From OV to VO in the English VP: a change on different levels of clause structure

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With this paper, I aim to explore the cues that govern residual pre-verbal object placement in Middle English (henceforth ME). In fact, whereas 1200 is commonly taken as the point in time when the VO is reanalyzed as the basic word order, negated and quantified objects undergo pre-verbal mapping until late ME (Fischer et al. 2000, Pintzuk and Taylor 2006). It will be shown that the change from OV to VO surface word order takes place involving different levels of grammar.

Previous research has shown in fact that the object placement in Old English (henceforth OE) was probably governed by information structural cues; in fact, Struik and van Kemenade (2018) and De Bastiani (2020) show that the pre-verbal placement of an object correlates with its givenness. Furthermore, De Bastiani (2020) argues for a phase in the reanalysis from an OV to a VO surface structure in the history of English, where the relevant cue for object placement is of prosodic nature. In fact, in early ME texts such as the Lambeth Homilies, pronominal objects surface before the verb, or are scrambled to a position above TP, whereas non-pronominal objects are mapped in post-verbal position in most cases (De Bastiani and Hinterhölzl 2020). Therefore, it will be contended that the change first involves the loss of the relevant cues at LF, and secondly the loss of the relevant cues at PF, as argued for in the account put forth by Hinterhölzl (2014, 2015, 2017) and further elaborated in De Bastiani (2019, 2020), which analyses the change from an OV to a VO surface structure in terms of a change in the relevant cues governing object placement. When the information structural constraints are blurred, weight is taken as the relevant factor. When weight is no longer decisive for the pre-verbal mapping of objects, surface VO is reanalyzed as the basic word order. Whereas the information structural and prosodic cues can explain the mapping of verbal objects, it is reasonable to assume that quantified and negated objects are subject to different constraints. This paper aims at determining the relevant cues governing the pre-verbal mapping of negated and quantified objects in ME, thereby determining how different types of cues interact in the change of directionality within the VP.

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