

Chapter 10

All those years ago: Preposition stranding in Old English

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This squib revisits the case for preposition stranding (P-stranding) in Old English as it was argued in the hot debate on *wh*-movement in the 1980s. It looks at more recent literature on the relevant issues, finding that P-stranding in Old English warrants an analysis in terms of *wh*-movement, which should allow for movement of a zero prepositional object out of PP. Examination of the York corpus of Old English adds more detail to the picture known, but largely confirms the findings so far.

1 Background

This squib follows up the discussion and analysis of preposition stranding (P-stranding) in specific types of Old English relative clauses in van Kemenade (1987), which has featured in discussion of various issues in more recent literature (Alcorn 2014; Emonds & Faarlund 2014). My treatment here is based on examination of the *York corpus of Old English* (YCOE) (Taylor et al. 2003); it re-addresses some of the theoretical issues, and reconsiders the analysis.

Examples of P-stranding in present-day English are given in (1a–b), exemplifying P-stranding by *wh*-movement in *wh*-relative clauses. *Wh*-movement in relative clauses moves a constituent to Spec,CP (in modern terms), and may involve long *wh*-movement through an intermediate Spec,CP (1b). This *wh*-movement strategy allows preposition stranding relatively freely in present-day English, as in (1a,b):



- (1) a. That's the guy [_{CP} who_i I told you about t_i]
b. That's the guy [_{CP} who_i I thought [_{CP} t_i I had told you about t_i]]

Preposition stranding in Old English is, however, not allowed in constructions comparable to (1). Relative clauses that involve movement of an overt relative pronoun are common in Old English texts, but they do not feature P-stranding (this is also true of *wh*-questions, Allen 1977; 1980). When a prepositional object is relativised, it pied-pipes the preposition along to Spec, CP, as in (2):

- (2) Blickling, 89.13 (Allen 1980: 270)
Gehyr ðu arfæsta God mine stefne, [_{CP} [mid ðære]_i ic earm to
Hear thou merciful God my voice, with which I, poor (one), to
ðe cleopie t_i]
thee call

There are several other types of relative clauses in Old English that do allow P-stranding, and in which stranding is indeed obligatory. These share the property that they do not have an overt relative pronoun. I give examples of relatives with the invariant complementiser *þe*, with short and long relativisation, in (3) (both from van Kemenade 1987: 147–148), of an infinitival relative in (4), and an example of an adjective+infinitive construction in (5).

- (3) Orosius, 141, 22 (van Kemenade 1987: 147)
a. & het forbærnan þæt gewrit [_{CP} 0_i þe hit t_i on awriten wæs]
and ordered burn the writ that it in written was
'and ordered to burn the writ that it was written in'
b. Ðonne hie lecgeað ða tiglian beforan hie [_{CP} 0_i þe him beboden
then they put the tiles before them that them ordered
wæs [_{CP} 0_i ðæt hie sceoldon ða ceastre Hierusalem t_i on awritan]]
was that they should the city Jerusalem on draw
'Then they put in front of them the tiles that they were ordered to
draw the city of Jerusalem on.'
- (4) Blickling, 157 (van Kemenade 1987: 151)
Drihten, þu þe gecure þæt fæt [_{CP} 0_i t_i on to eardienne]
Lord, you yourself chose that vessel in to live
'Lord, you chose for yourself that vessel to live in.'

- (5) LS8 (Eust) 315 (Fischer et al. 2000: 266)

Wæs seo wunung þær swyþe wynsum on to wicenne
 was the dwelling-place there very pleasant in to live
 ‘The dwelling-place there was very pleasant to live in.’

A special case are relatives with *that* as the relative pronoun form, as we will see below.

P-stranding in constructions such as (3–5) featured prominently in the 1970’s and 1980’s debate on whether preposition stranding in the North and West Germanic languages is derived by *wh*-movement (Chomsky 1977; Chomsky & Lasnik 1977; Van Riemsdijk 1978: 286–297; Vat 1978; van Kemenade 1987), or by a second relativisation strategy of deletion over a variable (Maling 1976; Bresnan & Grimshaw 1978; Allen 1977; 1980), which may involve long-distance deletion. This debate has been resolved to the extent that, as far as the data can show us, both strategies are subject to subjacency (Allen 1980; van Kemenade 1987): they both respect the complex NP constraint and the *wh*-island constraint, and occur only in constructions that allow COMP to COMP movement. In the terms of Chomsky (1977); Chomsky & Lasnik (1977), this means that they must result from *wh*-movement. Vat (1978), in the wake of Van Riemsdijk (1978) follows Allen (1977) in showing that Old English has the same type of P-stranding by R-pronouns such as *þær* ‘there’, satisfying subjacency, and argues that P-stranding in relatives without an overt pronoun must be due to *wh*-movement of *þær*, with subsequent deletion under identity with the antecedent.

Van Kemenade (1987) presents another variant of this analysis. The general ban on P-stranding in Van Riemsdijk’s (1978) analysis is accounted for by the status of PP as a bounding node for subjacency. Dutch P-stranding is allowed because Dutch allows an “escape hatch” to this ban in the form of positions on the left of the preposition in (6a–b) that are designated for R-pronouns, the only (overt) items in Dutch grammar that strand a preposition:

- (6) a. Jan heeft het gisteren [PP *daar over* (**daar*)] gehad.
 Jan has it yesterday there about had
 ‘Jan talked about that yesterday.’
 b. Jan heeft het *daar* gisteren *over* gehad.
 c. *Daar* heeft Jan het gisteren *over* gehad.

(6c) shows that R-pronouns also move to Spec,CP. Van Kemenade (1987) proposes a parallel analysis for preposition stranding by *þær* and by various types of pronouns in Old English: this is obligatory when the object of the preposition is

þær ‘there’, and optional when the object is a personal pronoun (both examples from van Kemenade 1987: 117):

- (7) a. Boeth, XXVII, 61, 20
þæt *þær* nane oðre on ne sæton
that there no others on not sat
‘that no others sat (on) there’
- b. WSGospel, Mt
þa genealæhte *him* an man to
then approached him a man to
‘then a man approached him’

Van Kemenade (1987: 126–35) proposes that this type of pronoun fronting represents a form of cliticisation that is compatible with *wh*-movement, inspired by the fact that it applies to personal pronouns as well, and by the fact that the positions where *þær* and pronouns occur in Old English are special positions in Dutch syntax more generally. She extends this analysis to P-stranding in relatives without an overt pronoun as zero cliticisation, that is, P-stranding in the constructions exemplified in (3–5) are cases of *wh*-movement of a phonetically null variant of *þær* or a personal pronoun.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the merits of this approach in the light of more recent literature, and based on an examination of the *York corpus of Old English* (YCOE, Taylor et al. 2003). These concern a number of issues, which I would like to address in turn:

- the locality conditions at play in the various constructions;
- other instances of P-stranding in relatives;
- the parallelism between P-stranding by *þær* and pronouns, and P-stranding in relatives (and related constructions) without an overt pronoun.

2 Locality conditions

There is no evidence that the relation between the CP of *þe*-relatives and the variable with which they are associated in any way violates the subjacency condition, as noted above in relation to (3b). This would indicate that *þe*-relatives and related constructions in Old English are derived by *wh*-movement, of a zero clitic, or a zero operator. Note that the *þe*-relative is by far the most frequent

relative in Old English (over 13,000 examples in YCOE, including some 500 examples of P-stranding), but long *wh*-movement is generally rare in Old English, and (3b) is one of only two examples in the YCOE corpus of a *þe*-relative with a long-distance dependency. Note, nevertheless, that the facts are compatible with subjacency, and I therefore assume, with van Kemenade (1987), that they are derived by *wh*-movement of a zero element that is identified under identity with the antecedent. This is in line with the fact that they are most typically restrictive relatives.

3 P-stranding by pro-forms and zero pro-forms

I now turn to a renewed assessment of the question to what extent it is justified to parallel P-stranding by pronouns and *þær*-adverbs with P-stranding in constructions with an invariant complementiser. An argument in favour of this parallel might be an observation in Alcorn (2014) that there are two spelling variants of the Old English antecedents of the prepositions *by* and *for*, {*be*} and {*for*} for unstranded prepositions, and {*bi* (*big*, *bii*, *by*, *bie*) and {*fore*} for stranded prepositions. She argues that the choice between the two is prosodically conditioned, with the stranded variant being prosodically independent. This observation applies equally to prepositions stranded by *þær* and personal pronouns, and those stranded in *þe*-relatives. This suggests that the prepositions involved behave similarly. Observe, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the stranding strategies are the same, it could rather be determined by their pre-verbal or clause-final position.

Allen (1980) argues against the parallelism between stranding by *þær* and personal pronouns and stranding in *þe*-relatives: *þær*-relatives, which also involve stranding, had been introduced into the debate by Vat (1978), who argues that *þe*-relatives are really *þær*-relatives with subsequent deletion of *þær* in Spec,CP under identity with the antecedent. Allen argues that *þær*-relatives and *þe*-relatives take different antecedents, with *þær*-relatives occurring with inanimate antecedents only, while *þe*-relatives take any antecedent. This observation is borne out by examination of the YCOE corpus: *þær*-relatives, totalling 315 in number, are frequently found with NP antecedents that have no locative connotation, but these are not animate, they rather comprise rather diverse notions such as '(utter) darkness', 'the heavenly kingdom', 'eternal life', 'the course of things', 'hellfire', 'tortures', 'the fairness of glory', 'wedlock', and so on. Allen also argues that a parallel between stranding by personal pronouns and stranding in *þe*-relatives is problematic in view of the fact that the range of prepositions stranded by pronouns is limited, whereas this is not in the case of *þe*-relatives.

An argument not mentioned by Allen which may also be important is that *þe*-relatives are dominantly restrictive, whereas *þær*-relatives are often non-restrictive.

(8) Or_6:3.136.4.2863

& on oþerre wæs an gewrit, þær wæron on awritene ealra þara
and on other was a writ, there were on written all the
ricestena monna noman
richest men's names

'and in the other was a writ, on which were written the names of all the
richest men'

Note that the clause introduced by *þær* in (8) is ambiguous between a V2 main clause and a non-restrictive relative. This is frequently the case in *se*-relatives and *þær*-relatives (cf. Los & van Kemenade 2018). Surely the identification with the antecedent must be subject to tighter restrictions in restrictive relatives, where the relative clause serves to further identify the antecedent.

On the basis of the arguments reviewed so far, we may dismiss an analysis in terms of overt *þær*/pronoun movement to Spec,CP and subsequent deletion, *pace* Vat (1978), since on this analysis we would expect a complete parallelism between *ðær* and *þe*-relatives, and this is not feasible. Van Kemenade's zero cliticisation approach allows a broader set of contexts for extraction, including personal pronouns. Let us suppose that the zero clitic is in effect a zero operator which piggybacks on the escape hatch out of PP that is overtly around in the grammar, and which can be used more liberally in restrictive relatives with a zero operator, and other clauses where the identifying context for the zero operator is strict. There are several analyses to this effect available in the literature. One is Abels (2003; 2012), who casts the escape hatch in terms of phase theory, making crucial use of a zero parallel to R-stranding in Dutch. He proposes that Dutch R-pronouns (including their zero variant) are base-generated on the left of P of a special class of zero place prepositions. An argument against this analysis is thus again that it works for some prepositions only, whereas stranding in *þe*-relatives is general for all prepositions. Another analysis to the same effect is Matsuomoto (2013). He argues for a cyclic linearisation analysis that capitalises on the idea that (zero) prepositional objects can be extracted in contexts where V and P have the same head-complement parameters. In effect, this means that extraction is only possible when the complement of P is on its left (for whatever reason). All analyses along these lines thus make use of a position on the left of P that allows an escape hatch for extraction of the (zero) prepositional object.

At this point, it is also interesting to look at Old Norse, which has a relativisation strategy with an invariant complementiser *er* or *sem*, in which (zero) prepositional objects are relativised, stranding the preposition (Faarlund 2004: 260, see Maling 1976 for present-day Icelandic). Interestingly, Old Norse also has some form of stranding by pronouns, although apparently on a more limited scale: Faarlund (2004) cites an example of pronoun topicalisation with stranding (2004: 233, his (98)), and of an R-pronoun stranding a preposition in a nonroot question (2004: 258, his (32c)).

Emonds & Faarlund (2014) assume that Old English had no preposition stranding, based on van Kemenade's (1987)'s analysis of stranding in relatives with invariant complementisers as zero cliticisation. This glosses over the fact that zero cliticisation is in fact van Kemenade's analysis of P-stranding in relatives with invariant complementisers, a construction clearly shared by Old English and Old Norse.

An important remaining point are locality conditions: the evidence underlying Allen's (1980) and van Kemenade's (1987) conclusion that the various relativisation strategies respect subjacency is far from robust, although it is consistent across clause types and extraction sites. Abels (2003: 181–186) argues that comparatives of inequality provide the one context which can only involve operator movement. Here, we run into a robustness problem once again: there is only one relevant example of a comparative of inequality with P-stranding in the YCOE corpus:

- (9) Or_2:5.48.36.938
 to beteran tidun þonne we nu on sint
 to better times than we now in are
 'in better times than we are in now'

We can conclude that the evidence is consistent with subjacency, although we would like to base this on more robust data. I nevertheless maintain that relatives with invariant complementisers and other *wh*-related constructions with zero operators are movement constructions. There is a general ban on P-stranding, and I follow Abels (2003; 2012) in taking PP to be a phase head. A zero operator can be extracted out of PP, via its Spec, or a Phase edge. I leave the details for further research (see e.g. Walkden 2017, CGSW abstract). The fact that there was stranding was an important basis for extension of stranding to other contexts over the Middle English period.

4 Other instances of P-stranding in relatives

I now turn to further evidence for stranding in Old English, which also occurs in *that*-relatives, albeit to a limited extent. This is an interesting construction to consider, since the *þe*-relative is presumably the historical precursor of the present-day English *that*-relative, which is also typically assumed to involve *wh*-movement, either of a null operator, or of a *wh*-pronoun with subsequent deletion under identity with the antecedent. Old English *that*-relatives are ambiguous: we could regard *that* as an overt demonstrative pronoun, which would make the *that*-relative a neuter gender instance of the *se*-relative (which is usually non-restrictive); we could alternatively regard it as an early instance of an invariant complementiser. There is evidence both ways: of the total of 2,743 examples of *se*-relatives in the YCOE corpus, I found 42 coded as *se*-relatives with stranding. All of these have a demonstrative as relative pronoun, and the complementiser *þe*. 21 of the cases have *ðæt* as the relative marker, and have straightforward neuter antecedents, such as (10) with neuter *sweord* as antecedent; a further 12 have two *þæt* forms, the neuter demonstrative pronoun *ðæt* as antecedent, and *þæt* as the relative marker, as exemplified in (11); two examples have a feminine antecedent (12). Four examples have a relative form other than *þæt*, viz. *þære* (feminine genitive/dative singular, with a feminine antecedent); *þæm* (masculine/neuter dative singular), or *þa* (masculine/neuter nominative/accusative plural). This once again includes (12), remarkably with a feminine antecedent *mægþe*.

(10) Bede_2:10.138.4.1327

Ða sealde se cyning him *sweord*, *þæt* he hine mid gyrde; ...
 then gave the king him (a) sword, that he himself with girded
 ‘Then the king gave him a sword, which he girded himself with’

(11) CP:46.351.5.2368

..., sua him læs licað *ðæt* *ðæt* hie to gelaðode sindon,
 ... so them less pleases that that they to called are
 ‘..., the less they are pleased with that to which they are called’

(12) Bede_5:22.478.23.4805

Ond þonne Norþanhymbra *mægþe* *þæm* Ceolwulf se cyning in
 and then Northumbrians’ province that Ceolwulf the king in
 cynedome ofer is,
 kingship over is
 ‘And in the province of Northumbria, over which King Ceolwulf reigns’.

The majority of these examples (21 + 12) is thus compatible, on the one hand, with a pronominal interpretation of *that* (since in most cases the antecedent is neuter) and on the other hand with that of an invariant complementiser (assuming that P-stranding involves zero operator movement). The cases with a feminine antecedent (2 in total) suggest that *that* is an invariant complementiser, since a gender mismatch between antecedent and relative pronoun would not be expected. The cases with pronominal forms other than *that* (4 in total) suggest, on the other hand, that movement of the pronoun strands the preposition, since the form of the pronoun is incompatible with an interpretation as invariant complementiser. Old English *that*-relatives with stranding thus suggest some evidence for P-stranding by an overt relative pronoun, in a specific context.

The YCOE corpus also features two examples of relatives coded as *se þe* relatives with P-stranding. One of these seems to be unreliable, as it is presumably not a *se*-relative but a *þe*-relative on an antecedent that is appositive in the context. (13) looks like a bona fide case of a *se þe* relative with P-stranding.

(13) Bede_4:31.376.2.3751

Swylce eac ealle ða hrægl, þa ðe he mid gegearwad wæs,
 such also all the robes, which that he with attired was
 ‘Also all the robes in which he was attired, ...’

The observations about *that*-relatives fit well with the analysis sketched here: *þæt* is at this stage of the language clearly to some extent ambiguous between relative pronoun status and its later grammaticalised complementiser status, witness the fact that it features a substantial number of cases of P-stranding. We also find the first instances of unambiguous P-stranding by a relative pronoun as in (13).

In conclusion, we can say that the findings of the 1980’s literature on P-stranding largely hold up. This applies to the theoretical analysis (any analysis must somehow allow for relatively free extraction out of PP when the prepositional object is a zero element), as well as to the factual coverage now allowed by the YCOE corpus (we can present more detail now, but there are no facts that were glossed over earlier).

Abbreviations

YCOE York corpus of Old English

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