This talk will give an overview of the verb second (V2) phenomenon, as found in both main and embedded clauses in the Germanic languages, and it will also explore a particular derivation of (embedded) V2, in terms of a CP/CP-distinction.

All the Germanic languages except modern English (but including e.g. Old English) are V2, i.e. in all declarative main clauses and in all wh-questions, the finite verb is in the second position, regardless of whether the first position is occupied by the subject or by some other constituent. This can be extended to yes/no-questions, provided it is assumed that the first position in such questions is empty (and such an assumption is supported by the fact that it allows an account for Greenberg’s 1963:83 “Universal 11”, cf. Vikner 2007). English only requires V2 in some main clauses: questions and negative topicalisations.

As far as embedded clauses in the Germanic languages are concerned, V2 is never obligatory, and although it is optionally possible in many embedded clauses, this is not the case for all types of embedded clauses, as e.g. embedded questions never allow V2 (Julien 2007, Vikner 2001).

I will explore a particular derivation of (embedded) V2, in terms of a CP/CP-distinction, which may be seen as a version of the CP-recursion analysis (de Haan & Weerman 1986, Vikner 1995 and many others). This analysis will be compared to a fine-grained left periphery approach (Rizzi 1997 and many others).

The idea is that because embedded V2 clauses do not allow extraction, whereas other types of CP-recursion clauses do (Christensen et al. 2013a,b), CP-recursion in embedded V2 is assumed to be fundamentally different from other kinds of CP-recursion, in that main clause V2 and embedded V2 involve a CP (“big CP”), whereas other clausal projections above IP are instances of cP (“little cP”).

Part of the talk builds on joint work with Ken Ramshøj Christensen and Anne Mette Nyvad.

References: