

AN ANALYSIS OF THE OBJECT POSITION IN
ANCRENE WISSE AND *THE KATHERINE GROUP*

Ancrene Wisse and the *Katherine Group* have been considered as twin texts since 1929, when J. R. R. Tolkien stated that MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402 and MS Bodley 34 —containing *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*, respectively— presented a consistent and regular phonology, morphology and orthography. These prose works were claimed to be the exponents of the so-called AB language.¹

This paper, being a part of a larger research project, tries to prove the lack of uniformity of such AB language. At the same time, but in a parallel way, the aim is to find out to what extent has the French language influenced on the prose of these six 13th century works. Previous research on the influence of French upon the AB language has just made reference to lexical borrowings. This is intended to be, therefore, a new and more comprehensive approach, that had been waiting for so long to be made.

The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of an aspect of the word-order usage in the *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group*: the position of the object with respect to the verb. An attempt is made to show which word-order patterns are common or unmarked and which are uncommon or marked in the corpus, by tabulating their frequency of occurrence. The distribution of clauses and their classification has been made following Kubouchi's model (1975).²

¹ Note the following abbreviations throughout: AW = *Ancrene Wisse*; SK = *Sancte Katerine*; SM = *Seinte Margarete*; SI = *Seinte Iuliane*; SW = *Sawles Warde*; HM = *Hali Mei?had*.

² Kubouchi, T., 1975: "Word order in the *Ancrene Wisse*." *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts & Sciences*. Tokyo.

The material used for this analysis is the English text of the *Ancren Riwle* as presented in CCC MS. 402, edited by J. Tolkien.¹ For the analysis of the *Katherine Group*, S. D'Ardenne's edition of MS. Bodley 34 has been taken.²

The sample under analysis is a 15% for each of the six prose works, the margin of error being thus remarkably minimized.³

1058 sentences (practically the whole sample) have been analysed for the study of the object position in the six prose works. They are distributed as follows:

Ancrene Wisse : 667 Sancte Katerine : 85

Seinte Margarete: 113 Seinte Iulienne : 67

Sawles Warde: 38 Hali Meilhad : 88

INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

TYPE1: INDEPENDENT CLAUSES WHICH ARE NOT INTRODUCED BY A COORDINATE CONJUNCTION OR ADVERBIALS

In *Ancrene Wisse* the SVO order is by far the most frequent (67.7%). Next comes OSV (12%) and in the third place OVS (7.2%).

Sancte Katerine presents the SVO order as the most frequent (46.6%), followed by VO (33.3%).

Seinte Margarete shows OSV order as the main (69.2%), followed by SVO (19.2%)

In *Seinte Iulienne* the most frequent order is SVO (80%)

¹ Tolkien, J. R. R., ed., 1962: *The English Text of the Ancren Riwle. Ancrene Wisse* (CCC MS. 402) [E. E. T. S., o. s. 249], Oxford University Press, Oxford.

² D'Ardenne, S. T. R. O. ed., 1977: *The Katherine Group edited from MS. Bodley 34*. Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", Paris.

³ A part of the beginning, a part of the end and two parts of the middle were selected for each of the prose works.

Sawles Warde presents the same frequency for it (80%), followed by SOV (20%)

Hali Meilhad has SVO as the most frequent, too (69.2%), followed by OSV (15.3%).

As can be seen, with the exception of *Seinte Margarete*, all the works present the SVO order as the most frequent for this Type 1 of independent clauses. Table I shows how this order reaches the highest rate of occurrence (61.7%) for the six prose works, in Type 1 of independent clauses. OSV is next in frequency, reaching a 17.9% of the whole for the same type of sentences.

A tendency can be said to be present in all of them to strengthen the basic pattern SVO, already present in Old English, and of the utmost importance in Modern English. French may have had an effect in the consolidation of that order pattern, since that order becomes more firmly established in the development of its history. Moignet¹(1988: 356) mentions it:

L'ordre Sujet-Verbe-Complément devient assez vite prépondérant, dans l'histoire du français. Il est quasiment de règle quand l'utilité ne se fait pas particulièrement sentir de lier la phrase à ce qui précède ou à mettre en relief un élément complément (...)

For Brunot²(1966: 268) this pattern also “était déjà la plus fréquente en ancien français”.

TYPE 2. INDEPENDENT CLAUSES INTRODUCED BY ADVERBIALS

A) STARTING WITH NE

¹ Moignet, G., 1988: *Grammaire de l'ancien français*. Klincksieck, Paris.

² Brunot, F., 1966: *Histoire de la Langue Française. Tome I*. Librairie Armand Colin, Paris.

In *Ancrene Wisse* the most frequent pattern is VSO (53.8%), followed by VO (35.8%).

The only order present in *Sancte Katerine* is VSO (100%).

Seinte Margarete presents VOS all the time (100%).

No clear preference is shown in *Seinte Iulienne* for either of the following patterns: VOS (50%) and SVO (50%).

In *Sawles Warde* only VSO is found (100%).

The same applies to *Hali Meilhad*: VSO (100%).

For this Type 2a of clauses there seems to be a general agreement in the pattern VSO, which reaches the highest frequency, except in *Seinte Margarete*—again being slightly different from the rest—and *Seinte Iulienne*. As a contrast, *Sancte Katerine*, *Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meilhad* offer this as the only possibility in Type 2a of independent clauses.

Table I shows how VSO gets the highest percentage (56.3%), very much above the other order patterns. It is the most used in the six prose works for this type 2a of independent clauses. VO follows, with a 29.2%.

B) STARTING WITH ANY OTHER ADVERBIAL

This time the most frequent order in *Ancrene Wisse* is SVO (48.1%), followed by VSO (29.6%).

In *Sancte Katerine* SVO (66.6%) is the most widely used order, followed also by VSO (16.6%) and SOV (16.6%).

In *Seinte Margarete* SVO presents the highest percentage (50%).

In *Seinte Iulienne* OV (50%) and VO (50%) are equally distributed.

Both *Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meilhad* do not present any object for this type of clauses.

Seinte Iulienne is again different from the rest; it can be argued that a more traditional order is present in it, since the object precedes the verb in a 50% of the occurrences.

The most frequent order in the six prose works for this type 2b of independent clauses is, therefore, SVO.

TYPE 3. COORDINATE CLAUSES WHICH ARE INTRODUCED BY A COORDINATE CONJUNCTION

A) INTRODUCED BY ANT, AH AND THAH

In *Ancrene Wisse* VO (65.8%) appears as the most frequent order, followed by SVO (21.1%).

Sancte Katerine presents VO (59.2%) as the most used pattern, followed by SVO (22.2%).

In *Seinte Margarete* VO (50%) is the most frequent, also followed by SVO (23.3%), like the works above.

In *Seinte Iuliene* VO (77.7%) presents the highest frequency, too, followed at a long distance by SVO (11.1%).

Sawles Warde shows SVO first (45.4%), followed by VO (27.2%).

Hali Meilhad, like the other works above, shows a preference for VO (61.9%), followed by SVO (19%).

There is a general agreement in the choice of order pattern for this type of coordinate clauses. Table I shows the unquestionable preference for the VO order, which presents the highest frequency of occurrence (62.9%), followed at a considerable distance by SVO (21.5%).

It has often been stated that Old English usually presented the order SOV after *and* and *ac*, that is, the so-called subordinate order. But this usage surely did not survive that period. And, supposing it had survived after Old English, what seems absolutely certain is that it is not reflected in the six prose works under study (its presence is limited to two occurrences in *Ancrene Wisse* and *Sancte Katerine* and only one in *Seinte Margarete*, *Seinte Iuliene* and *Hali Meilhad*).

The superiority of VO in this type of coordinate clauses coincides with the usage, at that very moment, of the French language. Brunot (1966) states that this order pattern is the most frequent in Old French when the Subject is not present. The syntax of that romance language may have played an impor-

tant role in the preference for the SVO pattern, rather than for the native SOV pattern.

B) INTRODUCED BY FOR, OÍER AND ME

The most frequent order in *Ancrene Wisse* is SVO (52.3%), followed by VO (23.8%).

In *Sancte Katerine* all the patterns show the same frequency: SVO (33.3%), VS (33.3%) and SVOC (33.3%).

In *Seinte Margarete* the most usual is SVO (75%), followed at a distance by OSV (25%).

Seinte Iulienne presents the same frequency for SVO (50%) and VSO (50%).

In *Sawles Warde* and *Hali Meilhad* there is only one pattern for this type of clauses: SVO (100%).

All the prose works coincide in their more or less frequent use of the SVO pattern for the Type 3b of independent clauses. This can be observed in Table I, where the highest rate of occurrence (57.6%) corresponds to this order.

TYPE 4. IMPERATIVE AND INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

The most frequent order in *Ancrene Wisse* is VO (43.4%), followed by VO S (16.1%).

Sancte Katerine shows a preference for VO (66.6%), followed by VSO (33.4%).

In *Seinte Margarete* VO is the most usual (44.4%), followed by SVO (22.2%).

Seinte Iulienne shows SVO as the most frequent (41.6%), followed by VSO (33.3%).

In *Sawles Warde* the only order pattern present is VO (100%).

Hali Meilhad shows VO (66.6%) as the most frequent, followed at a great distance by VOS (22.2%).

All the prose works, with the exception of *Seinte Iulienne*, agree to choose preferably the VO pattern for imperative and interrogative sentences. So it is seen in Table I, where VO presents the highest frequency (45.1%) for this Type 4 of independent sentences.

This order pattern is the commonest in Old French syntax, both for interrogative sentences, where the pronoun régime is postponed (Moignet, 1988), and for imperative sentences (Brunot, 1966). Therefore a possible influence of the French syntax in the consolidation of that order pattern should be considered.

DEPENDENT CLAUSES

TYPE 1. CLAUSES WITH THE SUBJECT AND VERB

In *Ancrene Wisse* SVO (63.6%) is the most frequent order, followed by OSV (24.3%) and SOV (10.6%).

In *Sancte Katerine* SVO is the most usual, too (67.8%), followed at a great distance by OSV (17.8%).

Seinte Margarete also presents SVO (56.7%) as the most frequent, followed by OSV (24.3%) and in the third place SOV (18.9%).

In *Seinte Iulienne* the most usual pattern is SVO (83.3%), followed by OSV (16.6%).

The same happens in *Sawles Warde*, where SVO reaches the highest percentage (66.6%), followed by OSV and SOV (16.6% each of them).

In *Hali Meilhad* SVO is also the most frequent (55.8%), followed by OSV (23.5%), SOV (17.6%) and OVS (2.9%).

All the prose works present the SVO pattern as the most frequent, a very significant fact when dealing with subordinate clauses, for which the order SOV used to be the usual one in the past. But the SOV pattern is relegated to

a third position (11.8%), whereas SVO reaches a 63.3% and its immediate follower, OSV, a 23.2%.

Trying to find a possible parallelism with Old French, we face, on one hand, a punctual distinction made by Togeby¹(1974: 61):

Dans les subordonnées, l'objet se place après la verbe si le sujet est un substantif (...). Mais si le sujet est un pronom, l'objet se place volontiers entre celui-ci et le verbe

on the other, Brunot's hesitation (1966: 268):

Ici, l'usage demeure encore très variable pendant toute cette première période.(...) Partout on rencontre des exemples contradictoires

In any case, all the works under study have taken a step towards a more innovative prose. *Seinte Margarete* remains more traditional, as its lower frequency in SVO and higher frequency in SOV prove.

Table III shows the general agreement in choosing the SVO order as the most frequent —with a high frequency sometimes (*Sawles Warde*: 62.2%), lower other times (*Seinte Margarete*: 36.9%). Thus it can be concluded that this kind of prose is gradually trying to get rid of those patterns which tied it to the native tradition. Even if this stage only witnesses slow transitions, some features of modernity and innovation are already reflected in the different order patterns that have been shown for the various types of clauses, some of which may have been reinforced by imitation to the French model.

All in all, the most frequent order patterns in the 1058 clauses under analysis, are, as Table III shows: SVO (43.1%), followed by VO (23.9%) and in the third place OSV (12%). SOV remains the fifth, with a 5.9%.

SOV, so frequent in Old English, decreases its use considerably, while the other patterns become more usual. Whereas in Old English the object, be it a

¹ Togeby, K., 1974: *Précis Historique de grammaire française*. Akademisk Forlag, Copenhagen.

pronoun or a noun, came before the verb, in the Early Middle English period the object-noun starts to be rejected before the verb, the pronoun being preferred in this position. After examining the occurrences of the object in the six prose works, whenever SOV is present the following can be observed:

<i>Ancrene Wisse:</i>				
Type 1:	SO(pron)V:	5 occur.	SO(n) V:	3 occur.
Type 3a:	»	2	»	0
Subordinate:	»	21	»	4
<i>Sancte Katerine:</i>				
Type 1:	»	1	»	1
Type 2b:	»	0	»	1
Type 3a:	»	1	»	1
Subordinate:	»	2	»	0
<i>Seinte Margarete:</i>				
Type 3a:	»	1	»	0
Subordinate:	»	3	»	4
<i>Seinte Iulienne :</i>				
Type 3a:	»	1	»	0
<i>Sawles Warde :</i>				
Type 1:	»	2	»	0
Type 3a:	»	1	»	0
Subordinate:	»	2	»	0
<i>Hali Meilhad :</i>				
Type 3a:	»	1	»	0
Subordinate:	»	4	»	2

None of the prose works - with the exception of *Sancte Katerine*, which seems more traditional in this respect - presents for Type 3a of independent clauses the pattern SO(n)V, so current in Old English.

The highest number of occurrences of SO(n)V is localised in subordinate clauses.

Sawles Warde does not present that order pattern in any of its clauses.

All the works show a number of pronoun-objects superior to that of noun-objects. This fact coincides with the usage in Old French. B. Lee¹ (1974: 64) states:

Old French, like modern French, usually placed pronominal objects before the verb.

Therefore the pattern SO(pron)V is itself an inheritance from the English tradition, but it may have been reinforced by the practice of the French syntax. The development of the English language gives a gradual boost to the SVO order, although the SOV pattern will still be present in Modern English poetry. Examples:

“® since that I *me* repent of my lost years”
“or youth led me, and falsehood *me* misguided” (quot. Kellner, 1892: 291).²

As for the OSV order (12%), the third with the highest frequency in the six prose works, it is convenient to point out that when the object is placed first in the clause, the subject follows it and precedes the verb more frequently than the OVS order. The productivity of the latter tends to diminish, given that it belongs to an earlier stage of the language. Thus, in *Ancrene Wisse* there are 25 occurrences of OVS, as against 77 of OSV. In *Sancte Katerine* there are 4 occurrences of VS versus 6 of OSV - here the preference is not so marked -. In *Seinte Margarete* there is 1 occurrence of OVS versus 30 of OSV. In *Seinte Iulienne* there is 1 occurrence of OVS versus 2 of OSV. In *Sawles Warde*, 2 occurrences of OSV; and in *Hali Meilhad* 1 occurrence of OVS versus 8 of OSV.

¹ Lee, B. G., 1974: *Linguistic Evidence for the priority of the French text of the Ancrene Wisse*. Mouton, The Hague.

² Kellner, L., 1892: *Historical Outlines of English Syntax*. Macmillan & Co., London.

(Table III shows likewise, for each of the six prose works, the frequency of occurrence of OVS and OSV). This time, however, the influence of the French language cannot be said to be present in the increase of the OSV order, since OVS was the norm in Old French. According to Brunot¹ (1969: 447):

En ancien français, quand la phrase commence par un complément (...), le verbe le suit immédiatement, et le sujet se trouve rejeté après le verbe

Last, but not least, we are left with the question concerning the position of the object with respect to the verb. J. Williams² (1986: 233) gives some general lines:

Between the years 1000 and 1500 the frequency of an accusative object before a verb decreased markedly:

ca.	1000	1200	1300	1400	1500
	52%	53%	40%	14%	2%

In the six prose works under analysis we observe a very marked preference for the object after the verb, for all types of clauses (see Table IV). In some cases, nevertheless, the results should be presented with a certain caution.

For instance, in *Seinte Margarete* VO and OV show the same frequency. In its subordinate clauses the VO order is not much more frequent than OV, thereby leading to the conclusion that its prose is of a more traditional character.

Seinte Iulienne does not show a clear preference for either pattern in Type 2b of independent clauses, although it does for the rest.

¹ Brunot, F. & Bruneau, C., 1969: *Précis de Grammaire Historique de la langue française*. Masson et Cie, Paris.

² Williams, J. M., 1975: *Origins of the English Language*. Free Press, New York.

With these two exceptions, the VO order is practically consolidated in the prose written during the early thirteenth century, after the results of the sample analysed for this study.

Ana M^a Hornero Corisco
University of Zaragoza

APPENDIX

TABLE I

A) INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

TYPE 1	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
	OV							0	0,0%
	OVS	9	1	1	1		1	13	6,6%
	OSV	15		18			2	35	17,9%
	OVCS							0	0,0%
	OSVC							0	0,0%
	SOV	8	2			2		12	6,1%
	VO	6	5	1			1	13	6,6%
	VOC	1						1	0,5%
	VOS							0	0,0%
	SVO	84	7	5	8	8	9	121	61,7%
	VSO	1						1	0,5%
	SVOC							0	0,0%
	TOTAL							196	100,0

TYPE	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
	OV		1					1	2,1%
	OVS							0	0,0%
	OSV							0	0,0%
	OVCS							0	0,0%
	OSVC							0	0,0%
	SOV							0	0,0%
	VO	14						14	29,2%
	VOC							0	0,0%
	VOS	2		1	1			4	8,3%
	SVO	1			1			2	4,2%
	VSO	21	3			2	1	27	56,3%
	SVOC							0	0,0%
	TOTAL							48	100,0

TYPE	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
OV					1			1	2,4%
OVS								0	0,0%
OSV								0	0,0%
OVCS		1						1	2,4%
OSVC		1						1	2,4%
SOV			1					1	2,4%
VO		4		2	1			7	17,1%
VOC								0	0,0%
VOS								0	0,0%
SVO		13	4	3				20	48,8%
VSO		8	1	1				10	24,4%
SVOC								0	0,0%
TOTAL								41	100,0

TYPE	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
OV		2	1	3	1		1	8	3,4%
OVS		3	1					4	1,7%
OSV		4	1	1				6	2,5%
OVCS								0	0,0%
OSVC				1				1	0,4%
SOV		2	2	1	1		1	7	3,0%
VO		81	16	15	21	3	13	149	62,9%
VOC		3		1			1	5	2,1%
VOS		1						1	0,4%
SVO		26	6	7	3	5	4	51	21,5%
VSO		1			1	1	1	4	1,7%
SVOC						1		1	0,4%
TOTAL								237	100,0

TYPE	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
OV		1						1	3,0%
OVS		3	1					4	12,1%
OSV				1				1	3,0%
OVCS								0	0,0%
OSVC								0	0,0%
SOV								0	0,0%
VO		5						5	15,2%
VOC								0	0,0%
VOS								0	0,0%
SVO		11	1	3	1	2	1	19	57,6%
VSO		1			1			2	6,1%
SVOC			1					1	3,0%
TOTAL								33	100,0

TYPE A	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
OV		9					1	10	7,0%
OVS		9						9	6,3%
OSV				1				1	0,7%
OVCS								0	0,0%
OSVC								0	0,0%
SOV								0	0,0%
VO		43	2	4	2	1	12	64	45,1%
VOC		1		1				2	1,4%
VOS		16			1		4	21	14,8%
SVO		8		2	5			15	10,6%
VSO		12	1	1	4		1	19	13,4%
SVOC		1						1	0,7%
TOTAL								142	100,0

TABLE II

B) SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	OCCUR.	%
OV							0	0,0%
OVS		1				1	2	0,6%
OSV	57	5	9	2	2	8	83	23,2%
OVCS							0	0,0%
OSVC							0	0,0%
SOV	25	2	7		2	6	42	11,8%
VO							0	0,0%
VOC							0	0,0%
VOS		1					1	0,3%
SVO	149	19	21	10	8	19	226	63,3%
VSO	3						3	0,8%
SVOC							0	0,0%
TOTAL							357	100,0%
TOTAL SUM	667	85	111	66	37	88	1054	1054

TABLE III

AVER.	ORDER	AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM	%
	OV	1,9%	1,2%	2,7%	3,0%	0,0%	2,3%	2,0%
	OVS	3,6%	4,7%	0,9%	1,5%	0,0%	2,3%	3,0%
	OSV	11,4%	7,1%	27,0%	3,0%	5,4%	11,4%	12,0%
	OVCS	0,1%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	OSVC	0,1%	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,2%
	SOV	5,2%	8,2%	7,2%	1,5%	10,8%	8,0%	5,9%
	VO	22,9%	27,1%	19,8%	36,4%	10,8%	29,5%	23,9%
	VOC	0,7%	0,0%	1,8%	0,0%	0,0%	1,1%	0,8%
	VOS	2,8%	1,2%	0,9%	3,0%	0,0%	4,5%	2,6%
	SVO	43,8%	43,5%	36,9%	42,4%	62,2%	37,5%	43,1%
	VSO	7,0%	5,9%	1,8%	9,1%	8,1%	3,4%	6,3%
	SVOC	0,1%	1,2%	0,0%	0,0%	2,7%	0,0%	0,3%
	SVOC	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100,0%

TABLE IV:
SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS

A) INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

TYPE		AW	SK	SM	SI	SW	HM
1.	OV	25,8%	20,0%	50,0%	20,0%	20,0%	23,0%
	VO	74,2%	80,0%	50,0%	80,0%	80,0%	77,0%
2A	OV	2,5%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	VO	97,5%	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
2B	OV	7,4%	16,6%	0,0%	50,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	VO	92,6%	83,4%	100,0	50,0%	0,0%	0,0%
3A	OV	8,9%	18,5%	20,0%	7,4%	9,0%	9,5%
	VO	91,1%	81,5%	80,0%	92,6%	91,0%	90,5%
3B	OV	19,0%	33,3%	25,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	VO	81,0%	66,7%	75,0%	100,0	100,0	100,0
4.	OV	28,2%	0,0%	11,1%	0,0%	0,0%	5,5%
	VO	71,8%	100,0	88,9%	100,0	100,0	94,5%

B) SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

	OV	35,0%	28,5%	43,2%	16,6%	33,3%	44,1%
	VO	65,0%	71,5%	56,8%	83,4%	66,7%	55,9%

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