PRONOMINAL OBJECTS IN OLD ENGLISH TEXTS

It is often argued that pronominal objects[1] in Old English were subject to thematic-rhematic organization of the text. Thus, V. Kohonen makes a statement that «new objects were placed in the terminal field, while given objects could occur in all positions» [Kohonen 1978 : 145]. If we apply this generalization to pronominal objects we are to find out immediately that this rule does not work. It is indeed possible to find a number of examples where terminal positions are occupied by new pronominal objects.

«He cwæð Godes wordum eac **to us** eallum» – «He said with God's words to all of us» [WHom 11 B2.2.9, 0049 (190)].

Though "*to us eallum*" can be regarded as one semantic unit which forms a prosodically heavy element and thus should be placed at the end of the clause nevertheless in this particular context the pronominal object functions as a rheme, new information. In the previous passage the author spoke about what the prophet had taught his people and this doctrine was also intended to the audience.

But at the same time purely thematic pronominal object can also be placed in the terminal position:

«… swa swa ðe Hælend deþ, ðe læd to heofenen rice þa ðe on him ilyfað gif heo mid gode weorcum **hine** glædiað» – «…just like the Saviour does who leads to heaven those who believe in him, if they gladden him with good works». [ÆLet 4 B1.8.4.3, 0052 (414)].

The pronominal object «*hine*» which is a substitute of the name «*Hælend*» is not rhematic, it is not new information. Here it seems rather difficult to judge whether this pronoun is contrastive and thus occupies the position closer to the end of the clause or we deal just with the unstressed thematic pronoun as a proclitic to the verb. All in all the analysis of such kinds of examples proves that the terminal position was not rhematic in itself, at least as far as pronominal objects are concerned. That means that even if there was a tendency to place pronominal objects closer to the terminal filed, not every object pronoun in pre- or postverbal position can be considered to be rhematic.

In the corpus of texts I came across such examples where dative and accusative pronominal objects are placed together after the nominal object and tend to stand right close to the end of the clause while the rhematic nominal object occupies the initial position.

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[1] Here I deal only with the dative and accusative forms of the pronouns. The problem of positioning the dative and accusative forms in respect to each other are not taken into account. For more details on this point see Koopman 1990 and Koopman 1991.

«Hit is lang to reccenne, þæt we on bocum ymbe godes wundra rædað. Nu wille ic þeah be suman dæle scortlice **hit eow** sum asecgan» – «It is long to retell what we read about God's wonders in books. But now I want to say it to you shortly something about this part» [WHom 6 B2.2.1, 0010 (23)].

The pronouns "*hit*" and "*eow*" are themes. "*Eow*" has its antecedent in the personal pronoun "*we*" referred to the people addressed, those who are listening to or reading the homily. "*Hit*" is also a substitute while «*be suman dæle*» plays the role of the rheme, i.e. that something the author intends to tell the audience. I admit that in this case the rheme is split and its second part is expressed by the word "*sum*" which is semantically connected with the expression «*be suman dæle*», i.e. "*something about this part*". Such kinds of examples, as I suppose, show that there are no reasons to believe that the position of the pronominal objects can be conditioned exceptionally by their informational status.

The terminal position could also be occupied by a thematic object pronoun which is a part of such constructions as «*him to gewealde*» (him as power), «*him to friðe*» (him for peace) «*him to wife*» (him as wife), «*him to fultume*» (him as a help), «*eow to þearfe*» (you as a need) and the like.

«& gerad eal Norþhymbra land **him to** gewealde» — «and conquered all the land of the Northumbrians to his dominion [ChronA B17.1, 0585 (946.3)];

Such pronouns as «*betux him*», «*betwux eow*», «*heom betweonan*», are placed in the terminal field though the object pronouns there are never rhematic.

«…ðæt hie hiene eft hæbben on ðæm ecan life **betux him**…» – «…that they will have him in that perpetual life between themselves» [CP B9.1.3, 0778 (21.165.9)].

Postverbal final positions can be occupied by those pronominal objects which are a part of the grammatical constructions containing an infinitive with the particle «to»:

«…ðæt he gesette oðre **for hine to demenne**…» – «…that he set others for him to judge…» [CP B9.1.3, 0600 (18.131.11)];.

«…ðe ic bebead **him to secganne**…» – «…which I bade him to say…» [Bede 5 B9.6.7, 0176 (9.410.29)].

Thus, to generalize I'd like to say that such statements as those made by V. Kohonen should be take with great caution. I believe that interpretation of personal pronoun positions in terms of information packaging in the scarce number of texts of the dead language is not devoid of high degree of subjectivity and is usually supported not by firm methods and well elaborated criteria but by mere intuition. Positions of personal pronouns in Old English were undoubtedly determined by a number of factors not to mention a complex interplay of

intonation and peculiarities of information packaging as we can see it in the modern languages.

So far I have been trying to show that pronominal objects can be placed in the terminal field even after the verb ignoring the fact whether they are thematic or rhematic. In the examples above it is easy to notice that pronominal objects could stand either in preverbal position or be placed after the verb. What could be the reason, the driving force of putting pronominal objects before or after the verb in a clause?

Here following Mitchell 1985, Kohonen 1976 and Kohonen 1978 I differentiate between simple clauses, principal clauses, subordinate clauses and the so-called ac/and clauses (i.e. coordinate clauses). The statistical data of pronominal objects distribution vary depending on the type of the clause as well as the period of text fixation. Thus, as an example I have chosen too vernacular manuscripts of the «Anglo-Saxon Chronicles», that of manuscript "*A*" dating back to the IXth century and manuscript "*E*" the last entry of which was made at the beginning of the XIIth century, i.e. the late Old English-early Middle English period.

Table 1

Pronominal Objects in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (MS «*A*»)

Type of Clause Position of V and O	Coordinate Clause (ac/and Clause)	Principal Clause	SubClause	Simple
OprV	44 (19,6%)	4 (1,8%)	44(19,6%)	7 (3,1%)
VOpr	12 (5,4%)	7 (3,1%)	4 (1,8%)	10 (4,5%)

Table 2

Pronominal Objects in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (MS «*E*»)

Type of Clause Position of V and O	Coordinate Clause (ac/and Clause)	Principal Clause	SubClause	Simple
OprV	61(13,7%)	14 (3,1%)	93(20,9%)	30 (6,7%)
VOpr	33 (7,4%)	14 (3,1%)	24 (5,4%)	16 (3,6%)

The analysis of the data helps to make a conclusion that in all the types of clauses except for the subordinate clauses pronominal objects could be used almost equally either

before or after the verb. This tendency is supported by the analysis of other texts, especially non-translated ones written by bishops Aelfric and Wulfstan where pronouns are used in the same positions. This raises several questions. The first one is whether there was any difference in the use of pronominal objects in the same type of the clause but in different positions with reference to the verb? And what was the situation with the use of pronominal objects in subordinate clauses at various stages of Old English?

Languages with a relatively free word order allow for a different placement of the same sentence elements. This rule is used for pragmatic purposes as we can see it in modern languages. In Old English free word order made it possible to use syntactic variants of the utterance for the pragmatic purposes as well.

As an example I have chosen a passage from the translated text of «*Apollonius of Tyre*»:

«Quicumque mihi Tyrium Apollonium, contemptorem regni mei, vivum exhibuerit, accipiet auri talenta centum, qui vero caput eius attulerit, accipiet ducenta».

«Swa hwilc **man** swa me Apollonium lifigendne to gebringð, ic **him** *gife* fifti punda goldes, and þam ðe me his heafod to gebringð, ic *gife* **him** *c* punda goldes» – « What man soever that shall bring me Apollonius living, I will give him fifty pounds of gold, and to him who shall bring me his head, I will give him a hundred pounds of gold» [ApT B4.1, 0054 (7.23)].

The translation of the passage is in some places rather free. The scribe, thus, paraphrased the Latin "*accipiet*" as "*I give him*" adding the pronominal object which is absent in the Latin text. Everything may have been done by chance. But this extract, I believe, can be interpreted from the point of view of its pragmatics. The passage makes it clear that King Antioch wants to get Apollonius by all means dead or alive, and he gives this task to one of his servants. The King does not spare money and is ready to pay more money to those who will bring Apollonius' head. If Apollonius' death is of paramount importance to the king he emphasizes that he will surely give this big sum of money to anyone who realizes his task. In both phrases "*ic him gife*" and "*ic gife him*" we deal with the thematic object pronoun coreferential with the preceding pronoun «*man*». But judging from the context the semantics of the «*ic him gife*» phrase is rather neutral while in «*ic gife him*» the pronominal object in the postverbal position serves to highlight the action itself expressed by the verb. This semantic differentiation is clearly traced in simple and principal clauses.

In Aelfric's works there is a tendency to position pronominal objects in principal clauses after a group of verbs. This group includes verbs of saying, admonition, request and the like, e.g. «*secgan*» (to say), «*biddan*» (to bid), «*beodan*» (to admonish, to preach).

«We **biddað eow** preostas: beoð þyses gemyndig» «We bid you, priests: remember this» [ÆLet 2 B1.8.2, 0223 (211)];

This position serves to concentrate the hearer's attention on important things the speaker is going to speak about further in his speech.

In earlier texts this principle of the use of pronominal objects was not so widely spread. In the «*Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*» (MS "*A*") I have found only two examples of the kind:

«Hy þa sendan **heom** mare fultum» — «Then they sent them more assistance» [ChronA B17.1, 0073 (449.9)];

«& he sende **him** micla gifa» — «and they sent him many gifts» [ChronA B17.1, 0402 (885.30)].

Scarce use of postverbal pronominal objects at early stages of Old English and its later extensive use should be considered within the frames of the general word order development in English. Following Lehmann 1974, Hopper 1975, Kohonen 1978 and others I think that early Germanic languages were SOV languages. In the early IXth century Old English texts we can observe a gradual decline of this word order type and frequently used SVO word order which competes with SOV. The placement of objects after the verb started with nominal phrases. When a new syntactical position was created it was then later filled by pronominal objects as well.

But this process was very rapid in principal, coordinate and simple clauses. In subordinate clauses the situation was different. In early texts postverbal position in the subordinate clauses is occupied by prepositional pronominal objects. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle "MS *A*" contains few of such examples (only 2), while in «MS *E*» there are 13 instances of postverbal pronominal objects with prepositions. 9 examples in the "MS *E*" are those with non-prepositional postverbal pronominal objects. In «*Cura Pastoralis*» prepositional pronominal objects are used after the verb in 24 clauses and there is only one example of non-prepositional pronoun object. In Aelfric's «*Letters*» the situation is different. In 33 cases prepositional pronominal objects are placed after the verb and in 12 examples a non-prepositional pronoun is used after the verb. So the tendency is obvious. In early texts the placement in postverbal position in subordinate clauses was allowed only to the prepositional pronominal objects while e.g. in Aelfric's texts the number of pronominal object used after

the verb increases and includes also non-prepositional ones. I interpret this tendency from the point of view of structural complexity, «weight» and «length» of objects, the so-called law of "growing elements" introduced by O. Behagel (see also Reszkiewicz 1966, and Rybarkiewicz 1977a, 1977b). According to this theory the longer elements are placed closer to the end of the clause. As a rule pronominal objects are light elements and stand at the beginning of the clause. But if we assume that prepositional pronouns can be regarded as one single unit which forms a "weighty", "heavy" element then it is their structural complexity which induced their transfer to the terminal field of the clause, i.e. postverbal positions in subordinate clauses. A number of pronominal objects were used with such prepositions as *«togeanes»*, *«beforan»*, *«betweox»*, *«ofer»*, *«from»* which made up for the heaviness of the object. And thus the prosodic organization of the language which had a free word order made no restrictions for the transfer of such objects in to the postverbal position. This transfer could also be triggered by the analogy to the use of nominal objects in the same positions which can be observed at the early stages of Old English.

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