

'Fashionably late' finite verbs in Old English

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Outline

- Old English (OE) main clause word order
- 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)

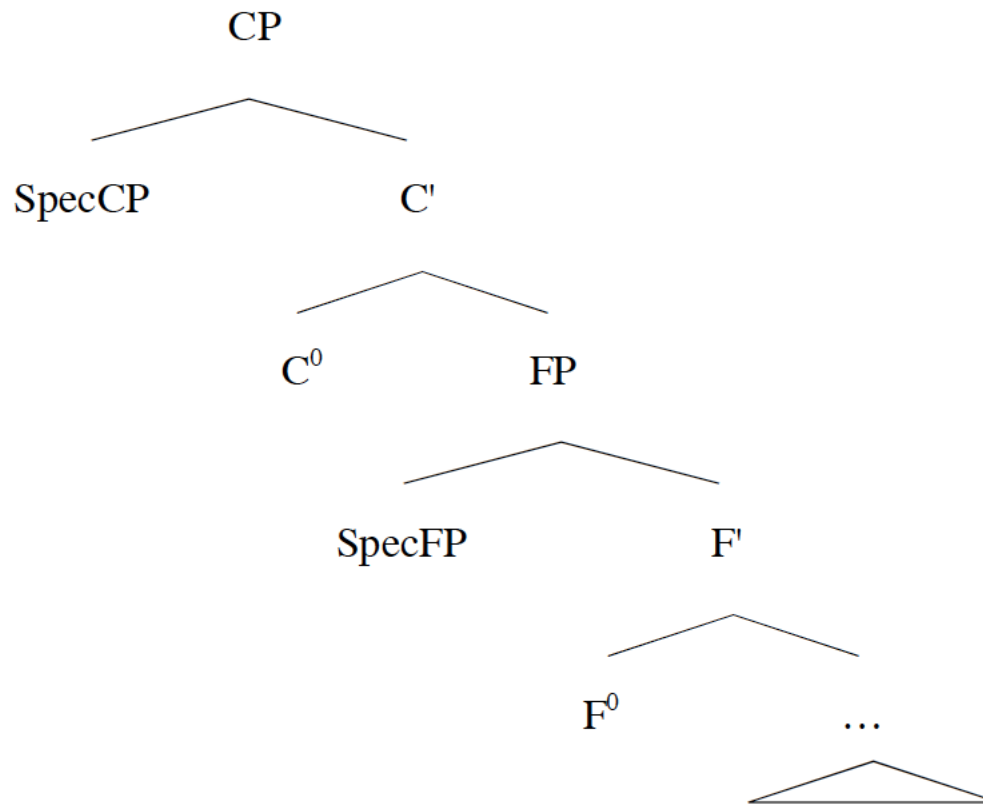
Problem 2: V3 clauses

- 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, 2014)

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)
- I'm excluding them today.

The consensus analysis



<i>Position</i>	SpecCP	C ⁰	SpecFP	F ⁰
<i>Contents</i>	<i>wh</i> -words, topicalized or focalized elements, certain adjuncts	(V _{fin})	pronominal subjects, (pronominal objects, given subjects, light adverbs)	(V _{fin})

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-F⁰ 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 satisfying.
 - 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): FP may be either head-initial or head-final.
 - Prediction of this analysis: once certain contexts are discounted, the proportions of F-initial and F-final should be roughly the same in main and subordinate clauses.
 - But this is not the case (Koopman 1995: 142): F-initial remains more common in main clauses.
 - True V2 is not found in OE complement clauses (van Kemenade 1997; 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?
 - Pintzuk & Haeblerli (2008: 403): we need to know “what syntactic/semantic/discourse factors significantly influenced the choice of head-initial versus head-final structure for OE speakers”
- 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
 - Faller (2012): using an independent declarative does not always involve asserting a proposition

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 only gets us so far...

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), Cichosz & Gaszewski (2014).
- Three good candidates:
 - *soplice* ‘truly’
 - *witodlice* ‘certainly’
 - *wundorlice* ‘wonderfully’

SpOAs in OE

- Clause-type requirement met.

Table 1: OE speaker-oriented adverbs by clause type

Clause type	<i>soplice</i>	<i>witodlice</i>	<i>wundorlice</i>
Main	1248	911	73
Conjunct	125	69	16
Direct interrogative	2	1	0
Subordinate	137	48	15

- Hypothesis: clauses containing SpOAs are (more likely to be) F-final, i.e. verb-late.
 - This is due to the presupposed status of their main proposition.

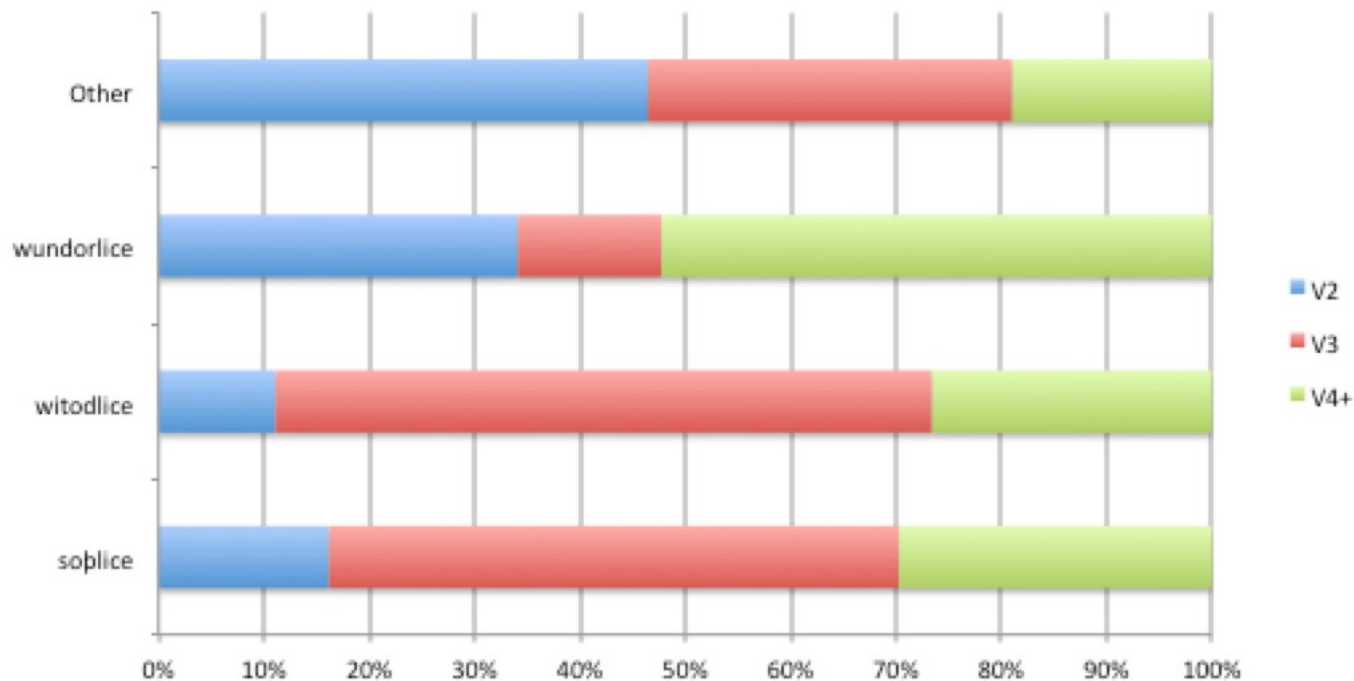
Investigating SpOAs (1)

- Search of the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003).
- I compared V2, V3 and V4+ main clauses.
 - V4+ main clauses (almost) certain to be derived by F-final structure.
 - Only clauses containing 3+ constituents other than the verb.
 - Excluded:
 - V1 clauses
 - V2 clauses introduced by temporal adverb
 - Left-dislocated and vocative constituents

Verb position: results

Table 2: Verb position in main clauses with and without *soplice*, *witodlice* and *wundorlice*

	V2		V3		V4+		Total
<i>soplice</i>	185	16.2%	619	54.1%	340	29.7%	1144
<i>witodlice</i>	94	11.1%	528	62.3%	225	26.6%	847
<i>wundorlice</i>	15	34.1%	6	13.6%	23	52.3%	44
Other clauses	11093	46.4%	8264	34.6%	4525	18.9%	23882



Verb position: discussion

- There is a difference between these contexts (chi-square: 835.88, df=6, $p < 0.001$)...
- ...but (with the exception of *wundorlice*, which has very few tokens) not obviously a preference for V4+.
 - (*contra* Walkden 2014: ch. 3)
- Instead, more V3, and very little V2.
 - Most cases of V2 involve initial adverb plus negated clause (cf. also Cichosz & Gaszewski 2014).
 - Such adverbs are arguably extraclausal.

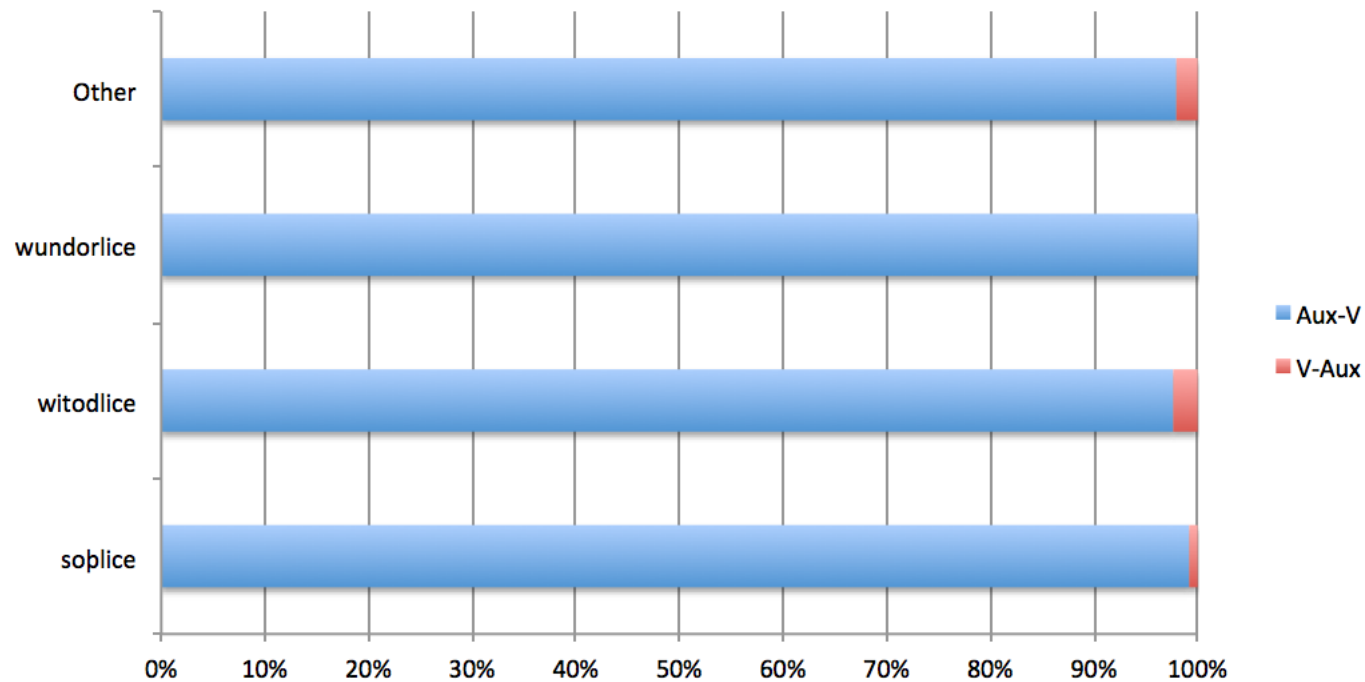
Investigating SpOAs (2)

- Search of the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003).
- I looked at main clauses containing both a non-finite verb and a finite verb.
 - Clauses in which the non-finite verb precedes the finite verb (V-Aux) are certain to be derived by F-final structure.
 - Hypothesis: greater proportion of V-Aux with SpOAs.

Aux-V vs. V-Aux: results

Table 3: Relative order of finite and non-finite verb in main clauses with and without soplice, witodlice and wundorlice

	Aux-V		V-Aux		Total
<i>soplice</i>	244	99.2%	2	0.8%	246
<i>witodlice</i>	166	97.6%	4	2.4%	170
<i>wundorlice</i>	15	100.0%	0	0.0%	15
Other clauses	9726	97.9%	204	2.1%	9930



Aux-V vs. V-Aux: discussion

- Numbers too small for chi-square, but no obvious difference.
- V-Aux order extremely rare *regardless* of presence or absence of SpOA.
 - This needs an account!

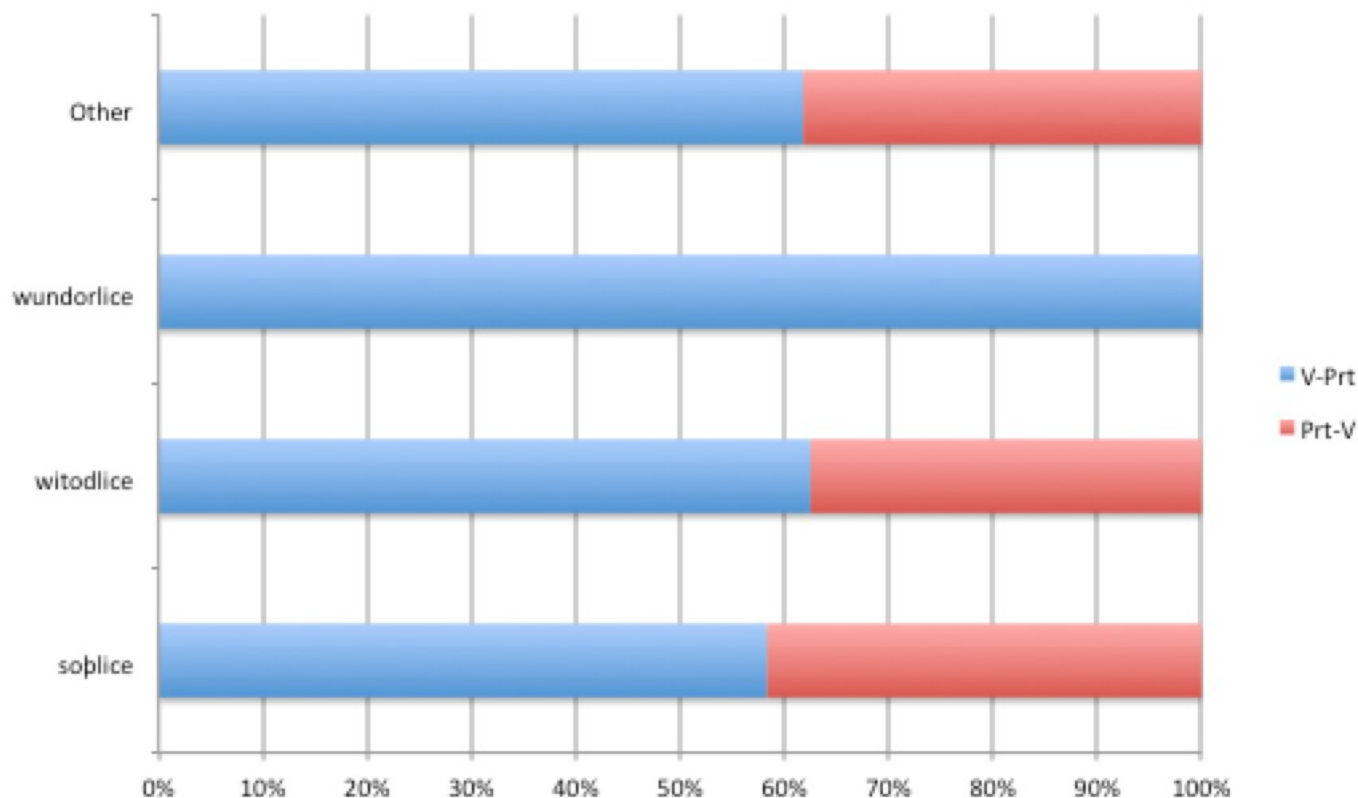
Investigating SpOAs (3)

- Search of the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003).
- I looked at SV main clauses containing a verbal particle (e.g. *up*, *ut*) or a negative object.
 - Clauses in which the particle or a negative object precedes the finite verb (Prt-V) are very likely to be derived by F-final structure (Pintzuk & Haeberli 2008).
 - Hypothesis: greater proportion of Prt-V with SpOAs.

V-Prt vs. Prt-V: results

Table 4: Relative order of finite verb and particle in main clauses with and without *soplice*, *witodlice* and *wundorlice*

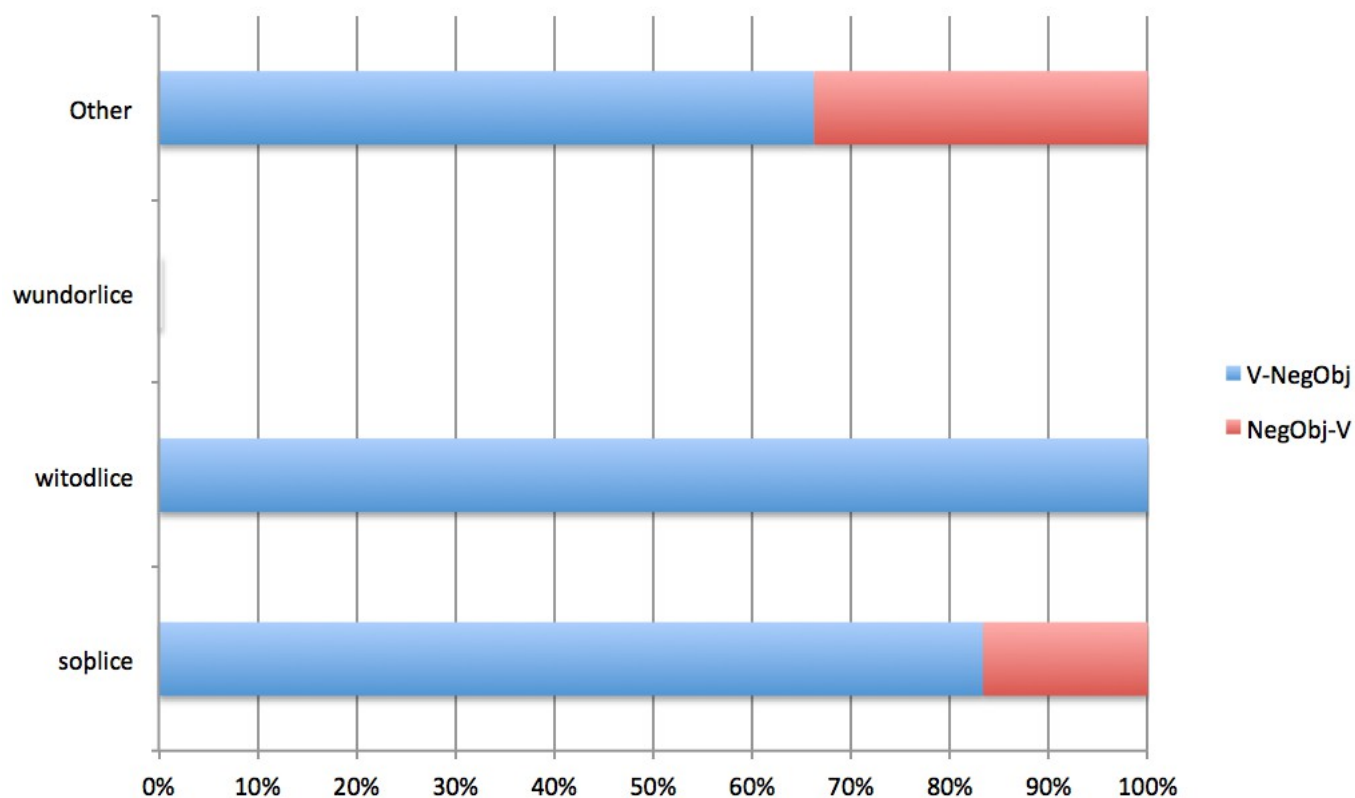
	V-Prt		Prt-V		Total
<i>soplice</i>	7	58.3%	5	41.7%	12
<i>witodlice</i>	5	62.5%	3	37.5%	8
<i>wundorlice</i>	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	2
Other clauses	199	%	123	%	322



V-NegObj vs. NegObj-V: results

Table 5: Relative order of finite verb and negative object in main clauses with and without *soplice*, *witodlice* and *wundorlice*

	V-NegObj		NegObj-V		Total
<i>soplice</i>	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	6
<i>witodlice</i>	3	100.0%	0	0.0%	3
<i>wundorlice</i>	0	-	0	-	0
Other clauses	53	66.3%	27	33.8%	80



Discussion and conclusion

- Neither the particle diagnostic nor the negative object diagnostic provides support for the hypothesis that clauses with SpOAs are more likely to be F-final.
- The non-finite verb diagnostic also provides no support for it.
- Therefore, it's probably wrong.

Discussion and conclusion (2)

- However...
 - Indicative of how a hypothesis about speech-act status in a dead language can – in principle – be tested.
 - Throws up unexplained facts about OE:
 - Why do non-finite verbs so regularly follow finite verbs in main clauses, when the opposite is true in subordinate clauses?
 - It looks like SpOAs consistently fail to trigger inversion when in initial position – a fact which the consensus theory of OE word order fails to account for.

Thank you for listening!

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