

Particle verbs in early Middle English

The case of *up**

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I provide a detailed case study of the syntax and semantics of the particle *up* in late Old English and early Middle English. In particular, I consider to what extent the particle *up* is still syntactically productive in the early Middle English period. Starting from the assumption that the present-day English phrasal verb developed from a system common to all West-Germanic languages in which all particles were resultative predicates, I will argue that Old English particles are secondary predicates. I will further argue that, in early Middle English, particles are still to a large extent syntactically defined, providing evidence from V-movement. At the same time, semantic developments may suggest a change in the syntactic status of particles.

2. The origin of the phrasal verb: Old English

2.1 Background

A number of the relevant features of Old English syntax are similar to those of its continental West-Germanic sisters Dutch and German. Like present-day Dutch and German and unlike present-day English, Old English has many OV word orders, beside VO orders. The examples in (1) show surface OV word order (both examples are taken from Fischer et al. 2000: 140 and 138 resp.)

- (1) a. *ðæt he hwelc gerisenlic wundor wyrcean mæge* (CP 17.119.9)
that he some suitable miracle perform can
'that he is able to perform some suitable miracle'
- b. *ond he his feorh generede, ond þeah he wæs oft gewundad* (ChrA 755.38)
and he his life saved although he was often wounded
'and he saved his life, although he was often wounded'

Old English also has a version of the verb-second constraint characteristic of Germanic syntax. For the details of the workings of verb-second in Old English I refer the reader to Chapter 4 in Fischer et al. (2000) and references cited there. For my purpose here, it is relevant to note that there is a clear word order asymmetry between root and non-root clauses with respect to the position of the finite verb.

- (2) a. Se Hælend wearð þa gelomlice ætiwed
 the Lord was then frequently shown
his leornung-cnihtum (ÆCHom I, 15.220.21)
 his disciples
 ‘The Lord then frequently appeared to his disciples’
- b. þæt ic þas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Engliscre
 that I this book from Latin language to English
 spræce awende (AHth, I, pref, 6)
 tongue translate
 ‘that I translate this book from the Latin language to the English tongue’

The syntax of Old English verb-particle combinations, as in Dutch and German, is closely interwoven with OV/VO word order and the possibility of finite verb movement. Koster (1975) has shown that in present-day Dutch a clause-final particle is stranded by verb-movement in root clauses. While both the OV/VO issue and the V-movement issue in Old English are more complicated than in present-day Dutch and German, it is quite clearly the case that Old English shares with Dutch and German the property of stranding the particle by V-movement, Fischer et al. (2000), Van Kemenade (1987), Koopman (1985). This is illustrated by the example in (3) where the particle *ut* is stranded by finite verb movement.¹

- (3) þa sticode him mon þa eagan ut (Or 4.5.90.13)
 then stuck him someone the eyes out
 ‘then his eyes were gouged out’

Verb and particle can thus be separated by V-movement. Further specific syntactic contexts in which particles can be separated from their verb are given in (4).

- (4) a. *Negation*
 forðæm hio nanne swetne wæsðm forð ne bringð (CP 45.341.22)
 because she no sweet fruit forth not brings
 ‘because it does not produce any sweet fruit’
- b. *Infinitive marking*
 þæt him wære alyfed ut to farene (GD2(H) 25.155.26)
 that him was allowed out to go
 ‘that he was allowed to leave’
- c. *Modals in verb clusters*
 ær he ut wolde faran to gefeohte (Or 3.8.122.11)
 before he out wanted go to fight
 ‘before he wanted to go out to the fight’

d. *Preposition stranding*ealond ... ðæt we ær ut of gongende wæron (Bede 5.1.384.23)

island ... that we before out from going were

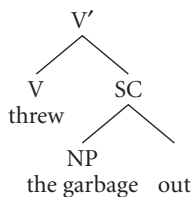
'island ... from which we had previously put out'

Separation of verb and particle by infinitive marking and modals, as in (4b) and (4c), are also routinely found in present-day Dutch and German. General word order facts for Old English verb-particle combinations are summarized in Table 1, taken from Hiltunen (1983: 108). The figures for main and subclauses illustrate the asymmetry discussed above.

My claim is that Old English particles are secondary predicates in a resultative construction. The standard test for secondary predicate status is that the object and the particle can be paraphrased as a copula sentence. Thus, in the present-day English example in (5), the particle *out* is the resultative predicate of the small clause *the garbage out*, that has a paraphrase 'the garbage is out(side)'. For resultative constructions, I adopt the small clause analysis proposed by Hoekstra (1988, 1991).

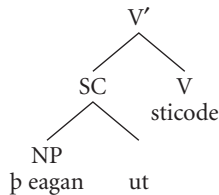
(5) a. Joe threw [the garbage out].

b.



Transferring this test to the Old English examples in (3) and (4), we derive a similar interpretation for the structure in (6) (representing example (3) before V-movement):

(6)



The particle *ut* is the predicate of a small clause (*þa eagan ut*) which can be paraphrased as 'the eyes are out'.

Table 1. The position of the particle in late Old English prose

	PRT (...) V	V (...) PRT
main clauses	45 (31%)	102 (69%)
coordinate clauses	98 (50%)	97 (50%)
subordinate clauses	60 (67%)	30 (33%)

For the semantics of particles, I adopt the Lexical Conceptual Structure (LCS) that Spencer & Zaretskaya (1998) propose for resultative constructions. Van Kemenade & Los (2003) show that this LCS captures the semantics of English verb-particle combinations as resultative constructions. The LCS template is given in (7); (8) gives the LCS for a present-day English phrasal verb and (9) gives the LCS for example (3).

- (7) [CAUSE [ACT (x)], BECOME [W(y)], BY[V(x)]]
 (8) a. He moved the box up.
 b. CAUSE the box *to* BECOME up BY moving
 (9) a. þa sticode him mon þa eagan ut
 b. CAUSE þa eagan *to* BECOME ut BY stician
 the eyes out ‘sticking’ (gouging out)

In the LCS template in (7), W denotes the change of state predicate (*up* in (8) and *ut* in (9)). (7) expresses the change-of-state nature of resultative constructions. What is striking about it is that the particle, a secondary predicate in syntax, is semantically the primary predicate. The verb expresses an activity for which the endstate is expressed by the particle. The entire combination of verb and particle, then, denotes a complex event.

Hiltunen notes that the meaning of Old English particles is always transparent (‘literal’ in his terms). I assume, following Wurmbbrand (1999) that semantic transparency of particles correlates with syntactic predicate status. Particles with a transparent meaning reflect the small clause structure in (5).² I further argue that the semantics of Old English verb-particle combinations is compositional, in the sense that the meaning can be predicted from that of the verb and the particle. (10) is a representative example.

- (10) þæt he ðone cwelmbæran hlaf aweg bære (AHT_h, II, 162)
 that he the deadly loaf away carry
 ‘that he carry away the deadly loaf’

If Old English particles are predicates, they are constituents and we expect that they can be modified and may undergo movement. The example in (11) illustrates topicalization and (12) gives examples in which the particle is modified.

- (11) Forð ic gefare, frind ic gemete (MCharm 11, 31)
 forth I go, friends I meet
 ‘forth I go, friends I meet’
 (12) a. Swa dyde Iohannes se driht-wurða writere he fleah feor upp swylce
 so did John the divine writer he flew far up as if
 mid earnes fyðerum (ÆLS 334.201)
 with eagle’s wings
 ‘So John the divine writer did and he flew far up as if he had eagle’s wings’

- b. Se halga swyðun þa ferde fram þam smiðe up (ÆLS 444.56)
 the saint Swithun then travelled from the smith up
 ‘Then the saint Swithun vanished from the smith’s sight’

This seems to justify the analysis for Old English particles as phrases in a small clause configuration.

3. The particle *up* in late Old English and early Middle English

I now turn to a closer examination of the syntax and semantics of the particle *up*, which is the most frequent particle in the present-day English phrasal verb (Denison 1985: 37). I collected data from prose texts in the late Old English (1050–1150) and early Middle English (1150–1250) parts of *the Helsinki corpus*, performing a lexical search for *up*. I supplemented my own data for *up* in late Old English with Hiltunen’s data.

3.1 Syntactic distribution in late Old English

Against the background of the general analysis above, I present a specific analysis for the syntax of *up* in late Old English. Let us first look at the asymmetry between root and non-root clauses, Table 2.³

These figures conform to the general root/non-root asymmetry for Old English particles (Table 1). I restrict the discussion to main clauses and subclauses, leaving aside for now coordinate clauses, which require special treatment beyond the scope of this paper.

The percentage for main clauses fits with the general observation about Old English syntax made above: the particle is stranded by V-movement in a clear majority of cases (75% V (...) PRT order in main clauses). (13) provides some examples.

- (13) a. ða ahof he up his eagan (ÆCHom 184.5)
 then lifted he up his eyes
 ‘Then he lifted up his eyes’
 b. He teah ða þæt isen up swa eaðelice of ðam stane (ÆLS 446.69)
 he pulled then that sword up so easily of the stone
 ‘Then he pulled up the sword from the stone very easily’

Table 2. The position of *up* in late Old English prose

	PRT(...) V	V (...) PRT
main clauses	8 (25%)	24 (75%)
coordinate clauses	40 (57%)	30 (43%)
subordinate clauses	19 (79%)	5 (21%)

This leaves eight cases (25%) of PRT (...) V word order in main clauses. In two of these eight cases, the particle forms a combination with a nonfinite verb, hence these do not touch on the V-movement issue. An example is (14).

- (14) þa wæs þæt Godes folc up-agan (ÆLS 312.4)
 then was that God's people up-gone
 'Then God's people went up'

Two cases are equivocal because they seem to have an entire clause as topic, which may have the effect that what follows can be interpreted as a subclause. An example is (15).

- (15) Ða sona swa se fiscere geseah þæt se iunga man æt his fotum læg, he
 then soon as the fisherman saw that the young man at his feet lay he
 mid mildheortnesse hine up ahof (ApT 18.8)
 with mercy him up lifted
 'Then as soon as the fisherman saw that the young man lay at his feet, he lifted
 him up with mercy.'

There is one case which appears to have a base-generated postverbal small clause following the nonfinite verb. This ties in with the analysis of Chapter 6 in Fischer et al. (2000). On that analysis, we would have to say, then, that such small clauses are not checked in preverbal position obligatorily.

- (16) Ða wolde seo sexburh æfter syxtyne gearum don hire swustor ban of ðære
 then wanted Sexburh after sixteen years do her sister's bones of that
 byrgene up (ÆLS 436.73)
 grave up
 'then after sixteen years Sexburh wanted to dig up her sister's bones from the grave'

This leaves three cases unaccounted for, but it is well-known that V-movement in main clauses, while very robust, does not occur in 100% of the cases, cf. Pintzuk (1991).

For subclauses, I assume that OV word order with PRT-V order is the default option.⁴ The subclauses in my late Old English database show PRT-V word order in 20 cases (83%). An example is (17).

- (17) þe he of ðære byrgene up genumen wære wundorlice þurh
 when he of the grave up taken was miraculously by
 god. (ÆLS 450.133)
 god
 'when he was miraculously raised up from the grave by God'

This leaves four examples with V (...) PRT word order in subclauses. In one case, the clause has two contrasted particles in postverbal position, which may account for the postverbal order:

- (18) þæt he sceall ma bæncan upp þonne nyðer (ÆLS 14.57)
 that he shall more think up than down
 ‘that his thought should be more upwards than downwards’

This leaves three examples, each with V-PRT word order. It is not entirely clear how these should be accounted for. They might be early examples of the word order option that became standard in later English, as we will see below, and thus fit into the argument for phrase structure competition between OV and VO order in Pintzuk (1991). Alternatively, they might be the result of V-movement in subclauses, which occurs to a limited extent in Old English.⁵ There is no conclusive evidence for this in my examples.

3.2 The meaning of *up* in late Old English

In my late Old English examples, the semantics of *up* is invariably transparent: its meaning is directional, indicating a ‘vertical movement upwards’.

- (19) þa geherde he feringa swaswa agongnum halfre tide fyrst of þes ilcan
 then heard he suddenly just as in the previous hours first from the same
 gebedhuses hrofe þone ilcan blisse song upp astigan (Chad 170.104)
 church’s roof the same blissful song up rise
 ‘Then he suddenly heard the same blissful song rise up from the roof of the same
 church as in the previous hours’

The example in (20) shows that *up* can be topicalized in late Old English.

- (20) & up ða eodan to ðere byrig. (ChrE 1001.1)
 and up then went to their fort
 ‘and then (they) went up to their fort’

Recall that topicalization indicates the phrasal status of the particle, and that this phrasal status correlates with semantic transparency of the particle.

4. The transition to Middle English

4.1 The syntactic facts

The Middle English period is the stage for at least one major syntactic change: the loss of OV order. While OV orders are still possible, they rapidly lose ground. Hiltunen (1983) shows that the loss of OV word order has a pervasive effect on the verb-particle construction. Even in early Middle English, the particle is found predominantly in postverbal position. This situation is illustrated in Table 3, based on the facts in Hiltunen (1983: 110).

Even on the basis of Hiltunen’s figures in Table 3, however, we can see that the

Table 3. The position of the particle in early Middle English prose

	PRT (...) V	V (...) PRT
main clauses	7 (4%)	169 (96%)
coordinate clauses	30 (14%)	187 (86%)
subordinate clauses	23 (14%)	138 (86%)

Table 4. The position of *up* in early Middle English prose

	PRT (...) V	V (...) PRT
main clauses	5 (13%)	34 (87%)
coordinate clauses	7 (16%)	38 (84%)
subordinate clauses	15 (32%)	32 (68%)

loss of OV word order is only a part of the story, albeit an important part. Table 3 still reflects part of the asymmetry between main and embedded clauses which was so much clearer in Old English, as discussed in the previous section. The main factor responsible for this asymmetry was V-movement resulting in particle stranding. A glance at what is left of this asymmetry shows that V-movement was as relevant at the VO-stage of Middle English as it was at the OV-stage. Let us consider this in more detail with the facts I have collected for *up*.

If we compare Table 4 with Table 2, we see that the asymmetry between main and subclauses has become considerably less sharp, even though it still exists. And if we look at a number of specific contexts, it is clear that V-movement is still an important factor. Thus, the V (...) PRT word orders in main clauses include a considerable number of imperative clauses, for which it is standardly assumed that the finite verb has been moved to the highest functional position C. An example is (21):

- (21) “Strupeð hire steort-naket, and heoueð hire on heh up ...” (St.Marg. 42.11)
 strip her stark-naked and lift her on high up
 ‘Strip her naked, and lift her up high ...’

Also, subject-verb inversion is routinely found in my database, which indicates that the finite verb is still moved to a position left of the subject.⁶

- (22) Ac nu driuen ha him up wið swepes and wið schurges. (Wohunge 283.10)
 but now drive they him up with whips and with scourges
 ‘But now they rout him with whips and with scourges’

Another context indicative of V-movement is when non-VP material intervenes between the finite verb and the particle.

- (23) and zelt þach up his castel to his wiðerwines (Ancr. (Nero) 172.2387)
 and yields nevertheless up his castle to his enemies
 ‘and nevertheless yields up his castle to his enemies’

Thus I conclude that, in early Middle English, V-movement still plays a significant role in the syntactic distribution of verb-particle combinations: the three contexts discussed here comprise 16 (out of 34) main clauses in which there is clear evidence for V-movement. Even so, this leaves 18 main clauses without conclusive evidence for V-movement. These may comprise a number of cases where we have to assume a V-PRT order.

In some of the examples, the verb is in base-generated position. This is clearly the case when the particle follows a nonfinite verb, (24a), and is also strongly suggested when the verb-particle combination is coordinated with a simplex verb, as in (24b).

- (24) a. and hehte swiðe neomen hire and teon bi þe top up (St.Juliana 29.6)
and ordered quickly to take her and to take by the top up
'and ordered to take her quickly and to take her up by the top of her head'
- b. men ðet flattered hire of freolec, herieð & heueð up þe almes þæt
men who flatter her of generosity praise and lift up the alms that
hadeð hu wide ha is icnawen. (Ancr.(Nero) II.165.2288)
show how far she is known
'Men who pay her insincere compliments about her generosity, praise and
exalt the alms that show how far she is known'

The picture for main clauses gains further relief when we look at subclauses. The incidence of preverbal particle order in subclauses with *up* is still fairly robust (32%), but it shows that in the environment where V-movement plays a less prominent role than in main clauses, a majority of 68% has a postverbal particle.

- (25) ðe postes þæt sculen beren up ðis weorc he bien inanned hier
the posts that shall hold up this work they are named here
te-foren (Vices&V 95.2)
before
'The posts that were to bear this work are named before'

Let us consider subclauses in more detail. V-movement may be relevant in subclauses as well, but since this environment precludes the use of imperatives and subject-verb inversion, the evidence will be considerably harder to trace. In my database for *up*, there is only one subclause (a relative clause) in which non-VP material intervenes between the finite verb and the postverbal particle:

- (26) & wið ma 3et þæt 3euen anan up hare 3eomere bileaue (St.Kath. 88.1811)
and with more yet that give anon up their miserable belief
'and yet with more knights who give up anon their miserable belief'

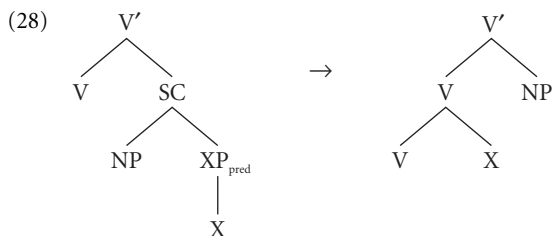
This leaves 31 (67%) subclauses featuring postverbal particles. It is clear, then, that in the transition from Old English to early Middle English, a sharp shift has taken place from preverbal to postverbal particle order.

4.2 A syntactic change

I propose that the shift from preverbal to postverbal particle position reflects a syntactic change. In order to illustrate this, I now turn to a discussion of more specific word orders for V, particle and NP object, and see to what extent the small clause configuration assumed for Old English is still relevant in early Middle English. I will only consider subclauses, since we have seen that V-movement precludes a clear picture of main clauses. The subclauses in my database for *up* include 19 cases of postverbal particles in which the clause features a verb as well as an “object” and a particle. These include:

- (27)
- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|------------|---|----------|---|----------|---------------|
| a. | 1 | pron. obj. | – | V | – | particle | |
| b. | 2 | NP obj. | – | V | – | particle | |
| c. | 3 | V | – | pron. | – | particle | |
| d. | 2 | V | – | NP | – | particle | |
| e. | 9 | V | – | particle | – | NP | |
| f. | 1 | V | – | particle | – | XP | – NP (coord.) |

I assume that the word orders (27a) and (27b) reflect scrambling, and will not consider them further. (27c) and (27d) may reflect the small clause structure proposed above for Old English, but now the small clause is generated in postverbal position. Alternatively, (27c) and (27d) may reflect V-movement from an OV-configuration, but there is no conclusive evidence for this. (27c) and (27d) are outnumbered by word order (27e), which as a robust word order pattern is new in early Middle English. I propose that (27e) is the result of a syntactic change, involving incorporation of the particle into the verb from a small clause configuration:



The change entails that the particle in the new word order has become a head, which may tie in with the fact that it cannot be modified in this word order in present-day English, whereas this is possible in the alternative word order pattern:

- (29)
- | | |
|----|--|
| a. | *John looked right up the information. |
| b. | John looked the information right up. |

This change may further be linked to the semantic development of particles in Middle English. Hiltunen (1983) notes that particles develop metaphorical meanings in this

period, which are extensions of the transparent meaning.⁷ In my early Middle English database for *up*, I found the first clear examples of such an extended meaning.

- (30) þat he alle his castles sculde iiuen up. (ChronE 58)
 that he all his castles should give up
 ‘that he should give up all his castles.’

This meaning of *up* is attested six times in the last few entries of the final continuations of the Peterborough Chronicle. Denison (1985: 44) points out later examples too, which indicates that the Chronicle examples are the earliest cases of a usage well-attested later. In fact, this development shows some early signs of the present-day English phrasal verbs, which often, but not always, have idiomatic meanings.

Recall my assumption that transparent meaning is associated with phrasal status of particles. Particles with a metaphorical or even idiosyncratic meaning may be indicative of a change in syntactic status, namely that they are no longer full phrases. This would be in line with the idea in the literature (see Jackendoff 1997 for example) that idioms have less internal structure than their literal counterparts.

At his point, I can only speculate about the cause of the change suggested above. A possible factor could be Scandinavian influence (Denison 1981): Old Norse had postverbal particles from the earliest stages and the language contact situation with English after the Viking conquest in the late Old English period may have had a considerable effect on the English verb-particle combination. A detailed investigation of the differences between the north-eastern and the south-western dialects, which awaits further research, could shed light on the extent of influence from Old Norse.

Another possibility is that a reanalysis took place on the basis of a frequent surface Old English order. In Old English main clauses, the verb often surfaces left of the particle as a result of V-movement. My database for *up* includes 3 out of 24 main clauses (and 5 out of 5 subclauses) in late Old English in which the particle immediately follows the verb in surface word order. We cannot establish the plausibility of this on the basis of these figures alone and I leave this issue for further research.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Old English particles are syntactic predicates which correlates with completely transparent semantics, and that the picture is less unequivocal for particles in early Middle English. The syntactic distribution facts discussed in this paper show that early Middle English has moved some way away from Old English OV syntax, but that at the same time it continues to feature finite verb movement, primarily in main clauses. Hence, the loss of OV is not the only factor in the loss of the preverbal particles. The syntactic facts show that *up* is clearly still syntactically

productive, but at the same time the development of new meanings of *up* suggests that the phrasal status of *up* in early Middle English is not always apparent.

Notes

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1. There are two types of verb-fronting in Old English. In *wh-*, *ne* or *þa* initial clauses, the finite verb moves to the second position in the clause. In topic-initial clauses, the finite verb also fronts, but to a position lower than the second position. In the latter case, nominal subjects predominantly follow the topic, whereas pronominal subjects always precede the topic. In *wh-*, *ne* or *þa* initial clauses, both nominal and pronominal subjects follow the verb (Fischer et al. 2000, Chapter 4 and references cited there).
2. Since present-day English has many phrasal verbs in which the particle has a non-transparent meaning, this means that I reject the view that a syntactic small clause analysis can account for all present-day English phrasal verbs (Hoekstra 1988, Den Dikken 1995).
3. The numbers in this table represent my late Old English data for *up* supplemented with those of Hiltunen. The same holds for Table 4, illustrating *up* in early Middle English.
4. I refer the reader to Chapter 6 of Fischer et al. (2000) for a Kayneian analysis. I will not discuss such an analysis here.
5. Pintzuk (1991:92–93) discusses five examples which to her suggest particle stranding in embedded clauses. A detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. In my database for *up*, there are no relevant examples.
6. I leave aside the details of the V-movement discussion for Old and Middle English, for which I refer the reader to Chapter 4 of Fischer et al. (2000).
7. Hiltunen (1983:148) uses the following classification for the meaning of early Middle English particles and verb-particle combinations: 1) literal, for the core meaning of the particle; 2) metaphorical, for extended literal meanings (the literal meaning is still traceable, but has been extended); 3) idiomatic, for entirely idiosyncratic meanings.

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