

The status of the first clause in Old English correlative constructions

META LINKS

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This paper will consider the structural characteristics and discourse semantic functions of correlative constructions Old English (OE). An example of a correlative construction with temporal þa is given in (1). Van Kemenade and Los (2006) argue that in (1) the subclause, introduced by the conjunction þa, serves to locate the event in time/discourse, while the second clause, introduced by the resumptive adverb þa, relates the follow-up event. The subclause can also be introduced by þonne or conditional gif.

- (1) þa he þa to him cwom, þa wæs he forht geworden.
 then he then to him came, then was he fearful become
 'When he then came to him, he had become fearful.'
 (Bede_2:9.128.17.1222)

Although not strictly located outside the clause or completely independent, the nature of the subclause in correlative constructions provides an interesting perspective on the tension between parataxis and hypotaxis in OE. Although the first clause shows subclause characteristics, it functions more like a main clause (van Kemenade & Los, 2006). In addition, the structural relation between the two parts is somewhat complex: the resumptive adverb need not be present, but when it is, it might steer the subclause towards a more extra-clausal function. This characteristic provides a challenge for syntactic modelling, raising the question how to structurally analyse these constructions in OE and over time as their presence seems to be related to a number of discourse-configurational properties. Several hypotheses will be presented: 1) OE was a discourse-configurational language, as reflected in part in its V2 character and promoted by the availability of demonstrative pronoun and deictic adverb paradigms (van Kemenade, 2009); 2) correlative constructions play an important role in establishing temporal/conditional linking in OE discourse; and 3) based on evidence from Present-day Dutch (Bennis, 1986; Zwart, 2011) the structural analysis of the subclause in relation to the main clause is assumed to be related to the absence/presence of the resumptive adverb. Using a qualitative and quantitative approach (using the YCOE and PPCME2 corpora), I expect to show changes in both structure and discourse function. It will also be explored to what extent the properties of correlative constructions are related to the division of labour between parataxis and hypotaxis in OE. The results suggest that the decline of these OE correlative constructions goes hand-in-hand with the collapse of demonstrative and deictic paradigms, and the loss of V2.

References

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