WORD ORDER CONVERGENCE IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

MICHIO HOSAKA[*1]

[*]Corresponding Author: hosaka.michio@nihon-u.ac.jp
[1]The Department of English Language and Literature, Nihon University, Tokyo, Japan

1. Introduction

It is well known that early English had various types of word order, such as SXV, SVX, and XVS. However, in the course of the historical changes that have taken place in English, its word order has gradually come to be fixed as SVX. Such a word order change has been the target of historical studies for ages (van Kemenade 1987, Roberts 2007, inter alia). This paper focuses on the word order of the three-verb clusters (Modal+*have/be*+Participle) in OE and ME, and argues how it has converged in the history of English.

2. Methods and Data Analysis

This paper aims to clarify the word order change based on the statistical analysis of the data from the YCOE and PPCME2, and explore the mechanisms of its convergence from the perspective of the cultural evolution of language. As Table 1 shows, the word orders of 1-3-2 and 3-2-1 are the typical orders of Germanic languages and have decreased in number. On the contrary, the 1-2-3 order, which is the norm in PDE, has increased in the later period of OE. In addition, as Table 2 shows, it is obvious that the 1-2-3 order has been firmly established in ME.

	Early OE	Late OE
1-2-3	113 (55.4%)	478 (86.8%)
1-3-2	44 (21.6%)	30 (5.4%)
3-2-1	42 (20.6%)	38 (6.9%)
3-1-2	4 (2.0%)	3 (0.5%)
2-1-3	1 (0.5%)	2 (0.4%)
2-3-1	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	204	551

Table 1 Three-verb clusters in OE

	Early ME	Late ME
1-2-3	365 (90.1%)	1628 (98.4%)
1-3-2	34 (8.4%)	1 (0.1%)
3-2-1	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
3-1-2	6 (1.5%)	24 (1.5%)
2-1-3	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2-3-1	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.1%)
Total	405	1654

Table 2 Three-verb clusters in ME

Notes: 1-2-3 (Modal-*be/have*-Participle), 1-3-2 (Modal-Participle-*be/have*), 3-2-1 (Participle-*be/have*-Modal), 3-1-2 (Participle-Modal-*be/have*), 2-1-3 (*be/have*-Modal-Participle), 2-3-1 (*be/have*-Participle-Modal)

It has long been disputed philologically and theoretically as to why such word order changes have occurred in the history of English. The explanation can be found in the rise of functional projections (FPs) under the evolutionary assumption of dynamic structures being flexibly adaptive to communicative needs.

	1-2-3	1-3-2	3-2-1
Main cl.	268 (88.7%)	23 (7.6%)	10 (3.3%)
Sub. cl.	323 (71.3%)	51 (11.3%)	70 (15.5%)
Total	591 (78.3%)	74 (9.8%)	80 (10.6%)

3. Discussion

Given that lexical projections are head-initial, the structures of these word orders converge as they have been shown in the trees.
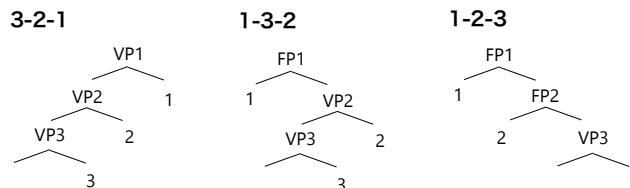
Figure 1 The derivation

This shows that the word order of the three-verb clusters converged into 1-2-3 with the emergence of new functional projections. This can be regarded as the result of the rise of auxiliary verbs often explained in grammaticalization, which is assumed to be one of the processes of cultural evolution (Heine and Kuteva 2007, Smith 2011, inter alia). To be precise, ModalP, PassiveP and PerfectP emerged adaptively in order to compensate for the loss of verbal inflections in the course of the historical changes that have taken place in English. This convergence of word order is regarded as a good example of cultural evolution.

References

Heine, B. and T. Kuteva (2007) *The Genesis of Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kemenade, A. van (1987) *Syntactic Case and Morphological Case in the History of English*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Roberts, I. (2007) *Diachronic Syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, A.D.M. (2011) Grammaticalization and language evolution. In H. Narrog and B. Heine (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization*. 142-152. Oxford: Oxford University Press.