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### Citation for published version:

Gisborne, N & Truswell, R 2015, 'Semantic reanalysis of Old English free relatives', *Diachronic Generative Syntax* 17, Reykjavik, Iceland, 29/05/15 - 31/05/15.

### Link:

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### Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

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# Semantic reanalysis of Old English free relatives

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## Reanalysis

- Reanalysis requires a many–one mapping between grammars and forms. This mapping yields **latent ambiguity**. Assume:
  - Grammar  $G_0$  associates form  $F$  with structure  $S_0$ .
  - Grammar  $G_{\{0,1\}}$  associates  $F$  with structures  $S_0$  and  $S_1$ .
  - Grammar  $G_1$  associates  $F$  with  $S_1$  ( $\neq S_0$ ) only.
- $F$  is only ambiguous under  $G_{\{0,1\}}$ , but a learner exposed to  $F$  may induce any of these grammars:  $F$  underdetermines choice of  $G$ .
- Reanalysis: until time  $t$ , learners typically associated  $F$  with (say)  $G_0$ ; after  $t$ , they are increasingly likely to associate  $F$  with  $G_{\{0,1\}}$  or  $G_1$ .
- This logic is applicable wherever generative mechanisms are distinguished from their output: phonology (Andersen 1973), syntax (Lightfoot 1979), semantics (Traugott & Dasher 2002, Eckardt 2006).

## Semantic reanalysis

- Semantic reanalysis is like any other kind of reanalysis.
- Latent ambiguity reflects different ways of signalling the same communicative intention.
- Most research on semantic reanalysis (“historical pragmatics”) concerns reanalysis of noncompositional meaning elements as entailments.
  - *Going to*: motion + plan ( $\approx$  imminent future)  $\rightarrow$  future (Traugott).
  - *Pas*: Description of small unit of motion ( $\approx$  scalar endpoint)  $\rightarrow$  NPI (Eckardt).
- Diffusion of the post-reanalysis variant could reflect a bias in favour of compositional expression of communicative intent over “leaving it to pragmatics”.
- This kind of semantic reanalysis is a key component of theories of grammaticalization: part of an explanation of the lexical  $\rightarrow$  functional pathway.
- But richer theories of semantic structure (e.g. Kamp & Reyle 1993, Kadmon 2001, Potts 2005) imply a wider typology of semantic reanalyses.
- We examine consequences of developments in the semantics of English *wh*-forms, particularly the development of a discourse anaphor into a syntactically dependent element.

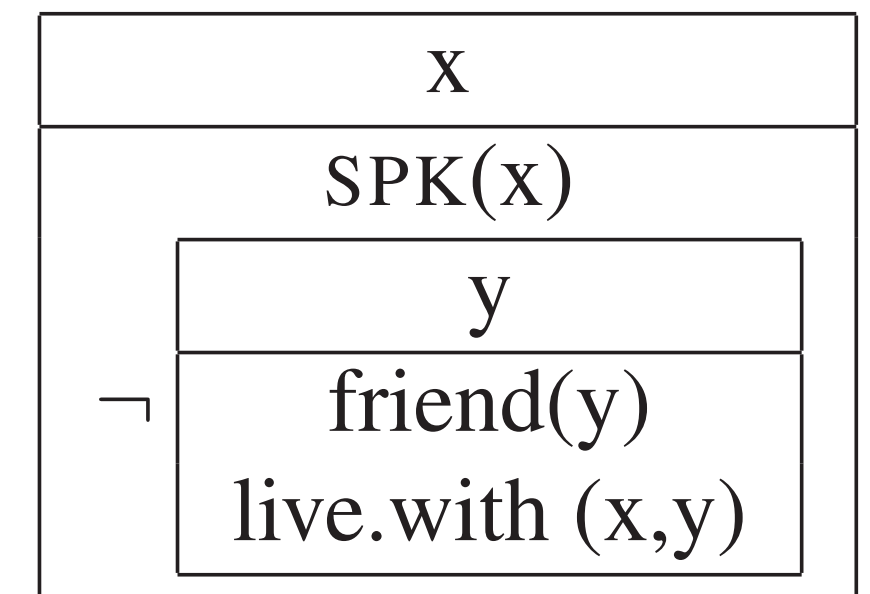
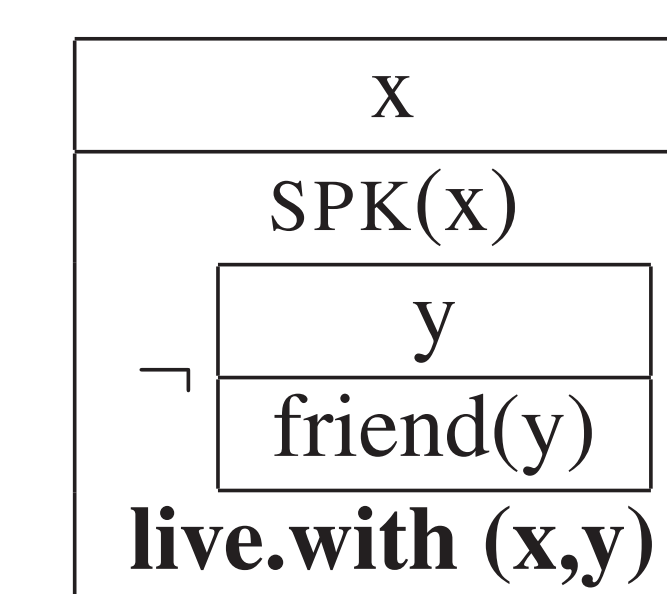
## Case study: English headed *wh*-relatives

- OE used *hw*-forms in free relatives and interrogatives, and as restricted indefinites, but not in headed relatives.
- It also allowed parenthetical appositive noun phrases.
  - (1) Ic sylf eom anginn, ic ðe to eow sprece.  
I self am beginning, I that to you speak  
“I myself am the beginning, I that am speaking to you.” (coaelhom,+AHom\_1:63.45)
  - (2) þæt heo untrume menn mihte gehælan, swa hwylcne swa heo geneosode licgende on sare.  
that she sick men might heal so which so she come.to lying in pain  
“... that she might heal sick people who she comes across, lying in pain.” (coalive,+ALS\_[Eugenia]:128.266)
- This gives a stable latent ambiguity:
  - (3) a. ... NP<sub>*i*</sub> ... Free relative<sub>*i*</sub> ...  
b. ... [NP NP *t<sub>i</sub>*] ... Headed relative<sub>*i*</sub> ...
- *A priori*, (3a) is simpler, but evidence for (3b) could be found from syntactic or semantic considerations:
  - **Syntax**: Proper embedding of relative in matrix: [IP ... RC ...]
  - **Semantics**: Referential dependency on inaccessible antecedent (under negation, universal, conditional, etc.)
- This semantic configuration is found sporadically throughout OE.
  - (4) & mytte þe hie comon to þære ceastre, hie nænigne cuðne næfdon mid hwam hie wunian and with that they came to the town they NEG.any friend NEG.had with whom they live meahton.  
might  
“and when they came to the town, they had no friend with whom they might live.” (62 ID coverhom,HomU\_10\_[ScraggVerc\_6]:69.1026)
  - (5) & him cydde eall hwæt þær gelumpen wæs.  
and him said all what there happened was  
“and told him everything that had happened there” (coneot,LS\_28\_[Neot]:78.69)
  - (6) & gif him deoflu hwæt on heora gebance lære, hwanon hi modigian magon oððe prutian, ne and if them devil what in their thought leave whereby they become.proud may or boast, NEG gebwærion hig þam,  
consent they him.DAT  
“And if the devil introduces anything into their thought, as a result of which they may become proud or boastful, they must not give in to him.” (cochdrul,ChrodR\_1:84.8.1101)
- The *wh*-phrase in these configurations cannot have a straightforward anaphoric relation to the antecedent.
  - (7) a. #I told him everything<sub>*i*</sub>. It<sub>*i*</sub> happened here.  
b. #I didn’t have any friends<sub>*i*</sub>. I could stay with them<sub>*i*</sub>.
- However, the syntactic distribution of *wh*-relatives remains restricted to clause-final positions.<sup>a</sup> Proper embedding of a headed *wh*-relative within a matrix is unattested until early ME.
  - (8) þe eareste Pilunge [hwer of al þis uel is] nis buten of prude.  
the first stripping where of all this evil is NEG.is but of pride  
“The first stripping, from where all this evil comes, is nothing but pride” (cmancriw-1,II.119.1506)
- Semantic reanalysis as a headed relative appears to have been initially masked by a syntactic restriction to clause-final position (“obligatory extraposition”), subsequently lost in EME.

<sup>a</sup>Details: “Clause-final” = followed only by right-peripheral material, within the matrix or the left periphery.

## Accessibility

| X              | y |
|----------------|---|
| female(y)      |   |
| sick.men(X)    |   |
| come.to(y,X)   |   |
| lie.in.pain(X) |   |
| heal(y,X)      |   |



## Discussion and conclusions

- The EME syntactic reanalysis that introduced clause-medial headed *wh*-relatives builds on prior analysis of *wh*-relatives as semantically integrated but obligatorily extraposed.
- No direct evidence for semantic reanalysis here (though examples like (4)–(6) are concentrated in later OE). However, emergence of syntactically dependent *wh*-forms is a late development in a gradual set of semantic changes dating back to early IE (Belyaev & Haug 2014).
  - Correlative with generalizing *wh* (early IE).
  - Clause-final free relative with definite (discourse-anaphoric) *wh* (see Truswell & Gisborne 2014).
  - Same word order, “obligatory extraposition” of headed *wh*-relative (late OE).
  - Syntactically integrated *wh*-relative (early ME).
- Assuming that the “obligatory extraposition” stage results from reanalysis, it is similar to Traugott/Eckardt reanalysis in that it favours more structurally constrained expression of communicative intention, but with effects which do not have properties of classical grammaticalization.

## References

Andersen 1973 *Language* 49; Belyaev & Haug 2014, SuB 19; Eckardt 2006, OUP; Kadmon 2001, Blackwell; Kamp & Reyle 1993, Kluwer; Lightfoot 1979, CUP; Potts 2005, OUP; Traugott & Dasher 2002, CUP; Truswell & Gisborne 2014, SuB 19.

All examples from YCOE and PPCME2 unless otherwise stated.