

DESCRIPTIVE SYNTAX OF THE OLD ENGLISH CHARTERS

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by

CHARLES CARLTON



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PREFACE

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to E. Bagby Atwood, now deceased, who introduced me to the field of linguistics, and to Charles C. Fries, Hans Kurath, Albert H. Marckwardt, and Kenneth L. Pike, all of whose scholarship has been a profound influence.

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Northridge, California
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CHARLES CARLTON

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

acc.	accusative case	part.	participle
adj.	adjective	pers.	person
adv.	adverb	pos.	position
B	Birch, <i>Cartularium Saxonicum</i>	prep.	preposition
cl.	clause	pres.	present tense
conj.	conjunction	pret.	preterit tense
CS	subject complement-subject of the verb word order	pl.	plural number
CV	subject complement-verb word order	pron.	pronoun
CVS	subject complement-verb-subject word order	R	Robertson, <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters</i>
dat.	dative case	S	Sweet, <i>The Oldest English Texts</i>
dep.	dependent clause	SC	subject of verb-subject complement word order
E	Earle, <i>A Hand-Book to the Land-Charters, and Other Saxon Documents</i>	SCV	subject-subject complement-verb word order
fem.	feminine gender	sen.	sentence
gen.	genitive case	SI	subject-indirect object word order
H	Harmer, <i>Anglo-Saxon Writs</i>	sing.	singular number
imper.	imperative mood	sg.	singular number
ind.	indicative mood	SO	subject-direct object word order
IO	indirect object-direct object word order	subj.	subject of the verb
IS	indirect object-subject word order	SV	subject-verb order
IV	indirect object-verb word order	SVC	subject-verb-subject complement word order
K	Kentish dialect	V	inflected verb form
M	Mercian dialect	vb.	verb
masc.	masculine gender	VC	verb-subject complement word order
N	Northumbrian dialect	VI	verb-indirect object word order
neg.	negative	V ⁱ	infinitive form of verb
neut.	neuter gender	VO	verb-direct object word order
nom.	nominative case	V ^p	present or past participle form of verb
Ø	zero inflectional ending, or absence of inflection	VS	verb-subject word order
OE	Old English	VSC	verb-subject-subject complement word order
OI	direct object-indirect object word order	W	Whitlock, <i>Anglo-Saxon Wills</i>
OS	direct object-subject word order	WS	West Saxon dialect
OV	direct object-verb word order	Ø	[see above, under O]

INTRODUCTION: PREVIOUS STUDIES IN OLD ENGLISH SYNTAX

The study of Old English grammar and syntax has gone through three phases. In the first phase, linguists were strongly influenced by the study of the classical languages, Greek and Latin. These languages were set up as models; if Greek and Latin had vocative, locative, and ablative cases, then Old English must have the same cases. These early books, as well as later ones, are based on the tacit assumption that syntactic relationships between units were expressed entirely by inflectional endings; therefore, the possibility of any other syntactic system was ignored. This first phase may be represented by George Hickes' *Institutiones grammaticae* (Oxford, 1703) which has a strong bias toward Latin.

The second phase was brought about by the discovery and study of the relations between the various members of the Indo-European family of languages. In those early days of scientific language study, linguists were concerned primarily with phonology and morphology so that syntax was largely excluded. Actually this was a logical development at that time, for the theory and techniques of modern linguistic science were just being developed then, and, too, syntax, by its very nature, presupposes the working out and organization of the phonological and morphological systems. Therefore, the Old English grammars of this period (which may be represented by the grammars of Eduard Sievers and Joseph Wright) discussed Indo-European, Primitive Germanic, Primitive Old English, phonology in elaborate detail, sound laws, and word classes according to Indo-European stems. Again, as in the first phase, it was assumed that inflection was the only syntactic expression of relationships between units, and word order continued to be overlooked.

Although as early as 1882 Sievers broke away from the traditional listing of five to seven cases for Old English (he listed only three for most nouns: nominative-accusative, genitive, and dative-instrumental)¹, the influence of these early periods in emphasizing phonology and morphology to the exclusion of syntax has been continued until fairly recent times. Typical books are: George T. Flom, *Introductory Old English Grammar and Reader* (Boston, 1930); Moore and Knott, *The Elements of*

¹ Eduard Sievers, *Angelsächsische Grammatik* (Halle, 1882), p. 122.

Old English (Ann Arbor, 1942); James Bright, *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, revised and enlarged by James R. Hulbert (New York, 1935).

This is not to say that syntax was never mentioned in any history or grammar. For instance, an early though brief reference to word order is found in Rasmus Rask, *Angelsaksisk Sproglære* (Stockholm, 1817), although he still adheres to the belief in the autonomy of inflection.²

Others who made some mention of word order in Old English were Wundt, Deutschbein, Ten Brink, and Jespersen.

The third phase is the inclusion of syntax in grammars and recognition of word order as an operating syntactic signal in Old English. Grammars used in the study of Old English in the United States have generally contained no discussion of syntax. From abroad have come five books which include discussions of syntax although they are admittedly incomplete and restricted in their coverage.

Fernand Mossé's *Manuel de l'anglais du moyen âge* is largely a history of the English language, but it devotes thirty-seven pages to syntax based on the ninth-century writings of Alfred. Mossé notes:

La syntaxe est fondée sur les textes. C'est dire qu'elle n'a aucune prétention à être complète. Elle est seulement faite pour servir à l'intelligence de ces textes.³

However, Mossé further comments:

En vieil anglais, l'ordre dans lequel se placent les divers éléments de la phrase ... est beaucoup plus libre qu'en anglais moderne La flexion est encore suffisamment riche pour permettre d'apercevoir le rôle joué par chacun de ces éléments Il n'y a aucun système et la phrase reste très souple.⁴

Norman Davis's revision of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer* contains eighteen and one-half pages on syntax, but he comments:

In so limited a space the grammar could not aim at anything like completeness. It sets out to cover the texts in this book, and all examples are drawn from them.⁵

This grammar deals only with the West Saxon dialect ... and with the early form of it — that is, the language of about the time of King Alfred.⁶

G. L. Brook's *An Introduction to Old English* devotes approximately eleven pages to syntax:

In many respects the syntax of Old English is similar to that of Modern English. The object of the present chapter is not to give a complete survey of Old English syntax but to call attention to such differences between the syntax of Old English and that of Modern English as are likely to cause difficulty to a student reading Old English texts.⁷

² Benjamin Thorpe, *A Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue, of Erasmus Rask* (London, 1865)

³ Fernand Mossé, *Manuel de l'anglais du moyen âge*, Vol. I (Paris, 1945), p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵ Norman Davis, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer* (London, 1955), p.v.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷ G. L. Brook, *An Introduction to Old English* (Manchester, 1955), p. 83.

Randolph Quirk and C. L. Wrenn provide a forty-five page discussion of syntax in *An Old English Grammar*.⁸

The treatment of inflexions, syntax, word-formation, and phonology represents an attempt to describe realistically the forms that occur most prominently in the important literary manuscripts, systematised in a manner that seems most significant for the Classical Old English which they generally present.⁹

We are not therefore attempting a systematic description of Old English syntax as a whole.¹⁰

P. S. Arden's *First Readings in Old English* includes a "Synopsis of Syntax" of twenty-four pages in outline form which allows little explanation and few examples:

Our texts do not afford material for a *complete* survey of the syntax of the language, but they exemplify a wide range of usage.¹¹

Word order is discussed in all of the above-mentioned grammars although it is summarized and oversimplified so that many features are omitted.

Specific syntactic studies of Old English were made as early as 1851¹² and have continued to be made down to the present day. Usually only one limited problem of syntax was investigated in a particular work. Generally these studies were based on a wide and casual selection of materials; the linguistic methods and sampling methods were questionable because they were often unexplained; therefore, the conclusions were misleading or restricted in application. Often, too, the statements were very subjective, giving the author's feelings or philosophical theories rather than the facts of grammar.¹³ The investigators were not content merely to describe the linguistic situation as it existed or the language as it was used in preserved records.

In Kennedy's *Bibliography of Writings on the English Language* (from the beginning of printing to the end of 1922), there are seventy-three items on Old English syntax listed from 1851 to 1922.¹⁴ These range from short "notes" or comments to exhaustive studies like Johann Ernst Wülfing's *Die Syntax in den Werken Alfreds den Grossen* (Bonn, 1894-1901).¹⁵

⁸ See book review by Sherman M. Kuhn, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LVII, No. 1 (January, 1958), 114-117.

⁹ Randolph Quirk and C. L. Wrenn, *An Old English Grammar* (London, 1955), p. vii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹ P. S. Arden, *First Readings in Old English* (Wellington, 1951), p. ix.

¹² Edwin Guest, "On a Curious Tmesis, Which Is Sometimes Met With, in Anglo-Saxon and Early-English Syntax", *Proceedings of the Philological Society*, V (1851), pp. 97-101.

¹³ See, for instance, the various theories to account for the change from inflection to word order expressed by Morsbach, Humboldt, and Jespersen, summarized by G. Hübener, "Das Problem des Flexions-schwundes im Angelsächsischen", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, XLV (1920), 84-101.

¹⁴ Arthur G. Kennedy, *A Bibliography of Writings on the English Language* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 153-157.

¹⁵ Although extensive, Wülfing's work is not a complete syntax; he handles the parts of speech but not the sentence.

The works are divided into ten categories: general syntax (based on one particular work or related body of materials), sentence types, parts of the sentence, concord, clauses and phrases, word order, case, number, modification, and ellipsis.¹⁶

Since 1922 the same types of studies have been written, usually emphasizing one limited problem of syntax which may give the reader a distorted view of that particular item in its relation to the complete grammatical system.¹⁷

As stated before, Old English has been described until recently as a language, like Latin, in which syntactic relationships depended on inflection alone or at least to a very high degree; therefore, word order was ignored as having little or no significance. In 1940 Charles C. Fries summarized this viewpoint: "In Old English, however, the order of the words in such sentences (actor-action-goal or subject-verb-object) has no bearing whatever upon the grammatical relationship involved. Taxemes of selection do the work, and word-order is non-distinctive and connotative."¹⁸ These statements may be qualified somewhat by the following considerations. The purpose of the article was to emphasize the contrast between Old English and Modern English in the use of one syntactic device: Old English dependence on inflection to distinguish the subject and object and Modern English dependence on word order for the same distinction. The conclusions regarding Old English seem to be restricted to evidence from Ælfric's sermons (c. 1000 A. D.).

Some of the earlier linguists had various theories to account for the change from inflection in Old English to word order in Modern English; Morsbach and Humboldt thought that the rise of word order was after and because of the loss of inflections;¹⁹ Hübener, Wundt, Deutschbein, and Ten Brink suggested that loss of inflections occurred after the beginning of analytic word order;²⁰ Jespersen agreed that "fixed word order must have come in first".²¹

Several more recent and more detailed analyses of a wider range of materials have shown that the present dependence of Modern English on word order to indicate syntactic relationships was established and functioning in the Old English period, and that the change from inflection as a major syntactic force to word order was neither a sudden nor a complete change.

Russell Thomas has shown that the word order of the prepositive genitive was

¹⁶ Representative studies are: Christian E. Bale, "The Syntax of the Genitive Case in the Lindisfarne Gospels", *Iowa Studies in Language and Literature* (The State University of Iowa, 1807); Hugh M. Blain, "Syntax of the Verb in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from 787 AD to 1001 AD", (= *University of Virginia Monographs*, No. II), (1901); Morgan Calloway, Jr., *Studies in the Syntax of the Lindisfarne Gospels* (Baltimore, 1918).

¹⁷ The studies by Morgan Calloway, Jr., *The Consecutive Subjunctive in Old English* (Boston, 1933) and by Howard M. Moroney, *Old English upp, uppe, uppan and upon* (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1943), are typical of this group.

¹⁸ Charles C. Fries, "On the Development of the Structural Use of Word-Order in Modern English", *Language*, XVI (1940), 199.

¹⁹ Hübener, "Das Problem", pp. 84-101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Otto Jespersen, *Progress in Language* (London, 1894), p. 97.

fixed by the end of the eleventh century,²² and that it was functional in some patterns much earlier.²³

Frederic G. Cassidy states: "From c. 900, when case-distinction is still strong, the word order patterns found in Modern English were already well established, at least in their parts."²⁴ Later, he states, "By c. 1050, then, word-order in the major Old English pattern is already over 75% the same as in the modern pattern."²⁵

Mildred K. Magers, in her study, concludes that SVO word order was a definite trend established by the tenth century.²⁶ She further concludes that word order was established as a grammatical device before the loss of inflections in Old English.²⁷

Robert L. Saitz investigated the subject-object order in Old English; he states:

If the concord group (pronoun or adjective plus noun) was syntactically functional in the 9th century SO (subject-object) patterns, it could have been so in not more than 41% of the patterns. If we assume the necessity for a subject-object distinction, there must have been other syntactic signals to account for the remaining 59%.²⁸

If we examine those SO patterns of the 9th century which are not distinct on the basis of inflection, we find that in 94% of these patterns, the word order of subject before object prevails.²⁹

We must conclude from the evidence presented in these studies that the Old English system of syntax employed both inflection and word order; that they operated simultaneously and cooperatively; that just as there are some distinctive and some non-distinctive inflections, there may be some distinctive and some non-distinctive word order patterns. In situations where the inflectional signals are ambiguous, perhaps it is the word order signals which are operatively dominant; in situations where the word order signals are ambiguous or non-distinctive, then perhaps the inflectional signals are operatively dominant.

PROBLEM

Ultimately, a definitive treatment of Old English syntax must be based on analyses of all the various types of writing in Old English which are now available. Such a

²² Russell Thomas, *Syntactical Processes Involved in the Development of the Adnominal Periphrastic Genitive in the English Language* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1931), p. 111.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²⁴ Frederic G. Cassidy, *The Backgrounds in Old English of the Modern English Substitutes for the Dative-Object in the Group Verb + Dative-Object + Accusative-Object* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1938), p. 86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁶ Mildred K. Magers, *The Development of the Grammatical Use of Word-Order for Relationships Expressed by the Accusative with Special Reference to the Development in Subordinate Clauses* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1943), p. 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁸ Robert L. Saitz, *Functional Word Order in Old English Subject-Object Patterns* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1955), p. 84.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

work has not yet been completed because the basic work, that is, the analysis of particular types and groups of writings, has not been done. The purpose of this book, then, is to use the techniques of modern descriptive linguistics in a syntactic analysis of the Old English charters in order to ascertain the facts of the word order and structure of the sentences, clauses, and phrases, and the use of syntactic signals (inflections to show case, number, person, mood, tense, etc.) in the individual words as they pertain to structural meaning in the charters.

This is not necessarily a definitive work, nor even a complete one; it is a part of the basic work of Old English syntax based upon a corpus not yet covered. One can only state and analyze the features of syntax found in these texts; unique, rare, and ambiguous usages will necessarily have to be deferred for full treatment when the complete body of Old English writings has been covered and synthesized.

DEFINITION OF CHARTERS

The term CHARTERS is used to designate legal or semi-legal documents. However, British scholars who have collected and partially edited and annotated the materials have included not only land-charters but also wills, manumissions, writs, *notitiae* or evidential writings, declarations, and *memoria causa* or the recounting of the history of certain estates or of litigations. It is this broader meaning of CHARTERS that is used in this book.

SOURCE MATERIALS

An important consideration is the selection of documents to be used as source materials for this study. Many of the charters are translations or summaries of Latin charters. To avoid misleading linguistic evidence (the influence of Latin) which might be found in summaries, translations, and late copies, only original manuscripts and well-authenticated copies contemporary with the event described have been used. The selection is based primarily on the opinions of Walter DeGray Birch and Edward A. Bond, who have made a thorough study of the manuscripts using both internal and external evidence for verifying the dates and authenticity of the manuscripts. Questionable documents and documents in which the amount of Old English is small or in which the syntax is obviously of little value (e.g., land boundaries described by a series of prepositional phrases) have been excluded.

The following volumes contain the source materials for this study:

Birch, Walter DeGray, *Cartularium Saxonicum*

Bond, Edward E., *Facsimiles of Ancient Charters in the British Museum*

Earle, John, *A Hand-Book to the Land-Charters, and Other Saxon Documents*

Harmer, Florence E., *Anglo-Saxon Writs*

Robertson, A. J., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*

Sweet, Henry, *The Oldest English Texts*

Whitelock, Dorothy, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*

Subsequent references to the source materials will be by letter and number: the first letter of the editor's last name and the number of the text in the particular collection (page numbers are given for Earle and Sweet). For instance, *B 318* refers to No. 318 in Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*; *R 66* refers to No. 66 in Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*; *S 175* refers to p. 175 in Sweet, *The Oldest English Texts*.

The following list gives all the texts included in this study, their location in the sources, date, dialect,³⁰ and number of lines. When there are characteristics of two dialects, the letters representing the dialects will be hyphenated; the predominant dialect will be put first: *M-K*, Mercian characteristics are predominant.

TABLE 1

List of Documents

<i>Source</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Page (vol.)</i>	<i>Grantor</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dialect</i>	<i>No. Lines</i>
1. Birch	318	446 (I)	Æðelnoð	805-31	M-K	12
2. B	330	459-60(I)	Osuulf	805-10	M-K	44
3. B	403	560 (I)	Ealhburg	850	K-M	15
4. B	404	560-61(I)	Eadwald Oshering	850	K-M	15
5. B	405	562-63(I)	Lufa	850	K-M	19
6. B	412	575-77(I)	Abba	833	M-K	56
7. B	416	583 (I)	King Wiglaf	836	M	10
8. B	417	583-4 (I)	Badanoð Beotting	850	K-M	21
9. B	452	35-36(II)	King Berchtwulf	848	M	14
10. B	496	101 (II)	King Ethelbearht	858	K-WS	7
11. B	507	117-8 (II)	Eadwald	863	K-WS	4
12. B	558	195-7 (II)	Ælfred (dux)	870	M-WS	55
13. B	591	236-7 (II)	(Narrative)	901-24	WS	68
14. B	609	268 (II)	Bishop Werfrid	904	WS-M	10
15. B	631	306 (II)	Aldred (presbyter)	909	N	17
16. B	639	315 (II)	Æthelstan	925	WS	6
17. B	678	366-7 (II)	Wulfgar (thane)	931	WS	31
18. B	1010	213 (III)	Æthelwyrd	958	WS-K	23
19. B	1063	282-3 (III)	(Narrative)	960-2	WS	43
20. B	1064	284-5 (III)	Queen Eadgifu	961	WS	45
21. B	1097	328-9 (III)	King Æthelbryht	961-95	WS	37
22. B	1233	523-4 (III)	Bishop Oswold	969	WS	20
23. B	1267	560-2 (III)	King Eadgar	970	WS	57
24. B	1306	629-31(III)	Ælfhelm	973-4	WS	51
25. B	1317	652-3 (III)	Wulfgat	1000-99	WS	28

³⁰ The dialects will be abbreviated in the usual way: *WS* — West Saxon; *M* — Mercian; *K* — Kentish; *N* — Northumbrian.

<i>Source</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Page (vol.)</i>	<i>Grantor</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Dialect</i>	<i>No. Lines</i>
26. B	1318	653 (III)	Convent (Worcester)	1000-99	WS	9
27. Robertson	66	136 & 138	Wynflaed	990-2	WS	37
28. R	75	148	Godwine	1020	WS	9
29. R	81	156	Abbot Ælfweard	1023	WS	20
30. R	83	162 & 164	Bishop Æthelstan	1023	WS	49
31. R	87	172	Bishop Brihteah	1033	WS	9
32. R	94	180	Bishop Leofinc	1040	WS	23
33. R.	101	188 & 190	Archbishop Eadsige	1044	WS	38
34. R	102	190	Abbot Ælfstan	1044-5	WS	18
35. R	103	192	Godric	1044-8	WS	12
36. R	108	204	Archbishop Eadsige	1048	WS	15
37. Harmer	1	120	King Edward	1053-8	WS	5
38. H	24	164-5	King Edward	1065-6	WS	16
39. H	27	182-3	Archbishop Wulfstan	1020	WS	8
40. H	28	183	King Cnut	1020	WS	10
41. H	55	245	King Edward	1053-7	WS	9
42. H	63	269	Bishop Æthelric	1001-12	WS	12
43. H	96	360-1	King Edward	1062-6	WS	8
44. H	115	410-1	King Edward	1062	WS	9
45. Whitelock	16(1)	42	Æthelric	995-9	WS	19
46. W	16(2)	44 & 46	King Ethelred	995-9	WS	33
47. W	20	56, 58, 60, 62	Ætheling Æthelstan	1015	WS	91
48. W	30	78	Thurstan	1042-3	WS	16
49. Earle	—	240-1	Bishop Ælfric	1038	WS	38
50. Sweet	—	175	Ælfred (dux)	870	M-WS	15

LATIN INFLUENCE

Since Latin was widely used for writing in the Old English period and since many charters have Latin versions, there is the question of Latin influence on Old English syntax in the charters.

In selecting the corpus, I included only original Old English charters which do not have a Latin version with the exception of one charter (B 1267) which does have a Latin version.

The scarcity of Old English material makes it difficult to find Old English prose which is not a translation. However, we do have charters which are not translated into or from Latin. Therefore, this source of original Old English prose should not be ignored.

Scholars who have worked with this problem have come to conclusions which minimize or negate the influence of Latin on Old English. George W. Small states that "there is no clearly demonstrated taking over of a construction into the LIVING language (Old English) that had no previous existence in English".³¹

³¹ George W. Small, "On the Study of Old English Syntax", *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LI (March, 1936), p. 1.