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COMMUNICATIVE STRUCTURE OF OLD GERMANIC SENTENCE

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The paper focuses on the communicative structure of the Old Germanic sentences, considering the genre-specific features of the texts in question. Special attention is paid to the arrangement of sentence constituents according to the communicative purpose of the delivered message. The particular emphasis is given to declarative sentences with the finite verb in the initial position (V1). Old Germanic syntax exhibits considerable variability in the arrangement of sentence elements, reflecting the SOV, SVO, and VSO patterns. This research explores the conditions for these syntactic arrangements in relation to the pragmatic aims of the sentence featuring an emphatically stressed, foregrounded finite verb. The paper argues that the information structure of an Old Germanic sentence is realized in terms of 'topic' and 'focus' within their pragmatic motivation. It should be noted that the vast bulk of Old Germanic texts belong to the religious genre and were created for didactic purposes. We propose that the motivation for using the V1 pattern is both pragmatic and syntactic. The initial position of the finite verb has several functional reasons, including its discursive function. Due to its didactic nature, religious prose opens a sentence with a clause that introduces a new message and logically emphasizes the focused idea. Furthermore, we hypothesize that V1 constructions indicate the mutual influence of grammar and discourse in the formation of syntax in Germanic languages.

Key words: Old Germanic syntax, Old English, Old High German, word order, religious discourse, V1 pattern, information structure.

КОМУНІКАТИВНА СТРУКТУРА ДАВНЬОГЕРМАНСЬКОГО РЕЧЕННЯ

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У статті розглянуто комунікативну структуру давньогерманського речення з урахуванням жанрових особливостей досліджуваних текстів. Особливу увагу приділено організації конститuentів речення відповідно до комунікативної мети повідомлення. Аналізу підлягають розповідні речення з особовим дієсловом в ініціальній позиції (VI). Давньогерманський синтаксис демонструє відносно високу варіативність у розташуванні складників речення, що представлено моделями SOV, SVO та VSO. У цій статті висвітлено умови для синтаксичної організації реченневих складників, що тісно пов'язано з прагматичною метою речення, яка граматично втілена у винесенні особового дієслова в ініціальну позицію. Наголошено, що інформаційна структура давньогерманського речення реалізується з погляду «теми» та «фокусу» в межах їх прагматичної мотивації. Переважна кількість давньогерманських текстів належить до релігійного жанру, що свідчить про їх дидактичне призначення. На наш погляд, використання моделі VI у стверджувальних реченнях є прагматично вмотивованим. Винесення особового дієслова в ініціальну позицію зумовлене його функційним призначенням включно з дискурсивною функцією. Завдяки своїй настановній природі релігійна проза починає речення з логічного наголосу на окремій думці. Ми припускаємо, що конструкції з особовим дієсловом в ініціальній позиції вказують на взаємний вплив граматики та дискурсу у становленні синтаксису германських мов.

Ключові слова: давньогерманський синтаксис, давньоанглійська, давньоверхньонімецька, порядок слів, релігійний дискурс, ініціальна позиція дієслова, інформаційна структура.

Introduction. In this paper, we would like to return to a traditional problem in Germanic linguistics: what are the consequences of verb placement for grammar and language performance. Before embarking on the analysis, we provide an overview of word order in Germanic languages. Old Germanic syntax displays variability in the arrangement of sentence constituents, both in the left and right peripheries. It is evidenced by the parallel coexistence of structures V1, V2 and V3 in declarative sentences, and in the right periphery with the patterns OV and VO. According to J. Greenberg, natural languages demonstrate six possible word order patterns, and only three of them dominate, namely, SVO, SOV, and VOS [Greenberg 1963, p. 76]. Proto-Indo-European is traditionally reconstructed as a SOV language, but with a largely pragmatic word order rather than being a rigid grammatical rule [Buniatova 2003]. It should be mentioned that V2 pattern is one of the distinct features of Germanic syntax. The West Germanic languages, being the reflexes of Proto-Germanic, belong to the V2 word-order language group. In all Germanic languages, except English, the finite verb occupies the second position in declarative main clauses [Buniatova 2003, p. 117]. As for subordinate clauses, in English and North Germanic languages the SVO word order is preserved, whereas in Dutch, German, and Frisian it changes to SOV [Askedal 2009, p. 10; Harbert 2007, p. 353].

In our research the issue of the verb-first (V1) pattern in declarative sentences is examined in the light of genre-bounded discourse supported by data from Old Germanic religious texts. The latter includes the traditional array of religious genres, e.g., homilies, sermons, saints' lives, rules, treatises, liturgical prayer collections.

Studies of Old Germanic word order with respect to information structuring show that the V1 pattern is considered a narrative device directly related to the design of the information structure of the sentence. Accordingly, word order correlates with pragmatic factors and the placement of the verb in the sentence. Old information precedes new and "heavy" parts of speech follow "light" ones in Old English, Old High German, and Old Icelandic [Behaghel 1932]. It is realized through establishing coordinative discursive connections. In Old High German, for example, the initial position of the finite verb in declarative sentences plays a special role in the context of structuring information, when new information is provided about what has already been established or known, or when a new situation arises in the discourse [Hinterhölzl 2010, pp. 316–317]. According to P. Hopper, the placement of the verb in the initial position indicates the communicative status of an individual sentence, namely, foregrounding the information [Hopper 1987].

Methodology. The study is based on texts in Old English and Old High German, both homiletic prose and narrative of the eighth to twelfth centuries. The suggested methodology for achieving validated results is based on data extracted from OE and OHG religious texts retrieved from The Helsinki Corpus, Project Gutenberg eBook Homilies, and the Titus Project Thesaurus. It should be noted that the analyzed discourse prose represents a special case within the overall corpus of religious prose. It is considered to be a “frozen” (*I. B., T. H.*) type of discourse due to a number of its features, which are typical of the texts aimed to be orally delivered.

Discussion. Before the analysis, let us highlight the issue of information flow in the text. As maintained by K. Lambrecht, the information structure involves two aspects of the organization of an utterance, which, on the one hand, can be divided into *topic* and *comment* and, on the other hand, the most relevant information in an utterance is the *focus*, not the *background* [Lambrecht 1994, p. 117, p. 206]. The concept of *topic* refers to the information already given or implied in an individual context, while the *focus-background* level is determined from the point of view of the speaker’s attitude to the informational relevance of the constituents in the sentence. The topic is defined as an entity identified by the speaker, about which information or commentary is provided. The focus is considered an emphasis by which the speaker singles out part or the whole of a message, which should be interpreted as informative. Focusing information gives it the status of the new one in the sense of directing the recipient’s attention to it, and not only if it is presented for the first time in the text. This indicates that the focused information can be restored from the previous context. It should be noted that identifying the topic and focus in Old Germanic texts requires determining the grammatical correlations of the named categories.¹ The factors of information organization in the text play a significant role in word-order patterns.

According to M. A. K. Halliday, the informational focus is one of the types of emphasis, by which the speaker highlights a part of the message being delivered. From the speaker’s point of view, the message should be interpreted as informative. At the same time the focused information is believed to be the ‘new’ one in terms of how the speaker presents it even if it has been represented before. It is estimated that the recipient cannot restore the given information from the previous discourse. It is

¹ The diachronic study of the information structure in historical corpora faces methodological difficulties because it is impossible to recover the “vivid” speech of that period. Therefore, in Old Germanic texts the communication focus is implemented primarily through the word order, since the position of the finite verb predominantly depends on the informational and structural status of the discourse referents involved in the utterance (Hinterhölzl et al., 2005, pp. 143-183).

proposed that the focus of the message is regarded as new, textually (and situationally) underived information [Halliday 1967, p. 204]. It is known that the placement of focus in a sentence depends on the position of the verb, which serves to separate the topic from the rest of the sentence, i.e., the comment.

Studies on information structure in diachrony deal with relational information structure, i.e. the relationships between the constituents of a sentence, and between topic and focus. Referential information structure, i.e. the relationship between referents and context (e.g., the discourse context, realized in terms of ‘known’ and ‘new’, is insufficiently developed in historical linguistics [Bech & Eide 2014, pp. 1–14]. Therefore, the researchers distinguish between two types of focus, i.e., *non-contrasting*, which presents the new information, and *contrasting*, which realized in different structural positions [Jacobs 1992, pp. 7–16].

Remarkably, information structuring in a sentence is pragmatically determined, due to which the constituents acquire the necessary communicative weight. Thus, lexical or morphological elements, different types of syntactic structures, or intonation serve to denote a topic. Furthermore, a topic can exhibit different degrees of syntactic integration into the sentence, both when it performs a grammatical function in the main clause and when the topic is implemented outside the sentence but correlates with an element within the given sentence. In this regard, we observe the interaction between word-order patterns and pragmatics in sentences with V1 structure.

According to P. Hopper, the word order pattern with the verb in initial position (V1) was used in Proto-Germanic mainly in imperative and interrogative sentences, as well as in conditional sentences with an asyndetic type of connection [Hopper 1975, p. 18]. However, the main declarative sentences with the verb in the initial position are attested in the early stages of the development of all Germanic languages [Walkden 2014, p. 92]. The following sentences exemplify the V1 position with *verba dicendi*, *verba voluntatis*, *modal verbs* etc., e.g.:

(1) OE *Cwæp se æpela lareow, 'Weorþiaþ ge eowerne Drihten God mid gedafenlicum þingum, & on-secggaþ ge him mid soþfætnesse wæstmum, þonne gefylleþ Drihten eower beren mid genihtsumnesse.* – “The eminent teacher (St. Paul) Hath said, Worship your Lord God with meet things, and offer to him the fruits of soothfastness (sincerity)” (Bl.H., The Third Sunday in Lent, I. 41);

(2) OE *Ne mihhte se mánfulla ehtere mid nanre ðenunge þam lytlingum swa micclum fremian, swa micclum swa hé him fremode mid ðære reðan ehthnysse hatunge* – “The wicked persecutor could not by any service so greatly favour those

little ones, so greatly as he favoured them by the fierce hate of persecution” (Aelf.H., Natale Innocentium Infantum, 84);

(3) OS **Quamun** *managa Iudeon an thene gastseli* – “Many Jews came to the great hall” (Heliand 2736);

(4) OS **Bidun** *allan dag that uuerod for them uuiha* – “The people waited all day long in front of the temple” (Heliand 174);

(5) OHG **Antlingota** *tho ther engil, quad iru: thie peilago geist quimit ubar thi* – “And the angel answered and said to her: the Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Tatian III, 7);

(6) OHG **Wolt** *ih hiar nu vedinon (ni mag iz thoh irkoboron), wio managfalt gilari in himilriche wari* – “I would like to speak here (although I can only do so inaccessibly) about the diversity of dwellings in the kingdom of heaven” (Otfrid V, 23, 1–2).

The examples (1)–(6) introduce the change in narrative situation, so placement of the verb in the initial position provides the new narrative context with a wide focus and highlights the entire content of the sentence [Fourquet 1974, pp. 314–323].

J. Smith gives that declarative sentences with a finite verb in the initial position are defined as sentences with ‘dramatic force’ because of their emphatic character [Smith 1971, p. 96]. Hence, it can be noted that their use depended on the emphasis, or on the narrative structure of the text. According to S. Luraghi, the placement of the verb in the initial position in declarative sentences of Germanic languages is a free, pragmatically determined option, and not grammaticalized for any specific function [Luraghi 1995, p. 356]. Maintaining our considerations on the variability of word order in Old Germanic languages, it makes sense to turn to the level of information structure, where focus marking has a significant impact.

The following part of narration consists of a number of internal episodes in which every sentence begins with the finite verb in the initial position. In this case, the motivation for such an arrangement of constituents might be a thematic shift, or an aesthetic effect, as it is proposed by P. Hopper, a kind of “breathing pause” [Hopper 1979, p. 221], e.g.:

(7) OHG **Uuarun** *tho hirta in thero lantskeffi uuahhante inti bihaltante nahtuuahta ubar ero euuit. Quam thara gotes engil inti gistuont nah in, inti gotes berahtnessi bischein sie; giforhtun sie im tho in mihhilero forhtu.* – “There were shepherds in the area, keeping watch over the flocks at night. An angel of God came and stood near them, and the glory of God shone around them; they were then filled with great fear” [Tatian, VI, 6,1];

(8) OE **Wæs** *ðæt Gode swiðe gecoren man on his dædum. He wæs on Pannania þære mægðe ærest on woruld cumen, in Arrea ðæm tune. Wæs he hweðre in Italia afeded in Tician þære byrig. Wæs he for worlde swiþe æþelra gebyrda & godra, wæron his yldran hweðre fæder & modor, buta hæðne. Wæs his fæder ærest cyninges þegn, & ða ætnehstan geðeah þæt he wæs cininges þegna aldorman.* – “He was very dear to God on account of his works. He first came into the world in the land of Pannonia, in the town of Sabaria. He was, nevertheless, brought up in the city of Ticino in Italy. In the sight of the world, he was of very noble and good birth, but yet his parents, father and mother, were both heathens. His father was first a king’s servant (thane), and at last rose to be chief of the king’s servants (thanes)” [Bl.H. XVIII, p. 211].

In line with our previous discussion, the V1 pattern in Old Germanic is also represented in the negative sentences [Buniyatova 2021; Horodilova 2023]. The use of the NegV1 pattern can be explained by the influence of the focus on pragmatically important information. The placement of negative markers together with the finite verb in the initial position has also been regarded as a contextually bound phenomenon caused by the genre specificity of the Old Germanic religious discourse, e.g.:

(9) OE **Ne þurfon** *ge wenan þæt ge þæt orceape sellon, þæt ge under Drihtnes borh syllap, þeh ge sonna instæpæs þære mede ne ne onron* – “You need not think that you are giving that without return (gratuitously) which you give under the Lord’s security, though you receive not at once the recompense” [BL.H. p. 41];

(10) OHG **Ni losent** *thar in noti gold noh diuro wati, ni hilfit gotowebbi thar noh thaz silabar in war* – “In this distress, neither gold nor valuable garments are accepted as ransom, indeed, no precious fabric or silver is of any use there” [Otfrid V, 19, 45–46].

We can assume that negative markers placed in the initial position had a prosodic quality in Old Germanic religious texts. Examples (9) – (10) show that the introductory negative phrase describes the frames that function as topics of contrast. Thus, in this case, the pragmatic effect is achieved through contrastive stress.

It should be noted that the statements in the text are organized into distinct logical relationships and form a hierarchical structure. The passage from the theological treatise of Isidore (8th century) is a subject of interest from the point of view of negation, e.g.:

(11) OHG **Nibu** *christ druhtin sii, umbi huuenan quadh dauid in chuninga boohhum* – “If Christ is not the Lord, how could David say in the Book of Kings” [Isidor III, 7, 209–211];

(12) OHG *Nibu druhtin uns firleazssi samun* – “Unless the Lord left us seeds” [Isidor VII, 5, 573–574].

It is worth noting that Isidore's treatise differs from other religious texts in its argumentative nature. In this regard, we consider sentences (11) – (12) which do not trigger a narrative function, but a substantiating and instructive one, where the negation is additionally marked by the conditional conjunction *ibu* “if”. The negative particle *ni* creates a focus of attention on *Christ* and *druhtin*, and all other elements depend on the context.

The communicative structure of the Old Germanic sentence presents a special interest from the point of view of the arrangement of its constituents. According to N. Asher and A. Lascarides, the relations in discourse likely in grammar are represented on the levels of coordination and subordination [Asher & Lascarides 2003]. The provided analysis shows that the required discursive function is achieved through the V1 patterns, including negative constructions.

Conclusion. In light of this discussion, we have concluded that the arrangement of constituents in the Old Germanic sentences is motivated by the information structuring of the message being conveyed. Old Germanic syntax demonstrates structural variability, including the SOV, SVO, and VSO patterns. Notably, the number of attested declarative sentences with the finite verb in the initial position is relatively high. The V1 pattern is noteworthy and is explained by the influence of pragmatically important information. This strategy indicates a special performative semantics of the message, where the focused element is foregrounded and logically stressed. It would make sense to talk about the genre-specific nature of this phenomenon in the context of the religious discourse of the texts under consideration. The arrangement of constituents with the placement of the finite verb in the far left-hand position is considered in the context of the information structuring, due to the peculiarities of the religious discourse. It has been traced that the sentences with a finite verb in the initial position either introduce a new referent to the discourse or provide new information about an already established referent. Proceeding from the above, it is reasonable to consider the interaction between the grammatical and pragmatical subsystems at the level of information structuring in the Old Germanic timespan.

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