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## THE EMERGENCE OF SUBORDINATE CLAUSES IN OLD ENGLISH FROM PARATACTICALLY CONJOINED STRUCTURES

In our paper we are going to demonstrate that hypotactic constructions develop from paratactic ones and not the other way round. On the basis of numerous Old English examples, we will try to demonstrate how hypotactic constructions come into being and what is the possible mechanism lying behind this process; one can speak of a hypotactic relation between two clauses when one of them is subordinate and the other is main, so in this sense the term subordinate clauses could actually be used interchangeably with the term hypotactic structures. We will concentrate upon the transition phase between parataxis and hypotaxis, which will allow us to see how hypotaxis was developing from parataxis in English.

### 1. Parataxis vs. hypotaxis

In Old English there are many sentences, the status of which cannot easily be established. What we mean is that certain clauses cannot easily be qualified either as main clauses or dependent ones. Moreover, since most researchers have access only to the modern editions of the mediaeval texts, be it electronic or non-electronic, there appears the problem of the modern punctuation used by the editors. Mitchell (1988: 172) observes that “it is clear that modern *readers* cannot always grasp the exact nuance an Anglo-Saxon author, reader, or reciter, conveyed to his *hearers*. Even if we assume that there is only one such nuance and that the modern editor has grasped it, he cannot always convey it to others by modern punctuation, which is concerned with modern English as a written rather than as a spoken language, whereas in Old English (one ventures to think) we may sometimes have to do with the rhythms and clause terminals of something closer to speech than to writing”. The problem is that, although Old English possessed a great number of dependent clauses, the status of which cannot be questioned, there are still many ambiguous contexts where it is not certain whether we have to do with parataxis or hypotaxis. Parataxis is a process whereby words and

sentences are conjoined with one another, but they form sort of independent units where no subordination is present. Then, if we may say so, parataxis reflects a less advanced stage of language. With the passage of time, when language becomes more 'mature', it starts to develop dependent clauses that cannot stand on their own but their existence and behaviour is conditioned by main clauses. The moment dependent clauses start to appear, we can start talking about hypotaxis, which reflects a more advanced stage of language. In other words, with the passage of time, languages become more and more mature and abstract. However, before an advanced stage of hypotaxis can be developed, the language has to go through a transition stage where both parataxis and hypotaxis coexist. According to Kiparsky (1995) Indo-European was a paratactic language, where, for example, finite subordinate clauses were not embedded but adjoined and this can be evidenced by Sanskrit, Hittite, Old Latin and Classical Greek. Later on, when Indo-European split into different languages, most daughter languages that came into being, together with the Germanic family, introduced an innovation in their syntax and departed a little from the original IE pattern. In those languages, dependent clauses became syntactically embedded, taking up modifier or argument positions within the main clause. However, according to Bednarczuk (1980: 145), "the relation between parataxis and hypotaxis has not been precisely defined [...]" Furthermore, he says that it is impossible to state empirically whether parataxis is older than hypotaxis or vice versa, or which of the two constructions has arisen from which. However, he adds that "the most widespread theory which says that hypotaxis has arisen from parataxis is based on the fact that it is less frequent in colloquial language and in children's speech, while in the historical development of different languages it expands at the cost of parataxis". However, "in some languages, on the contrary, we can observe the expansion of parataxis at the cost of hypotaxis".

Although we are convinced that the formal tendency in languages seems to be basically towards hypotaxis, we should assume that it is never the case that parataxis disappears from the language altogether. There is always a transition stage where both paratactic and hypotactic structures coexist. According to Jucker (1991) "it is generally recognised that languages move from parataxis to hypotaxis. They do this on two levels. On the one hand, the proportion of hypotaxis versus parataxis tends to increase in the course of time, and, on the other hand, hypotactic constructions usually have paratactic origins. This implies that there must be one or possibly several intermediate stages between true parataxis and true hypotaxis and that there are constructions that are neither clearly paratactic nor clearly hypotactic but somewhere in-between. In most cases this development will have been not so much a matter of discrete steps, but rather a gradual movement, which makes it difficult to ascertain the exact status of a construction at any one time". Although Old English achieved quite an advanced stage of hypotaxis, still there are many cases where we can have problems with the classification of some of the clauses. Modern English, however, is much more hypotactic than Old English.

## 2. Unambiguous cases

We will now analyse some examples to illustrate how paratactic constructions develop into hypotactic ones. Let us first take some sentences that are conjoined paratactically with one another:

- (1) **Þa** geaf se cyng his sunu þone eorlðom on Norðfolc 7 Suðfolc, **þa** lædde he þæt wif to Norðwic: **þær** wes þet brydeala mannum to beala *ChronE 1075/4*  
 ‘Then gave the king to his son the earldom in Northfolc and Southfolc, **then** led he the lady to Northwic, **there** was this wedding to the men’s joy/harm’
- (2) Octauianus rixade LVI wintra, 7 on þam XLII geare his rices Crist wæs acenned *ChronE 1/1*  
 ‘Octauianus reigned LVI winters, **and** on the XLII year of his kingdom Christ was born’
- (3) Her Certic forþferde, 7 Cynric his sunu rixade forþ XXVI wintra, 7 heo sealdon heora twam nefum Stufe 7 Wihtgare eall Wihtland *ChronE 534/1*  
 ‘Here Certic died, **and** Cyneric his sun reigned for XXVI winters, **and** they gave to their two nephews Stuf and Wihtgar all of Wihtland’

It can be seen that in the highlighted areas of the above examples there is no subordination whatever, as the sentences are conjoined paratactically. It should be noted, however, that the degree to which parataxis is employed depends on the individual users of a given language. That these sentences have been conjoined paratactically by one language user does not mean that it was not possible to conjoin them hypotactically by another. Attention should be paid to the fact that, while on the one hand language maturity can refer to a given language as a whole at a certain period in language history, its maturity can as well refer to anybody individually, and therefore, whereas some users of a given language choose, be it consciously or involuntarily, to employ more paratactic structures in speech production, others will use more advanced structures. Children and beginning L2 language users, however, are likely to use paratactic constructions first and only after a time can they construct hypotactic ones; L2 language users, however, already have some experience with L1 where hypotactic constructions are not uncommon.

Let us now have a look at some ambiguous cases where the dependency or non-dependency of the sentences is not that evident, which fact makes translation more difficult.

## 3. Parataxis 1/Hypotaxis 1

By parataxis 1/hypotaxis 1 we mean a structure that contains an element, which in parataxis and hypotaxis is part of the same structure: in parataxis it is part of a main

clause which in hypotaxis becomes a dependent clause introduced by the element. Moreover, in parataxis it functions as the subject, object or adjunct, whereas in hypotaxis the element functions as the relative connector.

We will first concentrate upon elements that function as the subject:

- (4) Her forðferde Æþelberht Cantware cining, **se** rixade LVI wintra *ChronE 616/1*  
 a) parataxis – ‘Here died Æþelberht the Cantware king, **he** reigned LVI winters’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘Here died Æþelberht the Cantware king, **who** reigned LVI winters’
- (5) He macode þær twa abbotrice: an of muneca oðer of nunna; **þet** wæs eall wiðinnan Wintanceastra *ChronE 963/6*  
 a) parataxis – ‘He made there two abbeys: one of monks the other of nuns, **it** was all within Wintanceaster’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘He made there two abbeys: one of monks the other of nuns, **which** was all within Wintanceaster’

In the above examples the elements *se* and *þet* are ambiguous and can be treated in two ways. On the one hand, in parataxis 1 they will function as demonstrative pronouns or personal pronouns that are not relative connectors, and whose function is that of the subject of an independent clause. On the other hand, in hypotaxis 1 they will function as relative connectors, which would also form the subject of the clauses they introduce, but this time the clauses would be dependent ones, which, by their nature, cannot stand alone.

Let us now turn to other elements that in parataxis 1 function as the direct object and in hypotaxis 1 as a relative connector. In the example below the sentences introduced by the element *þone* behave more like independent clauses than dependent ones:

- (6) Eadgar æþeling [...] þær wæs eac gefangen; **þone** let se cyng syððan sacleas faran *ChronE 1106/37*  
 a) parataxis – ‘Eadgar nobleman there was also caught, **him** let the king afterwards fare safe’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘Eadgar nobleman there was also caught, **whom** let the king afterwards fare safe’
- (7) he wæs biscop XLV wintra, **þone** Ecgferð cining ær bedraf to Rome *ChronE 709/7*  
 a) parataxis – ‘he was bishop XLV winters, **him** Ecgferð king before drove to Rome’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘he was bishop XLV winters, **whom** Ecgferð king before drove to Rome’

What we have just said about the treatment of the direct object, can also apply to the indirect object. If we look at the sentences that follow below, it will be seen that they also can be approached in two different ways:

- (8) Eadbriht onfeng rice on Cent, **þam** wæs oðer nama nemned Præn  
*ChronE 794/5*  
 a) parataxis – ‘Eadbriht obtained kingdom in Cent, **him** was other name given Præn’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘Eadbriht obtained kingdom in Cent, **whom** was other name given Præn’
- (9) se þridda het Heanric **þam** se fæder becwæð gersuman unateallendlice  
*ChronE 1086/52*  
 a) parataxis – ‘the third’s name was Heanric, **him** the father gave innumerable gifts’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘the third’s name was Heanric, **whom** the father gave innumerable gifts’

On the one hand, in parataxis 1 the element *þam* will be treated as having the function of the indirect object, but on the other, in hypotaxis 1 it will function as a relative connector and the sentence will need to be treated as a dependent clause.

Apart from the type of sentences that we have just seen, a fourth type of ambiguous cases can be distinguished. This time it concerns other functions than that of subject or object, namely adjuncts. To illustrate this, let us have a look at the examples below:

- (10) **Þa** hi comen on middewarde þe sæ, **þa** com an mycel storm  
*ChronE 1070/39*  
 a) parataxis – ‘**then** they came to the middle of the sea, **then** came a big storm’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘**when** they came to the middle of the sea, **then** came a big storm’
- (11) þa lædde he þæt wif to Norðwic: **þær** wes þet brydeala mannum to beala  
*ChronE 1075/5*  
 a) parataxis – ‘**then** led he the lady to Norwich, **there** was this wedding to the men’s joy/harm’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘**then** led he the lady to Norwich, **where** was this wedding to the men’s joy/harm’
- (12) We witan oþer egland her be easton **þer** ge magon eardian gif ge willað  
*ChronE 0/10*  
 a) parataxis – ‘We know other island here by the east, **there** you may dwell if you wish’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘We know other island here by the east, **where** you may dwell if you wish’

On the one hand, in parataxis 1 the elements *Þa* and *þær* will be treated as adverbs, but on the other, in hypotaxis 1 they can be looked at as relative pronouns.

#### 4. Parataxis 2/Hypotaxis 2

So far we have been speaking of parataxis 1 and hypotaxis 1. However, there is also another type of ambiguous sentences that are of somewhat different nature. By parataxis 2/hypotaxis 2 we mean a structure that contains an element that in parataxis and in hypotaxis is not part of the same structure: in parataxis it is part of the main clause where it usually functions as the object, and in hypotaxis it is part of the dependent clause that it introduces and in which it functions as a relative connector.

Let us first take a sentence which is unambiguous from the point of view of whether it is dependent or not:

- (13) 7 he sende Scottum gewrit **þet** hi scoldon gecerran to rihtum Eastrum  
*ChronE 627/6*  
 ‘and he sent to the Scots a writing **that** they should turn to the right Easter’

There can be no doubt that the sentence *þet hi scoldon gecerran to rihtum Eastrum* is a dependent clause, because *þet* cannot be treated as the direct object selected by the verb *sende*, as this function is already expressed by the word *gewrit*. However, we cannot be so sure about the following sentences:

- (14) Ða gehet se cining Pauline **þet** he wolde his dohter gesyllan Gode  
*ChronE 626/4*  
 a) parataxis – ‘Then the king promised Paulin **that**: he would his daughter give to God’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘Then the king promised Paulin, **that** he would his daughter give to God’
- (15) 7 hider ic wille **þet** we secan Sancte Petre *ChronE 656/52*  
 a) parataxis – ‘And here I wish **that**: we (should) search for Saint Peter’  
 b) hypotaxis – ‘And here I wish, **that** we (should) search for Saint Peter’

On closer consideration we can suppose that the sentence is not so unambiguous as it at first seems, since the element *þet* can be looked at from two different perspectives. On the one hand, in the so called parataxis 2, it will serve as the direct object pronoun selected by the verb *gehet*, but on the other, in hypotaxis 2, it will serve as a relative connector.

These structures are very interesting insofar they offer us a clear picture as to how parataxis 2 turns into hypotaxis 2. They are actually in a transition stage and struggle towards hypotaxis 2. Let us have a look at (16) below:

- (16) ða cwædon hi **þet þet** hi þæs ne gemundon þonne ma þe heora geferen  
*ChronE 755/31*  
 ‘then said they **that, that** they didn’t care about it more than their companions’

In this sentence there is no doubt that the first *þet* is the direct object pronoun of the main clause, whereas the second *þet* is a subordinating connector. However, in hypotaxis 2, in the double *þet þet* the subordinating connector was substituted by the more abstract and less expressive element *þe*, like in (17) below:

- (17) *se cyng him nolde agifan þet þe he on Normandige uppon him genumen hæfde*  
 ‘the king wouldn’t give him **that, which** he in Normandy uppon him had taken’  
*ChronE 1106/5*

At a more advanced stage of language maturity, the two words in *þet þet*, as well as in *þet þe*, seem to have been reinterpreted as a sort of a subordinating connector, one of which became superfluous and thus was got rid of, the other serving solely as a subordinating connector in dependent clauses. This seems to be confirmed in Old English in sentences like the one below:

- (18) *þa bæd Swegen eorl hine þet he sceolde gewendon mid him to scipe*  
*ChronE 1046b/27*  
 ‘then bid earl Swegen him, **that** he should turn with him to the ship’

In example (18) the word *þet* is most likely to be treated as a subordinating connector, because it would be a little odd for the main sentence to have two direct objects.

Let us now see an analogical situation with other elements:

- (19) *man getealde him þet nigonðe for þan heðenscipe þe hi drugon ChronE 634/7*  
 ‘one told him the ninth **for that** heathenship, **that** they protracted’

Here *for þan...* will be treated as part of the main clause, and there is no doubt about it. However, in (20) below:

- (20) *7 on þis ilcan tyme forðferde <Ælfsige> abbot of Burh, 7 man ceas þa Arnwi munec to abbot, forðan þe <he> wæs swiðe god man 7 swiðe bilehwit*  
*ChronE 1041/9*  
 ‘And at the same time died Ælfsige abbot of Burh, and one chose then monk Arnwi for an abbot, **for that** he was a very good man and very honest’

the element *forðan* is already part of the subordinating connector but if we take away the dependent clause and the comma, and leave *forðan*, we will obtain a correctly built sentence where *forðan* forms part of the main clause. Let us have a look at the hypothetical example based on the one right above:

- (21) *7 on þis ilcan tyme forðferde <Ælfsige> abbot of Burh, 7 man ceas þa Arnwi munec to abbot for ðan*  
 ‘And at the same time died Ælfsige abbot of Burh, and one chose then monk Arnwi for an abbot **for that**’

With the process of abstraction, the subordinating connector *forðan þe*, which is already a simplification of *for ðæm þet*, underwent further simplification whereby some elements were considered superfluous and went out of use for reasons of economy, like in:

- (22) And on Wiht gehergode Wulfhere Pending 7 gesealde Wihtwarum Æðelwolde  
 Suðseaxena cininga **forþan** Wulfhere hine onfeng æt fulwihte *ChronE 661/3*  
 ‘And Wulfhere Pending devastated With and gave to the men of Wiht Æðelwold  
 the king of Southsaxons, **for** Wulfhere took him at bap-tism’

Here we can see that we have to do with hypotaxis, which is a natural tendency in language whereby the usual direction is from parataxis to hypotaxis but, as we mentioned earlier, the most problematic stage is the transition stage where hypotaxis is not yet fully established. It is much easier to deal with either of the extremes, be it parataxis or hypotaxis than with the transition stage.

## 5. Conclusions

We hope to have demonstrated, in a somewhat simplified way however, how subordinate clauses (hypotactic structures) were developing in Old English. The direction of the development was from parataxis to hypotaxis and not the other way round. When paratactic structures were developing into hypotactic ones in the history of English, they passed through a transition phase. This means that on the one hand they can be treated as main clauses conjoined paratactically with the structures preceding or following them, or on the other hand as subordinate clauses conjoined hypotactically with the structures preceding or following them. Therefore, when one comes across structures that find themselves in such an intermediate phase, it is very difficult to judge whether one has to do with main clauses or with subordinate clauses. However, this intermediate phase was a necessary step in the whole process of the development of subordinate clauses in the history of English.

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