

## **OV and VO order in the transition from Old English to Middle English: a language-internal account**

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The aim of this paper is to present a language-internal account for the grammaticalization of the VO word order in the transition from Old English (henceforth OE) to Middle English (henceforth ME), building on a novel approach that postulates information structural and prosodic interface conditions responsible for the pre- and post-verbal spell-out of constituents within an anti-symmetric approach (cf. Hinterhölzl 2014).

The main questions underlying the research is whether the grammaticalization of the VO word order in English can be ascribed entirely to language-internal mapping conditions and to determine the degree of dialectal variation across the ME periods, taking into account a qualitative and quantitative investigation of texts coming from different dialectal areas.

In our framework, a default rule requires all objects to move out of the vP for licensing reasons, that is, to check the subcategorizational features of the selecting verb. What yields the pre- and post-verbal surface order is the possibility to spell-out the higher or lower copy. The spell-out of constituents is driven by the Information Structural (henceforth IS) and prosodic mapping conditions.

The IS mapping conditions require all given objects to be spelled-out pre-verbally, whereas new and/or focused objects are spelled-out post-verbally. The weight condition that we propose and that will become crucial in the development of word order in the history of English builds on a novel definition of prosodic heaviness, according to which constituents whose head and complement are filled count as heavy. The weight condition requires heavy constituents to be spelled-out in a strong position in prosodic structure, while light constituents are spelled-out in a weak position in prosodic structure. A phase-based account of deriving prosodic structure from syntactic structure is proposed in which strong positions coincide with post-verbal and weak positions coincide with pre-verbal positions in the derivation (cf. Hinterhölzl 2014)

In essence, we propose that originally IS driven word orders are reanalysed as being prosodically determined in that focused constituents on the basis of their accent are interpreted as metrically heavy and given constituents on the basis of being unaccented and typically realized as pronouns are interpreted as metrically light elements. Word order becomes rigidly VO when the original IS-conditioned orders and a stylistic optional rule of post-posing heavy constituents are re-interpreted as a mapping condition that excludes heavy constituents from occurring in a Specifier position in the I-domain in English.

The conditions postulated above interact during the OE period. From a quantitative preliminary investigation of OE data it emerges that in texts covering the years 850 – 1050 the IS mapping conditions were more influential in the placement of constituents, presenting overwhelmingly given pre-verbal constituents and overwhelmingly new and post-verbal constituents, whereas in late OE (1050-1150), the IS structural conditions are in competition with the prosodic condition, a fact which emerges more clearly when analysing post-verbal constituents. Whereas pre-verbal constituents are still predominantly given, the IS status of the post-verbal constituents is heterogeneous, showing both new and given referents, the latter of which however occur either in lists, or are specified by a relative clause, that is, are to be described as heavy. The development of this process can be observed in the Continuations of

Peterborough, which in its later developments presents an Early ME syntax, where pre-verbal constituents are overwhelmingly light, whereas the post-verbal constituents are heavy and consist of both given and new referents.

In their study on the variation between OV and VO order in Early ME, Kroch and Taylor (2000) highlight differences in the rate of post-verbal objects between the West Midlands and South-East Midlands dialects. Moreover, when investigating the V2 syntax of the English language, Kroch and al. (2000) claim that the Northern texts show features to be ascribed to the language contact with the Scandinavian settlers, whereas the Southern texts show properties directly descending from the OE syntax. Finally, Emonds and Faarlund (2014) propose that language contact with the Scandinavian settlers might have had a far greater impact on ME than has been considered up to now.

In light of this, the study of dialectal variation becomes of major importance, since the systematic comparison of the properties of texts coming from the different areas of England may shed light on the impact of language contact and tell us to which degree the language change in OE was language-internal.

For the present research, IS status and prosodic weight of the constituents are included in the investigation; moreover, clauses containing an auxiliary verb are examined, in order to determine the position of the diverse types of objects (DPs, demonstratives, quantified and negated objects and PPs) with respect to the non-inflected verb.

The postulation of IS and prosodic interface conditions within a uniform VO base order can provide a novel tool to account both for the synchronic variation in the different dialectal areas, as well as provide novel insights into the grammaticalization of a syntactically driven VO order in the English language.

#### Selected References:

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