

**Verb-third in early West Germanic: a comparative  
perspective**

GEORGE WALKDEN

Department of Linguistics and English Language, University of  
Manchester

---

***NB:** This is a post-print version reflecting changes made in the peer review and editing process, but not the publisher's PDF. See <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199687923.do> for further specifics. This article appeared in George Walkden and Theresa Biberauer (eds.), *Syntax over time: lexical, morphological, and information-structural interactions*, 236–248 (Oxford: Oxford University Press). When citing, please use the page numbers given there. The publisher should be contacted for permission to re-use or reprint the material in any form.*

---

ABSTRACT

In this paper I develop an analysis of the alternation between verb-third (V3) and verb-second (V2) in the older West Germanic languages in terms of information-structural considerations. I present the situation in Old English and Old High German as well as new data from Old Saxon, proposing on the basis of this data that there were (at least) two possible left-peripheral targets for verb-movement in Proto-West Germanic, Force<sup>0</sup> and Fin<sup>0</sup>, with information-structural considerations determining the surface constituent order of neutral declarative clauses. Strict V2, under this account, is a more recent development in Old Saxon and later Old High German.

## KEYWORDS

Old Saxon, Old English, Old High German, V2, V3,  
information structure, split CP

### 14.1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the V2/V3 alternation that has often been observed in Old English (OE) main clauses. Some scholars (e.g. Westergaard 2005; Hinterhölzl and Petrova 2009b) have speculated that the V3 pattern resulted from an innovation in Old English. In this paper I present this alternation and my analysis of it, then draw on comparative data from the other early Germanic languages, Old High German (OHG) and the little-studied Old Saxon (OS). It will be argued that the possibility of V3 is more likely to be the result of shared retention than of innovation among these languages. The approach has in common with Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) the idea that information structure is key to understanding the V2/V3 alternation, and that this should be captured in terms of a split CP. However, I call into question their hypothesis (2009b: 325–6) that V2 in OHG arose from reanalysis of V1 orders accompanied by a left-dislocated aboutness topic while V3 in OE/OS arose from reanalysis of V2 orders with initial familiar topic accompanied by a left-dislocated aboutness topic. I argue that this hypothesis is not supported by the data, and

that it is in any case not well founded from the point of view of diachronic methodological parsimony.

Sections 14.2, 14.3, and 14.4 of this paper deal with the clausal left periphery in OE, OHG, and OS respectively, and Section 14.5 sketches a diachronic scenario. Section 14.6 summarizes and concludes.

## 14.2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE LEFT PERIPHERY IN OLD ENGLISH

A first glance at the syntax of OE main clauses ‘suggests a strong parallelism’ between OE and modern Germanic V2 languages such as Dutch and German (van Kemenade 1987: 42). Examples (1)–(3) illustrate this.<sup>1</sup>

(1) We habbað hwæðere þa bysene on halgum bocum  
we have nevertheless the examples in holy books  
‘We have, nevertheless, the examples in holy books’  
(cocathom1,+ACHom\_I,\_31:450.315.6332)

(2) On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes saule  
in two things had God the man’s soul  
gegodod  
endowed  
‘With two things had God endowed man’s soul’

---

<sup>1</sup> References to OE examples are given from the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003).

(cocathom1,+ACHom\_I,\_1:184.161.166)

- (3) Hwi wolde God swa lytles þinges him forwyrnan  
why would God such small thing him deny  
'why would God deny him such a small thing'  
(cocathom1,+ACHom\_I,\_1:181.74.71)

In all of these examples the verb follows the first constituent; in *wh*-questions such as (3), and where an adverb such as *þa* or *þonne* is initial, this pattern is essentially exceptionless (Eythórsson 1995: 293), and it is the majority pattern in main clauses in general. Many scholars have analysed this as uniform leftward verb-movement: to C in the case of van Kemenade (1987) and to Fin<sup>0</sup> in the case of Roberts (1996). However, three alternative patterns exist which cast doubt on the analysis of V2 in OE as parallel to V2 in modern German and Dutch. These are verb-late main clauses (cf. Koopman 1995; Pintzuk and Haerberli 2008), verb-initial main clauses (van Kemenade 1987: 44–5), and verb-third main clauses.<sup>2</sup> The latter pattern, in which two constituents precede the finite verb, as in (4), (5) and (6), is the one which concerns us here.

---

<sup>2</sup> I omit (second and subsequent) conjunct clauses from consideration, since it has often been observed (e.g. Mitchell 1985; Kiparsky 1995) that these appear to pattern with subordinate clauses in constituent order terms.

(4)    æfter his gebede he ahof þæt cild   up  
      after his prayer he lifted the child up  
      ‘After his prayer he lifted the child up’  
      (cocathom2,+ACHom\_II,\_2:14.70.320)

(5)    Fela spella him sægdon þa Beormas  
      Many stories him told     the Permians  
      ‘The Permians told him many stories’  
      (coorosiu,Or\_1:1.14.27.243)

(6)    Nu se rica mann ne mæg her habban ...  
      Now the rich man NEG can here have ...  
      ‘Now the rich man cannot here have ...’  
      (coaelive,+ALS[Ash\_Wed]:110.2758)

Where the subject is pronominal, as in (4), it almost invariably precedes the verb in main clauses (Haeberli 1999b: 335). Van Kemenade (1987: 138–40) was aware of such examples, in which the second-position constituent is a subject, and argued that an asymmetry between pronominal and non-pronominal subjects arose because the former were clitics. Pintzuk (1999) took a similar line, in the process noting that examples such as (5) existed in which the object appeared to be proclitic. The existence of examples such as (6) was first brought to light in generative research by Allen (1990: 150–151), and their

relative prevalence was established by Haeberli (2002), who found that subject-verb non-inversion (i.e. V3) occurred 188 times (28.7% of the time) in a small corpus of 654 clauses with full subjects in second position and a fronted constituent in initial position, taken from ten text samples. The clitic analysis is rendered extremely problematic by the existence of such examples, which indicate that another explanation must be sought for V3 in OE: as Bech (2001: 98) puts it, ‘the fact that one fifth of the subjects in the [XP-V<sub>fin</sub>-subject] pattern cannot be clitics, but nevertheless occur in exactly the same position as the clitic elements, can hardly be overlooked’. Koopman (1997) provides further general arguments against a clitic analysis of OE pronouns.

Bech (2001), Westergaard (2005), van Kemenade and Los (2006), Walkden (2009) and Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) suggest that the factor unifying examples such as (4)–(6) is that the elements in second position are all discourse-given; Westergaard (2005) and Westergaard and Vangsnes (2005) present a close parallel from a recent synchronic study of Tromsø Norwegian. If this information-structural approach is correct, then analyses such as those of Pintzuk (1999) or Fuß (2003), positing V-to-T<sup>0</sup>-movement and variation in whether the subject moves to SpecTP, are unenlightening with regard to V3 unless additions are made. Walkden (2009: 60) and Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b: 324) proceed to formalize the

information-structural patterns in terms of the cartography of the split CP in the tradition of Rizzi (1997). Here I will base my analysis on the more nuanced split-CP hierarchy presented in (7), from Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007), following Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b).

- (7) ForceP > ShiftP > ContrP > FocP > FamP\* > FinP  
(Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007: 22; their (37))

It is assumed that movement of constituents to these left-peripheral positions in OE is relatively unconstrained. Following Aboh (2008) and Cruschina (2009), I take information-structural features to be present in the syntax, added in the numeration; the element bearing these features must then enter into an Agree relation with a left-peripheral head. Where the probing features are associated with a movement-triggering feature, an EPP-feature in the sense of Chomsky (2000, 2001) or a generalized movement-triggering feature  $\wedge$  in the sense of Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014), the lower element must move into the relevant specifier position.

Multiple landing sites for the finite verb are needed; I hypothesize that these are (at a minimum) Force<sup>0</sup> and Fin<sup>0</sup> (cf. also Roberts 1996). I assume that in OE, Force<sup>0</sup> always requires a constituent to be merged in its specifier. This may be satisfied

by internal Merge of a high frontable constituent, corresponding to the Stylistic Fronting posited by Fanselow (2003) for modern German. The relevant feature can be conceptualized in the movement typology of Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (2014) as  $\hat{\text{E}}$  associated with an Edge Feature; cf. Rizzi 2005 for the suggestion that  $\text{Force}^0$  is universally a phase head. Alternatively, a discourse-related adverb (*þa*, *þonne* ‘then’) or a null discourse-continuity operator may be first Merged in SpecForceP. In cases where the feature is satisfied by external Merge, the finite verb moves to  $\text{Force}^0$  (I remain neutral concerning the exact mechanism of head-movement). This accounts for the consistently V2 nature of clauses introduced by *þa*, *þonne* ‘then’, and also for verb-initial main clauses. The latter have been argued to have the specific illocutionary value of expressing/recounting (M. Reis 2000a, 2000b), a property which seems to carry over to the older Germanic languages, where this pattern is referred to as ‘Narrative Inversion’ (cf. e.g. Sigurðsson 1993 on Old Norse).

In neutral declarative contexts, on the other hand, the verb moves as far as  $\text{Fin}^0$  but no further, with other elements able to move past it into the left periphery of the clause. Crucially, familiar topics, which represent given information, may move to SpecFamP. An analysis of V3 in these terms immediately explains the high prevalence of subject pronouns in SpecFamP, since unstressed subject pronouns are ‘the



canonical instance of a given nominal' (Westergaard and Vangsnes 2005: 137). As FamP may be recursive, as indicated by the Kleene star, sequences where multiple personal pronouns precede the verb such as those discussed by Koopman (1992) can be accounted for unproblematically. (8) and (9) illustrate OE declarative clauses with verb-movement to  $\text{Fin}^0$  and given and new subjects respectively, abstracting away from irrelevant levels of structure.

(8) [ForceP [*æfter his gebede*]  $\emptyset$  [FamP [*he*] [FinP *ahof*[ ... ]]]]  
           after his prayer                   he           lifted ...

(9) [ForceP [*On twam þingum*]  $\emptyset$  [FinP *hæfde* [TP [*God*] ... ]]]  
           in two things                   had           God ...

One problem with this approach (and that of Hinterhölzl and Petrova 2009b) is that, all other things being equal, one would predict verb-movement to  $\text{Fin}^0$  to occur in subordinate clauses, since the classic observation that the complementizer and the finite verb are in complementary distribution (e.g. den Besten 1977; Evers 1981, 1982) can only be used to account for the absence of verb-movement to  $\text{Force}^0$  in subordinate clauses under this analysis. Roberts (1996: 160) proposes that complementizers in OE are first Merged in  $\text{Fin}^0$ , thus blocking verb-movement. The complementizer then moves to  $\text{Force}^0$

because ‘the selected Force of embedded contexts requires PF-realisation’ (1996: 160). While this account solves the technical problem, the PF-realization requirement is no more than a stipulation, and the account also faces learnability problems: how is the acquirer to discern the first-Merge position of the complementizer? In the framework of Roberts and Roussou (2003) and van Gelderen (2004), one might expect it to “grammaticalize” upwards by eliminating the movement and treating Force<sup>0</sup> as its first merged position, but this would give the wrong result for OE. Nevertheless, I will adopt this proposal, since I have no better answer to this problem at present.

### 14.3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE LEFT PERIPHERY IN OLD HIGH GERMAN

In this section I broaden the picture by introducing data from a second early West Germanic language, Old High German. Much of the data is drawn from Tomaselli (1995) and Axel (2007), although the analysis I develop is closer to that of Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b). Since many of the relevant facts about OHG are the same as for OE, this section will be briefer than the preceding one.

It has long been observed that OHG exhibits a variant of the V2 property that is fairly well established (e.g. H. Reis 1901). Lippert (1974) counts 280 of 380 main declarative

clause examples in *Isidor* as verb-second (73.6%), with the rest classifiable ‘into a relatively small number of easily distinguishable and clearly describable types’ (Axel 2007: 63). Examples of subject-initial and non-subject-initial verb-second are in (10) and (11).

(10) der antichristo stet pi demo altfiant  
the antichrist stands with the old.fiend  
‘The Antichrist stands with the devil’  
(*Muspilli* 44)

(11) pidiu scal er in deru uuicsteti uunt piuallan  
thus shall he in the battlefield wounded fall  
‘Thus he shall fall, wounded, on the battlefield’  
(*Muspilli* 46)

However, there are also a number of cases of verb-third main clauses in OHG, first brought to light by Tomaselli (1995):

(12) erino portun ih firchnussu  
iron portals I destroy  
‘I destroy iron portals’  
(*Isidor* 157)

- (13) Dhes martyrunga endi dodh uuir findemes mit  
his martyrdom and death we demonstrate with  
urchundin dhes heilegin chiscribes  
evidence of the holy writings  
'We demonstrate his martyrdom and his death with  
evidence from the Holy Writings'  
(*Isidor* 516)

Tomaselli argues that subject pronouns are the only elements found in this position (1995: 348). Furthermore, she claims that V3 clauses are only found in the *Isidor* translation and in the Monsee Fragments; later texts largely do not contain this type of clause. As Axel (2007: 239) points out, these are dated earlier than most OHG prose texts.

Tomaselli's first claim appears to be falsified, at least on the surface, by clauses such as (14) (from Axel 2007: 239):

- (14) forlazan imo uuir dit  
forgiven him becomes  
'he will be forgiven'  
(Monsee Fragments 6,9)

On the basis of Tomaselli's second claim, Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) state that V3 in OHG constituted 'a very rare declining pattern' (2009b: 316), later implying that such

clauses are grammatical only in OE and OS: ‘depending on whether the subject is given or represents new information we find V3- or V2-clauses in the former two languages [OE and OS—GW]’ (2009: 324). This has implications for their diachronic analysis, to which I shall return in Section 14.5.

Unfortunately, Axel (2007) provides little unambiguous data on non-pronominal elements that may occur in second position, other than a few examples with adverbs:

- (15) siu tho giuuantu sih  
she then turned REFL  
‘she then turned herself’  
(*Tatian* 665,19)

She argues that ‘there is no compelling evidence that more than one XP can move to the left periphery in OHG’ (2007: 249–50), but also that the reduction of XP-positions in the left periphery was not yet fully completed in earlier OHG (2007: 202), and that ‘XP-pron-V<sub>fin</sub>-sequences were a native and at least partially productive pattern in earlier OHG’ (2007: 248), in contrast to Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b). Axel adduces considerable evidence for this, including the fact that pronouns are often inserted in this position counter to the source text in translations (2007: 248). She also demonstrates that such examples cannot be written off as instances of verb-late order

(pace Lenerz 1984), since further pronouns may follow the verb, which they may never do in ordinary verb-late clauses:

- (16) Vnde do iu habeta si leid in-fangen in  
and then you.DAT.PL had she sorrow received in  
iro herzen  
her heart  
'and then her heart was filled with sorrow for you'  
(N Ps VII 23, 26)

She also demonstrates that there is no compelling evidence that these pronouns are  $X^0$ -clitics in OHG as suggested by van Kemenade (1987) for OE and Tomaselli (1995) for OHG; rather, they should be analysed as full XP elements (2007: 277), even if phonologically clitics. This does raise the question of why other XP elements did not move to this position (if indeed they did not), and what the trigger for the movement is; Axel states that it is simply optional (2007: 277).

Other than the absence of evidence for full XP movement to the left of the finite verb, the situation in early OHG, at least, seems fully compatible with the hypotheses about clause structure advanced for OE in Section 14.2, namely that second-position pronouns and adverbs are familiar topics in SpecFamP. This similarity of analysis is not unusual in the literature: Eythórsson (1995: 324–330), for example, explicitly

assumes syntactic identity between OHG, OS, and OE in verb placement in main clauses, at least to a first approximation.

There is no need to assume with Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) that OHG differed substantially from OE in this regard. However, it is true that the movement of subject pronouns to SpecFamP appears to be optional in those OHG texts in which it occurs at all, whereas it is virtually obligatory in OE (Haerberli 1999b: 335). Furthermore, as Axel (2007: 244–5) demonstrates, in early OHG texts pronouns may intervene between *wh*-elements and the finite verb. While this pattern is usually assumed to be ungrammatical in OE (e.g. van Kemenade 1987: 196), it seems that in OHG *wh*-questions do not behave differently from other main clauses. These more nuanced differences will undoubtedly reward future research.

#### 14.4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE LEFT PERIPHERY IN OLD SAXON

Along with OE and OHG, OS is one of only three West Germanic languages to have a textual tradition dating back to the first millennium AD. Two main texts exist from this period: the *Heliand*, a gospel harmony written in alliterative verse of 5,968 lines, and fragments of a version of the Genesis story, also in verse. Both can be dated to the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Given the antiquity of these texts, it is surprising that, in comparison to the vast amount of work dealing with the constituent order and clause structure of OE, OS has rarely been given any serious attention, a lack noted elsewhere in the literature (e.g. by Linde 2009: 366). For the most part, traditional philological works on syntax (e.g. Behaghel 1897) and grammars in the philological tradition (e.g. Gallée and Tiefenbach 1993) have had nothing to say about OS clause structure, and the extensive survey of verb position in the early Germanic languages by Eythórsson (1995) only mentions OS in passing. The only book-length study is Ries (1880), which due to its antiquity is useful only as a point of departure for the modern linguist. Rauch (1992), Erickson (1997), and Linde (2009) also discuss constituent order, but without going into particular detail.

My own data consist of an exhaustive sample of the finite clauses in the *Heliand*, using the Behaghel and Taeger (1996) edition. Clauses were manually tagged for clause-type (main, conjunct, subordinate, relative, *wh*-question, yes-no question, imperative), and for verb position (initial, second, or late), as well as for two other features: the negation morpheme *ni/ne* proclitic to the finite verb, and absence of overt subject.

Of the finite clauses in my corpus, 2,348 were analysed as (non-conjunct) main clauses. As with OE and OHG, a variety of surface orderings are visible: however, these fall into



a limited number of types. As observed by Erickson (1997), V2 seems to be the dominant pattern in OS as it is in OE and OHG.

A total of 1,597 of the 2,348 main clauses in my corpus

(68.0%) had the verb in second position, as in (17).

(17) Mattheus uuas he hetan

Matthew was he called

‘He was called Matthew’

(*Heliand* 1192)

A further 481 clauses (20.5%) are verb-initial. Only 270

clauses (11.5%) have the verb in a position later than second.

This is similar to OE and OHG: Koopman (1995), for example,

finds for a variety of Old English texts that the frequency of

verb-final main clauses is between 0.6% and 6.1%, and

Cichosz (2010: 73–4) finds that between 10.7% and 16.5% of

main clauses in OE, and between 1.2% and 10.7% of main

clauses in OHG, have the verb in a position later than second.

Some unambiguous examples of verb-late order are given in

(18)–(20):

(18) Ic eu an uatara scal / gidopean diurlico

I you in water shall baptize tenderly

‘I shall baptize you tenderly in water’

(*Heliand* 882–3)

(19) Krist im forð giuuet / an Galileo land  
Christ REFL forth went into Galilee land  
'Christ went forth into the land of Galilee'  
(*Heliand* 1134–5)

(20) Ic is engil bium  
I his angel am  
'I am his angel'  
(*Heliand* 99)

Crucially, verb-third as found in OE and early OHG, in which the pre-finite element is given information, does not appear to be a productive pattern in OS. I can only find four examples of this order occurring with a personal pronoun subject in my corpus; two of these are given in (21) and (22).

(21) Thanna thu scalt lon nemen / fora godes ogun  
then you shall reward take before God's eyes  
'Then you shall be rewarded before God'  
(*Heliand* 1563–4)

(22) Bethiu man sculun / haldan thene holdlico  
therefore one should hold him favourably  
'Therefore all should keep him in their favour'

*(Heliand 1869–70)*

Both of these clauses begin with adverbs that may also serve as adverbial subordinators, rendering them potentially ambiguous between main and embedded clauses, although they are traditionally read as the former. More tellingly, since no adverbs are present as diagnostics for verb-movement to the left periphery rather than solely to  $v^0$  (cf. Fuß and Trips 2002), neither is an unambiguous example of V3 with verb-movement to  $\text{Fin}^0$  as found in OHG and OE.

Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b: 320) suggest that (23) (their (12)a) is an example of V3 with verb movement as in OE.

- (23) Thar imu tegegnas quam en idis    fan    adrom  
there him against came a woman from different  
thiodun  
tribe  
‘There, a woman from another tribe approached him’  
*(Heliand 2984)*

However, this example is as inconclusive as (21) and (22) with regard to underlying structure. Since extraposition and heavy NP shift must be postulated for OS as for OE, it is possible to argue that the verb in (23) is unmoved and that the postverbal

constituent *en idis fan adrom thiodun* ‘a woman from another tribe’ has in fact been moved rightward over it. Since this constituent represents new information—as acknowledged by Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b: 320)—this state of affairs is all the more likely, as rightward movement (at least in OE) appears to be driven by information-structural considerations (Pintzuk 2005: 124, n. 12; Taylor and Pintzuk 2009). Furthermore, as for (21) and (22), in context it is entirely possible to analyse (23) as an embedded clause with the meaning ‘where a woman from another tribe approached him’.

The extreme rarity of this order in my corpus must also be taken as an argument against its productivity. For OE, the order XP-SubjPron-V<sub>fin</sub> is ‘used consistently’ (Haeberli 1999b: 335) when an element other than *þa*, *þonne* ‘then’ or a wh-phrase is fronted. In the *Heliand*, by contrast, there are 462 examples of V2 declarative main clauses in which the subject pronoun follows the finite verb, e.g. (24) and (25), and 223 examples of V2 declarative main clauses in which the subject pronoun precedes the finite verb. All of these can be seen as ‘missed opportunities’ (Faarlund 1990: 17–18) for V3.

- (24) mildi uuas he im an is mode  
 mild was he them in his mood  
 ‘He was gentle in spirit to them’  
 (*Heliand* 1259)

(25) Thar fundun sea enna godan man  
there found they a good man  
'There they found a good man'  
(*Heliand* 463)

I therefore conclude that V3 as found in OE and early OHG, with a familiar topic in second position preceding the finite verb, is not a productive feature of OS, or at least of the variety represented by the *Heliand*. Rather, V2 appears to be generalized in main clauses in OS much as it is in later OHG, modulo the V1 and rare verb-late patterns, which OE and OHG also exhibit.

#### 14.5. MAIN CLAUSES IN PROTO-WEST GERMANIC: A DIACHRONIC SCENARIO

Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) assume that V3 clauses were the product of a single innovation in pre-OE/OS, and that a different change took place in OHG. The diachronic scenario they posit is as illustrated in (26) (their (28)) for OE and OS, and (27) (their (27)) for OHG.

- (26) a. Stage I: (topic +non-V1)  
 [Aboutness] [<sub>ForceP</sub> (familiar topic) [<sub>TP...V<sub>fin</sub>...</sub>]]
- b. Stage II:  
 [<sub>ForceP</sub> [Aboutness] (familiar topic) [<sub>TP...V<sub>fin</sub>...</sub>]]
- c. Stage III:  
 [<sub>ForceP</sub> [Aboutness]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Subject V<sub>fin</sub> t<sub>i</sub>] ...]

- (27) a. Stage I: (topic + V1)  
 [Aboutness] [<sub>ForceP</sub> V<sub>fin</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ...]]
- b. Stage II:  
 [<sub>ForceP</sub> [Aboutness] V<sub>fin</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ...]]
- c. Stage III:  
 [<sub>ForceP</sub> [Aboutness]<sub>i</sub> V<sub>fin</sub> [t<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ...]]]

In other words, they posit that OE and OS underwent a process of reanalysis that caused clause-external aboutness topics to be integrated into a clause with a clause-internal, TP-external familiar topic (26a–b). In OHG, on the other hand, this clause-external aboutness topic is integrated instead into a clause in which initial position is occupied by the finite verb (27a–b). These topics are then reanalysed as originating inside the clause (26b–c,) (27b–c). V3 as a syntactic possibility in OE and OS thus results from the innovation in (26a–b).

Hinterhölzl and Petrova's (2009b) general approach is appealing in many respects, since they offer a detailed

consideration of the interaction between information structure and constituent order which makes nuanced predictions; furthermore, they attempt to account for a wide range of data. However, the specifics of their diachronic proposal are unsatisfactory for a number of reasons, both empirical and theoretical. For a start, Hinterhölzl and Petrova are incorrect in asserting (2009b: 324) that in OS ‘clauses expressing subordinating discourse relations [topic-comment structures—GW] pattern with OE rather than with OHG’ in exhibiting V3; as I have shown in Section 14.4, XP-V<sub>fin</sub>-SubjPron rather than XP-SubjPron-V<sub>fin</sub> is almost ubiquitous in the *Heliand*, and there is no clear evidence that clauses in which the verb has moved from its first-Merged position into the left periphery as in Old English, but in which a constituent still intervenes between it and an XP in initial position, are possible at all in OS. Of course, our data on the language is limited, and it could be that the non-occurrence of such clauses is coincidental: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However, at the very least the prevalence of XP-V<sub>fin</sub>-SubjPron is an argument against treating OS and OE as identical in this regard.

Hinterhölzl and Petrova’s reanalysis schema in (27) for OHG also cannot account for the fact (mentioned in passing earlier in their paper, 2009b: 316) that V3 orders do exist in this language, as clearly demonstrated by Axel (2007); see Section 14.3. Hinterhölzl and Petrova would either have to argue that

the unequivocal examples of this kind (such as (16)) are ungrammatical, which seems unlikely, or that V3 in Old High German is in fact the product of a similar innovation to that which took place in OE.

There are also a few conceptual problems with this analysis. The schemata in (26) and (27) make numerous assumptions about the syntax of earlier stages of the languages in question. For instance, in order for (26a) to be possible, Proto-West Germanic (or just Proto-Ingvaeonic) would have had to allow clause-internal preverbal familiar topics, suggesting that a V2 pattern, of a kind, was already possible. But for (27a) to be possible, Proto-West Germanic (or at least prehistoric OHG) would have had to allow verb-initial clauses with verb-movement to Force<sup>0</sup>. Hinterhölzl and Petrova's analysis thus either requires both V1 and V2 to have been possibilities in Proto-West Germanic, a state of affairs which they do not support with diachronic argumentation, or requires extra changes, which they do not discuss, to have taken place between Proto-West Germanic and the individual prehistoric OHG/OS/OE languages. Furthermore, evidence for stages a) and b) in their schemata is lacking, as they acknowledge in a footnote (2009: n. 7). Finally, Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b) motivate neither of the changes that they propose as initiating the reanalysis chains: why would the reanalysis involve a



clause with a familiar topic for OE/OS acquirers only, and a verb-initial clause for OHG acquirers only?

The alternative I will pursue here is simpler, in that it only involves a single change: the reanalysis of ambiguous SubjPron- $V_{fin}$ -... clauses as involving verb-movement to Force<sup>0</sup> rather than to Fin<sup>0</sup> in early Old Saxon. In terms of the analysis in Section 14.2, I am proposing that the system involving multiple targets of verb-movement, Fin<sup>0</sup> and Force<sup>0</sup>, as found in OE and early OHG, was the original one, and the change that occurred in OS was the generalization of verb-movement to Force<sup>0</sup>. The only plausible alternative is to assume that the change happened in reverse in OE and OHG, which is not as diachronically parsimonious: the well-established family tree structure of West Germanic, in which OE and OS (together with the later-attested Old Frisian and Dutch) are often assumed to form a North Sea Germanic or Ingvaeonic subgroup to the exclusion of OHG,<sup>3</sup> prevents one from positing that these two languages shared an innovation, and so one would need to posit two separate (but parallel) identical innovations. Contact

---

<sup>3</sup> This hypothesis is not uncontroversial; however, the debate centres around the affiliation of OS, which shares certain features with OHG that the two do not share with OE (see Nielsen 2000 for discussion). For our purposes it is important simply to note that OS can be considered phylogenetically and geographically intermediate between OE and OHG. No one, to my knowledge, has proposed a subgrouping associating OE and OHG with each other to the exclusion of OS.

is also not a likely explanation, since OE and OHG occupied areas of the West Germanic dialect continuum that were not geographically contiguous, with the OS-speaking area between them. By contrast, the generalization of verb-movement to Force<sup>0</sup>, and hence of V2, in OS and later OHG could plausibly have spread as a single wave of diffusion across the Continental West Germanic area.

I can only speculate as to why V2 became generalized in OS and later OHG but not OE. One possibility is to link this generalization to another syntactic difference between these languages, namely the possibility/prevalence of null arguments. In OE the possibility of leaving arguments unexpressed “occurs (or survives) only spasmodically” (Mitchell 1985: 633; cf. also Pogatscher 1901; van Gelderen 2000: ch. 3; Walkden 2014: ch. 5). OHG, on the other hand, seems to allow null arguments more liberally (cf. Axel 2007: ch. 6), and this possibility also exists in OS. Since the second position element in OE and OHG V3 clauses is most often a given subject, and since given subjects are the most likely elements to remain unexpressed if the grammar of the language sanctions null arguments at all, the evidence available to the acquirer for V3 in OS may simply have dropped below a critical level at some point in the language’s prehistory, at which point internal pressures may have intervened to trigger verb-movement to Force<sup>0</sup> and thus generalized V2. Detailed comparative work on null arguments

in early Germanic is in its infancy (though see Rosenkvist 2009 for an early summary, and Walkden 2014: ch. 5); if it can be established that null arguments were significantly more common in OHG and OS than in OE, it may be plausible to posit a causal nexus, though such a change would have to have taken place before the onset of the textual record, rendering the claim difficult to assess.

Several further, language-specific changes must be posited in order to capture the intricacies of the data. For instance, V2 must have become generalized in OE *wh*-questions, since both in OHG (Axel 2007: 244–5) and Gothic (Eythórsson 1995: 25) pronouns were able to intervene between *wh*-elements and the finite verb.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, if it is the case that only pronouns and not full XP topics could intervene between the initial XP and the finite verb in OHG, then an explanation for this qualitative difference as compared with OE is required. Detailed consideration of these questions is beyond the scope of this chapter.

---

<sup>4</sup> Fuß (2003: 199) argues that all such cases in Gothic are word-for-word translations of the Greek *Vorlage* and ‘do not tell us anything about the syntax of Gothic’. This is problematic in that we must assume that these examples are fully ungrammatical in Gothic if we do not wish to posit this pattern as a native one; furthermore, the existence of an identical pattern in OHG, in which the order does not follow the Latin original, suggests that we are dealing with a shared retention here.

To summarize: under the scenario sketched here, Proto-West Germanic had generalized V2/V3, i.e. verb-movement to Fin<sup>0</sup> and no further, in ordinary declarative clauses, with the surface occurrence of V2 or V3 depending on the information-structural status of clausal constituents.

#### 14.6. CONCLUSION

In Sections 14.2, 14.3, and 14.4 I showed that the syntax of OE, OHG, and OS with respect to verb placement in neutral declarative main clauses was extremely similar, but that differences existed, primarily in the frequency of occurrence of V3 clauses: these are extremely common and apparently the default pattern in certain contexts in OE, rare but still abundantly attested in OHG, and, crucially, nonexistent in my corpus of OS. The alternation between V2 and V3 in OE was shown to be information-structurally conditioned. I developed a (partial) feature-based analysis of the relevant movements within a cartographic framework in which information-structural features are present in the syntax, based on Walkden (2009), Axel (2007) and Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b), and argued that OS differed from OE and early OHG in that it had generalized V-to-Force<sup>0</sup> movement.

Using the data and analysis from these sections I then outlined a diachronic scenario whereby OS (and later OHG) lost the possibility of V3 and generalized V-to-Force<sup>0</sup>

movement. Such a scenario was shown to be preferable to that of Hinterhölzl and Petrova (2009b), an account which faces certain empirical and conceptual problems discussed in detail in Section 14.5.

If my account is along the right lines, some light is shed not only on the syntactic properties of the early West Germanic languages but also on those of unattested stages of the Germanic family tree.

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

Behaghel, Otto, and Burkhard Taeger. 1996. *Heliand und Genesis*, 10th edn. Halle: Max Niemeyer.

#### REFERENCES

- Aboh, Enoch. 2008. Information structuring begins with the numeration. Ms., University of Amsterdam.  
lingBuzz/000712.
- Allen, Cynthia. 1990. Review of van Kemenade (1987).  
*Language* 66, 146–152.
- Axel, Katrin. 2007. *Studies on Old High German syntax: left sentence periphery, verb placement and verb-second*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bech, Kristin. 2001. Word order patterns in Old and Middle English: a syntactic and pragmatic study. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Bergen.

- Behaghel, Otto. 1897. *Die Syntax des Heliand*. Vienna:  
Tempusky.
- Besten, Hans den. 1977. On the Interaction of Root  
Transformations and Lexical Deletive Verbs. Ms.,  
University of Amsterdam.
- Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, and Ian Roberts. 2014.  
A syntactic universal and its consequences. *Linguistic  
Inquiry* 45, 169–225.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2000. Minimalist inquiries: the framework.  
In Roger Martin, David Michaels and Juan Uriagereka  
(eds), *Step by step. Essays on Minimalist Syntax in  
honor of Howard Lasnik*, 89–156. Cambridge, MA:  
MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In Michael  
Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: a life in language*, 1–52.  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cichosz, Anna. 2010. *The influence of text type on word order  
of old Germanic languages: a corpus-based contrastive  
study of Old English and Old High German*. Frankfurt:  
Peter Lang.
- Cruschina, Silvio. 2009. The syntactic role of discourse-related  
features. *Cambridge Occasional Papers in Linguistics*  
5, 15–30.
- Erickson, Jon. 1997. Some observations on word order in Old  
Saxon. In Christa Dürscheid, Karl Heinz Ramers and

- Monika Schwarz (eds.), *Sprache im Fokus: Festschrift für Heinz Vater zum 65. Geburtstag*, 95–105. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Evers, Arnold. 1981. Verb-second movement rules. *Wiener Linguistische Gazette* 26, 15–34.
- Evers, Arnold. 1982. Twee functionele principes voor de regel ‘Verschuif het Werkwoord’. *Glott* 1, 11–30.
- Eythórsson, Thorhallur. 1995. Verbal syntax in the early Germanic languages. Ph.D. dissertation. Cornell University.
- Faarlund, Jan Terje. 1990. *Syntactic change: towards a theory of historical syntax*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Fanselow, Gisbert. 2003. Münchhausen-style head movement and the analysis of verb-second. In Anoop Mahajan (ed.), *Syntax at sunset: head movement and syntactic theory*, 40–76. UCLA Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Frascarelli, Mara, and Roland Hinterhölzl. 2007. Types of topics in German and Italian. In Kerstin Schwabe and Susanne Winkler (eds.), *On information structure, meaning and form: generalizations across languages*, 87–116. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fuß, Eric. 2003. On the historical core of V2 in Germanic. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 26, 195–231.
- Fuß, Eric, and Carola Trips. 2002. Variation and change in Old and Middle English: on the validity of the Double Base

- Hypothesis. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 4, 171–224.
- Gallée, Johan Hendrik, and Ingrid Tiefenbach. 1993. *Altsächsische Grammatik*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2000. *A history of English reflexive pronouns: person, self, and interpretability*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gelderen, Elly van. 2004. *Grammaticalization as economy*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Haeberli, Eric. 1999b. Features, categories and the syntax of A-positions. PhD dissertation. University of Geneva.
- Haeberli, Eric. 2002. Inflectional morphology and the loss of V2 in English. In David Lightfoot (ed.), *Syntactic effects of morphological change*, 88–106. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hinterhölzl, Roland, and Svetlana Petrova. 2009b. From V1 to V2 in West Germanic. *Lingua* 120, 315–328.
- Kemenade, Ans van. 1987. *Syntactic case and morphological case in the history of English*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Kemenade, Ans van, and Bettelou Los. 2006. Discourse adverbs and clausal syntax in Old and Middle English. In Ans van Kemenade and Bettelou Los (eds.), *The handbook of the history of English*, 224–248. Blackwell: Malden, MA and Oxford.



- Kiparsky, Paul. 1995. Indo-European origins of Germanic syntax. In Adrian Batty and Ian Roberts (eds.), *Clause structure and language change*, 140–169. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Koopman, Willem. 1992. Old English pronouns: some remarks. In Fran Colman (ed.), *Evidence for Old English*, 44–87. Edinburgh: John Donald.
- Koopman, Willem. 1995. Verb-final main clauses in Old English prose. *Studia Neophilologica* 67, 129–44.
- Koopman, Willem. 1997. Another look at clitics in Old English. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 95, 73–93.
- Lenerz, Jürgen. 1984. *Syntaktischer Wandel und Grammatiktheorie. Eine Untersuchung an Beispielen aus der Sprachgeschichte des Deutschen*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Linde, Sonja. 2009. Aspects of word order and information structure in Old Saxon. In Roland Hinterhölzl and Svetlana Petrova (eds.), *Information structure and language change: New approaches to word order variation in Germanic*, 367–389. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lippert, Jörg. 1974. *Beiträge zur Technik und Syntax althochdeutscher Übersetzungen unter besonderer*

*Berücksichtigung der Isidorgruppe und des  
althochdeutschen Tatian.* Munich: Fink.

Mitchell, Bruce. 1985. *Old English syntax.* 2 vols. Oxford:  
Clarendon.

Nielsen, Hans Frede. 2000. Ingwäonisch. In Johannes Hoops,  
Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich and Heiko Steuer  
(eds.), *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*,  
2nd edn., vol. 15, 432–438. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Pintzuk, Susan. 1999. *Phrase structures in competition:  
Variation and change in Old English word order.* New  
York: Garland.

Pintzuk, Susan. 2005. Arguments against a universal base:  
evidence from Old English. *English Language and  
Linguistics* 9, 115–138.

Pintzuk, Susan, and Eric Haeberli. 2008. Structural variation in  
Old English root clauses. *Language Variation and  
Change* 20, 367–407.

Pogatscher, Alois. 1901. Unausgedrücktes Subject im  
Altenglischen. *Anglia* 23, 261–301.

Rauch, Irmengard. 1992. *The Old Saxon language: Grammar,  
epic narrative, linguistic interference.* New York: Peter  
Lang.

Reis, Hans. 1901. Über althochdeutsche Wortfolge. *Zeitschrift  
für deutsche Philologie* 33, 212–238, 330–349.

- Reis, Marga. 2000a. Anmerkung zu Verb-erst-Satz-Typen im Deutschen. In Rolf Thieroff, Matthias Tamrat, Nanna Furhop and Oliver Teuber (eds.), *Deutsche Grammatik in Theorie und Praxis*, 215–227. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Reis, Marga. 2000b. Review: O. Önnersfors: Verb-erst-Deklarativsätze. Grammatik und Pragmatik. *Studia Linguistica* 54, 90–100.
- Ries, John. 1880. *Die Stellung von Subject und Prädicatsverbum im Héliand*. Strasbourg/London: Karl J. Trübner.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In Liliane Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*, 281–337. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 2005. Grammatically-based target-inconsistencies in child language. In Kamil Ud Deen, Jun Nomura, Barbara Schulz and Bonnie D. Schwartz (eds.), *The Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference on Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition North America (GALANA)*, 19–49. Cambridge, MA: UCONN/MIT Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Roberts, Ian. 1996. Remarks on the Old English C-system and the diachrony of V2. In Ellen Brandner and Gisela Ferraresi (eds.), *Language change and generative*

- grammar*, 154–164. Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft  
7. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Roberts, Ian, and Anna Roussou. 2003. *Syntactic change: a Minimalist approach to grammaticalization*.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór Ármann. 1993. Argument drop in Old  
Icelandic. *Lingua* 89, 247–280.
- Rosenkvist, Henrik. 2009. Referential null subjects in  
Germanic: an overview. *Working Papers in  
Scandinavian Syntax* 84, 151–180.
- Taylor, Ann, Anthony Warner, Susan Pintzuk, and Frank  
Beths. 2003. York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of  
Old English Prose.
- Taylor, Ann, and Susan Pintzuk. 2009. Information structure  
and the syntax of objects in Old English: a corpus study.  
Paper presented at the Workshop on Corpus-based  
Advances in Historical Linguistics, University of York.
- Tomaselli, Alessandra. 1995. Cases of verb third in Old High  
German. In Allan Battye and Ian Roberts (eds.), *Clause  
Structure and Language Change*, 345–369. Oxford:  
Oxford University Press.
- Walkden, George. 2009. The comparative method in syntactic  
reconstruction. MPhil dissertation. University of  
Cambridge.

Walkden, George. 2014. *Syntactic reconstruction and Proto-Germanic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press..

Westergaard, Marit. 2005. Norwegian child language and the history of English: The interaction of syntax and information structure in the development of word order. In Kevin McCafferty, Tove Bull and Kristin Killie (eds.), *Contexts—Historical, Social, Linguistic. Studies in Celebration of Toril Swan*, 293–310. Bern: Peter Lang.

Westergaard, Marit, and Øystein Vangsnes. 2005. Wh-questions, V2, and the left periphery of three Norwegian dialect types. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 8, 117–158.

Author's address: Department of Linguistics and English Language, University of Manchester, Samuel Alexander Building, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom.

[george.walkden@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:george.walkden@manchester.ac.uk)