

June 6, 2003

CLASS 4: Word Order Changes in English

Word Order Typology

Beginning in the 1960s, a number of **implicational universals** have been established, which describe the ways syntactic features of languages pattern together. Generalizing and simplifying somewhat, there are **two principal “language types”** in the world, as shown in the table below:

V(erb) O(object):	<i>John drives a car</i>	O(object) V(erb):	<i>John a car drives</i>
Aux(iliary) V:	<i>John has driven</i>	V Aux(iliary):	<i>John driven has</i>
N(oun) A(adjective):	<i>car fast</i>	A(adjective) N(oun):	<i>fast car</i>
N Dem(onstrative):	<i>car this</i>	Dem(onstrative) N:	<i>this car</i>
N Poss(essor):	<i>car of John</i>	Poss(essor) N:	<i>John’s car</i>
P(reposition) NP:	<i>in the car</i>	NP P(ostposition):	<i>the car in</i>
• no morphological case		• morphological case	

These correlations **aren’t perfect**: try fitting Modern English (NE) into either of these moulds.

- NE is a good, but not perfect, example of a VO language
- Welsh is a perfect VO language
- Japanese is a perfect OV language

Word Order Patterns in OE

Recap some basic **syntactic features of OE** (see Class 3, but this time I aligned them correctly!):

- (1) Ða ic ða ðis **eall gemunde**... *verb last in subordinate clauses*
when I then this all remember
 ‘Then when I remember all this...’
- (2) Ða **gemunde** ic eac hu ic geseah... *verb second in main clauses*
then remember I also how I saw
 ‘then I also remember how I saw...’
- (3) hwæt **segest** þu, earþlingc? *verb second in direct questions*
what sayest thou earthing
 ‘What do you say, ploughman?’

(1) shows that **subordinate clauses were usually OV**. OE also had **V Aux** order in subordinates:

- (4) nimþe se cyng **alyfan will**, [þæt man wergyld **alysan mote**]
unless the king allows will that one weregild pay may
 ‘unless the king will allow a weregild to be paid’
- (5) & hie cuadon [þæt þæt ilce hiera gefeþum **geboden wære**]
and they said that the same to-their comrades offered were
 ‘and they said that the same was offered to their comrades’

Some orders relating to the OE **noun phrase (NP)**:

- (6) an god man *A N*
a good man
- (7) þæt lond *Dem N*
that land
- (8) deofles lare *Poss N*
devil’s teaching

OE was, on the other hand, **basically prepositional**:

- (9) fram Sciringes heale *P NP*
from Skiringssalr

Although there were **some postpositional** constructions:

- (10) & ic gewham wille **þærto** tæcan þe hiene his lyst ma to witanne
and I whomever shall there-to direct that him of-it would-please more to know
 ‘and I shall direct anyone to it who would like to know more about it’

And, as we have already seen last class, OE had **plenty of morphological case**.

OE was a **predominantly OV** language, with **two complications**:

- ❶ OE was *verb second (V2) in main clauses* (cf. (2)-(3) above)
- ❷ some things could appear after the verb even in subordinate clauses

- (11) [Ða he þiderweard **seglode fram Sciringes heale**], þa wæs him on þæt bæcþord Denemearc
when he thither sailed from Skiringssalr then was to-him on the larboard Denmark
 ‘When he sailed there from Skiringssalr, Denmark was on his larboard side.’

Obviously, since OE the English language has undergone considerable changes, also in syntax and word order — NE is definitely a VO language, for example. Many basic changes took place in the ME period, **from OE to ME**. But before we go there, **was there only one OE**...?

Changes in OE

As we've seen OE descends from **Proto-Germanic**, itself derived from **Proto-Indo-European**.

- Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic had both only the word order **SOV** [no data]
- after the Germanic split, North and West Germanic see the **rise of V2**-constructions

Some examples from the North/West Germanic runic corpus (**rune inscriptions, 5c**):

- (12) **runo** *rune.ACC* **fahi** *suitable* **divine** *make.1.SG.PRES*
 'I make the suitable, divine rune.'
- (13) **ek** *I.NOM* **Hagustaldaz** *bury.1.SG.PRET* **hlaniwido** *son.ACC* **mango** *my.ACC* **minino** *my.ACC*
 'I, Hagustaldaz, buried my son.'

In other words, OE is in itself an **intermediate stage** of word order developments. This is often obscured by the fact that most OE texts stem from the **same period**.

Early OE has usually SOV word order in **both main and subordinate clauses**:

- (14) **Æðred** *me* **ah,** **Eanred** *mec* **agrof**
Æðred *I.DAT* **own.PRES** **Eanred** *I.ACC* **carve.PRET**
 'Æðred owns me, Eanred carved me.'

But since we have more texts from the non-early periods, from now on we idealize and assume that OE is a uniform language (i.e. abstract away from these early stages) which is **SOV in subordinate clauses** and **SVO with V2 in main clauses**, this is surprisingly close to **Modern High German** rather than NE. None of these assumptions are without problems; maybe some *Hausarbeiten* will deal with the issues in more detail.

Uniformity Hypothesis: V2 languages (modern German, Dutch, Scandinavian — and OE) have only **one underlying word order**; *the word order of subordinate clauses is the basic one*. All other orders are **derived** (e.g. SOV → SVO in main clauses, SOV → OVS in topicalization etc.).

Changes in ME

So there is some evidence that OE was an OV language. Obviously the situation described above has changed since OE. Most of these changes took place in (**early**) **ME**, especially **OV > VO**. The **last reasonably systematic OV text** in the English language is the **Final Continuation** of the *Peterborough Chronicle* (1154). [See the xeroxed material on the final pages of the handout.]

Why did the language change in this radical way? [Some *Hausarbeiten* deal with this question.]

Why did this happen in **English**, but not in **German** or **Dutch**? Nobody really knows, but:

- it's an old idea that the **breakdown of the OE case system** was connected to this.

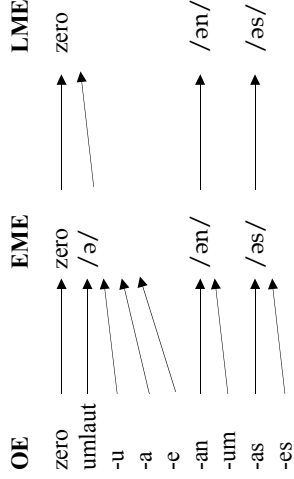
We saw in Class 3 that the OE case system had 24 "slots" marked by nine markers:

zero, umlaut, -u, -a, -e, -an, -um, -as, -es

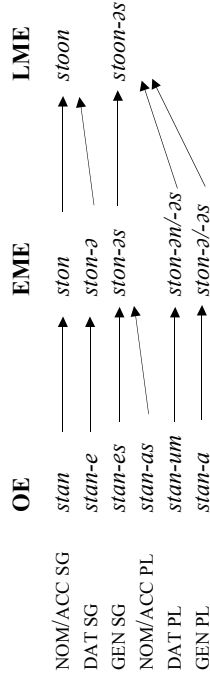
In **late OE**, two sound changes took place:

- all unstressed vowels become /ə/
- final /m/ and final /n/ merge

These changes **reduce the number of formal markers to four** in ME. By later ME, final /ə/ isn't pronounced anymore. So we have the following situation (following Lass 1992:195):



For example, witness the fate of the **a-stem declension**:



The **ME /ən/ (written -en) ending** was **more widespread in plurals** than now (e.g. *eyen* 'eyes', *shoon* 'shoes' etc.). Formally, though, **the LME system is parallel to the NE one** because it distinguishes only **singular vs. plural** and **genitive from non-genitive forms** (although it makes these distinctions in slightly different ways from NE).

The same operations reduced both the **article** and **adjectival endings to zero** (adjectives went through a phase of an -e vs. zero ending, as in Chaucer, but that was lost around 1400).

Reading

Blake & Cable 2002: chs. 5-7 — Blake 1992: ch. 3