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Transitivity à la Old English

Magdalena Charzyńska-Wójcik

Abstract: The paper is devoted to analysing how the evolving notion of transitivity in its various theoretical guises deals with the Old English data. In the first part it introduces two different classifications of OE verbs, both representing traditional approaches to transitivity, albeit based on different defining criteria. The empirical accuracy and theoretical status of these classifications are subsequently critically evaluated. The second part of the paper attempts to show how the theoretical apparatus available within the major current linguistic theories: formalism and functionalism fares with respect to the OE data. The strengths and weaknesses of all the presented approaches are brought together in the concluding part of the paper, which additionally presents the desiderata concerning prospective analyses of OE transitivity.

Key words: verb, transitivity, passivisation, case alternations, valency alternations, Old English, traditional grammar, formal grammar, functional grammar

1. Introduction

The paper will analyse how the evolving notion of transitivity in its various theoretical guises deals with the Old English data. In order to achieve this, it would be best to offer a diachronic survey of accounts dealing with OE phenomena related to transitivity. However, due to the fact that OE transitivity has not been subject to any systematic study, this is impossible. What is available, instead, are two traditional treatments of Old English verbs – one from the late 19th/early 20th century and one from the third quarter of the 20th century, and a few isolated papers devoted to OE transitivity in the last 30 years. Apart from that, the linguistic literature offers only occasional references to OE data in detailed studies devoted to the transitivity of some other language(s). Therefore, I will try to make the best of what is available and will start by presenting the two traditional approaches to transitivity in the first part of the paper (Section 2). Since the two accounts differ in what they consider the defining property of transitivity, each view will be discussed in a separate subsection (2.1 and 2.2). As can be expected, each of the two approaches has its advantages and disadvantages, so by way of evaluating them, I will put forward the OE data which will test the validity of either approach (Section 2.3). Next, I will further analyse the same data by applying to them the theoretical machinery proposed in the current literature (Section 3), with each of the two major linguistic trends,

i.e. formalism and functionalism presented in a separate subsection (3.1 and 3.2) together with the few existing accounts of OE transitivity representing them. The strong and weak points of all the approaches emerging from this evaluation will be presented in Section 4, which will also draw more general conclusions from the analysed data and present the desiderata concerning prospective analyses of OE transitivity.

2. Traditional accounts of transitivity¹

There are two main types of traditionally understood transitivity: broad and narrow. In languages with morphological case, where OE belongs, the former is defined with respect to the presence of a nominal object regardless of its case, while under the latter understanding it is limited to accusative objects only (cf. Beedham 2010: 23). In effect, the former relies on the number of arguments (a quantitative approach), while the latter makes reference to a particular object type (a qualitative approach). The two approaches to OE data will be presented in Section 2; with 2.1 devoted to the broad view and 2.2 offering the details of the narrow variant. Section 2.3 will adduce independent OE data which will enable us to evaluate the correctness of the two accounts.

2.1 The broad (quantitative) view

The oldest source where OE transitivity is tackled in any comprehensive way is Bosworth and Toller's (1898) *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* and Toller's (1921) *Supplement* to the dictionary (abbreviated as B&T and BTs respectively in the presentation of examples). The *Supplement* often expands the information contained in the main volume, corrects it or supplants additional examples; therefore, every lexical item needs to be checked in both volumes. It has to be clarified that, as stated in Charzyńska-Wójcik (in press), Bosworth and Toller's work does not offer a proper classification of OE verbs but, being the most comprehensive

¹ The idea of writing this paper emerged when I was working on my earlier paper devoted to Old English transitivity, albeit approached from a purely traditional perspective (Charzyńska-Wójcik in press). It occurred to me that it would be interesting to contrast this picture with the accounts of transitivity available in the two major approaches to linguistic data available in the current literature – formal and functional – with a view to juxtaposing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three approaches: traditional, formal and functional. As a result, this section offers in a broad outline the essence of that earlier article as a necessary starting point for the comparison.

dictionary of Old English, it classifies most OE verbs into two major types: *verba activa* vs. *verba neutra* or transitive verbs vs. intransitive verbs.²

While the latter set of terms requires no clarification, the former set is unfamiliar to readers of the current linguistic literature and therefore, calls for an explanation.³ The terms *verbum activum* vs. *verbum neutrum* derive from a grammatical description of Latin. The contrast originally referred to the (non) availability of a verb to appear in the passive voice, thereby indirectly conveying information concerning the presence of an object. In particular, *verbum activum* implied a possible contrast with *verbum passivum*, which, in turn, signalled the presence of an object, while *verbum neutrum* indicated that no such contrast was available. Importantly, after their first appearance in the grammatical description of English in the 16th century, the terms *verbum activum* vs. *verbum neutrum* started to be replaced with a rival nomenclature, i.e. transitive vs. intransitive verbs, but one can still come across them until the late 19th century, as evidenced by their presence in Bosworth and Toller (1898). Interestingly, the terms *verbum neutrum* and *verbum activum*, though only restricted to the first part of the dictionary (abandoned in later parts in favour of the familiar *transitive* vs. *intransitive* classification), are not consistently used there, as shown in (1) below, which presents the relevant uses of the verb *beornan* together with the accompanying classifications.

(1) *beornan* ‘to burn’

a. *v.n.*

Heofoncandel barn⁴

heavenly-candle burnt

‘The sun burnt.’

Cd. 148; Th. 184, 31; Exod. 115. (*B&T*)

² The remaining complete dictionaries of Old English are too concise to be of use for this study. Hall’s (1916) *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, apart from providing the verbs’ meanings, does not supply any accompanying classifications; similarly, Sweet’s (1897) *The Student’s Dictionary of Old English*, Skeat’s (1879) *An English-Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary* or Napier’s (1906) *Contributions to Old English Lexicography*. One cannot, of course, ignore here the huge project whose aim is to produce a comprehensive dictionary of the language based on the *Complete Corpus of Old English Texts in Electronic Form*. *The Dictionary of Old English* (available at: <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>), however, is still under construction with complete entries only covering the letters A to G.

³ For the details of the history of the terms and their uses see Michael (1970) and Charzyńska-Wójcik (in press).

⁴ Throughout the paper the examples quoted after Bosworth and Toller include the textual information supplied in the dictionary, but the actual linguistic forms are quoted after the *Complete Corpus of Old English* (henceforth *CCOE*) in order to ensure consistency in the format of the quoted OE data throughout the paper: both the main volume of the dictionary and the supplement present the OE text with length marks, while *CCOE* does not.

- b. *v. trans.*
 swa ... fyr wudu byrneð
 as fire wood burns
 'As the fire burns the wood'
 Ps. Th. 82, 10. (*B&T*)

As can be seen, the two types of uses exhibited by *beornan* are classified by an eclectic pair of terms: *neutrum* vs. *transitive*.

However, an examination of the verbal entries in both parts of the dictionary makes it clear that the change from active/neuter to transitive/intransitive (or the choice of a particular term in favour of the rival nomenclature) is of a purely formal nature and does not entail any modification of the defining parameters of transitivity. In effect, a verb is classified as active/transitive if it is accompanied by a nominal object in any of the verbal cases which were available in OE, i.e. the accusative, dative or genitive. This can be observed in the individual entries of verbs classified as active in the main volume of the dictionary or transitive in the supplement volume, as shown in (2) and (3) below.

(2) *B&T*

- a. *búgan* 'to inhabit' – *v. a. acc.*
 b. *cwéman* 'to give pleasure, please, delight, propitiate, satisfy' – *v. a. dat.*
 c. *brúcan* 'to use, make use of, to pass, spend, enjoy, have enjoyment of, to eat, bear, discharge' – *v. a. gen*

(3) *BTs*

- a. *bregdan* 'to pluck, pull, draw, drag' – *trans. with acc.*
 b. *derian* 'to injure, hurt, harm, damage' – *trans. with dat.*
 c. *éfestan* 'to strive after, endeavour to do, undertake' – *trans. with gen.*

This approach to transitivity, which does not discriminate between the verbal cases, seems very well motivated in view of the data adduced below:

(4) case alternations

- a. DAT~ACC
blissian 'to make to rejoice, to gladden, delight, exhilarate' – *v. trans. dat. acc. (B&T)*
 b. ACC~GEN
earnian 'to earn, merit, deserve, get, attain, labour for' – *v. trans, gen. acc. (B&T)*

- c. DAT~GEN
miltisian 'to have or take pity upon a person, shew mercy, be merciful, pity' – *dat. gen.* (*B&T*)
- d. DAT~ACC~GEN
fandian 'to try, tempt, prove, examine, explore, seek, search out' – *v. trans. gen. dat. acc.* (*B&T*)

As can be seen, an OE verb can appear with an object which exhibits case alternations, without an accompanying change of meaning.⁵ This is further illustrated in (5) below, where the verb *blissian* 'to gladden, rejoice' is shown in three clauses and each occurrence is accompanied by an object in a different case:

- (5)
 - a. ACC
þa se halga ongann hæled blissigean
 then the saint began man-ACC to-gladden
 'Then the saint began to gladden the man.'
Andr. Kmbl. 3213; An. 1609. (B&T)
 - b. DAT
þu... god, eallum blissast
 you God all-DAT gladden
 'You, God, make all rejoice.'
Hy. 7. 34; Hy. Grn. ii. 287, 34 (B&T)
 - c. GEN
dis ... folc micclum blissian wile mines deaðes.
 this people greatly to-rejoice will my death-GEN
 'The people will greatly rejoice over my death.'
Hml. Th. i. 86, 32. (BTs)

In conclusion so far, OE (mono)transitive verbs, under the interpretation of transitivity assumed by Bosworth and Toller, fall into as many as seven types, summarised in Table 1 below.

⁵ As noted by Plank (1982: 84), '[w]hat strikes one, nevertheless, is that very frequently different predicates have to be employed in Modern English translations to bring out the differences expressed by alternative case choices in Old English. But one still has the feeling that the relevant meanings, though different, are always semantically related, which definitely speaks against positing numerous homonymous verbs in such cases (e.g. *hieran₁*, *hieran₂*). Moreover, the differences in verbal meaning corresponding to the different object markers also seem to have something in common, rather than varying arbitrarily from one verb to the next. These observations must be taken into account in any reasonable interpretation of the Old English dative/accusative opposition.'

Nº	Type
1.	V-ACC
2.	V-DAT
3.	V-GEN
4.	V-ACC/DAT
5.	V-ACC/GEN
6.	V-DAT/GEN
7.	V-ACC/DAT/GEN

Table 1. *Types of (mono)transitive verbs according to Bosworth and Toller*

In contrast to transitives, which are differentiated into several types on the basis of the case(s) assigned by a given verb, if a verb is marked as *neuter* or *intransitive*, there is no further subclassification in the dictionary, as shown by the partial exemplary entries of intransitive verbs given in (6) below.

- (6)
- a. *belgan* 'to swell with anger, to be angry, to be enraged'
– intrans. (*B&T*)⁶
 - b. *blówan* 'to blow, flourish, bloom, blossom'
– v. n. (*B&T*)
 - c. *búgan* 'to bow or bow down oneself, bend, swerve, give way, submit, yield, turn, turn away, flee'
– v. intrans. (*B&T*)
 - d. *eardian* 'to dwell, live, feed'
– intrans. (*B&T*)
 - e. *elcian* 'to put off, delay'
– v. n. (*B&T*)
 - f. *forhtian* 'to fear'
– intrans. (*BTs*)

As clearly transpires from an examination of the accompanying examples, a verb is classified as intransitive if it is not accompanied by a nominal object. This, however, does not automatically imply homogeneity, as structures where a verb

6 Inconsistent as they are, the classifications are in each case represented in the way they appear in Bosworth and Toller.

is not accompanied by a nominal object do, in fact, fall into several types. In particular, apart from instances where a verb is never accompanied by an object of any type, in some of the clauses contained within the entries classified as intransitive/neuter, the verb is accompanied by a prepositional object, as shown in (7) below.⁷

(7)

- a. *belgan* 'to swell with anger, to be angry, to be enraged'
ge belgaþ wið me
you-PL are-angry with me
'You are angry with me.'
Jn. Bos. 7, 23. (B&T)
- b. *blówan* 'to blow, flourish, bloom, blossom'
hio grewð & blewð & westmas bringð.
it grows and blossoms and fruits produces
'It grows and blossoms and produces fruits.'
Bt. 33, 4; Fox 130, 6. (B&T)
- c. *búgan* 'to bow or bow down oneself, bend, swerve, give way, submit, yield, turn, turn away, flee'
 - (i) Hi bugon and flugon
they gave-way and fled
'They gave way and fled.'
Chr. 999; Erl. 135, 25. (B&T)
 - (ii) Hi bugon to ðam
they submitted to that
'They submitted to that.'
Jos. 9, 27; Chr. 975; Erl. 125, 24. (B&T)
- d. *eardian* 'to dwell, live, feed'
 - (i) ðeah hi ... somod eardien
though they together should-dwell
'Though they should dwell together.'
Bt. Met. Fox 20, 292; Met. 20, 146 (B&T)
 - (ii) Abram eardode ... on þam lande Chanaan
Abraham dwelled in the land Canaan
'Abraham dwelled in the land of Canaan.'
Gen. 13, 12. (B&T)

⁷ Importantly, I do not wish to claim that the supplied examples represent the only types of (intransitive structures) attested with these verbs. Instead, these are to be treated as examples which prompted the dictionary classification.

e. *elcian* ‘to put off, delay’

- (i) Ic latige on sumere stowe, odde ic elcige
I linger in some place or I delay
‘I linger in some place or delay.’

Ælfc. Gr. 25; Som. 27, 14. (*B&T*)

- (ii) Ðæt he leng ne elcode to his geleafan
that he longer not delayed to his belief
‘That he no longer delayed his belief.’

Homl. Th. ii. 26, 1. (*B&T*)

f. *forhtian* ‘to fear’

þa ongan he forhtian & sargian.
then began he to-be-afraid and to-grieve
‘Then he began to be afraid and to grieve.’

Mk. Bos. 14, 33; Boutr. Scrd, 21, 22. (*BTs*)

Another type of intransitives are verbs, such as *beornan* ‘to burn’ given in (1) above, which show transitive uses next to intransitive ones.⁸ They represent valency alternations of the type discussed in Levin (1993).

Next, there are verbs, or rather usages of verbs, which Bosworth and Toller classify as *absolute*. The very term *absolute* has a long and complex history, which I will not pursue here in view of the difficulties it causes even without this additional diachronic dimension. It is in fact hard to say what differentiates structures classified by Bosworth and Toller as absolute from those classified as intransitive. Both types can either appear in object-less structures or in structures with a prepositional object. The examples below represent clauses classified in Bosworth and Toller as absolute and, as is clear, the example in (8a) is object-less, while the one in (8b) features a prepositional object.

(8)

- a. Ic smegu
I meditate
‘I meditate.’

Ps. Surt. ii. p. 185, 3. (*B&T*)

- b. he smeað on his mode ymb þis eorðlice lif.
he meditates in his spirit about this earthly life
‘He meditates in his spirit about the earthly life.’

Bt. 39, 7; Fox 224, 4. (*B&T*)

⁸ Some of the verbs illustrated above also exhibit this alternation.

Moreover, some structures are classified as absolute when one object type is missing, while the other one is present, as in (9) below:

- (9) se ðe swerað nehstan his
 he who swears neighbour his
 'The one who swears to his neighbour.'
 Ps. Spl. 14, 6. (*B&T*)
- (10) Se gerefa (...) ða (...) þone ađ him swor,
 the steward then the oath-ACC him-DAT swore
 swa he hyne sylf stafode, be hys sunu wifunge.
 as he himself dictated about his son's marriage
 'Then the steward swore him (Abraham) an oath concerning his son's marriage, as Abraham himself had dictated it.'
 <s id="T06210051700" n="24.9"> Gen; B8.1.4.1 (*CCOE*)

Swerian 'to swear, make oath' is a ditransitive verb, which can appear with an accusative Theme and a dative Recipient, as shown in (10). In (9) above, *swerian* appears without the accusative Theme and the clause is classified as absolute, which might suggest that it is the non-expression of a nominal object that qualifies a structure as absolute.

It can, therefore, be concluded that while some structures which are classified as absolute are characterised by the absence of an object which normally accompanies a given verb (as in (9) above), many structures can be classified either as intransitive or as absolute since there does not seem to be an underlying principle behind these classifications. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that one can come across instances of identical structures which receive these two different types of labels even in the case of one and the same verb, as illustrated by the partial entries of *blissian* 'to rejoice', from the main volume of the dictionary and the supplement volume.

- (11) *blissian*
- a. main volume:
 - I. *v. intrans.* 'to rejoice, exult, be glad or merry'
 - II. *v. trans. dat. or acc.* 'to make to rejoice, to gladden, delight, exhilarate'
 - b. the supplement:
 - I. absolute
 - II. 'to rejoice at' (with gen.)

Now the impression of confusion concerning the notion *absolute* is complete. Thus, the only observation that can be made with any certainty is that Bosworth and Toller acknowledge the fact that OE allowed the non-expression of a verbal object but their system does not clearly set apart instances of ambitransitive verbs (also referred to as verbs of dual membership or *labile*), such as those illustrated in (1) above, from instances of object-drop.

In conclusion so far, Bosworth and Toller's classification of verbs is binary, and is based on the presence of the nominal object. Leaving aside the terminological inconsistencies, this means that a verb is considered transitive if it is accompanied by a nominal object, regardless of its case and intransitive if it is not accompanied by a nominal object. This is, in essence, a broad understanding of transitivity, i.e. an understanding based on a quantitative criterion.

When it comes to evaluating this approach, it has to be said that its major empirical asset consists in accommodating the variability of the case-marking properties of verbal objects. Moreover, it recognises the existence of *labile* verbs and acknowledges the availability of object-drop, though the resulting (identical) structures are not, as noted above, clearly formally differentiated – an aspect which certainly constitutes a serious drawback. Ambitransitives result from an operation affecting the inventory of Thematic roles and cases available for the verb, while object-drop is a purely syntactic process conditioned by the context, to the effect that an object can be omitted if it is sufficiently implied and can easily be inferred. In addition to that, as already indicated, the system fails to clearly mark verbs which never take an object of any type.

In effect, the binary division into transitive and intransitive verbs fails to formally differentiate between the various subtypes of OE intransitive verbs and, as will be shown in the course of the paper, putting all of the subtypes of transitives on a par obliterates an important distinction between them – a distinction which will be brought to light in Section 2.3.

Let me now move on to the theoretical status of the quantitative criterion. It is true that 'all human languages classify actions into two basic types: those involving one obligatory participant, which are described by intransitive sentences, and those involving two obligatory participants, which are dealt with by transitive sentences' (Dixon 1979: 102). But defining transitivity solely on the basis of the number of core arguments is circular, as pointed out by LaPolla *et al.* (2011).

The traditional syntactic definition of transitivity says that a language has one or more constructions where two arguments are given special status in the clause as core (obligatory) arguments, as opposed to only one argument being given that status. This is straightforward, but defining transitivity in this way doesn't help us understand very much about the language given the circularity of identifying a clause as transitive because it has two arguments, and saying that it has two core

arguments because it is a transitive clause. The traditional view also does not recognise the diversity of morphosyntactic phenomena that show that clauses with two core arguments are not all alike (...).

LaPolla *et al.* (2011: 471)

2.2 The narrow view

The other traditional type of approach to transitivity, though with a slightly different focus, is represented by Visser's (1963–1973) *An Historical Syntax of the English Language*. It is the only source presenting a comprehensive classification of OE verbs, as later works, for example Mitchell (1985) or Ogura (1996), rely heavily on Visser's findings. In addition to these, there have been a few isolated attempts at interpreting some selected aspects of OE transitivity, as will be shown in Section 3, but none of them has aimed at a holistic typology. In effect, despite important advances in linguistic theory, Visser's view on OE transitivity remains the definitive word on the matter.

As indicated at the outset of Section 2, the narrow view takes the presence of an accusative object as the defining parameter of transitivity. In agreement with that, Visser classifies a verb as transitive if it is accompanied by a direct object; and by a direct object (a term used 'for want of a better'; Visser 1963–1973: §418) he means a nominal object in the accusative case. In consequence, a verb not accompanied by a direct object is intransitive. Note that this implies that OE transitives are a homogenous group (verbs with an ACC object), while intransitives encompass verbs with no object at all as well as verbs with indirect objects. To complicate matters further, Visser's definition of the direct object implies that indirect objects are both nominal objects in non-accusative cases, i.e. in the dative and genitive, and prepositional objects. In effect, OE transitivity is viewed in terms of a binary opposition, defined with respect to the presence of the accusative NP object.

Note, however, that the importance of the accusative in defining transitivity necessitates taking a stand on the matter of case alternations between ACC and DAT/GEN (cf. (4) and (5) above). This aspect, however, is absent from Visser's typology: the variability of case assignment exhibited by OE verbs, so pervasive throughout the period,⁹ is not discussed with respect to transitivity. This gives the impression that Visser classifies individual structures rather than verbs with a full array of their complementation patterns. That this, however, is not the case becomes obvious on examining Visser's 'syntactical units in Old English

⁹ Towards the end of the OE period, the genitive as a verbal case was more and more frequently replaced with the accusative but the DAT~ACC alternation remained very common.

that consist of subject + verb without further complement' (§129). It is clear that Visser's classification of objectless verbs makes crucial reference to alternative complementation patterns. In effect he recognises four different types of verbs, depending on whether these verbs can take an object and if so, of what type: direct or indirect.¹⁰

It can therefore be concluded that the crucial aspect of structure which, according to Visser, defines OE transitivity does not take into account one of the most important characteristics of the language, i.e. case variability. In effect, it is not clear how to treat verbs whose objects exhibit ACC~non-ACC case alternations, i.e. types 1. (V-ACC/DAT), 2. (V-ACC/GEN) and 4. (V-ACC/DAT/GEN) from Table 1 above.

Let us now move on to another important property of the OE verbal system which a classification of OE verbs must properly accommodate, i.e. verbs of dual membership, object-drop structures and inherently intransitive verbs (which never take an object of any kind). It has to be noted that Visser introduces a formal distinction between inherently intransitive verbs and verbs of dual membership in §129, though the implementation of this distinction suffers from a variety of defects. They are discussed in detail in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2013). Suffice it to say that inherently intransitive verbs are treated as a separate subtype of intransitives, which are set apart from the intransitive uses of verbs of dual membership. The latter are treated as 'etymologically related homonym[s]' of transitive verbs – a solution which, in fact, under the guise of a distinction, levels down the two types of verbs.

The final issue relevant now is related to object-drop structures. Visser (1963–1973: §129) formally distinguishes them from intransitive verbs (of both types mentioned above) by resorting to the appellation 'absolute'. Again, the details of the implementation and individual classifications can be disputed but the underlying idea of differentiating between the types is certainly right.

In sum, Visser's qualitative criterion when confronted with OE data has its strengths (it formally differentiates between object-drop structures and inherent intransitives) and weaknesses (it does not accommodate object case variability and does not capture the relationship between labile verbs). What remains to be discussed is the theoretical status of direct-objecthood as the defining criterion of transitivity.

First of all, as noted by LaPolla *et al.* (2011: 470), standard definitions of transitivity involve the notion of the direct object, while '[n]othing is said in these definitions about what a direct object is and how to identify it'. As noted in Charzyńska-Wójcik (in press), similar problems are encountered in modern counterparts of the qualitative approach to transitivity, such as those resorting to S (subject of an intransitive clause), A (subject of a transitive clause)

¹⁰ The shortcomings of this classification are presented in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2013).

and P (object of a transitive clause)¹¹ in defining transitivity. These terms ‘are often taken for granted’ (Haspelmath 2011: 535) but ‘there are substantial differences in the literature in the way these terms are understood’ (Haspelmath 2011: 538). Precise criteria defining (in)transitivity can often be found in individual languages, but transitivity-related phenomena are so diverse that these criteria cannot be generalised across languages (Haspelmath 2011: 542). Note that

if transitivity is defined by the presence of a particular category in a particular language, then classifying clauses in this language as transitive on the basis of the presence of this category is, in effect, perfectly circular. Another very unwelcome reflection following from the same set of observations is whether by applying different criteria to different phenomena approached from different perspectives linguists have not, in effect, defined a different category?

Charzyńska-Wójcik (in press)

To conclude, we have seen that the classification of OE verbs based on the qualitative understanding of transitivity suffers from both empirical and theoretical deficiencies, in the same manner as the quantitative interpretation of OE transitivity.

In order to offer a relative evaluation of the two approaches, we must first of all see if transitivity is a valid notion for OE and if so, find out what it entails.

2.3 Passive as a diagnostic of transitivity

The phenomenon most immediately associated with transitivity, as already implied in the discussion of the terms ‘active’ verb and ‘neuter’ verb, is the availability of a given verb to appear in a passive structure. As noted by Kittilä (2002), the (non)availability of passivisation makes it possible (in most cases) to distinguish transitive from intransitive clauses. It cannot be treated as an iron-clad test, though, as other factors play a role as well but it is clear that ‘[t]he acceptability of passivization correlates to some extent with transitivity: the more transitive a clause is, the more readily it can be passivised’ (Kittilä 2002: 23). It is obviously the semantic understanding of transitivity that is directly correlated with passivisation (de Mattia-Viviès 2009: 105 and Toyota 2009: 11) but there are syntactic correlates as well. A transitive clause, i.e. a clause with a verb classified as transitive, is expected to be passivisable, in contrast to an intransitive one, for

¹¹ The terms S, A, P (or O), T, R (or G) first appeared in the linguistic literature in the 1970s as tools of comparative linguistics. Only S, A and P are relevant for us now, while T and R (alongside A) represent relations within ditransitive clauses. With time the terms started to be used in descriptive linguistics. In consequence, the categories took on different meanings.

which the opposite prediction holds. As the two definitions of transitivity result in some verbs being classified as transitive under one understanding and intransitive under the other, it will be interesting to see how the two classifications square with the passivisation facts.

According to Bosworth and Toller, transitives are verbs which can take a nominal object regardless of its case. Therefore, all verbs meeting this condition are expected to produce passives under this understanding of transitivity. Naturally, verbs with no object at all or those accompanied by prepositional objects are not expected to appear in passives. In contrast, under Visser's definition, only verbs with accusative objects are expected to produce passives, as only these are classified as transitive. Intransitive verbs, i.e. verbs with dative or genitive objects, prepositional objects or with no object at all are by a logical extension expected not to appear in passives. Note that the two definitions make the same predictions for verbs with accusative objects, which are transitive under both views. Likewise verbs with no object at all and verbs with prepositional objects are classified as intransitive both by Bosworth and Toller and by Visser. In consequence, it is the behaviour of verbs with dative or genitive objects under passivisation that will be of crucial importance here. Another aspect which needs to be tackled and which is underspecified by Visser, is the membership of verbs with objects showing accusative vs. non-accusative case alternation.

OE passivisation is a relatively well explored issue (Charzyńska-Wójcik 2002; Mitchell 1985; Quinn 2005), requiring no special corpus examinations, and the relevant facts can be summarised in five points. First of all, OE verbs without an object are generally not passivisable, so there are no OE passives of the type encountered in many other Germanic languages, such as German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Dutch and Afrikaans:

(12)

- a. German (Mohr 2005: 120)
Es wurde getanzt.
- b. Icelandic (Mohr 2005: 120)
(það) var dansað.
- c. Norwegian (Mohr 2005: 159)
Det ble danset.
- d. Dutch (Mohr 2005: 120)
Er wordt gedanst.
- e. Afrikaans (Mohr 2005: 120)
Daar word gedans
expl was danced
'There was dancing.' or 'People were dancing.'

Secondly, the same holds without exception for verbs with prepositional objects: these do not form passives in OE (cf. for example, Allen 1980; Denison 1985; Fischer *et al.* 2000; van der Gaaf 1930; Goh 2000a, 2001; van Kemenade 1987), or in early Middle English, in contrast to the period after 1300.

Thirdly, verbs with accusative objects invariably undergo passive transformation in OE, as shown below.

(13)

a. active – ACC

Swylce eac in ðæm ilcan gefeohte mon sloh Rædwoldes sunu
 moreover in the same battle one killed Rædwold's son-ACC
 'Moreover, in the same battle somebody killed the son of Rædwold.'
 <s id="T06870025500" n="9.132.10"> Bede 2; B9.6.4 (CCOE)

b. passive – NOM

... þæt we næfre ne geearnien þæt we slegene beon scylon.
 that we never not should-deserve that we killed be ought-to
 'That we should never deserve it that we ought to be killed.'
 <s id="T06900011100" n="3.270.2"> Bede 4; B9.6.6 (CCOE)

What we see here is a classic correspondence between the accusative object in the active and the Nominative subject in the passive.

Next, there are verbs with non-accusative nominal objects. These undergo passivisation, albeit the resulting passive is of a different type than the one produced with verbs accompanied by accusative objects. This is illustrated in (14) below.

(14) impersonal passivisation with a genitive and dative NP

a. active clause with GEN and DAT

For ðæm þu him sealdest his modes willan,
 because you him granted his spirit's wish
 and þæs þe he mid his weolorum wilnade,
 and that which he with his lips asked-for
 þæs þu him ne forwyrndest.
 that-GEN you him-DAT not refused

'Because, you granted him the wish of his spirit and you did not refuse to him what he asked for with his lips.'

<s id="T06320026200" n="20.2"> PPs (prose); B8.2.1 (CCOE)

- b. passive
 and him wæs swa forwyrned dæs inganges syððan.
 and him-DAT was so refused the entrance-GEN soon
 ‘And he was soon refused entry.’
 <s id="T03790012100" n="480"> ÆHex; B1.5.13 (CCOE)

Here, in contrast to (13), the case marking of the object NP is unaffected by passivisation, i.e. the dative and genitive of the active are retained in the passive. The resulting passive clause lacks a Nominative subject and shows the verb in the 3SG form. This type of passive is referred to as impersonal, as opposed to the passive illustrated in (13), which is classified as personal.

Finally, there are the troublesome verbs, i.e. those whose objects exhibit the relevant transformation. These undergo personal passivisation, i.e. the object of the active shows up as a Nominative subject of the passive and controls the form of the verb.¹²

(15)

- a. active – GEN
 He ne gearnode nanes wuldres,
 he not deserved no glory-GEN
 ‘He deserved no glory,’
 <s id="T03350001800" n="84"> ÆLS (Vincent); B1.3.35 (CCOE)
- b. active – ACC
 gyf hi hit gearnodon.
 if they it-ACC deserved
 ‘If they deserved it.’
 <s id="T03360004900" n="200"> ÆHom 1; B1.4.1 (CCOE)
- c. passive
 Þurh ðas seofon mægenu. bið þæt ece lif gearnod;
 through the seven virtues is the everlasting life-NOM deserved
 ‘Everlasting life is earned through these seven virtues.’
 <s id="T02700006400" n="167.205"> ÆCHom II, 17; B1.2.20 (CCOE)

How do these facts relate to the broad and narrow view of transitivity? Note that the dividing line between verbs which form passives and those that do not

12 It needs to be borne in mind that the complementation patterns of OE verbs changed over time, to the effect that some verbs which were never accompanied by accusative objects in early OE started to appear with accusative NPs in late OE. In effect, the verbs which originally only appeared in impersonal passives started to produce personal ones. It is, therefore, crucial to remember this diachronic dimension of the OE period.

confirms the correctness of Bosworth and Toller's approach: verbs which are classified by Bosworth and Toller as transitive (i.e. verbs which can take a nominal object in any of the available verbal cases) can passivise. This view, however, in spite of correctly capturing the verbs' ability to passivise, fails to accommodate the fact that there are two different types of passive – a consequence of there being different types of verbs, which are not distinguished within the broad interpretation of transitivity. Interestingly, the two verb types follow from Visser's typology. His classification, while not in accordance with the general passivisation possibilities of OE verbs, correctly identifies verbs which form personal passives.

In effect, neither of the two classifications of OE verbs stemming from the two views on transitivity correctly captures the passivisation facts. However, the picture of OE passivisation emerging from a combination of the two approaches is complete and correct: Bosworth and Toller's division between transitive and intransitive verbs coincides with the division between verbs which can passivise and those that do not. The internal differentiation between verb types which produce personal passives on the one hand and impersonal passives on the other is only derivable from Visser's classification, which sets apart verbs with accusative objects from verbs which are not accompanied by an ACC NP. It is only the former that produce personal passives.

Let us now move on to the current approaches to transitivity to see how they fare with respect to the OE facts.

3. Current approaches to transitivity

The view that transitivity is a universal phenomenon, central to the structure of all languages, 'global within a single language i.e., relevant to all constructions of the language in the same way' (LaPolla *et al.* 2011: 469) is omnipresent in the current linguistic literature.¹³ It is, however, accompanied by an equally strongly voiced assertion that the term is not clearly defined, as its content is in most works taken for granted (cf. for example, LaPolla *et al.* 2011: 469; Luk 2012: 4; Næss 2007: 2; Szupryczyńska 1973: 175; Toyota 2008: 10). As a result, many researchers discussing particular aspects of transitivity do not even attempt to define it.

In the current linguistic literature there are two basic approaches to transitivity: syntactic, concerned with the formal presence of a category (defined very

¹³ The volume devoted to transitivity, edited by Kulikov *et al.* (2006), offers a wide range of various transitivity-related phenomena addressed from a variety of theoretical perspectives, where transitivity is viewed as 'a central overarching category' (Kulikov *et al.* 2006: vii).

differently within different accounts, ranging from a lexical projection – clearly a development of the traditional approaches to transitivity, to a functional projection); and semantic, concerned with the transfer of action between the elements of a clause. The former, by its very nature, can (at least seemingly) express transitivity only in terms of a binary opposition, i.e. the relevant element is either present, making a clause transitive, or absent, rendering it intransitive. The latter is inherently gradient, as the transfer of action can be expressed by means of degrees. These two major interpretations of transitivity correspond roughly to the two major types of approaches to grammar: formal (discussed in Section 3.1) and functional (presented in Section 3.2) respectively. Both are represented by a wide variety of different offshoots and it is neither possible nor necessary to present an exhaustive survey of how these approaches tackle the problem of transitivity. Instead, I will try to see how the basic machinery available within either approach deals with the most pertinent problems identified in our discussion so far. In particular:

(16)

- (i) valency alternations accompanied by a meaning change (of the *bregdan* type);
- (ii) alternations of object case which do not entail meaning changes;
- (iii) OE passivisation with further differentiation into two types.

3.1 Formal approaches to transitivity

Over the many years of formal grammar's development the definitions of transitivity have always reflected the most recent theoretical advancements. These have gone in various directions and focused on different aspects of structure. I will, therefore, not attempt an exhaustive survey here. Instead, I will present a very broad outline of the development of the term, which has led to the current standard understanding of transitivity. Obviously, due to the fact that there is no single understanding of the notion of transitivity or its formal implementation, it is of course always possible to point to a researcher currently working in a formal approach whose understanding of transitivity and its defining characteristics will diverge from what is presented in this paper.¹⁴

14 By way of illustration, let me point out Bowers (2002: 186), who works within a formal framework and explicitly states that his understanding of transitivity diverges from the mainstream. His own specific understanding of the notion formalises it as 'an independent property, separate from the property of having an external argument'.

In the early form of generative grammar, as proposed in Chomsky (1965), transitivity is related to the presence of the direct object – clearly a development of the traditional approach. Hence, verbs fall into two classes: those with the subcategorisation feature $[+_{NP}]$, i.e. transitive, and intransitive, whose subcategorisation is $[+_{\#}]$. Note that the defining parameter is the presence of the object. In other words,

[i]n the standard theory of argument structure, the only structural difference between transitive and intransitive sentences is that transitives have both an external argument and an internal argument, whereas intransitives have either one or the other, but not both.

Bowers (2002: 186)

This formulation was subsequently refined to encompass the division of intransitives into unergatives and unaccusatives with no accompanying reclassification of verbs but a reinterpretation of their structure. This interpretation of transitivity was further developed by Hoekstra (1984), who argues that

a more sensible classification of verbs could be made in terms of the property of selecting a Θ -subject. The traditional class of intransitives can be divided into two subclasses, one of which displays the properties of transitives, while the other share[s] its properties with passives of traditional transitives. I suggest that transitivity is regarded no longer as a property of combining with an NP to form a VP (or rather V'), but rather as having an external Θ -role.

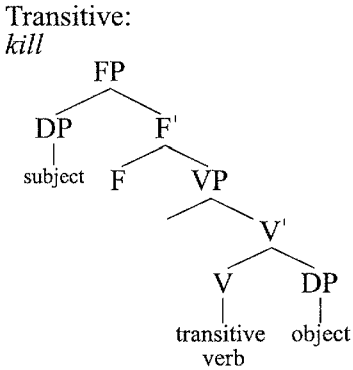
Hoekstra (1984: 227)

This is not merely a reformulation, as was the case above, but a change of the defining parameter, with an ensuing change in the classification of unergatives. Under the former view (in both its earlier and later variants), where transitivity is defined in relation to the number of arguments, they represent intransitives because they have only one argument: either external (the earlier version) or internal (the later one). The new approach classifies them among transitives, as transitivity is defined in relation to the presence of the external Θ -role, which is clearly present in unergatives. In effect, while some verbs retain their original membership despite the change of the defining parameter (those with two arguments and those with only one argument with an internal Θ -role), the verbs 'in the middle', i.e. showing characteristics of both types are classified differently in the two approaches.

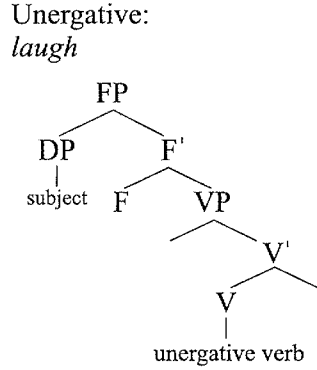
The structures presented below (after de Swart 2007: 186) would therefore receive different interpretations under these two major approaches.

(17)

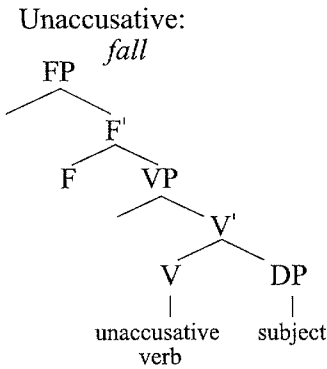
a. TYPE A



b. TYPE B



c. TYPE C



Under the former understanding (in its later form), only the structure of Type A is transitive as it exhibits both an external and an internal argument. The structure of Type B has only an external argument and the structure of Type C only an internal argument, hence these do not qualify as transitives. In contrast, under the latter view, Type A and Type B are transitive, since both exhibit an external Θ -role, and Type C is the only structure without an external Θ -role, so it is not a transitive one.

Note, that I intentionally avoided using the term *intransitive*, as together with the development of the notion of transitivity *transitive* does not contrast with *intransitive* any more. Contrary to what has been signalled above, it no longer represents a binary concept, though the inference does not seem to have received an explicit formulation. This takes us back to our earlier discussion concerning

the appellation *neuter verb*. Note that the term does not seem suitable to explain the grammar of English verbs and was soon replaced with one that was felt to be more fitting: *intransitive verb* but, as is clear, the change was purely cosmetic. This time the change is deeper, as it affects the membership of verbs representing Type B (cf. (17) above).

With the rudiments of transitivity as understood within formal grammars laid out, it is now time to see how this theoretical machinery works with respect to the relevant OE data. Before this can be done, however, let me clarify that in the following I will be using the term *transitive* and *intransitive* in the sense of the original formulation of Chomsky (1965), which, though not in keeping with the developments within the model, coincides with the understanding of the notion presented in Section 2.1. It is therefore (slightly) less likely to introduce additional confusion.

First of all, it has to be admitted that the three structures presented in (17) above are very well motivated from the perspective of OE. Valency alternations listed in (16i) are perfectly captured by the Structures of Type A (transitive/active) vs. Type C (intransitive/neuter). Moreover, verbs which are never accompanied by an object (intransitive/neuter verbs with no alternations) are represented by Type B, thus clearly set apart from the alternating verbs. The absolute structures, i.e. those with verbs which normally take an object are represented by Type A, with the object position occupied by a phonetically empty element.

As for the differentiation between accusative and non-accusative object cases under passivisation (cf. (16iii)), formal approaches to grammar in all their different shades possess the necessary machinery to account for these, by resorting to a distinction between structural (accusative) vs. non-structural case¹⁵ (dative

¹⁵ *Structural* case is contrasted with *lexical* case (Chomsky 1986) or *quirky* case (Andrews 1982). Some researchers use the terms *lexical* case and *quirky* case interchangeably (cf. for example Quinn 2005: 17 'lexical case, also known as 'inherent' or 'quirky' case'), though for others they represent different entities. As shown in Pesetsky and Torrego (2011), *quirky* case does not represent an alternative to structural case but merely makes the presence of structural case 'undetectable' (Pesetsky and Torrego 2011: 9). It is exhibited in Icelandic and, I believe, Old English genitive and dative case marking on verbal objects also qualifies as *quirky*. In contrast, *lexical* case is an alternative to structural case and can be exemplified by the dative and instrumental case marking on Russian objects. Moreover, non-structural cases are sometimes differentiated into *lexical* and *inherent*. An example of this differentiation is proposed by Woolford (2006: 111), for whom '[l]exical Case is idiosyncratic Case, lexically selected and licensed by certain lexical heads (certain verbs and prepositions). Inherent Case is more regular, associated with particular Θ -positions.' Therefore, I contrast the term *structural* case with *non-structural* case to avoid terminological confusion.

A comment that is due at this point is that van Gelderen (2011), in line with her earlier assertions, claims that in OE all cases were inherent. The loss of the inherent case and the emergence of structural case are associated by the author with the changes operating

and genitive). Again, how exactly this difference is implemented in successive versions of the theory changes over time. In the pre-minimalist version of generative grammar, all object cases were assigned by the verb, yet the case assignment process took place at different levels of structure. This assertion, combined with the then-standard assumption concerning passivisation (cf. Jaeggli 1986), accounted for the observed discrepancy in behaviour between accusative and non-accusative object cases.¹⁶

In later versions of the theory, generally known as the Minimalist Programme, where D-Structure and S-Structure are given up, the difference is accounted for by assuming that different projections are responsible for the structural vs. non-structural case. The latter is seen as an idiosyncratic property of individual verbs,¹⁷ while a functional projection ν is responsible for the former. In consequence, the two types of cases are clearly differentiated, which, in turn, explains their different behaviour under passivisation. The dative and genitive morphology ‘provided’ by the verb naturally remains intact under passivisation. In contrast, the functional head responsible for the structural case has different properties in the passive and in the active clauses: in active (transitive) clauses it assigns both the external Θ -role and the accusative case, but in passive clauses it assigns neither of these. Further developments within the model offer a more complex picture, where the difference is expressed by reference to ‘Strong Phase’ and ‘Weak Phase’ and in a yet more recent work, Chomsky (2005) claims that it is the lexical category V, rather than the functional category ν , which assigns the accusative case but only after ‘inheriting’ it from the ν that selects it.

As shown above, the technical details change with the developments of the model over time (a very useful summary of these is presented in Pesetsky and Torrego 2011), but what remains stable is the retention of the basic distinction between the accusative case on the one hand and the dative and genitive on the other. Syntactic processes such as passivisation affect only the former, i.e. the structural case (hence the resulting nominative marking on the relevant argument, and personal passivisation), while they have no effect on the latter, i.e. non-structural cases (which remain unchanged under passivisation, and the resulting passive structures are impersonal). In conclusion, generative approaches are perfectly suited to account for the different behaviour of the accusative vs. dative and genitive under passivisation.

in the case system in the 12th century. However, as passivisation is not discussed there, it is not clear how the distinction between the accusative vs. non-accusative case(s), which we have seen to be vital in OE, can be accommodated into van Gelderen’s account.

16 A study of OE passivisation couched in such terms is offered in Charzyńska-Wójcik (2002) and Bondaruk and Charzyńska-Wójcik (2003).

17 It has to be noted, though, that ‘[n]ot much is said in Minimalism about how inherent case is assigned or checked’ (van Gelderen 2011: 132).

When it comes to alternations of object case which do not entail meaning changes (cf. (16ii)), generative approaches, assuming (as shown above) a formal difference between accusative cases on the one hand and non-accusative cases on the other, do not seem to offer a way of accounting for the lack of meaning difference between the variously case-marked objects. One and the same structure cannot exhibit case differences without an accompanying change of denotation because it would imply that the alternation represents a free variation. The defining principles of formal grammars inherently disagree with free variation and representatives of the model are prone to claim that free variation as such does not in fact exist. It is, therefore, not a viable option either in the earlier or in the later versions of formal grammar. Perhaps this is why there has not been much overt concern for the problem of object case alternations, despite the fact that the phenomenon is not restricted to OE but can also be observed in other early Germanic languages. There are, to the best of my knowledge, very few studies dealing with object case alternations in OE: Plank (1982), Goh (2000b), Toyota (2008, 2009) and van Gelderen (2011).¹⁸ Plank offers a philological account of object case alternations in OE from a functional perspective; Toyota also represents functional linguistics, while Goh, though representing formal grammar, draws heavily on Plank's ideas, i.e. resorts to the theoretical machinery available within functional grammars. This is very telling, as it in effect indicates that formal grammars have no instruments with which to approach the phenomenon. In a more recent contribution van Gelderen (2011) also resorts to the same functionalist notions but manages to adapt them into a formal framework of minimalism. I will, therefore, present the essence of all four studies in Section 3.2, devoted to functional grammars.

3.2 Functional approaches

As was the case with the formal model, it is neither possible nor necessary to offer here a survey of all the approaches to transitivity available under the auspices of the theory. Instead, I will focus on how the theoretical constructs available within functional grammars deal with the aspects of OE transitivity listed in (16) above.

Semantic approaches to transitivity resort to the notions of *affectedness* (Hopper and Thompson 1980) and *opposedness* (Plank 1982). Another proposal – independent though closely related to that of Hopper and Thompson's concept of *affectedness* – is Tsunoda's (1981) resort to *effectiveness*, which is, like the

¹⁸ The primary focus of van Gelderen (2011) is diachronic: the author concentrates on establishing the basic valency of OE and the changes that affected the language in the course of its development.

other two, 'a multifactorial account of transitive encoding' (de Swart 2007: 27). While differing in the exact set of parameters defined as relevant, what these proposals have in common is that they approach transitivity from a variety of different perspectives (subject-, object- or verb-oriented, including their mutual relationships) and, as a result, can detect and express fine-grained distinctions among the analysed structures in terms of a scale of transitivity. In effect, the higher the degree of *opposedness*, *affectedness*, or *effectiveness*, the higher the transitivity of a clause. So, transitivity viewed in this way is a scalar, or gradient phenomenon: the more of the *transitive* features a clause has, the higher it scores on a transitivity scale.¹⁹

This approach contrasts with a much simpler distinction available in formal grammar. However, while the parameters of description are very different between functional and formal grammars, the two approaches do converge at some points. The different status of accusative vs. non-accusative verbal cases finds different expressions in the two types of approaches but the relevance of the contrast is acknowledged in both: within scalar approaches to transitivity the accusative case is connected with a high degree of transitivity, while the dative and genitive cases are associated with lower degrees of transitivity. In generative grammar (in all its versions) the accusative case is clearly formally differentiated from the dative and genitive case. In fact, as noted by de Swart (2007: 149), most of the transitivity parameters 'have a certain effect on case-marking patterns (...). Furthermore, the thematic role of an argument can also influence the case-marking patterns it can participate in.'²⁰

It seems, therefore, that semantically based transitivity with its gradient nature is perfectly suited to account for OE alternations of object case which do not involve a change in the meaning of a verb (cf. 16ii). As noted above, I am aware of four authors discussing OE object case alternations from the perspective of transitivity:²¹ Plank (1982), Goh (2000b), Toyota (2008, 2009) and van Gelderen (2011). All of them, more or less directly, resort to the notion of scalar semantic transitivity: Plank invokes the notion of *opposedness*, which is also referred to by

19 The status of the transitivity parameters has, naturally, been subject to debate. For instance Tsunoda (1985) argues that not all parameters are of equal relevance; a similar assertion is expressed in Lazard (1998); likewise Malchukov (2006) criticises Hopper and Thompson's (1980) unranked and heterogeneous list as untenable for a full expression of transitivity-related phenomena.

20 Legendre *et al.* (1993) appeal to the notion of prominence (a term not clearly defined, as reported by de Swart 2007: 138, 141) and argue for a relationship between the prominence of arguments and their formal encoding.

21 Numerous authors note the fact that OE verbs show case alternations, for example Mitchell (1985), Allen (1995), Quinn (2005), etc. Practically every researcher dealing with OE verbs makes a note of the fact. However, few have studied what underlies this alternation and its relationship to transitivity.

Goh, along with *affectedness*; van Gelderen talks about *affectedness* and *definiteness* and Toyota talks about the degree of (*energy*) *transfer*.

The essence of Plank's (1982) contribution to the issue of case alternations in OE is contained in Section 2 ('Object Cases and Verb Meaning in Old English') of a paper devoted to a seemingly unrelated topic, entitled *Coming into Being among the Anglo-Saxons*. The article is primarily devoted to an analysis of linguistic expressions the Anglo-Saxon relied on to talk about having children. This is intended to offer a glimpse into the nature of their beliefs about procreation, hence the title. But it does offer an interesting contribution to the issue of case alternations to the extent that all later studies represent only variations of Plank's original proposal.

Plank's idea is that OE case alternations are not meaningless but encode different degrees of *opposedness* between the arguments of a clause. Since the degree of *opposedness* can only be defined with reference to another relation, the concept of *opposedness* is relational rather than absolute. As a result, 'we occasionally find vacillation in the choice of object cases without significant difference in meaning' (Plank 1982: 85). The basic idea is, however, that a higher degree of *opposedness* is expressed by the accusative case, while the dative expresses a lower degree.²² What this means for OE verbs is that whatever general lexical meaning they have, their ultimate sense is determined in use. And this is done with the contribution of object case choices. As noted above, all later contributions draw on this interpretation of OE cases.

In a paper devoted to alternative case markings of objects of OE verbs, written almost twenty years later, Goh (2000b) notes with surprise that this kind of variation has not attracted much linguistic attention. In the same spirit as Plank but in a different framework, Goh argues against treating the alternation as a free variation²³ which does not entail any relevant differences and which would render it 'arbitrary or purposeless' (Goh 2000b: 197). Instead, as noted above, the author adopts Plank's concept of *opposedness*, strengthens it with Hopper and Thompson's idea of *affectedness* and argues that the case alternation expresses

different degrees of semantic opposedness and affectedness. In particular, the relative obliqueness of NPs, which is based on the potential for passivization, provides strong linguistic evidence for this claim. In conclusion, different degrees of opposedness and affectedness formed by alternative object case markings should be seriously considered in the interpretation of OE texts.

Goh (2000b: 197)

²² The semantics of the genitive is tackled only in passing, as it does not contribute to the main topic pursued by Plank (1982).

²³ This is not only dictated by the requirements of the theory but also motivated by Goh's interpretation of the actual linguistic data.

What is very telling, however, is that in order to account for the linguistic facts exhibited in OE Goh, in spite of representing generative linguistics, resorts to the theoretical concepts offered by functional approaches. As noted above, van Gelderen (2011) overcomes this problem by transplanting these concepts into minimalist terms. In particular, van Gelderen (2011: 128–129) claims that in OE ‘the genitive Case is used when the object is partially affected, i.e. when the measure of involvement of the object is relevant (...). Limit of involvement translates into an absence of definiteness. (...) The accusative is used in signaling affectedness (...)’ In other words, the genitive vs. accusative alternation expresses partial affectedness and definiteness respectively. These ideas are ‘translated’ into the feature system of Minimalism by an appeal to interpretable measure-features (situated in a functional projection ASP) ‘responsible for the affectedness or non-affectedness of the Theme, marked by either accusative or genitive respectively’ Gelderen (2011: 132).

It has to be emphasised, however, that van Gelderen’s discussion of object case alternations, although representing a formal step forward with respect to Goh (2000b), ignores the dative case, while the dative seems to have appeared in these alternations much more frequently than the genitive. In effect, van Gelderen’s account of OE object case alternations has to be considered incomplete.

Toyota’s (2009) approach to transitivity also views it as a gradient concept. According to Toyota, ‘transitivity can take advantage of case markings in order to create different degrees of transfer such as marking the direct object with accusative, dative or locative case’ (Toyota 2009: 50).

In conclusion, the researchers differ considerably in the details but the overall picture they present is the same: they view transitivity as a concept expressing ‘differences in degree rather than in kind’ (Plank 1982: 86). In effect, the higher the degree of *affectedness/opposedness/(energy) transfer*, the higher the degree of transitivity, itself related to the potential for passivisation.

This takes us to (16iii), i.e. the passivisation possibilities exhibited by OE verbs. While Goh (2000b: 186) formally represents a generative model and as such does not belong to this section, the theoretical machinery she applies to a discussion of OE transitivity is, as shown above, inherently functional. Therefore, it seems beneficial to see how the author deals with the two types of OE passivisation.

Claiming as she does that the ‘distinction encoded in cases represents different degrees of opposedness or affectedness’, Goh (2000b: 194) remarks that it is ‘based on the potential for passivization’. This is done via an appeal to ‘an obliqueness hierarchy’, which ranks NP arguments with respect to

their cases.²⁴ The hierarchy separates the accusative case from the dative and genitive. What this means is that accusative NPs in OE are less oblique than dative or genitive ones (Goh 2000b: 190) and the less oblique the case, the more passivisable it is. However, since the obliqueness hierarchy is actually *based* on the two types of passivisation (discussed in Section 2.3), it does not contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon at all.

Let me now move on to the other author who deals with the relationship between the case alternations of objects and passivisation in OE, i.e. Toyota (2009).²⁵ As noted above, according to Toyota (2009: 50), alternative case markings of OE verbal objects express different degrees of transfer, i.e. different degrees of transitivity. However, when it comes to the relationship between different object cases and the type of passive formation a given verb participates in, Toyota merely states that '[a]s in the case of active voice expressing different degrees of energy transfer according to case marking, the passive can be constructed with different subject cases' (Toyota 2009: 46). Note, however, that we do not receive any answer here: Toyota merely restates the fact that cases are related to energy transfer and since this is true of the active, the same applies to the passive clauses.

In conclusion, the fine-tuned system of semantic transitivity is perfectly suited to account for OE alternations of the type specified in (16ii). As for the variation specified in (16i), Hopper and Thompson's (1980) interpretation of transitivity in its original form cannot account for these, as shown in Malchukov (2006). However, since numerous advances within functional approaches have made it possible to successfully deal with the phenomenon, functional grammars can be said to be capable of articulating these alternations as well. What is, however, left unexplained is the relationship between OE cases and the two types of passivisation: since the cases express a difference of degree and transitivity is viewed as a scalar phenomenon, it is not possible to draw any dividing lines. In effect, it seems inherent in scalar approaches to transitivity that they will preclude binary oppositions: first of all between verbs which do not produce passives at all and those that do, and within the latter group between verbs that produce personal passives and those whose passives are impersonal.

²⁴ Goh (2000b) explains that while the concept of relative obliqueness is not new in itself, the way she applies it to account for the OE facts differs from its earlier interpretations. In contrast to approaches defining it with respect to grammatical roles or functions, she defines it with respect to the cases of the arguments.

²⁵ Plank (1982) does not deal with passivisation at all.

4. Conclusion

As stated in the Introduction, OE transitivity has not attracted much attention and while it is obvious that if it constituted the focus of any systematic research, solutions would be proposed which would accommodate the specific OE data, regardless of the assumed model, it is, however, very telling that the existing accounts are not, at this stage, ready to explain in a systematic way the variant of transitivity encountered in OE. On the whole, however, each of the analysed approaches seems very well equipped to explain a particular aspect of OE transitivity discussed here, while it is less (or not at all) suited to account for other properties.

In particular, formal grammars seem perfectly suited to account for valency alternations accompanied by a meaning change (16i). Functional grammars offer an apparatus tuned to detect and express the fine details of alternations of object case which do not entail a change in the meaning of the verb (16ii), while traditional approaches *jointly* account for the passivisation properties of OE verbs (16iii), to the effect that the quantitative variant predicts which OE verbs can passivise, while the qualitative approach sets apart verbs producing personal passives from verbs whose passives are impersonal. It is true that formal grammars are also capable of expressing the difference but it has to be emphasised that what the formal approaches offer here is a restatement of observations concerning passivisation, in contrast to traditional grammars, which offer classifications allowing us to *predict* passivisation facts typical of OE verbs. In effect, it can be concluded that each of the relevant aspects is best accounted for by a different theory.

The above observations prompt two types of conclusions. First of all, if a model does not explain everything, it does not, in effect, explain anything. Secondly, and much more optimistically, each of the approaches has an invaluable and unique perspective to offer, which is not available if a different standpoint is taken. The models, therefore, can be seen as complementing each other.

Assuming a broader view on the same facts reveals yet another set of inferences. First of all, we see new solutions to certain problems springing up from their older versions, effectively offering restatements rather than breakthroughs in the understanding of the analysed concepts. Formal grammars are extremely refined developments of traditional approaches. Note the earlier vs. later understanding of transitivity discussed in Section 3.1, where the older one relied on the number of arguments, just as the quantitative traditional approach does (Section 2.1) and the latter one shifted the focus to the presence of a particular element: the *external* argument – a condition reminiscent of the presence of a *direct* (as opposed to *indirect*) object as a defining property of transitivity in the qualitative variant of the traditional approach (Section 2.2).

The same can be said of the functional approaches. The system in which object cases correspond to the degree of transitivity brings a distant echo of an almost century-old notion introduced by Meillet and Vendryes (1924: 522), who claim that in Indo-European the case of the verbal objects expressed different shades of relationships that the object bore to the verb: '[a]n Indo-European verb did not 'govern' the case of its complement; rather, the noun juxtaposed to the verb was inflected in the case required by the meaning that was expressed by the case itself'.²⁶ While there are significant differences between the two approaches (the latter incorporating parameters of description reaching outside the V+NP complex), what they have in common is the assertion that the case of the object expresses in a meaningful way the relationship of the object to the verb.

Another, albeit very different, example of convergence is related to the 'clandestine' rejection of the transitive vs. intransitive contrast within more recent versions of formal grammar in favour of a three-fold distinction into transitive vs. ergative vs. unaccusative verbs. While we have shown that the membership of ergatives shifted from intransitives to transitives in later versions of the theory and it is in fact still possible to talk about intransitive verbs, note that the term is not frequently invoked. This has a two-fold significance. First of all, as already noted, the notion of an *intransitive* verb does not seem crucial to the description of English, just as the notion of a neuter verb was unfit to serve that function. Secondly, and more importantly, by renouncing the transitive vs. intransitive contrast, formal grammars have, in effect, made a step towards functional approaches, for which a binary view on transitivity has long been insufficient. This, in turn, indicates that under the differences in the theoretical machinery there are underlying similarities. It is important, as we have not only seen that the findings of one theory can enrich another but we can also see that the views of the different theories do not stand in contradiction to each other. In fact, this is to be expected, as the different models describe the same linguistic reality.

That the semantic and syntactic approaches to transitivity can be happily married is shown in an extremely interesting approach to transitivity offered in Toyota (2009), which combines syntactic and semantic transitivity, showing the need for both. The author shows the two types of transitivity to be diachronically related, claiming that OE transitivity is of the older, semantic type. It resorts to subtle distinctions of transfer expressed by the choice of object case. This type gave way to a chronologically younger, syntactic transitivity. In this way Toyota's diachronic account of English transitivity shows the necessity for both formal and functional approaches. An observation which should not be overlooked at this point is that Toyota's account can be compared to Meillet and Vendryes's (1924) diachronic interpretation of the notion of transitivity. Their claim that transitivity

26 Translation quoted from Luraghi (2010: 221).

is a concept inapplicable to Indo-European means in effect the language did not yet have syntactic transitivity.²⁷

In conclusion, if we learn our history lesson well, we will note that the genuine nature of transitivity seems best articulated by a set of very diverse tools, which, though eclectic, are tailor-made for the linguistic data and not the other way around. Perhaps, then, the Latin-based notion of transitivity is, after all, a concept of great consequence.

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27 Faarlund (2013: 278) remarks that '[a]ccording to some Indo-Europeanists, the Indo-European verbs were all originally intransitive'. Note that this statement can only have diachronic significance, as synchronically it does not make sense to classify all verbs as intransitive since the category does not have any structural relevance. I, therefore, prefer Meillet and Vendryes's (1924) standpoint on the matter.

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