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SUBJECTLESS INFINITIVE COMPLEMENTS OF PERIPHRASTIC CAUSATIVE VERBS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH AND POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE LOSS OF THE CONSTRUCTION

Abstract: The article presents selected facts concerning two kinds of analysis of Subjectless Infinitive Complements (\emptyset I) of Causative Verbs in Middle English. One of them is the Indefinite Object Deletion Analysis (hence IOD), which can be considered natural in terms of the Object Deletion principles. The other one is the Verb Raising Analysis (hence VR) which provides some interesting facts about the history of English causatives. Among others, the article addresses the auxiliary-like behaviour of causative verbs in Middle English and says that the very loss of \emptyset I can be accounted for reasonably by postulating that the existence of \emptyset I and passive *aci* constructions are mutually exclusive. In addition, one should also remember about the double application of IOD and VR, which yielded unclear and semantically complicated structures, as possible factors in the loss of \emptyset I constructions in English.

Keywords: Syntax, Subjectless Infinitive Complements, periphrastic causative verbs, Middle English.

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wybrane fakty dotyczące dwóch rodzajów analizy bezpodmiotowych dopełnień bezokolicznikowych (\emptyset I) czasowników kauzatywnych w języku średnioangielskim. Jedną z analiz jest *Indefinite Object Deletion Analysis* (stąd IOD). Drugą jest *Verb Raising Analysis* (stąd VR), która to analiza w ciekawy sposób wyjaśnia historyczne zachowanie angielskich czasowników kauzatywnych. Artykuł odnosi się również między innymi do specjalnego statusu czasowników kauzatywnych – podobnego do statusu czasowników posiłkowych i postuluje, że utratę konstrukcji \emptyset I w biegu historii języka angielskiego można racjonalnie wyjaśnić poprzez wskazanie, że współistnienie konstrukcji \emptyset I i biernej

konstrukcji *aci* wzajemnie się wyklucza. Ponadto należy również pamiętać o podwójnym zastosowaniu IOD lub VR w jednym zdaniu, co prowadziło do niejasnych i skomplikowanych struktur znaczeniowych, jako możliwej przyczynie eliminacji konstrukcji \emptyset I z języka angielskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: Składnia, bezpodmiotowe dopełnienia bezokolicznikowe, peryfrastyczne czasowniki kauzatywne, język średnioangielski.

Introduction

Causation is one of the most fascinating and often discussed issues in philosophy, philosophy of language and linguistics. Regrettably, appropriate discussion over the analysis of the Middle English periphrastic causative constructions has not received sufficient attention in modern linguistic theory. Back in the 1970s, it was probably only Baron (1972), (1974) and (1977) who undertook a detailed structural exposition of Middle English causative verbs. Unfortunately her works were merely devoted to a limited number of verbs, analyzed in the context of linguistic change. Other researchers, e.g., Royster (1922), Ellegård (1953), Takahashi (1984), Terasawa (1985) and Fischer (1992), (1995), (1996) and (1997), Lauer (2010), Lowrey (2012) as well as Moretti (2022) concentrated either on selected causative verbs or were concerned about specific, fragmentary discussion of the verbs in question. In turn, Gołąbek and Stachurska (2020) published a short outline of the history of English periphrastic causative verbs as a part of their monograph on sociolinguistic variation.

Periphrastic causative constructions are two-part configurations which express causation. The Modern English system of periphrastic causatives differs from the Middle English one. In Modern English seven different types of complements can be used with periphrastic causative verbs; however, not every periphrastic causative may be used with every complement. It is important to distinguish *let* from other causative verbs with its permissive/causative meaning. Modern English periphrastic causatives can be divided into two groups as far as their structure is concerned: verbs taking *to*-infinitive and verbs occurring with bare infinitives as their complements. The most prominent causative verbs taking bare infinitive complements are *make* and *let*. The history of Modern English periphrastic causatives can be traced back to the Middle English period.

Middle English had a full range of periphrastic causative verbs. The causative verbs *let*, *do(n)*¹, *make*, *cause*, *gar* and *get* occupied the most significant position. The causative verbs *let*, *do(n)* and *make* were inherited from Old English, whereas the remaining verbs developed their causative use in the Middle English period. Generally, the causative verbs in Middle English could be used either with a plain or (*for*) *to*-infinitive. It was also possible to find structures of type NP AP, NP PP,

¹ As far as the history of *do* is concerned, we should bear in mind that the causative *do* may have given rise to auxiliary *do*.

etc. functioning as the complementation of the causative verbs. One might also come across structures with a *that*-clause which had the same function. Last, but not least, it was not unusual to attest sentences with causative verbs plus the infinitive, with the logical subject of the infinitive being not expressed. This particular feature associated with the use of the causative verbs in Middle English will be the focus of our analysis in the present paper.

1. Subjectless Infinitive Complements of Middle English Causative Verbs

It is a well-documented fact that both in Old and Middle English one could attest causative verb constructions which had an infinitive complement with its subject being omitted. This is in line with Moretti (2022:167) who says that “although the V – INF pattern is no longer used in Present-day English causative constructions, it was possible in Old and Middle English to have causative constructions with the subject of the infinitive unexpressed (for example *he made build the castle)”. Hence, in Old English and Middle English we come across sentences like (1) – (4) where causative verbs (or perceptive verbs) have an infinitive complement without an accusative subject.

- (1) *virtue maketh wynne hevene* (Ayenbite 84)
‘Virtue makes people win heaven’
- (2) *Herode king let sekenn Crist* (Ormulum 7308)
‘King Herod made [soldiers] seek Christ’
- (3) *thet maketh to vorthenche* (Ayenbite 125,5)
‘that makes people grieve’
- (4) *They... lette cry that all men sholde departe* (Malory 23,36)
‘They made people shout so that all men should leave’

Such a construction will be referred to as ØI. ØI is not possible in Modern English except for a few cases which are idiomatic expressions, e.g., *make believe*. In Middle English ØI after causative verbs was not unusual and there must have been some rules to generate such structures in the grammar of the language. Three possible kinds of analysis for ØI come to the fore: the Passive Analysis, the Indefinite Object Deletion (hence IOD) analysis and Verb Raising (VR) analysis (cf. Takahashi 1984). Below, we present some of the arguments against the validity of the Passive Analysis. In our opinion, the oddity of the Passive Analysis is rather evident, hence it will be disregarded in our subsequent considerations. In turn, we are going to concentrate on IOD and VR.

2. Indefinite Object Deletion Analysis

Takahashi (1984:201) says that in German (and also in Dutch) causative verbs can take ØI when the subject of the infinitive is unspecified e.g.,

- (5) *Ich lasse ein Lied singen*
‘I let a song be sung’

- (6) *Ik laat deze woorden uitspreken*
 ‘I let these words be pronounced’

It may be argued that Equi² and IOD are independently motivated rules which are operative in the derivation of sentences like (5) and (6) (cf. Takahashi *ibid.*). Further on, it may be plausible to claim that the IOD analysis can also account for ØI in Middle English (and Old English). Let us demonstrate the derivation of (1), (3) and (4) (here repeated as (7), (8) and (9) respectively), making use of IOD.

- (7) *virtue maketh wynne hevne* (Ayenbite 84)
 ‘Virtue makes people win heaven’
 (8) *thet maketh to vorthenche* (Ayenbite 125,5)
 ‘that makes people grieve’
 (9) *They... lette cry that all men sholde departe* (Malory 23,36)
 ‘They made people shout so that all men should leave’
 (7’) a. make people [people win heaven]
 b. make people [Ø win heaven] ‘Equi’
 c. make Ø [Ø win heaven] ‘IOD’
 d. makes win heaven ‘other rules’
 (8’) a. make people [people grieve]
 b. make people [Ø grieve] ‘Equi’
 c. make Ø [Ø grieve] ‘IOD’
 d. makes to grieve
 (9’) a. let people [people cry [that...]]
 b. let people [Ø cry [that...]] ‘Equi’
 c. let Ø [Ø cry [that...]] ‘IOD’
 d. let cry that... ‘other rules’

In IOD we do not encounter the difficulties that we meet in the Passive Analysis proposed by Takahashi (1984:201). We do not need to distinguish the derivations of ØI according to the transitivity of infinitive verbs. To illustrate that point we can compare examples (7’) and (8’). As to the necessity for a restriction concerning IOD and the lack of an independent motivation for Conversion to Infinitive, this does not apply to IOD. This analysis does not involve the process of generating an agent phrase or a past participle. Another difficulty encountered in the Passive Analysis, that is the problem with the Equi analysis, disappears totally. From the examples presented, it is clear that the IOD analysis is quite compatible with the Equi analysis. The remaining difficulties that appear in the Passive Analysis are also resolved in the IOD analysis. Here, there is no need for a passivisation process which converts an object of the sequence V preposition to a passive subject (a process which was

² Equi (short for *Equivalent Noun Phrase Deletion*) is a syntactic rule (also known as a syntactic processes, transformation, or alternation) that relates sentence structures.

unfamiliar to the early periods of English). Also, we do not need to postulate the production of \emptyset I structures with a *that*-clause as an object of the infinitive verb.

We believe that in the IOD analysis, an indefinite object in the matrix sentence is supposed to be deleted by IOD after it has triggered identity deletion of the embedded subject, which is in line with Takahashi (1984:202). In Middle English it was not unnatural to leave indefinite objects unexpressed. In our opinion, in Middle English such indefinite objects were not expressed whenever the unexpressed item was clearly deduced from the context. This is precisely what Visser (1963-1973:§129) claims. The scholar argues that such a non-expression of the object occurs in Middle English whenever the unexpressed element can be understood clearly from the context or situation in order for the sentence to be intelligible.

Moreover, Takahashi (1984:203) says that in Middle English there was a rule to delete the object which is understandable from the context or situation, regardless of whether it is expressed explicitly somewhere else (e.g., in one of the conjuncts of co-ordinated sentences) or not. It may be added that in the case of the causative \emptyset I constructions, the action expressed by the infinitive verb can be supposed to be performed by non-specific people, probably the servants or followers of the person referred to by the subject NP of the causative verb. On the basis of the above observation, taking into consideration the IOD in the Middle English period, it may be postulated that the derivational processes described in sentences like (7')-(9') are valid. Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned factors we believe that the IOD analysis is superior to the Passive Analysis (cf. Takahashi 1984:202).

3. Verb Raising Analysis

3.1. Verb Raising

One of the most important effects of Verb Raising (VR) is the production of a simplex surface structure from a complex deep structure. The question is whether *aci* (Accusative with Infinitive) sentences with causative verbs behave like simplex sentences. It seems plausible to argue that there is some evidence suggesting the possibility of surface simplicity of *aci* sentences, which may be as follows³. The first piece of evidence is the word order. The word order in *aci* sentences with Middle English causative (and perceptive) verbs shows more flexibility than those with other classes of verbs. In the following sentences (10)-(11), the subjects of the infinitives are not in their normal position, but either before the higher verb or after the lower verb:

(10) *Y shal the make blede* (Firumbras 3738)
'I will make you bleed'

(11) *... and lateth ouer go al zour wepyng* (Troy Book 2, 3937)
'and let all your weeping pass'

³ Takahashi (1984:206-207) gives very similar types of evidence in support of the possibility of surface simplicity of *aci* sentences.

In Takahashi's opinion such sentences are rather rare in Middle English. However, we should remember that sentences with verbs of mental perception such as *believe* or *know* and verbs of saying, e.g., *say* do not show this pattern at all⁴. Assuming that the sentences (10)-(11) have simplex structure as the result of VR, we may postulate, after Takahashi (1984:207), the following derivation:

- (12) a. I make you [you bleed]
b. I make you [Ø bleed] 'Equi'
c. I make bleed you 'VR'
d. I you make bleed 'Scrambling and other rules'

Our second piece of evidence comes from the observation of the auxiliary-like behaviour of causative verbs. As it is well known, some causative verbs in the Middle English period, especially *do* and *let*, tend to behave like auxiliaries.

- (13) *Unto the mayde that hir doth serve* (Chaucer Romaunt of Rose 2697)
'Towards the virgin that serves her'
(14) *And let do wryten othere newe* (Confessio Amantis II 958)
'And make [people] write other kinds [of things] anew'

Takahashi (1984:208) claims that the causative verbs in the above sentences can be regarded as tense auxiliaries. However, the question is whether *do* still functions as a causative here. As is known, the relation between the causative and auxiliary *do* is a long-standing problem. Mustanoja (1960:602) quotes (13) as an example where *do* is used in a colourless and unemphatic periphrasis which is equivalent to a simple finite form *he did come-he came* (for details of this type of structures cf. Ellegård (1953), Rissanen (1991), Miller and Leffel (1994)). In turn, Lowrey (2012) notices that causative *do* shifted from being used in contexts which were non-agentive to being more frequently used in agentive ones. As to (14), Takahashi (1984:208) considers it reasonable that *let* functions as an auxiliary and *do* is a causative verb. Further on, he says that from a cross-linguistic point of view, there seems to be a tendency that if a causative is a verb-raising causative, it behaves like an auxiliary verb. Therefore, examples (13) and (14), where the causative verb behaves like a tense causative, can be taken to suggest the great possibility of these verbs being verb-raising verbs. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that Middle English developed the full use of VR in causative sentences. The question is why this possibility disappeared in the course of the history of English. The issue will be addressed in the subsequent section.

⁴ The only exception where the main object of the higher verb is not placed between the higher and lower verb is the structure in which the object is preposed by WH-movement.

3.2. Loss of Verb Raising

Takahashi (1984:208) assumes the existence of passive *aci* sentences like (15) to be one cause of the disappearance of \emptyset I:

- (15) *He...to their ine did it be born* (Cursor Mundi 4856)
 ‘He made it be borne to their inn’

Later on, he claims that such passive *aci* has been attested in all periods of the history of English. Thus, there are four possible ways to express *I make one call her*, with infinitive complements:

- (16) a. I make one call her
 b. I make her be called
 c. i) I make call her
 ii) I make her call

In terms of pragmatics, some of these ways may disappear when there are too many alternative ways to express the same notions, as it is natural to dismiss redundancy. Hence, Takahashi (1984:209) postulates that the minor types, i.e., VR-produced complement types like (16c), should be lost. He also claims that there seems to be a principle that only the languages without a rule of VR allow passive *aci* constructions. Let us stress that the situation in Middle English, that is, the co-existence of \emptyset I and passive *aci* constructions, is not compatible with this principle. Therefore, the disappearance of \emptyset I can be explained as a modification aiming at the conformity to the principle. In this way we can account for the loss of \emptyset I in the VR analysis.

4. Double application of Indefinite Object Deletion or Verb Raising

In Middle English we also find sentences like the following, where several verbs follow one another. We believe that those structures may result from double application of IOD or VR:

- (17) *Plenty of wine they have done let meke* (Mandeville’s Travels 77,4)
 ‘They have caused [people] to make plenty of wine’

Such concentrations of verbs might have caused ambiguity and difficulty. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the loss of the rule to derive \emptyset I is partly attributed to the fact that it produced unnatural sequences of verbs as seen in the above example.

Conclusions

This paper presents some revisited facts considering two kinds of analysis for \emptyset I sentences in Middle English. One of them is the IOD analysis, which can be considered natural in terms of the Object Deletion principles in Middle English. The other is the VR Analysis which provides some interesting facts about the history of English causatives. The auxiliary-like behaviour of causative verbs in Middle English

can receive a convincing explanation and the very loss of ØI can be accounted for reasonably by postulating that the existence of ØI and passive *aci* constructions are mutually exclusive. In addition to those reasons, one should also remember about the double application of IOD and VR, which yielded unclear and semantically complicated structures, as possible factors in the disappearance of ØI constructions in Middle English.

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