

Stylistic Fronting in Early English?

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A commonly held view in the literature is that the process referred to as Stylistic Fronting (SF) is part of the grammar of early English. Roberts (1993), Trips (2000) or Kroch and Taylor (2000) propose that there was SF in Middle English (ME), with the latter two attributing its presence in ME to Scandinavian influence. More recently, Fischer (2010) and Ohkado (2010) propose that SF was already a feature of Old English, thereby making the contact scenario less likely. Although references to SF in early English are frequently found in the literature, there is hardly any detailed empirical work on this issue. Notable exceptions to this observation are Trips (2000) and Ohkado (2010). However, Trips (2000) focuses entirely on the *Ormulum*, a text which is not representative for ME in general, and Ohkado (2010), although giving a much more detailed overview of relevant phenomena in OE and ME, still leaves a certain number of issues unaddressed. The existence of SF in OE and/or ME can therefore not be considered as being solidly established. The aim of this paper is to shed further light on the question whether early English had SF by providing a detailed quantitative analysis of the distribution of a wide range of elements with respect to the finite verb/auxiliary in contexts varying according to the nature of the subject (gap, pronoun, full DP). A better understanding of the status of SF in early English is of importance not only for the purposes of analyzing OE and ME as such, but also for the way we have to view important diachronic changes after these periods and, in particular, the decline of verb movement in Early Modern English.

References

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