Old English Syntax and Its Relation to German: A Comparative Study

Freja Bang Lauridsen ✉

1. Introduction

One does not have to know much about linguistics to be able to spot a certain resemblance between the predecessor of modern-day English, Old English (OE), a language spoken on the British Isles in the Early Medieval Period, and Present-Day German (PDG), spoken today in countries such as Germany, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, and the native language of over 100 million people. The resemblance between the two languages – one almost a millennium old, the other one contemporary – has not passed unnoticed by linguists either, and the syntax of the two have often been compared. Due to many shared syntactic traits such as Subject Object Verb (SOV) constituent order, Verb Second (V2), and a complicated inflectional system, German has often been referred to as a present-day version of the now far-gone OE. However, more thorough examination indicates that the two languages differ on important areas, raising important questions about the link between the two.

This article intends to discuss the link between the syntax of PDG and the syntax of the predecessor of modern-day English, OE. The found similarities and dissimilarities of the two will be compared to those of PDG and Present-Day English (PDE), in order to show that throughout time the English language, although still similar in some respects, has lost its close link to German and thus also its Proto-Germanic roots.

I will begin this article by examining certain obvious parameters suggesting a similarity between the syntax of OE and the syntax of PDG to understand why scholars have often compared the two languages syntactically. Among other parameters, I will look at constituent order, case, and prefixes. These similarities will be explored in detail and examples in both languages will be given. Continuing to investigate the relationship between OE and PDG, I will examine some of the syntactic properties of OE that differ from those of PDG. I will look into features such as type of V2, use of indefinite articles and personal pronouns to see if the two languages actually are as close as suggested. After this

overview of the main similarities and dissimilarities between the two languages, I will briefly account for why PDE has lost most of the syntactic properties linking the English language to German. Finally, I will move into a discussion about the closeness of PDE and PDG compared to that of OE and PDG, explaining why the latter two are syntactically closer than the former and why the English language has lost its close link to the German language and their common Proto-Germanic origin.

2. How do Old English and present-day German syntax resemble each other?

2.1 Historical language origin

OE and PDG resemble each other in various parameters. Apart from a large, shared inventory of cognates, they seem to share several syntactic features. These features did not emerge randomly but can be attributed to a shared origin in the prehistorical ancestor Proto-Indo-European – a reconstructed language which is thought to have been spoken in Eurasia in the Neolithic era (Ringe 2017, 84). Beginning as a dialect of Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Germanic emerged around 500 B.C. During the first half of the first millennium, Proto-Germanic split into two branches, East Germanic and Northwest Germanic, and later the latter split into North Germanic and West Germanic (see figure 1) (Ringe 2017, 241).
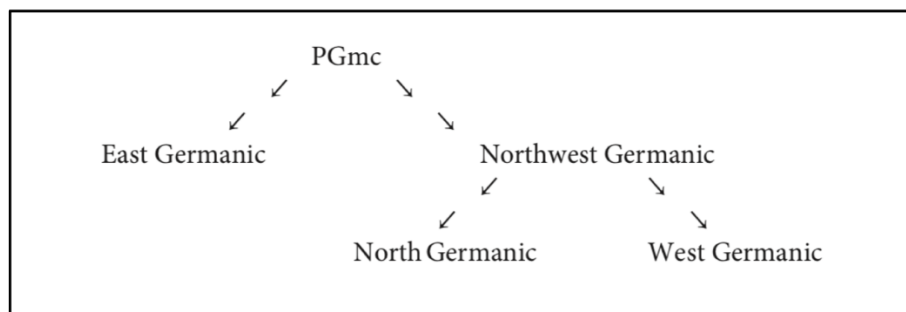

Figure 1: The evolution of Proto-Germanic (Ringe 2017, 241).

OE and PDG are both West Germanic languages. Between the 6th and 8th century A.D., OE and the PDG predecessor, Old High German, developed from West Germanic dialects. Since then, the two have evolved separately into PDE and PDG. This development will be returned to later.

Although shared properties are not necessarily due to common origin, this is often the case, and languages with numerous similar or identical features have often had some kind of contact in the past.

Consider for example the resemblance between Dutch and German, two West Germanic languages, or Swedish and Danish, two North Germanic languages. Or even Danish and German, which, although further back, also have a shared past.

2.2 Constituent order and Verb Second

One of the properties that makes OE and PDG resemble each other is their shared constituent order. At first sight, both languages seem relatively free in their constituent order, and therefore the structures of the two languages have long been topics of discussion in linguistic circles. Some linguists have argued that both OE and PDG have a free constituent order meaning that the position of the constituents is more or less irrelevant due to the extensive inflectional systems of the languages. Following Noam Chomsky and the generative grammar, I assume that all languages have one, and only one, basic constituent structure. Other surface structures can indeed occur, but these are thus viewed upon as variations from the basic constituent order (Fischer et al. 2001, 146).

Due to the striking V2 phenomenon forcing the verb to appear in second position, scholars have argued that both OE and PDG have Subject Verb Object (SVO) order as their basic constituent order. Looking briefly at OE and PDG main clauses, this assumption seems appealing:

1) *Se wolde gelytlian þone lyfigendan hælend*
   He would diminish the living lord
   "He would diminish the living lord" (Pintzuk and Taylor 2006, 249)

2) *Er hält einen Vortrag*
   He gives a talk
   "He gives a talk" (Vikner 2019, 440)

Looking only at these two examples, one would presumably take OE and PDG to be SVO languages. Despite this, most generative accounts agree that both OE and PDG have SOV as their basic constituent order (Trips 2002, 76; Vikner 2019, 442). This seemingly odd assumption is, however, justified when looking into embedded clauses of the two languages:

3) *…þæt he se papa æðelbyrhte þam cyninge gewrit & gyfe sende*
   …that he the pope æthelbirgh the king letters and gifts sent

"…that he, the pope, sent letters and gifts to Æthelbriht, the king" (Trips 2002, 76)

4) …*weil er gerade einen Vortrag hält*

…because he just now a talk gives

"…because he gives a talk just now" (Vikner 2019, 440)

As exemplified in these two embedded clauses, OE and PDG exhibit SOV order in embedded clauses. The reason why one is easily tricked into believing that both languages are SVO languages and not SOV languages is that neither of the languages is very consistent in their constituent order and thus vary between a number of surface structures (Trips 2002, 78; Vikner 2019, 439). The most common of these surface orders is SVO which occurs as a result of the V2 constraint which both OE and PDG are restricted by. V2 forces the finite verb in main clauses to appear in the second position immediately after some other constituent, e.g. an adverbial, the object, or the subject (Vikner 2019, 443-444). The verb is thus moved from its position after the object, in the head of the verb phrase, V°, where it is born in SOV-languages, to the second position. Most Germanic languages are asymmetric V2 languages i.e. they rarely use V2 in embedded clauses (Trips 2002, 226-229), and this is the case in PDG embedded clauses where the verb stays in sentence-final position exhibiting the basic SOV structure. OE arguably differs from PDG concerning the symmetric/asymmetric distinction. This will be discussed further in section 3.1 and 3.6. Generally, it can be argued that due to V2 both OE and PDG are rather inconsistent in their surface constituent orders. As with the symmetric/asymmetric distinction, it should be noted that OE is even more inconsistent than PDG in that it in some instances drops its V2 completely resulting in a variety of constituent orders (Trips 2002, 230-235). I will also return to this complex variation in section 3.6.

Despite the inconsistency in constituent order and V2, OE and PDG can both be said to be SOV languages – with V2 to blur the picture. To take SOV to be the basic constituent order of both languages and all other occurring orders to be derived from this order is less complicated, i.e. it necessitates a smaller number of additional rules and exceptions, than if we took SVO to be the basic order (Vikner 2019, 439). OE and PDG can thus be said to have two structurally very important syntactic features in common – namely constituent order and V2.

2.3 Case

As mentioned briefly in the above section, both OE and PDG are highly inflected languages. Both languages have extensive inflectional systems for nouns, pronouns, adjectives, determiners, and of course verbs, presumably inherited from their common ancestors Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European, which were highly inflecting languages with rich systems of morphological case (McFadden 2020, 282). In PDG nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and determiners are inflected to indicate case, gender, and number. PDG has four cases: nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive, three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter, and two numbers: singular and plural (Stocker and Young 2012, 3-11). OE follows almost the exact same patterns of declension the only exception being that early OE arguably had a fifth case namely instrumental case, which will be returned to later in section 3.2. In figure 2 and 3 the paradigms of the PDG definite articles *der/das/die* 'the' and its OE equivalent *se* are given as examples of the extensive case systems in both languages.

	Masculine	*Neuter*	*Feminine*	*Plural*
Nom.	Der	Das	Die	Die
Acc.	Den	Das	Die	Die
Gen.	Des	Des	Der	Der
Dat.	Dem	Dem	Der	Den

Figure 2: The paradigm of the definite articles *der/die/das* 'the' (Stocker and Young, 31).

	Masculine	*Neuter*	*Feminine*	*Plural*
Nom.	se	þæt	sēo	þā
Acc.	þone	þæt	þā	þā
Gen.	þæs	þæs	þǣre	þāra
Dat.	þǣm	þǣm	þǣre	þǣm

Figure 3: The paradigm of the demonstrative *se* 'the' (Hogg 2002, 19).

PDG verbs are inflected to indicate person, number, mood, tense, and aspect, and the same applies to OE verbs. Both languages have three persons: 1st person, 2nd person, and 3rd person. Two numbers: singular and plural. Three moods: the indicative, the subjunctive, and the imperative. And six tense/aspect-combinations: present, preterite, perfect, past perfect, future and future perfect (Stocker

and Young 2012, 123-124). Here it should however be mentioned that whereas PDG has three base tenses, present, preterite, and future, called *Grundtempora*, OE only has two base tenses namely present and preterite. The rest are tense/aspect-combinations – which Mitchell and Robinson (2011) call 'the resolved tenses' (in German *Perfekttempora*) – and are made up from a participle (present, preterite, or perfect) or an infinitive together with the verb 'to be', the verb 'to have', or a modal verb (Mitchell and Robinson 2011, 103).

Despite this tiny difference in tense/aspect-combination, the two languages are very similar in their extensive inflectional systems. The inflectional systems are used to express syntactic relationships within sentences, and both OE and PDG can thus be said to be synthetic languages as opposed to PDE which is an analytic language dependent on constituent order and helper words such as particles and prepositions (Sapir 2014, 135). Hence, the inflectional system of OE with its rich morphological diversity is more closely related to PDG than it is to its modern-day counterpart, PDE.

2.4 Scrambling

Case and V2 are two of those parameters that complicate OE and PDG constituent order. A third parameter is scrambling; a term used to explain apparently optional leftward movements of certain constituents that result in a variety of constituent orders that differ from the one underlying order (Ross 1967). The phenomenon of alterations in constituent order is especially common in languages with extensive case-marking (Chocano 2007, 1) such as Japanese or Hindi or as regards this article: OE and PDG. Within generative grammar, scrambling is viewed as a stylistic rule (Ross 1967), however, scrambling is still a phenomenon of discussion among linguists, and numerous explanations have been given through the years as to why scrambling occurs and what causes it (Trips 2002, 164). It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate all these different approaches, and this section will instead simply provide a brief overview of scrambling in OE and PDG as seen from a generative approach.

Due to scrambling, constituents can occur in a variety of orders without changing the core meaning of the sentence. Consider the following two PDG embedded clauses. In the first sentence, no scrambling has occurred – in the second, the two elements *Ellen* and *die Gerüchte (über Ina)* 'the rumours (about Ina)' have been scrambled. Despite of the scrambling in the second sentence, the meaning of the two sentences is close to identical.

5) *… dass keiner Ellen die Gerüchte über Ina geglaubt hat*

… that no one (nominative) Ellen (dative) the rumours (accusative) about Ina believed has

"… that no one believed Ellen's rumours about Ina" (Chocano 2007, 58)

6)   *… dass Ellen die Gerüchte über Ina keiner geglaubt hat*

… that Ellen (dative) the rumours (accusative) about Ina no one (nominative) believed has

"… that no one belived Ellen's rumours about Ina" (Chocano 2007, 58)

In PDG, scrambling is invariably restricted to the *Mittelfeld* 'middle field' as seen below.

The structure of the Present-Day German clause

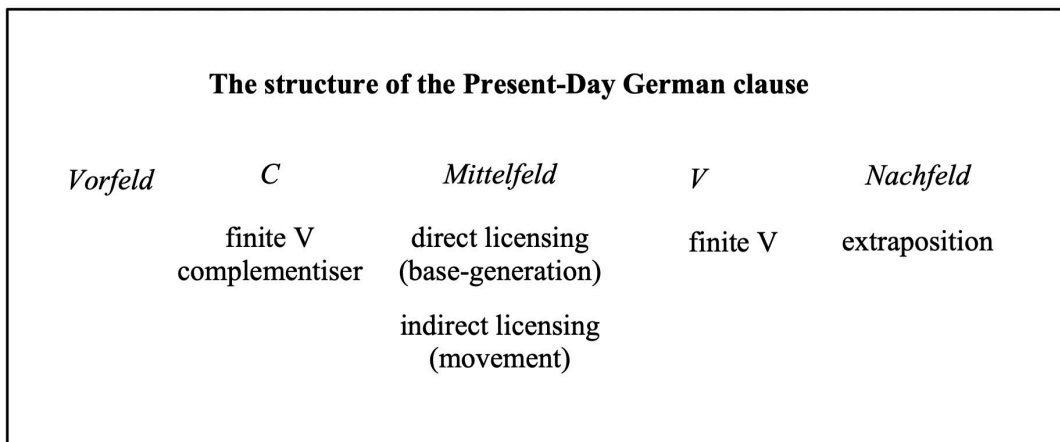| *Vorfeld*	*C*	*Mittelfeld*	*V*	*Nachfeld*
	finite V complementiser	direct licensing (base-generation)	finite V	extraposition
		indirect licensing (movement)		

Figure 4: The structure of the PDG clause (Adapted from Chocano 2007, 31)

This is also the case in the above example, where *Ellen* and *die Gerüchte (über Ina)* 'the rumours (about Ina)' appear in positions between the subordinating conjunction and the finite verb (Chocano 2007, 23-30).

OE also allows scrambling, hence its relatively free constituent order. Consider the following example:

7)   *… & he moniʒ mynster & cirician in ðæm londe ʒetimbrede*

… and he many monasteries and churches in that land built

"…and he built many monasteries and churches in that land" (Trips 2002, 190)

Here the prepositional phrase *in ðæm londe* 'in that land' separates the main verb *ȝetimbrede* 'built' from the object *moniȝ mynster & cirician* 'many monasteries and churches' which indicates that the object has undergone scrambling (Trips 2002, 190), just as in the PDG example above. As can be seen, OE and PDG both allow for scrambling and scrambling is thus another field within syntax where the two languages resemble each other.

2.5 Inflectional prefixes

As it has been discussed in the previous sections, both OE and PDG are highly inflecting languages. This is also seen in their morphology, which is far more extensive than that of PDE. When coining new words in PDE, one can resort to prefixing or suffixing. However, in PDE, prefixing can only be derivational whereas suffixing can either be derivational or inflectional (Plag 2012, 15). In PDE's ancient counterpart, OE, however, prefixes could be both derivational and inflectional (Arista 2012). Consider for example the much-debated OE prefix *ge-,* which is the descendant of a common Germanic element *ga-/gi-* (McFadden 2015, 2):

8) *Gecēped* 'kept'
   Geholpen 'helped' (Arista 2012, 411)

In the two examples above, *ge-* works as an inflectional morpheme, forming the past participle of the verb. The interesting thing here is that whereas PDE has lost its inflectional prefixes, PDG has not. PDG has even preserved the *ge-* prefix from Proto-Germanic – *ge-* being used to form past participle form, just as in OE (Schultink 1979, 225):

9) *Geschlafen* 'slept'
   Gesehen 'seen'

Looking at the OE and PDG past participles, we see that both languages have the inflecting prefix *ge-* as a productive element of verbal morphology, indicating once again a striking resemblance between the two languages.

3. How do Old English and present-day German syntax differ from one another?

The above parameters of resemblance suggest a strong link between OE and PDG. Those parameters do however not show the full picture, and OE and PDG syntax do differ from one another in certain important areas, which will be elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Different types of Verb Second

In section 2.2 I argued that one of those properties that made OE and PDG syntax resemble each other was their SOV constituent order which was restricted by V2. It is indeed correct that the two languages have a similar clause structure for both main clauses and embedded clauses and that this structure is the result of the V2 constraint. However, when examining the topic further, it becomes clear that there could be disagreement as to what type of V2 the two languages exhibit.

Several studies have indicated that the V2 constraint involves placement of the tensed verb in either of two different positions (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 354), and thus V2 can be divided into two subgroups: CP-V2, where the V2 constituent order results from movement of the tensed verb from its underlying position as head of the verb phrase (V°) to the complementizer (C°) position, with concomitant movement of some phrasal constituent to the specifier of the complementizer phrase (CP-Spec), and IP-V2, where the V2 constituent order reflects movement of the tensed verb to a lower position, INFL (I°). Scholars generally agree that PDG is a CP-V2 language (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 353), but when it comes to OE there is still disagreement as to what kind of movement causes the tensed verb to appear in second position and thus if OE is either CP-V2 or IP-V2. In this article, I follow Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe (1999) in arguing that OE exhibits IP-V2. They base this argument on the statement that OE exhibits competition between two underlying clause structures, INFL-final and INFL-medial, slowly beginning the change in constituent order from SOV to SVO that took place during the Middle English (ME) period. According to Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe (1999, 362), only OE underlyingly INFL-medial clauses seem to be V2; that is, unlike in PDG, V2 sentences in OE do not derive transformationally from an underlying INFL-final phrase structure, resulting in the tensed verb appearing in I° and not in C° as in PDG and other CP-V2-languages. The association between INFL-medial underlying structure and V2, and the corresponding absence of the PDG derivational relationship between INFL-final and V2, can be explained only if we assume that OE is an IP-V2

language like Icelandic and not a CP-V2 language like PDG (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 362). OE and PDG thus arguably differ with respect to the type of V2 they exhibit.

3.2 Instrumental case

In section 2.3 on case, I emphasized the strong resemblance between the OE and PDG case systems, where certain word classes (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and determiners) are inflected for gender, number, and four cases: nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive. However, OE can in some sense be said to have one additional case, namely instrumental case, which was used to express instrument, means, manner, accompaniment, or time (Baker 2012, 39). Consider the following example of instrumental case in use (the instrumental inflection is underlined):

10) … *hē forðon <u>fǣgre ænde</u> his lif betȳnde*

     … he therefore <u>with a beautiful end</u> his life concluded

     "… he therefore concluded his life <u>with a beautiful end</u>" (Baker 2012, 40)

It should be mentioned however that even in OE the grammatical feature of instrumental case was rare. According to Baker (2012, 38-39): "The instrumental case was disappearing during the centuries when Old English was being written. It has a distinct form only in masculine and neuter singular adjectives and pronouns; everywhere else the dative is used." Thus, it can be argued that although there are indeed traces of instrumental case in OE, this fifth case has for the most part merged with the dative, which does its work instead.

In comparison, PDG only has four cases and no traces of instrumental case as in OE. Instead, the function of instrumental case is carried out by a construction with dative as demonstrated in the following example:

11) *Sie malte die Wand <u>mit einem Farbroller</u>*

     She painted the wall with a paint roller

     "She painted the wall with a paint roller"

OE and PDG arguably differ with respect to their number of cases, OE occasionally operating with a fifth case in contrast to the four cases used in PDG.

3.3 Indefinite articles

Another area where OE differs from PDG is with respect to articles. As mentioned earlier, OE uses *se* and its inflections (as found in the paradigm in figure 3) as definite articles. PDG similarly uses *der/das/die* and the inflections of these (as found in the paradigm in figure 2). However, when it comes to indirect articles, OE has no equivalent to the PDG *ein/eine*-forms 'a/an', and the phrase 'onto a mountain' would thus be translated into *on beorg* in OE (Mitchell and Robinson 2011, 100)*,* whereas it would be translated into *auf einen Berg* in PDG. In very few instances, the OE word for 'one' *ān* is used as an indirect article as in *Þæt wæs an cyning,* but then the sentence means 'that was a certain king' or 'that was indeed a king' instead of just 'that was a king'.

It happens that nouns are used without a preceding article in PDG as well. For example, if the noun is in plural such as *hast du Orangen gekauft?* 'did you buy oranges?' or before nouns of nationality, profession, or religion such as *sie wurde Lehrerin* 'she became a teacher' (Stocker and Young 2012, 31-33). Nevertheless, in the vast majority of cases the indirect articles are used distinguishing PDG from OE.

3.4 Inflection of personal pronouns

Personal pronouns is yet another area where OE and PDG differ from one another. In both languages, personal pronouns are inflected for gender, case, and number. Regarding number, personal pronouns can either be singular or plural – at least that is how languages such as PDG as well as PDE, Present-Day Danish and many other modern languages are structured (Stocker and Young 2012, 45). However, in OE, personal pronouns can either be singular, plural, or dual. The dual, the additional set of personal pronouns distinctive for OE, was used when referencing to two people only (Hogg 2002, 21), and its paradigm is found below:

		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Genitive
Singular	1st	ic	mē	mē	mī
	2nd	þū	þē	þē	Þīn
	3rd	masc: hē neut: hit fem: hēo	masc: hine neut: hit fem: hī	masc: him neut: him fem: hire	masc: his neut: his fem: hire
Plural	1st	wē	ūs	ūs	ūre
	2nd	gē	ēow	ēow	ēower
	3rd	hī	hī	him	hira
Dural	1st	wit	unc	unc	uncer
	2nd	git	inc	inc	incer
	3rd	-	-	-	-

Figure 5: The paradigm of the personal pronouns in Old English
(Adapted from Hogg 2002, 21-22)

In PDG there is, as mentioned, no such thing as dual, and the two languages thus differ with respect to the inflection of personal pronouns.

3.5 Negative concord

With regard to negation, the two languages also differ from one another. OE is a negative concord (NC) language meaning that any negative sentence can contain multiple negatives, but this results in only one single logical negation (Fischer et al. 2001, 54). Consider the following example, where the negations are underlined:

12) … *þæt heora* <u>nan</u> <u>ne</u> *mehte* <u>nanes</u> *wæpnes gewealdan*
… that of-them <u>none</u> <u>not</u> could <u>no</u> weapon wield
"… that <u>none</u> of them could wield any weapon" (Fischer et al. 2001, 54)

Here it should be mentioned that whereas PDE does not have NC, it does allow one negation together with a negative polarity item, which is the case with 'any' in the above example.

As with PDE, Standard-PDG does not have NC. Here multiple negatives do not affirm each other – instead they cancel out one another. German, however, has not always been a non-NC language and in earlier stages of the language, it was indeed possible to have several negations without them cancelling out each other (Ackema et al. 2012, 207). Some local variants of PDG do in fact still have NC. Consider for example the following example in Bavarian:

13) *Koa Mensch is ned kema*

No human has not come

"Nobody came" (Ackema et al. 2012, 207)

It is appealing to assume that the Bavarian NC is a remnant of Middle High German, Old High German, or even earlier variants of the language and that this type of NC has a shared past with the OE NC. However, according to Ackema et al. (2012, 208): "The [German] dialects did not simply preserve the old syntactic patterns, but in fact developed new types." Thus, there is no prominent connection between the use of double negation in OE and in local variants of PDG.

3.6 Complex variation

As has probably become obvious from the above, OE was not very consistent in its syntax. As examined in the previous sections, this regards both constituent order and V2 as well as the use of instrumental case and indefinite articles. Especially constituent order and V2 seem to be distributed almost randomly making it hard to deduce the underlying order. In section 2.2, I stated that OE, just like PDG, has SOV as its underlying constituent order and that all other orders were derived from this. However, in section 3.1 it became clear that things were not so simple, and that OE exhibits competition between two underlying clause structures, INFL-final and INFL-medial (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 361). This issue is further complicated by the V2 phenomenon that forces the finite verb into second position in main clauses and arguably also in embedded clauses in OE making the language a symmetric V2 language (also referred to as an IP-V2 language) just as Yiddish and Icelandic (Bruening 2016, 6). However, the problem that arises is that OE does not always have V2 order in embedded clauses – in many cases, it is limited to main clauses alone. According to Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe (1999), this is due to the fact that only OE INFL-medial clauses exhibit V2 and thus some clauses are allowed to have the finite verb in final position. Other scholars have given other good

explanations for this phenomenon, but due to the limited amount of space, I will not discuss these explanations here.

To confuse the picture even further, OE also occasionally exhibits Verb Third (V3) and even Verb Fourth (V4) (Bruening 2016, 3). Consider here an example of OE V3:

14) *Þeahhweðer his hiredmen ferdon ut mid feawe mannan of þam castele*
    Nevertheless his household-men went out with few men from the castle
    "Nevertheless, his household-men went out with a few men from the castle"
    (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 367)

In contrast, PDG is extremely strict in its expression of the V2 constraint (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 366) almost always exhibiting V2 order in main clauses and SOV order in embedded clauses. There are however a few exceptions where PDG uses V3 order – for example in sentences with left-dislocations as illustrated in the following example:

15) *Diesen Mann, den kenne ich nicht*
    This man him know I not
    "This man, I do not know" (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 366)

Constituent order and V2 are not the only areas that exhibit complex variation in OE. As mentioned, OE sporadically makes use of indefinite articles although the language does not actually use these. The same goes for the use of instrumental case. Sometimes instrumental case is used, sometimes it is not – in these instances dative is used instead. This great amount of variation can arguably be explained as part of changes taking place within the English language. It is plausible that the variation in case was due to the fact that the instrumental case was disappearing during the centuries where OE was being written and thus was used less and less often (Baker 2021, 39). Likewise, the sporadic use of an indefinite article was perhaps a sign that English was in the process of introducing indefinite articles into the language. No matter what, OE can be said to be a language of variation – especially when compared to PDG where most syntactic phenomena can be explained by rules or principles.

As a concluding remark, it should be mentioned that the parameters discussed in section 3 are only some of the instances where OE syntax differs from that of PDG. Syntax is an extensive field of

study, and it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article to examine all of those areas where OE and PDG differ.

4 Syntactic development of English away from its Germanic roots

It is a well-known fact that PDE has lost most of those parameters linking it to the German language – among these are SOV constituent order, V2, case, scrambling, and inflectional prefixes. It is beyond this article to go into depth with all of these syntactic changes. However, in the following section, I will give a brief account of the losses.

According to Croft (2002, 232): "Languages do not occur in static or stable states. All languages exhibit some degree of grammatical variation, and they change over time; in fact, much synchronic variation represents language change in progress". As discussed in the previous section, OE was a very inconsistent language exhibiting plenty of variation within its syntax. Following Croft's (2002, 232) argument, this variation could very well be an indication that syntactic changes were taking place. When dealing with these changes, the ME period was a specific period of interest. Regarding the change in constituent order from SOV to SVO, scholars agree that it took place between 1150 and 1350 A.D. in early ME (Trips 2002, 2). Like other major syntactic changes, the loss of SOV order involved a lengthy period of structured variation, in which the two constituent orders, SOV and SVO, were competing (Pintzuk and Taylor 2006, 249). There is some disagreement as to what specifically caused the change in constituent order. Some argue that it was due to language contact with Old Norse, the language of the Scandinavian (Trips 2002, 331), others that it happened due to the changes in the inflectional morphology that took place during the ME period (Haeberli 2002, 102).

As concerns the loss of V2, there is evidence that by the fourteenth century, in the ME period, the V2 property was clearly being lost (Trips 2002, 66). Also here, scholars disagree as to what caused the change. Many scholars do however argue that the loss of V2 was due to the fact that there were two co-existing types of V2 in ME, namely CP-V2 and IP-V2, which has both been discussed earlier in this article – CP-V2 being typical of the northern English dialects and IP-V2 being typical of the southern English dialects (Trips 2002, 224). The loss of V2 is thus thought to be the result of the competition between these two types of V2 in the speech of people who have been exposed to both systems (Kroch, Taylor, and Ringe 1999, 368).

As with the other parameters, the case-marking system was lost during the ME period (Roberts 2018, 127). The distinction between the nominative, accusative and dative case was already to some extent obscured in late OE (which can be seen in figure 4, where almost all of the personal pronouns

in accusative and genitive case are identical) (Kemenade and Los 2006, 202). Fairly early in the ME period, this syncretism had become so widespread that there was a general collapse of the case-marking system, with the difference between nominative, accusative, and dative cases disappearing entirely from most word classes (Kemenade and Los 2006, 202). There is no general agreement among linguists as to what caused this change. However, it has been argued that the change to a more fixed constituent order allowed for less overt case-marking, which eventually resulted in the disappearance of case in English (Kemenade and Los 2006, 220). Thus, the disappearance of SOV constituent order and V2 and the disappearance of case were not parallel developments but were instead deeply interconnected. The loss of scrambling goes hand in hand with both the loss of SOV constituent order, the loss of V2, and the loss of morphological case, taking place simultaneously (Roberts 2018, 127). According to Roberts (2018, 130), scrambling involves raising of the object to AgrOP-Spec in order for the scrambled determiner phrase (DP) to check its case (Roberts divide different types of inflections into different levels of phrase structure. AgrOP is a maximal projection below I' and above VP. AgrOP-Spec is thus the specifier position of this agreement phrase). However, when morphological case is lost, AgrOP-Spec loses its strong case feature, and there are no longer any reasons for the object to move there. Movement to this position becomes impossible, and scrambling is ultimately lost.

The use of prefixes such as *ge-* as inflectional markers was also lost during the ME period ultimately disappearing around 1500 A.D. (Arista 2012, 412-413). In OE, the borderline between derivational and inflectional morphology was not so neatly drawn as in PDE (Arista 2012, 422), and thus prefixes such as *ge-* could function both derivationally and inflectionally. During OE, *ge-* becomes generalized, ultimately functioning only as an inflectional marker of the past participle (Arista 2012, 422). However, the past participle already has an inflectional ending, and when *ge-* is added, the past participle becomes over-marked i.e it becomes excessively marked. Such over-marking ultimately causes the disappearance of the inflectional prefix *ge-* (Arista 2012, 413).

As discussed in section 2, PDG still exhibits all of the abovementioned features, and it can thus be argued that OE in its development into ME and later into PDE developed in the opposite direction of the German language.

5. The weak syntactic relation between present-day English and present-day German

In section 2, I demonstrated that OE and PDG resemble each other with respect to several syntactic features such as SOV constituent order, V2, and inflectional prefixes. However, in the above section, section 4, it was made clear that the contemporary variant of the English language, PDE, has lost most of these parameters linking it to PDG. It thus seems that the syntactic bond between PDE and PDG is relatively weak compared to the syntactic bond between the ancient counterpart, OE, and PDG. PDG and PDE still have some features in common which they have inherited from their common ancestors, Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic, for example, a large number of cognates (Robinson 1992, 2). But when it comes to syntax, the two languages seem to have grown apart – or rather the English language seems to have evolved in the opposite direction of the German language and their common Germanic roots. The German language, on the other hand, has preserved many of the traits inherited from Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European – among these, SOV constituent order and case (Lehmann 1972, 240-241). Throughout this article, it has become evident that the observed similarities between OE and PDG were not passed on to the modern-day variant of the English language and thus, PDE seems rather distant from the German language and their common Germanic roots. It can thus be concluded that the two languages have developed in distinct directions or at least in different paces since they evolved from West Germanic dialects between the 6th and 8th century A.D. Throughout their development, the two languages have grown further and further apart as English has distanced itself from its Proto-Germanic roots, which PDG to some extent still resemble.

5.1 Development of German in the direction of English

One way of explaining the difference between PDE and PDG syntax would be to assume the English language to be further advanced in its development than the German language. Following this line of thought, the German language with its many Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic traits has been developing at a slow rate whereas the English language has developed more rapidly dropping most of the traits of its predecessors along the way. German is thus thought to simply be behind English in its development. There are several arguments supporting this line of reasoning, for instance the strong indications that PDG is in the process of losing morphological case. Even though the four central cases are still distinguished in PDG the categories where distinctions are marked have been

heavily reduced, and syncretism has increased significantly. For instance, in standard-PDG, the genitive case is disappearing and merging into the dative case (often with the use of specific possessive structures) (McFadden 2020, 287-288). In this sense, the dative case is growing while the genitive is becoming rarer and rarer. In most of those languages, which have already lost their case systems, it seems to have been the genitive that was lost first (McFadden 2020, 287). This change taking place in PDG could thus be an indicator that German is losing its extensive case system, just like English lost its case system in the ME period (Roberts 2018, 127).

Another change in progress suggesting that German is developing in the direction of English is the indication that PDG is slowly giving up its SOV constituent order in embedded clauses. In embedded clauses introduced by the conjunction *weil* 'because', two constituent orders can occur: SVO and SOV – the latter primarily used in formal speech and writing (Kempen and Harbusch 2016, 1). The same arguably applies to embedded clauses introduced by *denn* 'because/than' and perhaps other conjunctions as well.

Both of the traits mentioned above have already been lost in English, and thus these two ongoing changes in PDG support the claim that the German language is actually developing in the direction of the language English – just at a slower pace. There is not done much research on the development of German in the direction of English, and thus it is problematic to conclude anything. The topic would, however, be an interesting field of study for future research to see if the idea does indeed hold water.

6. Conclusion

This article examined and discussed the link between the syntax of OE and PDG as well as the relationship between the two languages and their Proto-Germanic roots. In the first part of this article, it became evident that OE and PDG share several syntactic traits of Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic origin, linking the two languages together. Nevertheless, it was also found that the two languages differ with respect to several fields within syntax; the two languages for example exhibit different kinds of V2, express negation differently, inflect personal pronouns in two distinct ways, etc. As the English language develops from OE into ME, it loses traits such as SOV constituent order, V2, and case and moves further and further away from its Germanic origin. German on the other hand, preserves many of the traits inherited from Germanic carrying on SOV constituent order, V2 and case into PDG. Eventually, the English language has lost so many of those traits linking it to its Germanic past that the resemblance between English and German is no longer striking. Syntactically, there are no obvious parameters that link PDE and PDG to each other, and the similarity between OE and

PDG that was so striking is no longer noticeable when comparing the two modern-day variants of the English and the German language.

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