THE WORD ORDER IN OLD ENGLISH PROSE AND THE FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE

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The character of the word order in Old English (OE) is fundamentally different from that in Modern English (ModE). Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sequence predominates in ModE and any inversion of that sequence has a more or less clearly marked character. SVO is only one of many possibilities in OE. In fact all six major word order patterns (Greenberg 1966) appear there and it cannot be stated that any one of them is basic or fundamental in relation to the others. The six possibilities are:

SOV — OSV
VSO — VOS
SVO — OVS

The following clauses illustrate it (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; entries 670—836 A. D.):

(1) *Ðeodor biscop hine gehalgode* (SOV)
(2) Buton *twegen hleaperas AElfred kyning sende* mid gewritu (OSV)
(3) Her *nom Beorhtric cyning Offan dohtor E.* (VSO)
(4) *Ða* on morgenne *gehierdun þaet þaes cyninges þegnas* (VOS)
(5) Her *Gotan abraecon Rome burg* (SVO)
(6) Ond *hiene haefde* aer *Offa Miercne cyning* (OVS)

One of the concepts used for explaining the above illustrated variety of possible word orders has been the so-called "heaviness" principle (structural complexity of elements). For OE it is employed in Reszkiewicz (1966) and more recently in Strang (1970).

According to Reszkiewicz it is possible to account for one basic word order in terms of "size, weight, and structural complexity of each element". He distinguishes ten classes of elements labelled from 0 to 9—0 being extra-light element i.e. conjunction; 9 being over-heavy included independent sen-

tence. These classes are progressively more complex; 6, 7, 8, and 9 each consisting of "lighter" elements to form a single complex one.

In ranking the elements there is a departure from the "heaviness" principle in respect to 1, 2, and 5, denoting Subject; initial Verb of the predicate i.e. finite verb; and non-finite part of the predicate, respectively. Thus the criterion here is morphological and is the first exception to the "rule". Although Reszkiewicz indicates the possibility of differentiating pronominal, nominal, and clausal S, by denoting them 1^3, 1^6, 1^8, respectively, he never employs it in the actual analysis. This must leave certain phenomena unexplained as for instance the different placement of S itself in relation to another *morphologically* defined element; viz. 2 (finite verb).

More disadvantageous is the fact that Reszkiewicz labels Objects, in terms of the principle, as 6 if nominal but also as 3 if pronominal. As 3 is sequenced after 2 it becomes impossible to account for the fact that OE pronominal Object regularly appears *before* V (cf. (1) above) in terms of the "heaviness" principle alone and without some extra condition which would explain those sequences 3—2 where 3 is a pronominal Object as *not being deviant from some basic sequence but in agreement with a rule*. This rule cannot be the "heaviness" principle but rather, as shown below, the communicative principle.

Similarly the OE brace construction, requiring that the non-finite part of the predicate should be put at the end of the clause, appears deviant for Reszkiewicz; the sequence 6—5 being naturally deviant in the "heaviness" terms. Nevertheless, the construction is by no means rare in OE and it is only in Late OE that it is yielding ground to the modern placement.

Actually Reszkiewicz (1966:63—69) himself lists eight main causes of "deviations" from his Fundamental Ordering Pattern (FOP) and its expansions; the communicative principle is the first that he mentiones.

FOP is given as:

$$0-1-2-(3)-(4)-(5)-(6)-(7)-(8)-(9)^1$$

and it is "a pattern which, being most common, and least individual, unemphatic, and unmarked, constitutes the model of ordering sentence elements in most clauses" (Reszkiewicz 1966:105).

Maximally expanded FOP assumes the form:

$$(0)-(4)-(3)-(8)-(7)-(6)-(4)-(3)-\begin{Bmatrix}(1)-(3)-(4)-(6)-(7)-(4)--(5)-(2)\\(2)-(3)-(4)-(5)-(6)-(7)--(8)-(1)\end{Bmatrix}-(3)-(4)-(5)-(6)-(6)-(8)-(9)$$

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[1] Where; 0=Conjunction; 1=Subject; 2=Finite verb of the Predicate; 3=Personal pronoun; 4=Adverb; 5=Non-finite verb; 6=Nominal phrase; 7=Prepositional phrase; 8=Subordinate (dependent) clause; 9=Independent clause.

It is clear that FOP will have many "exceptions" where the actual sequence of elements is different and must be accounted for by some other rules. On the other hand, its maximally expanded form is too powerful; it comprises too many possibilities without explicitly accounting for the placement of a given element in the given section of the expanded pattern unless some other additional rule is called for. Generally, it is a descriptive and not an explanatory model. It does not go beyond the statements that some elements appear in some places (unfortunately, too many) without referring to totally different principles (hence the list of "deviations" that Reszkiewicz (1966) makes).

The pattern appearing in Strang (1970: 313) is similar to that in Reszkiewicz (1966):

$$(0)-(1)-2-\frac{\text{Tail}}{\textbf{3...9}}$$

That the elements of OE sentence are placed in a limited agreement with the "heaviness" principle is the result of an interplay of various factors. It is maintained here that the so-called communicative principle or Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) of the Prague School (cf. Firbas 1961, 1964, 1974) better explains the phenomenon of OE word order than the "heaviness" principle. There exists restricted coextensiveness of the two principles. Previously mentioned information with lower degree of Communicative Dynamism (CD) is, according to FSP, placed initially or towards the beginning of the clause. What is new in the process of communication is placed after the given. The order *given—new* (theme—rheme) is characteristic for an unemotive message; a pure statement with no particular stressing of any item either contrastively or to display emotional attitude toward what is being stated (cf. Bolinger 1952). Emotiveness of the message reverses that order i.e. the sequence becomes *new—given* (rheme—theme).[2]

Pronominal forms are usually thematic (unless contrastive). At the same time they classify as light elements when compared with nominal or prepositional phrases. Because of this coextensiveness the position of pronouns in OE is, at least theoretically, equally well accounted for by both the "heaviness" principle and FSP. The coextensiveness of the two is the result of the fact that, generally, longer words appear less often than shorter ones (it was long ago established by Zipf—cf. Zipf 1935); and those longer words normally carry a greater communicative load.[3] They constitute what is new in the

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[2] Cf. also ModE emphatic fronting as in "Out they rushed" or "Many a time has he given me good advice". (Zandvoort 1969:238—239).

[3] It can be seen in the example of a long nominal phrase or even a single noun and a short pronoun which can replace it.

message (FSP) being at the same time heavy in terms of the "heaviness" principle. The other elements remain light and constitute the given.

Still, FSP goes further than the other principle. It explains also those facts which cannot be accounted for in terms of the "weight" of elements. Prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses very often appear at the end of a given string of elements, the fact being properly recorded in FOP. Yet, they also appear initially, and occasionally medially in OE. This placement of heavy elements, though recorded in the expanded form of FOP, can never be explained without referring to "semantic attraction" or some other principle outside the scope of the "heaviness" principle itself (cf. Reszkiewicz 1966). Nevertheless, the initial or medial placement of the phrases like:

(7) þy ilcan geare

   on þissum geare

   on morgenne

is well accounted for by FSP which treats them as thematic in a given context.

The above points to the redundant character of the "heaviness" principle as the investigated phenomena are equally well and too often even better explained by FSP.

For the purposes of this paper a small sample of an OE text (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; entry for 755 A. D.) has been investigated in detail. The following results have been achieved:

Table 1. Unemotive sequences

SO = theme — rheme	OS = theme — rheme	V position conforming to the basic CD (theme — rheme)		V position not conforming to the basic CD
		V rhematic in clauses with no O	V yields final position to a more rhematic element	
15	5	5	4	13

Table 2. Emotive sequences

SO = rheme — theme	OS = rheme — theme	VS emotive sequence (without O or Complem.)
3	1	2

Table 3. General results

Unemotive clauses fully conforming to the basic CD	Unemotive clauses deviating from the basic CD because of		Emotive clauses with rheme — theme structure	Total
	V position	other factors		
13	13	2	6	34

The ratio of emotive to unemotive clauses is 6 : 28 pointing to the informative rather than ornamented and highly literary prose. Nevertheless, out of 28 unemotive clauses only 13 entirely conform to the basic CD sequencing i.e. theme—rheme. They constitute 46,4% of all unemotive and 38,2% of all 34 clauses. Out of 15 unemotive clauses not conforming to theme-rheme sequence 13 deviate from it because of the position of V and only 2 for some other, possibly rhythmic, reasons.

S and *O* major elements, including Predicative Complement *C*, may be said to be *entirely susceptible to FSP in OE prose*. For instance, if OS sequence appears in an unemotive clause (cf. Table 1) O is always thematic and S rhematic, as in (8):

(8) oþ þaet hiene an swan ofstang

On the other hand, if SO appears in an emotive clause, its S is rhematic, being emphasized or contrasted, and its O is thematic—conforming to rheme—theme requirement for emotive clauses — as in (9):

(9) hiera naenig hit gepicgean nolde

The orders OS and CS are not frequent but when they do appear FSP principle stands behind it.

The obvious proof of OE structures being susceptible to FSP requirements is the regular placement of pronominal O before V and nominal O after it:

(10) ond he *hine* ofslog

(11) ond he ofslog *þone aldor mon*

In the first example O is thematic, known, being previously mentioned, and therefore it is placed *before* a more important V. In the second example O — "recipient" of the action exerted by S — becomes the most important item through being mentioned for the first time in the process of communication. It is therefore fully rhematic, new, and V gets in such case only transitional value in terms of communication[4] (cf. also (1) and (5) above).

The above data show that basically there is one single factor that often spoils the FSP sequence in OE; out of 15 deviations from the basic FSP pattern 13 are because of V placement. This behaviour of V in OE is caused by the prevalence of VSO (VOS) and SOV (OSV) patterns in Early OE texts (8th and 9th cc.). In such patterns V will usually spoil the theme — rheme sequence (except for SOV pattern with pronominal O as shown above).

When all three major constituents are present — S, V, O or C — and O is not pronominal the transitional value of V (cf. Firbas 1961; 1965) causes that the most optimal placement for this constituent is in the middle (SVO or OVS patterns). In VSO (VOS), being initial, V will have higher CD value

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[4] On this, cf. Firbas 1965; 1974.

than the adjoining thematic constituent; while in SOV (OSV) it will have lower CD value than the left-adjoining rhematic constituent. We arrive at transition-theme-rheme and theme-rheme-transition respectively; both deviating from the basic CD sequence.

In the sample under investigation out of the nine cases in which V cooperates with FSP requirements there are only four in which V actually conforms to this principle; *all four are SVO (SVC)* and this is believed to be highly significant:

    (12) *oþ he ofslog þone aldormon*

    (13) *he wraec þone aldormon Cumbran*

    (14) *he wolde adraefan anne aeþeling*

    (15) *se Cyneheard waes þaes Sigebryhtes broþur*

For clauses with nominal O which is rhematic, i.e. new, the ordering SVO (and for similar reasons also SVC) is the most optimal sequence in view of FSP requirements. When S is new and O is given FSP will naturally require the reverse order, i.e. OVS (as in (6) above).

The important conclusion seems to be that when either S or O (C) — not both at the same time — is rhematic, *the FSP principle*, while realizing the basic CD distribution of elements in an unemotive declarative clause, *will exert pressure on V constituent*, which has transitional CD value in this case, *to take the medial position.*

In the analysed text from comparatively early period (755 A. D.) clauses with medial V are still comparatively rare. Later texts display the ever growing ratio of such clauses (cf. Carlton 1970: 139—140 for the statistics of VO and OV sequences in OE Charters; also Fries 1940 for similar statistics).

The above data and their interpretation lead the author to a tentative suggestion that *the development of SVO pattern into the predominant word order in ModE was caused*, at least as far as the medial V position is considered, *by the FSP principle active in the OE language*. In claiming this it is assumed that in the majority of actually produced clauses with nominal O it is rather S than O that is thematic (otherwise OVS would have to become predominant). In order to prove this point more extensive statistical data are needed although the short sample which has been analysed fully corroborates this assumption.

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