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"PREPOSITIONAL" AND SUBJECT-PREDICATE RELATION

A STUDY IN FOURTEENTH CENTURY VERSE AND PROSE'

The present paper was preceded by a more exhaustive study of word order patterns in *Piers Plowman and Middle English Sermons* [1] where the author seems to have established a correlation between the position of subject and predicate and what may be called prepositional (i. e. any element, or elements, not belonging to the associative group of the subject).

A quantitative analysis of Middle English texts has shown that the relation of subject-predicate and predicate-subject occurrences in clauses with and without a prepositional is far from balanced, the respective figures being 56.1% to 1.9% in the former group, and 26.7% to 15.3% in the latter, the mean coefficient of contingency (Chi-square value) amounting to 0.669. Thus, although non-prepositional clauses outnumber prepositional ones, the former sequences contain only about one tenth of the predicate-subject patterns, while the less frequent prepositional clauses include the rest.

This striking proportion is the starting point for the present paper which will seek to find the nature of this correlation between the two variables. Apart from the two texts mentioned above, the analysis will include *Mandeville's Travels, The Townley Play of Noah*, Wyclif's *Of Feigned Contemplative Life*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *The Monk's Tale* [2]. None of these texts has ever been analysed from the angle in question.

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[1] To appear in print under the title *Word Order Patterning in Middle English, A Quantitative Study Based on "Piers Plowman" and "Middle English Sermons"*.

[2] The following editions of the texts have been used: F. N. R o b i n s o n (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, Oxford University Press; W. W. S k e a t (ed.), *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts*, Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1886; W. O. R o s s (ed.), *Middle English Ser-*

Sentences with a prepositional may be defined as sequences which begin with an element not belonging to the associative group of the subject; this element, then, either belongs to the associative group of the predicate, or is more or less closely connected with it. A predicative or an object, for instance, is more closely related to the predicate than are verbal modifiers. Lack of an object or a predicative in sequences with verbs ordinarily associated with them causes a gap in the structure, whereas their absence only amplifies the meaning of the sequence, since their presence noly amplifies the meaning of the sequence. Thus, the presence of an object or a predicate is often a necessary element of the structure, the presence of modifiers a possible element. In both cases the reference to the predicate is direct. The reference is indirect when the predicative is not structurally associated with the predicate itself, but with the whole clause of which the predicate in question is part.

On the basis of the assumption that syntactically related elements have a tendency to form continuous word groups in the sequence, the following hypothesis is proposed: If a syntactic unit belonging to the associative group of the verb precedes the subject in the sequence, the order of the predicate in relation to its subject is statistically predictable, the degree of determinancy being higher the closer the conection of the prepositional with the predicate.

In order to test this hypothesis, all the given sentences have been classed according to the character of their prepositional, that is, according to the functions they perform in the sentence. The distribution of the respective patterns was indeed found to be different in the various groups, as shown in the following table.

Examples:

The prepositional is a predicative:

PS: *Worthi is the werkmon his hure to haue* PIERS, A, III, 91;
   Ful redy was at prime Diomede TROILUS, V, 15;
   Moore proud was nevere emperour than he MONK'S, 2472;

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mons, London, Early English Text Society, 1940; Kenneth S i s a m (ed.), *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1921.

Character of prepositional	Percentage of predicate-subject occurrences (As opposed to subject-predicate)						
	Piers	Troilus	Monk's	Town-ley	Wyclif	Mandev	Ser-mons
Predicative	87.7	100	80,0	—	100	—	63.0
Object	64.8	62.5	59.3	85.7	100	100	42.0
Adv. Place	52.6	50.0	52.3	68.4	40.0	78.3	39.1
Adv. Time	51.7	41.8	25.0	68 0	25.0	14.3	17,2
Adv. Manner	40.6	61.7	41.6	62.5	30.7	60.0	20.3
Other	11.2	14.7	20.8	41.9	13.3	12.5	14.3

    (TOWNLEY no occurrences)
    The beste lif for prestis is holy lif WYCLIF, 70;
    (MANDEVILLE no occurrences)
    And ther-for cursed is the child SERMONS, 119, 37.
SP: *Holi churche icham* PIERS, A, I, 73;
    (TROILUS no occurrences)
    Proud he was of herte MONK'S, 2186;
    (TOWNLEY no occurrences)
    (WYCLIF no occurrences)
    (MANDEVILLE no occurrences)
    Dombe we ben of all goodness SERMONS, 147, 15.
The prepositional is an object:
PS: *The culorum of this clause kepe I not* PIERS, A, III, 264;
    And that knowe alle ye TROILUS, I, 340;
    His mantel over his hypes caste he MONK'S, 2714;
    Thi felowship set I not a pyn TOWNLEY, 364;
    And this techith Austin and othere seyntis WYCLIF, 86/7;
    Ensampull of this goynge finde we in holywritte SERMONS, 76. 1.
SP: *Bothe wyndowes and wowes ich wolle amended* PIERS, C, IV, 65;
    For this trove I ye knowen alle or some TROILUS, I, 240;
    To thee this storie I recommende MONK'S, 2719;
    Hym that maide all of noght I thank oonly TOWNLEY, 288;
    (WYCLIF no occurrences)
    And that stryt passage men clepen... "Clyron" MANDEVILLE, 205;
    These thre faders thou muste wurshippe SERMONS, 23, 35.
The prepositional is an adverb of place:
PS: *Therinne wonieth a wighte* PIERS, B, I, 63;
    Among thise othere folk was Criseyda TROILUS, I, 169;

Ther was no boond with which men myghte him bynde MONK'S, 2072;
Full low ligis he TOWNLEY, 84;
Ther schulden men singen WYCLIF, 267;
There weren enclosed twenty two kynges MANDEVILLE, 163;
Here was than in hym grett holynes SERMONS, 4. 19.

SP: *And in the stories he techeth to bistowe* PIERS, B, VII, 75;
Among the Grekes soone he gan TROILUS, IV, 66;
And ther he wende han bee allied MONK'S, 2530;
Bi me he settis no store TOWNLEY, 92;
But here men moste be war WYCLIF, 217;
And there he thoughte for to enclose hem MANDEVILLE, 167;
And vn-to hym he shall com SERMONS, 167. 4.

The prepositional is an adverb of time:
PS: *Thanne sayde Symonye* PIERS, A, III, 26;
At which day was taken Antenore TROILUS, IV, 50;
Now maystow wepen MONK'S, 2077;
Full long shall I not honye TOWNLEY, 318;
Than were matynys WYCLIF, 131;
Now may sum men asken MANDEVILLE, 176;
And than shall we fynde sokore SERMONS, 114, 29.

SP: *And aitur mony metes his mawe is a-longet* PIERS, A, VII, 254;
While he bood in this manere, he gan his wo... to hide TROILUS, V, 30;
But first I you biseke MONK'S 1984;
When we swete..., thou dos what thou thynk TOWNLEY, 196;
First men ordeyned songe WYCLIF, 125;
And now I am comen hom MANDEVILLE, 313;
And as the gates were shett, oure Lord com SERMONS, 134, 10.

The prepositional is an adverb of manner:
PS: *As wroth as the wind wex Mede ther-after* PIERS, C, IV, 486;
Thus writen clerkes wise TROILUS, III, 852;
In prose eek ben endited many oon MONK'S, 1980;
Right so is it cald TOWNLEY, 513;
And thus, bi this nouelrie of song, is Goddis lawe vnstudied WYCLIF, 165;
Right so doth the verray dyamand MANDEVILLE, 65/6;
And so seyth Seynt Poule SERMONS, 210, 16.

SP: *Curteisliche the kynge thanne come* PIERS, B, IV, 44;
Peraunter, thanne so it happen may TROILUS, V, 991;
Right thus ahe wol bigynne MONK'S, 1909;
For this well I wate TOWNLEY, 444;
So the fend casteth to damne the world WYCLIF, 306;
Right so the dyamand... taketh squarenesse MANDEVILLE, 67;
And with-oute hym thou may do no good dede SERMONS, 119, 23.

The prepositional is represented by any other word(s):
PS: *Of other heuene... holde thei no tale* PIERS, A, I, 9;
Of hym thenke I my tale forth to holde TROILUS, I, 263;

With Godes owene Fynger wroght was he MONK'S, 2008;
Therfor shall I fordo all this medill-erd TOWNLEY, 100;
And herefore ben many proude lorelis founden WYCLIF, 139/40;
And herof had thei als gret meruaylle MANDEVILLE, 151;
Ageyns suche speketh Crist in the gospell SERMONS, 166, 27.

SP: *If that ye suffre hym... ye hadde hym nevere lief* TROILUS, III, 863;
With many a teere he thanked God MONK'S, 2179;
As He in bayll is blisse, I pray Hym in this space TOWNLEY, 553;
For gif a man faile... men holden that grete synne WYCLIF, 186;
Git antheles men fynden hem MANDEVILLE, 51;
Gytt for Cristes sake... he toke cruwell passion SERMONS, 2, 38.

The six categories of prepositionals can easily be grouped
into three classes (I. predicative, object; II. adverbial modifiers;
III. other) differing in the degree of close relationship to the
predicates in the given sequences, class I. being very closely
linked with the predicate, class III. very loosely, class II. occupy-
ing a medium position. The numerical data seem to agree with
the hypothesis, since a decrease in frequency of PS patterns
coincides with a decrease in closeness of relationship of the
given prepositionals to the predicates.

However, in spite of this general decrease, some disturbing
features are present. The first refers to the predicative group.
Although in five of the seven texts this group represents the
highest percentage of occurrences (compared vertically), *The
Townley Play of Noah* and *Mandeville's Travels* show zero per-
centages. This may be partly due to the fact that on the whole
predicatives occur comparatively rarely as prepositionals (in
these texts do not occur at all), which leaves room for accidental
relations, especially in short texts. Moreover, even in the texts
where they do occur, it was sometimes impossible to identify
a noun in the function of a predicative. In doubtful cases (and
where possible) the noun preceding the predicate was inter-
preted as a subject (since subject-predicate order is the typical
one), the noun following the predicate as predicative. Negative
evidence, however, need not abolish the general hypothesis,
especially since in the remaining groups the two „doubtful" texts
reveal numerical data in support of it.

One would also expect, perhaps, smaller differences in per-
centages along the horizontal lines. This deviation from the per-

fect distribution, however, seems to be compensated by the general decrease in percentages along the vertical lines for all texts. Perfect arrangement of the proportions would be required only if it were claimed here that the choice of the SP or PS pattern depended solely on the syntactic function of the prepositional. Such a hypothesis could hardly be maintained, as some other elements correlating with the occurrence of the respective patterns come to light after closer inspection.

Nevertheless the data presented in the study seem sufficiently clear to conclude that the relation of subject to predicate in the sequence is predictable if the syntactic function of the prepositional is given. The degree om predictability ranges from the mean of 90.0% with a predicative prepositional, through 81.7% and 73.3% for other elements and objects, and approaches zero predictability only with adverbial modifiers (round 50%). Since this correlation is found both in fourteenth century verse and prose, it cannot be treated on the platform of style, but must be regarded as a feature of the linguistic structure, namely as an element of syntactic redundancy.