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A Correspondence Between Old and Present Day English Progressive Periphrasis. A Syntactic Account of the Data in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*¹

1. Introduction

Old English periphrastic construction ‘beōn’ and the present participle has been widely discussed in the literature (see Visser 1973, Brinton and Traugott 2005, Mitchel 1985, Fischer and van der Wuff 2006, Denison 1993 to name a few). Despite a fairly general agreement that in certain environments the periphrasis depicts temporally extended event, the variety of environments incorporating the periphrasis disallows to state with certainty whether the periphrasis systematically behaves like its modern counterpart.² This lack of consensus may be illustrated by arguments proposed by Strang (1970: 350–351) and Traugott (1972: 90, following Mossé 1938a, 1938b; Traugott 2003: 188–189) on one hand, who state that the combination of the verb ‘beōn’ with the present participle was employed to signal temporal continuity of an event, and Brinton (1988: 109) on the other hand, who is of the opinion that this combination is to be treated as temporally stative and the participle in its nature belongs to adjectival domain. Furthermore, the bases of this presentation can be supplemented by arguments concerning the overall development of the progressive construction in the English language proposed by Fennell (2001: 105):

¹ This article is a shortened and revised version of M.A. Thesis written at the University of Wrocław, under the supervision of Maja Lubańska PhD. I would also like to thank Prof. Joanna Błaszczak for insightful comments contributing to the revision and Anglica Wratislaviensia linguistic reviewer for comments on the earlier version of this article. All the remaining errors are my own.

² As pointed out by Anglica Wratislaviensia linguistic reviewer, this is considered more often a matter of semantics than syntax.

The progressive developed in Old English. ... In the course of Middle English it begins to develop, though its exact source is not certain. It may directly result from –ande constructions or it may result from a fusion of the verb and the present participle as an adjective, and the verb + on + the gerund.

The main aim of this study is to illustrate that Old English periphrastic construction ‘bēon’ + the present participle occurring in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* exhibits the verbal syntax characteristics of its modern counterpart. The presented discussion is maintained in the frameworks of minimalist generative syntax, historical linguistics and lexical semantics.

The organisation of the article is as follows: section 2 aims at presenting the methodology adapted in the study, this encompasses the minimalist syntax and the lexical semantics. In section 3, the justification of the selection of the data is provided. Section 3.1 illustrates the results of the study. Finally, section 4 concludes the presented research.

2. The method of investigation

The theoretical syntactic assumptions applied in the study are those of the Minimalist Program, originally introduced by Chomsky in 1992, supplemented by further modifications (Chomsky 1994, 1995, 1998, 1999).

As for OE, it is assumed that it is a verb-second language with the finite verb occupying the Complementizer position in root clauses, following Fischer et al. (2000: 114). Non-root clauses are treated as Inflection-final structures. However, since OE underlying word order is still a matter of debate (see Fischer et al. 2000, Pintzuk 2002, 2005), the proposed analyses are provided for both SVO and SOV configurations. These analyses are based on the general representation of progressive clauses in PDE proposed by Adger (2003: 174, 175). The syntactic configurations of OE progressive root and non-root clauses under the SVO order are presented in (1) and (2). The structures under SOV order are schematized in (3) and (4). These analyses are based on Adger (2003: 331) and Roberts (2007: 196).³

1) [CP [Topic_[top]] [C' [C [C_[uTop*]] I_[Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, uCase: nom] bēon_[uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]]] [IP [DP Subject_[D, uCase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [I' [I_[Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, uCase: nom] bēon_[uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]] [ProgP bēon_[uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]] [vP [DP Subject_[D, uCase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [v' [v Verb_[uD, uCase: obl, uInfl: Prog]] [VP [v Verb_[uD]] [DP Object_[D, uCase: obl]]]]]]]]]

2) [IP [vP [DP Subject_[D, uCase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [vP [DP Object_[D, uCase: obl]] [v' [v Verb_[uD*, uCase: obl, uInfl: Prog]] [VP [v Verb_[uD]] [DP Object_[D, uCase: obl]] [I' [I_[Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, uCase: nom] bēon_{[uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number,}

³ [uCase: obl] feature of objects should be regarded as referring to a particular case required by the verb.

uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]] [ProgP **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]]
 [vP [DP **Subject** [D, ucase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [vP [DP **Object** [D, ucase: obl]] [v² [v
 Verb [uD*, ucase: obl, uInfl: Prog]] [vP [v Verb [uD]] [DP **Object** [D, ucase: obl]]]]]]]]]]

The root clause in (1) presents the underlying word order. As argued by Roberts (2007: 192–196), the derivation of non-root structure in (2) involves movement of the object to Spec, vP slot due to strong EPP feature on ‘v’ and subsequent translocation of the entire vP to SpecTP position. In contrast, under the SOV order the basic configuration is exhibited by a non-root clause in (4).

3) [CP [Topic [top]] [C' [C [C [u_{top}*]]] [I [Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, ucase: nom] **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]]] [IP [DP **Subject** [D, ucase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [I' [ProgP [vP [DP **Subject** [D, ucase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [v' [VP [DP **Object** [D, ucase: obl]] [v Verb [uD]]] [v Verb [uD, ucase: obl, uInfl: Prog]]]]] **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]] [I [Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, ucase: nom] **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]]]]]]

4) [IP [DP **Subject** [D, ucase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [I' [ProgP [vP [DP **Subject** [D, ucase: nom, φ: number, φ: person, φ: gender]] [v' [VP [DP **Object** [D, ucase: obl]] [v Verb [uD]]] [v Verb [uD, ucase: obl, uInfl: Prog]]]]] **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]] [I [Tense, Number, Person, Mood, uD*, uφ: number, uφ: person, uφ: gender, ucase: nom] **bēon** [uInfl: Tense, uInfl: Number, uInfl: Person, uInfl: Mood, Prog]]]]

As purely syntactic considerations are insufficient in determining the verbal affiliation of the periphrasis, the chosen methodology is supplemented by the employment of logical structures of predicates of natural languages. These structures are the ones presented by Van Valin (2005: 45) for predicate classes of: state, activity, achievement, accomplishment, active accomplishment and causative verbal stems. The membership of relevant OE predicate in a particular class is judged on basis of its entry in *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

The linking mechanism between the lexical semantics and syntactic considerations is based on the adaptation of: (i) The Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) proposed by Baker (1988: 46) and (ii) Larson's idea (Larson 1988: 382) concerning thematic hierarchies, which states that the ordering of theta-roles (θ-roles) in a particular hierarchy is reflected in syntax by assigning the topmost constituent position to the first θ-role and the lowest constituent slot to the last θ-role in the hierarchy. The ideas illustrated above are employed in the following way: if a verb in its logical structure exhibits only one participant, this participant will be represented in the syntactic structure as a complement of ‘V’; in the cases where the lexical analysis of a verb indicates two arguments, the second argument will be encoded in syntax as a complement of ‘V’ and the first argument will be realized in the Spec, vP position. Under these assumptions, UTAH will be employed to ensure that (i) single arguments are consistently realized as complements of ‘V’ and (ii) in the cases where in logical

structures there is more than one participant, their relative order is reflected in Spec, vP – complement of ‘V’ configuration in all cases.

The mode of investigation presented above constitutes the basis for the analysis illustrated in the subsequent sections.

3. On the choice and the approach towards the data

The aim of this section is to justify the choice of the corpus which will be a subject of the analysis. The data on which the analysis will be conducted is adapted from Scheffer (1975: 129–148). It encompasses OE prose text of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which is considered by Scheffer as a text with insignificant influence from Latin (ibid.). This selection of data is motivated by the fact that Latin constructions involving ‘esse’ + *participium praesentis*, i.e. ‘be’ + present participle are never transferred into OE specimens by means of parallelism. Moreover, OE periphrasis in ‘bēon’ + present participle is employed to render Latin non-progressive structures (Scheffer 1975: 158, 166). Therefore, it can be argued that, by the time the translations of Latin texts were written down, OE periphrasis in ‘bēon’ and the present participle has gained certain foothold in the grammar of the Old English language. Due to the above-mentioned, evaluation of texts being translations from Latin will not meet one of the aims of the study, i.e. the indication of possible origin of PDE progressive tense in aforementioned OE periphrasis.

3.1. The analysis

The number of analyzed occurrences of progressive periphrasis in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* amounts to 23 instances. Their classification in terms of lexical semantics and argument realization patterns are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Predicate class and argument realization of OE stems in progressive periphrasis in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

Predicate class	Requiring one argument	Requiring two arguments	T o t a l	All arguments realized overtly	Single argument not realized overtly	The first of two arguments not realized overtly	T o t a l
State	4	1	5	4	1		5
Activity	10	4	14	8	6		14
Achievement		1	1			1	1
Semelfactive							
Accomplishment	2	1	3	2		1	3
Active accomplishment							
Causative							

As can be noted from Table 1, majority of cases are constituted by predicates denoting activities. However, stems referring to states represent one fifth of the overall number of cases. The representative data concerning state predicates is provided in (5). The derivations of (5), under the SVO and SOV underlying word orders are exhibited in (6) and (7), respectively.

5) *Pa wæs Eadward cyng on Gleawcestre sittende*

Then was Edward king in Gloucester sitting

Manuscript D, annals 1052

6) [CP [AdvP *Pa* [top]]] [C' [C [C [utop*]]] [I [Pert, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *Eadward cyng* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg]] [I' [I [Pert, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]] [ProgP *bēon* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog] [vP [PP *on Gleawcestre*] [vP [v *sittende* [uInfl: Prog]]] [VP [V *sittan* [uθ]]] [DP *Eadward cyng* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg]]]]]]]]]]]

7) [CP [AdvP *Pa* [top]]] [C' [C [C [utop*]]] [I [Pert, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *Eadward cyng* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg]] [I' [I [Pert, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [ProgP [vP [PP *on Gleawcestre*] [vP [VP [DP *Eadward cyng* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg]] [V *sittan* [uθ]]] [v *sittende* [uInfl: Prog]]] *bēon* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [I [Pert, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]]]]]]]]]]

As (6) and (7) show, ‘sittan’ is treated as an unaccusative verb. However, structures employing unaccusative verbs do not possess ‘v’ element (Chomsky 1995: 315–316). However, the ‘v’ element is also treated as a carrier of progressive inflectional features and as such its presence in the structure appears to be inevitable. This paradox is, however, resolved if the assumptions presented by Adger (2003: 223–224) are taken into consideration. Adger argues that PDE structures built around unaccusative predicates also possess ‘v’ element. This element in such structures is unique in its nature, as it does not require a specifier and does not value the accusative case feature, since it is not equipped with uninterpretable [uD] and [uCase: acc] features (Adger 2003: 223–224). This is maintained in the study in a slightly modified manner. As stated in section 2, the derivation of OE embedded clauses under basic SVO order involves the movement of the complement of the verb to Spec vP position due to ‘v’ element’s EPP feature. The existence of this feature, as argued by Roberts (2007: 192–196), is an OE parametric characteristic, which was lost in the course of the development of the English language. Thus, in order to account for embedded structures with unaccusative predicates under underlying SVO order, the ‘v’ element lacks solely the uninterpretable accusative case feature. In contrast, in main clauses the assumptions presented by Adger (*ibid.*) are retained without any changes.

Furthermore, the data in Table 1 indicate a number of environments in which either the sole or one of the required participants of the event is not realized overtly

in the structure. Those clauses will be treated as containing null subjects (*pro*) which, as argued by Holmberg (2005), are unpronounced pronouns that enter the derivation being fully equipped in ϕ -features and retain the behavior of ordinary subjects. Furthermore, Holmberg, following Chomsky (1982) and Rizzi (1986), notes that *pro* serves as the carrier of the θ -role assigned to the subject as well as nominative case and EPP feature. The relevant case is illustrated in (8). The derivations of (8) under SVO and SOV word orders are exhibited in (9) and (10).

- 8) ... 7 þær was.xii. monaþ wuniende
and there was twelve months remaining
Manuscript A, annals 855

9) [CP þær_[top]] [C' [C [C_[utop*]] [I [Pret, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] WAS [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *pro* [D, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg, ucase: nom]] [I' [T [Pret, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *was* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]] [ProgP *bēon* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]] [vP [AdvP xii. monaþ] [vP [v wuniende [uInfl: Prog]]] [VP [V *wunian* [uθ]]] [DP *pro* [D, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg, ucase: nom]]]]]]]]]

10) [CP þær_[top]] [C' [C [C_[utop*]] [I [Pret, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] WAS [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *pro* [D, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg, ucase: nom]] [I' [ProgP [vP [AdvP xii. monaþ] [vP [VP [DP *pro* [D, φ: Masc, φ: 3rd, φ: Sg, ucase: nom]] [V *wunian* [uθ]]] [v wuniende [uInfl: Prog]]] *bēon* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [I [Pret, Ind, 3rd, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Masc, uφ: 3rd, uφ: Sg] *was* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: 3rd, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]]]]]]

What is also visible in Table 1, is the single instance of an achievement predicate requiring two arguments as complements. This is presented in (11).

- 11) ... þe swa manig ungelimp wæs forðbringende.
the so many misfortune was producing
Manuscript E, annals 1086

Structural representations of (11) are exemplified in (12) – SVO and (13) – SOV.

12) [CP [DP þe swa manig ungelimp [D, top, ucase: acc]] [C' [C [C_[utop*]] [I [Pret, Ind, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Sg] WÆS [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *pro* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Sg,]] [I' [I [Pret, Ind, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Sg] *wæs* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: Sg, Prog]] [ProgP *bēon* [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: Sg, Prog]] [vP [DP *pro* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Sg]] [v' [v forðbringende [uθ, ucase: acc, uInfl: Prog]]] [VP [V forðbringan [uθ]]] [DP þe swa manig ungelimp [D, top, ucase: acc]]]]]]]]]

13) [CP [DP þe swa manig ungelimp [D, top, ucase: acc]] [C' [C [C_[utop*]] [I [Pret, Ind, Sg, uθ, ucase: nom, uφ: Sg] WÆS [uInfl: Pret, uInfl: Ind, uInfl: Sg, Prog]]] [IP [DP *pro* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Sg,]] [I' [ProgP [vP [DP *pro* [D, ucase: nom, φ: Sg]] [v' [VP [DP þe swa manig ungelimp [D,

u_{case}:acc]] [v forðbringan [u_D]] [v forðbringende [u_D, u_{case}:acc, u_{infl}:Prog]] bēon [u_{infl}:Pret, u_{infl}:Ind, u_{infl}:Sg, Prog]]] [I [Pret, Ind, Sg, u_D, u_{case}:nom, u_φ:Sg] wæs [u_{infl}:Pret, u_{infl}:Ind, u_{infl}:Sg, Prog]]]]]]

(12) and (13) show that object DP in (11) underwent movement from complement of the verb position to SpecCP slot. This operation can be accounted in terms of topicalization.⁴

As for clauses containing an accomplishment predicates, their argument realization patterns involve a single predicate, which is overtly realized and two predicates, out of which one is not overtly present. Syntactic representations of those cases do not differ from relevant cases presented above. Therefore, it appears unnecessary to present them in details.

4. Conclusion

The provided analysis indicates that Old English periphrastic construction ‘bēon’ and the present participle exhibit characteristics of a combination of an auxiliary and a lexical verb. As it was presented, the syntactic derivations developed for Present Day English progressive structures can be applied to Old English data. The derivations are valid under both underlying SVO and SOV word orders. In the cases where subject or object DPs do not remain *in situ*, it can be argued that those result from topicalization or scrambling, and do not violate the verbal syntax of the construction.

Furthermore, it was illustrated that the present participles involved in the periphrasis retain their verbal, as opposed to adjectival, characteristics. They are accompanied by the required participants. The instances in which one of the required arguments is not realized overtly in the structure were treated as structures containing *pro* element, understood as an empty DP receiving its features from the ‘I’ element. Under such an analysis, the argument structure of the verbal stem from which the participle was derived was retained, as the existence of *pro* was assured at the LF. Moreover, it should also be noted that various types of predicates served as stems for the present participles. Among those, predicates denoting states were also no exception and the clauses in which they occur meet the requirements of the verbal syntax of the periphrasis.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the Old English language the combination of the verb ‘bēon’ and the present participle was employed to express the temporal span of an event. However, the amount of data is scarce. This fact can be attributed to the register on which the research was conducted. Nevertheless, the

⁴ Although it is not presented here, the data in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contain cases in which objects are moved out of vPs to positions lower than CP. Those cases are accounted in terms of scrambling (Thráinsson 2001).

fact that the construction appears in formal texts may be perceived as a trait of its stabilization in the grammar of the Old English language. In addition, this research indicates that the analyzed Old English periphrasis can be treated as a predecessor of the progressive structures in Present Day English.

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