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Syntactical Connections in Old English (Composite Sentence)

¹Olga N. Shalifova

²Elena Yu. Makeeva

¹ Samara State Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities, Russian Federation

Karl Marx prospect, 177-26, Samara city, 443079

PhD (Philology), Associate Professor

E-mail: dekanatino@mail.ru

² Samara State Academy of Social Sciences and Humanities, Russian Federation

Kirova prospekt, 301-38, Samara city, 443114

PhD (Philology), Associate Professor

E-mail: helen_mckey@mail.ru

Abstract. The article focuses on the evolution of the composite sentence in English. Special attention is given to Old English and different ways of syntactical connection of the clauses within a composite sentence. It is specially stressed that the syntactical structure of Old English was determined by the nature of its morphology on the one hand, and by the relation between the spoken and the written forms of the language, on the other. The authors come to the conclusion that the whole Old English syntax was paratactic and that subordination in it was not developed enough.

Keywords: Old English; syntax; subordination; parataxis; composite sentence; history of English; language change; Anglo-Saxon; development.

Introduction.

The aim of this research is to provide some insight into the evolution of the composite sentence in English. Despite a large number of studies devoted to linguistic change in general and to the history of English in particular, there are areas that have seen little or no systematic investigation. The fact remains that English is by no means untypical as far as syntactic change is concerned as it has changed in a number of ways in the past thousand years. Syntax is the arrangement of words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. In fact, the word syntax is derived from the Greek word “syntaxis”, which means “arrangement”. In other words, syntax is the part of grammar which deals with sentences and combinability of words. The core of syntax is the study of the sentence. On the one hand, syntax embraces the structure of the sentence, that is, its components, their structure and the relations between these components, and on the other hand structural and communicative types of sentences.

Though since the nineteenth century there have been some excellent studies in historical phonology and morphology, syntactic change was very often not represented in the textbooks on the history of English. In this paper we plan to concentrate on Old English mostly.

Literature review.

The fact is that synchronic and diachronic linguistics were not really distinguished prior to de Saussure [1]. Only when his works appeared, linguistics had been recognised as a scientific discipline and scholars reached the conclusion that grammatical systems can be changed through the process of language acquisition. Later the development of the “principles and parameters” approach to syntax in the work of N. Chomsky [2] provided a solid foundation for the development of a rich and insightful approach to comparative and historical syntax and now diachronic syntax is becoming fully integrated in contemporary syntactic theory. Here we regard diachronic syntax as a form of comparative syntax, where the comparison is between two different stages of the same language rather than between two different languages or dialects. Concerning the nature of syntactic structures, we also adopt the theory developed by Noam Chomsky and his associates and known as generative grammar [3].

According to this theory, all languages are systems, or rather series of interrelated systems governed by rules. Languages are highly structured; they consist of patterns that appear in various combinations and rules that apply to produce these patterns. Because any language is systematic, the history of any language is the history of change in its systems. Change occurs at different rates and times within the subsystems of a language.

Research

The particular aspect of language change that we are interested in is syntactic change, particularly change in the means by which words and phrases are combined in English to form composite sentences. The approach described in this paper also combines the insights of formal syntactic analysis with quantitative methodology and the tools of corpus linguistics.

We also believe that the historical development of a language as a continuous slow process without sudden breaks and quick transformations. Nevertheless we find it convenient to follow the commonly accepted division of the English language into three periods. Of course, these periods are matters of convenience and the dividing lines between them are purely arbitrary. But within each of the periods it is possible to recognize certain broad characteristics and certain special developments that take place. Thus, the period from 450 to 1150 is known as Old English. It is sometimes described as the period of full inflections, because during most of this period the endings of the noun, the adjective, and the verb are preserved more or less unimpaired. From 1150 to 1500 the language is known as Middle English. During this period the inflections, which had begun to break down toward the end of the Old English period, become greatly reduced, and it is consequently known as the period of leveled inflections. The language since 1500 is called Modern (New) English. By the time we reach this stage in the development a large part of the original inflectional system has disappeared entirely, and we therefore speak of it as the period of lost inflections [4, 46].

Scholars studying the diachronic development of English agree that word order in Old English, at least compared with that in Modern English, was relatively free. Old English was mostly a synthetic language and possessed a system of grammatical forms which indicated connections between words. The word order of Middle English, predictably, falls between that of Old English and that of Modern English, less free than Old English but often with more options than Modern English allows. Further, the tendency toward rigidity of syntax increases throughout the Middle English period as inflections are lost [5, 180].

There are many excellent modern books on Old English, but most focus on the material needed for a basic literary understanding of the poetry and prose of the period, or have other limited goals. Some books also proceed to more advanced study in English historical linguistics and deal with Old English spellings, sounds and morphology but either do not address syntax at all or cover only word order and simple sentence patterns.

The syntactical structure of Old English was determined by the nature of its morphology on the one hand, and by the relation between the spoken and the written forms of the language, on the other. As Old English was mostly a spoken language, its written form resembled oral speech (with the exception of translations from Latin and poems, as “the old poetic language on the whole showed a great many divergences from everyday prose, in the choice of words, in the word forms, and also in the construction of the sentences” [6, 54]). As a result, the syntax of the sentence was relatively simple: complicated syntactical constructions occurred rarely, coordination of clauses prevailed over subordination though composite sentences occurred rather frequently. Still in early

original prose many constructions are not very accurate and seem disorderly and loosely connected; the prose of this period is characterized by unexpected turns from direct to indirect speech, by polysemantic conjunctions and other connectors, distant position of modifiers and the words they modify and so on. Still Old English syntax is recognizably English; in some passages the word-order at least is almost without exception that of the modern language. At other times, we seem to be wrestling with a foreign language.

In Old English there were different ways of syntactical connection of the clauses within a composite sentence: clauses could be linked together with certain connectors, that is syndetically; clauses could be linked together by their order without a connector (asyndetically); some subordinate clauses could be joined by definite forms of the verb. These means of syntactical connection were often combined and in some cases the distinction between coordination and subordination is very subtle.

For example, when sentences of different syntactical value are simply placed together, one by the side of the other, we usually refer to this type of connection as paratactic (parataxis or coordination). The absence of connectors is a characteristic feature of this type of connection and the clauses here look as if they were independent of each other. But what seems to be parataxis, mere coordination in this connection, is only apparent; on closer observation we realize that parataxis with complete independence of the sentences does not occur at all because clauses cannot be connected without a certain kind of hypotaxis or subordination. The fact that two sentences are put together paratactically proves that there is a logical connection between them, that one sentence in some way modifies the other. In other words, what seems formally a paratactic connection is logically hypotaxis or subordination [7], e.g.:

• Ic wat, inc waldend god abolgen wyrð ...[8] – I know **[that]** the ruling god will be angered by you two ...

• Be þam ylcum fæderum, we foresprecende wæron, awriten is ... [9] – It is written by the same preachers of **whom** we were talking ...

• þā cōmon þēōfas eahta, woldon stelan þā māðmas [10] ... – And eight thieves came there, **who** wanted to steal the treasure ...

The second clauses in the examples above are actually, though not formally, subordinate to the clauses preceding them; for this reason they are sometimes referred to as “semi-subordinate clauses” [11, 102].

These examples prove that Old English did not draw as clear a distinction between subordinate and coordinate clauses as is the case in modern English. Besides, though Old English had a few ways of subordinating one clause to another, it favoured the other pattern of parataxis – the juxtaposing of clauses with no formal signal of their relationship other than a coordinate conjunction:

• þa he forþ on þat leoht com, þa beseah he hine under bæc wið þes wifes, þa lesode heo him sona ... [12] – **Then [when]** he came forth into that light, then looked he back toward that woman, **then** slipped she from him immediately ...

Thus, we can say, that to some extent on the whole Old English syntax is paratactic, that is lacking subordinating conjunctions, at least in comparison with syntax in Modern English, which is hypotactic, that is characterized by the use of dependent and subordinate clauses. In Old English texts there was much less of the complex subordination that characterizes English prose now. Most syndetic clauses within the sentence tended to be linked simply by the conjunctions “and/and” meaning *and* and “þā” meaning *then/when/after*:

• Þā geahode se cyning Polimius be ðām witseocum menn, hu sē apostol hine fram ðære wōdnysse ahredde, **and** het hine to him gelangian [13] ... – When the king Polymius heard of the mad man and how the apostle had saved him from madness, he asked him to be fetched ...

• Þā ofslihð se deōfol ðe him wiðstandað, and hī þonne farað mid halgum martyrdome to heofenan rice [13]. – **When/After** the devil destroys those who resist, they go to the heaven as holy martyrs.

When we consider these and other conjunctions in Old English we realize that they are polysemantic and express different types of coordination and subordination. Thus, the conjunction *swa* in the examples below introduces temporal (1), adversative (2) conditional (3) types of clauses and clauses of manner (4):

• (1) ... heora blōd is heora lif, and **swa** hraðe swa hi beoð dēāde, **swa** beoð hī mid ealle geendode. – ... their blood is their life, and **as soon as** they are dead they are totally ended [13].

• (2) We sind Godes gefylstan, **and swa** ðeah ne do we nan þing to Gode buton Godes fultume [13]. – We are God's ministers, **yet** we do nothing for God with outhis help.

• (3) ... þu scealt grot eþan þine lifdaga **swa** þu laplice wrohte onstealdest [8]. – ... you shall eat the earth all your life long **because** you have committed an awful crime ...

• (4) Drihten cwæð, Far **swa** ic ðe sæde [13] ... – The Lord said: "Go!" **as** I said to you ...

Another thing that is so peculiar about Old English is its fondness for correlation. This may have its origin in, and so be a more sophisticated manifestation of, the same feeling of insecurity in the face of the complicated sentence which produced repetitions and loosely connected clauses as mentioned above:

• **Swa swa** man afandað gold on fyre, **swa** afandað God þæs mannes mod on mislicum fandungum [13] ... – **As** a man tries gold in the fire, **so** God tries the mind of man ...

• **þa** wearð hē and ealle his geferan forcupran and wyrsan þonne ænig oðer gesceaft; **and þa** hwīle þe hē smeade hu hē mihte dælan rice wið God, **þa hwīle** gearcode se Ælmihtiga Scyppend him and his geferum helle wīte ... [13] – **Then** he and all his followers became more wicked and worse than any other creatures; **and while** he meditated how he might share power with God, the Almighty Creator prepared hell-torment for him and his followers ...

Conclusion and Perspectives

Much of the difficulty with correlative pairs arises from the fact that the conjunction and the adverb have the same form. All that also proves the fact that subordination in Old English was not developed enough, subordinating conjunctions needed the support given by correlative particles and the whole system of subordination in Old English had just started to develop.

We believe that our further research should be aimed at disclosing more subtle distinctions between different types of conjunctions and conjunctive words in the making of the composite sentence as a major structural sentence pattern of English.

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**Способы синтаксической связи в древнеанглийском языке
(на материале сложного предложения)**

¹ Ольга Николаевна Шалифова

² Елена Юрьевна Макеева

¹ Поволжская государственная социально-гуманитарная академия, Россия
443079, г. Самара, пр. Карла Маркса, дом 177, кв. 26
Кандидат филологических наук, доцент
E-mail: dekanatino@mail.ru

² Поволжская государственная социально-гуманитарная академия, Россия
443079, г. Самара, пр. Кирова, дом 301, кв. 38
Кандидат филологических наук, доцент
E-mail: helen_mckey@mail.ru

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается эволюция средств связи между частями сложного предложения в английском языке. Особое внимание авторы уделяют древнему периоду развития английского языка, останавливаясь на зависимости синтаксических связей от морфологической структуры языка. Проведенный анализ фактического материала позволяет сделать вывод о преобладающей роли паратаксиса и слабой развитости подчинительных связей в сложных предложениях древнеанглийского языка.

Ключевые слова: Древнеанглийский язык; синтаксис; подчинение; паратаксис; сложное предложение; средства связи; диахрония; англо-саксонский период.