

## V2 relatives in Old English

The verb-placement asymmetry between main (verb-second) and subclauses (verb-final) found in Dutch and German is less pronounced in Old English (OE) (Pintzuk 1999), but the extent to which OE differs is difficult to determine, as the distinction between main and subclauses cannot readily be determined on the basis of punctuation or other typographical conventions. The problem is exacerbated by one type of clause which has long been known to be analytically ambiguous (Mitchell 1985: 188):

- (1) Maurus gemette ænne man eft se wæs yfele getawod  
Maurus met a man afterwards that was evilly stricken  
(ÆLS[Maur]:283.1661)
- (2) And Maurus ða gemette ær he to mynstre come  
and Maurus then met before he to monastery came  
ænne dumbne cnapan 7 se wæs creopere eac  
a dumb boy and that was cripple as-well  
(ÆLS[Maur]:19.1507-8)

In spite of their very similar structures, (1) has been coded as a relative clause, and hence as a subclause (IP-SUB) in the parsed OE corpus (YCOE; Taylor et al. 2003), whereas (2) has been coded as a main clause (IP-MAT). The same construction is found in German (Gärtner 2001) and Dutch (Den Dikken 2005) as a matrix clause, either with (3b) or without (3a) a preceding ‘and’ (cf. (2), with the Tyronian sign ‘7’). Note the true relative clause in (3c), whose syntax differs, along similar lines as the differences between main and subclauses (see again Gärtner 2001; Den Dikken 2005), including the placement of the finite verb (underlined).

- (3) [In Broek, there lived an old woman].
  - a. **Die** kon de toekomst voorspellen. (<https://www.verhalenbank.nl/items/show/8599>)  
that could the future predict
  - b. , en **die** kon de toekomst voorspellen.
  - c. , **die** de toekomst kon voorspellen.  
, who the future could predict  
‘(and) she/who could predict the future’

As standalone *that* can no longer refer to single human referents, Skeat’s edition of Ælfric’s *Saints Lives* routinely translates cases like (1) by relative clauses, hence the IP-SUB-label in YCOE. This paper makes the case for a main clause analysis of these cases, as *se*-relatives, unlike *þe*-relatives, are used in the *Saints Lives* for “second mentions” of a protagonist who has just been introduced – exactly the “presentational” function noted of cases like (3a-b) in Dutch and German. This raises the possibility that the verb-placement asymmetry between main and subclauses in OE is actually more pronounced than large-scale word order studies made possible by YCOE would suggest.

## References

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