Verb-third in early West Germanic: a comparative perspective

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Introduction

A V2/V3 alternation has often been observed in Old English (OE) root clauses, with some authors (e.g. Hinterhölzl & Petrova 2009) speculating that the V3 pattern resulted from an innovation. I'll present this alternation and my analysis of it, then draw on comparative data from the other early Germanic languages, Old High German (OHG) and the little-studied Old Saxon (OS). It will be argued that the possibility of V3 is more likely to be the result of shared retention than of innovation among these languages.

Outline of the talk:

1. Old English
2. Old High German
3. Old Saxon
4. Diachronic analyses
5. Conclusion

1 Old English

First glance at the syntax of Old English root clauses "suggests a strong parallelism" between Old English and modern Germanic V2 languages (Kemenade 1987: 42):

(1) *On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes sawle gegodod* (AHTh I, 20)
      in two things had God the man's soul endowed
      'with two things had God endowed man's soul'

However, as well as verb-initial (Kemenade 1987: 44-5) and verb-final (Koopman 1995; Pintzuk & Haeberli 2008) root clauses, OE may exhibit verb-third where a fronted constituent other than *þa*, *þonne* 'then' or a wh-phrase is in initial position:

(2) *æfter his gebede he ahof þæt cild up*   (AHTh II, 28)
      after his prayer he lifted the child up

(3) *Fela spella him sægdon þa Beormas*   (Oros 14, 27)
      Many stories him told the Permians
      'The Permians told him many stories'

(4)   *Nu se rica mann ne mæg her habban ...*   (ÆLS 1, 268.110)

            Now the rich man NEG can here have ...

V3 clauses with subject pronoun in preverbal position have been recognised as the dominant pattern since Kemenade (1987). Direct and indirect object pronouns may also occupy this position, as in (3).

The presence of a full DP in second position is rarer, but examples exist, as in (4). Haeberli (2002): subject-verb non-inversion (i.e. V3) occurred 28.7% of the time in a small corpus of 654 clauses with full subjects and a fronted constituent in initial position.

The prevalence of examples like (4) demonstrate that an analysis purely in terms of the clitic status of second-position elements, as in Kemenade (1987) and Roberts (1996), is not sufficient alone (cf. also Koopman 1997 for arguments against such an analysis).

Bech (2001: 98): "The fact that one fifth of the subjects in the XSV pattern cannot be clitics, but nevertheless occur in exactly the same position as the clitic elements, can hardly be overlooked".

An alternative approach (Bech 2001, Westergaard 2005, Kemenade & Los 2006) derives this alternation from the information value of constituents. In Bech's early Old English corpus, 85.2% of the subjects of XSV clauses had low information value ($\approx$ given rather than new), vs. 59.8% of the subjects of XVS clauses (2001: 160), and the latter figure falls to 30.5% when clauses with initial *þa* are discounted.

Cf. Westergaard & Vangsnes (2005), Westergaard (2005) for similar V3 data from wh-questions in the Tromsø dialect of Norwegian. Unstressed subject pronouns are 'the canonical instance of a given nominal' (Westergaard & Vangsnes 2005: 137).

How to model this in clause structure? If the information-structural approach is correct, then an analysis such as that of Fuß (2003), positing V-to-T and variation in subject movement to SpecTP, is unenlightening. Walkden (2009) and Hinterhölzl & Petrova (2009) suggest that a split-CP approach following Rizzi (1997) may be of value. Here I adopt Hinterhölzl & Petrova's analysis, based on the cartography of the left periphery sketched in Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007):

(5)   ForceP > ShiftP > ContrP > FocP > FamP* > FinP

                       (adapted from Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007: 22; their (37))

ForceP is the locus of V2 (in Modern German and Dutch, and in contexts such as *þa-* and wh-clauses in OE). But in OE root clauses, the verb only moves to Fin[0] (cf. Roberts 1996). Given constituents may move to SpecFamP. Many cases of V2 in OE are therefore epiphenomenal under this analysis.

Assumptions about information-structural feature system: 'A numeration N pre-determines the Information Structure of a linguistic expression' (Aboh 2008: 2, Cruschina 2009). Agree takes place between the left-peripheral head and a matching lower constituent; when an information-structural feature on this head is coupled with a movement-triggering feature, movement to the left periphery results (as with Tense, Case or phi-features; Aboh 2008: 33).

2 Old High German

Tomaselli (1995) and Axel (2007) present a number of cases of V3 root clauses in OHG:

(6)   *erino portun ih firchnussu*   (Isidor 157)
       iron portals I destroy
       'I destroy iron portals'

(7)   *Dhes martyrunga endi dodh uuir findemes mit urchundin ...*   (Isidor 516)
       his martyrdom and death we demonstrate with evidence
       'We demonstrate his martyrdom and his death with evidence ...'

(8)   *forlazan imo uuirdit*   (Monsee Fragments 6,9)
       forgiven him.DAT becomes
       'he will be forgiven'

V3 clauses are only found with any frequency in the translation of Isidor and in the Monsee Fragments, two early prose texts from Lorraine and Upper Austria respectively.

Unfortunately, there is little data on whether non-pronominal elements may occur in second position, other than a few examples with adverbs:

(9)   *siu tho giuuanta sih*   (Tatian 665,19)
       she then turned REFL
       'she then turned herself'

Axel: 'there is no compelling evidence that more than one XP can move to the left periphery in OHG' (2007: 249-50), but 'XP-pron-V$_{fin}$-sequences were a native and at least partially productive

pattern in earlier OHG'; pronouns are often inserted in this position counter to the source text in translations (2007: 248). They aren't just examples of unmoved verbs, since other pronouns may follow the finite verb:

(10)   *Vnde do iu habeta si leid in-fangen in iro herzen*   (N Ps VII 23, 26)
        and then you-DAT.PL had she sorrow received in her heart
        'and then her heart was filled with sorrow for you'

Other than the absence of evidence for full XP movement to SpecFamP, the situation in early OHG is fully compatible with the hypotheses about clause structure advanced for OE, although the pattern appears to be rarer (no frequency data exists, as far as I am aware).

3 Old Saxon

Background: OS, ancestor of modern Low German, has a textual tradition dating back to the first millennium AD. Two main texts, from the first half of the 9th century: the Heliand, a gospel harmony written in alliterative verse of 5968 lines, and fragments of a verse translation of Genesis. In addition, a few other fragmentary texts exist. There has been little syntactic work on OS (though cf. Ries 1880, Erickson 1997, Linde 2009).

My data: 1948 clauses from first 2000 lines of the Heliand. Edition: Behaghel (1948). Clauses were manually tagged for clause-type, verb position (initial, second, or late), preverbal negation, and absence of overt subject.

Some raw figures: of 874 root clauses, 326 clauses (37.2%) are V1, 481 (55.0%) are V2, and 67 (7.7%) have the verb in a later position.

Verb-third does not appear to be a productive pattern in Old Saxon. I can only find two examples of this order with a personal pronoun subject in the first 2000 lines of the Heliand, (11) and (12). The order XP-V-SubjPron is far more common (discounting clauses beginning with *tho, than(ne)* 'then' and wh-phrases): there are 97 examples, e.g. (13).

(11)   *Thanna thu scalt lon nemen / fora godes ogun*   (Heliand 1563-1564)
        then you shall reward take before God's eyes
        'Then you shall be rewarded before God'

(12)   *Bethiu man sculun / haldan thene holdlico*   (Heliand 1869-1870)
        therefore one should hold DEM.MASC favourably
        'Therefore all should keep him in their favour'

(13)   *mildi uuas he im an is mode*   (Heliand 1259)
         mild was he 3PL.DAT in his mood
         'He was gentle in spirit to them'

Both of these clauses begin with adverbs that may also be used as subordinators, rendering them potentially ambiguous between root and embedded clauses. Neither is an unambiguous example of verb-movement to Fin^0 as found in OE. Hinterhölzl & Petrova (2009: 320) claim that (14) (their (12)a) is an example of V3 with verb movement as in Old English:

(14)   *Thar imu tegegnes quam en idis fan adrom thiodun*   (Heliand 2984)
         there him against came a woman from different tribe
         'There, a woman from another tribe approached him'

However, this example is as inconclusive as (11) and (12) with regard to underlying structure. Since extraposition and heavy NP shift must be postulated for OS as for OE, the verb in (14) may be unmoved with the new information *en idis fan adrom thiodun* 'moved rightward' over it: rightward movement (at least in OE) appears to be driven by focus (Pintzuk 2005: 124, fn12; Taylor & Pintzuk 2009). Furthermore, as for (11) and (12), in context it is entirely possible to analyse (14) as an embedded clause with the meaning 'where a woman from another tribe approached him'.

I therefore conclude that V3 as found in OE, with a familiar topic in second position preceding the finite verb in Fin^0, is not a productive feature of OS, or at least of the Heliand, and that OS has (basically) generalised V-to-Force^0 movement in root clauses.

4 Diachronic analyses

Hinterhölzl & Petrova (2009) assume that V3 clauses were the product of a single innovation in pre-OE/OS, which did not take place in OHG. The diachronic scenario they posit is as illustrated in (15) (their (28)) for OE and OS, and (16) (their (27)) for OHG:

(15)   a. Stage I: [Aboutness] [$_{ForceP}$ (familiar topic) [$_{TP}$...V$_{fin}$...]] topic + non-V1
         b. Stage II: [$_{ForceP}$ [Aboutness] (familiar topic) [$_{TP}$...V$_{fin}$...]]
         c. Stage III: [$_{ForceP}$ [Aboutness]$_i$ [$_{TP}$ Subject V$_{fin}$ t$_i$] ...]

(16)   a. Stage I: [Aboutness] [$_{ForceP}$ V$_{fin}$ [$_{TP}$ ...]] topic + V1
         b. Stage II: [$_{ForceP}$ [Aboutness] V$_{fin}$ [$_{TP}$ ...]]
         c. Stage III: [$_{ForceP}$ [Aboutness]$_i$ V$_{fin}$ [t$_i$ [$_{TP}$ ...]]

In other words, they posit that Old English and Old Saxon underwent a process of reanalysis that caused clause-external aboutness topics to be integrated into a clause with a clause-internal, TP-external familiar topic ((15)a-b). In Old High German, on the other hand, this clause-external aboutness topic is integrated instead into a clause in which the finite verb is in initial position ((16)a-b). These topics are then reanalysed as originating inside the clause ((15)b-c, (16)b-c).

Problems with this analysis

- Full story not being told for the OHG data: a similar/identical V3 pattern exists in early OHG texts, as demonstrated. Hinterhölzl & Petrova describe this as 'a very rare declining pattern' (2009: 316) and do not discuss it further.
- OS data do not support their claim (2009: 324) that this language patterned with OE: it seems to be more similar to late OHG, as demonstrated.
- Makes stipulations about the synchronic syntax of earlier stages. Why should we assume that in Proto-WGmc. familiar topics, but not aboutness topics, were clause-internal?
- Stage II is strange, as it requires aboutness topics (presumably potentially arguments) to be first Merged in the left periphery.
- Diachronic stipulation: assuming a single point of origin, why would one language follow the path in (15) and another the path in (16)?

Alternative analysis:

In Germanic philology, Old English and Old Saxon are traditionally grouped together to the exclusion of Old High German as in the (very simplified) tree below:

West Germanic

Old High German   *Ingvaeonic*

Old Saxon   Old English
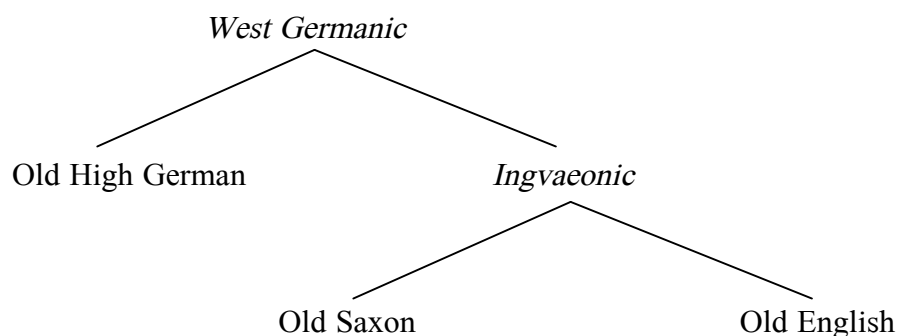
It is phylogenetically and geographically implausible to assume that OE and OHG shared a single innovation (or that contact played a significant role). Parallel innovation of the same phenomenon is a possible alternative, but criteria of economy should lead us to opt for the analysis in which V-to-Fin[0] movement was present in neutral declaratives in Proto-West Germanic and V-to-Force[0] movement was generalised in OS.

How could the latter change have happened? Speculation: OS (and OHG), unlike OE, freely allowed subject-drop. Since given subjects figure in the majority of OE V3 clauses, the evidence available to the acquirer for V3 in OS may have dropped below a critical level at some point in the language's prehistory (as seems to have happened elsewhere in OHG).

5 Conclusion

- Old English V3 is perhaps best analysed using a split-CP approach.
- V3 is present in early Old High German, although rare.
- V3 cannot be assumed to be a productive pattern in Old Saxon.
- We should reconstruct the availability of V3 for Proto-West Germanic.

Primary source

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