

Embedded Clauses in Old English: Between Syntax and Pragmatics

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1. Introduction

- We examine the issue of word order variation in Old English (OE) embedded clauses
- We critically evaluate previous syntactico-centric analyses of OE word order variation, in particular Biberauer & Roberts 2005
- We argue that word order variation in OE embedded clauses cannot be fully understood in a syntactic vacuum and explore some pragmatic factors that any adequate analysis must consider

1.1 The empirical picture at a glance

- There are five possible orders of the Subject (S), Object (O), finite Verb (Vf) and non-finite Verb (Vn) in OE embedded clauses (1)-(5)
- Unattested: ***S–Vn–O–Vf**

(1) **S–O–Vn–Vf** (VERB FINAL, ‘DEFAULT’)

gif we ðone heofenlican eard habban **willað**
if we the heavenly earth have will
‘if we are desirous to have the heavenly country’

(cocathom2,ÆCHom_II,12.2:125.542.2752)

(2) **S–O–Vf–Vn** (VERB RAISING)

gif ðu **soð** wylt *gehyran*
if you truth will hear

(coaelive,ÆLS_[Alban]:57.4031)

(3) **S–Vf–O–Vn** (VERB PROJECTION RAISING)

gif hi nellað **pone sang** gelæstan
if they not-will the song perform

(coaelive,ÆLS_[Swithun]:237.4375)

(4) **S–Vf–Vn–O** (POSTVERBAL OBJECTS)

gif þa yflan ne **mihton** ongytan þa oþre yflan...
if the evil not might understand the other evil...
'if the evil cannot understand the other evil...'

(cogregdC,GDPref_and_4_[C]:34.310.28.4641)

(5) **S–Vn–Vf–O** (LEAKING)

Gif ic oferswiðan ne **mihte** hine ær cucene
if I overcome not might him earlier alive
'If I might not overcome him formerly when living...'

(coalive,ÆLS_[Vincent]:232.7947)

1.2. Previous accounts of OE word order variation

- VAN KEMENADE 1987: OE is a well-behaved head-final Germanic language; rightward movements for all head-complement orders
- PINTZUK 1991, 1999: OE is a mixed head-initial and head-final language
- ROBERTS 1994, NUNES 2002: universal base hypothesis; head-initial
- BIBEARAUER & ROBERTS 2005 (henceforth B&R 2005) is partly a response to Pintzuk's (2002, 2005) criticism of the 'many movement' analyses (if head-initial, more movements need to take place to derive all the word order patterns without deriving *S-Vn-O-Vf)

2. A closer look at B&R 2005

The motivation behind B&R's analysis of OE word order:

- (a) do not derive *S-Vn-O-Vf
- (b) have a uniform trigger for movement (EPP on v and T)
- (c) do not have the OV/VO alternation always be related to interpretative differences
(Roberts 1994: postverbal objects are focused; Pintzuk 2002: frequency of VO increases with time – cannot be the case that the speakers started using more focused objects)

The analysis in a nutshell:

- All phrases are base-generated head-initial, following Kayne 1994

- Probes: T and v
- Goals: DP **or** vP/VP because they contain a D-bearing element (pied-piping)
- Both T and v have the option of attracting DP or vP/VP
- Obligatory head movement of V to v
- T° must be filled: in monoclausal structures, the finite verb (modal) is base-generated there; in bi-clausal structures V_R moves to T, while T°def attracts V+v.

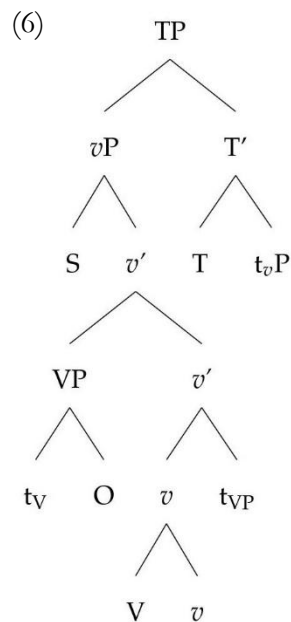
THIS GIVES A SEEMINGLY VERY ELEGANT ANALYSIS OF COMPLEMENT-HEAD ORDERS

all **OV** orders arise due to VP or DP movement to (inner) Spec, vP

all **Vn-Vf** orders arise due to vP movement to Spec, TP

2.1. Verb Final (S–O–Vn–Vf)

- V-to-v
- VP-movement to (inner) Spec, vP, and vP-movement to Spec, TP

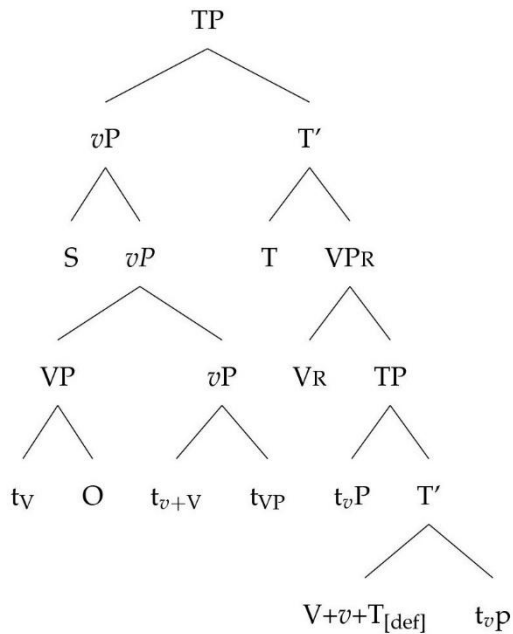


2.2. Verb Raising (S–O–Vf–Vn)

- B&R: OE verbs such as *willan*, *scullan*, select infinitival TP complements (bi-clausal structure)

- Following Zwart (2001), they assume that such verbs select what Chomsky (2001) refers to as T_{DEF} i.e., defective (non-phi-complete) T, or T which is selected by V rather than C
- Unlike Zwart, however, B&R take that TP_{DEF} projects a specifier
- The head T_{DEF} will attract v (+V)
- vP will be used to satisfy D- and EPP features of T_{DEF}
- First, the remnant vP (S-t_v-O) will move to Spec, TP_{DEF}
- The vP ultimately moves to Spec, TP_{MATRIX}
- This is possible since TP is not a phase; the edge material is available for further movements

(7)



Issues related to Verb Raising orders:

➤ Ditransitives

- In ditransitives, the second object can be left behind: S–O1–Vf–**O2**–Vn
- If [S O1] is in vP (which includes VP) in Spec,TP, where is O2?

- (8) a. ...þæt hi **mine þeawas** magon **him** secgan,
 ... that they my way may him tell
 '...that they might tell him of my ways'

(coelive,ÆLS[Agnes]:313.1932)

- b. þæt hi eac þam folce magon wisdomes gife gelæstan.
 that he also to-the people may wisdom's gift accomplish
 'that he also may provide the people with the gift of wisdom'

(cochdrul,ChrodR_1:62.24.863)

- B&R are made aware of the problematic cases by a reviewer, and they give the following explanation: In all the cases where the second object is 'stranded' lower in the clause, V_R is a control predicate. Consequently, the external argument of embedded vP is PRO (9)
- This stipulation leaves room for the possibility of Spec of the (control) matrix vP attracting the first overt D-bearing element, which would be the direct object, instead of the (PRO) subject.

(9) $v [_{VP} V_R [_{TP} [_{vP} PRO_{SUBJ} [_{VP} O tV O]] V_{+v} tvP]]]$

- Assuming that the argument structure of the matrix predicate changes due to the number of internal arguments of the embedded verb is quite unorthodox
- The unmarked order of OE objects in ditransitives is ACC-DAT (Koopman 1990)
- Therefore, the explanation could work when O1 is ACC (direct object)
- But when it is O1 is DAT, as in (8b), it is not clear how the dative object got closer to matrix v

➤ Stranded quantifiers

- To account for data like (10) on B&R's analysis, we could say that vP is in Spec, TP_{MATRIX} , but the object quantifier is in the lower, Spec, TP_{DEF}
- The badness of Modern English **[Reading the books]_{vP} the child has (all) been* shows that the issue of stranding a quantifier when it is embedded (deeply) inside a larger phrase is not a trivial issue

- (10) a. þonne [seo sunne hi hæfð [TP_{DEF} [t_{vP} ealle underurnen, ðonne bið an gear agan.
 when the sun them has all underrun then is one year gone
 'when the sun underruns them all/all of them, then is one year gone/over'

(cotempo,ÆTemp:4.16.133)

➤ **Adverb placement**

- Still in Verb Raising orders (S–O–Vf–Vn), S and O can be separated by adverbs, including frequency adverbs *gelomlice* 'often, frequently' in (11a), temporal adverbs *eft* 'afterwards' (11b), *ðonne* 'then' in (11c), or various types of PPs (11d), even two consecutive PPs (11e)
- If we assume with B&R that the VR order involves vP in SpecTP, the adverbials in (11) would have to be merged higher than the object in the vP, and lower than the subject, i.e., **between two specifiers** inside vP [_{vP} S – Adv/PP – O]

(11) a. in þam se cyning **gelomlice** his gebedo meahte gesean & godcunde lare gehyran
 in which the king often his prayer might seek and divine teaching hear
 'in which the king could often seek his prayer and hear divine teachings'

(cobede, Bede_3:17.230.3.2354)

b. ðæt he **eft** ðæt good ðære mildheortnesse ne ðyrfe gesciendan mid
 that he afterwards the good of-the generosity not have-to disgrace with
 gidsunge & mid reaflice.
 greed and with extortion

'so that he may not afterwards have to disgrace the virtue of generosity with greed and extortion'

(cocura, CP:45.341.9.2292)

c. Gif he **ðonne** ðæt wif wille forsacan, ðonne hræce hio him on ðæt nebb foran
 if he then that woman will reject then spit she him on the face in-front
 'if he then will reject the woman, she should spit in front of his face'

(cocura, CP:5.43.15.238)

d. butan he **mid þam reafe** þa drohtnuncge wylle underfon.
 unless he with the garment the conduct will receive
 'unless he will receive the (monastic) conduct with the vestment'

(cochdrul, ChrodR_1:51.12.678)

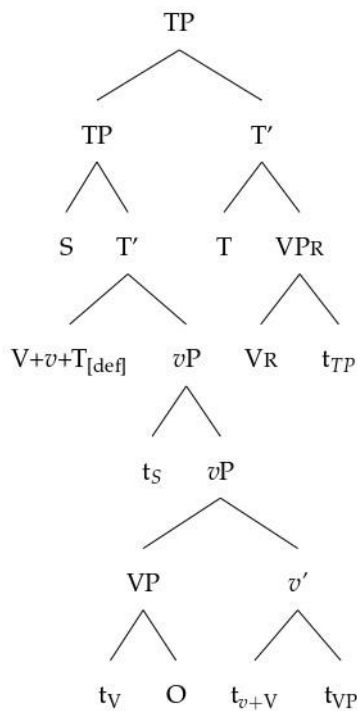
e. & gif hwa on þam winlandum for Godes lufon win wylle forgan
 and if anyone on that vineyard for God's love vine will destroy
 'and if anyone in that vineyard for God's love will destroy the vine...'

(cochdrul, ChrodR_1:6.26.166)

➤ TP_{DEF} to Spec, TP_{MATRIX} ?

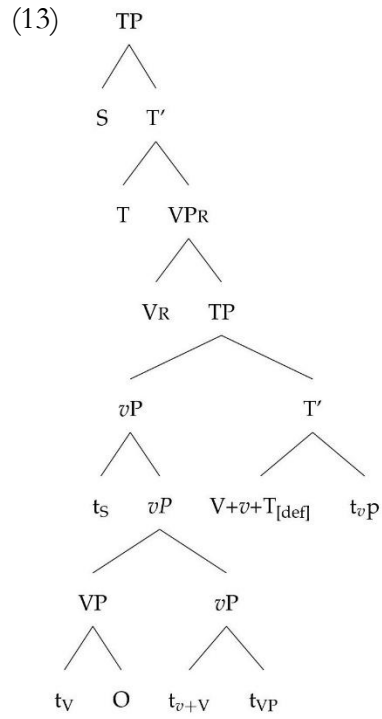
- A big issue with B&R's analysis is that it generates the unattested word order *S-Vn-O-Vf
- In B&R's own words: "there is nothing which prevents a Goal G from being properly contained inside a category which is moved in order to satisfy the Probe's EPP-feature."
- In fact, this is required for them to explain why the entire VP is sometimes moved when the Goal is the Object, and the entire vP when the Goal is the Subject
- Of course, in simple cases, the only possible bigger structure for a probe on v to attract will be VP, and the probe on T will only be able to attract vP
- However, in bi-clausal structures, the picture gets more complicated; there is no principled way to exclude the possibility for T_{MATRIX} to attract the entire embedded TP
- After all, the subject is properly contained in the embedded TP (in its spec), just like it is originally properly contained in the vP (from where it is attracted in VPR, see below)

(12)



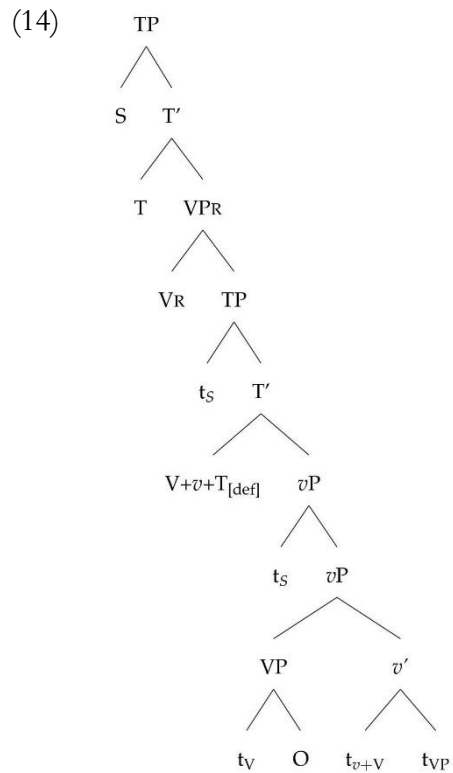
2.3. Verb Projection Raising (S-Vf-O-Vn)

- Same as VR, only DP movement to matrix Spec, TP (out of the vP in Spec, TP_{DEF})



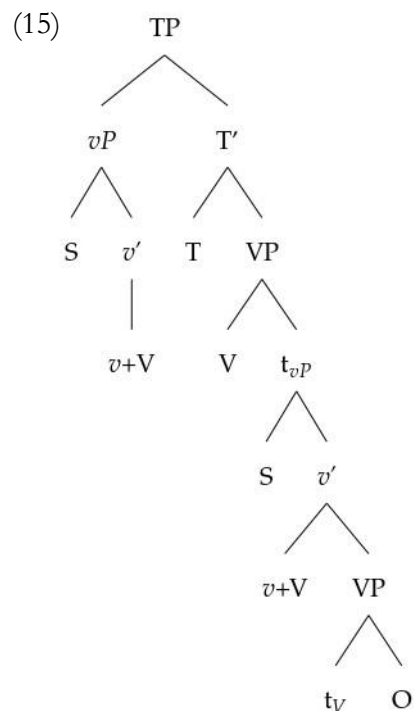
2.4. Postverbal objects (S–Vf–Vn–O)

- Like VPR, only DP movement applies throughout (for both Spec, TP_{DEF} and Spec, TP_{MATRIX})



2.5. Leaking (S-Vn-Vf-O)

- Based on an old insight from poetry – that ‘postverbal objects are focused’ (in Beowulf) – B&R include this concern in their analysis
- Leaking is treated similarly to Verb Fronting (vP fronting to Spec,TP), except vP has an optional EPP feature, which can then be used to play with focus interpretation
- EPP feature on v is related to ‘defocusing’
- Therefore, objects will not move if they are ‘focused’
- However, vP still moves to spec, TP_{MATRIX}, but VP doesn’t because it has already undergone spell-out
- This part of the analysis involves non-constituent movement, a very undesirable result
- Unorthodox view that once a phase is spelled out, it cannot move as part of a bigger constituent
- On this view, it would be impossible to derive sentences like “*Which cup that Mary told John that Helen bought did she lose?*”



More empirical problems

1. TWO SUBJECT POSITIONS IN OE (FP AND TP)

- (16) **matrix clauses:** [_{CP} C [_{AgRP} *PronounSubj* Agr [*þa/þonne* or **NEG.adv** [_{TP} *NPSubj*'T ...]]]
(Haeberli 1999, van Kemenade 2000, 2002)

but also in embedded clauses, without any restriction on the subject type

- (17) **embedded clauses** [_{CP} [_{SigmaP} (*subject1* Opro1 [*þa/þonne* [_{TP} *subject2* [_{AgROP} Opro2 [_{VP} ...]]]]]]]
(van Kemenade and Milićev 2005/2012)

2. SCRAMBLING (German/Russian/Serbian style) IN OE

e.g in VPR: S–Aux–Adv–O–V or S–Aux–O–Adv–V (with the same type of Adv)

- (18) a. þæt hio scoldan þær *Godes word* bodian & læran.
that they should there God's word preach and teach
'that they should preach and teach God's word there'
(cobede,Bede_5:10.414.7.4156)
- b. þæt ic wolde *onsægdnisse* þær onsecgan,
that I would sacrifice there offer
'that I would offer sacrifice there'
(coalex,Alex:36.13.459)
- (19) a. þæt man sceolde ofer eall Angelcyn *scypu* **fæstlice** wyrcean
that one should over all England ships quickly make
'[Here the king ordered] that people should quickly build ships all over England'
(cochronC,ChronC_[Rositzke]:1008.1.1424)
- b. þæt he wolde **fæstlice** *pam deofolgildum* wiðsacan ond Cristes geleafan onfon
that he would quickly the idolatry reject and Christ's faith receive
'that he would quickly reject idolatry and receive Christ's faith'
(cobede,Bede_2:10.136.20.1322)

SCRAMBLING/CLAUSE INTERNAL 'TOPICALIZATION' IS DIFFERENT FROM D-/EPP RELATED MOVEMENTS?

First D-/EPP related movements, **then scrambling**, special subject movements, pronominal movements...?

BUT: If we know that OE has the option of moving DP objects alone, how can we be sure that in S-O-Aux-V the object alone has not scrambled across the modal/auxiliary verb?

Milićev 2016: object in **S-O-Aux-V** are more topical than in **S-Aux-O-V**

[‘high’ objects behave like secondary topics; restrictions on ‘referential heaviness’ – very few cases where both the subject and the object are nominal and referential]

3. UNMARKED WORD ORDER?

Q1: Are **all 4 word** order patterns **unmarked** (excluding leaking, because there EPP can be associated with interpretation)? Answer: **no**

Q2 Is there then a **unique IS interpretation** of each of the 4 orders? Answer: **not quite**

- Struik and van Kemenade 2020: all preverbal objects are +Given; so OV=givenness of the object
- But then not all VO orders are interpreted uniquely (-Given objects); Milićev 2016, 2022 – three interpretations of VO orders (contrastive focus on the object, contrastive focus on the lexical verb, and a ‘defocused’ verb+object) - and this is what is left open in B&R’s VO orders in Pattern 4 (S-Aux-V-O)
- But when B&R include interpretation (Pattern 5, Leaking), the problem is that leaking structures also have more than one interpretation; (CFoc on O; CFoc on V, CFoc on Aux)

Q3: **Exclude the role IS** in the variation? No.

Q4: **Why** has it been **so difficult** to recognize the role of IS in the word order variation in OE?

- Because IS marking by syntactic means (movements) in OE is not as simple as, say, marking of +topic or +focus(contrastive) of **terms** (DPs, referents in the discourse) – impossible to claim there are specific topic or focus projections in the structure (‘low left periphery’ or a fine grained middle field)
- OE is concerned with marking of IS/discourse status of **non-terms: predicates and propositions** [A proposition is that part of the meaning of a clause or sentence that is constant, despite changes in such things as the illocutionary force of the clause.].

Let us illustrate this with ‘IS/discourse status of propositions’

Milićev 2016, 2022: in the same clause types (conditional and temporal clauses; NB. both central and peripheral), S-(O)-**V-Aux** and S-**Aux**-(O)/**V**(O) have **different pragmatic inferences**;

- PROPOSITIONS WITH V-AUX ORDERS ARE **PRAGMATICALLY PRESUPPOSED**

What is **pragmatic presupposition** (vs. pragmatic assertion)? Pragmatic status of linguistic material: whether something is part of the **Common Ground** of a conversation, or update/at-issue/Main Point of Utterance (MPU)

[NB. No special commitment to Stalnaker’s presupposition-as-common-ground theory; we’re open to other theories of discourse and discourse development (at-issueness, Main Point of Utterance...). The idea here is that we can speak of cognitive/discourse statuses of propositions.]

Conditional and temporal clauses with V-Aux order are ‘given’, inferable, plausible (to use more familiar terminology of cognitive/pragmatic statuses of terms)

(a) GIVEN PROPOSITIONS (featured in the preceding context; almost repetition)

That David cut off a piece of Saul's coat is given in the preceding line. Strictly speaking, CG material is that the *event* of David taking off a piece of Saul's coat has taken place. But the tense is not the same in (20a) and (20b); in (a) we have preterite, in (b) perfect. So we can only say that we have *an effect* that the proposition in (b) is given, rather than that 'everything but the complementizer' is given.

(20)

a. Sua sua **Dauid** **cearf** **swiðe** **digellice** **suiðe** **lytelne** **læppan** of Saules **mentle**
so as David cut very secretly very small peace of Saul's coat
'As **David very secretly cut off a very small corner of Saul's coat**, his liege lord,'
(cocura,CP:28.199.10.1334)

b. Forðæm hit is awriten ðætte Dauid, ða **he ðone** **læppan** **forcorfenne**
therefore it is written that David when he the piece cut-off
hæfde, ðæt he sloge on his heortan
had that he struck on his heart
'Therefore it is written that David, **when he had cut of the piece [of the coat]**, struck his heart,
(cocura,CP:28.199.16.1336)

Similarly in (xx), where the event of Philistines sending the stolen Ark of the covenant (the shrine) back to the Israelites is CG material (being given in (21a)), the modal verb *willan* 'will, want' is not; still, the speaker delivers the whole proposition as pragmatically presupposed, unconcerned with the 'novel information' from the modal. We will return to this issue later, when we illustrate non-presupposed/not-CG propositions.

(21) [PRECEDING SENTENCE]

'They then asked their wisemen what was wiser for them to do about **the holy shrine, whether they should send it home or they should keep it there longer**'
(coaelhom,ÆHom_22:249.3420)

. gif ge þæt halige scrin ham **sendan** **wyllað**,
if you the holy shrine home send will
'If you want to send the holy shrine home, do not send it empty, but reverently, with gifts'
(coaelhom/ÆHom_22:252.3422)

(b) INFERRABLE PROPOSITIONS (technically inactivated, but can be identified by the addressee through its relationship to an activated element)

If a person of authority issues an order for someone to be seized and lead to him (the content of (22a), the proposition that the order has been carried out and that these persons were brought in front of the authority (22b) can be treated as CG or as no essential update.

(22)

a. 'and immediately ordered Stranguilio and Dionysias to be seized and led before him where he sat on his throne'

b. ða ða hi **gebrohte wæron**, þa cwæð he beforan ealre þare gegaderunge
 when they brought were then said he before all the assembly
 'When they were brought, then he said before all the assembly...'

(coapollo,ApT:50.5. 530-531)

(c) PLAUSIBLE/NON-CONTROVERSIAL. (propositional content is common or shared (encyclopaedic) knowledge (of certain facts of life, religious and social conventions, practices, and habits)

- Conversely, **AUX-V = NON-PRESUPPOSED PROPOSITIONS**

Non-presupposed conditional and temporal clauses arise due to a number of factors; most often: PRESENCE OF A (**CONTRASTIVELY**) **FOCUSED ELEMENT** (any element)

Other factors: **beginning of new segments** (text/narrative organization) and **reverse discourse subordination** (**syntactic subordination** ≠ **discourse subordination**; the embedded clause presents content which is 'more informative/important/relevant' than the main clause (from the point of view of the broader discourse context)

Example: **CFOC ON MODAL**. In (23) two hypothetical situations are considered (two if-clauses; cows willing to go forth with a cart carrying the shrine or not willing to go). Only, from the point of view of the speaker, (23a) is unexpected and unlikely (milch cows are unlikely to leave their calves); [unexpectedness/unlikelihood is the main characteristic of CFoc (Zimmermann 2008)] and is delivered as non-presupposed (Aux-V).

Note again that the modal verb is equally (not) 'given'/inferable/plausible in both clauses. But the speaker can easily override the 'novelty' of this information.

(23) [preceding sentence]

"Take two young cows, that have not been under yoke, **so that they can take the holy shrine with the golden gifts that you offer God**, and keep their calves at home tied'

a.. þonne mage ge tocnawan, gyf þa cy **willað gan** forð on þone weg
 then may you know if the cows will go forth on the way

fram heora cealfum,
 from their calves

'Then you may know, if the cows will go forth on the way from their calves, that it was God's anger that tortured you so'

b. Gif hi þonne **gan nellað** mid þæs Godes scrine heonon...
 if they then go not-will with the God's shrine away
 'if they will not go with the God's shrine away, [then you may know that the torment was not because of God's anger, [but happened otherwise]'

(coaelhom,ÆHom_22:268.3426-3429)

Presupposition cancelling **focus + predicate 'being born'**

- (24) Saturnus þe abat his suna [þonne hi **geborene wæron**], swa swa..
 Saturn who devoured his sons when they born were so as
 'Saturn who devoured his sons when they were born, [even as his worshippers have written
 in their books]' (coalive, ÆLS_[Chrysanthus]:103.7391)
- (25) þa brohte sum man his dohtor him to, [seo **wæs dumb geboren**],
 then brought some man his daughter him to who was dumb born
 'Then a certain man brought his daughter to him, who was born dumb'
 (coalive, ÆLS_[Martin]:1103.6690)

What **B&R** offer us is **more structure**: V_R and TP_{def} – can more structure accommodate different pragmatic inferences? more structure is usually convenient, but what we do with it requires some ‘discipline’

Finally, the question of how exactly we use IS to get to discourse/pragmatics

Are pragmatically presupposed propositions ‘defocused’?

If focus always involves bipartite structures [[background] [focus]], the options in (26) can be entertained

- (26) a. [_{background} proposition] [_{focus} \emptyset]
 b. [_{background} proposition] [_{focus} TAM]
 c. [_{background} vP eventuality] [_{focus} modal +TAM]

The modal verb is ‘semantically impoverished’, not enough ‘novelty’ to upgrade the proposition to ‘non-presupposed/at-issue’ status.

This is just a direction towards a possible account; determining IS of a sentence taking into account ‘context-dependence’, where ‘context’ (discourse) has its own ‘rules’ - is obviously not easy; but it is clearly necessary: jumping from syntax directly to discourse organization is an uncomfortable move