

Object Movement in Late Middle English

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the derivation of surface OV order in late Middle English. Kitahara (1997) has offered an analysis of object shift in Icelandic in terms of economy considerations. I argue that his analysis cannot account for the basic facts about late Middle English object movement as it stands, and some modification following Chomsky's (1995) suggestion is necessary.

2. Object-Verb Order in late Middle English

Van Kemenade (1987, 177) concludes, combining the results of Canale (1978) and Hiltunen (1983), that in English the underlying order has changed from OV to VO around 1200. However, Foster and van der Wurff (1995, 1997) has shown that OV order survived in late Middle English so tenaciously that it cannot be considered as merely an archaism. In this section, we review the facts about object-verb order in late Middle English, drawing on van der Wurff (1997).

[1] In late Middle English, both pronominal and non-pronominal objects can be found in surface OV order.¹ The subject of an Exceptional Case Marking complement can also precede the ECM verb.

- (1) ȝif þei piȝe degrees knowyn.
if they these degrees know

(*Jacob's Well* 21/17)

- (2) it hym conserveth florissyng in his age.
it him conserves flourishing in his age

(Chaucer, *Melibee* 995)

- (3) the grace of God, amydde the lyly white,
the grace of God amidst the lily white
The beaute causith to be of more delyte.
the beauty causes to be of more delight

(Lydgate, *Life of Our Lady* ii. 559-560)

[2] Surface OV order can be found in a sentence with an auxiliary and a nonfinite verb.

- (4) For syn he was born I haue hym blent.
for since he was born I have him blinded.

(*Castle of Perseverance* 531)

- (5) And fayn I wolde my sowle saue.
and gladly I would my soul save

(*Castle of Perseverance* 378)

[3] When the negator *nouȝt/not/nat* occurs, the pattern in (6) where both the verb and the object have moved out of v^{\max} occurs only with pronominal objects.

- (6) perfore I do it nouȝt
therefore I do it not

(*Cloud of Unknowing* 125/20)

- (7) V it not [t(V) t(Obj)]

Non-pronominal objects always follow the negator, unless the sentence contains an auxiliary.

- (8) & ȝit he ȝeuip not pis grace.
and yet he gives not this grace

(*Cloud of Unknowing* 69/12)

In a sentence with an auxiliary, the non-pronominal object can precede the negator.

- (9) I may the beautee of hem not sustene
I can the beauty of them not endure

(Chaucer, *Merciles Beaute* 2)

Examples can be found in which only one of the verb and the pronominal object precedes the negator.

- (10) God sterep not pee in pis writyng
God stirs not you in this writing

(*Book of Privy Counselling* 155/17)

- (11) so slyly that the preest it nat espide
so slyly that the priest it nat saw

(Chaucer, *Canon's Yeoman's tale* 1230)

Both the object and the verb can follow the negator in an OV sentence.

- (12) Though that the feend nouȝt in oure sighte him shewe
although that the devil not in our sight him shows

(Chaucer, *Canon Yeoman's Tale* 916)

- (13) And though I nat the same wordes seye.
and though I not the same words say

(Chaucer, *Tale of Thopas* 959)

[4] Preverbal objects in OV sentences can be separated from their verb by various types of elements; an adjunct, an indirect object, and an auxiliary.

(14) I may my persone and myn hous so kepen and deffenden.

I may my person and my house so keep and defend

(Chaucer, *Melibee* 1334)

(15) him that alle pise guodes ham lenp.

him that all these goods them lends

(*Ayenbite of Inwyte* 6-7)

(16) And Absolon his gyterne hath ytake

and A. his guitar has taken

(Chaucer, *Miller's Tale* 3353)

[5] Foster and van der Wurff (1997) examine the discourse function of the OV order in late Middle English and observe that OV order in prose has strong correlation with givenness of the object, while OV order in verse has correlation with definiteness and specificity of the object.

Although we have seen various properties of object movement in late Middle English, we will concentrate on the properties in [1] and [2] in the following sections.

3. The Shortest Derivation Condition Analysis

Kitahara (1997, 37-46) argues that the timing of verb movement and object shift can be deduced from the morphological properties of T in combination with the Strong Feature Condition, the Shortest Derivation Condition and the Minimal Link Condition.

(17) Strong Feature Condition

Spell-Out applies to Σ only if Σ contains no category with a strong feature.

(18) Shortest Derivation Condition

Minimize the number of elementary operations necessary for convergence.²

(19) Minimal Link Condition

H(K) attracts α only if there is no β , β closer to H(K) than α , such that H(K) attracts β .

H(K) in (19) is the head of the target K, and the notion of 'closer' is understood in terms of c-command and equidistance.

(20) β is closer to H(K) than α iff β c-commands α , and β is not in the minimal domain of CH, where CH is the chain headed by γ , and γ is adjoined to H(K).³

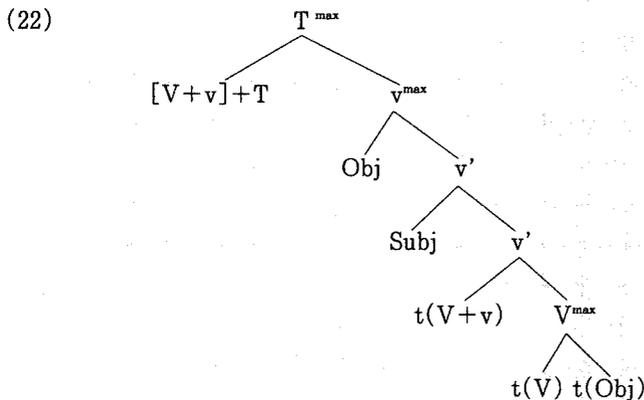
Now let us consider the following Icelandic pair. Given that the adverb *ekki* is generated inside

v^{max} , the fact that the finite verb precedes *ekki* in both (21a) and (b) indicates that the finite verb obligatorily undergoes overt movement to T: T has strong V-feature in Icelandic.

- (21) a. Jón keypti [_{VP} ekki t(keypti) bókina].
 b. Jón keypti bókina [_{VP} ekki t(keypti) t(bókina)].

The Shortest Derivation Condition analysis accounts for the optionality of the overt object shift in (21a, b) as follows. In the derivation of (21a), covert application of Move raises the component of formal features of the object in the LF component. This involves the elementary operations of concatenation and replacement. In the derivation of (21b), overt application of Move raises the components of phonetic and semantic features of the object along with the component of the formal features. This involves only the elementary operation of concatenation, but induces covert application of Erase, involving the elementary operation of replacement. Thus, the two derivations involve the same number of elementary operations. Therefore, the Shortest Derivation Condition allows both of them.

As for the overt movement of the subject in (21b), the Minimal Link Condition allows T to attract the subject (in the inner specifier position of v) over the object (in the outer specifier position of v). Since the object is in the minimal domain of the chain the head of which adjoins to T, it does not count as 'closer' to T than the subject.⁴

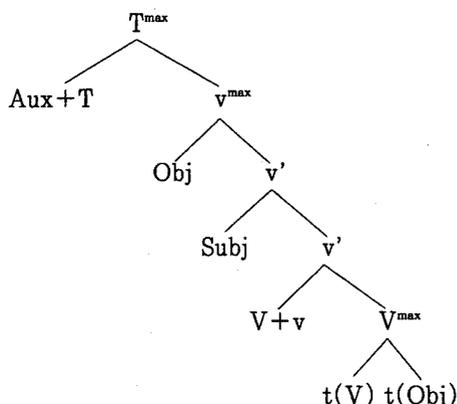


The following pair shows that overt object shift is prohibited in a sentence with an auxiliary.

- (23) a. Jón hefur [_{VP} ekki keypt bókina].
 b. *Jón hefur bókina [_{VP} ekki keypt t(bókina)].

In the derivation of (23a, b), the strong V-feature of T is checked by the auxiliary, and the nonfinite verb stays in the v^{max} .

(24)



Since the nonfinite verb does not raise to T, the object is not in the minimal domain of a chain the head of which adjoins to T: it counts as closer to T than the subject. Accordingly, the Minimal Link Condition prohibits T from attracting the subject.

Although the Shortest Derivation Condition analysis accounts for the basic facts about Icelandic object shift neatly, we cannot apply it to object movement in late Middle English as it is. There are two problems to be solved. First, under the Shortest Derivation Condition analysis, overt object shift to the outer specifier position of v is concomitant with overt verb movement to T. Therefore, the surface order to be expected is VO, not OV. Second, overt object shift in a sentence with an auxiliary yields a structure in which the Minimal Link Condition prohibits the subject raising. As a consequence, overt object shift should not be allowed in a sentence with an auxiliary. However, as we have seen in section 2, OV order can be found in a sentence with an auxiliary in late Middle English. Thus we need some modification to the Shortest Derivation Constraint analysis.

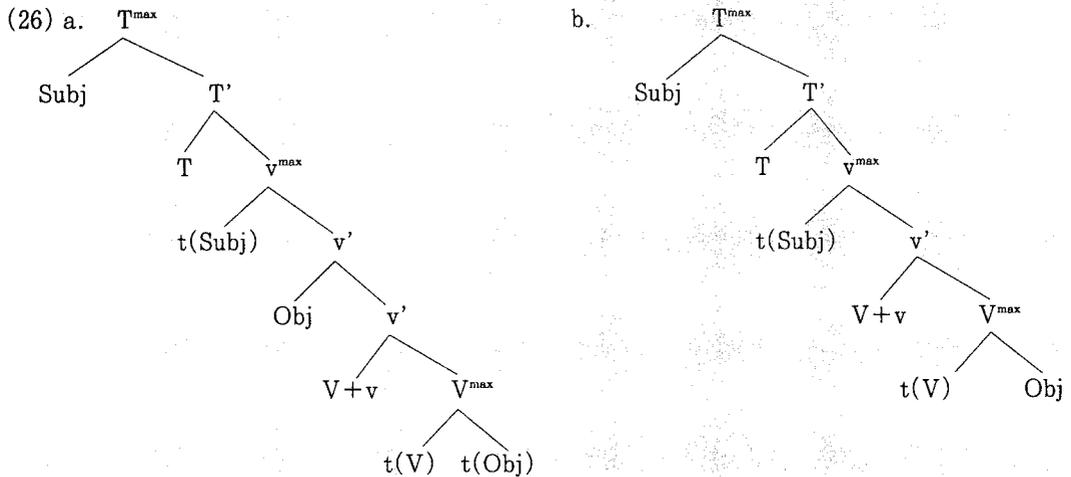
4. Modification to the Shortest Derivation Constraint Analysis

According to Chomsk (195, 358), $V+v$ can assign the external θ -role of V to any of the specifier positions of v because they are in the minimal domain of v . He suggests that we drop the notion of equidistance entirely, and adopt the simplified notion of "closer" in (25).

(25) β is closer to the target K than α if β c-commands α .

He claims that it follows from these assumptions that (i) overt object raising is only to the inner specifier positions of v , (ii) the subject will merge in the outer specifier position of v , and accordingly, (iii) only the subject can be attracted by T.

If we accept this proposal and assume that T bears no strong V-feature in late Middle English, we can account for the possibility of the OV order in late Middle English straightforwardly.



As we have seen in the preceding section, overt object raising and covert object raising involves the same number of elementary operations. Therefore, both (26a) and (26b) are permitted by the Shortest Derivation Condition. We get the surface OV order if the object undergoes overt object raising. Since subject raising to the specifier position of T no longer depends on verb raising to T, we expect OV, as well as VO, in a sentence with an auxiliary.

5. Summary

In section 2, we have seen various facts concerning object movement in late Middle English. Unlike Icelandic object shift, late Middle English object movement yields surface OV order and occurs in a sentence with an auxiliary. In section 3, Kitahara's (1997) analysis of Icelandic object shift in terms of the Shortest Derivation Condition and the Minimal Link Condition has been reviewed. In section 4, it has been shown that if we modify Kitahara's analysis by accepting Chomsky's (1995) proposal that the role of external argument of V can be assigned to any of the specifier positions of v, we can account for the basic facts about object movement in late Middle English.

¹Late Middle English examples are taken from van der Wurff (1997).

²Kitahara (1997, 35) interprets Merge, Move and Erase in terms of elementary operations 'concatenation' and 'replacement'; cyclic application of Merge = concatenation, cyclic application of Move = concatenation, noncyclic application of Merge = concatenation + replacement, noncyclic application of Move = concatenation + replacement, noncyclic application of Erase = replacement.

³c-command: α c-commands β iff every category dominating α dominates β , $\alpha \neq \beta$, and neither dominates the other.

⁴Kitahara (1997) assumes that v-V^{max} configuration assigns the role of external argument of V to the inner specifier of v, so that object shift must follow the concatenation of subject and a projection

of v.

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