

The Grammar of Old English Alliterative Verse: *Verb-Second in Metrical Contexts*

Monique Tangelder, *Radboud University, Nijmegen*

Within the field of historical phonology examples of Old English (OE) alliterative verse are regarded as valuable sources to support ideas on the prosodic make up of OE, and *Beowulf*, as the longest example of OE alliterative poetry, has become a firm favourite for analysis. Contrary to the poem's unparalleled status for morphological and phonological analysis of OE, verse texts are not readily accepted as source materials in studies of historical syntax. The grammatical sentence structures of alliterative verse are constrained by metrical considerations, which tends to raise questions about the suitability of such texts for syntactic research purposes. The position taken here is that such concerns about suitability can be addressed. The metrical confines of alliterative verse necessitate use of the full grammatical flexibility the language allows to accommodate the format. This results in selection of grammatical options perhaps less frequently found in prose texts, but analysis of verse examples demonstrates that - despite the restrictions of metre - verse texts maintain the grammatical integrity of OE as a verb-second (V2) language, and provide valid additional material for grammatical analysis.

V2 structure is believed to be an innovation on the basic Object-Verb (OV) character of Proto-Germanic/Proto-Indo-European that happened to languages belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family (cf. Kiparsky 1995). The motivation behind the change may have been stylistic at first, in which V2 structure draws the attention to the first constituent (Los 2012), and this innovation tends to affect main clauses, whereas subclauses preserve older orders (Los 2016). V2 patterns are found in non-embedded clauses in OE similar to modern Germanic Languages, but it also shows a number of clear deviations such as pronouns intervening between the finite verb and initial topicalized phrases (e.g. van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1999), and other examples of V3 order where the subject is not a pronoun (Swan 1994, Haeberli 1999, 2000), which led to Fuss (2003) introducing the term 'Pseudo-V2' for structures resulting from a merely linear adjacency.

Despite the prevalent preference for prose texts, verse evidence has already proved to be valuable in grammatical analysis. Getty (2000) looked at pre-auxiliaries in *The Battle of Maldon* compared to earlier examples of OE verse. More recent work on *The Orrmulum* by van Kemenade & Truswell (to appear) conclude that the strict metre of the text required Orrm to make extensive use of the structures afforded by his grammar thereby providing more insight into the grammar of Early Middle English. Tangelder and Los (2017) observed that fronted finite verbs do not easily fit the structure of OE poetry; only few appear in alliterating positions in *Beowulf* due to restrictions of the metrical form, which must have prompted the composer to circumvent restrictions by using less common structures that may or may not be strictly grammatical.

The current approach builds on the observations described in Tangelder & Los (2017) by analysing prominent examples of OE alliterative verse, and testing for grammatical (syntactic) integrity. Word orders found in verse should be seen as exploring the periphery of the grammatical spectrum of OE, but the prevalent creative use of OV/VO and V2 orders alongside (archaic) stock phrases demonstrates that the interplay between the grammatical and phonological/metrical demands produces texts that are rhythmic as well as grammatically valid.