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MIDDLE ENGLISH.

VARIATION IN CLAUSE STRUCTURE – SOV/SVO

TABLE OF CONTENTS, KEYWORDS AND ABSTRACT

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Keywords

Syntactic variation, linguistic change, competition, Old English, Middle English, formal approach, Government and Binding theory, the Minimalist Program, principles, parameters, head-complement, specifier-head, verb-second, double-base hypothesis, topicalization, scrambling, object-verb order, verb-object order, clitics

Abstract

Recent syntactic frameworks and the development of research in the fields of comparative syntax and historical linguistics have contributed to a detailed investigation into the processes of linguistic variation and change. The generative enterprise has always assumed the existence of Universal Grammar and has aimed at examining synchronic, cross-linguistic similarities and differences in terms of distinct parameter settings. Although the generative theory has been mainly designed to account for synchronic variation, recent investigations have shown that important insights into the properties of Universal Grammar can be gained from a diachronic perspective as well. Hence, the parametric approach has been influential in works on diachronic syntax starting with David Lightfoot (e.g. 1979, 1991, 1999, 2006), Anthony Kroch (e.g. 1989a,b, 1994; Kroch and Taylor 1997, 2000) and Ian Roberts (e.g. 1993a, b, 1997, 2007).

The dissertation offers an outline of our understanding of syntactic change in terms of the Government and Binding theory and its more recent successor, the Minimalist Program. The way in which generative theory can be applied to historical linguistics, together with the way in which a parametric approach can be used to account for word order changes in the history of the English language, represent the essence of the proposed paper.

The proposed thesis, entitled *The Competition of Grammars in Middle English. Variation in Clause Structure - SOV/SVO*, and consisting of six main chapters, has a two-fold aim. Firstly, we address the question of syntactic change and propose an approach of the main research directions that have been postulated within the generative framework (with respect to the syntactic situation in the early stages of the English language). Secondly, we point out the main aspects which are under debate in the literature, by emphasizing the recent theoretical approaches in synchronic and diachronic linguistics.

While other studies are concerned with specific aspects related to the word order

phenomena in Old and Middle English, our paper proposes a general perspective of approaching word order, by discussing the different structures identified in main and subordinate clauses. Hence, our study is not an exhaustive one, our account being restricted to those aspects which imply variation in word order structures, namely "competition". Moreover, our analyses propose an explanation of the phenomena in early generative and minimalist terms.

In discussing the verb-second parameter, we focus on the position of nominal and pronominal subjects in different contexts in order to emphasize the "competition" between verb-second and verb-third orders. Furthermore, the discussion of syntactic structures in subordinate clause points out the variation between the contexts where the verb precedes or follows the object.

Throughout the paper, highly meticulous works that resulted from the investigation of diachronic phenomena within a version of Chomsky's generative framework (i.e. the Government and Binding theory, the Minimalist Program) were mentioned. Hence, Chapter III discusses the approaches proposed by David Lightfoot, Ian Roberts and Anthony Kroch, among others, which stimulated a new interest in investigating language change within a parametric approach, and were materialized in the works of e.g. Battye and Roberts (1995), van Kemenade and Vincent (1997), Pintzuk, Tsoulas and Warner (2000), Lightfoot (2002), inter alia, which we discussed in Chapter IV.

The last main chapter of the paper is concerned with the main empirical demonstration of the theories put forth in the previous chapters, namely, the analysis of the shift from an SOV language to an SVO language. The notion of competition receives an increased attention in this chapter. The thesis ends with a chapter dedicated to the general conclusions where we sketch the main ideas from each chapter and bring forth the results together with the limitations of the work, with the hope of stimulating further research. In the following pages, we will briefly present the six chapters of our paper, by emphasizing the main ideas that result from our approach.

The **Introduction**, represented by the first chapter of our paper, is dedicated to

offering an inventory of the main objectives and outlines the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Furthermore, we provide an overview of Old and Middle English syntax and end the chapter with a separate section dedicated to a brief description of the goals of each chapter of our paper.

Chapter II, **Literature Review. The Concept of Grammar**, represents a critical reading of the ideas developed in historical syntax since the early 1980s, by discussing the distinctive properties of the generative approach, including the notion of parameters and theories related to them.

The chapter aims at offering a sketch of the models developed within generative syntax during the past decades (e.g. The Government and Binding theory, the Minimalist Program), by analyzing the similarities and differences between them. In section 2.2, we point out to what extent the ideas developed under the Principles and Parameters framework represent a departure from the nineteenth-century tradition. Starting with section 2.3, we introduce both the terminological apparatus, where notions such as parameters, Universal Grammar, Case-checking, Case-assignment are clarified, and the technical apparatus, which provides an outline of the most important modifications due to the minimalist program.

As mentioned in section 2.3.3, under Chomsky's early MP, parameters have been associated with functional categories which have boomed during the early 1990s. In order to reach a more fine-grained analysis of the variation and change affecting the right and left peripheral domains in Middle English, we present Pollock's (1989) Split-IP hypothesis and Rizzi's (1997) proposal regarding the left periphery phenomena within a split-CP hypothesis in sections 2.3.6.1-2.3.6.4 and 2.3.6.5, respectively.

In conclusion, the Principles and Parameters theory has introduced a new way of investigating language variation and change, by stimulating the development of extremely prolific directions of research. Parameters are a very powerful tool for providing an accurate, theory-internal description of linguistic phenomena since they may offer an insight into the dimensions of cross-linguistic variation (e.g. OV vs. VO languages). Furthermore, their important role in the classification of natural languages

cannot be neglected. Under a parameter-based approach, the chapter identifies the locus of parametric variation and the methods which serve to account for grammar change in terms of parameter resetting.

Chapter III is entitled **Factors and Mechanisms of Language Change. Bilingualism in the Middle English Period** and it shows how Chomsky's Principles and Parameters model can be made compatible with the diachronic study of language change, by discussing the role of historical syntax in the generative enterprise and of generative grammar in historical linguistics. Following the formal framework introduced in Chapter II, a clear demarcation between language change (in the sense of E-language) and grammar change (in the sense of I-language) is necessary in relation to the factors and mechanisms that trigger their occurrence. We assume that grammar change must be understood in terms of change at the level of I-language, representing a process of parameter resetting whereby the older grammar has at least one parameter set differently from the new grammar.

We present the double-base hypothesis, which apparently solves the conflict between gradual and abrupt change in different stages of a language (Pintzuk 1999; Pintzuk, Tsoulas and Warner 2000; Kroch and Taylor 2000). Given the catalytic role played by language contact in motivating grammatical change, the discussion of the co-existence of Old and Middle English dialects with languages they came into contact with during the Scandinavian invasions and after the Norman Conquest forms the basis of section 3.5. However, we argue against the double-base hypothesis in section 3.4. given that its focus is not "grammar", but the speech community and the way in which an individual chooses among grammars available to them.

The process of language acquisition, as understood from a generative perspective, is introduced in section 3.6, together with the relation between the properties of human mind (e.g. UG) and the input data the learner is exposed to for attaining an adult stage of the grammar, or a grammar which is different from the grammar of the previous generation. As fixing the values of the parametric options allowed by UG is the main task of the language learner, we briefly present the most widespread models of language acquisition.

In conclusion, the chapter assumes that language change must be understood in terms of a change between individual grammars (cf. Lightfoot 1999), rather than between different parameter settings within one grammar, and that language change is abrupt at the level of I(nternalized)-language, having a gradual nature only at the level of E(xternalized)-language.

Chapter IV, entitled **Parameter Variation in Late Old English and Early Middle English**, proposes the syntactic analysis of the most relevant parameters in Middle English, i.e. the verb-second parameter and the head-complement parameter. and Having a structure divided into two main parts, it presents the word order phenomena in terms of the most recent accounts developed within the generative framework during the past twenty years. The main topics involve: the head movement parameter, the clitic status of pronouns and particles, linearization constraints, the disharmonic order of the subject and the verb and of the verb and the object, respectively.

The first part of Chapter IV (sections 4.2-4.4) focuses on the verb-second phenomenon in Old English and early Middle English. Hence, our paper presents the different distribution of nominal and pronominal subjects in Old English in sections 4.3.2-4.3.9, and compares the results with the Middle English word order patterns in main clauses in section 4.3.10.

Given the fact that several studies have indicated that the verb-second constraint characteristic of the Germanic languages involves movement to either of two different positions, depending on the language investigated, within the asymmetric analysis of Old English (cf. Travis 1984), verb-second is not a unified phenomenon. Hence, clauses introduced by the subject do not involve the CP layer (i.e. Spec, IP is the canonical position for the nominative subject), while operator-initial and topic-initial contexts are representative examples involving the verb-second constraint. This order does not apply, however, to subordinate clauses or coordinate clauses introduced by o*nd*, "and" or *ac "but",* where the verb-last position is preferred.

The word order distribution in Old English main clauses is described in section 4.3.2, by focusing on the type of the first element in a clause (nominal object, adverb,

prepositional phrases, interrogative elements, negative elements) and the type of subject (nominal or pronominal). The preliminary conclusion states that Old English exhibited subject-verb inversion only in particular contexts, and several counterexamples to this order may be encountered. Sections 4.3.3-4.3.5 analyze recent accounts to word order in Old English main clauses (e.g. A. van Kemenade 1987; S. Pintzuk 1999; Kroch and Taylor 1997, inter alia) which assume that Old English is a verb-second language, with exactly one constituent positioned before the verb. Under this line of thought, deviations are accounted for in terms of the clitic status of pronouns in contexts where verb-third patterns typically arise (section 4.3.4).

According to van Kemenade (1987), verb-movement occurs to the C position in topic-initial and operator-initial contexts. However, many researchers do not accept that V moves to C in all types of V2 clauses (section 4.3.5). Hence, verb-movement to C is assumed to take place only in operator-initial clauses (wh-questions, fronted ne, and adverbs such as Þa). In topic-initial sentences, the verb follows the pronominal and adverbial clitics and, in certain contexts, the nominal subjects. In the latter, the verb occupies an IP (TP)-internal functional head position, with the subject in a lower position, which is available both in main and in subordinate clauses. The analysis of such patterns is still the subject of debate among linguists, as illustrated in section 4.3.9.

Given that only main clauses are subject to the verb-second constraint, we attribute separate sections to the discussion of verb-second order in coordinate and subordinate clauses, where we claimed that the two types of clauses exhibit similar word order patterns, i.e. verb-final order.

Following the analysis in section 4.3.2, we treat the word order distribution in early Middle English in sections 4.3.10.1-4.3.10.3. On the basis of these examples, early Middle English shows the same particularities as Old English main clauses. By discussing van Kemenade's (1997) analysis of verb-second in OE and early ME, a more homogeneous word order pattern is encountered in topic-initial clauses with nominal and pronominal subjects. External factors have also been postulated in Kroch and Taylor's (1997, 2000) articles, i.e. the contact situation with the Scandinavians,

but we followed van Kemenade in arguing that there is no evidence for the Scandinavian languages at this stage and that the loss of the verb-second phenomenon was due to the decliticization of subject pronouns.

The second part of Chapter four focuses on the harmony and disharmony of word order with respect to the object and the verb in Old and Middle English, which have received significant attention in both the generative and the typological literature. Within the Government and Binding Theory, harmony in the order of different categories was reflected by head-initial or head-final order.

The Government and Binding model, mentioned in Chapter II of our paper, is based on the government operation, the distinction between VO-languages, on the one hand, and OV-languages, on the other, being generally accounted for by assuming a directionality parameter on government. Thus, VO languages have canonical government to the right, so that the nominal complement of a verb is on the right in order to receive Case, while OV languages exhibit the opposite behaviour.

Starting from the desire to develop a system with an optimal and simplified design, the Minimalist Program proceeds with the elimination of D-Structure and S-Structure, preserving the lexicon, the syntactic component, Logical Form and Phonological Form (section 2.3.2). Under this approach, movement is driven by a feature-checking or feature-valuing requirement, and the government operation is replaced by the specifier-head and head-complement configurations which represent the primitive operations of X-bar theory (sections 2.3.6.1-2.3.6.5). Furthermore, while the Government and Binding theory allows Move α to apply freely if well-formedness conditions are met, in the Minimalist Program, movement is subject to economy conditions, without being an optional operation. Thus, movement occurs only when necessary in order to check or value features.

Given these assumptions, the remaining sections discuss three different approaches to the underlying order of Old English and early Middle English clauses. Several studies of Old English syntax (e.g. van Kemenade 1987; Lightfoot 1991, Denison 1993, inter alia) claim that Old English was uniformly OV in underlying structure, and that variation in surface order was the result of optional movement rules

which derived the VO order from the OV structure: leftward movement of the finite verb (verb-second) and rightward movement of the object from pre-verbal to post-verbal position.

Under this line of thought, van Kemenade (1987) assumes an OV account of Old English, whereby the constituents in the verb phrase are base-generated in preverbal position. She postulates three rightward movement rules in order to account for surface patterns where VP constituents follow the verb: extraposition, verb raising and verb projection raising, presented in section 4.6.2.

We have also mentioned Pintzuk's (1999, 2002 et seq.) account of the word order variation found in OE in terms of the so-called double-base hypothesis (section 4.6.3). According to Pintzuk (1999), neither main clauses, nor subordinate clauses exhibit uniform Infl-medial word order (in main clauses), or uniform Infl-final order (in subordinate clauses). Instead, word order variation is accounted for by postulating variation in the order of finite and non-finite verbs (i.e. I-medial and I-final), on the one hand, and of verbs and their objects (i.e. verb-medial and verb-final), on the other hand. Given that the position of light elements (i.e. particles, pronominal objects and monosyllabic adverbs) cannot be easily accounted for in terms of rightward movement rules, the double-base hypothesis is a successful attempt to solve this problem. However, in case of the opposite order, where the auxiliary follows the main verb, these light constituents are in postverbal position, except for the case where the auxiliary is in final position and follows the nonfinite verb. Pintzuk's assumption is that leftward movement of the verb is to a higher position, i.e. to the Inflection position.

Analyzing syntactic variation and change under this view, the new grammatical option, i.e. the VO structure, does not replace the old one (OV structure) at the end of a long period of variation; rather the new option is acquired and used together with the older one. Eventually, the old option is lost at the end of the period of competition. Nonetheless, the generative perspective cannot accept tendential OV or tendential VO order, since a language must have one parameter or another, not both or a state intermediate between two parameter settings.

In the VO account, initiated by Kayne's (1994) Linear Correspondence Axiom and developed by van der Wurff (1997) and Roberts (1997), the constituents of the verb phrase are base-generated postverbally. The surface patterns where VP constituents precede the non-finite verb are derivable by leftward movement rules that apply to the constituents that occur preverbally (e.g. object noun phrases, prepositional phrases, personal pronouns, particles, adverbs).

The exploitation of the inflectional positions associated with V and DP in the clause structure is discussed from Roberts' (1997) perspective in section 4.6.4. Following Kayne (1994), he assumes that the underlying order throughout the history of the English language is subject-verb-object. Given these assumptions, Roberts argues that there is no motivation for any of the three rightward movement operations, and accounts for these word order patterns by postulating leftward movement of the verb and/or the object.

Following the minimalist assumptions, whereby change is reduced to the loss of movement dependencies caused by changes in abstract features of functional heads, Roberts (1997) relates syntactic change in Middle English to the loss of inflectional morphology. However, we argue against such an approach, the notion of Case being independent of morphological implications in that every nominal argument must have abstract Case regardless of whether Case is represented morphologically or not. Although Roberts does not offer a solid argumentation for the interaction between morphology and syntax, his approach offers a very useful insight into the word order change within a system which assumes uniform direction in the head-complement order.

In conclusion, this chapter aimed at emphasizing the main phenomena that took place during the Old and early Middle English periods, together with the variation in the structure of main and subordinate clauses, where alternating subject verb/verb-subject orders, object-verb/verb-object orders and finite verb-nonfinite verb/nonfinite verb-finite verb orders may be encountered. Furthermore, the literature review emphasizes both the positive aspects and the shortcomings identified in these studies.

Chapter five, **The Fixing of Parameters in Middle English. Corpus Analysis,** is centered around the concepts of competition and change in the Middle English period. The purpose of this chapter is to provide empirical evidence for the claim that late OE and early ME manifested variation in clause structure between verb-object and object-verb order. We focus on presenting data on the distribution of OV and VO orders in late Old English and Middle English. Section 5.3 introduces the corpus and presents the distinction between prose and verse, translations and original texts, together with the different types of clauses in which OV order occurs. In section 5.5, we briefly discuss the occurrence of OV order in the ME period by taking into account the literature on the loss of OV order. In order to do this, we provide a descriptive overview of each period from the corpus of texts from 1200 to 1500.

We conclude this chapter by arguing that the process of decline of OV order does not affect all contexts simultaneously. Hence, OV order in the first half of the fourteenth century is attested with any type of nominal objects, including the definite full nominal objects, while OV order in the 15th century is restricted to negative objects and quantified objects in the finite verb-object-nonfinite verb sequence, in relative clauses with an empty subject and coordinate clauses.

The proposed thesis ends with a chapter dedicated to the **General Conclusion**, by presenting the results of studying the topic that represented the basis of the present paper, and by pointing out the main directions of research that result from our study. Furthermore, it is worthwhile mentioning that the proposed thesis offers an overview of the word order patterns from Old and Middle English, together with an account of the syntactic variation from these periods. On the basis of the different approaches discussed in the paper, we may conclude that the data are more complex that the simple assumption that OV changed to VO seems to imply at first sight. As the present paper suggests, the number of parameters involved in the word order change in Middle English is significantly larger. Given these final remarks, we hope that the present study, together with the analyses carried out, may provide interesting and new perspectives that may clarify some syntactic aspects little developed in the Romanian academic field, and may open new directions of research in the future.