

## On the development of relativization in the English language

The present discussion deals with changes affecting relative clauses from late Old English to Middle English, specifically changes that have to do with the phenomenon of preposition stranding.

### 1. Introduction

*Relative clauses* are of course the focus of a vast amount of literature, both within the philological tradition and within specialized theoretical frameworks as is generative grammar, and this is partly, or rather perhaps very importantly due, to the fact relativization strategies are considered to exist ever since the times of proto-language – in the case at hand, Proto-Indo-European, and more specifically, at a later time, Primitive Germanic and, in a relevant way for the present discussion, Old English (OE). On the other hand, the phenomenon of *preposition stranding* constitutes one of the hallmark contrasts between English and the rest of languages within the Indo-European family, and this at least from the Old English period. Preposition stranding, which is opposed, as is widely known, to *pied-piping*, is a mechanism whereby the object of a preposition disappears<sup>1</sup>—because of movement or for some other reason— and the preposition is left alone.

The present discussion combines the mechanism of relativization and that of preposition stranding, and it is specifically about the explanation of the stranding of prepositions in relative clauses as occurs in Old English and in Middle English (ME), or rather in the transition from OE to ME. The relevance of the latter specification is due of course to the generalized theory that preposition stranding is far more restricted in OE than in subsequent periods of the language, the big change occurring in the transition to ME.

Before starting with the description of preposition stranding in OE relative clauses, it is just appropriate to illustrate both preposition stranding and pied-piping in Present-Day English (PDE) relative clauses.

- (1) a. This is the person that he worked for / ...<sub>[Spec,C]</sub> Op [Cthat [he worked for t ]]]  
 b. This is the person he worked for / ...<sub>[Spec,C]</sub> Op [C [he worked for t ]]]  
 c. This is the person who he worked for / ...<sub>[Spec,C]</sub> who [C [he worked for t ]]]  
 (2) This is the person for whom he worked / ...<sub>[Spec,C]</sub> for whom [C [he worked t ]]]

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<sup>1</sup> This is of course an informal expression. The formal analysis is offered below in the paper.

In all three sequences in (1) the preposition has been left stranded: in both (1a) and (1b) there is *Wh*-movement to the Specifier of C(omplementizer) of the D(eterminer)P(hrase) object of the preposition, which is a null or empty relative Operator, the difference between the two being that the C head is occupied by *that* in the former but not in the latter, and in (1c) the DP object of the preposition is the relative Operator *who*. In contrast with (1), pied-piping has been applied in (2), which means that the full P(repositional)P(hrase) undergoes *Wh*-movement to the cited Spec,C position. The core operations described are postulated as such ever since the Government & Binding framework (Chomsky 1981).

The OE data that have used for the present discussion have been taken from such secondary sources as Allen (1980) or van Kemenade (1987). The ME data have been extracted from *The Cely Letters* (see Hanham (1975) in the References list).

## 2. On the nature of preposition stranding in OE relative clauses

As suggested in the Section above, for preposition stranding to be a limited phenomenon in OE syntax is widely attested in the literature: as regards the classical generative bibliography, this circumstance is attested in such well-known works as Allen (1980a,b), van Kemenade (1987), Traugott (1992), or Fischer et al. (2000). According to all these, preposition stranding is possible only when the (prepositional) object is a pronoun, or in relative clauses introduced by the complementizer *þe*, the predecessor of the complementizer *that* in PDE, and actually from the ME period onwards.

For quite a long time, the explanation offered by van Kemenade (1987) in terms of the loss of inherent Case as assigned by prepositions was a central reference in the literature, and on the other hand Allen's (1980a) account came to prove crucial as regards both relativization and preposition stranding. The present analysis hinges on both cited works, though I will deal first in Section 2.1 below with some recent accounts in the literature. Before that, though, an account of the historical facts is needed, albeit a brief one due to space limitations. Precisely because of the cited space restrictions, I will focus exclusively on facts of preposition stranding directly related to relative clauses.

The core of the cited historical facts can be summarized as follows: of the three-fold typology of relative clauses in the OE period, namely *þe*-relatives, *se-seo-þæt*-relatives, and *se þe*-relatives, preposition stranding was found only in the first type, the other two allowing just for pied-piping.

- (3) a. Ac he sylf asmeade ða up-ahfednysse ðe he ðurh ahreas  
 but he self devised the presumption that he through fell  
 ‘But he himself thought up the presumption that he fell through’  
 (Alc.Th. Vol. I p.192.17, Allen 1980a:267)
- b.. ...wið ðone Heofonlican Cyning, for ðæs naman he ðrowode  
 with the Heavenly King for whose name he suffered  
 ‘...with the Heavenly King, for whose name he suffered’  
 (Alc.Th. Vol. I p.434.35, Allen 1980a:270)
- c. on ðære readan sæ on þære ðe he besanc to grunde  
 in the Red Sea in which that he sank to the bottom  
 ‘in the Red Sea, in which he sank to the bottom’  
 (ASL, XXV, 348, van Kemenade 1987:151)

As is widely known, the element *þe* is an indeclinable particle and, as noted above, is considered within generative grammar as a complementizer proper; on the other hand, the elements in the *se-seo-þæt*-paradigm, which inflect for gender, number, and also Case, correspond with the set of demonstrative items in OE, the phenomenon of deictic elements serving also as relativizers being very frequent within the Indo-European family.

The core aspect to highlight from (3) is then that preposition stranding is possible in OE relative clauses whenever no overt or pronounced relative pronouns are used. In the ME period, *wh*-items from the interrogative paradigm come to substitute for *se*-items as relativizers. The above-mentioned restrictions on preposition stranding disappear in this period, since *wh*-relatives (with an overt or pronounced *wh*-item) do allow for the preposition to be left in its original position, with no object to its side.

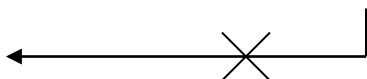
- (4) And getenisse men ben in ebron, quile men mai get wundren onn  
 and giant men are in Hebron which men may yet wonder at  
 ‘And there are gigantic men in Hebron, whom people may still marvel at’  
 (G & Ex. 3715, Allen 1980b: 226)

## 2.1. Recent accounts in the literature

I would like to focus briefly in this Section on two analyses in the recent literature that aim at explaining or justifying the restriction that preposition stranding is subject to in OE. The first of these is Ohkado (1990), and the second is Abels (2003).

Ohkado (1990) makes use of the so-called Head-Complement parameter (Chomsky 1986) and of the requirement that the values of the cited parameter as concerns VP and PP be the same. This way, the author argues that preposition stranding is possible as long as the head-final or otherwise head-initial value of PP coincides with that of VP. Assuming that OE is an OV language, then this means that VP is head-final: since prepositions are followed by the *se*-element, then this means that PP is head-initial, which value does not coincide with the above-cited value for VP. As a result, preposition stranding is not allowed in *se*-relatives: see (5).

(5) ... [VP(head-final) [PP(head-initial) P t<sub>se</sub>] V]



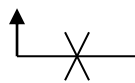
Ohkado (1990) argues that, by contrast with *se*-relatives, preposition stranding is possible in *þe*-relatives because, since the object of the preposition is an empty pronoun (the so-called empty or null Operator), then the corresponding value for the parameter is [unspecified]. The change that takes place in ME consists in that VP and PP come to have both the same Head-Complement parameter value: more specifically, both VP and PP are head-initial at this stage of the English language (more specifically, from ME onwards) and, as a result, preposition stranding is allowed in the (new) *wh*-relatives.

Now, Ohkado's argumentation appears to be speculative in two respects: first, and most importantly, as regards the very requirement that the values for the Head-Complement parameter coincide as regards VP and PP; secondly, as regards the characterization of the Head-Complement value as being [unspecified] whenever the prepositional object is an empty Operator.

Abels (2003) is of course a well-known work that incorporates the phase analysis (Chomsky 2000, 2001) to the domain of PPs. Abels argues that the reason why Germanic languages not allowing preposition stranding show such behaviour is that P constitutes a phase head: by contrast, prepositions do not constitute a phase head in PDE, hence the possibility of preposition stranding.

The phase account consists specifically in the movement of the object of the preposition out of PP being possible by (the object) stopping at a Spec position: but for the object to stop at Spec,P contradicts the so-called Anti-locality Constraint, which bans movement from the complement position to the Specifier position within the same projection. This impossible movement is shown in (6a) below. By contrast with (6a), (6b) shows the viable movement of the prepositional object out of the PP in those languages and/or structures where PP is not a phase: the cited object moves to a Spec position, but the Spec of *v*P, which is a phase on a general basis.

(6) a. [<sub>CP</sub> C [<sub>TP</sub> Subj [<sub>T'</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> *v* [<sub>VP</sub> V [<sub>PP</sub> *wh* [<sub>P'</sub> P *t<sub>wh</sub>*]]]]]]]]]



b. [<sub>CP</sub> *wh* [<sub>C'</sub> C [<sub>TP</sub> Subj [<sub>T'</sub> T [<sub>vP</sub> *t<sub>wh</sub>* [<sub>vP</sub> *v* [<sub>VP</sub> V [<sub>PP</sub> P *t<sub>wh</sub>* ]]]]]]]]]]



Now, a phase-based account like the one described is technically well-constructed. However, it offers no explanation for the contrast that is assumed to exist between *þe*-relatives and *se*-relatives in OE. On the other hand, and very importantly, Abel's account actually appears to describe in phase-based terms what preposition stranding consists in, but it does not seem to explain why preposition stranding is or is not the case, that is why in some languages PP is a phase whereas in others it is not.

### 3. The present proposal

I would like to argue that it is appropriate to go back to two highly-influential works in classical generative grammar as are Allen (1980a) and van Kemenade (1987).

As is widely known, one of the core aspects of Allen's discussion is that, since *se*-relatives, which are structures where the *se/seo/þæt*-element clearly moves, only allow for pied-piping (see (3b), or also the *se þe*-relative in (3c) above), then *þe*-relatives, which only allow for preposition stranding, the object of the preposition must have remained there, within the PP, and therefore no *wh*-movement of such an object to the Spec,C position applies. More specifically, she defends the controlled deletion of the relevant NP constituent: see (7) below.

(7) ...ða up-ahedefnyse<sup>i</sup> [<sub>CP</sub>ðe [he ðurh NP<sup>i</sup> ahreas]] → ...ða up-ahedefnyse [<sub>CP</sub>ðe [he ðurh e ahreas]]

Now, if Allen's theory is on the right track, then the phenomenon that hinges around *þe*-relatives consists in a preposition taking in the original position of external Merge an object (the prepositional object), and further Allen's analysis could even be completed from a more developed perspective by a null category similar to a *pro* object, which is actually what van Kemenade (1987) does. What is meant by this is that for preposition stranding not to be possible in OE *se*-relatives (or *se þe*-relatives) but to become possible in ME *wh*-relatives appears to be the major issue to explain. Given that, in the structures in question, there is movement, more specifically *wh*-movement to the Spec position of C, then what seems to be in need of an explanation is the ability of a prepositional object to behave as a theme on its own, and move on its own to the cited position.

This way, the Head-Complement parameter rationale, or the phase-based rationale cannot seem to work without accounting for why a prepositional object can behave on its own (that is, without the preposition) as a theme. Contrasting along these lines data from the late OE period and ME data is bound to give us important clues about the phenomenon in question. On the other hand, the present proposal hinges upon relative structures, given the assumed contrast between *þe*-relatives and *se*-relatives (or also *se þe*-relatives), but of course the capacity of prepositional objects to behave as themes is to be extended to other structural types such as topicalization structures or interrogative sequences.

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