Reviews


Olga Fischer, Ans van Kemenade, Willem Koopman and Wim van der Wurff, *The Syntax of Early English*


Reviewed by Madoka Murakami, Prefectural University of Kumamoto

1. Introduction

The book under review is a historical survey covering Old and Middle English (OE and ME), written by four Dutch experts on diachronic syntax. It consists of the following nine chapters:

Chapter 1 Language change and grammar change
Chapter 2 An outline of Old English syntax
Chapter 3 An outline of Middle English syntax
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Chapter 4  The Verb-Second constraint and its loss
Chapter 5  The loss of object-verb word order
Chapter 6  Verb-particles in Old and Middle English
Chapter 7  Changes in infinitival constructions
Chapter 8  The history of the ‘easy-to-please’ construction
Chapter 9  Grammaticalization and grammar change

Chapter 1 clarifies the authors’ standpoints in this work. Within Chomsky’s (1995) Principles and Parameters framework (or the Minimalist Program), they pursue the nature and causes of a number of syntactic changes in the history of English. By syntactic change, they mean grammar change of I-language, rather than language change over generations. Observing child language acquisition from this viewpoint, they even capture grammaticalization as a synchronic phenomenon. As Walenski (2001) puts it, they “assert that there are in fact no diachronic processes in language, only successive stages of synchronic grammars.”

Chapters 2 and 3 give a descriptive account of OE and ME syntax respectively, dealing with such issues as morphology and case assignment, word order (especially the choice between SOV or SVO), main clauses (interrogative and negative), and subordinate clauses (relative, complement, and adverbial). Finally in §2.6, it is emphasized that there is no preposition stranding attested in OE, in either passive or wh-movement constructions (except in certain rare cases for the latter). All these data prepare the reader for the theoretical treatment found in the later chapters.

2. Theoretical Issues

Chapter 4 discusses various word orders with respect to the Verb Second (V2) constraint. Assuming OE to be a C-V2 or asymmetric language, the authors place S in Spec,CP and V in C in the typical SV order. In the discussion of other cases such as interrogation, negation, and topicalization, they reveal the clause structure in (1) (their (72) on p. 126) for which they argue throughout the book.

In negatives like (1a), ne(= not) originates in the head of NegP, becoming proclitic on the finite verb (Vf) on the path of V-movement up to C. V raises similarly to C in wh-question (1b) and pa(= then)-construction (1c), while in the case of topic-initial sentences (1d-e), it stops in F position, the maximal projection of which seems to correspond to traditional AgrP. In the authors’ novel claim, however, FP hosts pronouns in Spec,FP, whether subject or object. Nominal subject NPs are located in Spec,TP, hence the difference of word order between (1d) Top VS and (1e) Top SV.
However, the V2 order began to decline in early ME, and disappeared in the seventeenth century. According to the authors, this was because V ceased raising to F, perhaps due to an impoverishment of subject-verb agreement morphology.

In Chapter 5, the authors discuss object positions vis-a-vis verbs, adopting VO instead of OV, as the uniform underlying order for OE shown in (2) (their (47) on p. 155), in the spirit of Kayne's (1994) universal base hypothesis. They account for the following word orders in *best/best (= that*)-clauses by inserting AgrOP onto every VP and moving around NP, V, and even AgrOP.
Sentence (2c) represents its surface as well as its underlying order. When V moves to AgrO, which triggers the raising of object NP into Spec,AgrOP in order to check off its strong N-features, the OV order seen in (2b) results. If the lower AgrOP with nonfinite V (Vnf) further moves into upper Spec,AgrOP, the SO Vnf Vf order like (2a) is obtained. In (2d), the object Saul is raised twice, perhaps due to the lower AgrOP’s inability to check N-features. Assuming that PPs can freely adjoin to AgrOP and VP, this series of movements explains why object NPs, PPs, and bare infinitives may either precede or follow Vf in OE.

Throughout the period of ME, however, surface OV tokens dwindled gradually, becoming unproductive in the fifteenth century, except for certain limited constructions. The authors attribute this shift to the loss of object raising to Spec, AgrOP. As a syntactician engaged in the study of V-movement for the past decade (Murakami 1992), I find this suggestion (p. 176) particularly interesting:

“... the following chain of events: at some point, erosion of verbal agreement led to the V-features of AgrO losing their strength, making overt V-movement impossible, which in turn meant that overt object movement became impossible as well...”
As they admit passim, however, the motivation as to why something does or does not move is not clear or conclusive.

Chapter 6 continues to defend the VO approach concerning particles this time. In OE, the Particle (Prt) overwhelmingly comes before a lexical V, and the authors derive the following orders in (3) (their (37) on p. 198) by resorting to two new maximal projections: one is AgrP containing object and Prt in its specifier and complement respectively, and the other PredicateP (PredP) as Prt’s checking locus.

The sentence in (3c) represents by far the most frequent pattern in OE, with object and Prt raised from the pattern of (3a). (However, why can the Vf *allocoden (= enticed)* stay in situ?) Examples with V coming before Prt as in (3a-b) are few in OE, but they become dominant in ME where V still raises but Prt need not move into Pred for the purpose of feature checking.

Making comparisons between main and subordinate clauses and also between
OE and Dutch, the authors supply abundant data and confirm the distribution showing that Prt separate from V marks the base position of the V in OE in the classic OV analysis. Abandoning that analysis according to which V + Prt arose together under a V node and the Prt never moved, they now claim that strandedness occurs in the following way: Prt is stranded as in (3b) when V-movement applies from immediately below Pred (in which Prt is located). In ME, however, overt movement of Prts is no longer necessary for feature checking, as patterns like (3a) become the norm. Thus, Prt does not indicate the original position of V in ME any more.

Chapter 7 deals with two new to-infinitival constructions which rapidly increased in ME: those of ‘(for) NP to V’ and ‘Accusative and infinitive’ (Acl), along with passive infinitives. The authors argue that the rise of these constructions can be related to the fixation of VO order seen in Chapter 5.

Consider an OE example of the following sort:

(4) leohtr is þam bearum maga swingcela to gepolianne
    lighter is for-children of-kinsmen lashes to suffer
    þonne Godes yrre on to beyrnanne
    than God’s ire to run-into
    ‘it is less painful for children to suffer the lashes of their kinsmen than to incur God’s anger’

In this sentence, the NP maga swingcela is the object of the Vnf gepolianne, but this OV order was replaced with VO in ME, and then the dative NP like þam bearum came adjacent to the infinitive. Furthermore, the reanalysis from (3a) to (3b) happened to make the NP no longer benefactive, hence the start of (for) NP to V.

(5) a. NP V NP [cP [ip PRO to V]] (‘benefactive construction’)
    b. NP V [cP [ip NP to V]] (‘subject construction’)

On the other hand, Acl or ECM sentences like I expect you to be clever developed in ME along with the decline of the following ‘object infinitivals’ which were typical of OE:

(6) a. he sette scole, 7 on þere he let cnihtas læran
    he set-up school and in it he let boys teach
    ‘he set up a school in which he had boys taught’
    b. Moyses forbead swyn to etenne
    Moses forbade pigs to eat
    ‘Moses forbade the eating of pigs’

The structure for (6) is shown in (7) where PROarb is the generic subject of Vnf, and NPo is the object of Vnf:
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(7) NP Vf [PROarb NPo Vnf]

However, these object infinitivals decreased rapidly in the ME period, mainly because of the rigidification of VO order. Other grammar-internal reasons are the loss of case distinctions, and the introduction of passive infinitives first into causatives as in (6a), and spreading then into object-control verbs as in (6b). Analogy and borrowing from Latin are only subsidiary factors; in Dutch, the AcI construction never gained ground in spite of the strong influence from Latin.

Chapter 8 continues to discuss the history of infinitives, with focus on the ‘easy-to-please’ construction. In OE, there are 46 tokens of this construction. For instance:

(8) ælc ehtnys bið earfoðe to þolienne
each persecution is hard to endure
‘every persecution is hard to endure’

Out of the 46, no examples of Preposition (P) stranding are attested. Moreover, this OE construction allows a null subject, suggesting that the subject position has no theta-role just like the passive subject position. Based on these facts, the authors argue that this infinitival construction has properties usually associated with passives, and conclude that what is involved in (8) is NP-movement of ælc ehtnys as in passivization:

(9) ælc ehtnys, bið earfoðe [IP t, [VP to þolienne t]]

Here the NP moved step by step via the inside SpecIP to the top.

But around 1400 in late ME, examples of the ‘easy-to-please’ construction with a stranded P started to appear like these:

(10) þei fonde hit, good and esy to dele wiþ t, also
they found it good and easy to deal with also
‘they found it good and also easy to deal with’

(11) þe gospel, . . . is . . . most esi to wynne heuene by t,
the gospel is most easy to gain heaven by
‘the gospel is easiest to gain heaven by’

The authors ascribe the occurrence of these P-stranded examples to the rise of P stranding in regular passives which began earlier than that in the ‘easy-to-please’ construction.

What now differs from passives, however, is that there are two possible derivations for (10): either conventional NP-movement in (12a) or innovative wh-movement in (12b):

(12) a. hit, esy [IP t, [VP to dele wiþ t]]
b. hit, esy [CP OP, [IP PRO to dele wiþ t]]
On the other hand, the only derivation for (11) is wh-movement, because of the object *heuene* intervening between V and P:

(13) *be gospel, is most esi* [CP OP, [IP PRO to wynne *heuene* by t]]

The authors therefore infer that, after sentences like (11)/(13) arose, the reanalysis from (12a) to (12b) was spurred to the extent that the transition is complete in present-day English.

Chapter 9 treats two specific cases of grammaticalization: semi-auxiliary *have to* and sentential *not*. Although grammaticalization theorists view the process as being semantically driven, the authors insist on its independence of semantic change.

In the case of *have to*, leaving aside factors such as the meaning of NPs and the semantic bleaching of *have* from possession to relation, the fixed VO word order in late ME plays a crucial role in the following series of reanalyses:

(14) a. [NPs have NPo] [OP, PRO to Vnf t] (in OE)
    b. NPs have [NPo [OP, PRO to Vnf t]] (I have my work to do)
    c. NPs have [NPo, PRO to Vnf t]
    d. NPs have to Vnf [NPo] (I have to do my work)

The resulting adjacency of *have* and the infinitive triggered the auxiliarization of *have*.

In their last argument, the authors embody in their NegP format Jespersen's (1917) cyclical development of negation:

(15) i. negation is expressed by one negative marker
    ii. negation is expressed by a negative marker in combination with a negative adverb or noun phrase
    iii. the second element in stage (ii) takes on the function of expressing negation by itself; the original negative marker becomes optional
    iv. the original negative marker becomes extinct

Stage (i) is illustrated by a pattern in *Beowulf*:

(16)

```
   CP
   /---
  Spec  FP
  /---/   /---
 Spec  NegP
    /---
 Spec  ...
    /---
 No  he  ti  ...
     /---
        fleotan meaht
```
When *no* (= *not*) became *ne* in Classical OE, it began to attract Vf, rendering itself proclitic on the Vf. It further weakened to occupy the head of NegP originally. The new specifier *na* then appeared to support it: Jespersen's stage (ii). An example of this stage was discussed earlier in the structure (1a).

In ME, the reinforcing negator is no longer *na*/*no*, but some spelling variant of *not* (*noht*, *noht*, *naubht*, *naubht*, etc). For instance:

\[
\text{(17) } \quad \text{CP} \\
\quad \text{C} \\
\quad \quad \text{Spec} \\
\quad \quad \quad \text{NegP} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Spec} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Neg'} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Neg} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{...} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{ne, seide} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{he} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{noht} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{t,}
\]

The weakening of *ne* went so far as to disappear by the close of ME: Jespersen's negative cycle was completed. The specifier *not* then shifted to become a head of NegP. The authors regard this history of negation as a pure case of morphosyntactic change.

3. Concluding Remarks

Critics such as Millar (2001) and Walenski (2001) have praised this book highly and deservedly; supplied with abundant examples, the authors' argumentation is coherent and persuasive.

It is true that so many heads and specifiers can accommodate the various word orders that occurred in ancient times. It seems to be a good idea to analyze an FP so as to contain pronouns in its specifier, but the authors have yet to explore the properties of head F and explain why the Spec,FP may host both subject and object, checking off their features simultaneously, e.g. (18):

\[
\text{(18) Ne het he us na leornian heofonas to wyrccenne} \\
\text{not ordered he us not learn heavens to make} \\
\text{He did not bid us learn to make the heavens'}
\]

As I am skeptical of any version of the split I system, I would not altogether reject Pintzuk's (1999) double base hypothesis according to which (19a) I-medial IP and (19b) I-final IP coexisted in OE:
I do find most convincing the reanalytical arguments for the 'easy-to-please' construction and the quasi-auxiliary have to.

On the other hand, the authors' argument in Chapter 6 in favor of the existence of PredP is dubious. They do not clarify the features of Prts in OE, nor why the Prts stopped moving in ME. Looking back to (3c) (the full clause is shown in (20)), it seems contradictory to have þæt folc in Spec, AgrOP without raising alloccoden into AgrO, since, according to the authors, V-to-AgrO movement is a prerequisite of NP movement into Spec, AgrOP.

(20) þæt hie mid þæm þæt folc ut alloccoden
    that they with that the people out enticed
    'that they might entice the people with it outside'

Additionally, when they discussed Prt O V word order, which is impossible in the PredP format, the authors were rather evasive, saying that in that case, those particles are actually adverbs. Such arguments as these failed to persuade me of the validity of the concept of multiple functional heads. As the number of heads increases, so too will the number of possible but still implausible analyses.

Although the entire work is worth reading, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 may be reserved for Minimalist proponents. The rest of the book will be appreciated by philologists and generative syntacticians alike. As Millar (2001) concluded, this is a great step towards "a work which married the philological expertise of a scholar such as Bruce Mitchell with post-Chomskian linguistics to produce a summative historical syntax of the English language."

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Danny Fox, *Economy and Semantic Interpretation*

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Much recent work in linguistic theory shares the idea that economy plays a role in determining interpretable outputs in an optimal manner, and that the interpretation given to the output does not bear on economy considerations. The book under review, comprising previously published articles, makes a proposal that significantly departs from this prevailing one. Fox (henceforth, F) regards certain economy principles as sensitive to semantic interpretation, suggesting that economy principles play an important role in determining the form of linguistic structures at the interface with the semantic component.

The book begins with an overview of the author’s framework, and thereafter is divided into two parts: Part I (Chs. 2–4) “Interpretation-Sensitive Economy” handles issues of relative scope and variable binding, and Part II (Chs. 5–6) “Binding Theory and the Representation of Scope” deals with economy considerations of LF reconstruction of A/A’-movement. The analysis is expressed within the minimalist framework, but much of the data he presents will make the book

References


