



# Object position and Heavy NP Shift in Old Saxon and beyond

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Workshop on Information Structure: Empirical Perspectives on Theory  
2nd-3rd December 2011

# Structure of the talk

1. Taylor & Pintzuk (2011): information structure and object position in Old English
2. Information structure and object position in Old Saxon (a new study)
3. The syntax of Heavy NP Shift: general considerations

# Old English word order (1)

- Since van Kemenade (1987), Old English (OE) has often been analysed as very similar to Modern German in clause structure
- V2 in main clauses:
  - (1) Her for se ilca here innan Myrce to Snotingham ...  
this-year went the same army inside M. to N.  
'This year the same army went inside Mercia to Nottingham ...'  
(cochronE,ChronE\_[Plummer]:868.1.1098)
- OV in subordinate clauses:
  - (2) ... & þær **wintersetle** namon  
... and there winter-quarters took  
'... and took up winter quarters there'  
(cochronE,ChronE\_[Plummer]:868.1.1098)

# Old English word order (2)

- However, things are not that simple: VO word orders are also found in subordinate clauses

(3) swa þæt heo bið *forloren* þam ecan life  
so that it is lost the.DAT eternal life  
'so that it is lost to the eternal life'  
(coelive,+ALS\_[Christmas]:144.117)

- Some linguists have proposed that VO order occurs iff the object is focused (e.g. Roberts 1997: 412)

# Taylor & Pintzuk (2011)

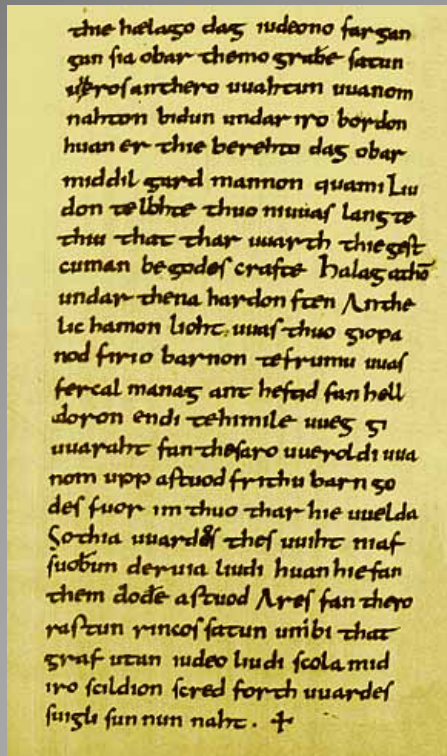
- T&P (2011) observe that, if this view were correct, postverbal objects would be new information ( $\approx$  focused) in both AuxV and VAux clauses.
- They show, however, that postverbal objects in VAux clauses are more commonly new information than postverbal objects in AuxV clauses (their Table 2).

Info Status	VAux		AuxV (n.s.)	
	N	% VO	N	% VO
given	507	9.7	507	45.0
new	185	20.5	326	50.3

VAux:  $\chi^2 = 14.6$ , p-value = 0.0005  
AuxV:  $\chi^2 = 2.27$ , p-value = 0.132

# The present study

- This paper assesses whether this finding of T&P (2011) for OE also holds for the closely related Germanic language Old Saxon (OS).



- OS is (broadly speaking) the ancestor of modern Low German.
- Attested in two main texts: a partial translation of Genesis, and a 5,983-line gospel harmony, the *Heliand*, written in alliterative verse
- Both are from the 9<sup>th</sup> century
- Data for this paper are drawn from the *Heliand*

# Methodology

- Methodology broadly follows T&P (2011).
- Used a partially tagged corpus of the Behaghel (1948) edition of the *Heliand* (Walkden 2011a).
- Extracted all subordinate clauses containing:
  - a) A **finite modal or auxiliary**
  - b) A **non-finite verb** (excluding *to*-infinitives)
  - c) A non-quantified, non-negative, non-pronominal **object** (accusative, dative or genitive)
- Excluded clauses in which the object preceded the subject, and other OAuxV clauses (these likely indicate some sort of object topicalization)
- Total number of usable clauses: **214** (not very many!)

# Clause types found (1)

- OVAux:

(4) huar he **thea liudi** tô *lêdean* scolde  
where he the people to lead should  
'where he should lead the people to'  
(*Heliand* 4816)

- VAuxO:

(5) that hie *hebbian* mugi **cuningduomes namon**  
that he have may kingdom.GEN name  
'that he may have a kingdom's name'  
(*Heliand* 5362–5363)

- Interestingly, no VOAux clauses (cf. Biberauer *et al.* 2010)



# Clause types found (2)

- AuxOV:

(6) that sie sculun **iro gode** *thionon*  
that they should their god serve  
'that they should serve their god'  
(*Heliand* 4459)

- AuxVO:

(7) that ênig liudeo ni scal *farfolgan* **is friunde**  
that any body-part NEG shall follow his friend  
'that no body part shall follow his friend'  
(*Heliand* 1492–1493)

- OAuxV (excluded)

# Information-structural annotation

- Binary distinction: (hearer-)**given** vs. (hearer-)**new**
- Categorization of information following Birner (2006: 45):

	<b>Hearer-old:</b>	<b>Hearer-new:</b>
<b>Discourse-old:</b>	Evoked: <b>Identity/Elaborating                      Inferrable</b> (inferentially linked and known to hearer)	<b>Bridging Inferrable</b> (inferentially linked, but not known to hearer)
<b>Discourse-new:</b>	<b>Unused</b> (not inferentially linked, but known to hearer)	<b>Brand-new</b> (not inferentially linked, and not known to hearer)

# IS annotation (2)

- **New includes:**

- Referentially new objects

(8)      *endi gehuggean ni uuili thana suâran balcon*  
and consider    NEG will the    heavy    plank  
'and does not want to consider the heavy plank'  
(*Heliand* 1705–1706)

- New discourse referents (in the sense of Karttunen 1976)
- 'Bridging' inferrables (Birner 2006):

(9)      *that thar gigareuuid uuarð godes andsacun*  
that there prepared    is    God's enemies  
'that is being prepared there for God's enemies'  
(*Heliand* 4421)

# IS annotation (3)

- **Given** includes:
  - Previously mentioned entities (previous 30 lines)
  - Shared/cultural knowledge

(10)    huuô man **himilrîki** *gehalon* scoldi  
          how one heaven    reach    should  
          ‘how one should reach heaven’  
          (*Heliand* 1839)

- Situationally evoked entities
- ‘Elaborating’ inferrables (Birner 2006):

(11)    thie hebbiad **iro** **herta** *gihrênod*  
          who have    their hearts purified  
          ‘who have purified their hearts’  
          (*Heliand* 1315)

# Results (1)

- Unlike most of the OE texts investigated by T&P (see their Table 1), in the OS *Heliand*, VO is no more common in AuxV than in VAux clauses.

Text	VAux		AuxV	
	N	% VO	N	% VO
<i>Orosius</i> (OE)	66	4.5	47	31.9
<i>Heliand</i> (OS)	96	18.8	118	23.7

*Orosius*: significant, p-value < 0.001  
*Heliand*: not significant, p-value = 0.407

## Results (2)

- An effect similar to that found by T&P (2011, their Table 2) for OE is found for the OS *Heliand*: while in VAux clauses there is a strong preference for VO with new objects, this effect is less salient for AuxV clauses

Info Status	VAux		AuxV (n.s.)	
	N	% VO	N	% VO
given	75	13.3	87	19.5
new	21	38.1	31	35.5

VAux: significant, p-value = 0.023  
AuxV: not significant, p-value = 0.088

# Discussion

- The difference between VAux and AuxV clauses in OS is not as drastic as in OE.
  - Could this be due to a confounding influence of prosodic/metrical factors, e.g. caesurae, line breaks?
  - Annotation could of course be in error (single annotator)
  - Task for future research: test the relevance of prosodic weight of the object (as done by T&P 2011 for OE)
- But an effect exists. This suggests the existence of a ‘base-generated VO’ grammar for OS, as for OE.
- On the other hand, Low German in its history did not shift from OV to VO, as is attested for English. What accounts for this difference in development?

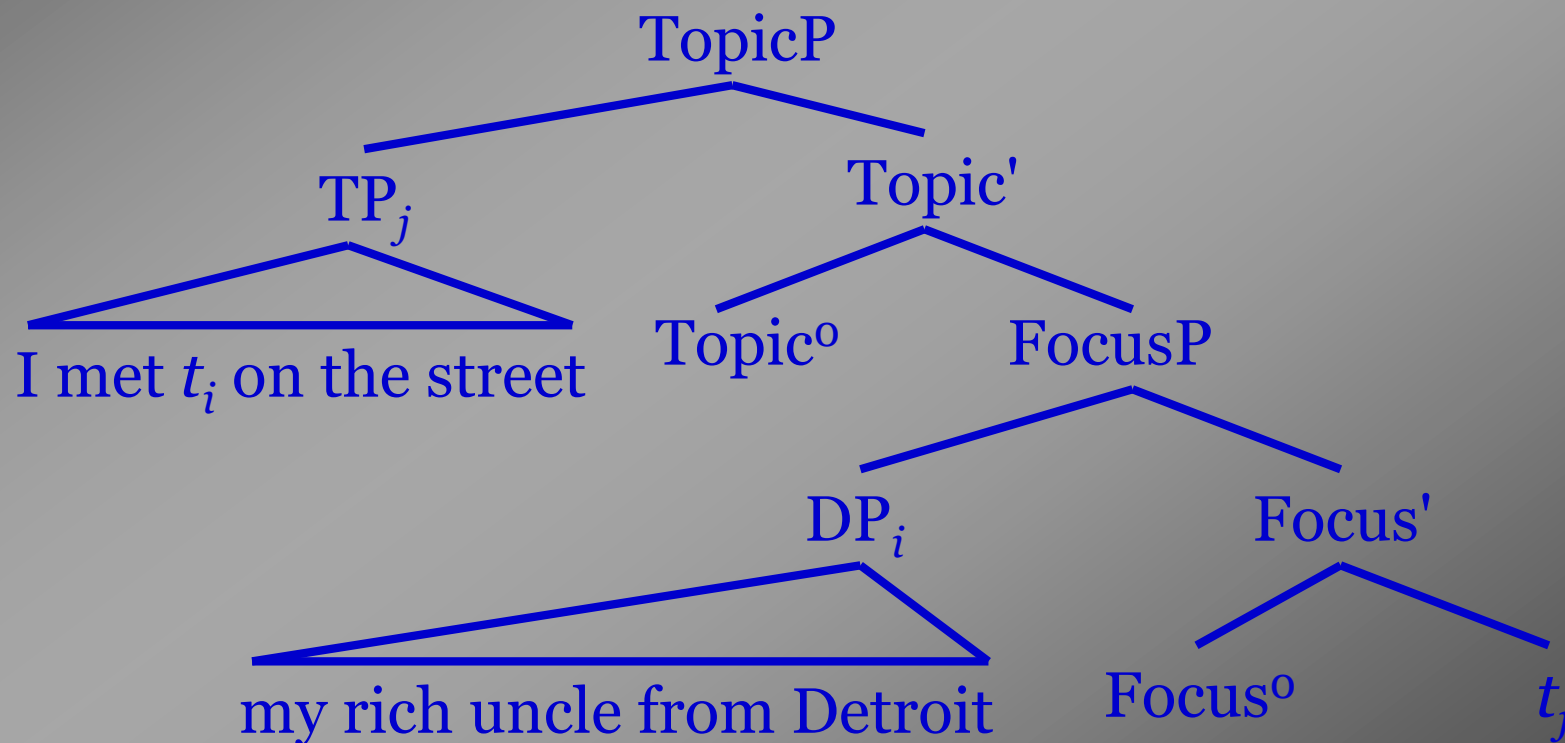
# The syntax of Heavy NP Shift

- Abstracting away from ‘base-generated VO’, how to analyse the preference for VO with new objects?
- Different types of analysis have been proposed, e.g. for OE and OS:
  - Option 1: information structure and syntax are two competing motivations for word order (e.g. Bech 2001, Linde 2009)
  - Option 2: focused objects remain *in situ* postverbally (e.g. Roberts 1997, Biberauer & Roberts 2005)
  - Option 3: focused objects are the result of rightward movement (e.g. Pintzuk & Kroch 1989, Wallenberg 2009, 2011)
- I will focus on option 3 here, specifically the proposal of Wallenberg (2009, 2011)



# Wallenberg (2009, 2011)

- Heavy NP Shift, across Germanic, is analysed as movement of the object to the left-peripheral SpecFocusP, followed by remnant movement of TP to SpecTopicP.



# Problems (1)

- In this proposal, the left periphery of the clause becomes the right periphery, in a sense.
- But the proposal is incompatible with approaches which assume a split CP to model the left periphery in OE, e.g. Hinterhölzl & Petrova (2009), Walkden (2011b).
- In these approaches, the higher TopicP and FocusP are needed to account for *left-peripheral* topics and foci.

(12) [Hiora umtrymnesse] [he] sceal *ðrowian* on his heortan  
their weakness he shall atone in his heart  
'He shall atone for their weakness in his heart'  
(*Cura Pastoralis* 60.17)

# Problems (2)

- Cross-linguistically, the left-peripheral focus position is assumed to be one of *identificational* focus (É. Kiss 1998)
- This would predict that polarity items (*some, any*) should be excluded from this position (É. Kiss 1998: 252)
- But such examples are found in OS and in modern English:

(13)     sô that *uuiten* ni   mag ênig mannisc barn  
          so that know   NEG may any   human   child  
          ‘so that no human child may know that’  
          (*Heliand* 4298–4299)

(14)     if I met on the street **someone from Bound for Glory**  
          **or No Remorse** they would most likely kick my ass  
          ([http://www.xcatalystx.com/board/viewtopic.php?](http://www.xcatalystx.com/board/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=2562&p=21819)  
          f=2&t=2562&p=21819)

# Problems (3)

- In conditional clauses in modern English, argument fronting to the left periphery is impossible (Haegeman & Ürögdi 2010: 118)
- But example (14) (repeated below) shows that Heavy NP Shift is possible in modern English conditional clauses.

(14) if I met on the street **someone from Bound for Glory or No Remorse** they would most likely kick my ass  
(<http://www.xcatalystx.com/board/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=2562&p=21819>)

# An alternative proposal

- Heavy NP Shift is movement to a SpecFocusP with subsequent remnant movement to SpecTopicP...
- ...but to the 'low left periphery' above  $v$ P (Belletti 2001)
- Advantages:
  - Compatible with use of the left periphery for left-peripheral things
  - The low FocusP typically hosts information-foci rather than identificational foci (Belletti 2001)
  - The low FocusP, unlike the high FocusP, is present in *if*-clauses
- Wallenberg (2011) considers such a solution, but argues against it on the basis that the remnant-movement of  $v$ P to the low SpecTopicP is unmotivated.
  - But the same applies to remnant-movement of TP to the high SpecTopicP.

# Remaining problems (1)

- The correlation between new information status/ information focus and ‘rightward movement’ is not absolute.
- Bies (1996), in a study of right-peripheral objects in Early New High German, finds small numbers of examples of preverbal objects with narrow focus and postverbal objects without narrow focus.
- Similar examples are found in OS:

(15)     *sô hues sô thu **biddien uuili berhton drohtin***  
          so what so you ask     will bright     lord  
          ‘Whatever you will ask of the bright Lord’  
          (*Heliand* 4037)

# Remaining problems (2)

- Grammatical weight (measured in terms of prosodic heaviness, e.g. number of words) favours Heavy NP Shift constructions independently of information status.
- See Bies (1996: 22) for Early New High German.
- See Taylor & Pintzuk (2011) for Old English.
- Quantitative investigation not yet carried out for OS. But suggestive examples exist:

(16)    that thu hêr *antkennien* scalt **craft drohtines**, **the mikilon maht godes**  
that you here recognize shall strength lord's    the great    power God's  
'that you shall here recognize the Lord's strength, the great power of God'  
(*Heliand* 4088–4089)

- Syntactic derivations shouldn't be sensitive to phonology!

# Solution?

- Approaches such as that of Wallenberg (2009, 2011) and the one adopted above, then, where Heavy NP Shift is conceptualized cartographically as movement to a dedicated syntactic position, may represent an oversimplification of a complex situation.
- Do information-structural categories have invariant syntactic (or phonological) correlates? If not, why not, and how do we model the interaction?



# Summary and conclusions

- In Old Saxon, as in Old English, not all postverbal objects are new information.
- In Old Saxon, as in Old English, postverbal objects in VAux clauses are significantly more likely to be new information than postverbal objects in AuxV clauses.
- This indicates that something else (another option, another grammar) is required to account for the variation.
- Heavy NP Shift, if viewed cartographically, is movement to the 'low' rather than the 'high' left periphery.
- But serious problems arise for any view that takes Heavy NP Shift to be an information-structurally motivated syntactic movement process.

# Thank you for listening!

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# Thank you for listening!

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# Appendix: The effect of case

- Cf. T&P's Table 3.
- As for T&P, the effect of case is not significant in AuxV clauses.
- As for T&P, the effect of case is significant in VAux clauses (but not for the same reason!).

Case	VAux		AuxV (n.s.)	
	N	% VO	N	% VO
accusative	75	14.7	73	20.5
genitive	14	7.1	16	12.5
dative	7	85.7	29	37.9

VAux: Yates'  $\chi^2 = 17.6$ , p-value < 0.001  
AuxV: Yates'  $\chi^2 = 3.33$ , p-value = 0.190