

# Syntactic Development and Verb-Final Word Order in Early Old English Main Clauses

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## Abstract

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This paper aims to reconsider the theories regarding the influence of Latin on Old English (OE) word order and support Kiparsky's (1995) theory of syntactic development of verb-final word order in OE from both philological and historical perspectives.

While the philological theory that Latin influenced OE prose has been accepted, Kiparsky opposes the traditional perspective regarding verb-final word order in Early Old English literature, which can be traced back to a Germanic language brought to Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasion in 449 AD.

Kiparsky's theory is consistent with Oppenheimer's (2006) archaeological and anthropological theory of the divergence of OE from other Germanic language branches. The verb-final word order in Early Old English literature should not be regarded as evidence of Latin influence on OE, but rather the indication of an indigenous characteristic of the Wessex version.

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**Key words:** Early Old English, Verb-final Word Order, Syntactic Development, Germanic Languages, English Historical Linguistics

## 0 Introduction

The verb-second (V2) word order is considered most typical in Old English (OE) main clauses as well as other Germanic languages. It is generally derived by moving the tensed verb to the head of the Complementizer Phrase (CP) and attracting the X Phrase (XP) to the specifier (spec) position of the CP. The first element of a sentence can be not only the subject but also any kind of phrase i.e. XP.

While the V2 word order is persuasive in main clauses, the verb-final (VF) word order is most typical in OE subordinate clauses. Although the distinction between the main and subordinate

clauses in the OE word order is not as rigid as in modern German, the VF word order in main clauses is seldom observed in Early Old English (EOE) literature, which is generally considered irregular.

This paper aims to reconsider the theories regarding the influence of Latin on OE word order and support Kiparsky's (1995) syntactic development theory of VF word order in OE from philological and historical perspectives.

## 1 Hypotheses on the influence of Latin on OE syntax

Few syntactic studies of the Latin influence on OE have been conducted although the OE prose style was probably developed under Latin influence. Vezzosi (2012) describes current opinion on the relationship between Latin and OE syntax:

The influence of Latin on English syntax has constantly been neglected, even though there is no doubt that Old English prose ultimately derived from Latin originals and despite it being implicitly taken for granted that syntactic complexity in Early Modern English was a Latinate feature. With the exception of the recapitulatory work by Sørensen (1957), the extent of Latin influence on the area of syntax still awaits more detailed investigation.

Traugott (1992) describes how difficult this problem is to solve, and expresses her attitude towards it:

(1) [I]n the case of Old English (OE), much of the prose is dependent on Latin (this is particularly true of the interlinear glosses). Where the OE is similar to Latin we do not always know whether this is a result of the Latin or of the OE; however, when the two are distinctly different, we may assume that we have fairly clear evidence of OE rather than of Latin structure.

(Traugott 1992: 168)

Examining the attitude regarding translations from Latin into OE should clarify the difficulty that Traugott indicated in comparing the OE translations with the corresponding original Latin literature. Godden (1992) describes King Alfred's attitude towards translations from Latin to OE:

(2) Although most works in Old English prose were to one degree or another translations from Latin, there is surprisingly little contemporary suggestion of any difficulty in rendering Latin thought in the vernacular. King Alfred discusses the principles and history of translation in his preface to the *Pastoral Care*, translating, he says, *hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete* (CP 7; ‘sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense’). There is perhaps a hint of linguistic barriers in the immediately following remark that he translated Gregory’s Latin *swæ ic hie andgitfullicost areccean meahthe* (‘as meaningfully as I could render it’), but he does not suggest that the English language was in any way inadequate to express biblical or patristic thought, or that the nature of either the language or his readership required any kind of simplification.

(Godden 1992: 514–515)

According to Godden’s claim, King Alfred did not adopt literal translations, which may have violated OE grammar in his scholars’ OE translations from Latin originals. This implies that we cannot expect direct evidence of Latin influence on OE syntax in Alfredian translations. There is another possibility, which the unusual sentences in OE attest to in such literature. It may be supposed that they reflect the syntax of the Wessex version of OE or the Wessex dialect.

## 2 Linguistic diversity in the British Islands after the Anglo-Saxon invasion

According to *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, such a linguistic diversity existed in the British Islands around the fifth century:

(3) Ðis ealond nu on andweardnyese<sup>(1)</sup> æfter rime fif Moyses boca, ðam seo godcunde æ awriten is, fif ðeoda gereordum ænne wisdom þære hean soþfæstnyse 7 þære soðan heanesse smeað 7 andetteaþ; þæt is on Angolcynnes gereorde 7 Brytta 7 Scotta 7 Peohta 7 Ledenwara: þæt an is, þæt Leden, on smeauinge gewrita eallum þam oðrum gemæne.

(Miller (ed. and trans.) (1890: 26, 28)

*‘At this present time the island studies and acknowledges one and the same science of sublime truth and true sublimity in the tongues of five nations, according to the number of the five books of Moses, in which the Divine law is written; that is in the tongues of the English,*

*Britons, Scots, Picts and Latins. This one, the Latin, is common to all the others, in the study of the Scriptures.'*

(Miller (ed. and trans.) (1890: 27, 29))

Latin seems to have been used for the study of Christianity, but it was not a common language for ordinary people when Bede wrote *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

However, the corresponding paragraph to the OE version in the original Latin version of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* displays a slightly different interpretation of the linguistic diversity in the British Islands at that time. The modern English translation says:

(4) This island at this present, with five sundry languages equal to the number of the books in which the Divine Law hath been written, doth study and set forth one and the same knowledge of the highest truth and true majesty, that is, with the language of the English, the Britons, the Scots, the Redshanks and the Latin, which last by study of the Scriptures is made common to all the rest.<sup>(2)</sup>

(King (ed. and trans.) (1979: 17))

When Bede was writing his works, he lived in a monastery at Jarrow in Northumbria. The area was culturally advanced and a centre of Christianity in Britain before the raids by the Danes. There is a possibility that Latin had widely spread and was commonly spoken among educated people as monks.

The situation was very different when King Alfred's circle of scholars translated the Latin works into OE. The cultural priority in Mercia and Northumbria declined because of the destruction caused by the Danes and only Wessex escaped the destruction. Alfred's project of translating from Latin into OE may indicate that Latin was not common even among the educated people. It is difficult to believe that Latin influenced OE significantly through language contact in Wessex where Alfredian translations were accomplished.

### 3 Syntactic development of word order in OE

#### 3.1 V2 word order in OE

We begin with an analysis of the V2 word order in OE because it is the most typical word order in main clauses. The following examples are quoted from Roberts (2007):

- (5) a. Se Hæland wearæð þa gelomlice ætiwed his leornung-cnihitum.

the Lord was then frequently shown his disciples.

'The Lord then frequently appeared to his disciples'.

(*ÆCHom* I, 15.220.21; Fischer et al. 2000: 106; Roberts 2007: 58)

- b. On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes sawles gegodod.

in two things had God this man's soul endowed

'With two things had God this man's soul endowed'.

(*ÆCHom* I, 15.20.1; Fischer et al. 2000: 107; Roberts 2007: 58)

- c. Pa astah se Hælend up on ane dune.

then rose the Lord up on a mountain

'Then rose the Lord up on a mountain'.

(*ÆCHom* I, 15.20.1; Fischer et al. 2000: 107; Roberts 2007: 58)

Notice that the subject precedes the finite auxiliary in (5a), which precedes an adverb; a Prepositional Phrase (PP) precedes the auxiliary in (5b), which precedes the subject; and the adverb *þa* ('then') precedes the finite verb in (5c), which precedes the subject. These finite auxiliaries and verbs are not in T as in present-day English.

The V2 construction is illustrated as follows:

- (6) [<sub>CP</sub>[<sub>C</sub> Vf [<sub>IP</sub> . . . . .V]]]

(Fischer et al. 2000: 107)

The first constituent is in spec-CP, the finite verb in C in (6). This analysis has been generally accepted, where a finite verb moves to the head position of a CP structure.

OE is not a rigid V2 language like modern German, because in cases where the first constituent is a non-subject, pronominal subjects precede the verb as in (8)-(9); verb-subject order is dominant only when the subject is a full noun as in (7).

- (7) On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes sawle gegodod

in two things had God the man's soul endowed

'With two things God had endowed man's soul'.

(*ÆCHom* I, 1.20.1; Fischer et al. 2000: 107)

(8) Forðon we sceolan mid ealle mod & mægene to Gode gecrrran

therefore we must with all mind and power to God turn

'Therefore we must turn to God with all our mind and power'.

(*HomU19* (BlHom 8) 26; Fischer et al. 2000: 107)

(9) Be ðæm we magon suiðe swuytule oncnawan ðæt ...

by that we may very clearly perceive that ...

'By that, we may perceive very clearly that ...'

(*CP* 26.181.16; Fischer et al. 2000: 107)

The word order pattern seen in (8) and (9) is often referred to as a kind of V3 word order specific to OE. However, it is actually a variant of the V2 word order in OE because the pronominal subjects in (8) and (9) are considered subject clitics (van Kemenade, 1987). Both V2 and V3 as a variant of the V2 word order are non-Latinate elements in the OE word order.

### 3.2 Verb-final word orders in OE and the parametric variations of CP structure in Germanic languages

The modification of the V2 for V3 word order in OE is a minor, rather than fundamental, one because this word order can be recognised as a V2 variation. However, there are other word order variations in OE. The application of the V2 word order requires the landing site of the moved finite verb, which is the head of CP ( $C^0$ ).

While the V2 word order in the main clause is obligatory in modern German, it is not always obligatory in OE. Instead of assuming that V-to- $C^0$  movement is optional in OE, Kiparsky (1995) argues that 'the category C itself is optional, where no principle of grammar requires its presence'. As Kiparsky argues that '[W] here  $C^0$  is not required for these or other reasons, its presence or absence is fixed on a language-specific basis', the differences in word order among Germanic languages ought to reflect the parametric variations of CP structures.

Kiparsky (1995) illustrates the three word-order variations as follows:

(10) a.  $_{CP} [ XP \text{ } _{C^0} [ \text{ } _{C^0} [V] S[ \dots ] ] ]$

b.  $_{CP} [ \text{ } _{C^0} [ \text{ } _{C^0} [V] s[ \dots ] ] ]$

c.  $s[ \dots V \dots ]$

(Kiparsky 1995, (4))

V2 clauses like (6a) are the standard main clause type in OE and other Germanic languages, which is discussed in 3.1. Verb-first clauses, which are obligatory in yes-no questions, also occur in declarative clauses in OE, Old High German, and Old Icelandic.

- (11) a. *Hæfde* se cyning his fierd on tu tonumen

(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A.D. 893)

‘The king had divided his army in two’.

- b. *Uuârun* thô hirtâ in thero lantskeffi (*Tatian* 6)

‘At that time there were shepherds in the area’.

- c. *ferr* þá Vagn heim suðr til Danmerkr (*Heimskringla* 160.29)

‘Then Vagn went home southwards to Denmark’.

(Kiparsky 1995, (5))

According to Kiparsky’s analysis, the VF main clause illustrated in (6b) displays a bare S structure, which does not accompany CP. Here are some examples:

- (12) He þa his here on tu *todælde* (*Orosius* 116.16)

‘He then divided his army in two’.

Her hæpne men ærest on Sceapige ofer winter *sætun*

(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, A.D. 855)

‘Here (in this year) heathen men first encamped in S. over the winter’.

(Kiparsky 1995, (6))

Such examples are observed almost exclusively in OE. Kiparsky supposes that  $C^0$  is a syntactically obligatory element even in Old High German and Old Icelandic main clauses. This implies that the CP structure was not developed to be obligatory in OE main clauses, and V2 was abandoned in Middle English and became residual in Early Modern English. The cause of the VF word order in EOE can be traced back to a Germanic language that was brought to Wessex by Saxons before OE was established in Britain.

### 3.3 Archaeological views on the origin of the Wessex version of OE

Oppenheimer (2006) discusses the problem of the language spoken in Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasion. He examines the language based on archaeological evidence, which

indicates that Celtic inscribed stones in Britain and Ireland are distributed primarily in Wales and Ireland with almost none in England.<sup>(3)</sup>

(13) One explanation of the dramatic difference in numbers of celtic inscriptions between England and the rest of the British Isles is that by the time Romans left, the inhabitants of England no longer spoke celtic, having changed over to some version of Latin, perhaps like the French. This rationalization is becoming increasingly popular, although it is still a controversial minority view. The evidence for it includes some British Latin loanwords in Anglo-Saxon and a small number of Latin place-names adopted by the Anglo-Saxons. The main problem with this explanation is that one would expect to see, in England as in Wales, Latin inscriptions continuing after the Roman withdrawal—which is not the case. Also, the low number of borrowings needs some other explanation. Although there are considerably more Latin than celtic loanwords in early English, the figure of two- hundred-odd is still very small when compared with the massive effect of the Norman invasion on English.

Given that neither Latin nor celtic words intruded much into Old English, there is the possibility that a third, pre-existing and more closely related (i.e. Germanic) language survived in England during Roman times, one which could hybridize more easily with the incoming Germanic influences from the Continent.

(Oppenheimer 2006: 338–9)

Oppenheimer argues against the traditional view of the rapid creation of OE when the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain based on the divergence between the language of *Beowulf* (Anglian) and that of *Alfred* (Wessex):

(14) It is not as if they had picked up much in the way of Celtic or Latin words on arrival—a known reason for rapid change. An alternative, deeper timescale and relationship needs to be sought in Old English dialects.

(Oppenheimer 2006: 353)

Oppenheimer submits a theory regarding the period of OE development:

(15) [T]he connection between Old English and the ancestral Common Germanic root predated the arrival of the Angles and Saxons. English would then be neither directly

descended from Old Saxon nor from Scandinavian (i.e. Old Norse).

(Oppenheimer 2006: 354)

According to his theory, the origin of OE in Britain can be traced back quite distantly before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in 449 AD.<sup>(4)</sup> This theory of the history of the English language is consistent with Kiparsky's regarding the development of OE syntax which we saw in 3.2.

## 4 Conclusion

The Latin influence on OE word order cannot be proved through the evidence of translations of EOE literature from Latin into OE. Kiparsky asserts his theory against the traditional perspective of philologists regarding VF word order in EOE literature, which can be traced back to a Germanic language brought to Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasion in 449 AD.

Kiparsky's theory is consistent with the archaeological and anthropological theory proposed by Oppenheimer. VF word order in EOE literature should not be considered a reflection of Latin influence on OE but rather an indigenous characteristic of the Wessex version OE, which might be traced back to a Germanic language predating the Anglo-Saxon arrival in Britain. It implies that the VF word in EOE indicates the development of EOE as a Germanic language.

### Notes

- (1) Bede completed the original Latin version of *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731, which was translated into OE in the late ninth century by King Alfred's circle of scholars.
- (2) King (ed. and trans.) (1979: 16, footnote 1) remarks:  
Latin is included as the language employed in the service of religion, not it appears, as the language of any separate people of Britain.  
However, this footnote seems to depend on the OE version.
- (3) Oppenheimer (2006: 336) illustrates the distribution of Celtic inscribed stones after the Romans in Figure 1.
- (4) Oppenheimer (2006: 341, 343) illustrates this theory with the Germanic languages tree based on differences in vocabulary in Figure 2, which is quite different from the conventional Germanic languages tree in Figure 3. According to his remark on Figure 2, OE diverged from other Germanic branches no younger than the Gothic Bible (350 AD), possibly as much as 4,000 years ago.

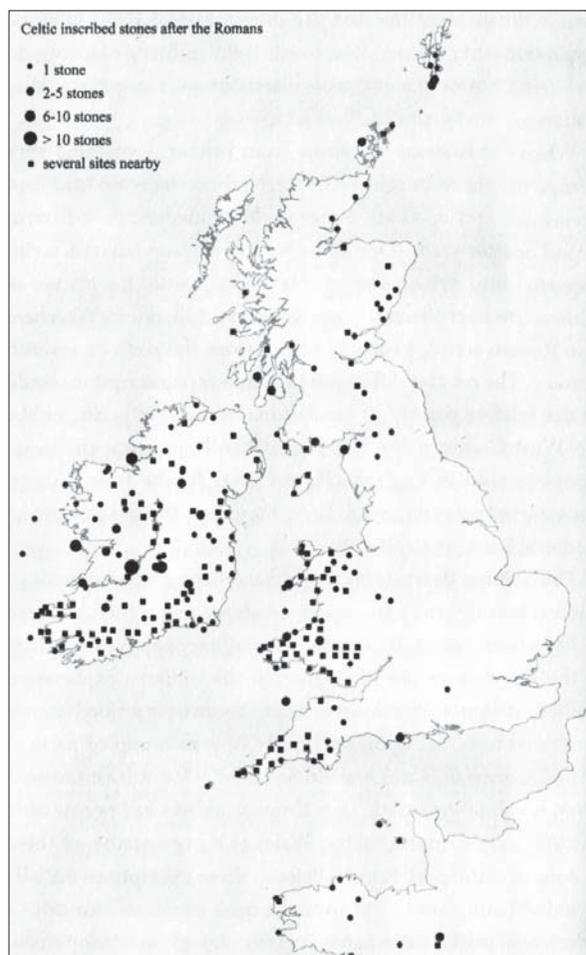


Figure 1 : Oppenheimer (2006: 336, Figure 7.4)

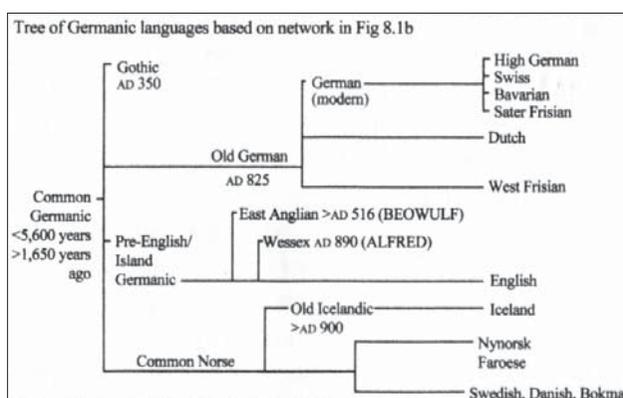


Figure 2 : Oppenheimer (2006: 336, Figure 8.1 c)

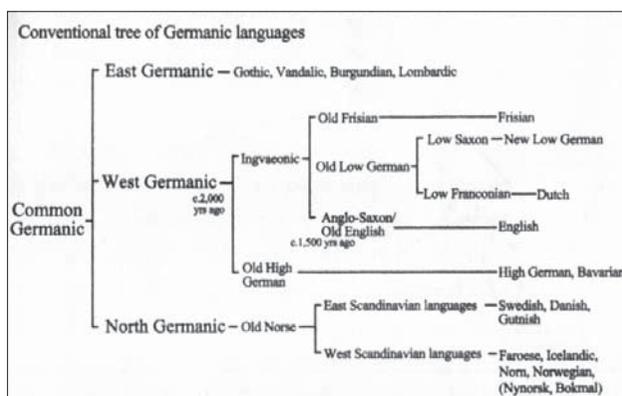


Figure 3 : Oppenheimer (2006: 341, Figure 8.1 a)

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## 統語的発達と初期古英語の主節における動詞末尾語順

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### 抄 録

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本論文は、古英語語順へのラテン語の影響の理論を再考し、Kiparsky (1995) による古英語の動詞文末語順の統語的発達の理論を文献的観点と歴史的観点から裏付けることを目的とする。

Kiparsky は、古英語散文がラテン語による影響を受けたものであるという文献学者による伝統的理論に対して、初期古英語の動詞文末語順が449年のアングロ・サクソンの到来以前にブリテン島にもたらされたゲルマン語に遡るという理論を主張している。

Kiparsky の理論は、Oppenheimer (2006) による古英語と他のゲルマン語との分岐に関する考古学的、人類学的理論とよく一致している。初期古英語文献における動詞文末語順は古英語に関するラテン語の影響と見なすべきでなく、Wessex (西サクソン) 方言の固有の特徴を反映していると考えべきである。

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キーワード：初期古英語、動詞文末語順、統語的発達、ゲルマン語、英語歴史言語学