortunately, he drives.'

Table 1 shows more comprehensively how Cinque's hierarchy intersects with topicalization in Moselle Franconian. We note that we can make sense of the fact that many aspectual adverbs resist topicalization under the idea that some aspectual information is projected within the verb-phrase (Travis, 2010).

AdvP	Example	Can it be fronted?
Evaluative	*leyda* 'unfortunately'	**Yes**
Epistemic	*wahrscheinlich* 'probably'	**Yes**
Past/future	*gesta* 'yesterday'	**Yes**
Frequentative	*dack* 'often'	No
Volition	*extra* 'intentionally'	No
Anterior	*schon* 'already'	No
Terminative	*nit mia* 'no longer'	No
Durative	*kurz* 'briefly'	No
Completive	*zum teil* 'partially'	No
Manner	*sching* 'beautifully'	No

Table 1: Cinque's (1999) hierarchy and Moselle Franconian

Subject-object asymmetry. Our second piece of evidence comes from a subject-object asymmetry. Whereas subjects can freely topicalize, objects can only topicalize if they are definite (4a-b). The availability of subject-topicalization is captured straightforwardly under the assumption that the external argument is introduced above the clause-medial phase, hence evading the PIC.

(4) a. Dat Bähr trinkt   dehn Möschel.
        the beer drink.PRES the Möschel.
        'Möschel drinks the beer.'

     b. *Ehn Bähr trinkt dehn Möschel.
         a   beer drinks the Möschel.
         'Möschel drinks a beer.'

We posit that indefinite objects resist topicalization because they are embedded within the *v*P, and hence are inaccessible to the A'-probe on C, following the PIC.

Scrambling. Definite objects, as in (4a), on the other hand, are able to circumvent the PIC due to the availability of a separate optional process - scrambling - which raises the definite object to a specifier of *v*P, and hence circumvents the PIC. Independent evidence for scrambling comes from embedded SOV-clauses, where definite objects may scramble above negation, but indefinite objects may not (5)

(5) ... dat den Hans (deh Bicher / *ehn Buch) nit (deh Bicher / ehn Buch) kofft
         that the Hans the books   a   book not the books   a   book   bought
     '... that Hans didn't buy the books / a book'

Against a relativized locality account. A competing analysis of the facts described so far is to suggest that the Ā-probe on C cannot probe past the highest DP, but can target either the highest DP or any XP above it (e.g. an adverb). Under an Interaction-Satisfaction model of Agree (Deal, 2023) we might model this as a probe with a satisfaction-condition of [SAT:Ā ∨ D]. Under this analysis we predict that scrambling should only be able to circumvent the probe-specific locality condition on C if it scrambles the object to a position above the subject. This prediction is not borne out. Although scrambling above the subject is possible in Standard German (6), it is not in Moselle Franconian (7).

(6) ... dass die Bücher Hans nicht kauft
         that the books Hans not   bought
     '... that Hans didn't buy the book.' (German)

(7) *... dat deh Bicher den Hans nit kofft
          that the books the Hans not bought
      '... that Hans didn't buy the book' (MF)

Conclusion. We argue on the basis of novel data from an under-described Germanic variety that the clause-medial *v*P phase *does* exist, contra Keine (2017, 2020). Our proposal centers on the separation of intermediate probing and the PIC. Intermediate probing independently circumvents the PIC and therefore veils its effects. We show that when intermediate probing by *v* is unavailable, PIC effects still show up in transitive clauses, a correct prediction if *v*P is a phase.

References. Abels 2012. Phases: An essay on cyclicity. • Chomsky 2000. Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework. • Chomsky 2001. Derivation by phase. • Cinque 1999. Adverbs and functional heads • Deal 2023. Interaction, Satisfaction, and the PCC. *Linguistic Inquiry*. • Keine 2020. Probes and their horizons • Keine & Zeijlstra 2020. Morphology of extraction: Reassessing vP phasehood. GLOW. • Legate 2003. Some Interface Properties of the Phase. *Linguistic Inquiry* • Travis 2010. Inner Aspect: The articulation of VP