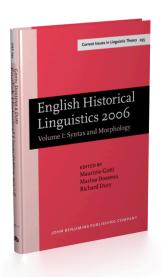# Introduction

Maurizio Gotti | Università degli Studi di Bergamo
Marina Dossena | Università degli Studi di Bergamo
Richard Dury | Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Introduction

Maurizio Gotti, Marina Dossena & Richard Dury
Università degli Studi di Bergamo

This volume contains selected papers concerning syntax and morphology originally presented at the 14th meeting of the International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (ICEHL) held in Bergamo on 21–25 August 2006. The area covered by this volume — morphology and syntax — is traditionally a central one for many scholars working in the field of diachronic linguistics. Its continued importance is shown by the continued production of numerous important monographs and studies, as the bibliographical references in the papers of this volume attest. Studies in the field of syntax and morphology have also become wider and richer with the contribution of many recent methodological innovations – from grammaticalisation studies to textual perspectives, from pragmatics to a sociolinguistic approach – which have influenced both synchronic and diachronic studies.

The order in which contributions appear in this volume reflects closely the basically-diachronic order of the conference programme. It is divided into two main sections; the first one deals with Old and Middle English, while the second with the Early and Late Modern English periods.

The first section opens with a paper by Ans van Kemenade, Tanja Milicev and R. Harald Baayen, who present an innovative approach to Old English word order aiming to reconcile the insights that derive from formal syntactic work with the data problems that these approaches have raised. In particular, their perspective highlights the discourse features of Old English texts in order to explain their typically high degree of word order flexibility. Significant determining features that they have identified are adverbs that function as discourse partitioners, and pronominal elements used in strategies of discourse reference. The use of these elements allows an extension of the range of possible subject and object positions and facilitates greater discourse flexibility.

In their paper on the Old English copula *weorðan*, Peter Petré and Hubert Cuyckens make use of a specially compiled corpus to account for its rapid decline in use in Middle English and its replacement, mainly by *become*. Drawing on Goldberg's (1995, 2006) Construction Grammar, the paper posits the existence of a lexeme-independent conceptual space with which a network of copular uses of *weorðan* are associated. These uses already in Old English served as a model

for the analogical extension of *becuman* as a copula. In early Middle English, the emergence of a 'true' passive construction made *weorðan* seem archaic in this function and blocked the spread to it of *becuman*. At the same time, *becuman* became associated with a new type of time-stable predicates. Having no collocational preferences, *becuman* then extended its use to other types of predicates and eventually took over from *weorðan* completely.

Kristin Bech's paper focuses on the relation between word order, verb types and clause types in Old and Middle English, with reference to the change from a language with a verb-second constraint to a verb-medial language. The word order patterns discussed are the XVS, SVX and XSV patterns, and the verb categories operated with are verbs with a complement, verbs without a complement, copulas and existential verbs. A distinction is made between coordinate clauses, i.e., clauses introduced by a coordinating conjunction, and non-coordinate clauses. The results of Bech's analysis show that there is a difference between the two clause types and between the word order patterns in the distribution of verbs. Furthermore, there is a clear development from Old to Middle English as regards verb distribution in the clause types and word order patterns, and this development is especially noticeable in the XVS pattern. The findings suggest that word order is not only determined by syntactic rules, but is also related to the information content of the sentence.

In her paper, Kristin Killie investigates whether the English progressive has undergone the 'prog imperfective drift' hypothesised by Bertinetto et al. (2000). According to their theory, an originally locative construction develops into a durative progressive, and subsequently into a focalized progressive, to end up in some cases as a pure marker of imperfectivity. To test this hypothesis, Killie examines data taken from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*. Her results indicate that the English progressive has clearly become more focalized through time. However, durative uses are only a minority use in the earliest texts (though it is not impossible that a dominantly durative progressive existed before then in speech). Rather than supporting the 'locative hypothesis', the data therefore suggest that the English progressive most probably originated in the (presumably) emphatic *beon/wesan/weorðan + Vende* construction, or alternatively, from more than one source. On the basis of her analysis, the author concludes that if the English progressive has gone through the PROG imperfective drift, the formulation of this process must be such as to allow for different types of source constructions, not only a locative source.

Gender assignment in Old English is the topic investigated by Letizia Vezzosi. Her analysis shows that although Old English has a three-gender formal assignment system, there are several instances in which the same noun shows more

than one gender. The author classifies Old English data (selected through the analysis of electronically available corpora and literary works), making comparisons with relevant data from typological investigations and historical linguistic studies. She is thus able to show that Old English gender variance depends on semantic and pragmatic factors that interfere with grammatical gender assignment. In particular, beside cross-linguistically frequent semantic traits such as [±animate] [±human], gender assignment in Old English seems to be sensitive to semantic roles. The author demonstrates that this parameter does not conflict with the previous semantic ones, since all of them can be derived from the more general feature [± individuated].

Through a study of a corpus of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies,* Tomohiro Yanagi shows that the quantifier *eall* in Old English exhibited the same distributional properties as the quantifier *all* in Present-day English. Indeed, *eall* can modify a nominative noun phrase, or an accusative noun phrase when this is followed by a predicative complement; moreover, the 'pronoun-quantifier' order is more frequent than the 'quantifier-pronoun' order. The paper also argues that the quantifier *eall* is base-generated as the head of the quantifier phrase, and generally selects a noun phrase as its complement. The data examined show that although the 'full-NP-quantifier' order can be derived by adjoining the noun phrase to the quantifier phrase, this operation is not applied to a noun phrase in the argument position, due to the ban on adjunction to arguments. Yanagi's analysis suggests that, unlike noun phrases, pronouns can be adjoined to the head of a quantifier phrase, thus yielding greater flexibility to the 'pronoun-quantifier' order.

Richard Ingham and Kleanthes K. Grohmann focus on misagreement between a singular verb and a plural subject, and examine a corpus of 15th-century London chronicles in order to investigate the origins of this phenomenon, and to assess whether it should be handled in structural terms. Their analysis shows that misagreement almost always arose with a postfinite (not prefinite) subject, and co-occurred in texts allowing null impersonal subjects. This phenomenon is analysed as agreement with a singular expletive subject, overt or null, existing as an option alongside the option of regular number agreement. As a preverbal subject contained no expletive element, number agreement was regular. Their study also shows that the structural position of the postverbal subject is irrelevant: three post-finite subject configurations have been identified, in all of which agreement is optional. The authors further note that an increase in the phenomenon occurred during the 15th century, and propose a dialect contact explanation: the influx of Northern speakers using the Northern Subject Rule in late medieval London may have activated a structural re-analysis of singular verb forms with plural subjects by London speakers in terms of agreement with a singular null subject.

As Middle English is widely known as the dialectal phase of English, it is unsurprising that so many scholars have studied the linguistic differences among Middle English dialects for such a long time. It is generally assumed that northern dialects innovate mainly due to Scandinavian influence, while southern dialects appear to be more resistant to change. The aim of Cristina Suárez-Gómez' study is to test whether this tendency is also reflected in relativisation, both in the system of relativisers and in the position adopted by the relative clause in relation to the main clause. Based on data from *The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*, her investigation shows that the system of relativisers inherited from Old English and the tendency towards extraposition typical of Middle English are associated with southern dialects, while the North shows a simplified system of relativisers as well as a marked tendency for relative clauses to be intraposed.

Bettelou Los' paper discusses the origins of English phrasal verbs and, in particular, the arguments advanced against identifying particles as grammaticalized predicates (such as the failure of many particles to function as independent predicates, the lack of telicity in many cases, and the failure of constituency tests and topicalisation). She argues that these same "quirks" are exhibited by predicates; indeed, resultative complex predicates show various degrees of productivity, transparency and idiosyncrasy which mirror those of particle verbs, and easily acquire idiomatic meanings that only work in combination with specific verbs. Her analysis shows that the semantic and syntactic similarities of complex predicates and particles point to a common origin, with particles having become grammaticalized from phrase to head. Moreover, the most striking quirks of the complex predicate construction, i.e., unselected objects and idiomaticity (fixed combinations of verb and predicate), are also shared by particle verbs. She concludes that although the similarity in behaviour of predicates and particles can be traced into Old English, it is only in Early Modern English that a significant point is marked in the development of the particle verb system. At that time the verbs participating in the combination are no longer restricted to 'light' verbs, but include deadjectival and denominal verbs, unergatives, and 'manner-of-motion' verbs.

The second part of the volume is devoted to contributions investigating syntactic and morphological issues in the Early and Late Modern English periods. In the first paper in this section Amanda Pounder examines adverb-marking patterns (zero or -*ly*) in coordinate constructions. She suggests that while both a paradigmatic selection analysis (Pounder 2004) and a suspended affixation analysis (Kabak 2007) could be applied, the systemic availability of the zero-derived adverb makes the former theoretically preferable. However, the available data show that there are some cases in which a suspended affixation or morphological ellipsis analysis must be invoked. The paper then focuses on the available patterns of morphological marking of derived adverbs in coordinate constructions in all periods

of Modern English. The analysis shows that in the coordination of adverbs one strongly dominant pattern remains constant, i.e., X-*ly* AND Y-*ly*, while the minority patterns X AND Y-*ly* AND X-*ly* AND Y are rare in the written texts examined. This can be explained by the fact that considerations of symmetry overcome the desire to avoid repetition of the -*ly* suffix, which has often been suggested for sequences of adverbs or adverbial modifiers in which the zero form appears.

It is generally assumed that the construction *It is me* emerged in the 16th century as a more colloquial alternative to *It is I*. In their paper, Claudia Lange and Ursula Schaefer focus on the structure and distribution of two constructions featuring *It is I / me*, namely, cleft constructions and identificational copular clauses in plays from 1600 to 1800. The analysis shows that *it is I* constitutes the generally preferred form; the very limited number of occurrences of *me* in the relevant constructions are either licensed by the syntactic context in cleft constructions or by referential conditions in identificational copular clauses. Lange and Schaefer further provide evidence for the assumption that identificational copular clauses are historically prior to cleft constructions, which in turn are not fully grammaticalised in the period under discussion, since they do not unambiguously display the biclausal structure which is a defining property of clefts.

Thomas Egan's paper traces the evolution of *to*-infinitive complement constructions with emotion matrix verbs *like*, *love, hate* and *prefer* over the past two hundred years. His analysis proposes that when the matrix verb is not preceded by a modal auxiliary, these constructions should be analysed in Present-day English as encoding general rather than specific predications. In Late Modern English, on the other hand, these same constructions were widely used to encode specific predications. Using data from *The British National Corpus* and *The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts*, the author demonstrates how these constructions have become increasingly restricted to encoding general predications over the past two centuries. This development is related to the parallel expansion of –*ing*-complement constructions and of *to*-infinitive complement constructions with modalised matrix verbs.

The aim of Svenja Kranich's study is to analyse the progressive form in 17th- and 18th-century English, identifying its uses as expressions of speaker attitude. After an overview of the Old and Middle English meanings of the progressive, the paper discusses the three different types of subjective progressives found in data from *ARCHER-2*. In this context, the author discusses some methodological issues, as formal criteria have proved insufficiently reliable for the distinction of subjective uses. Kranich then looks at the relation between subjective and other meanings of the progressive. In the 17th- and 18th centuries, the aspectual function of the progressive grammaticalises, which leads to changing relative frequencies between subjective and objective uses. The paper ends with the identification

of general tendencies in the relation between grammaticalisation and subjectification/objectification.

As illustrated in this brief overview, the studies presented here are an expression of ongoing theoretical developments as well as new analytical approaches to the study of English diachronic syntax and morphology. Together, they reflect the challenges and opportunities that confront a linguist working with complex developments in a language, and their far-reaching implications. It is to be hoped that the volume will encourage further discussion and reflection, strengthening our understanding of the evolution of these phenomena.

References

Bertinetto, Pier Marco, Karen H. Ebert & Casper de Groot. 2000. The Progressive in Europe. *Tense and Aspect in the Languages of Europe* ed. by Östen Dahl, 517–558. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Goldberg, Adele. 1995. *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goldberg, Adele. 2006. *Constructions at Work: The nature of generalization in language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kabak, Barış. 2007. Turkish Suspended Affixation. *Linguistics* 45: 311–348.

Pounder, Amanda. 2004. Haplology in English Adverb Formation. *New Perspectives on English Historical Linguistics: Selected papers from 12 ICEHL, Glasgow, 21–26 August 2002* ed. by Christian Kay. Carole Hough & Irené Wotherspoon, Volume II: *Lexis and Transmission*, 193–211. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.