PSYCH-VERBS IN OLD ENGLISH: FROM THEIR ORIGIN IN THE LEXICON TO FINAL SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

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In a lecture delivered in St. Louis at the beginning of this century, the great linguist Otto Jespersen expressed his deeply felt convictions about the scientific study of English in the following terms:

A scientific treatment of the English language must presuppose the scientific treatment of a great many other languages as well. (1904:2)

And later he went on to say:

But it is clear that indirectly, too, the scientific study of any language may be of value to the student of English. His ideas ought not to be narrowed down to one particular type of linguistic structure. (1904:6)

These programmatic words could fit equally well in any of the prolegomena to the various reformulations undergone by Chomsky's theory since Syntactic Structures. But the course of events have amply demonstrated that the twins shall never meet. In fact there is some work in progress which endeavours to compare the grammatical achievement of Jespersen and other traditional grammarians with that of contemporary generative grammar in order to prove that they are not com-plementary as Chomsky recently suggested.

Curiously enough, there is hardly an issue like that of 'grammatical case' to highlight the diversity of approach. In the pioneering lecture I have just quoted from, Jespersen, with a touch of humour which brings us quite close to the subject of this paper, states the following:

In a very able book on the absolute participle in English, the author says that it is right to parse the so-called nominative ab-
solute as 'a dative in disguise'. Now this amounts to very much
the same thing as saying that a locomotive is a horse in disguise
or - to remain within the sphere of language - to say that in
'he likes pears' he is a dative in, likes a plural in disguise, and
pears the subject in disguise, because in Old English the sentence
would run 'him liciaþ peran'. (1904:8)

Despite the intrinsic eloquence of these examples, there is more to it than meets
the eye. It is possible to argue that the adoption of a powerful theory such as the
'Government and Binding' approach launched by Chomsky in 1981, which 'sees'
the category of 'case' in all human languages, enables us precisely to see through
the disguise of things. This is not the same as merely looking at things. Not
inordinately, mortals have been surprised by the many secrets which the book of
nature, albeit open, keeps in disguise.

It is not my purpose to mediate in any divorce court in order to arrest feelings
of fear, doubt and mistrust. I will content myself with the grammatical discussion
of OE verbs which express precisely such feelings, the feeling of fear, doubt, liking
and abhorrence. These are the so-called 'psych-verbs' or verbs of experience, such as
lystan, tweogan, speowan, wlatian, lician, lustfullian, ondrædan, etc., which I have
classified in four distinct classes. Here are some illustrations:

Class A: LYSTAN: (1) Hwæt, ge þon þeow hwaþwega godcundlices on cowerres
salear habbaþ, þæt is andigil & gemyn, & se gesceaweslicia þilla þætt hine para
iwega lyste (Boethius 95). TWEOGAN: (2) þis is geneg sweatol þætce xonne mon
þætce tweogan ne þearf þætce caelec men geendiaþ on þæm deap, & eac heora welan
(Boethius 90). SPEOWAN: (3) Ælfræd kyning habat gretan... his wordum luflice
& freondlice; & þe þynan hæft þæt me com suðef off on gemyn, hwelec wutan
gi wæren geond Angelkyn... & hu þa kyningas... & hu hi... & hu him þa
speow æþer ge mid wige ge mid wisdome (Cura Past 2). WLATIAN: (4) Ic wene
þæt þæt ic hwæþwugungenes þe up ahofe of þære unromesonic fulneþe gehrotie
åþ þæm ilcan weorcþecþ þæt æþ ær ðæþades, buton þæt þæt ful si þæs þe þæt leofþ
is, þæt þæt forþy wlatigæ (Boethius 88).

Class B: LICIAN: (1) þas þing ic on þam forespreecan bacisce ðiwlice luflice,
forþan ic no ne tweæt þætce hi Godic liciaþ (Bede 35). (2) þætce on þæm þingum
þie þæt him sylfum swæ ðiwlice liciþ, þæt hi Godic miscliciaþ (Cura Past 20). (3) þæ
herringe þæt him licode (Cura Past 20). LUSTFULLIAN: (4) þæt þæt þonne þæm
mode licigæ & lustfullige, þæt hir gewundaþ (Cura Past 13). (5) Hwæþþ þæt he
liciþlicræg lond? (Boethius 92). (6) Hwæ i sceolde me lician flægr lond? (Boethius
93). (7) and heorn eallum þearle licode æþc þara þinga þe he forþ teah (Apollonius
152).

Class C: LUSTFULLIAN: (1) Forþþ þæt ic liftulfedele þære stowe swettesnes &
withe þæt ic þæt sceah (Bede 49). (2) ða þæm anum, þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þae

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scolde þe medome hierde and larcow bion sceold, ond eac hwelc se biþ þe him
ondædan sceal þæt he unnedome sie (Cura Past 14). (2) se de micelne welan haþþ,
he him ondrædan monige feond; giþ he nane æhta nœðe, ne þorfte he him xonne
ondædan...giþ þæ onne swelces nanwult nœðe, onne ne dorftes þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þæ þae
with Italian data. All we need is additional information in terms of case-specification. We take case as 'inherent case' in the modern sense, that is, dative, genitive, instrumental and prepositional equivalents and any accusative which could not be determined structurally. So, case-specification in this context means an actual morphological case or prepositional equivalent, but we should consider any accusative specification redundant if such an accusative could be determined structurally. The lexical entry of such verbs could be as simple as the four theoretically possible combinations of experiencer and theme plus or minus the specification of case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencer</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Verb-class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Lexical entry of psych-verbs in OE.*

This system generates precisely the four classes I have proposed for Old English. The verbs of class A can thus be explained as having inherent case in both arguments: in (1), experiencer *hine* and theme *para twega*; in (2), experiencer *nænne mon* and theme *pæs*; and in (3), experiencer *him* and theme *ægper ge mid wige ge mid wisdome*. Notice that none of the verbs of class A appear with an overt grammatical subject. Questions of order apart, the structure of these verbs as attested in Old English in final output coincides with the one proposed by Bellotti and Rizzi (1986:3) for the initial configuration of Italian *questo preoccupa Gianni*, lit, 'this worries Gianni' and *questo piace a Gianni*, lit, 'this pleases to Gianni'. They take great pains in demonstrating that *questo* in both structures is a derived subject and not the proper subject in the initial configuration as it is projected from the lexicon, probably unaware of the significance of the Old English data. In fact we may have reason to believe that only agents and experiencers without inherent-case-specifications can assume the role of subject at the initial level.

In contrast to the verbs of class A, the verbs of classes B and C possess only one argument with inherent case, the other argument lacking case-specification. In class B it is the experiencer: in (1) *G o d e*; in (2) *him selfsum*, etc. In class C it is the theme: in (1) *pare stowe swenesse*; in (2) *mid hytse para ecræ gefæna and eadignesse*. The argument lacking case-specification is the one that appears as subject in final structure: in class B it is the theme: in (1) *hi*; in (2) *hi*; in (3) *pære heringe þe*; in (4) *fægra lond*; in (6) *æc þe þinga þe he forþ teah*; in (7) *pæs*; in class C it is the experiencer: in (1) *ic*; in (2) * þut þe...* However, if our previous assumption about the externalization of subject is correct, only class C should evidence real subjects in the initial configuration, although this is difficult to prove in Old English. Finally in class D, with no particular case-specification, the experiencer presumably assumes the subject position from the beginning.

But of course, quite independently from the lexical origin of the structures we have discussed (the four hypothesized variations in the lexicon), we still have to account for their varying positional syntax in actual language. So, let us have a closer look at class A. If we select (1) and (2), we can easily postulate a configuration of the following form:

![Tree diagram]

*Figure 2. Initial syntactic configuration of Class A, (1) and (2).*

In this configuration the NP subject remains empty; then we have the first NP object, an experiencer: *hine* and *nænne mon* respectively; after this we have the second NP object, a theme: *para twega* and *pæs* respectively; and finally, at the end of the structure, we have the verb: *lyste* and *tweogan yeairf* respectively. With a minor adjustment, the situation of our example (3) is not very different except for the extraposition of the long NP *ægper ge mid wige ge mid wisdome*. So, in all these cases, allowing for the subsequent extraposition of a long object, we have the order 'Subject-Object(s)-Verb', that is, an SOV order. This SOV order is generally accepted as the initial structure of the Old English assembly line, the base of Old English, the starting point of the mapping of lexical information into syntax, for whatever sentence we end up with. In a generative grammar it is of crucial importance to establish a base from which to operate. Part of this base is what we may regard as the initial word-order, an abstract category parameter which to a
large extent determines from minimal variations important clusters of properties and differences amongst the languages of the world, within certain universal constraints. Cf. Chomsky's simile in this respect:

We may think of the language faculty as a complex and intricate network of some sort associated with a switch box consisting of an array of switches that can be in one of two positions. Unless the switches are set one way or another, the system does not function. When they are set in one of the permissible ways, then the system functions in accordance with its nature, but differently, depending on how the switches are set. The fixed network is the system of principles of universal grammar; the switches are the parameters to be fixed by experience. (1988:62-3)

Now, if we accept, as is generally done, that an order SOV is the initial order for Old English or, what is the same, that Old English is an SOV language underlyingly, like German or Dutch, we would like to know what the implications are, how do we explain the hundreds of clauses without SOV order and, in the light of this, we would also like to assess the actual validity or necessity of the assumption. One of the implications of accepting an underlying SOV order is that any order different from SOV is derived as illustrated in the following scheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic order at the initial state in the syntax: SOV</th>
<th>Derived orders</th>
<th>V/initial end-position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V/2</td>
<td>VS &gt; SV</td>
<td>V/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second front-position</td>
<td>main subject</td>
<td>position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Word-order scheme.

 Cf. for instance the normal 'Topic-Verb-Subject' order in main clauses with topologicalization of *pa*, *ponne*, and frequently also with *nu* (that is, as actual adverbs, not as conjunctions!) whether the subject is a pronoun or not: *pa ságlde heipá ságlde Apollonius; ponne com heo/ponne com seo cwen; nu wast fy, etc.* Notice that with other topologicalized elements such as objects (prepositional or non-prepositional) we have the order 'Topic-Verb-Subject' only if the subject is not a pronoun. Cf. in our list of illustrations class B, (6) -*and heom cailum (pearle) licode xic para...* - as against class D, (1) -*Ær pisseum we ságodon...* - at the beginning of the text; (1) of class B also, at the beginning of the text, is similar although a bit more complicated: *pas ðing ic... lutie.* Summarizing, we have the 'Topic-Verb-Subject' order (a) in structures with *pa*, *ponne*, *nu*, (b) with other topologicalized elements when the subject is not a pronoun. Cf. also the topologicalization of *Hw*-words in direct questions (*Hwæt súgeste fy, etc.* or of the negative particle *ne* in negations (*Ne sceal he noht, ne heo fy, etc.*). If our assumption is correct, the next step should be to link either order to a different type of structure, that is, SOV to one type, 'Topic-Verb-Subject' to another. In other words, we should if possible link V-final position to one type and V-second position to another. And indeed this is possible.

Let us now look again at class A, (1), (2), (3), the first three examples in our list of illustrations. All three examples illustrate subordinate clauses. And, of course, subordinate clauses typify such an SOV order even though it may be affected by other factors such as object extraposition, as is precisely the case with (3): the long disjunctive string of two prepositional objects is extrapoated, namely *ængil ge mid wige ge mid wisdome*, thereby partially disrupting what would otherwise be a perfect SOV order. So, the postulated initial order would be the order of the subordinate clause in principle. A similar link can be effected between the order 'Top-Verb-Subject' and main clauses introduced by the topicialized elements we have mentioned. We still have to explain two other presumably derived orders, the VS order associated with 'yes/no questions' and the SV order typical of declarative main clauses without topicialization of objects or adverbs. But it is not difficult to see how these orders are empirically linked to very specific and distinct types of structure. We would also have to explain the actual process of derivation and then why should it be the case that the basic order is SOV and not any of the presumed derived orders. So we have two issues here: (1) the derivational process of all three non-SOV orders (the topicialization order 'Top-V-S', the interrogative order 'VS' in 'yes/no questions', and the 'SV' order in declarative main clauses), and (2) the efficiency in deriving all three orders from SOV order.

As to issue (1), namely, the process of derivation, the solution is straightforward in the case of 'Top-V-S' and interrogative 'VS'. It is enough to assume a simple left-ward movement of the verb from the underlying basic end-position, which ends up to the immediate left of the subject. In 'VS' (the interrogative order of 'yes/no questions') the verb ends up in the first position in the sentence, that is, the immediate left of the subject is the first position in the sentence, but in 'Top-V-S' the movement to the immediate left of the subject materializes in the second position, since the topic by its very nature must appear at the extreme left of the sentence (the leftmost position). The case of 'SV' (declaratives like *ic cume, ju gast, etc.* is explained as a further derivation from the derived 'VS' which accounts for the previous structures, whereby the subject is topicialized. Actually, in Old English there occur cases of 'VS' in declarative main clauses: *com ic instead of ic com.* This situation, which is not at all rare, can be perfectly explained as cases one step short of the final process. This simple assumption of general movement leftward from end-position is the 'prima facie' characterization of the already well established Germanic phenomenon called *V2* precisely because the verb generally appears in a second position in declarative main clauses.

As to issue (2), the necessity (putting it strongly) or convenience (putting it mildly) of deriving 'Top-V-S', 'VS?' and 'SV' (all of them generally V2) from SOV (= V-last, staying in its underlying position), I must refer to the contributions of Taraldsen (1982), Platzack (1985) and Kemenade (1987). Essentially it boils down to the descriptive adequacy that can be achieved if we combine the V/2 phenomenon with an underlying SOV base, without preventing various avenues for expla-
natory adequacy. The V/2 phenomenon as a whole is as normal in Old English as in the other Germanic languages, the Scandinavian languages included, Modern English being the odd one out. Descending to a more precise formulation of the working of the V/2 phenomenon, we may put it this way. The Germanic languages are endowed with a position COMP to the left of the ‘NP VP’ frame, which is filled either by a complementizer, the case of the subordinate clauses, or by a finite verb, as illustrated in the following diagram:

\[
\text{Figure 4. Basic mechanism of sentence structure in Germanic.}
\]

When such a position is empty, the finite verb moves to this position filling it; when such a position is filled by a complementizer, the finite verb remains in its base position (end-position) since it cannot move to a filled position. This is what we have precisely in (1-4) of our class A, the common tree of which can now be illustrated with the appropriate and relevant COMP underlined:

\[
\text{Figure 5. Common initial tree for Class A.}
\]

If we follow the same procedure for all other cases, we shall be able to explain the diversity of structure as following directly from the interaction of V/2 and SOV, except for certain adjustments such as the extraposition phenomena of the sort already mentioned in connection within (4) of class A. There are two other adjustments that merit special attention. One concerns the position of clitics (moveable personal pronouns) and the other the position of pre-modalas as a result of verb-raising. The position of clitics has been addressed recently by Kemenade. Cf. her scheme (1987:119):

\[
\text{Figure 6. Kemenade’s descriptive model for clitic positions.}
\]

In (5) of our class B we have an instance of a clitic within the topic as can be easily appreciated in the following diagram:

\[
\text{Figure 7. Clitic within the topic.}
\]

If we had a Hw-word or nu alone, the would presumably be between the topic and
Comp. These cases merit further scrutiny. The phenomenon of ‘verb-raising’ can also be seen in one of our illustrations of class B, namely (6). Let us have a look at a ‘prima facie’ initial tree:

```
S
  |    |
  |    | S
  |    |
  Top

NP  VP
  |    |
  |    |
NPEx  V

NPTh  V

fæger lond  me  lician
```

Figure 8. ‘Prima facie’ initial tree containing a pre-modal.

The expected result of such initial configuration should be hwi ne sceolde fæger lond me lician? (or with the clitic between Top and Comp). But instead we have hwi ne sceolde me lician fæger lond? It is generally recognized that ‘pre-modals’ like sceolde were ordinary verbs and not at all auxiliaries in the technical sense, that is, they were the main verbs of their respective sentences, and the non-finite verb they appeared with was the verb of a subordinate clause, very much as in I want to go, want is not an auxiliary and go the main verb. So, the initial tree should be as illustrated in the following diagram, with indication of the subsequent restructuring:

```
S
  |    |
  |    | S
  |    |
  Top

NP  VP
  |    |
  |    |
NPEx  V

NPTh  V

fæger lond  S  Pro me  lician  sceolde
```

Figure 9. Initial tree with verb-raising and subsequent effects.

The verb-raising phenomenon is common in a structure of this type. The raising of lician to the right of sceolde breaks up the S(2) and unifies the two clauses, forming a verbal cluster. The result is hwi ne sceolde me lician fæger lond?

The remaining illustrations do not seem to present any syntactic problems at all. (9) of class B is a good illustration of V/2 with topicalization of heom ealum, a case to which I have already referred. Equally straightforward is (1) of class C, except that due to the length of the theme (a complex string modified by a relative clause), it is extraposed. As can be seen, pære stowe sweettesse and withe the ic pære gesith æpæh appears after lustfullede, whereby the verb loses its end-position. My final observation is reserved for ondredan of class D. The fact that this verb frequently, though not always, appears with a reflexive clitic of interest (in dative) does not alter in the least neither the lexical representation proposed nor its behaviour in syntax.

I have been dealing with verbs of experience positive and negative. I started by quoting Jespersen’s classical and ubiquitous example about someone’s liking for pears (presumably the king). I proceeded to the interesting class of speowan, the success-verb of good King Alfred and ended up in the dread-class! I don’t know if I have caused pleasure, displeasure, if I have caused fears or defrayed fears. But of one thing I am sure, recent linguistic scholarship, from the matrix of verbs to sentence parameters, can contribute substantially to the interpretation of Old English qua language in a modern sense. Much inspiration has come from the Italian workshop in recent years, which has been followed up with admirable zeal by an enviable group of young Dutch and Scandinavian linguists. Comparative syntax, an increasing attentiveness to important and crucial questions of parametric variations and, for once, empirical richness, would certainly not make Jespersen look in askance on his successors.

REFERENCES


