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West Germanic OV and VO : the status of exceptions

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Robert A. Cloutier

West Germanic OV and VO

The Status of Exceptions

Traditionally, the oldest stages of the West Germanic languages have been characterized as OV languages despite the rather frequent occurrence of VO orders in these oldest stages. This project evaluates three approaches to analyzing the free word order patterns of the oldest (West) Germanic languages, namely *construction-specific*, *construction-related*, and *competing grammars*. The first two assume one underlying word order and differ from one another in how they account for deviations from this word order: construction-specific approaches rely on various factors such as heaviness or newness to explain extraposition while construction-related approaches attribute word order variation to one particular feature such as morphology. The competing grammars approach differs from the other two by assuming two underlying word orders. The historical development of three particular constructions in the history of Dutch and English are examined, namely prepositional phrases of direction (directional phrases), objects modified by relative clauses (relative objects), and objects of naming verbs (naming objects), to test these hypotheses. These constructions were chosen on the basis of the literature on word order phenomena in Dutch and provide a novel way to approach the English data. The position of the relevant constituent with respect to the verb is examined along with its heaviness and newness, two factors that are often cited as having an effect on the position of sentential elements. The conclusion of the study is that the best way to analyze the evolving syntax of Dutch is with a combination of construction-specific and construction-related approaches and that of English can best be described with a combination of all three approaches.

This study is of interest to linguists interested in historical linguistics, corpus linguistics, the Germanic languages, and syntactic change, particularly that of the West Germanic languages Dutch and English

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