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Verb-Initial Word Order and Its Influence on Prose in Old English

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Abstract

Ogawa (1996, 2000, 2003) discusses the style of some prose works in the *Vercelli Homilies* (D. G. Scargg (ed.) 1992) written in the late tenth century, in which verb-initial word order sentences are very frequently observed. He analyses the stylistic effects of the verb-initial word order in homilies I and XVIII. Ogawa points out the characteristics of the verb-initial word order in the homilies by introducing previous theories. He concludes that such a characteristic style of the frequent use of verb-initial word order was developed by the authors of the homilies.

This paper makes clearer the difference between the verb-initial word order in the *Vercelli Homilies* and that in the Old English versions, *Boethius*, which was authored between the ninth and tenth centuries by Alfred's circle, and argues that the use of verb-initial word order in the *Vercelli Homilies* has some common characteristics with that of the verse version of the *Old English Boethius*. The comparison of these works illustrates how metrical syntax can be positioned in the development of word order from Early Old English to Late Old English. Using the edition by Malcolm Goddan and Susan Irvin (2009), the verse parts are cited from the C text (Cotton Otho A. vi), and the corresponding prose parts are cited from the B text (Bodley 180) of the Old English versions of *Boethius* in this paper.

Key words: verb-initial word order, Old English, prose, the *Vercelli Homilies*, the Old English Version *Boethius*

0 Introduction

Ogawa (1996, 2000, 2003) discusses the style in some of the *Vercelli Homilies*, which were written in the later tenth century, and wherein verb-initial sentential word order is very frequently observed. He analyses the effects in style of verb-initial word order mainly in Homilies I and

XVIII. He points out the verb-initial character of the word order in the homilies and introduces the previous works. Ogawa concludes that the typical style characterized by the frequent use of verb-initial word order was innovated or developed by the author of the homilies.

In this paper, I clarify the difference between the verb-initial word order in the *Vercelli Homilies* and that in the Old English (OE) version, *Boethius*, authored in the ninth century by Alfred's circle. The verse passages are cited from the C text (Cotton Otho A. vi), and the corresponding prose parts are from the B text (Bodley 180), using the edition by Malcolm Goddan and Susan Irvin (2009).

1 Verb-Initial Word Order in Late Old English Prose and the Original Latin Texts

According to Ogawa (2000), there is a remarkable stylistic characteristic in Homilies I and XVIII

Table. 1 Verb-Initial Word Order in the *Vercelli Homilies*

Homily	<i>beon/wesan</i>	modal verbs	others	Total
I	13	3	9	25
II				0
III				0
IV			4	4
V	1			1
VI			1	1
VII				0
VIII			2	2
IX			3	3
X	3	1	2	6
XI	1	1		2
XII	2		1	3
XIII	2			2
XIV	2	2	4	8
XV	2			2
XVI		2	1	3
XVII			1	1
XVIII	16	2	5	23
XIX				0
XX				0
XXI				0
XXII			11	11
XXIII	2			2

(Ogawa 2000, 237)

that relates to verb-initial word order, as illustrated below :

Ogawa points out that verb-initial word order in some passages of Homily I corresponds to the original Latin text (the *Gospel of John*) as follows :

- (1) a. *VercHom* 1.6 ... ærest to Annan. Wæs se Anna sweor þæs Caifan þe ðy gere wæs bisceop. Wæs þæs Caifas þe ær æt þære geþeahunge mid Iudeum wæs
(L [*Io* 18: 13-4] ... ad Annam primum, erat enim socer Caiaphae qui ..., erat autem Caiaphas qui)
- b. *VercHom* 1.12, Cumap Romane 7 genimap ure land 7 ure þeode
(L [*Io* 11: 48] et uenient Romani et tollent nostrum et locum et gentem)
- c. *VercHom* 1.216 7 þa gita wæs his tunuce onsundran untodæled. Wæs sio tunuce syllice geworht : næs nænig seam on, ac wæs eall on anum awefen
(L [*Io* 19: 23] ... Erat autem tunica inconsutilis desuper contexta per totum).
- (Ogawa 2003)

However, Ogawa (2003) also objects to the theory that verb-initial word order in Homily I is the result of the influence of the corresponding Latin text because some passages with verb-initial word order in Homily I do not reflect the original Latin word order, such as :

- (2) a. *VercHorn* 1.15 Witgode he þæt ungewealdene muðe be Cristes þrowunge.
(L [*Io* 11: 51] sed cum esset pontifex anni illius prophetauit, quia Iesus moriturus erat pro gente)
- b. *VercHom* 1.28 Þa stodon hie, þæs bisceopes þegnas, þær æt þam fyre 7 wyrmdon hie ; wæs þæt weder wel col
(L [*Io* 18: 18] Stabant ... ad prunas quia frigus erat)
- c. *VercHom* 1.94 'Nobis non licet Nis us alyfed þæt we moten ænigne man cwellan on þas tiid.' Sceolde þæt word bion gefylled, þæt he, dryhten hælend, ær sylfa cwæð
(L [*Io*: 31-32] Ut sermo Iesu impleretur quern dixit)
- d. *VercHom* 1.159 Þa eode he, ure dryhten Crist, ut beforan þa Iudeas. Hæfde he þa þyrnenne coronan on his heafde ...
(L [*Io* 19: 5] Exiit ergo Iesus portans spineam coronam)
- (Ogawa 2003)

According to Ogawa (2003), these verb-initial sentences are translated from Latin to OE, dissolving the many kinds of constructions in the original Latin text into simple sentences in OE.

Following Ogawa's claim, verb-initial constructions in OE prose should be thought to have developed with quite limited influence from the word order of Latin literature. It should be examined whether the verb-initial word order developed from metre in Early OE.

2 Verb-Initial Word Order in Early Old English

It is well known that verb-initial word order is frequently observed in OE verse. It is necessary to introduce some terms used in the study of OE metre before starting the discussion of the relation between verb-initial word order and metrical grammar in OE.

2.1 Metrical Grammar in Old English

2.1.1 Alliteration

Alliteration in OE poetry is a repetition of the same sound at the beginnings of two or three stressed words in a line. In the following examples, ‘/’ represents stress and ‘A’ represents alliteration :

- (3) / / / /
 Fēasceaft fundan. Hē þæs frōfre gebād
 destitute found he for that consolation experienced
 A A A Y
 ‘(he was) found destitute. For that, he lived to see consolation’
 (Beo 7, Terasawa 2011 : 3)
- (4) / / / /
 on flōdes æht feor gewītan
 in of-ocean possession far go
 A X A Y
 ‘(many treasures should) go far into the possession of the ocean’
 (Beo 42, Terasawa 2011 : 4)

The alliterative pattern of (3) is [AA: AX], and that of (4) is [AX: AY]. These are the most general patterns of alliteration.

2.1.2 Lift and Dip

Syllables are usually classified into two kinds of metrical positions. One is called the *lift*, which is a rhythmically stressed part marked ‘/’. The other is called the *dip*, a rhythmically unstressed part marked with ‘×’. A foot consists of a lift and one or more dips. The examples are shown as follows:¹

- (5) / × | / ×
 nightes hwīlum
 of-night every
 FOOT FOOT
 ‘every night’

(*Beo* 3044a, Terasawa 2011 : 32)

- (6) × × / | × /
 syðþan flōd ofslōh
 after flood destroyed
 FOOT FOOT
 ‘after the flood destroyed (the race of giants)’

(*Beo* 1689b, Terasawa (2011 : 32))

2.1.3 Word Classes in Metrics

There are three classes of words in OE poetry : stress-words, particles, and proclitics. Stress-words are always stressed, and consist of nouns, adjectives, non-finite verbs, adverbs, and some heavy pronouns. Proclitics, which include prepositions, demonstratives, possessives, copulative conjunctions, and prefixes, are not normally rhythmically stressed. Finally, particles, which are composed of finite verbs, demonstrative adverbs, personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and some conjunctions, are not usually rhythmically stressed.

2.1.4 Kuhn’s Laws

Kuhn’s laws for Old English metre are well known. Terasawa (2011 : 95) describes them as follows :

- (6) Kuhn’s First Law : Particles must be placed together in the first dip of a clause (i.e., either before or immediately after the first lift).
 (7) Kuhn’s Second Law : At the beginning of a clause, the dip must contain particles ; in other

words, proclitics alone cannot occupy the clause-initial dip.

According to Kuhn's second law, finite verbs can come to the first position of a sentence as particles that are not rhythmically stressed.

I examine the syntax of verb-initial constructions in OE in later parts of this paper. It is promising to analyse the verb-initial order from a metrical point of view as there should be a point of contact between syntax and prosody in the verb-initial construction, as suggested by Kuhn's Laws describing metrical grammar.

2.1.5 Word Class

Words in OE are usually classified into three categories with three degrees of rhythmic stress: stress-words, particles, and proclitics. Stress-words include nouns, adjectives, non-finite verbs, many adverbs, and some heavy pronouns. The second, proclitics, are not normally stressed; they include prepositions, demonstratives, possessives, copulative conjunctions, and prefixes. The third, particles, are sometimes, but not usually, stressed, and include finite verbs, demonstrative adverbs, personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and some conjunctions.

According to the above classifications, verbs are separated into two types: non-finite verbs, which always receive stress, and finite verbs, which do not usually receive stress. Verb-initial examples are examined in relation to metrical characteristics in this section.

2.2 Some Effects of Metrics on Verb-Initial Word Order

Here we examine some effects of metrics on verb-initial word order in the examples in metre 1 of *Boethius*.²

2.2.1 Non-Infinitive Verbs

According to Kuhn's Laws, non-infinitival verbs, which are particles, are placed in the first dip of a clause in the a-verse, as follows:

(8) *setton suðweardes sigeþeoda twa.*

set southwards victorious nations two

(Metre 1, 4, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 384)

'two victorious nations setting out southwards'

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 97-8)

(9) *Stod þrage on ðam. Þeod wæs gewunnen*

stood for a time on them nation was conquered (Metre 1, 28, Godden & Irvine 2009)

'It remained thus for a time ; the nation was conquered for many years ...'

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 98)

In (9) it is natural that *stod*, 'stood' is the first dip because *þrage*, 'for a time', which it follows, is alliterative. In (9) *setton*, 'set' does not receive stress because *sudweardes*, 'southward' in the a-verse, and *sigeþeoda*, 'victorious nations' in the b-verse, are alliterative. These finite verbs are analysed as moving to the initial position in the a-verse, where they do not receive stress, according to the alliterative requirement.

When the non-infinitival verb moves to the initial position in the b-verse, it can receive stress and take part in alliteration, as follows :

(10) fulluhtþeawum. **Fægnodon** ealle /Romwara bearn ...

rite of baptism rejoiced all Romans' children

(Metre 1, 33-34a, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 385)

'(the king himself received) baptism. All the offsprings of Roman citizens rejoiced ...'

(Godden & Irvine 2009, vol. 1, 98)

(11) Boetius. **Breæ** longe ær /wlencea under wolcnum ;

Boethius enjoyed for a long time prosperity under cloud

(Metre 1, 75-76a, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 386)

'For a long time he had enjoyed prosperity under the skies ; '

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 98-9)

In the above examples, *Fægnodon* 'rejoiced' in (10) and *Breæ*, 'enjoyed' in (11), are finite verbs, each receiving stress in initial position in the b-verse. That is, finite verbs in the b-verse move to the initial clause position when they are alliterative.

2.2.2 Infinitive Verbs

In contrast to non-infinitival verbs, infinitival verbs can receive stress in the initial position of the a-verse because they belong to the category of stress-words, as shown below :

(12) Ne wende þonan æfre /**cuman** of ðæm clammum.

not expected thence ever come from the fetters

Cleopode to Drihtne

call to the Lord

(Metre 1, 82b-83, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 386)

‘[He] ... never expecting to come from there out of those fetters. He called to the Lord...’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 99)

In (12) the infinite verb *cumin*, ‘come’ takes the initial position of the a-verse, which, syntactically, is not the clause-initial position. This phenomenon should be explained as a metrical requirement and as irrelevant to verb movement.

3 The functions of Verb-Initial Word Order in Early Old English

Now let us examine the functions of verb-initial word order in the earlier period of OE, considering both verse and prose in the OE version of *Boethius*.

3.1 Verb-Initial Word Order in Metre in *Boethius*

As we have seen in the previous sections, finite verbs may occur in sentence-initial position in OE metrical texts. When finite verbs occur in the first position in the a-verse, they must not be stressed, according to Kuhn’s Laws. On the other hand, when finite verbs occur in the first position in the b-verse, they must be stressed.

Consider the examples in (13) and (14), repeated from (8) and (9) above, in context.

- (13) Hit wæs geara iu ðætte Golan eastan
of Sciððia sceldas læddon,
þreate geþrungort þeodlond monig,
setton suðweardes sigeþeoda twa.

(Metre 1, 1-4, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 384)

‘It was a long time ago that the Goths brought shields from Scythia in the east, violently oppressed many a nation, two victorious nations setting out southwards.’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 97-8)

- (13) Stod þrage on ðam. Þeod wæs gewtnnen
wintra mænigo, oðþæt wyrd gescraf
þæt þe Deodrice þegnas and eorlas
heran sceoldan. Wæs se heretema

(Metre 1, 28-31, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 385)

‘It remained thus for a time ; the nation was conquered for many years until fate ordained that thegns and noblemen should obey Theoderic.’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 98)

Setton is in the initial position of the last clause in l. 4 in (13). This is the second clause of the compound sentence in the subordinate clause introduced by *ðætte*. It is translated into Modern English as a participial construction dependent on the main sentence, as shown by the translation of (13). The subject of *setton* is not phonologically expressed ; thus, it can be thought of as having been dropped. In (14), *stod* is in the initial position of the sentence in (14), l. 1. The following noun, *þrage*, is not the subject because it is not a nominative form. The expletive subject ‘it’ is phonologically expressed in this sentence.

It is supposed from the contexts that these sentence-initial verbs are not stressed because they serve as a kind of parentheses. The contextual requirement is fulfilled by metrical grammar by way of Kuhn’s Laws.

Next, we examine the contexts in which verbs in sentence-initial position in the b-verse are stressed by Kuhn’s Laws :

(15) heran sceoldan. Wæs se heretema
 Criste gecnoden, cyning selfa onfeng
 fulluht þeawum. **Fægnodon** ealle
 Romwara bearn and him recene to
 friðes wilnedon. He him fæste gehet
 þæt hy ealdrihta ælces mosten
 wyrðe gewunigen on þære welegan byrig,
 ðenden God wuolde þæt he Gotena geweald
 agan moste

(Metre 1, 31–38, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 385)

‘(thegns and noblemen) should obey Theoderic. That ruler was committed to Christ ; the king himself received baptism. All the offspring of Roman citizens rejoiced and immediately sought peace with him. He promised them firmly that they would be permitted to remain in possession of their ancient rights in that wealthy city, for as long as God wished that he might have power over the Goths.’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 98)

- (16) healdon þone hererinc. Wæs him hreoh sefa,
 ege from ðam eorle. He hine inne heht
 on carcernes cluster belucan.
 Ða wæs modsefa miclum gedrefed
 Boetius. **Breac** longe ær
 wlencea under wolcnum ;

(Metre 1, 71-76, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 386)

‘(he [(Theodoric)] commanded the lords of the people) to hold that warrior (firmly).
 His mind was troubled, in him was fear of that nobleman. He commanded him to be
 locked in a prison cell. Then Boethius’s mind was greatly troubled. For a long time he
 had enjoyed prosperity under the skies ; ’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 98-99)

In the context of (15), ‘**Fægnodon** ealleRomwara bearn ...’ is contrasted with the preceding sentence, ‘Wæs se heretema ...’. In (16), ‘**Breac** longe ær ...’ starts the passage describing Boethius’s prosperity in the past, contrasting it to his present situation. The function of the use of verb-initial word order is to attract the readers’ attention.³

3.2 Verb-Initial Word Order in the Prose in *Boethius*

Next, we examine verb-initial sentences in the prose version of *Boethius* in Early OE to compare the use of verb-initial word order in prose to that in verse.

Examples of verb-initial word order in prose are found in main clauses, as shown in (17) and (18) :

- (17) Sende þa digellice ærendgewritu to þam kasere to Constentinopolim,
 sent then secretary letter to the emperor to Constantinople

(Chapter 1, 19-20, Godden & Irvine 2009, vol. I, 244)

‘He then secretly sent letters to the emperor in Constantinople ...’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 5)

- (18) **Bædon** hine þæt ...
 asked him that

(Chapter 1, 22, Godden & Irvine 2009, vol. I, 244)

‘asking him ([the emperor]) to ...’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 5)

The subject position is obscure in this pattern of word order because the subjects of the finite verbs do not appear in the above examples. The use of verb-initial word order in these sentences is independent of the alliteration requirement.

Table 2 Comparison of Word Order in Prose and Verse in Main Clauses in the Old English Version of *Boethius*

	V2 (except for SV)	SV	V-Initial	Others
Prose (I)	5	4	2	2
Metre (I)	6	7	14	5
Sum	11	11	16	7

The frequency of the use of verb-initial word order is lower in prose than in verse, as illustrated in the table below :

The fact that verb-initial order is more frequent in verse is considered to be a natural consequence of the fact that the use of verb-initial word order in verse is determined by metrical grammar.

Next, we examine the effects of verb-initial word order in prose, in the absence of effects of metrical grammar. The sentences in (17) and (18) are repeated below in more context :

- (19) *Pa ongan he smeagan and leornigan on him selfum hu he þæt rice þam unrihtwisan cvninge aferran mihte, and on ryhtgcleaffulra and on rihtwisra anwealde gcbringan. Sende þa digellice ærendgewritu to þam kasere to Constantinopolim, þær is Creca hcahburg and heora cynestol, forþæm se kasere wæs heora ealdhlafordcynnes; bædon hine þæt he him to heora cristendome and to heora ealdrihtum gefultumede.*

(Chapter 1, 18-23, Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. I, 244)

‘Then he began to ponder and study within himself how he could detach the kingdom from that unjust king and bring it under the control of right-believing and just people. He then secretly sent letters to the emperor in Constantinople, where the chief city of the Greeks and their royal seat is, because the emperor was of the kin of their old lords, asking him to help them recover their Christianity and their old rights.’

(Godden & Irvine (eds.) 2009, vol. II, 4-5)

The context in (19) represents a series of political acts Boethius made against King The-

doderic. The use of verb-initial word order here is assumed to serve the purpose of contrasting the two sentences that begin with verbs. These null subject sentences are produced by the operation of pronoun dropping, which allows cohesion of the sentences in one common context. The character of the use of verb-initial word order in prose differs substantially from that in verse.⁴

4 Poetic Style in Prose in the *Vercelli Homilies*

Ogawa (2003) claims that the style of Vercelli X in the *Vercelli Homilies* is rhythmical prose and indicates that lines 196–199 can be interpreted as follows :

- (20) Men þa leofestan, sceoldon þa word bion
ealle cuðlice gelæste þe se hælend cwæð.
Sona þa on þone welegan mann on þære ilcan nihte
deap on becwom, 7 on his bearn ealle.
Fengon þa to gestreonum fremde syþþan.

(Vercelli X, l. 196–199)

‘Dearest people, these words that the Saviour spoke shall all be clearly fulfilled. Immediately, death came upon that rich man and all his children on that same night. Strangers took the treasures afterwards.’

(Treharne (ed.) 2010, 116)

Ogawa (2003) points out that this passage is introduced by vocative *men*, that *cuðlice* and *cwæð* in l.2 are alliterated, as are *fengon* and *fremde* in l.5, and that the repetition of the construction ‘on + noun’ in l.3 and 5 supports the form of poetic style.

The poetic style of the *Vercelli Homilies* is supposed to have developed under the influence of OE metre because repetition of the construction can be seen in prose 1 in *Boethius* (20) in Early OE, yet no alliteration is found.

5 Conclusion

We have compared the verb-initial word order in the *Vercelli Homilies* with that found in the verse and prose of the early OE version of *Boethius* in the previous sections. The examples discussed may not be sufficient to draw a firm conclusion. However, we can observe some

differences between them and indicate some perspectives on the change in verb-initial word order and the development of the prose style of the *Vercelli Homilies*.

The verb-initial word orders in *Boethius* verse are separated into two types. One type occurs in the a-verse as a null subject construction, and functions as a subordinate clause, being translated as a participial construction in Modern English. The other type occurs in the b-verse in a subject-verb inversion construction, and functions to indicate the beginning of a new paragraph and contrast the paragraph to another one, the effect of which is supported by stress on the verb by metrical grammar.

The use of verb-initial word order in the *Vercelli Homilies* X conforms to the latter type mentioned above, from which it developed. Its use in prose became extinct by the end of OE period. The decline of verb-initial word order was fated because alliteration is firmly combined with Germanic prosody and Middle English was greatly affected by Norman French and Latin after the middle of the 11th century.

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Notes

- (1) The explanation for another metrical position, which is called half-lift, is omitted because it will not be mentioned in the following sections of this paper.
- (2) The OE version of *Boethius* has two texts, the B text (Bodley 180) and the C text (Cotton Otho A. Vi). The B text consists of prose translations of the original Latin text. The C text consists of prose and verse translations, the latter of which were authorized from prose translations of the B text. Prose 1 in the B text does not include the corresponding Latin text from which it was translated to introduce readers of *Boethius*.
- (3) The position to which the finite verbs in (15) and (16) move should be higher than TP because they function to indicate the beginning of the clause. Fischer et al. (2000: 155) adopt FP for the position to which finite verb moves in OE. However, Roberts (2004) describes the position as FinP in a Split-C system. The projection FP is used to indicate that they are lower than CP and higher than TP.
- (4) Examples (17) and (18) are supposedly derived by pro-dropping because the finite verb is followed by a particle and an adverbial phrase. Pronominal subjects are not necessarily assumed to occupy a position under the CP projection because they are not semantically focused (considering the split-CP hypothesis by Rizzi (1997)). It can be deduced that the finite verb should move to T because pronominal pronouns would be focused in the Spec-CP position.

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古英語における動詞先頭語順と散文におけるその影響

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抄 録

小川 (1996, 2000, 2003) は, 12 世紀後半に書かれたヴェルチェリ説教集 (the *Vercelli Homilies*) にみられる動詞先頭語順が頻用される文体について論じている。小川によれば, この文体は同説教集の説教によって頻度が異なり, 特に説教 I および XVIII に多い。小川は, その文体的効果について論じ, この文体が説教の著者が創出した文体であるために, 散文における動詞先頭語順は消滅したと結論している。

当研究は, 『ヴェルチェリ説教集』と 9 世紀後半にアルフレッド大王のサークルで書かれた『古英語版ボエティウス『哲学の慰め』』とを比較し, 後者の散文版 (B テキスト) では, 動詞先頭語順の頻度が韻文版 (C テキスト) と比較して少なく, 用法にも違いがあること, 『ヴェルチェリ説教集』の動詞先頭語順の用法は古英語版『ボエティウス』に共通することを論じる。

キーワード: 動詞先頭語順, 古英語, 散文, 『ヴェルチェリ説教集』, 『古英語版ボエティウス』