This talk consists of two parts. I will first present some Old and Middle English word order data and say something about what I have done previously with respect to the relation between word order and discourse in English in these periods. In the second part, I intend to present some results of a pilot study I am going to carry out in the weeks before the workshop. Inspired by the work of the Humboldt group, I would like to study coordinating and subordinating discourse relations (cf. Asher & Vieu, 2005) in Old English (OE) SXV (verb-final) clauses, and I may also include XSV clauses (if there is time). Petrova (2006) has studied coordinating and subordinating discourse relations in verb-initial and verb-second clauses in OE and compared the OE situation to Old High German (OHG). She finds that in OE and OHG, verb-initial clauses are typically coordinating. As regards verb-second clauses, these are typically subordinating in OHG, whereas this is not the case in OE. However, she finds evidence that verb-final word order may signal subordinating discourse relations. Hopper (1979) claims that clauses with VS and OV order are usually foregrounded (= coordinating), whereas clauses with SV order are usually backgrounded (= subordinating). My curiosity about verb-final clauses thus arises from the fact that Petrova and Hopper come to different conclusions about the status of verb-final clauses as typically subordinating or coordinating. I am also interested in the XVS/XSV variation in OE. Most XVS clauses are clearly of the coordinating kind, since a majority starts with the adverb þa ‘then’, so a question that may be asked is whether XSV clauses contrast with XVS clauses in being typically subordinating. Two narrative/descriptive texts will be used: The Old English Orosius, which dates from the 10th and 11th centuries (early OE), and The Peterborough Chronicle, more precisely the entries between 1090 and 1121 (late OE). This is work in progress, so comments will be very welcome.

References:


