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DISCOURSE RELATIONS AND OLD ENGLISH WORD ORDER

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:

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