

中世英語統語論の諸問題

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Some Problems of Middle English Syntax

by

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This paper is an attempt to analyze the word order of Middle English. Previous attempts such as E.C.Traugott (1965) and J.C. McLaughlin (1970) seem to assume the subject-predicate construction existed in ME without much discussion. I think the topic-comment construction as is formalized in J.S.Gruber (1969) plays an essential part in ME syntax.

1. Introduction. Noam Chomsky (1965) defines the subject as the NP immediately dominated by an S node. E.C.Traugott (1965) evidently assumes such a notion of the subject in ME syntax. See her PS rule below.

$$S \rightarrow NP-VP$$

J.C.McLaughlin (1970) posits the similar PS rule.

$$S \rightarrow (Q)(Neg) NP VP Aux$$

Noam Chomsky (1965:72) says that the relation Subject-of can be defined by the rewriting rule of the form $S \rightarrow \dots NP \dots$

One of the peculiarities of ME syntax is that the position of the subject is not restricted to the preverbal position. F. Mossé (1952:126-129) classifies the cases of the inverse order of the subject in declarative sentences.

- (1) When the predicate is emphasized
- (2) Often when an object was placed at the head of the sentence
- (3) When an adverbial adjunct was put at the head of the sentence
- (4) Frequently after an adverb of time, of place or of

connection (*thus, then, etc.*)

- (5) In comparative clauses
- (6) After a conjunctive sub-clause placed at the head of the sentence

Modern English preserves the constructions (1)-(6) to a certain degree. Notice that in the above constructions some element is placed at the head of the sentence instead of a subject. But see (7) and (8).

(7) Was never y-herd so swete a steven, (Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchesse*. 307)

(8) Schortly to say, is nane can tell
The halle condicioun off a threll.

(John Barbour, *The Bruce Freedom Book I* 273-4)

In (7) and (8) no element occupies the place of a subject. Especially in (7) the sense subject *so swete a steven* is moved to the end of the sentence. The sentences (7) and (8) are very peculiar to the speakers of Modern English.

We tentatively define the subject as the NP immediately dominated by an S node and at the same time immediately preceding the verb in deep structure. The subject in ME has some other peculiarities which will be discussed in later sections.

J.S.Gruber (1969) maintains that topic-comment constructions play an essential role in child language. He notes several characteristics of the noun phrases in the syntax of child language, and then concludes that these noun phrases act as a topic rather than as a subject. He further says that the subject is the obligatory, most deeply embedded topic of the sentence in a language which is so structured as to have it.

Gruber's approach suggests that we can treat these peculiar subjects in ME as topics.

2. Topic vs. subject. The language of the child which Gruber discusses has the following characteristics.

- (1) Most of the child's sentences have either a pronominal subject or no subject expressed in the preverbal position at all.
- (2) The inversion applies to main verbs in questions if and only if the verb has a noun subject.
- (3) The inversion of the subject with *be* occurs only in the case that the subject of the underlying sentence is a

noun.

- (4) The auxiliary verb is not yet manifested in the child's grammar. (Gruber considers *do* and *does* as a question marker.)
- (5) There is no consistent agreement between the verb and its subject.
- (6) Only the case-marked pronouns (*me, him, them*) appear in isolation, or as the objects of verbs or of prepositions.
- (7) Noun phrases in isolation are sometimes connected with some element within a sentence by a relation of possession.

Gruber's interpretation is that the child, in his grammar, generates a "subject" noun in a quite different way from a "subject" pronoun. He assumes that the child utilizes at this stage some notion of topicalization. Topicalization means that some major constituent of a sentence, such as a noun phrase, which is identical with (or has the same referent as) a constituent in the given sentence, may be generated before or after this sentence. In the given sentence, then, this noun phrase is represented by a pronoun or by nothing at all. The co-generated constituent is called the topic, and the given sentence is called the comment. In his interpretation all noun phrases and case-marked pronouns which appear to be subjects are in fact topics. Only the unmarked pronouns (*I, he, it*) occupy the subject position.

Gruber formalizes his theory as follows.

(1) $S \rightarrow NP S'$

(2) $S' \rightarrow VP$

(3) $VP \rightarrow V NP$

(4) $V \rightarrow \left. \begin{array}{l} \text{Pro} \\ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V' \\ \text{Cop} \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$

(5) $\text{Pro} \rightarrow \text{he, she, they, I, we, you, it, this, that}$

(6) $NP \rightarrow (\text{Det}) N, \text{him, me, them, you, this, that, etc.}$

He postulates the topic noun phrase as an underlying form instead of generating it through the process of extraposition. He says that the relation of identity or possession called for between the topic and some element in the comment clause, has already been described. *Pro* and the topic noun phrase must have the same

referent. *Pro* is supposed to have referential qualities. But it is not sure precisely how the relation of identity should be assigned between *Pro* and the topic noun phrase. He thinks that *Pro* is not a subject but some sort of introductory word to verbs. He speculates that a child first produces subjectless sentences. Then he uses the innately known topic-comment construction to compose richer sentences. Later, if the child is learning English, he comes to regard the topic as a subject with its own features. J.K. Chambers (1973) comments on the last stage of Gruber's hypothesis. In his opinion the topic-comment construction in the child language develops into focused variants of simple declaratives.

Gruber discusses the relationship between the child's use of pronouns and their usage in adults. He contends that there is a drift toward a grammar in which the pronoun, once used only as object, has come to be used in additional contexts. The form of the pronoun used as the subject becomes more and more restricted, more and more bound to the verb as an inflection; while the form used in the verb phrase becomes used in wider and wider circumstances.

Gruber thinks that topicalization is a kind of language universals which are available in language acquisition. The subject in adult English is a kind of topic with its own qualifications; i.e. the subject is obligatory, and appears only once in a sentence.

3. The topic-comment in ME syntax. Let us review the characteristics of ME word order.

- (1) There are six relative positions that the subject, verb, and its object might occupy according to Mossé (1952: 122).

SVO	He takez hys leve
SOV	I hym folwed
VSO	gaf ye the chyld any thyng?
VOS	Thus taughte me my dame
OSV	al pou most sugge
OVS	but hood wered he noon

- (2) In direct questions the word order is the main verb-subject.
- (3) With impersonal verbs the order "(indirect) object-verb"

is normal.

- (4) In the compound and periphrastic tenses the object is generally found between the inflected auxiliary verb and the participle or infinitive.

As is mentioned in section 1, some declarative sentences have the "verb-subject" order without any preverbal elements at all. The object can appear before the verb whether it is a full NP or a pronoun. But the sequences SO and OS seem not to be allowed when they are full noun phrases. The object can appear before the verb whether it is a full NP or a pronoun.

There are certain similarities between the child language which Gruber discusses and the syntactic structures of Middle English.

- (1) The impersonal constructions which are often found in OE and ME require no surface subjects.
- (2) There are cases of nonsubjectivalized passives.
Me was gegiefen an boc.
- (3) When the sentence opened with a subject in the form of a personal pronoun it was not uncommon for this subject to be repeated in the sentence in the form of a noun.
(Visser 1963: 53-62)
up roos he Julius, pe conquerour
- (4) The sentence begins with what appears to be the subject, but some other element is substituted which bears a relation of possession. (Visser 1963: 60-62)
He, the chieftain of them all, His sword hangs rust-
ing on the wall
- (5) When the subject has the form of an infinitive, it is occasionally repeated by *it*.
To ligger at hom it is ful strong
- (6) No complement of the form *that*+Sentence occurs in subject position.

Of course, Middle English is far more complex than child language. The inversion in questions always applies regardless of the nature of the subject NP in ME. There is agreement between the verb and its subject. But Mossé (1952: 110-1) says that a lack of concord is frequent when the subject is placed after the verb, or where the verb comes between elements of a compound subject.

It seems that Middle English is a period of transition, when

the topic-comment relation still plays an important role but the notion of the subject-predicate relation gradually emerges. Consider, for example, the development of the impersonal constructions. The indirect object which is placed before the verb begins to be treated as subject.

How to formalize topicalization is still unclear. Is topicalization a transformation, or is it base-generated as is suggested by Gruber? If we take the latter course, how can we assign the identity between the topic and the subject?

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