

Negative concord and Old English clause structure: some afterthoughts

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1 Introduction

Old English (OE) has word order properties that are reminiscent of the modern West Germanic asymmetric Verb Second (V2) languages like Dutch or German. In main clauses, the finite verb tends to occur towards the beginning of the clause whereas placement towards the end of the clause is common in subordinate clauses. To capture this similarity, van Kemenade (1988) proposes that OE can be structurally analysed like modern West Germanic. In basic X-bar theoretic terms, this means that the finite verb moves to C in main clauses while it stays in T in a head-final TP in subordinate clauses.¹ However, it has been shown in subsequent work that there is evidence for head-initial structure in subordinate clauses and that therefore the headedness of TP may be variable in OE. Different types of evidence have been put forward to support the hypothesis that the verb can occur in a head-initial projection in subordinate clauses, with the main data being related to the distribution of particles, pronouns, stranded prepositions

*I am very happy to dedicate a second paper of mine to Liliane Haegeman. A single one would simply not have been enough for someone special like Liliane. Here, I would like to express my particular gratitude to her for getting me started in linguistics. Making use of further data and recent theoretical proposals, the present trip down memory lane provides a short addendum to our joint work, which marked the beginning of the gratifying privilege I had of being Liliane's PhD student.

¹For simplicity's sake, I will refer to structures here that include head-final projections. However, this choice is not likely to substantially affect the main points made in this paper. My main focus will be an empirical generalization on OE and West Flemish syntax, and, as far as I can tell, there are no obvious advantages or disadvantages in capturing this generalization in terms of an approach that includes head-final structure and one that bans them (cf. Haeberli & Haegeman 1995: 103-107) for some discussion).

and negative objects (Pintzuk 1993, 1999, 2005) and to Negative Concord readings (Haerberli & Haegeman 1995). In this paper, I will reconsider the evidence from Negative Concord by adding some quantitative data and by examining relevant word orders in light of the most recent proposals that have been made with respect to the structural analysis of OE.

2 OE subordinate clause syntax

In OE subordinate clauses, the finite verb frequently occurs at the end of the clause. This is shown in (1).

- (1) swilce he wið his dohtor sume digle spæce sprecan wolde
 as he with his daughter some secret speech speak would
 'as he would speak some secret speech with this daughter' (coapollo, ApT:1.10.10)

In (1), the finite auxiliary is preceded by the subject pronoun, a PP, an object, and a non-finite main verb. Both clauses can be analysed by assuming that the subject is in SpecTP, the finite verbal element in a head-final T and the other constituent(s) in the complement of T. As van Kemenade (1988) already points out, however, the finite verb is not always in final position in OE subordinate clauses. This is illustrated in (2).

- (2) a. þæt ic mihte [God forbeodan]
 that I could God forbid
 'that I could forbid God'
 (coaelive,+ALS[Peter's_Chair]:186.2398)
 b. ðæt se reccere ða ðeawas & ða unðeawas cunne [wel
 that the teacher the virtues & the vices can well
 toscadan]
 distinguish
 'that the teacher can distinguish virtues and vices well'
 (cocura,CP:20.149.16.1019)

In (2), the finite auxiliary is followed by the non-finite main verb and its complement (2a) or an adjunct (2b). Given cases like those in (2), van Kemenade (1988) proposes a range of rightward movements for OE that derive word orders in which the finite verb is not at the end of the clause. For example the

subordinate clauses in (2) can be argued to involve movement of the bracketed constituent from the left of the auxiliary to the right, a process that has been referred to as Verb Projection Raising (VPR) in the literature on varieties of modern West Germanic.

If, in (2b), the subject is in SpecTP and the finite auxiliary in T, an analysis in terms of VPR seems to be inevitable. The word order in (2a), however, could be derived either through VPR or simply through a head-initial TP structure in which T selects a head-final VP to its right. Strong evidence for the availability of the latter option, i.e. head-initial TP, in OE is provided by Pintzuk (1993, 1999, 2005). Her approach is to look at clauses that must clearly be head-final and then to examine what types of elements can and cannot undergo rightward movement in such clauses. Under the assumption that with a head-initial TP only one XP position is available before the verb in T (i.e. SpecTP), Pintzuk considers those subordinate clauses as unambiguously head-final in which at least two heavy constituents precede the finite verb. Focusing only on such clauses, Pintzuk identifies several elements that can generally not occur to the right of the verb: particles, object pronouns, stranded prepositions and negative object. But in subordinate clauses with a single constituent before the finite verb, these elements do occur after the verb. Pintzuk therefore concludes that particles, object pronouns, stranded prepositions and negative objects are diagnostic elements for head-initial structure. Since the diagnostic elements cannot undergo rightward movement in unambiguously head-final clauses, their occurrence to the right of the verb must be the sign of a head-initial TP structure. Pintzuk therefore proposes that OE shows variation with respect to directionality: TP can be both head-initial and head-final (the double base hypothesis).

3 Negative Concord and OE clause structure

Haeberli & Haegeman (1995) (henceforth HH) provide independent cross-linguistically based evidence in favour of Pintzuk's hypothesis that head-initial TP structure can be found in OE. HH's argument is similar to Pintzuk's as it is based on a phenomenon that does not seem to be possible with head-final structure, but nevertheless occurs in OE subordinate clauses. The empirical domain that HH consider is Negative Concord (NC), the phenomenon whereby two or more negative elements in a clause do not cancel each other out but together express a single negation.

HH's starting point is an observation made by Haegeman (1995) for West

Flemish (WF). WF has an asymmetric V2 syntax with verb-final subordinate clauses comparable to Dutch and German. But in contrast to those languages, WF also has VPR and productive NC. An illustration of NC is given in (3) (from Haegeman 1995: 133):

- (3) da Valère an niemand niets nie gezeid oat
 that Valère to nobody nothing not said has
 'that Valère had not said anything to anyone'

What is of interest for our purposes now is that a negative constituent contained within a VP that has undergone VPR cannot enter an NC relation with an element outside this VP. I will refer to this generalisation with the label *NC-VPR. It is illustrated in (4), where only the Double Negation reading is possible.

- (4) dan-ze niemand nie willen niets zeggen
 that-they nobody not want nothing say
 'that they do not want to say nothing to anyone' (Double Negation)
 '*that they do not want to say anything to anyone' (NC)

As HH point out, *NC-VPR makes an interesting prediction for OE. Like WF, OE is a NC language. Sentential negation is expressed by the preverbal negative marker *ne*, which can co-occur with one or more other negative elements (three in (5)) to express a single negation.

- (5) þe næfre nan man ne geseah ær on nanum lande
 that never no man not saw before in no land
 'that no man has ever seen before in any land'
 (cootest, Exod:34.10.3577)

The prediction then is the following: If *NC-VPR also holds in OE and NC is not possible with a negative element occurring inside a VP that has undergone VPR, the configuration 'Neg1-Aux-Neg2-V' with an NC reading should only be found with clauses that can be analysed as involving head-initial TP as the relevant word order could be obtained without VPR in such cases. As for clauses which must be analysed in terms of a head-final TP, NC readings with a negative element between the finite auxiliary and the non-finite main verb should be ungrammatical and therefore not be found in OE.

HH claim that this prediction is largely borne out. Clearly head-final subordinate clauses with VPR generally do not have a negative element in the VP moved to the right. However, HH identify eight examples that could potentially be prob-

lematic. They propose an analysis for six of them and speculate on the status of the remaining two. Overall, HH conclude that *NC-VPR also seems to hold in OE, and that the regular occurrence of the order 'Neg₁ Aux Neg₂ V' can be related to head-initial TP, confirming Pintzuk's double base hypothesis.

In the remainder of this paper, I briefly re-evaluate HH's conclusions for two main reasons. First, HH do not provide any quantitative evidence. This weakens their claims somewhat as a crucial part of their argument is based on the hypothesized ungrammaticality of an option in OE (NC with VPR in clearly head-final clauses). Ungrammaticalities can never be conclusively established in corpus data, but quantitative evidence is useful in that the likelihood that the absence of an option in a corpus is a sign of ungrammaticality increases with the number of examples in which this option could have occurred but did not. A second reason for reconsidering HH's observations is that more work on OE syntax has been carried out over the last 20 years, and we may wonder what the status of the examples that HH have identified as potentially problematic is within more recent analyses of OE.

3.1 *NC-VPR: Quantitative evidence

My first goal is to provide a quantitative analysis of the interaction between NC and VPR. In contrast to HH, who used *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English* (Healey & Venezky 1980), I will base myself on the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003). The main issue I will consider is the following: Under the assumption that *NC-VPR holds for OE as it does for WF, HH propose that all subordinate clauses of the type 'Neg₁-Aux-Neg₂-V' must be the result of head-initial TP. We therefore get the following prediction P that needs to be tested quantitatively:

- (6) P: The sequence 'Neg₁-Aux-Neg₂-V' does not occur in clearly head-final clauses in OE.

With respect to defining "clearly head-final", I will start with the minimal and most constrained hypothesis (but cf. section 3.2 below for some further discussion). In a head-initial structure, the finite auxiliary is under T and the subject is in SpecTP. The minimal assumption is therefore that they are adjacent. Thus, head-final structure is required if one or more constituents intervene between the subject and the finite auxiliary.

In order to test P, I have collected all OE subordinate clauses containing a finite auxiliary, a non-finite main verb and at least two negative items. In all cases,

one of the negative items is the preverbal negative marker *ne*, which can express negation on its own and is generally analysed as a prefix on the finite verb. An NC relation is then established between *ne* and one or more additional negative elements in the clause. Overall, there are 631 clauses that meet the requirements described before. However, not all of them are equally relevant for testing P. In 146 clauses, the second negative element is the subject occurring in SpecTP. In these cases, a violation of *NS-VPR would not have been possible as the subject in SpecTP could not have been included in a VP undergoing VPR.

This leaves us with 475 clauses containing *ne* plus one or more negative non-subject XPs. But once again, not all of these could have given rise to a violation of *NS-VPR. For that to be possible, there has to be one additional non-subject constituent which could intervene between the subject position and the auxiliary and thus indicate clear head-final structure. Focusing then on all subordinate clauses that contain a negated auxiliary, a non-finite main verb, at least one negative non-subject XP, and at least one other non-subject XP², we are left with 266 clauses that could potentially have given rise to a violation of *NC-VPR if the four elements had been placed in the order 'XP-*neAux*-NegYP-V'.

Thus, the pool of examples that allow us to test P is relatively substantial. If we now examine it for the occurrence of 'XP-*neAux*-NegYP-V' order, we can find 14 clauses of this type coming from 10 different texts. An illustration is given in (7).

- (7) þæt hy æt necstan ne magon nan land geseon.
 that they at last not can no land see
 'that finally they cannot see any land'
 (cogregdH,GDPref_1_[H]:5.20.34)

The 14 examples of the type shown in (7) correspond to 5.3% of the 266 clauses identified above and to 14.3% of all clauses with the order '*neAux*-NegYP-V' (n = 98; XP occurs in a position other than to the immediate left of *neV* in the remaining 85.7%). Although these frequencies are low, they are high enough to raise some initial doubts as to whether *NC-VPR can indeed be maintained for OE.

A possible account emerges if we take a closer look at these 14 potentially problematic examples. In 7 of these, the subject is a pronoun, and in the remain-

²Not included here are object pronouns and subordinate clauses. The former are not likely to be diagnostics for head-final structure as they very frequently intervene between the subject and the finite verb. As for the latter, they do generally not occur between the subject and the finite verb even in clearly head-final contexts.

ing 7, there is no overt subject in SpecTP because of subject movement (relative clauses) or because of subject omission in a second conjunct. If we focus on clauses with full DP subjects only, the result is clear-cut. Among 54 clauses with a DP subject, a negated auxiliary, a non-finite main verb, one negative YP and at least one other XP, there is not a single one that has the order 'Su-XP-*ne*Aux-NegYP-V'.³ Although the amount of data allowing us to test P with full DP subjects is not huge, the fact that 54 clauses would have the potential ingredients to violate *NC-VPR but do not do so is nevertheless suggestive. HH's conclusion is therefore supported if an analysis for the 14 clauses with a pronominal subject or no overt subject can be given in terms of a head-initial TP structure.

3.2 *NC-VPR: Apparent counterexamples

HH also identify examples with subject pronouns as the main source of potential counterarguments against *NC-VPR in OE. They suggest that subject pronouns can cliticize to C and that the element intervening between the subject and the finite auxiliary in an example like (7) either occupies SpecTP (following Pintzuk's (1993, 1999) hypothesis that OE is a symmetric V2 language with SpecTP as a topic position) or is fronted through Stylistic Fronting. None of these assumptions is uncontroversial, however. There is no evidence suggesting that OE subject pronouns are true head clitics, the status of OE as a symmetric V2 language has generally not been accepted in the literature, and whether there are independent reasons for postulating a process of Stylistic Fronting is by no means certain.

In terms of recent approaches to the clausal syntax of OE, however, most apparent counterexamples to *NC-VPR can be accounted for quite straightforwardly. It has been widely assumed in the literature that above TP there is a second projection hosting subjects in the OE clause structure. Different labels have been given to this projection by different authors. But what is common to all these analyses is the assumption that subject pronouns always move to the higher subject position whereas full DP subjects generally occur in the lower one but can occasionally also move higher. The relevant part of the clause structure is shown in (8), which is based on the most recent version of this approach (Walkden 2017).

³Interestingly, Haeberli & Haegeman (1995: 100, ex. 29b) cite such a case, but the relevant text is not included in the YCOE. Cf. fn. 5 below for a further observation concerning this example.

- (8) [CP₂ XP C₂ ... [CP₁ SU₁(pro/DP) C₁ [TP SU₂(DP) T]]]

Walkden uses the label CP₁ for the higher host of subjects, where CP₁ combines the features Fin and Fam (familiar Topic) of a split CP structure. It is the Fam feature on C₁ which triggers the systematic movement of subject pronouns to SpecCP₁. For subordinate clauses, it can be assumed that the complementizer is merged in C₁ but then raises to C₂. With C₁ containing a copy of the complementizer, the finite verb cannot move to C₁ and remains in T. Together with the assumption that adjuncts can occur between CP₁ and TP (cf. e.g. Haerberli 2000, van Kemenade & Los 2006), we get the result that 'Su-adjunct-V' orders or 'adjunct-V' orders with a no overt subject can be derived even if TP is head-initial (cf. Haerberli & Ihsane 2016: 506).⁴ An example like (7) can thus be analysed with a head-initial structure and without reference to VPR:⁵

- (9) [CP₂ þæt [CP₁ hy þæt [æt necstan] [TP hy [T' [T ne magon] [VP nan land geseon]].

13 of the 14 potential counterexamples identified earlier can be analyzed along these lines as they involve AdvPs or PPs. The only example that remains problematic is the following:

- (10) þæt wæs ða ða he ludeas nolde nan wuht læran hwæt hi don scolden
that was when he Jews not-wanted no whit advise what they do should
'that was when he didn't want to advise the Jews what to do'
(cocura,CP:58.443.3.3159)

Here an argument occurs between the subject pronoun and the negated auxil-

⁴van Kemenade & Los (2006) suggest that the position between CP₁ and TP is a position for discourse particles such as þa or þonne ('then'). In the 14 examples with 'XP-*ne*Aux-NegYP-V' order, there are indeed three in which þonne occurs in the XP position. However, Haerberli & Ihsane (2016: 506) show that other items can be found in this position as well (possibly as the result of movement) and that more than one item can occur there at the same time. I will assume here that the XP position is open to any type of adjunct, including PPs, but that it may initially have been a particle position, the use of which was extended over time.

⁵Note that, according to (8), a structure like (9) would also be possible with a full DP subject. More precisely, if, as Walkden's analysis suggests, Fam is the crucial feature attracting subject pronouns to CP₁, one would expect a familiar non-pronominal DP also to be able to occur in CP₁. This is indeed what could be argued for the example mentioned in fn. 3 above. The relevant subject has a demonstrative determiner ('these') and refers to an entity that has already been mentioned in the same paragraph a few lines before. However, given that full DP subjects tend to remain in SpecTP, the rarity of such a word order (absent in the YCOE) would be expected.

inary. Iudeas cannot be argued to be a familiar topic as the referent is not mentioned before, so movement to CP₁ is not an option. The only options seem to be that the adjunct position between CP₁ and TP can occasionally be targeted by an argument, or alternatively that TP allows multiple specifiers. It is not entirely clear how the viability of these options could be tested and I will therefore have to leave this issue open.

4 Conclusion

HH put forward an argument in favour of the occurrence of head-initial structure in OE (or its equivalent in a system without variation in directionality) that is based on the syntax of NC and more specifically on the observation from WF that NC is not possible for a negative constituent contained within a VP that has undergone VPR to the right of an auxiliary and that therefore sequences of the type 'Neg₁-Aux-Neg₂-V' must involve head-initial structure. In this paper, I have evaluated HH's claims on the basis of a detailed quantitative analysis and recent theoretical proposals. Among 631 subordinate clauses with at least two negative elements, a finite auxiliary and a non-finite main verb, there is only a single one (0.2%; example 10) that cannot be straightforwardly accounted for in terms of HH's hypothesis and recent analyses of the clausal syntax of OE. Even if we define the set of relevant examples in a more restrictive way, the frequency of exceptions remains extremely low. If we look at all subordinate clauses in which a violation of *NC-VPR could have occurred (clauses with an additional XP), we get a proportion of 1 out of 266 (0.4%). Or if we focus only on clauses with Aux-Neg-V' order and one additional XP, the rate is 1 out of 98 (1.0%). Even though the complete absence of potentially problematic cases would have been preferable, the highly exceptional status of example (10) suggests that the argument for a head-initial inflectional projection put forward by HH stands up to close quantitative and updated theoretical scrutiny.

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