

Parametric change in predication and beyond in Middle Welsh

In early Middle Welsh, we find the following word-order patterns in finite and nonfinite copular constructions. In nonfinite clauses, the predicate marker *yn* is compulsory, and the subject follows the predicate in the following order:

- (1) be.INF *yn* predicate subject

While the predicate marker *yn* is obligatory in nonfinite clauses, it is optional in finite ones. If it is present, the subject precedes the predicate, while if it is absent, the subject follows the predicate:

- (2) be.FIN predicate subject
(3) be.FIN subject *yn* predicate

These word-order patterns are robustly attested in the canonical Middle Welsh *Mabinogion* texts, where they are close to exceptionless.

While these patterns are close to exceptionless in canonical Middle Welsh, they are often concealed by the fact that Middle Welsh is a null-subject language and has inflected infinitives, thus allowing null subjects in both finite and nonfinite clause. Thus, although no clauses contradict these rules, only a minority of clauses unambiguously manifests the patterns outlined above. Their acquisitional robustness is therefore open to question, since actual performance data frequently pattern as in (4) and (5), where no asymmetry is visible.

- (4) be.INF *yn* predicate \emptyset_{subj}
(5) be.FIN \emptyset_{subj} *yn* predicate

In finite main clauses in the present tense, the difference between (2) and (3) corresponds to a difference in the form of the copula: *ys* in (2), but *mae* in (3) (cf. Irish copula *is* vs. substantive *tá*, Doherty 1996, Lash 2011). No formal distinction is made in the other tenses.

I analyse these patterns as follows:

- (i) there are two predicational patterns listed in the lexicon, those associated with the predicate marker *yn* and those not associated with it;
- (ii) the structure lacking *yn* is derived as follows: *ys* is inserted as the predicate head Pred, projecting the predicate as its complement:

- (6) [PredP [[Pred *ys*] [XP predicate]]]

This Pred is selected by v_{Pred} , which introduces the subject of predication:

- (7) [vP_{Pred} subject [v_{Pred} [PredP [[Pred *ys*] [XP predicate]]]]]

The v_{Pred} head also bears predicate-agreement phi-features (cf. object agreement), agrees with those features on its predicate complement, and triggers movement of the entire predicate phrase to its outer specifier:

- (8) [[PredP [[Pred *ys*] [XP predicate]]] [v_{Pred} subject [v [~~PredP~~ [~~Pred *ys*]~~ [~~XP predicate~~]]]]]

This yields the pattern in (2), with *ys* (be.FIN) – predicate – subject order. *Ys* is marked [+FIN], hence this pattern is unavailable in nonfinite clauses. Furthermore, even in finite contexts, the lexicon makes available another Pred-head, allowing for an alternative derivation.

- (iii) this alternative derivation involves projecting predication from the predicate marker *yn*:

- (9) [PredP [[Pred *yn*] [XP predicate]]]

As before, this Pred is selected by v_{Pred} , which introduces the subject of predication:

- (10) [vP_{Pred} subject [v_{Pred} [PredP [[Pred *yn*] [XP predicate]]]]]

This is the same v_{Pred} head as before, so it too triggers movement of the entire predicate

phrase to its outer specifier:

- (11) [[PredP [[Pred *yn*] [XP predicate]]] [_{vPred} subject [v [~~PredP~~ [[Pred *ys*] [~~XP predicate~~]]]]]]

So far, the derivation is identical to the previous one. However, with *yn*, the T-domain becomes relevant: in finite clauses, T agrees with the subject, and triggers movement of the subject to its specifier. The tense-bearing auxiliary is inserted into T, and undergoes head movement to a head position high in the T-domain (as is general in Welsh, a VSO language). This yields *mae* (be.FIN) – subject – *yn* – predicate order in finite clauses. In nonfinite clauses, nonfinite ‘be’ is inserted in T, but nonfinite T does not trigger subject raising, hence the order be.INF – *yn* – predicate – subject obtains. An alternative version of essentially the same analysis can be proposed using rightward-projecting specifiers (cf. Abels & Neeleman 2012), but is not included here for space reasons.

In later Middle Welsh, a new word-order pattern emerges in nonfinite clauses, namely be.INF – subject – *yn* – predicate. This came to dominate by the mid fifteenth century. Furthermore the copula *ys* disappears from the language entirely. I attribute these changes to a single change, namely the loss of the movement-triggering feature on _{vPred}. In nonfinite clauses, the derivation proceeds as far as 0, but, thereafter, there is no movement of PredP to the specifier of _{vPred}. Thus, whether T triggers subject-raising (in finite clauses) or not (in nonfinite clauses) is irrelevant: both orders will yield the same order.

In the final part of the paper, I argue that, while apparently an isolated change in the copular system, the loss of predicate raising is a more far-reaching change in the development of Welsh, having manifestations in other areas of word order and clause alignment. Specifically, Welsh loses postposed subjects in unaccusative structures (12), and postposed pronominal objects in transitive structures, (13), in parallel with these changes:

- (12) verb.FIN.UNACC PP subject
(13) verb.FIN.TRANS PP object.PRO

I argue that the pattern in 0 is permitted only because an unaccusative subject is base-generated in SpecvP, and an unaccusative verb and its complement form a PredP. Movement of [PredP verb.UNACC PP] to an outer SpecvP yields this order; (13) is parallel. Once this movement disappears from the language, these orders automatically disappear too.

Furthermore, late Middle Welsh witnesses enormous changes in clause alignment, with ergative alignment in nonfinite clauses being replaced by a system of accusative alignment (Tallerman & Wallenberg 2012). I argue that both transitive and intransitive patterns within the ergative system essentially represented an instance of 0, with PP equivalent to an ergative agent and ‘subject’ equivalent to an absolutive element (a transitive object or intransitive subject):

- (14) verb.INF.UNACC [PP complement] subject.ABS
(15) verb.INF.TRANS [PP subject.ERG] object.ABS

This system automatically collapses as PredP raising is eliminated. These far-reaching changes therefore justify viewing this as a major parametric change in the language.

References

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