

Verb-late clauses in Old English

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Outline

- Old English (OE) “verb-second” (V2)
- Verb-late main clauses
- Excursus: V2 in mainland Scandinavian
- Investigating the interpretation of verb-late main clauses in Old English
- Conclusion

Verb-second (V2)

- V2 construction: a construction in which exactly one constituent must precede the finite verb.
- German:
 - Er **hat** das Buch gelesen
he has the book read
'He has read the book.'
 - Das Buch **hat** er gelesen
the book has he read
'He has read the book.'
- German main clauses must be V2.

Asymmetric V2

- German subordinate clauses must be verb-final:
 - ... dass er das Buch gelesen **hat**
... that he the book read has
'... that he has read the book.'
- V2 conditioned by clause type = 'asymmetric'
 - Basic generative analysis: finite verb is in C^0 , except when a complementizer gets in the way (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987 for OE)

Asymmetric V2 in OE

- A glance at Old English “suggests a strong parallelism” with modern Germanic asymmetric V2 languages (van Kemenade 1987: 42)
 - Her **for** se ilca here innan Myrce to Snotingham this-year went the same army inside M. to N.
‘This year the army travelled inside Mercia to Nottingham’
(cochronE,ChronE_[Plummer]:868.1.1098)
 - ... hwæðer se halga Petrus þær wununge **hæfde**
... whether the holy Peter there dwelling had
‘... whether Saint Peter lived there’
(coaelive,+ALS[Peter's_Chair]:109.2346)
- However, the parallelism is not complete...

Problem 1: V1 clauses

- Verb-first clauses exist:
 - **Wæs** he se biscop æfest mon & god
was he the bishop pious man & good
'He the bishop was a pious and good man'
(cobede, Bede_3:22.250.23.2556)
- Often described as characteristic of dramatic, lively narrative (whatever that means)
 - cf. van Kemenade (1987: 44–45), Kiparsky (1995: 163), Cichosz (2010: 78)
- Similar structures are found in modern colloquial German and Dutch (Önnerfors 1997)

Problem 2: V3 clauses

- Verb-third clauses exist:
 - æfter his gebede he **ahof** þæt cild up
after his prayer he lifted the child up
'After his prayer he lifted the child up'
(cocathom2,+ACHom_II,_2:14.70.320)
- Not just (subject) pronouns preverbally!
- Linked to information-structural status of preverbal constituent
 - cf. Swan (1994), Bech (1998, 2001), Koopman (1998), Haeberli (2002), Westergaard (2005), Walkden (2009, in press)

Problem 3: Second conjuncts

- Second conjuncts don't play by the rules:
 - Her **for** se ilca here innan Myrce to Snotingham ...
this-year went the same army inside M. to N. ...
'This year the army travelled inside Mercia to Nottingham'
 - ... & þær wintersetle **namon**
... and there winter-quarters took
'... and took up winter quarters there'
(cochronE,ChronE_[Plummer]:868.1.1098)
- They behave (a bit) like subordinate clauses.
 - See Andrew (1940: 1), Mitchell (1985: 694),
Kiparsky (1995: 148–149), Bech (2001: 86–93)

Problem 4: Verb-late clauses

- Verb-late clauses exist:
 - Her Cenwalh adriften **wæs** from Pendan cyninge
this-year C. out-driven was from P.DAT king.DAT
'This year Cenwalh was driven away by King Penda'
(cochronA-1,ChronA_[Plummer]:645.1.324)
 - Baloham ðonne fulgeorne feran **wolde**
B. then full-gladly proceed.INF wanted
'Ballam then very much wanted to proceed'
(cocura,CP:36.255.22.1674)
- Here I will use the term 'verb-late' as a cover term for a structural configuration in which the verb cannot be in C⁰.

Prevalence of verb-late clauses, 1

- Depends how, and what, you count.
- Pintzuk (1993): 6.3% of main clauses
 - (though cf. Pintzuk & Haeberli 2008)
- Koopman (1995): between 0.6% and 6.1%
- Cichosz (2010: 73–74):
 - 69 of 418 (16.5%) in poetry sample
 - 19 of 122 (15.6%) in original prose sample
 - 15 of 140 (10.7%) in translated prose sample

Prevalence of verb-late clauses, 2

- Pintzuk & Haerberli (2008):
 - Whole YCOE corpus (Taylor *et al.* 2003)
 - Only unambiguous examples (i.e. examples where an analysis of verb-in-C⁰ is *impossible*), using diagnostic elements with fixed positions
 - Particles such as *up, ut*: 111/196 (56.6%)
 - Though this diagnostic may be problematic...
 - Negative objects: 17/54 (31.5%)
 - Stranded prepositions: 20/143 (16.3%)

Approaches to verb-late clauses

- Four different approaches:
 - Acknowledge that they're a problem and give up?
 - State that they're all ungrammatical?
 - State that they're due to Latin or metrical influence?
 - State that they're the product of an (archaic) competing grammar?
- The first approach is not much good.
 - Cf. Eythórsson (1995: 302–303), Fuß (2003: 225, fn. 15)

“They’re all scribal errors”

- Corpora of natural language invariably contain a small proportion of sentences that native speakers would judge ungrammatical.
- But the proportion of verb-late clauses is too high for them to be written off:
 - ‘it is hard to believe that different scribes made the same grammatical error throughout the period, at roughly the same percentage’ (Koopman 1995: 139–140)

Latin or metrical influence?

- Cichosz (2010: 88–89): verb-late clauses in OE are due to Latin influence.
 - But Cichosz's own data don't support this: autochthonous poetry and prose show higher proportions of verb-late than translations!
 - For the same reason, metrical considerations in poetry can't be the sole explanation.
 - Anyway, just saying that they're due to Latin or metrical influence doesn't really answer the question of their role in the synchronic system of OE (though these factors may still be relevant).

Competing grammars?

- Verb-late pattern is often said to be ‘archaic’. Could it simply be a competing grammar?
 - This approach is taken by Pintzuk (1993, 1999).
 - Prediction of this analysis: once certain contexts are discounted, the proportions of V2 and verb-late should be roughly the same in main and subordinate clauses.
 - But this is not the case (Koopman 1995: 142): V2 remains more common in main clauses.
 - True V2 is unattested in the complement clauses of some types of predicates (Salvesen & Walkden forthcoming)

A new approach

- Attempt to figure out what the *interpretive* properties of verb-late main clauses in OE are: is there a meaning difference?
- For this it is useful to look at V2/non-V2 alternations in living languages. This might provide a clue as to where to start.
- Over to mainland Scandinavian...

Embedded V2 in Scandinavian

- Variation as to whether V2 is found in embedded clauses:
 - Olle sa att han inte **hade** läst boken (not V2)
O. said that he NEG had read book.DEF
'Olle said that he had not read the book'
 - Olle sa att han **hade** inte läst boken (V2)
O. said that he had NEG read book.DEF
'Olle said that he had not read the book'
 - Both are possible (in Swedish; Wiklund 2010: 81)
- Is there a meaning difference?

The assertion hypothesis

- ‘The more asserted (the less presupposed) the complement is, the more compatible it is with V2 (and other root phenomena).’
(Wiklund *et al.* 2009)
 - Some debate.
 - Julien (2007, 2009): V2 clauses are asserted, non-V2 clauses are not asserted.
 - Wiklund (2009a, b, 2010): V2 clauses are asserted, but non-V2 clauses may or may not be.
 - Relevant notion of assertion not easy to define or operationalize.

A clear-cut case

- V2 incompatible with factive verb *regret*:
 - Olle ångrade att han inte **hade** läst boken (not V2)
O. regretted that he NEG had read book.DEF
'Olle regretted that he had not read the book'
 - *Olle ångrade att han hade inte läst boken (V2)
O. regretted that he had NEG read book.DEF
'Olle regretted that he had not read the book'
- V2 predicted to be bad by both Julien and Wiklund
- Julien (2007) supports this with a corpus study (though methodological details annoyingly vague)

Assertion and presupposition

- I assume:
 - A proposition is **presupposed** if the speaker believes that its truth belongs to the common ground
 - In **asserting** a proposition the speaker intends to update the common ground to include the truth of that proposition
 - Not uncontroversial: Julien (2007: 244; 2009: 229) suggests that some embedded clauses can be both presupposed (by the speaker) and asserted (treated as new information for the purposes of the hearer). Hooper & Thompson (1973: 486) argue that it is possible for a clause to be neither presupposed nor asserted. Here they are mutually exclusive by definition

Back to Old English

- If in Scandinavian embedded clause V2 is sensitive to the asserted/presupposed distinction, why not OE V2 in main clauses?
 - Cf. Searle's (1975) taxonomy of illocutionary force:
 - assertives
 - directives
 - commissives
 - expressives
 - declarations

A suggestive example

– Ic þe nu, brego Beorhtdena, biddan **wille** ... anre bene
I you now chief bright-Danes ask will ... one favour
'I now ask you for one favour, chief of the Bright-Danes'
(*Beowulf*, ll. 426–428)

- Request (“directive” in Searle’s terms)
- However, cherry-picking suggestive examples is not going to convince many people...

Investigating assertion in OE

- Identifying the force of non-embedded clauses in OE is not straightforward:
 - Most of the syntactic factivity diagnostics of Kiparsky & Kiparsky (1970) are not relevant to main clauses
 - Most tests to distinguish asserted & presupposed (e.g. 'Hey, wait a minute!'; von Stechow 2004) require native speaker judgements

Speaker-oriented adverbs (SpOAs)

- In Modern English, these include *honestly*, *probably*, *obviously*, *clearly* and *luckily*
- Special syntactic properties:
 - incompatible with interrogatives
 - What has Charley (*luckily) discovered?
 - incompatible with inversion contexts
 - So fast did Tom (*luckily) run that he got to Texas in ten minutes.
 - cannot occur in the complements of factive verbs
 - cannot occur in the scope of negation

Semantics of SpOAs

- Bellert (1977: 342), Liu (2009: 339): speaker-oriented adverbs take the main proposition and construct a secondary proposition evaluating it
 - Luckily, John was spotted by a lifeguard
 - \approx John was spotted by a lifeguard
AND
It is lucky that (John was spotted by a lifeguard)
- Truth of the main proposition is presupposed by the secondary proposition

SpOAs in OE

- Little research has been done on SpOAs in OE.
 - Though cf. Swan (1988), Lenker (2010), Bennett (forthcoming), Percival (forthcoming)
- Two good candidates:
 - *soplice* ‘truly’
 - *witodlice* ‘certainly’

Investigating SpOAs

- Search of the YCOE (Taylor *et al.* 2003).
- Early OE (pre-950) vs. late OE (post-950).
- I compared V2 with V4+ main clauses.
 - Proxies for V-to-C⁰ and verb-late respectively.
 - Only clauses containing 3+ constituents other than the verb.

Results for early OE

	<i>With soplice</i>		<i>Without soplice</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	8	0.1	5489	99.9	5497
V4+	24	1.2	2048	98.8	2072
Total	32	–	7537	–	7569

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 34.297, df=1)

	<i>With witodlice</i>		<i>Without witodlice</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	6	0.1	5491	99.9	5497
V4+	20	1.0	2052	99.0	2072
Total	26	–	7543	–	7569

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 29.765, df=1)

Some early examples

- He þa **soplice** oðre þara flascena
he then truly other.ACC the.GEN bottles.GEN
þam halgan were **brohte**
the.DAT holy.DAT man.DAT brought
'He then truly brought one of the bottles to the holy man'
(cogregdC,GD_2_[C]:18.141.28.1696)
- Þa **witodlice** æfter þæs lichaman æriste
then certainly after the.GEN body.GEN awakening.DAT
be Lazares wundrum & mægnum **wæs** ætswiged
of L.GEN wonders.DAT and virtues.DAT was kept-silent
'Then, certainly, we hear nothing of Lazarus's wonders
and virtues after his body's resurrection'
(cogregdC,GDPref_and_3_[C]:17.217.17.2929)

Results for late OE

	<i>With soplice</i>		<i>Without soplice</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	135	1.1	11631	98.9	11766
V4+	99	3.9	2419	96.1	2518
Total	234	–	14050	–	14284

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 98.068, df=1)

	<i>With witodlice</i>		<i>Without witodlice</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	56	0.5	11710	99.5	11766
V4+	40	1.6	2478	98.4	2518
Total	96	–	14188	–	14284

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 36.813, df=1)

Some late examples

- Zosimus **soðlice** þa eorðan mid tearum ofergeotende
Z. truly the.ACC earth.ACC with tears.DAT overspilling
hire to **cwæð**
her.DAT to said
'Truly, soaking the earth with his tears, Zosimus said to
her ...' (comary,LS_23_[MaryofEgypt]:362.234)
- ic **witodlice** æghwanane **eom** ungesælig buton westme
I certainly in-every-way am unhappy beyond increase
'I am truly unhappy in every way beyond increase'
(coeust,LS_8_[Eust]:203.210)

Is this a property of all adverbs?

No; the results for *swipe* ‘severely, terribly’ are as expected, with no statistically significant difference.

Early	With <i>swipe</i>		Without <i>swipe</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	107	1.9	5390	98.1	5497
V4+	35	1.7	2037	98.3	2072
Total	142	–	7427	–	7569

p=0.5215 (Yates’s chi-square: 0.411, df=1)

Late	With <i>swipe</i>		Without <i>swipe</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	79	0.7	11687	99.3	11766
V4+	14	0.6	2504	99.4	2518
Total	93	–	14191	–	14284

p=0.6054 (Yates’s chi-square: 0.267, df=1)

Finding

- Speaker-oriented adverbs occur in verb-late clauses with a frequency that is very clearly not due to chance.

Tentative hypothesis

- First person pronouns are more likely to occur in expressives than second or third person pronouns...?
- Prediction: first person pronouns are more likely to occur in verb-late clauses.
- Same type of search as for SpOAs.

Results for OE

Early	1 st		2 nd /3 rd		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	305	14.0	1874	86.0	2179
V4+	223	22.5	767	77.5	990
Total	528	–	2641	–	3169

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 35.042, df=1)

Late	With <i>witodlice</i>		Without <i>witodlice</i>		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N
V2	305	6.8	4198	93.2	4503
V4+	397	33.8	779	66.2	1176
Total	702	–	4977	–	5679

$p < 0.0001$ (Yates's chi-square: 624.312, df=1)

Discussion, 1

- These results can be interpreted in many ways...
- Not inconsistent with the hypothesis that verb-movement to C^0 in declaratives was linked to the assertion of the main proposition of the clause, whereas in clauses in which the main proposition was presupposed, such as expressives/evaluatives, verb-movement did not take place.

Discussion, 2

- Petrova (2011) finds that Middle Low German verb-late clauses are usually ‘mirative’, serving to highlight the unexpectedness of information. This would be compatible with the interpretation suggested here.
- May help to explain the prevalence of verb-late in conjunct clauses, if these are not part of the main assertion...?
- More work needed. Suggestions appreciated!

Thank you for listening!

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