

Information-structure driven word order variation in the history of English: a phase-based approach

This paper presents a phase-based account of Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME) word order, in which OV word order as well as VAux order is derived from an AuxVO base by information structural triggers.

The relation between information structure and syntax, and specifically OV/VO was addressed in Bech (2001) and Taylor & Pintzuk (2012). They show that the given-before-new hypothesis (Gundel 1988) applies to some extent to the observed variation. Preverbal objects have the tendency to be given, while postverbal objects have the tendency to be new. Taylor & Pintzuk (2012) show that this is only true in VAux clauses. The relation between the IS-status of objects in AuxV orders is blurred and they cannot directly correlate one word order with one IS-category. Struik & van Kemenade (subm) show that such a correlation does exist; referential preverbal objects are almost exclusively given in both AuxV and VAux clauses. VO word orders are mixed in terms of IS; they contain both new and heavy given objects, but also non-heavy given objects. Elenbaas & van Kemenade (2014) report similar findings for early ME: the number of OV word orders has dropped significantly, but is exclusively discourse-given. We will present an analysis in which OV word order is derived by IS-driven movement from a VO base.

We will argue that a phase-based approach, inspired by Biberauer & Roberts (2005 et seq., see also Wallenberg 2009 for an antisymmetric approach to scrambling), accounts for all word orders in OE and eME. We make the following assumptions about OE clause structure; we assume that the OE auxiliaries are lexical verbs which trigger restructuring. This means that all clauses with an auxiliary and lexical verb are biclausal. The auxiliary verb takes a defective T complement. This is not a full-fledged phase, because it is selected by V rather than C, which means that the derivation will continue for longer before material is sent to spell-out. Finally, we assume that the lexical verb in the lower cycle undergoes obligatory V-to-*v*-to-T movement, a property often associated with infinitives in complements of restructuring verbs.

It is generally assumed that interaction with interfaces, such as pragmatics, takes place at the edge of a phase. We argue that given IS-status is assigned to objects in spec,*v*, while objects not in spec,*v* are assigned new IS-status (see López 2009 for a similar proposal). This leaves the question how only given objects are moved to spec,*v*, while new objects remain in a lower position. We assume that given objects have an extra (unvalued) feature layer (see Biberauer & van Kemenade 2011 for a similar proposal for subjects). We take feature checking to be a local operation, so a given object is forced to move to Spec,*v* to have its features checked. This extra feature is not necessarily a specific IS-feature, but rather a feature already formalised in the language, such as Gender. OE nouns and modifiers are marked for gender, but evidence for Gender became less robust with increasing case syncretism, the loss of inflectional classes and grammatical gender. This eliminated the extra feature-layer, which in turn resulted in a loss of OV word order. We assume that objects have the possibility to pied-pipe; they move either by themselves or they are pied-piped as part of a larger structure, which accounts for leaking structures, in which VP-internal material is

In defective T-complements the object will still be below the verb even after movement to spec,*v*. They remain in this position if no further movement takes place, which means that a given objects can surface in VO word order. However, if further movement to a higher position does take place, it can only involve given objects. Once a phase is completed, material inside it will be sent to spell-out and will be unavailable for further syntactic operations (cf. Chomsky's (2000) Phase Impenetrability Condition). This means that any new objects left in basic position are not accessible to further syntactic operations and will remain

in that position. This explains the mixed VO orders reported in both Taylor & Pintzuk (2012) and Struik and van Kemenade (subm.). Further movement possibilities relate to the checking of features on the subject, where the subject once again moves by itself or pied-pipes as part of a larger constituent, νP . We illustrate the derivation of the OV orders in (2a-c) below. $\nu P1$ indicates the νP in the lower clause, $\nu P2$ the νP in the higher clause.

(1) AuxOV

V-to- ν movement; movement of O to spec, ν ; movement of $V+\nu$ to T_{def} ; $\nu P2$ -movement to Spec, T_{def} ; V_R -to- ν movement; S-movement to Spec, T
 $[_{CP} C [_{TP} S T [_{\nu P2} \nu+V_R [_{VR} t_{VR} [_{T_{def}} [_{\nu P1} t_S O t_{\nu+V}] [_{VP} t_V t_O]]] \nu+V+T t_{\nu P1}]]]]]$

(2) OAuxV

V-to- ν movement; movement of O to spec, ν ; movement of $V+\nu$ to T_{def} ; V_R -to- ν movement; S-movement to Spec, T .

$[_{CP} C [_{TP} S [_{\nu P1} t_S O t_{\nu} [_{VP} t_V t_O]]] T [_{\nu P2} \nu+V_R [_{VR} t_{VR} [_{T_{def}} \nu+V+T t_{\nu P1}]]]]]$

(3) OVAux

V-to- ν movement; movement of O to spec, ν ; movement of $V+\nu$ to T_{def} ; $\nu P1$ to Spec, T_{def} ; V_R -to- ν movement; T_{def} to Spec, $\nu P2$; S to Spec, TP

$[_{CP} C [_{TP} S T [_{\nu P2} [_{T_{def}} \nu+V+T [_{\nu P1} t_S O t_{\nu+V} [_{VP} t_V t_O]]]]] \nu+V_R [_{VR} t_{VR} t_{T_{def}}]]]$

We argue that OVAux movement is derived by additional scrambling of the lower clause to spec, ν of the higher clause as a result of VP-defocussing.

The various steps in the derivation were lost in stepwise fashion from late Old English onward. We show that first pied-piping of objects disappears. This results in an increase in postverbal material, which reduces the evidence for the two-step scrambling of objects in OVAux order. Secondly, pied-piping of the subject disappears as well. This is what marks the loss of OV word orders.

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