


# Chapter 3

## Noun phrase modifiers in early Germanic: A comparative corpus study of Old English, Old High German, Old Icelandic, and Old Saxon

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This chapter gives an overview of modifier position in noun phrases in the early Germanic languages Old English, Old High German, Old Icelandic, and Old Saxon. We first present data for the relative position of adjectives, cardinal numerals, possessives, participles, and quantifiers in relation to the head noun. Then we compare aspects of the different languages and discuss factors that might account for the distribution, such as texts and genres, weight, and lexical factors. We show that the default position for modifiers in early Germanic languages is prenominal, and that instances of postnominal modification in most cases can be explained with reference to specific factors. Because the evidence for default prenominal modification is so clear in these languages, we question whether noun phrase modification was ever by default, or even mostly, postnominal in Proto-Germanic, despite the evidence from Runic data and early Gothic, which shows adjectives in postnominal position.

### 1 Introduction

The present study provides an overview and discussion of the general noun phrase modification patterns in four old Germanic languages: Old English, Old



High German, Old Icelandic, and Old Saxon. The Germanic languages stem from Proto-Germanic, one branch of the Indo-European family of languages. There is no one agreed approach to the dating and naming of the earliest periods of Germanic. It is generally agreed that the earliest runic remains<sup>1</sup> are of a North-West Germanic language, which had started to develop separately from East Germanic, and which later developed into Common Scandinavian (North Germanic) and West Germanic, each developing sub-divisions over time. As for the East Germanic branch, Gothic is the only language for which we have fairly robust evidence (with particular relevance to the topic of this chapter, see Ratkus 2011). In our study, Old Icelandic represents North Germanic, whereas Old English, Old High German, and Old Saxon represent West Germanic.

The four languages we investigate stem from different time periods. Old English and Old High German cover the period from approximately 700 to 1100, while Old Saxon is mainly attested in 9<sup>th</sup> century texts. Old Icelandic is the “youngest” of the languages in terms of written sources, with written material, apart from runes, primarily from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, Old Icelandic was spoken for a long time before that, and generally covers the period from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The question therefore arises as to whether these languages are comparable. Here we take recourse to Lass’s (2000) proposal that different Germanic languages reflect different stages in the development away from their common ancestor. For example, Gothic and Old Icelandic are ranked as being “oldest”, i.e. closest to their common ancestor, with Old English in second place, followed by Old High German (2000: 30). Old Saxon is not part of Lass’s ranking scale, but it patterns with Old English in having the same archaic features. The ranking is based on linguistic criteria<sup>2</sup> (2000: 26), and is thus independent of manuscript production dates. Our assumption is that the four languages of this study all represent an “old” stage.

## 2 Background

The point of departure for the study was the reported divergence in the literature on what the canonical order is for modifier and noun in the languages.

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<sup>1</sup>The oldest rune stone is the Svingerud stone, discovered in the autumn of 2021, near Oslo, Norway, and revealed to the world in January 2023. It dates from between 1 and 250 CE.

<sup>2</sup>The linguistic criteria are: root-initial accent, at least three distinct vowel qualities in weak inflectional syllables, a dual, grammatical gender, four vowel-grades in (certain) strong verbs, distinct dative in at least some nouns, inflected definite article (or proto-article), adjective inflection, infinitive suffix, and person/number marking on the verb.

It is generally recognized that substantial changes have taken place in the Germanic languages with respect to their organizational principles. The changes have traditionally been described as a development from relatively free word order to a more rigid order, which characterizes the corresponding present-day varieties. In the past decades, however, a considerable body of research has revealed that the order in the earlier stages was not “free”, but rather partly determined by information structure, that is to say that speakers had some freedom to organize their phrases so as to be able to present information in certain ways; as old information or new, as backgrounded or emphasized information, for instance. In modern varieties on the other hand, the organization is largely syntactically fixed, with more limited scope for variation, though the extent of fixedness differs between the modern languages.

The detailed work on the nature of word order changes in Germanic carried out so far has largely focused on clauses, and in particular the order of the lexical verb in relation to other sentence elements (see for instance articles in Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2009; Ferraresi & Lühr 2010; Batllori & Hernanz 2011; Meurman-Solin et al. 2012; Bech & Eide 2014). In addition, most of these are single-language studies, and comparative studies are lacking.

Less attention has been paid to word order within noun phrases, even though they, too, display a change from flexible to firm word order. There are exceptions, such as Demske (2001), Allen (2012), Breban (2012), Vartiainen (2012), Börjars et al. (2016), but these focus on the development of the determiner system rather than word order; Fischer (2000, 2001, 2006, 2012), Haumann (2003, 2010), Bech (2019) for Old English, Bech (2017) for Old Norwegian and Old English, and Tiemann (2024 [this volume]) for Old Norwegian, and for an overview of modifier order in early Germanic based on the literature, see Ratkus (2011: §4.4).

#### 2.1 Modifier example: Adjective phrases

A central noun phrase modifier is the adjective,<sup>3</sup> for which a structural distinction is made between attributive (also referred to as adnominal) and predicative adjectives; the former occur inside the noun phrase, and the latter occur as part of a predicate subcategorized by a copula (Fischer 2000, 2001; Pysz 2009 and Haumann 2010 in discussions of Old English noun phrases use the terms differently,

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<sup>3</sup>In structural terms, adjectives are heads of adjective phrases which can consist of the adjective or host more material. The corpora distinguish between single adjectives and adjective phrases, and so did we in our queries. For the sake of simplicity we refer to “adjectives” in the following, except when it is necessary to refer to adjective phrases, e.g. in the case of a contrast between simple and complex adjective phrases.

not strictly for a positional distinction). Some simple examples are *the good man* (attributive) and *the man is good* (predicative). Since our concern is with variation within the noun phrase, we consider only structurally attributive adjectives.

Below are examples of the positions in which adjectives can occur in the early Germanic languages; note that all the patterns except (6) are possible in all the languages. Example (1) shows a prenominal adjective, and in (2), the adjective is postnominal (in all examples any modifier relevant at that point is in bold, and the noun head is in italics). As (1) and (2) show, when the noun phrase contains only one adjective, it can occur before or after the noun, though the factors which influence the frequency of the patterns vary across the languages.<sup>4</sup>

(1) Old English

& Crist hine lufode for his **clænan** *mægðhade*  
 and Christ him loved for his pure.DAT.SG.WK chastity.DAT.SG  
 ‘and Christ loved him for his pure chastity’ (coaelhom,+AHom\_1:1.3)

(2) Old Icelandic

og sendi honum *gullhring* **digran**  
 and sent him goldring.ACC.SG large.ACC.SG.STR  
 ‘and sent him a large golden ring’ (1250.STURLUNGA.NAR-SAG,396.291)

If two adjectives modify a noun, the adjectives may flank the noun (3); frequently the second adjective then occurs with a conjunction (4)–(5) (the latter has been excluded from some studies of attributive adjectives, but see Haumann 2003 and Grabski 2017).

(3) Old Saxon

Thuo forun thar **uuisa** *man* **snella** *tesamne*  
 then went there wise.NOM.PL.STR man.NOM.PL bold.NOM.PL.STR together  
 ‘Then wise, bold men travelled there together.’ (OSHeliandC.100.201-202)

(4) Old High German

Ménniscon chúnne [...] táz frâgee únsih cota . dânnan sîn mûot  
 man.GEN.PL race.NOM.SG DEM ask.SBJV us gods whence its mind  
 uuánchôe . álde sîn lôz ze únchundi zîhe . in  
 tremble.SBJV or its destiny to uncertainty travel.SBJV in

<sup>4</sup>In the examples, we only provide detailed glossing of the noun phrase of interest. Additional glossing is only provided if necessary for the understanding of the examples.

### 3 Noun phrase modifiers in early Germanic languages

**gnôten**                      *díngen*                      *únde únguissen*  
difficult.DAT.PL.STR matter.DAT.PL and uncertain.DAT.PL.STR  
'The race of men should ask us, the gods, why its mind trembles or its  
destiny becomes insecure in difficult and uncertain matters.'  
(N\_Mart\_Cap.I.14-37 (edition 3959–3972))

- (5) Old Icelandic  
Gissur,                      **góður**                      *höfðingi*                      og **göfugur**,  
Gissur.NOM.SG good.NOM.SG.STR chieftain.NOM.SG and noble.NOM.SG.STR  
fór                      langa leið og mikinn heiðarveg með sitt                      föruneysi.  
travelled long way and great heath-road with his.REFL company  
'Gissur, a good and noble chieftain, travelled a long way and along a wide  
road across a heath with his company.' (1210.JARTEIN.REL-SAG,.191)

Further evidence of freedom of noun phrase word order comes from an example like (6), which shows that Old Icelandic permitted attributive adjectives to occur outside the noun phrase. This type, however, appears to be rare in Old Icelandic (25 instances), and we have not found examples of it in the other languages.

- (6) Old Icelandic  
þá lét Guð hana frammar **góðum**                      ná                      *verkum*                      en aðra  
then let God her more good.DAT.PL achieve deed.DAT.PL than other  
helga menn  
holy men  
then God let her achieve good deeds more than any other holy men'  
(1150.HOMILIUBOK.REL-SER,.23)

## 2.2 Noun phrase modifier position: Previous studies

As regards Proto-Germanic, Lehmann's (1972) discussion of word order is framed within assumptions about word-order harmony in the sense of Greenberg (1963), and he argues for adjective–noun being the neutral order in Proto-Germanic, partly on the basis that this would be “in harmony” with the object–verb order (see also Lehmann 2005–2007 and discussion of possessives in Braunnüller 1982, and for evidence against this interpretation of word order harmony, see Dryer 1992). For the two varieties for which we have ample sources and many descriptions, Old Norse<sup>5</sup> and Old English, the assumed neutral position varies between the languages.

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<sup>5</sup>We use “Old Norse” here to refer to the old Scandinavian languages in general. In this chapter, we focus on one of them, Old Icelandic.

Work on Old Norse that comments on noun-phrase internal word order generally describes the postnominal position as neutral for modifiers, with prenominal position being associated with emphasis, or rhythmic and stylistic variation (e.g. Iversen 1972; Valfells & Cathey 1971: 28; Faarlund 2004: 67–8; Barnes 2008; Börjars et al. 2016). There are, however, no dedicated large-scale empirical studies of noun-phrase word order for Old Norse (but see Tiemann 2024 [this volume] for Old Norwegian). Our study shows that prenominal, not postnominal, position is the default position for modifiers (see Section 4).

In Old English, on the other hand, the prenominal position is deemed to be neutral and the postnominal position somehow marked, with postposition traditionally assumed to have been emphatic or stylistically marked (e.g. Mitchell 1985: 78; Fischer et al. 2000: 46). Some relatively recent works on Old English provide interesting discussion of adjective–noun order and the factors that influenced it (Fischer 2000, 2001, 2006, 2012; Haumann 2003, 2010; Pysz 2009; Grabski 2017, 2020). However, the accounts do not arrive at the same conclusions, and the fact that some data are excluded from the discussion and that the studies are written within different theoretical and terminological frameworks also make it difficult to compare and evaluate claims.

Fischer (2000, 2001, 2006, 2012) takes adjectival inflection as a point of departure and argues that there is an iconic relation between the inflectional property, the information status (given–new), and the position of the adjective. Strong adjectives are assumed to be generally associated with new information and therefore placed in postposition, and weak ones with old information and placed preminally.

Haumann (2003, 2010), on the other hand, finds that the position of the adjective follows exclusively from interpretive and functional differences, such as restrictive vs. non-restrictive modification, individual-level vs. stage-level reading and attribution vs. predication. There is therefore in her view a clear division of labour between prenominal and postnominal adjectives, which is largely independent of adjectival inflection. Both Fischer’s and Haumann’s studies have been subject to critique, for instance in Grabski (2017) and Bech (2019), both of whom find that their proposed analyses do not fully match the data.

Pysz’s (2009) aims are not so much to establish the semantic and information-structural factors that influence the order, but to provide a theoretical analysis accounting for the difference in structure between prenominal and postnominal modification. In the end she uses two separate and incompatible frameworks (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar and a movement-based analysis) to account for different types of noun phrases.

In his PhD thesis, Grabski (2017) examines adjectival pre- and postmodification in Old English, using the YCOE corpus (Taylor et al. 2003). Like us (see Table 2), he finds that premodification is overwhelmingly more common for Old English than postmodification. Contra Fischer (2000, 2001, 2006, 2012) and Haumann (2003, 2010), he finds that adjectival inflection does not indicate interpretive properties. Rather, in the relatively rare case that an adjective is postposed, it is due to the general ‘verb-like’ character of the adjective; i.e. it is ‘adverb-like’ (e.g. *full* ‘full’ or *heah* ‘high’), a participle, has a stage-level reading (referring to incidental rather than inherent characteristics), or is modified by other elements. Of the previous studies on Old English adjectival position, Grabski’s study is the one that most closely tallies with our study.

There are no dedicated studies of noun-phrase word order in Old Saxon or Old High German, but Walkden (2014) provides examples of both pre- and postnominal adjectives in Old Saxon. Schrodtt (2004: 37) describes the prenominal position as the regular one in Old High German, but points out that the adjective can follow the noun for metrical and rhythmical reasons (see also Demske 2001: 70 and Petrova 2024: Section 2.2 [this volume])

The divergence in the accounts of modifier–noun order is unexpected, given the common ancestry of the languages and the similarities in current varieties.

The present study is organized as follows. In Section 3 we present the corpora used. Section 4 contains a description of the method, as well as the empirical findings with respect to the position of adjectives, cardinal numerals, possessives, participles, and quantifiers in relation to the noun head. In Section 5 we provide a more detailed description and discussion of specific factors that influence word order in the different languages, before we conclude in Section 6.

## 3 Data

For this study we used various available corpora, as shown in Table 1. As is evident from Table 1, the corpora are of very different sizes, hence the issue of representativity and comparability arises.

The YCOE corpus for Old English contains all the main Old English prose texts, both translated (from Latin) and non-translated, and of various genres. The most well-represented genres are homilies, religious treatises and biographies/lives, but the corpus also contains texts from a number of other genres: history, travel-ogues, fiction, rules, philosophy, science, ecclesiastical laws, secular laws, charters and wills, Bible, medical handbooks, geography, apocrypha, and prefaces. The texts are mostly from the West Saxon dialect area. Although quite a few genres are represented, the corpus obviously does not fully capture Old English as it

Table 1: The corpora used for this study

Language	Corpus
Old English (OE)	<i>York–Toronto–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose</i> (YCOE, Taylor et al. 2003); 1.5 million words; syntactically annotated
Old High German (OHG)	<i>Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch 1.1</i> (ReA, Donhauser et al. 2018; Donhauser 2015); 500,000 words; annotated for lemma, part-of-speech and morphosyntax
Old Saxon (OS)	<i>Heliand Parsed Database</i> (HeliPaD, Walkden 2015); 46,067 words; syntactically annotated
Old Icelandic (OI)	<i>Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus</i> texts 1150–1350 (IcePaHC, Wallenberg et al. 2011) ≈ 235,000 words; syntactically annotated

must have been at the time, but it is generally deemed to represent the language well.<sup>6</sup>

The Old Icelandic texts in IcePaHC have a heavy bias towards saga narrative texts: 11 out of 15 texts for 1150–1350 are classified as sagas, with the genres of science, sermons, law and history each only represented by a single text. The Old Icelandic data are standardized for modern Icelandic orthography, and we do not change this here. Three of the texts which we use, *Alexander*, *Homiliubok* and *Marta*, are assumed to be translations or retellings of Latin source texts.<sup>7</sup> As such, any specific findings for these texts should be viewed with caution.

HeliPaD is a parsed version of the most substantial Old Saxon text, the *Heliand*, a gospel harmony in alliterative verse dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It follows the Sievers (1878) edition of the C (Cotton) manuscript, and is annotated according to the general principles of the Penn historical corpora of English; see Walkden (2016) for more information about this corpus.

ReA includes the complete Old High German attestation (750–1050) except glosses and single word records, as well as the complete Old Saxon attestation dated back to roughly the same time period (800–1200). The texts are lemmatized and annotated for parts of speech and morphosyntax, searchable via AN-

<sup>6</sup>For details see <https://www-users.york.ac.uk/lang22/YCOE/YcoeHome.htm>.

<sup>7</sup>For details see <https://github.com/antonkarl/icecorpus/tree/master/info>.



NIS (Krause & Zeldes 2016). In the present paper, only the Old High German records of ReA are considered, while Old Saxon is treated based on HeliPaD. The Old High German attestation consists of poetic texts and translations from Latin. Representatives of the first type of texts are heroic poems, e.g. *Hildebrandslied*, or religious poems, like Otfrid's *Gospel Book*. Translations attested from the Old High German period differ in their degree of freedom from the respective Latin original. Interlinear translations (e.g. *Benediktinerregel*, *Murbacher Hymnen*) are form-by-form and word-by-word translations. Non-interlinear, or free translations, e.g. the translation of Isidorus's treaty *De Fide*, the translation of Tatian's *Gospel Harmony*, or the *Monsee Fragments*, also display a close relation to the structure of their original but allow for free patterns considered as evidence for genuine Old High German grammar (Dittmer & Dittmer 1998). There is no prose work composed in the vernacular language and handed down to us from the Old High German period, which is a basic problem when treating questions of word order both at the constituent and the sentential level (Fleischer 2006).

It is of course a problem that the textual witnesses of the languages are so different in terms of both size and genre, in addition to being from different time periods, as discussed in Section 1. This is, however, a problem that does not have a solution, since we have to use whatever texts we have for these older languages. We nevertheless think the languages can be compared, but always with these caveats in mind.

## 4 Method and patterns

We queried the corpora presented in Table 1 to extract the data presented in Table 2. YCOE, IcePaHC and HeliPaD are annotated in (mostly) the same way, i.e. they are syntactically parsed. ReA, on the other hand, contains morphosyntactic span annotation, and in addition the modifiers are tagged for pre- and post-nominal position at the part-of-speech level. It is therefore possible to retrieve comparable information from all the corpora.

Table 2 shows the query results for the four languages. Old English is the most consistent of the languages, with 97.6% of the modifiers in prenominal position. Old High German and Old Saxon are quite similar in the general distribution, but show some differences with respect to individual patterns. The total for Old Icelandic shows a lower percentage of prenominal modifiers than the other languages, but this is in large part due to the special position of possessives. It is important to note that these are relatively rough categories and that there may be some noise in the data, since we have not done manual sifting to any great extent, which is normally necessary in any corpus work intended to give absolute numbers. We are, however, quite certain that any data noise does not skew

the data to the extent of invalidating the general findings, as the aim of this paper is to provide an overview for the different languages. Figure 1 visualizes the percentages in Table 2.<sup>8</sup>

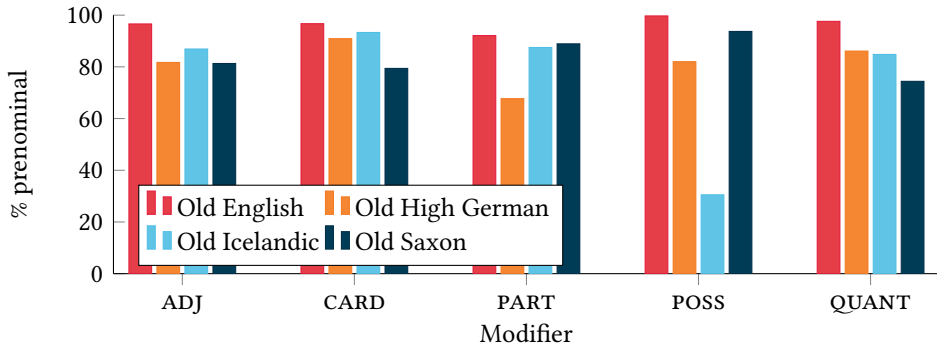


Figure 1: Modifier–noun order in Old English, Old High German, Old Icelandic, and Old Saxon

Table 2: Modifier–noun order in Old English, Old High German, Old Icelandic, and Old Saxon

	OE		OHG		OI		OS	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
ADJ–N	40 957	96.6	3 097	81.7	3 529	86.9	1 335	81.3
N–ADJ	1 454	3.4	694	18.3	532	13.1	307	18.7
CARD–N	8 075	96.7	662	90.9	616	93.3	108	79.4
N–CARD	278	3.3	66	9.1	44	6.7	28	20.6
PART–N	2 190	92.1	176	67.7	77	87.5	64	88.9
N–PART	189	7.9	84	32.3	11	12.5	8	11.1
POSS–N	29 647	99.7	3 528	82.0	1 339	30.5	1 403	93.7
N–POSS	78	0.3	774	18.0	3 057	69.5	94	6.3
QUANT–N	18 179	97.6	1 350	86.1	1 742	84.8	261	74.4
N–QUANT	442	2.4	218	13.9	312	15.2	90	25.6
MOD–N	99 048	97.6	8 813	82.8	7 303	64.9	3 171	85.7
N–MOD	2 441	2.4	1 836	17.2	3 956	35.1	527	14.3

<sup>8</sup>The data in the ADJ–N/N–ADJ rows in Table 2 also contain 108 instances of flanking, which would then be counted twice, both the prenominal and in the postnominal category. See Section 5.6 for more about flanking.

In Sections 4.1–4.5 we give examples of the different patterns presented in Table 2. We exemplify each pattern from one or two languages, but all the languages show all the patterns, though to different extents.

#### 4.1 Adjective–Noun, Noun–Adjective

This group contains adjectives that either stand alone before or after the noun or occur together with other modifiers.

(7) Old English

a. ADJ–N

Se frumsceapena mann Adam  
 DEF.NOM.SG first.created.NOM.SG.WK man.NOM.SG Adam.NOM.SG  
 næs gestryned ne acenned  
 not.was begotten not born

‘The first man, Adam, was neither begotten nor born.’  
 (cocathom2,+ACHom\_II, 1:4.59.41)

b. N–ADJ

Se þridda het Heanric, þam se fæder becwæð  
 DEF third was.called Henry DEF.DAT.SG DEF father bequeathed  
 gersuman unateallendlice  
 treasure.ACC.PL innumerable.ACC.PL.STR

‘The third was called Henry, to whom the father left innumerable treasures.’ (cochronE,ChronE\_[Plummer]:1086.59.2889)

The constituent *utewardum* in (8) represents a special category of modifiers named “positional predicates”, discussed in Pfaff (2024 [this volume]). Positional predicates agree in case, gender and number with the head noun, but semantically they resemble adverbs/adverbials. These behave differently from other adjectives; one prominent feature is that they occur postnominally.

(8) N–ADJ

Þa gefengon hi þara ðreora scypu twa æt þam  
 then captured they DEF.GEN three.GEN ships.ACC two.ACC at DEF.DAT.SG  
 muþan utewardum  
 mouth.DAT.SG outside.DAT.SG.STR

‘Then they captured two of the three ships outside the river mouth.’  
 (cochronC,ChronC\_[Rositzke]:897.26.991)

The two patterns (ADJ–N, N–ADJ) can also be found within a complex noun phrase, e.g. (9).

(9) Old Icelandic

ADJ–N and N–ADJ

af því að hann var **fésnaður** *maður* en *drengur*  
because he was poor.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG but fellow.NOM.SG

**góður** og karlmaður í skapi  
good.NOM.SG.STR and man.of.valour in mind

‘because he was a poor man but a good fellow and a man of valorous mind’ (1210.JARTEIN.REL-SAG,.29)

#### 4.2 Cardinal numeral–Noun, Noun–Cardinal numeral

Here we include cardinal numerals in pre- or postnominal position. The numerals may occur together with other elements.

(10) Old Saxon

a. CARD–N

Giuuet im *thuo umbi thria* *naht* after *thiu* [...] an  
went he.DAT then about three.ACC.PL night.ACC.PL after DEM to  
Galilealand *thesaro thiedo drohtin*  
Galilee DEM.GEN.SG/PL people.GEN.SG/PL lord.NOM.SG

‘Then the lord of this people went to Galilee, about three nights after that.’ (HeliandC.1027.1994-1996)

b. N–CARD

endi hiet *sia nahor gangan*, *Andrease endi Petrus* *erist sane*,  
and called they.ACC nearer go Andrew and Peter first soon  
*gibruother tuena*  
brotherACC.PL two.ACC.PL

‘and called them to come closer, Andrew and Peter at first, two brothers’ (HeliandC.686.1255-1258)

(11) Old High German

a. CARD–N

Huuer uuac **dhrim** *fingrum* *allan aerduhuuasun?*  
who weighed three.DAT.PL finger.DAT.PL all earth

‘Who weighed the whole earth with three fingers?’

(Isidor\_1.1 > I\_DeFide\_4 (edition 805–815))

b. N-CARD

Wir duemes tház [...] mit unsen *fíngoron* **zuein**  
 we do DEM with our finger.DAT.PL two.DAT.PL  
 ‘We do this [...] with our two fingers.’  
 (Otfriid\_1.1 > O\_Otfr.Ev.5.2 (edition 68–78))

### 4.3 Possessive–Noun, Noun–Possessive

The YCOE corpus (Old English) and the HeliPaD corpus (Old Saxon) treat possessive pronouns differently from the IcePaHC corpus (Old Icelandic), but crucially all corpora mark them as distinct from non-possessive pronouns, so we were able to get comparable datasets across the corpora, via corpus-specific searches. The point to take home for Old English is that possessives are extremely rare post-nominally. Old Icelandic, on the other hand, is different from the other varieties in favouring the order noun–possessive, as shown in Table 2.

(12) Old Icelandic

a. POSS–N

En þeir feðgar ríða heim með *sína* *menn*  
 and they father and son ride home with their.REFL.ACC.PL man.ACC.PL  
 ‘And father and son ride home with their men.’  
 (1350.FINNBOGI.NAR-SAG,663.2204)

b. N–POSS

og hann skal sitja fyr *ádrykkju* *minni* í kveld  
 and he shall sit before drinking.DAT.SG my.DAT.SG tonight  
 ‘and he shall sit as my drinking-mate tonight’  
 (1275.MORKIN.NAR-HIS,1574)

(13) Old Saxon

a. POSS–N

diuridon *usan* *drohtin*  
 glorified our.ACC.SG lord.ACC.SG  
 ‘(They) glorified our lord.’ (HeliandC.32.83)

b. N–POSS

dopta allan dag druhtfolc mikil, uuerod an uuatere [...]  
 baptized all day people great people in water  
*handon* *sinon*  
 hand.DAT.PL his.DAT.PL  
 ‘(He) baptized the great multitude in water all day with his hands.’  
 (HeliandC.533.978-981)

#### 4.4 Participle–Noun, Noun–Participle

This category comprises both present and past participles, with or without agreement marking.<sup>9</sup>

(14) Old High German

a. PART–N

ih bisueru thih bi themo **lebenten** *gote*  
I beseech you for DEF.DAT.SG living.DAT.SG.WK god.DAT.SG  
‘I beseech you for the sake of the living God.’  
(Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat190 (edition 9–19))

b. N–PART

Galih ist himilo rihhi *gaberge* **gabor(ga)nemo** in  
similar is heaven’s kingdom treasure.DAT.SG hidden.DAT.SG.STR in  
acchre  
field  
‘The kingdom of heaven is like a sacred store of wealth in a field.’  
(Monsee\_1.1 > MF\_1\_M.X (edition 106–116))

(15) Old English

a. PART–N

- i. and of heora muðe and nospyrlum stod **stincende**  
and of her mouth and nostrils stood stinking.NOM.SG.STR  
*steam*  
steam.NOM.SG  
‘and her mouth and nostrils emitted stinking vapour’  
(cocathom2,+ACHom\_II,\_23:200.49.4451)
- ii. & **gebigedum** *cneowum* gebæd for ðam folce  
and bent.DAT.PL.STR knee.DAT.PL prayed for DEF people  
‘and prayed for the people with bent knees’  
(cotempo,+ATemp:11.5.354)

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<sup>9</sup>Postnominal participles are often small clauses rather than attributive adjectives, as in (i) from Old English.

- (i) Nu ic geseo minne *geleafan* **blowende** and mine *sawle*  
now I see my.ACC.SG faith.ACC.SG flourishing.ACC.SG.STR and my.ACC.SG soul.ACC.SG  
**anlyht** and þysne *dracan* **acwealdne** licgean  
illuminated.ACC.SG.STR and DEM.ACC.SG dragon.ACC.SG killed.ACC.SG.STR lie  
‘Now I see my faith flourishing and my soul illuminated and this dragon lie killed.’  
(comargaT,LS\_16\_[MargaretCot.Tib.\_A.iii]:13.10.152)

b. N-PART

se nama tacnaþ þone sige þe *Drihten*  
 DEF name marks DEF victory that Lord.NOM.SG

**gesigefæsted** wipstod deofle  
 triumphant.NOM.SG.STR withstood devil

‘the name marks the victory in which the triumphant Lord withstood the devil’ (coblick,HomS\_21\_[BlHom\_6]:67.18.815)

#### 4.5 Quantifier–Noun, Noun–Quantifier

Here we searched for any quantifier.

(16) Old Icelandic

a. QUANT-N

og tók nú Knútur við Hollsetulandi og öllu því  
 and took now Knútur with Holstein and all.DAT.SG DEM.DAT.SG

*ríki* er átt hafði Haraldur jarl  
 kingdom.DAT.SG which possessed had Haraldur earl

‘and now Knútur accepted Holstein and all that kingdom which Earl Haraldur had possessed’ (1260.JOMSVIKINGAR.NAR-SAG,309)

b. N-QUANT

Það er mælt um *sakir* þær allar sem hér  
 it is spoken about case.ACC.PL DEM.ACC.PL all.ACC.PL which here

eru taldar  
 are told

‘It is spoken about all those cases which are told here.’  
 (1270.GRAGAS.LAW-LAW,334)

(17) Old Saxon

a. QUANT-N

Thar hie sittean fand Andrease endi Petrusse bi them ahastrome,  
 there he sit found Andrew and Peter by DEF water.stream

**bethia** thia *gibruoðer*  
 both.ACC.PL DEF.ACC.PL brother.ACC.PL

‘There he found Andrew and Peter sitting by the river, both the brothers.’ (HeliandC.630.1152-1156)

b. N-QUANT

Uuerthe thin uuilleo obar thesa uuerold alla  
become.SBJV your will over DEM.ACC.SG world.ACC.SG all.ACC.SG  
'Your will be done over all this world.' (HeliandC.853.1604-1606)

## 5 Discussion: Specific factors in the different languages

In this section we examine whether there are specific factors in the different languages that influence the element order. We specifically consider the influence of text types, different types of possessive modifiers, weight, individual lexical items, lexicalized patterns, and whether the adjectives flank the head noun. We have not considered all these factors for each language, but rather picked out factors to investigate more closely on the basis of Table 2. We assume that these factors could be at play in all the languages, but selected those languages for which these factors were most clearly influential.

### 5.1 Old High German texts and genres

As outlined in Section 3, the Old High German corpus consists of poems and vernacular translations of Latin sources, both making it methodologically unjustified to simply assume that the attested word order patterns represent genuine Old High German grammar. Applied to the question at issue, this means that the variation in the order of nouns and modifiers illustrated in the examples above may be the result of metrical considerations or of non-native loan syntax, rather than of independent, language-internal factors. As the degree of dependence of the vernacular writings on the word order of the Latin original differs among the individual translations, the method of comparing the source syntax and its representation in the translations has become a leading principle in assessing evidence for native Old High German grammar (Dittmer & Dittmer 1998; Donhauser 1998; Fleischer 2006; Fleischer et al. 2008).

To test how factors such as genre and loan syntax affect the word order in noun phrases in Old High German, the number of pre- and postnominal modifiers was retrieved and compared for individual texts as representatives of the following three text types:

- (i) poetry, represented by Otfrid's *Gospel Book* and the poetic records included in Steinmeyer's (1916) collection of Minor Old High German documents;
- (ii) interlinear translations such as the *Benediktinerregel* and *Murbacher Hymnen* as representatives of the strict form-by-form and word-by-word type of translations;



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- (iii) non-interlinear translations such as the copy of Isidorus's treaty *De Fide*, the texts comprised in the manuscript collection called the *Monsee Fragments* and the translation of Tatian's *Gospel Harmony* into Old High German.

The frequencies of adnominal modifiers of the various types, surfacing in pre- and postnominal position, were retrieved for these three types of texts individually from the ReA corpus. They are provided in Table 3 and visualized in Figure 2.

Table 3: Pre- and postnominal modifiers in poetry, interlinear translations and non-interlinear translations in Old High German

		Poetry		Interlinear translations		Non-interlinear translations	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
ADJ	ADJ-N	973	77.3	403	74.4	634	88.9
	N-ADJ	276	22.1	139	25.6	79	11.1
CARD	CARD-N	105	86.1	97	93.3	281	98.6
	N-CARD	17	13.9	7	6.7	4	1.4
PART	PART-N	23	67.6	51	62.2	30	57.7
	N-PART	11	32.4	31	37.8	22	42.3
POSS	POSS-N	1 232	76.9	62	28.3	1 591	99.1
	N-POSS	370	23.1	157	71.7	15	0.9
QUANT	QUANT-N	372	67.3	131	94.9	442	97.1
	N-QUANT	181	32.7	7	5.1	13	2.9

The numbers in Table 3 give rise to some important generalizations. First, they confirm the observation that could be inferred from Table 2, namely that participles used as modifiers have a unique status among modifiers in that they tend to follow their head nouns more independently of the text type, i.e. independently of factors such as rhyme or loan syntax. Note that participles score even higher in postnominal position in non-interlinear translations than in poetry and texts with a high degree of loan syntax, which suggests that this is a genuine property that modifying participle phrases share with clausal modifiers, e.g. attributive relative clauses, in Old High German.

Apart from participles, all remaining modifying categories display lower frequencies of postnominal position in non-interlinear translations than in the remaining two types of texts. For cardinal numbers, possessives and quantifiers,

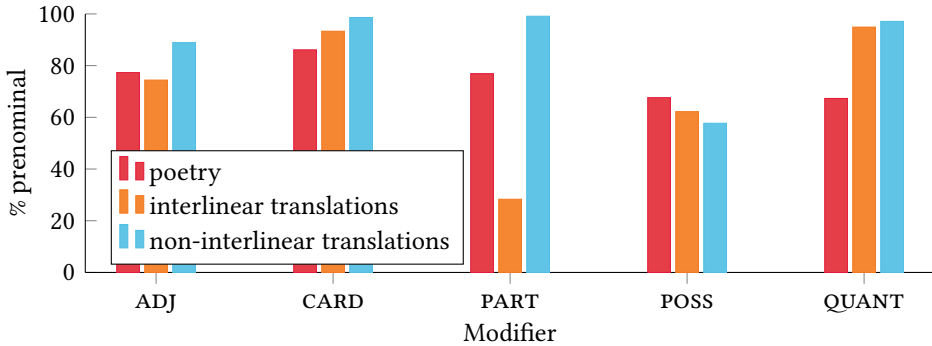


Figure 2: Pre- and postnominal modifiers in poetry, interlinear translations and non-interlinear translations in Old High German

the percentage of postnominal modifiers in non-interlinear translations is almost negligible, below 3% of all attested cases. Adjectives surface after the noun in non-interlinear translation more often than with cardinal numerals, possessive and quantifiers, i.e. in 11.1% of the cases, but this frequency is lower than the overall one in Table 2, which is 18.3%.

A closer look at the Old High German patterns in non-interlinear translations and their relation to the Latin sources reveals that the proportion of independently produced, and thus native, postnominal categories is even lower than the numbers in Table 3 suggest. Consider the numbers in Table 4.

Table 4: Latin influence on postnominal modifiers in non-interlinear translations in Old High German (participles are excluded)

	Equal to Latin	Different from Latin	Misparsings	Total
N-ADJ	66	4	9	79
N-CARD	3	1	0	4
N-POSS	14	0	1	15
N-QUANT	11	2	0	13

Table 4 shows that the frequency of postnominal modifiers not influenced by Latin is extremely low in non-interlinear translations. For example, possessives are never attested in postnominal position if there is no corresponding Latin sentence displaying this pattern. With cardinals, there is a single example (18) in which the Old High German text contains a postnominal cardinal numeral independently of the Latin original. Note that the corresponding Latin pattern

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involves a single cardinal *duos* ‘two.ACC.PL’ selecting the prepositional phrase *de discipulis suis* ‘of his disciples’ as a complement. In other words, not only does the Old High German translation change the order of the cardinal and the reflexive possessive relative to the noun, but also the structure within the object phrase.

- (18) *gihalota / sine iungiron            zuene*  
 called    his    disciple.ACC.PL    two.ACC.PL  
 ‘(He) called his two disciples.’ (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat64 (edition 10–20))  
 Lat. convocans / duos de discipulis suis

Regarding adjectives, the picture is similar. The comparison between the Latin original and the vernacular translation reveals that in only 4 of 79 examples does the scribe opt for a postnominal placement of the respective modifier independently of its position in the source text. Three of these examples, however, are less conclusive. One is (19), where the adjective *folle* forms the extended phrase ‘full of hate’, which is used as an apposition postposed after the head noun. The second one is (20), which involves the quantifier *al* annotated as an adjective, probably because it translates the prenominal Latin adjective *universus*. The third one, given in (21), is special in that it involves a very infrequent Old High German pattern used to translate the absolute constructions of the Latin original. One valid example with a postnominal adjective remains, given in (22). It is found in the oldest one of the three translations taken into consideration, suggesting that the independent postnominal use of adjectives is likely a non-productive pattern only present in the earliest phase of the Old High German attestation.

- (19) *iudea liuti                    nides            folle*  
 Jewish people.NOM.PL    hate.GEN.SG    full.NOM.PL.STR  
 ‘the Jewish people, full of hate’  
 (Monsee\_1.1 > MF\_2\_VG.XXXI (edition 186–206))  
 Lat. iudei repleti sunt zelo at inuidia
- (20) *Tho antlingita thaz            folc            al*  
 then replied    DEF.NOM.SG    crowd.NOM.SG    all.NOM.SG  
 ‘Then the whole crowd replied.’ (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat199 (edition 250–260))  
 Lat. Et respondens universus populus
- (21) *after moysise            dodemu*  
 after Moses.DAT.SG    dead.DAT.SG.STR  
 ‘after the death of Moses’ (Isidor\_1.1 > I\_DeFide\_6 (edition 70–80))  
 Lat. defuncto moyse

- (22) dhazs dher forasago auh dhen selbun *druhtin*      **dh**rifaldan  
 that DEF prophet also DEF same Lord.ACC.SG threefold.ACC.SG.STR  
 in sinem heidim arauhida  
 in his shape showed  
 ‘that the prophet referred to the same threefold Lord in his  
 manifestations’ (Isidor\_1.1 > I\_DeFide\_4 (edition 929–939))  
 Lat. *Quem ut trinum in personis ostenderet*

Let us look at the quantifiers. As the numbers in Table 4 suggest, in 11 out of 13 examples, the postnominal quantifier in Old High German is explainable as a syntactic loan, given that the Latin original also displays a postnominal quantifier. In two examples, given in (23) and (24), the quantifier is prenominal in the Latin original but postnominal in the translation. The fact that there are two modifying categories present in the examples will be discussed in detail in Section 5.6 below.

- (23) sibun *geista*      **andere**      mit imo  
 seven spirit.ACC.PL other.ACC.PL.STR with him  
 ‘seven other spirits with him’ (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat57 (edition 194–204))  
 Lat. *septem alios spiritus secum*
- (24) Inti sulihhen      *ratissun*      **managen**  
 and such.DAT.PL.STR parable.DAT.PL many.DAT.PL.STR  
 ‘and with many such parables’ (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat74 (edition 38–48))  
 Lat. *et talibus multis parabolis*

## 5.2 Possessive modifiers in Old Saxon and Old Icelandic

In Old Saxon, whether a possessive modifier can be postnominal or not is determined by person and number. Specifically, the indeclinable modifiers *is* (POSS.3SG.M/N) and *iro* (POSS.3SG.F, POSS.3PL), which are simply the genitive forms of the corresponding pronouns, are always prenominal (814/814 examples in the HeliPaD). By contrast, the other possessives *min* (POSS.1SG), *unka* (POSS.1DU), *usa* (POSS.1PL), *thin* (POSS.2SG), *inka* (POSS.2SG), *iuwa* (POSS.2PL), and *sin* (POSS.REFL) are all declined as adjectives, and these forms may be either prenominal (507/589; 86%) or postnominal (82/589; 14%).

Old Icelandic pronominal possessors inflect like strong adjectives and are often considered to belong to the same class (Heltoft 2010: 20; Barnes 2008). However, with respect to order they pattern radically differently. As the data in Table 5 (taken from Table 2, but presented separately for clarity) show, while adjectives are predominantly prenominal, the predominant pattern for pronominal

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possessors is postnominal. In this respect, Old Icelandic pronominal possessors may show similar positional behaviour to pronominal possessors in Gothic (see Ratkus 2011: 213), but diverge strikingly from parallel elements in Old English and Old Saxon.

Table 5: Position of adjectives and pronominal possessors in Old Icelandic (1150–1350)

	Prenominal		Postnominal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
ADJ	3 529	86.9	532	13.1
POSS	1 339	30.5	3 057	69.5

Examples of prenominal and postnominal pronominal possessors are shown in (25) and (26), respectively.

- (25) Nú fara **sína** leið hvorir  
 now goes his.REFL.ACC.SG way.ACC.SG each  
 ‘Now each one goes his own way.’ (1310.GRETTIR.NAR-SAG,1542)
- (26) Stigu þeir Svarthöfði á bak og fóru leið  
 stepped they Svarthöfði onto back and went way.ACC.SG  
**sína**  
 their.REFL.ACC.SG  
 ‘They and Svarthöfði mounted the horses and went on their way.’  
 (1250.STURLUNGA.NAR-SAG,401.492-493)

Börjars et al. (2016: 19–20) argue that the prenominal position for pronominal possessors may be associated with information-structural properties such as contrast or emphasis. The natural use of ‘own’ in the idiomatic translation of (25) may be taken to support this claim. As we saw in Section 2.2, the assumption in the literature is that the postnominal position is canonical and the prenominal position emphatic or otherwise marked also for adjective phrases, but the data in Tables 2 and 5 make this an unlikely scenario.

### 5.3 Weight matters: Old English and Old Icelandic

It has been shown that weight matters when it comes to element order at clausal level (see e.g. Taylor & Pintzuk 2012 for Old English). And indeed, the Old English

data indicate that this is the case with respect to noun phrase constituents as well (see also Grabski 2017).

In Table 6, “simple AP” refers to adjective phrases consisting of just one adjective and “complex AP” refers to a phrase where the adjective is modified or combined with a complement.

Table 6: Position of simple adjective phrases and complex adjective phrases in Old English (excluding flanked adjectives)

	Prenominal		Postnominal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Simple AP	40 957	96.6	1 454	3.4
Complex AP	950	72.1	367	27.9

When the adjective phrase consists of one adjective (simple AP), it overwhelmingly occurs prenominally. If the AP is complex, it still occurs prenominally in the majority of cases, but about a quarter of the cases occur postnominally. Example (27) shows a prenominal complex AP, and (28) is an example of a postnominal complex AP.

(27) Ure Drihten sæde oft **swiðe digle** *bigspell*  
 our Lord said often very profound.ACC.PL parable.ACC.PL  
 ‘Our Lord often told very profound parables.’ (coaelhom,+AHom\_3:1.397)

(28) Drihten God ælmihtig, heo cwæð, ic eom þin *þeowa*  
 Lord God almighty she said I am your.NOM.SG servant.NOM.SG  
**clæna** and **ungewæmmed** **fram eallum mannum**  
 pure.NOM.SG.STR and undefiled.NOM.SG.STR from all men  
 “‘Lord God almighty’, she said, ‘I am your servant, pure and undefiled by any man.’” (comargaC,LS\_14\_[MargaretCCCC\_303]:4.23.43)

As regards the postnominal complex APs, it should be noted that most of the noun phrases in which they occur also have a prenominal element. This is often a numeral, such as *ane* in (29),<sup>10</sup> or a quantifier, such as *sumne* in (30), but adjectives

<sup>10</sup>Old English did not have an indefinite article, but the numeral *an* frequently resembles the indefinite article in function, representing a stage in the development towards the present-day indefinite article (Rissanen 1967: 261).

also occur, such as *anwintre* in (31).<sup>11</sup> As exemplified by (29) and (30), these cases are often presentational; i.e. an entity or a person is introduced, and then further information is given in the postnominal AP. This is often also the case where an adjective precedes the noun: the head of the noun phrase is presented in the discourse, and then elaborated on in the postnominal AP (31).

- (29) *Quirinus* him andwyrde, ic habbe **ane** *dohtor*  
 Quirinius him answered I have a.ACC.SG.STR daughter.ACC.SG  
**wlitige** **on ansyne**  
 beautiful.ACC.SG.STR in countenance  
 ‘Quirinius answered him, “I have a daughter who is beautiful in countenance”.’ (coelhom,+AHom\_24:102.3821)
- (30) *Pa* geseah ic somninga me ætstandan **sumne** *monnan*  
 then saw I suddenly me stand.near some.ACC.SG.STR man.ACC.SG  
**uncuþes** **ondwleotan**  
 unknown.GEN.SG.STR face.GEN.SG  
 ‘Then I suddenly saw a certain man with an unfamiliar face stand near me.’ (cobede,Bede\_4:26.352.31.3563)
- (31) *Witodlice* ðæt lamb sceal beon **anwintre** *purlamb,*  
 truly DEF lamb shall be one.winter.NOM.SG.STR pur-lamb.NOM.SG  
**clæne** & **unwemme**  
 pure.NOM.SG.STR and perfect.NOM.SG.STR  
 ‘Truly that lamb shall be a one year old male lamb, pure and perfect.’  
 (cootest,Exod:12.5.2828)

For Old Icelandic as well, the corpus data indicate some correlation between weight and position. At a broad level, comparing simple APs with complex APs, we see that though complex APs more frequently occur prenominal than post-nominal, this is only marginally so, and the proportion of complex APs in prenominal position is lower than the rate for simple APs, see Table 7.

Generally, these complex prenominal APs consist of an adjective modified by an intensifier, e.g. (32) and (33), although they can also involve an adjectival complement, e.g. (34)–(36).

<sup>11</sup>The word *oðer* ‘other’ is tagged as an adjective in the YCOE corpus, and it frequently occurs in these constructions.

Table 7: Position of simple adjective phrases and complex adjective phrases in Old Icelandic (1150–1350) (excluding flanked adjectives)

	Prenominal		Postnominal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Simple AP	3 046	94.2	188	5.8
Complex AP	136	52.9	121	47.1

- (32) Þórhallur var **vel auðigur** *maður*  
 Þórhallur was rather rich.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG  
 ‘Þórhallur was a rather rich man.’ (1310.GRETTIR.NAR-SAG,.1760)
- (33) Hann var **harðla góður** *klerkur* og inn mesti  
 he was very good.NOM.SG.STR clerk.NOM.SG and DEF most  
 spekingur að viti  
 wise.man in wit  
 ‘He was a very good clerk and the most wise man of wit.’  
 (1300.ALEXANDER.NAR-SAG,.18)
- (34) Öllum þotti þetta hið mesta þrekvirki orðið af tólf  
 all.DAT seemed DEM DEF most daring act become of twelve  
**vetra gömlum manni**  
 winter.GEN.PL old.DAT.SG.STR man.DAT.SG  
 ‘This seemed to everyone the most daring act by a twelve-year-old man.’  
 (1350.FINNBOGI.NAR-SAG,631.327)
- (35) Á þessum sama tíma gerðist þessu líkt  
 at DEM same time become DEM.DAT.SG similar.NOM.SG.STR  
*tákn*  
 wonder.NOM.SG  
 ‘At the same time there became a wonder similar to this one.’  
 (1350.MARTA.REL-SAG,.884)
- (36) en síðan að vera námgjarn að Guðs lögum og góður kenninga  
 and then to be eager to learn of God’s laws and good teachings  
 við sér ófróðari menn  
 with they.REFL ignorant.CMPR.WK man.ACC.PL  
 ‘and then to be eager to learn of God’s laws and good teachings with men  
 more ignorant than themselves’ (1150.HOMILJUBOK.REL-SER,.114)



The only categorical positional distribution with respect to weight we observe for Old Icelandic is that complex APs containing a degree or comparative clause cannot be fully prenominal. The most frequent configuration is one where the AP is discontinuous with a prenominal head adjective and a postnominal modifier or complement, e.g. (37) and (38).

- (37) Og eru dæmi til þess að níðið hefir bitið enn  
and are proof to DEM.GEN that insult.DEF has bitten even  
**ríkari menn en þu ert**  
richer.CMPR.WK man.ACC.PL than you are  
‘And that is proof of the fact that the insult has bitten men even richer than you are.’ (1275.MORKIN.NAR-HIS,.1334)
- (38) Hann var þá svo frægur maður fyrir sakir  
he was then so famous.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG for sake  
**afls og hreysti að engi þótti þá slíkur af**  
strength.GEN and prowess.GEN that no.one thought then such of  
**ungum mönnum**  
young men  
‘He was so famous because of his strength and prowess that no one was thought his like amongst young men.’ (1310.GRETTIR.NAR-SAG,.1428)

#### 5.4 Lexical differences: Old Saxon quantifiers

Within individual classes of modifiers, there is substantial variation between individual lexical items. Old Saxon quantifiers and adjectives are a case in point; Table 8 illustrates.

Table 8: Lexical variation in Old Saxon quantifiers and adjectives

	Prenominal		Postnominal	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>mikil</i> ‘much’	15	15.3	83	84.7
<i>twena</i> ‘two’	7	25.9	20	74.1
<i>manag</i> ‘many’	39	43.8	50	56.2
<i>al</i> ‘all’	153	87.9	21	12.1
<i>sulik</i> ‘such’	76	98.7	1	1.3

The adjective/quantifier *mikil* ‘much, great’ occurs overwhelmingly in postnominal position, which is strongly against the trend for all types of modifiers in Old Saxon as well as in the other early Germanic languages. An obvious hypothesis is that whether it is postnominal or prenominal depends on whether it is an adjective (‘great’) or a quantifier (‘much’). However, this hypothesis does not seem to be correct. In both (39) and (40) *mikil* is an adjective rather than a quantifier, but in (39) *mikil* is prenominal whereas in (40) it is postnominal.

- (39) *endi suokeat iu burg oðra, micil manno*  
 and seek you.DAT city other great.ACC.SG.STR man.GEN.PL  
*uuerod*  
 people.ACC.SG  
 ‘and seek another city, a great crowd of people’ (HeliandC.1013.1945-1946)
- (40) *that im uuerod mikil, folc folgoda*  
 that him.DAT people.NOM.SG great.NOM.SG.STR folk followed  
 ‘that a great crowd followed him’ (HeliandC.1264.2368-2370)

Meanwhile, the quantifier *manag* ‘many’ has a slight tendency to be postnominal, but is almost as frequently prenominal. And at the other end of the spectrum, *sulik* ‘such’ is found almost exclusively in prenominal position; the lone counterexample to this generalization (HeliandC.311.587–592) has *sulik* following a metrical caesura, and hence can be viewed as appositional.

## 5.5 Lexicalized patterns: Old English

When we consider the postnominal adjectives in Old English, we see that most of them reflect specific collocations and lexicalized patterns, cf. Table 9, rather than distinctive noun + adjective combinations. Some of these are kept in Present-day English, e.g. *God almighty* (41), *spoonful* (42) and *Christ himself* (43). Among the lexicalized patterns we also find the positional predicates such as the one exemplified in (8).

- (41) *ac he is God ælmihtig*  
 but he is God.NOM.SG almighty.NOM.SG.STR  
 ‘but he is God almighty’ (coaelhom,+AHom\_4:163.609)

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- (42) & anne *cuculere*      **fulne**              ameredes huniges & grene  
 and a    spoon.ACC.SG ful.ACC.SG.STR purified    honey    and green  
 popig  
 poppy  
 ‘and a spoonful of purified honey and green poppy’  
 (coherbar,Lch\_I\_[Herb]:106.1.1711)
- (43) *Crist*              **sylf**                      sang Pater noster ærest  
 Christ.NOM.SG self.NOM.SG.STR sang Pater noster first  
 ‘Christ himself sang Pater noster first.’ (colaw1cn,LawICn:22.2.125)

Table 9: Lexical patterns in postnominal adjectival modifiers in Old English

Adjectival modifiers	n	%
Postnominal adjectival modifiers	1 454	100.0
Specific collocations and lexicalized patterns	1 186	81.6
Examples tagged correctly and not displaying a particular lexical pattern	196	13.5

The first row in Table 9 gives the number of all items tagged as adjectives occurring postnominally in noun phrases in the YCOE corpus, without any further manual checking of accuracy, cf. also Table 2. The second row refers to the number of examples in this set which feature a recurrent noun + adjective combination, which can, but does not have to be, lexicalized. The final row gives the number of examples that remain once (1) the collocations and lexicalized examples referred to in the second row have been deducted from the overall number and (2) any examples where the tagging is not correct, e.g. because the adjective is a complement of the noun phrase rather than a modifier in the noun phrase, have been removed. If we take these examples to be a truer reflection of the productive use of the postnominal position for adjectives, it is clear that postnominal adjectives are even less productive in Old English than suggested by the numbers in Table 2. Old English has few postnominal modifiers in general, and the ones that occur can almost always be explained with reference to specific factors such as weight and lexicalized patterns.

## 5.6 Flanked adjectives

In Old English, adjective phrases can be flanked, i.e. with one adjective occurring prenominally and the other postnominally (44), sometimes with overt coordination (45)–(46) (see Section 2.1).

- (44) þa geseah he sittan ænne **swearne** *deofol*  
 then saw he sit a.ACC.SG black.ACC.SG.STR devil.ACC.SG  
**ormætne** on his hrycge  
 immense.ACC.SG.STR on his back  
 ‘Then he saw an immense, black devil sit on his back.’  
 (coalive,+ALS\_[Martin]:1182.6755)
- (45) and gefette ænne mæssepreost, Policarpus gehaten, **halig**  
 and fetched a.ACC.SG masspriest Policarpus called holy.NOM.SG.STR  
*wær* and **snotor**  
 man.NOM.SG and wise.NOM.SG.STR  
 ‘and fetched a mass priest called Policarpus, a holy and wise man’  
 (coalive,+ALS\_[Sebastian]:124.1287)
- (46) **Earme** *menn* & **tydre** &  
 miserable.NOM.PL.STR man.NOM.PL. and weak.NOM.PL.STR and  
**deadlice**  
 mortal.NOM.PL.STR  
 ‘miserable men, weak and mortal’  
 (cocathom1,+ACHom\_I,\_18:323.181.3587)

If flanking is a factor in the ordering of noun phrase elements, we would expect the number of examples with two prenominal adjectives to be low, and the number of postnominal adjectives that are part of a flanking pair to be substantial. This is indeed the case: out of the 196 postnominal modifiers that did not occur in a lexicalized pattern (see Table 9), 49 (25%) occurred in flanking constructions.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, among the 40,957 instances of prenominal adjectives (see Table 2), there are only 296 (0.7%) examples of two co-occurring prenominal adjectives, as in (47). Of those, 21.6% are classifiers, i.e. adjectives denoting type or origin, such as *Romaniscan* in (47) (see Bech 2017: 15).

<sup>12</sup>Note that this only concerns flanking without overt coordination, i.e. the type in (44), not the one in (45) or (46).

- (47) *oðer gewuna is mæssesonga in þære halgan*  
 another custom is mass.service in DEF.DAT.SG holy.DAT.SG.WK  
**Romaniscan cirican**  
 Roman.DAT.SG.WK church.DAT.SG  
 ‘Another custom in the holy Roman church is the service of the mass.’  
 (cobede,Bede\_1:16.66.15.615)

Furthermore, of the 296 examples containing two prenominal adjectives, the first adjective is *agen* ‘own’, *ilca* ‘same’, *self* ‘self’, *swilc* ‘such’, or *oðer* ‘other’ (58) in 186 (62.8%) of the cases; i.e. what can be said to be “peripheral, non-descriptive, determiner-like adjectives” (see Bech 2017: 12).

- (48) & *eac swa me sædon oþre æfæste*  
 and also so me said other.NOM.PL.STR religious.NOM.PL.STR  
*weras*  
 man.NOM.PL  
 ‘and other religious men also told me this’  
 (cogregdC,GDPref\_and\_3\_[C]:16.211.2.2797)

In Old English, flanking seems to be used in order to avoid placing two (or more) regular lexical adjectives preminally.

Old Icelandic exhibits examples of flanked adjective phrases as well, and there is a good deal of variation. There are examples with two adjectives and no coordinator (49), or overt coordination (50), as well as examples involving several adjectives and a mixture of asyndetic coordination and overt coordination, e.g. (51) and (52).<sup>13</sup>

- (49) *Haraldur konungur Sigurðarson reið fyrir framan fylking sína*  
 Haraldur king Sigurðarson rode for front legion his.REFL  
**svörtum hesti blesóttum**  
 black.DAT.SG.STR horse.DAT.SG blazed.DAT.SG.STR  
 ‘King Haraldur Sigurðarson rode in front of his legion on a black horse with a blaze.’ (1275.MORKIN.NAR-HIS,.2054)
- (50) *Hann var ungur maður og vænn*  
 he was young.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG and handsome.NOM.SG.STR  
 ‘He was a young and handsome man.’ (1275.MORKIN.NAR-HIS,.1715)

<sup>13</sup>*Einn* is a numeral that is acquiring properties associated with an indefinite article at this stage. We have glossed it as a numeral, but translated it as ‘a certain’ in (51).

- (51) Svo barst að eittvert sumar að einn íslenskur  
 so happened PTCL some summer that one.NOM Icelandic.NOM.SG.STR  
*maður*, **ungur** og **fráligur**, kom til konungs  
 man.NOM.SG young.NOM.SG.STR and swift.NOM.SG.STR came to king  
 og bað hann ásjá  
 and asked him help  
 ‘So it happened one summer that a certain Icelandic man, young and  
 swift, came to the king and asked him for help.’  
 (1275.MORKIN.NAR-HIS,113)
- (52) Hann var **vitur** *maður* og  
 he was wise.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG and  
**vinsæll** **ör** og **mjög**  
 blessed.with.friend.NOM.SG.STR swift.NOM.SG.STR and very  
**orðfær** **linur** og **lærður** **vel**  
 well-spoken.NOM.SG.STR gentle.NOM.SG.STR and learned.NOM.SG.STR well  
 ‘He was a wise, swift, very well-spoken, gentle and well-learned man,  
 blessed with friends.’ (1210.THORLAKUR.REL-SAG,101)

Moreover, the flanked configuration is more common than structures involving two prenominal adjectives and structures involving two postnominal adjectives, see Table 10. Of the 112 examples represented in Table 10, only 6 did not have a coordinator, and only one of these is flanked, i.e. the example in (49).

With respect to noun phrases containing three adjectives, there are eight examples in the IcePaHC data and seven out of these eight are in the configuration A-N-A-A, e.g. (53) and (54), i.e. also flanked, and all eight examples involve at least one coordinator.

Table 10: Position of two simple adjectives in Old Icelandic (1150–1350)

	Both prenominal		Both postnominal		Flanked	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Two adjectives	25	22.3	25	22.3	62	55.4

- (53) Hann var ráðamaður að Hofi, **mikill** maður og he was influential.man at Hofi great.NOM.SG.STR man.NOM.SG and **sterkur** og **hinn ódælasti** strong.NOM.SG.STR and DEF.NOM.SG obstinate.SUPL.NOM.SG.WK  
 ‘He was an influential man at Hofi, a great and strong and most obstinate man.’ (1350.FINNBOGL.NAR-SAG,657.1794)
- (54) Svo er frá Fjölni sagt, að hann væri **vitur** so is from Fjölnir said that he be.PST.SBJV wise.NOM.SG.STR **maður** og **ráðugur** og **illgjarn** man.NOM.SG and shrewd.NOM.SG.STR and malicious.NOM.SG.STR  
 ‘So it is said of Fjölnir that he were a wise and shrewd and malicious man.’ (1260.JOMSVIKINGAR.NAR-SAG,.893)

There is just one example where all three adjectival phrases occur on the same side, and that is postnominally, shown in (55).

- (55) og keisarinn ríður fram að sjónum og hefir í hendi *spjót* and emperor.DEF rides forth to sea and has in hand spear.ACC.SG **eitt mikið, gullrekið** og one.ACC big.ACC.SG.STR inlaid-with-gold.ACC.SG.STR and **alblóðugt** all.bloody.ACC.SG.STR  
 ‘and the emperor rides forth to the sea and has in his hand a certain spear, big, inlaid with gold and all bloody’  
 (1260.JOMSVIKINGAR.NAR-SAG,.586–587)

The general impression for Old Icelandic is that there is a dispreference for “unbalanced” noun phrases, so when there is more modification, flanked adjectives is a way of achieving balance.

Flanking of nouns appears to be a relevant pattern in Old High German as well, helping to account for the distribution of postnominal modifiers in the examples taken from non-interlinear translations and discussed in Section 5.1. If we look at those examples which contain a postnominal modifier independently of the Latin original, we find that in five out of six of these, there is another prenominal modifier present in the noun phrase. This applies in examples (18), (20), (22), (23) and (24), in which the noun appears to be flanked by two modifiers.<sup>14</sup> The ex-

<sup>14</sup>Example (19) is set aside here because, as argued in Section 5.1, the adjective phrase *nides folle* ‘full of hate’ is an apposition adjoined to the noun phrase, rather than a part of it.

ample in (21) is the only exception in that it involves an independent postnominal modifier without a prenominal one in the same noun phrase.

Flanking also helps to explain why adjectives which are postnominal in Latin are left in this position in the Old High German. Among the examples taken from non-interlinear translations and discussed in Section 5.1, there are 13 cases of double modification. Both modifiers are postnominal in Latin but in the translation, one is prenominal while the other one is left after the noun. This applies to double modification by way of adjectives alone, cf. (56), but also by way of determiner-like categories co-occurring with adjectives, see (57) and (58).

- (56) **ubil**            *scalc*            **inti lazzo**  
bad.NOM.SG servant.NOM.SG and lazy.NOM.SG.WK  
'bad and lazy servant' (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat149 (edition 258–268))  
Lat. serve male et piger
- (57) **thiz ist min**            *sun*            **leobar**  
DEM is my.NOM.SG son.NOM.SG dear.NOM.SG.STR  
'this is my dear son' (Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat91 (edition 146–156))  
Lat. hic est filius meus dilectus
- (58) **mit diu her gientota** / [...] **thisiu**            *uuort*            **allu**  
when he finished            DEM.ACC.PL word.ACC.PL all.ACC.PL.STR  
'when the Lord had finished all these sayings'  
(Tatian\_1.1 > T\_Tat153 (edition 3–13))  
Lat. cum consummasset / [...] sermones hos omnes

Although the frequency of postnominal modifiers is low in Old High German, and although the independent evidence for postnominal modification is extremely restricted, flanking of nouns in constructions involving multiple modifiers appears to be a factor leading to variation in the position of adnominal modifiers in Old High German.

Finally, flanking is possible in Old Saxon too, though it is not particularly common. There are a total of 30 such examples in the HeliPaD, including (3) above. Caution is needed, as we are dealing with a poetic text. Twenty-five of these examples involve a line break between the two adjectives, along with a further three that have a caesura (half-line break) between the two adjectives. Only two examples feature no metrical break, and both involve the functional adjective *sulic* 'such'. One of these is (59).



- (59) that thu iu sulic uuiti mikil githolos  
 that you ever such.ACC.SG.STR torture.ACC.SG great.ACC.SG.STR suffer  
 undar theson thioda  
 under DEM people  
 ‘that you ever endure such great torture under these people’  
 (OSHeliandC.1723.3095-3097)

Still, in view of the existence of such examples it seems reasonable to expect that flanked adjectives are a factor in modifier positioning in Old Saxon as they are in the other early Germanic languages investigated.

## 6 Conclusion

In this study we aimed to give an overview of modifier position in Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon, and Old Icelandic noun phrases. We recognize that though by name, these are all “Old” varieties of Germanic languages, they are at different time distances from Proto-Germanic. However, as argued in Section 1, this does not invalidate the comparison. We also recognized issues that arise from the radically different amount of data available for the different languages, difference in corpus design and thus in queries, and the different nature of the texts. With respect to the latter issue, we showed in Section 5.1 that detailed studies of genres can also lead to interesting results.

The languages we have compared here show some striking similarities with respect to the order of elements in the noun phrase; for instance in that the orders exemplified in (1)–(5) exist in all languages. All languages show substantially more flexibility with respect to word order than their modern varieties, but we have identified some common patterns, most obviously in that modifiers overwhelmingly occur prenominal. Only in Old Icelandic is this pattern to some extent obscured by the preference for possessors to occur postnominally. As pointed out by Ratkus (2011), this may be a property that Old Icelandic shares with Gothic, which would be interesting since these are the two early Germanic varieties which Lass (2000: 30) identifies as most archaic. Indeed, Ratkus (2011: 266) speculates that “at an early stage in the development of Germanic, adjectives were used in post-position to the noun”. However, Ratkus (2011: 219–222) also points out that it is only in earlier Runic inscriptions and in early Gothic that evidence for postnominal modifier position is found; in the later Gothic represented by the *Skeireins*, in later Runic, and in older Germanic languages in general, prenominal modifier position is the general rule, as we have also shown.

Thus, we think the issue of what the default word order in Proto-Germanic was merits further consideration, though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore this.

The position of possessors is also of special interest in Old Saxon, where we saw in Section 5.2 that those possessors which are expressed as indeclinable genitive forms of pronouns are invariably prenominal, whereas those that decline like adjectives can also be postnominal, but still only at about the same rate as adjectives in general are postnominal.

Though different principles for determining word order were at work in the early varieties from those that operate in the corresponding modern varieties, the principle of avoiding heavy modifiers prenominally applies in these varieties, just as in the modern ones. This includes the possibility of having the complement of a prenominal adjective following the noun, as in *older languages than the ones we have looked at*.

A particularly interesting shared pattern we have identified is the preference for a balanced noun phrase; that is, if there are multiple modifiers, these tend to be split between pre- and postnominal position. This is of theoretical significance: approaches to noun phrase structure can account for head-first and head-last structures, and in some approaches a flatter structure is assumed that allow independent factors – such as information structure – to determine the word order. However, we are not aware of any analysis in which the head noun acts as a kind of pivot around which the structure aims for a balance.

## Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	PL	plural
ADJ	adjective	POSS	possessive
CARD	cardinal numeral	PTCL	particle
CMPR	comparative	QUANT	quantifier
DAT	dative	REFL	reflexive
DEF	definite	SBJV	subjunctive
DEM	demonstrative	SG	singular
GEN	genitive	STR	strong
MOD	modifier	SUPL	superlative
N	noun	WK	weak
NOM	nominative		

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