

**The Loss of OV Orders in the History of English:
A Re-Evaluation**

As relative clauses can be expected to be relatively unaffected by the stylistic and discourse factors that impact the word order of main clauses (Bybee, 2002), the competition in the directionality of preposition stranding in Early Middle English relative clauses is a pointer to a significant change. The Early Middle English period of 1150–1250 shows a roughly 50%-50% split between OV (preverbal strandings) and VO (postverbal strandings) in our investigation of the PPCME2 corpus but, for the next century (1250–1350), where we resort to the new PLAEME corpus in view of the well-known data gap in PPCME2 (Truswell et al., 2019, p. 21), we unexpectedly find higher rates of OV: a 74.5%-to-25.5% preference for OV relative clauses. This unexpected high rate for OV orders in PLAEME can be explained by: a) register (verse versus prose); b) a higher proportion of southern texts (known to be conservative in their syntax; Kroch & Taylor, 2000^B); and c) the existence of Old English model texts for some of our Early Middle English works: whilst the choice for OV orders seems to be highly conditioned by these factors, VO orders, on the other hand, are not affected by these constraints and their use sharply increases from the 1250–1350 period onwards.

Identifying a precise date for the loss of OV orders in English has so far proven elusive. Studies such as van Kemenade (1987), Pintzuk (1999), and Hinterhölzl (2014), date this loss to the 13th century, whilst analyses such as van der Wurff (1997) and Moerenhout and van der Wurff (2000, 2005), do not date the loss of OV until well into the 16th century. Taking the stranding facts to be a proxy of underlying OV and VO, our careful scrutiny of the Early Middle English data supports the view that unconstrained OV orders drastically decline in frequency after the first period of Early Middle English (1150–1250), and that the loss of OV can be confidently dated to the 13th century.

Corpora employed:

PLAEME: *A Parsed Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* (Truswell et al., 2018).

PPCME2: *Penn–Helsinki parsed corpus of Middle English* (Kroch & Taylor, 2000^A).

YCOE: *The York-Toronto-Helsinki parsed corpus of Old English prose* (Taylor et al., 2003).

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