CHAPTER 3

Introduction: Trying to Hit a Moving Target (Non-)Canonical Word Order in the History of English

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3.1 Introduction

Typologists distinguish between languages that have a fixed and those that have a relatively free word order, with the latter still showing certain preferences and both types of language being subject to constraints regarding processing ease and efficiency (Hawkins 2012: 632). Present-Day English (PDE) is a language with a relatively fixed SV(O) basic (or canonical) word order in affirmative declarative sentences, a property it shares with the majority of languages in the world (Dryer 2013a in *WALS*). In order to meet discourse-pragmatic requirements such as the ordering of topic and comment, it has developed a range of constructions that allow elements other than the subject to be placed earlier in the sentence. Old English (OE), by contrast, was a language with a relatively free word order, which could therefore move constituents around in the sentence without additional syntactic marking to meet discourse-pragmatic needs. Diachronically, English thus does not have a single canonical word order, which means that historical linguists are shooting at a moving target: the overall change that English has undergone is from a discourse-prominent towards a syntax-prominent language (see, e.g., Fries 1940; Taylor & Pintzuk 2011; Los & van Kemenade 2012). In addition to having V2 as its basic word order (Fischer & van der Wurff 2006: 185), OE also allowed for other word order patterns, such as SOV and even OSV.

Dominant V2 word order means that in OE elements other than the subject can easily occur in sentence-initial position and the verb still occupies the second slot. Examples (1) and (2) are typical in that the sentence-initial position is occupied by adverbials (temporal and locative).[1]

[1] Glosses and translations are mine. Sources refer to the original examples; italics highlight relevant parts.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108863858.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(1) ða *cwom* godes engel of hiofonum.
then come$_{\text{V-PAST}}$ God's$_{\text{GEN}}$ angel$_{\text{NOM}}$ from heavens$_{\text{DAT}}$.
'then God's angels appeared from the heavens.' (*Martyrology*, ninth c.; Lass 1994: 225)

(2) In ðeosse abbudissan mynstre *wæs* sum broðor syndriglice mid godcundre gife gemæred ond geweorðad ...
In this abbess$_{\text{GEN}}$ minster$_{\text{DAT}}$ be$_{\text{V-PAST}}$ some brother$_{\text{NOM}}$ specially with divine$_{\text{DAT}}$ gift$_{\text{DAT}}$ glorify$_{\text{V-PastPart}}$ and honour$_{\text{V-PastPart}}$
'A certain brother lived in this abbess' minster who was especially glorified and honoured with a divine gift ...' (*Bede*; Traugott 1992: 278)

Interestingly, V2 does double duty in the second example. On the one hand, it allows the ordering of given/topic ('abbess') and new/comment ('a certain brother'). On the other hand, it provides a way of placing the heavy subject constituent (a post-modified NP) in sentence-final position, following Behaghel's (1930) principle of end-weight.

Another frequently attested word order pattern in OE transitive clauses is SOV, attested both in main clauses (as in (3) and (4)) and in subordinate clauses (illustrated in (5)).

(3) Æþred me ah Eanred me agrof.
Æþred$_{\text{NOM}}$ me$_{\text{DAT}}$ own$_{\text{V-PRES}}$ Eanred$_{\text{NOM}}$ me$_{\text{DAT}}$ carve$_{\text{V-PAST}}$.
'Æþred owns me and Eanred carved me.' (ring inscription, ca. 800; Lass 1994: 221)

(4) and he him sæde þas word[2]
and he$_{\text{NOM}}$ him$_{\text{DAT}}$ say$_{\text{V-PAST}}$ these word$_{\text{ACC-PL}}$
'and he said these words to him' (Ælfric *Homiles*; Haeberli 2018: 304)

(5) Adrian se casere hine ðreatede *þæt he Criste wiðsoce*.
Adrian the emperor$_{\text{NOM}}$ him$_{\text{DAT}}$ press$_{\text{V-PAST}}$ that he$_{\text{NOM}}$ Christ$_{\text{ACC}}$ deny$_{\text{V-SUBJ}}$.
'The emperor Adrian pressed that he should deny Christ/pressed him to deny Christ.' (*Martyrology*, ninth c.; Lass 1994: 224)

It is important to note that the objects in the first two examples are both pronominal. Full NP (or DP) objects were less likely to precede the verb.[3] Conversely, pronominal subjects showed a strong preference to precede the verb, even in clauses with sentence-initial adverbials (which would ordinarily have triggered VS), as illustrated in (6) from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*.[4]

[2] In the double-object construction in (4) the second O follows the V.
[3] More recent generative research uses DP (Determiner Phrase) instead of the older concept of NP (Noun Phrase).
[4] Some generative accounts (e.g., Lightfoot 1999) consider OE pronominal subjects to be clitics that require different treatment from regular subjects.

(6) And þā on ðissum ġēare betweox Natiuitas Sancte Marie and Sancte Michaeles mæssan *hī ymbsæton* Cantwareburuh
And then in this$_{DAT}$ year$_{DAT}$, between birth$_{NOM}$ saint$_{GEN}$ Mary$_{GEN}$ and saint$_{GEN}$ Michael$_{GEN}$ mass$_{NOM}$ they$_{NOM}$ besiege$_{V\text{-}PAST}$ Canterbury$_{ACC}$
'And then in this year, between September 8th and Sept 29th, they besieged Canterbury'

In addition to having dominant V2 and a strong preference for SOV in subordinate clauses, OE also provides evidence of minor or non-canonical word order patterns, including relatively rare instances of OSV(A), as in (7).

(7) Þillice word Maria heold aræfniende on hyre heortan.
Such$_{ACC_Pl}$ word$_{ACC_Pl}$ Mary$_{NOM}$ keep$_{V\text{-}PAST}$ ponder$_{V\text{-}PresPart}$ in her heart$_{DAT}$
'Mary kept and pondered such words in her heart.' (Ælfric *Homiles*; Fischer & van der Wurff 2006: 183)

Finally, the distribution of word order preferences in transitive clauses was not stable throughout the OE period. Traugott (1992: 285) points out that V-final in main clauses decreased in frequency because of the effects of V2 and heavy NP-shift. As a result, OV became increasingly restricted to subordinate clauses (see Lass 1994: 224 or Traugott 1992: 276).[5] In other words, assigning a basic or canonical word order to OE is complicated by the fact that there is ongoing change (see also Dreschler, Chapter 4 in this volume).

It is not only ongoing change that makes it difficult to assign a basic word order to OE. The matter is complicated by the fact that the notion of canonical word order cannot be defined in a theory-neutral way. In mentalist approaches (including generative grammar), it would be the basic word order that speakers of a language acquire as part of the grammatical system of their first language (or languages in multilingual environments). In empiricist approaches, it would be the most frequently attested and thus dominant and neutral word order. Patterns that are secondary in a mentalist approach or infrequent in an empiricist approach would constitute marked and thus non-canonical word orders. Typically, main declarative clauses are taken to be canonical. In PDE, *I gave him it* is more frequent and hence considered more basic or canonical than *I gave it him*.

Language typology distinguishes basic word order types cross-linguistically and, within these, unmarked and marked word order. It is

[5] Note, however, that differences between main and subordinate clause were transitory, which fits in with long-term trends in Indo-European recently discussed in Jing et al. (2023).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108863858.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

empiricist in that it allows for alternative word order patterns as variations of a basic word order type (e.g., Greenberg 1963: 79).[6]

Sun and Traugott (2011) point out that there are three different sites where word order changes may occur, namely clause structure, argument structure, and modifier structure within the noun phrase. Thus, in addition to the sequence of the functional roles of subject, object, and verb, the default mapping of semantic roles (agent, patient, recipient, etc.) onto syntactic functions is subject to diachronic change (see the Introduction to this volume). The third type of word order change mentioned by Sun and Traugott (2011) is also recognised by typologists, who distinguish between left- and right-branching languages (e.g., Greenberg 1963).

If we set aside difficulties in defining what 'canonical' word order means, the question arises which factors contribute to the emergence of non-canonical syntactic patterns. According to some of the theory-based approaches to non-canonicity, one cause lies within the affordances of information structure in discourse, where there is a tendency for old information to precede new and topics to come before comments (see Birner & Ward 2009). Constituent weight, specifically the principle of end-weight (e.g., Behaghel 1930; Warner 2007), and the requirements of online processing also play a role. The more flexible word order of OE has the advantage, for instance, that the heavy subject (with post-modification) in (2) naturally occurs in sentence-final position, whereas PDE needs to resort to strategies such as extraposition in combination with a dummy subject to accommodate long subjects (as in (8)).

(8) It would be a global ecological disaster for the major economies not to meet the Paris climate agreement goals.

Other scholars have pointed to language contact, particularly large-scale adult-second acquisition as an important factor behind changes in basic word order patterns of a language: 'word order seems to be the easiest sort of syntactic feature to borrow or to acquire via language shift' (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 55).

In the following, the main word order changes in the history of English will be described in terms of a change from 'discourse-prominent' to 'syntax-prominent' (Section 3.2), even though the chapters in this part of the volume go beyond core syntax (see Mycock & Glass, Chapter 6 in this volume, on a phenomenon on the right periphery). The survey will outline some of the main theoretical approaches that have looked at word

[6] See Dryer (2013b) for an overview and critical discussion of different word order typologies.

order changes since the OE period, with a brief section on developments in the methodologies used to investigate them.

3.2 Word Order Changes in the History of English

3.2.1 Loss of Word Order Flexibility and Emergence of Non-Canonical Patterns

According to Haeberli (2018), loss of OV (or V-final) begins in the OE period and reaches completion during the Middle English (ME) period (see also Rissanen 1999). Initially, this strengthens V2 word order in late OE and early ME, particularly in areas with language contact between OE and Old Norse (Haeberli 2018). Loss of V2 then begins in the fifteenth century and reaches (near) completion by the seventeenth century (Nevalainen 1997; Fischer & van der Wurff 2006: 185). Remnants of OV can be found in Early Modern English (EModE) and remnants of V2 into Late Modern English (LModE), as examples (9) and (10) show.[7]

(9) I *can* *thee* *thanke* that thou *canst* *such answeres* *duise*: But I perceyue thou *doste* *me* thoroughly *knowe*. (1533 Udall, *Roister Doister* I.ii; Rissanen 1999: 268)

(10) SURFACE. . . . They have no malice at heart –
MARIA. Then *is their conduct* still more contemptible (1777 Sheridan; Denison 1998: 236)

PDE also allows for V2 word order, but such instances are clearly non-canonical. Hawkins (1986) provides examples of V2 in negative contexts (as in (11)), following *so* (in (12)), and with directional adverbs or locatives, illustrated in (13) and (14), respectively (subjects and verbs in italics; emphasis added).

(11) a. Never *have I been* so insulted.
b. Under no circumstances *can I permit* it.

(12) a He can drive a car, and so *can I*.
b. So *be it*.
c. So slowly *did the workmen get on* with their work that they were dismissed.

(13) In *came the boy*.

(14) On each wall *hung a large picture*. (Hawkins 1986: 168–9, 171, 174)

[7] Note that with the auxiliary *can* preceding the O *thee*, (9) is not an example of 'pure' OV word order.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108863858.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While the chronology of the major change in word order type is relatively uncontested, the factors that contributed to it and that allow us to explain this fundamental typological change in the history of English are more varied and have been put forward within different theoretical frameworks. We will look at them in the next subsection.

With the flexibility of simply promoting almost any constituent to sentence-initial position in OE having been lost, the language had to develop patterns that would allow for discourse-pragmatic requirements to be met. Already existing constructions that allowed non-prototypical subjects, namely incipient *be*-passives, fully grammaticalised and increased in frequency (see Seoane 2006). In addition, English developed non-canonical syntactic patterns that allowed for topicalisation of already 'given' referents, which previously would simply occur in sentence-initial position. These include prepositional and *get*-passives (as in (15)), *it*-clefts (illustrated in (16)), extraposition (see example (8) above), and – if word order is taken to include the mapping of semantic roles onto syntactic function – patterns with non-canonical subjects, notably middles and secondary subject constructions, illustrated in (17) and (18), respectively.

(15) a. This problem has already been taken care of.
b. The train got cancelled.

(16) a. It was surely a novel, high-performance ChatBot that insulted him in this genius way.
b. It is with sincere regret that we have to inform you of the cancellation of the scheme.

(17) a. She scares easily.
b. The book reads well.
c. The straps on the backpack adjust for a comfortable fit.

(18) a. This tent sleeps four.
b. The guitar broke a string. (Hawkins 1986: 58–9)

As Hawkins (1986, 2012) has pointed out, a concomitant change to a rigid SVO word order in English is an increase in the semantic diversity of the S-slot. In other words, verbs have fewer selection restrictions and broader subcategorisation frames; in addition, English became more flexible with respect to raising and movement constructions. Thus, in the change from a loose-fit (discourse-oriented) to a tight-fit (syntax-oriented) language, English subjects became more semantically diverse: The middles in (17), for instance, have EXPERIENCER and PATIENT subjects with no marking for voice on the verb. The flexibility of English middles goes beyond these two semantic roles and even allows for LOCATIVE subjects as in (19).

(19) a. The new trails in the park cycle smoothly, even for beginners.
b. The moonlight pond fishes well in the early morning.

These examples illustrate well how 'a language that changes its lexical verb position, from SOV to SVO (like English), can see earlier requirements for predicate frame differentiation and argument differentiation weakened or overridden', as Hawkins (2012: 629) points out.

3.2.2 Theoretical Approaches to Word Order Changes

A relatively common explanation for the loss of the more flexible word order and a shift towards SVO makes a connection between loss of case marking and word order, claiming that in the absence of morphological marking for syntactic function, the development of fixed syntactic slots was a way to avoid ambiguities and ensure communication; in other words, the typological shift was a means to compensate for loss of morphological links (e.g., Vennemann 1975). Since this account makes a connection between the requirements of processing and fixed order, change is seen as occurring in language use, which is a functionalist explanation. The complementary theoretical perspective conceives of word order changes to occur during acquisition and as a result of shifting frequencies in the input. Change, in this view, is seen as occurring in I-language, with parameters of Universal Grammar (UG) being set differently from one generation to the next. This traditionally falls under the umbrella of a 'formal' (or generative) approach to change (even though much of the original formalism in generative grammar has been given up).

Fischer and van der Wurff are critical of the view that communication and successful processing rely on morphological marking or fixed word order, pointing to the role of context:

> If we ... take into account the considerable help of contextual, pragmatic and semantic factors in the task of decoding clauses, it is clear that it is a simplification to view the loss of case as having led to rampant ambiguity of subject and object status of NPs, for which the use of consistent SVO order needed to be employed as a repair strategy. (2006: 188)

Levshina (2022) does not deny the possibility of a connection between word order and morphological complexity. However, the existing research (e.g., Koplenig et al. 2017) that she cites indicates that the causal effect is from fixed word order to loss of inflections rather than in the other direction, or in her words, 'rigid word order helps to lose distinct forms' (Levshina 2022: 143). This is, by the way, a point that had already been

made by Jespersen at the end of the nineteenth century (Jespersen 1894: §75): 'a fixed word order was the *prius*, or cause, and grammatical simplification, the *posterus*, or effect'.

Some generative linguists conceive of V2 as a result of movement (from OV to V2 in main clauses: V-to-C movement); with loss of verbal inflection the verb no longer moves to V2 (see, e.g., Fischer et al. 2000: 135–6). The problem with this account is that loss of inflection in the verb does not necessarily lead to a loss in the flexibility of word order, as the case of Dutch illustrates (Fischer et al. 2000). In another generative account, OE pronominal subjects are analysed as clitics. According to this approach, de-cliticisation of the pronominal subjects increased SVO in the input and thus brought about the change in the basic word order pattern that children acquired (Lightfoot 1999; Taylor & Pintzuk 2012). In other words, this account assumes that competition was between two different types of grammar (OV and VO). This 'double base hypothesis' (Hinterhölzl 2017) can find an answer within the generative framework via change in the input to first language acquisition. There is a problem for the competing grammars account, however, in that variable use often continues for much longer than catastrophic change scenarios allow for: a case in point would be the fact that OV after auxiliary continues to be found into EModE and V2 is occasionally attested beyond the 1700s. Biberauer and Roberts have countered the criticism that has been voiced against catastrophic change scenarios:

> The gradualness of a change such as the one from OV to VO in English . . . could, in principle, be made compatible with the parametric approach if the population dynamics of change are taken into consideration; i.e. if the individuals making up a speech community undergoing change vary as to the parameter setting in their individual grammars, some having the 'innovative' value in their individual grammars, some having the 'conservative' value. (2017: 139)

Biberauer and Roberts (2017: 139) also acknowledge that variation between conservative and innovative patterns can also be observed in texts produced by the same individual, who would then, theoretically, have to have access to competing grammars. They therefore settle on an emergentist approach to parameter setting (see below).

A more sociolinguistic angle is provided by linguists who see language contact with Old Norse and (imperfect) large-scale second language acquisition (or disrupted transmission) as the driving factors that not only led to simplification and the loss of inflections but subsequently also to a more

fixed word order (see Weerman 1993). McWhorter (2002: 266) summarises this factor in the following way: 'The English timeline was decisively influenced by what Trudgill (2001) has termed, in apt and savory fashion, "the lousy language-learning abilities of the human adult"'. That sociolinguistic factors may affect syntactic change, particularly with respect to the use of non-canonical patterns, is discussed in more detail by Lange (Chapter 5 in this volume).

Sometimes different theoretical accounts overlap in the cause they see behind the shift in word order type. In his largely functional account, Rissanen (1999: 265) makes a connection between the (late) grammaticalisation of the article and the development of a more fixed word order (again, to compensate for loss of morphological marking). Hinterhölzl (2017) also sees a connection with the development of the article at the end of the OE period and the loss of word order flexibility; from within a generative framework, he provides a more detailed explanation claiming that

> the grammaticalization of the definite determiner at the end of the OE period in combination with the loss of Case in eME [early ME] destroyed the balances in a system in which mixed word orders were determined by information structural and prosodic conditions and led to a reanalysis in the complex interaction between syntactic structure, prosody and information structure. (2017: 10)

In this analysis (Hinterhölzl 2017: 26), OE has a VO-base and variable spell-out influenced by prosody and pragmatics, with the determiner influencing the weight of the noun phrase: 'Definite DPs will count as prosodically heavy as soon as the definite determiner is fully grammaticalized and reanalyzed as the head of the DP'. Bastiani (2022) shows that these forces are also at work in early ME.

As pointed out above, generative accounts traditionally view syntactic change occurring from one generation to the next as part of a change in the input and subsequent changes to the grammar that the next generation of speakers acquires. Usage-based accounts such as grammaticalisation theory and usage-based construction grammar conceive of change as emerging incrementally via small changes in patterns and pattern frequencies. More recent generative accounts call for an emergentist view of syntactic change, too:

> The central idea in the emergentist view of parameters is that the parameters of UG are *not* pre-specified in the innate endowment; in other words ... instead, they emerge from the interaction of all three factors [UG, data,

> cognitive principles; MH]. UG itself simply leaves certain options underspecified. These gaps must be filled in order for a grammar to exist, and they are filled by the acquirer . . . (Biberauer & Roberts 2017: 143)

In other words, theoretical accounts of language change (including word order change) appear to be converging. This also applies to methodological approaches in the field (see Section 3.2.2).

Construction grammar conceives of constructions as 'conventional, learned form–function pairings at varying levels of complexity and abstraction' (Goldberg 2013: 17). An important difference between this approach to language and generative accounts is that form and meaning are not separate components or modules but intricately linked in the speaker's grammar or 'construct-i-con'. The representation of English possessive constructions in Figure 3.1 provides an illustration of the different levels of abstraction or schematicity (first introduced by Trousdale 2008: 107) that construction grammarians have come to assume.

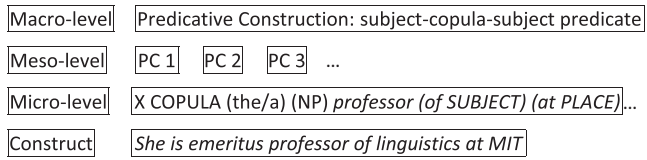

Figure 3.1 A construction grammar view of levels of abstraction (after Hundt 2016: 237; reprinted by permission from Brill)

Interestingly, these can now also be found in emergentist approaches to parameter setting from within the generative paradigm. Biberauer and Roberts (2017: 149) distinguish

- macroparameters (all heads of a relevant type);
- mesoparameters (all heads of a natural class, e.g., V);
- microparameters (small, lexically definable subclass of functional heads, e.g., modal auxiliaries, subject clitics); and
- nanoparameters (one or more individual lexical items).

An important difference with the constructionist approach lies in the fact that the different levels of schematicity or abstraction are not limited to the phrasal level but may be found in other areas of the construct-i-con, for instance the transitive schema at the most abstract level, which allows for less abstract (mono- and ditransitive) constructions at a meso-level,

benefactive constructions at a micro level, and lexically filled constructs at the lowest level of abstraction.

Kuningas and Leino (2006) claim that construction grammar is particularly suited to the modelling of word order because it makes the link between form and meaning, including discourse-pragmatic requirements. Despite this, research providing more of a bird's-eye perspective by aiming to account for the typological shift in English from a loose- to a more tight-fit language was a blind spot in diachronic construction grammar for a very long time. This most likely had to do with the fact that construction grammar was initially somewhat biased towards more idiomatic constructions. An early example of diachronic research into English constructions looks at the emergence of the *way*-construction (Israel 1996) and how the range of verbs that enter the construction develops across time. Hilpert (2013), one of the first book-length approaches to English diachronic syntax from a constructionist perspective, has a chapter on 'information packaging constructions'. However, this provides the basics of what information structure is and lists a number of constructions that serve the reordering of arguments (cleft constructions, dislocation, extraposition) rather than giving a formal account of how they could be modelled in a constructionist account.

Word order changes started to be modelled within constructionist approaches below the constituent level. Cappelle (2006) and Perek (2012) assume that at a relatively high level of abstraction, the nodes in the construct-i-con may be underspecified constructemes which, at a lower level of abstraction, would allow for allostruction and thus word order variation, for example in particle placement in particle verbs (*she took her hat off* vs. *she took off her hat*). Zehentner (2019) applies this notion in her diachronic study of the dative alternation, where a ditransitive constructeme would allow for two allostructions: the direct object construction, as in *He gave her the book*, and the prepositional object construction, as in *He gave the book to the first girl he met that day.*

Another factor for the relative paucity of word order as object of study in construction grammar approaches may have been that early constructionist research focused on vertical relations, and Figure 3.1 is an example of this emphasis. The notion of allostructions already shifted this emphasis towards horizontal links, as alternating constructions were conceived of as being linked on this level. This was then brought to bear on diachronic construction grammar more systematically (Sommerer & Smirnova 2020). Horizontal or 'lateral' relations take centre stage in the modelling of OV to VO change that Bloom (2021) provides. She makes a connection between subject relative clauses and main clauses in her study; the notion of

syntactic slots that can be variably filled is another concept characteristic of a constructionist approach:

> Old English subject relative clauses had a postverbal object slot available for heavy objects. Under the influence of the main clause, this slot expanded paradigmatically to include shorter objects, reducing the association of the postverbal slot with heavy objects. The first steps of this path are evidenced in Old English, particularly in the group of relative clauses that have many main clause characteristics and less so in relative clauses that lack such a strong similarity to main clauses. (Bloom 2021: 126)

Similarity relations (or 'analogy') thus are seen as an important driving force in a major typological shift in English.

The development of the novel syntactic patterns that emerged to compensate for the loss of flexibility in positioning elements in sentence-initial position (see Section 3.2.1) have also been studied from within different theoretical approaches, notably generative grammar (e.g., Los & Dreschler 2012; Los & Komen 2012; Los & van Kemenade 2012; Dreschler 2015, 2020), grammaticalisation theory (e.g., Sun & Traugott 2011), and diachronic construction grammar (e.g., Hundt 2007).

3.2.3 Methodological Approaches to Word Order Change

Research on word order change in English used to be largely qualitative. With the advent of computer corpora, more quantitative approaches became possible, which were initially pursued by linguists working within the functional paradigm (e.g., Nevalainen 1997). Usage-based construction grammar, especially research within the frequentist strand, has regularly relied on quantitative corpus data and statistical modelling. Again, Bloom (2021) is a good example of this approach being applied to word order change. More recently, generative studies have also increasingly used quantitative methods (e.g., Komen et al. 2014), including multivariate statistical modelling, to substantiate their claims. A good example is the study by Struik and van Kemenade (2020), who use data from *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (*YCOE*) and regression modelling to validate the claim that changes in word order and aspects of information structure are connected:[8]

[8] Struik and van Kemenade (2022) focus more on the theoretical details of the account, which postulates incremental changes in movement possibilities to account for long-term change of word order possibilities in English, an account that is compatible with the emergentist approach proposed by Biberauer and Roberts (2017).

> Multinomial regression analysis within a generalized linear mixed model shows that OV word order is reserved for given objects, while VO objects are much more mixed in terms of information structure. We argue that these results are more in line with an analysis which derives all occurring word orders from a VO base than an analysis which proposes the opposite. (2020: 1)

In a similar vein, García García (2023) is able to show that a connection exists between the development away from a relatively flexible, discourse-oriented syntax and the increase of labile verbs (i.e., those allowing alternation between transitive and intransitive construal).

3.3 Concluding Remarks

To sum up, the great majority of studies into word order changes in the history of English have been conducted within the theoretical frameworks of generative grammar and language typology. Generative linguists conceive of language to be organised in a modular fashion, that is, syntax and the lexicon are considered to be separate (but interacting) components of speakers' linguistic knowledge. Accordingly, generative studies have addressed the syntax–pragmatics and the syntax–prosody interfaces in their accounts of word order change. In terms of explanations for syntactic change, generative research has moved from catastrophic change scenarios (Lightfoot 1999) to emergentist models (Biberauer & Roberts 2017). In addition, the lexical level is increasingly considered in terms of so-called 'micro-parameters' (see Mathieu & Trusswell 2017), with studies moving from purely qualitative approaches to quantitative modelling.

In studies on grammaticalisation and usage-based constructionalisation research, word order started out as being of secondary importance. One of the driving forces behind the development of construction grammar has been the aim to account for patterns that are not transparent and that would have been considered too idiosyncratic to be part of syntax 'proper' by earlier generative research. As a result, construction grammar was initially largely blind to canonical word order and word order change at the constituent level. Moreover, the diachronic turn in construction grammar is relatively recent. A shift in focus from vertical to horizontal relations in the construct-i-con in particular has helped bring the typological shift in English from OV to SVO to the fore. At the same time, with a growing attention towards the most abstract level of syntactic representation, the question of how tenable the form-meaning pairing postulate underlying most constructionist research ultimately is has begun to receive critical attention (see Cappelle 2023: 59).

The sketch provided here has shown that generative research into historical syntax and construction grammar can be said to show converging trends, with the former becoming more attuned to the micro level of variation and change and the latter increasingly attempting to model the more abstract parts of the construct-i-con. Another converging trend can be seen in the combination of constructionist approaches to word order change and the field of language contact (see Dux 2018). Trying to account for canonical word order and word order change in the history of English thus turns out to be an exercise in shooting at a moving target in more than one sense.

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