

A Diachronic Survey of Syntactic Features in a Compiled Version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

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Introduction

- create a compiled version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC) based on the four text files of the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (YCOE2) (Taylor et al.2003)
- create subperiods for the compiled version based on external criteria (the ASC was composed over course of two and a half centuries)
- investigate syntactic changes across the subperiods; if the periodization is appropriate, grammar changes should be traceable in this document

Dissecting the ASC

- Comparison of each YCOE text file for mss. [A], [C],[D],[E] against each other
- Criteria for independence of two tokens: (1) range of variation > 1 token (2) contribution of additional information (3) difference in morpho-syntax
- Duplicate content was removed even if (1) slight lexical differences (2) merely grammatical differences (e.g. word order variation).

→ **Result: compiled version of the ASC with four subperiods, 5348 tokens:**

Rough date of composition	Text file: Chronicle & Scribe	# Tokens
891-910	[A], 1, 1a	897
911-920	[A], 2a-f	338
921- before 1000	[A], 3,3a,6	32
Period 1: 900-1000		1267
c. 1042	[C], Mercian Register	33
after 1000	[A], 4,5	59
1043-c.1060	[C], 2(from entry for 957), 3,4	828
Period 2: 1000-1100		920
c. 1100	[C], 5, 6, 7	162
1100-1107	[A], 8	99
c. 1080- 1100	[D] (entries for 1033-1080)	706
Period 3: c. 1100		967
after 1100	[A], 7, 9, 10, 11	48
c. 1150	[C] (entry for 1066 ending)	8
c. 1121	[E] (up to entry for 1121)	2138
Period 4: 1100-1150		2194

Table 1: Periodisation of the (OE) Anglo-Saxon Chronicle based on Mss. [A],[C],[D],[E]

Diachronic Investigation of the ASC

1. IP-headedness

Period	Main clauses			Conjoined main clauses			Subordinate clauses		
	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling
1	4	10	28.57	13	24	35.14	10	9	52.63
2	1	1	50.00	19	33	36.54	9	16	36.00
1&2	5	11	31.25	32	57	35.96	19	25	43.18
3	1	4	20.00	16	29	35.56	9	11	45.00
4	5	15	25.00	16	87	15.53	9	36	20.00
3&4	6	19	24.00	32	116	21.62	18	47	27.69

Table 2: Frequency of necessarily I-final clauses with a finite and non-finite verb in the ASC by period and clause type

Period	Main clauses			Conjoined main clauses			Subordinate clauses		
	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily I-final	% I-final	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily I-final	% I-final	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily I-final	% I-final
1	72	9	12.5	107	30	28.0	19	15	78.9
2	37	0	0	103	22	21.4	20	12	60.0
1&2	109	9	8.3	210	52	24.8	39	27	69.2
3	42	1	2.4	77	10	13.0	22	13	59.1
4	125	7	5.6	159	23	14.5	43	16	37.2
3&4	167	8	4.8	245	34	14.0	68	32	44.6

Table 3: Frequency of necessarily I-final clauses with two non-pronominal arguments before a finite main verb in the ASC by period and clause type

Period	Root clauses			Subordinate clauses		
	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily I-initial	% I-initial	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily I-initial	% I-initial
1	38	6	15.8	42	5	11.9
2	47	21	44.7	36	2	5.6
1&2	85	27	31.8	78	7	9.0
3	72	31	43.1	26	2	7.7
4	119	44	37.0	98	7	7.1
3&4	191	75	39.3	124	9	7.3

Table 4: Frequency of necessarily I-initial clauses with a diagnostic element in post-verbal position in the ASC by period and clause type

2. VP-headedness

	Root clauses			Subordinate clauses			All clauses		
Period	Overall relevant OV	Overall relevant VO	% OV	Overall relevant OV	Overall relevant VO	% OV	Overall relevant OV	Overall relevant VO	% OV
1	9	3	75.0	13	1	92.9	22	4	84.6
2	4	4	50.0	16	3	84.2	20	7	74.1
1&2	13	7	65.0	29	4	87.9	42	11	79.2
3	5	3	62.5	9	3	75	14	6	70.0
4	7	9	43.8	16	20	44.4	23	29	44.2
3&4	12	12	50.0	25	23	52.1	37	35	51.4

Table 5: Frequency of superficially VO and OV clauses in the ASC by period and clause type

	Root clauses			Subordinate clauses			All clauses		
Period	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily V-initial	% V-initial	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily V-initial	% V-initial	Overall relevant clauses	Of those necessarily V-initial	% V-initial
1	55	0	0.0	30	0	0.0	85	0	0.0
2	21	1	4.8	39	1	2.6	60	2	3.3
1&2	76	1	1.3	59	1	1.4	145	2	1.4
3	28	1	3.6	31	2	6.5	59	3	5.1
4	54	5	9.3	88	4	4.5	142	8	5.6
3&4	82	6	7.3	119	6	5.0	201	11	5.5

Table 6: Frequency of necessarily V-initial clauses as measured by diagnostic elements after a non-finite main verb in the ASC by period and clause type

3. V-to-C movement

	Main clauses			Conjoined main clauses			Subordinate clauses		
Period	V-spro	spro-V	%V-to-C	V-spro	spro-V	%V-to-C	V-spro	spro-V	%V-to-C
1	23	9	71.9	14	99	12.4	0	151	0.0
2	19	12	61.3	6	116	4.9	1	166	0.6
1&2	42	21	66.7	20	215	8.5	1	317	0.3
3	10	25	28.6	5	103	4.6	0	139	0.0
4	38	98	27.9	8	223	3.5	4	345	1.1
3&4	48	123	28.1	13	326	3.8	4	484	0.8

Table 7: Frequency of clauses with V-to-C movement

4. Arbitrary PRO

Period	Arbitrary PRO	Other	% Arbitrary PRO
1	20	2	90.9
2	22	10	68.8
1&2	42	12	77.8
3	23	16	59.0
4	63	44	58.9
3&4	86	60	58.9

Table 8: Frequency of non-finite clauses with arbitrary PRO subjects in the ASC by period and clause type

5. High pronominal scrambling

Period	Main clauses			Conjoined main clauses			Subordinate clauses		
	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling	high scrambling	no high scrambling	% high scrambling
1	4	10	28.57	13	24	35.14	10	9	52.63
2	1	1	50.00	19	33	36.54	9	16	36.00
1&2	5	11	31.25	32	57	35.96	19	25	43.18
3	1	4	20.00	16	29	35.56	9	11	45.00
4	5	15	25.00	16	87	15.53	9	36	20.00
3&4	6	19	24.00	32	116	21.62	18	47	27.69

Table 9: Frequency of clauses with high pronominal scrambling (scrambling value >0.7) and without high pronominal scrambling (scrambling value <0.3) in the ASC by period and clause type

Conclusion

There are continuous grammatical developments over the course of the composition of the Chronicle (cf. Bean 1983). The discovery of these developments support the suggested periodization of the ASC. All files of the ASC in the YCOE can be used without duplicate material to enrich the overall OE text material in future studies (Period 1 = early, Periods 2,3,4 = late). Standardized methodologies (e.g. Pintzuk 1999, Kroch & Taylor 2000) for well-studied changes may be used for chronological ordering of other OE texts based on internal factors in the future.

References

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