

V-final conjunct clauses in Old English: function and syntactic status

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keywords: Old English, conjunct clause, V-final, corpus study

Old English (OE) conjunct clauses (i.e. main clauses introduced by coordinating conjunctions, usually *and* ‘and’ and *ac* ‘but’) have a very unclear status in the syntactic system of the language. On the one hand, some studies claim that they resemble OE subordinate clauses in their strong preference for the V-final order (Mitchell 1985: §1685; Traugott 1992: 277; Fischer et al. 2000: 53; Ringe & Taylor 2015: 419). On the other hand, Bech (2001, 2017) quite convincingly shows that the proportion of V-final clauses among OE conjuncts is actually quite small, and it is potentially even smaller if Latin influence is considered as an important factor inflating the frequency of V-final conjuncts in some early OE translations (Cichosz 2021).

All in all, the current state of research suggests two mutually exclusive interpretations of the syntactic status of OE conjunct clauses. Bech’s (2001, 2012, 2017) studies suggest that all V-final main clauses, both conjunct and non-conjunct, perform similar functions in OE discourse, with the V-final order being more common with discourse-old subjects and long, non-durative verbs in both clause types (Bech 2012). By contrast, Zimmermann (2017) claims that V-final conjunct clauses are syntactically subordinate because the OE coordinating conjunctions could (and sometimes did) occupy the same position in the clause structure as the complementizers introducing subordinate clauses. Hence, function does not underly the use of the pattern: it is a purely syntactic phenomenon. The aim of this study is to determine which of these two hypotheses finds more convincing support in the available corpus data.

With this purpose in mind, all the V-final main, conjunct and subordinate clauses will be extracted from the YCOE corpus (Taylor et al. 2003). The V-final order is defined as a clause with at least two heavy constituents preceding the clause-final verb (this excludes clauses with only light, mostly pronominal elements, and follows the definitions provided by Pintzuk (1999; 2005), Ringe & Taylor (2015) and Mitchell (1985); clauses with simple and complex verb phrases will be analysed separately). Next, a set of all non-V-final main, conjunct and subordinate clauses with at least two heavy constituents (apart from the finite verb) will be extracted for comparison. The analysis will be divided into a quantitative and qualitative stage and it will seek answers to the following research questions: 1) which constituent types show a tendency for post- and pre-verbal placement in main, conjunct and subordinate clauses and what is the relation between the end-weight principle and the V-final order in each clause type? 2) what is the collocational range of V-final main, conjunct and subordinate clauses, i.e. is this word order typical of any verbs and/or verb types? 3) are V-final conjunct clauses functionally consistent, i.e. do they perform any clear and describable functions in OE discourse, and is this function similar to that of V-final main clauses? If Bech’s (2012, 2017) observations are to be confirmed, then it should be possible to note some functional consistency of V-final conjunct and non-conjunct clauses and both clause types should attract similar verbs and verb types, with end-weight playing an important role in the word order variation. If Zimmerman’s (2017) interpretation works better, then the V-final clauses should show little functional consistency and the V-final order should co-occur with different verbs and verb types and short verb forms (as it does in subordinate clauses).

The collocability of the analysed construction will be checked on the basis of the lemmatised version of YCOE prepared by our project team. The statistical significance of any possible lexical tendencies will be measured by means of collocation analysis (Gries 2003, Gries &

Stefanowich 2004). Since the analysed structure may have been influenced by foreign transfer (cf. Cichosz 2021), in the case of translations the qualitative functional analysis (generally based on samples extracted from different texts in YCOE) will exclude clauses with V-final sources in the Latin.

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