

PREVERBATION IN THE OLD GERMANIC LANGUAGES:
A RESEARCH PROJECT

1. INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Western linguistics remains basically dependent on the assumptions about language and language study that were elaborated in the late Antiquity, on the basis of the Aristotelian philosophy of speech and of science in general. The descriptive approach rests on the practice of description and classification of nature, and takes language as one more among the objects of human experience in relation with the so-called external world. Science aim has thereafter been to provide accurate descriptions of what exists and, if possible, causal connexions between the identified entities in every domain of knowledge.

Despite the fact that the Aristotelian consideration of linguistic categories takes place in the context of the theory of tragedy, i. e., within the framework of literary aesthetics, his terms and concepts were soon taken as parts of a naturalistic account of what language or speech consists of. Such an account was of no immediate practical use, and a descriptive grammar in our modern sense came only several centuries afterwards. The main concern among Greek linguistics was the philological study of their own classics, whose texts show significant dialectal divergences. From the old Greek grammars only two main theoretical works survive: Dionisius Thrax's modest *tekhne grammatike* and Appolonios Dyscholos's discursive syntax, who conceived syntax for the first time as the study of morphological element collocations rather than as the study of their connective properties.

The late Latinity has provided the European scholarship with the model of grammatical activity in two works: Donatus and Priscianus's grammars,

dependent on the Aristotelian logics and based on the subject-predicate utterance core. This paradigm assigns the free use of cases in Greek and Latin, so to say, the protagonism of the whole syntax. A scheme of action soon raised, as the ontological correlate to the grammatical system of case complements (subject, object, receiver, cause, qualitative determination). Within the humanistic tradition, Scaliger's work is a good account of both the grammatical and the ontological basic categories in terms of a general theory of action.

The use of verbs with preverb as a means of conveying meaning not otherwise lexicalized was, to a large extent, dead in classical Latin: verbs and preverbs were rigidly bound into plainly lexical units. Productivity in this domain is word-making, not sentence-making. But in old Greek, Vedic, Sanscrit, Hittite and in modern Germanic and Slavonic languages it is quite the opposite: there is an important linguistic productivity which consists of the syntactic innovation in the verb-preverb connection. Here we can distinguish two main streams of linguistic innovation: a conceptual and more static one, consisting of the finding of new words whether by connecting idiomatic or Greek-Latin roots with existing suffixes or by combining extant words in new composites, and a dynamic, syntactic way of conveying new meaning by a productive combination of rather abstract and unspecific verbs with rather abstract and general, but highly determined, particles. Both ways are in a quite different relation with the concept of time in language: the former aims at getting new entities provided with some ontological consistency (here we surprisingly find the Sanscrit use of nominal composites to express context-bound facts, composites which are, so to say, only *parole* elements, despite the nominalization and substantialization usually implied); the latter, the pre-verbation method, does not point at temporal permanence: it builds the utterance for the momentary occurrence and, in this case, the speakers are immediately creative, even if they make their combinations in a highly codified way.

The role of active pre-verbation is so central in such languages that in the language acquisition stages children often go through a period of expression building largely based on it: some lexical units are replaced by the preverbs

most frequently connected with them (a lamp is called *an* (“on”) by German children).

But as linguistics is based, as we have seen, on the grammatical habits of a language which lacked productive syntactic preverbatation, the dominant syntactical model remains fixed on the nominal-verb core of the verb with its nominal complements. Modern linguistics has to overcome a serious conceptual difficulty when aiming at representing the central role of preverbatation in the syntax of some Indo-European languages.

The research team formed at the University of Salamanca for the “Indo-European preverbatation Project” has, as its main goal, the comparative study of this syntactical and lexical procedure in most ancient and mediaeval Indo-European languages showing this feature in one or another evolutive stage, as a means to correct the dominant models of describing the central expression patterns in such languages. The Germanic languages considered - Gothic, Old High German, Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon- play a heuristically important role in this respect, because the Germanic languages show a very strong productivity of that procedure along their whole history and, being spoken by the linguists in the Project, it is possible a direct linguistic sensibility for their immediate appreciation of such constructions meaning.

2. THE EMPIRICAL BASIS

The research is based on an exhaustive case sample of motion verbs with preverb in the Rigveda, Dr. Ana Agud’s previous work. This scholar has also developed the main lines of the Project. Thereafter some verbal roots expressing motion have been selected, following the criterion of taking the main Indo-European motion roots correlates (roots: **er-* “run”; **ghengh-* “go”, “come”; **g^wem-* “go”, “come”; **k^werp-* “go”, “go back”; **per-* “go”, “travel”;

**steigh-* “go up”, “go down”; **tregh-* “run”; **wendh-* “go back”), and the roots with highest frequency in each language.

Among the extant texts, we have selected those which can be hold as the most representative of spontaneous speech: narrative, spoken discourses. Of course, between literary composition and spontaneous oral language there is a fundamental difference which cannot be obliterated by any linguistic method whatsoever. The grammar we are building from our corpus is the one of the written language, depending on that of the oral language in an unspecified way. For the Germanic languages we have also taken the Bible, having in mind that the Bible is the only extant text in Gothic.

The chosen texts are as follows:

Gothic: the Bible;

Old High German: *Tatian*, *Isidor*, *Die Benediktinerregel*;

Old English: King Alfred’s translation of *Cura Pastoralis*, *The AngloSaxon Chronicle*, the Bible, Aelfric and Wulfstan’s *Sermons*;

Old Saxon: *Heliand*;

Old Norse: not selected yet.

3. INFORMATION SCHEME

A computerized information card has been designed, containing the following items: textual localization of the sentence, literary gender, metrical scheme, preverb specification (in numeral code) and position feature specification (before-after, joint-separate), verbal root, its morphological characterization (augmentation, reduplication, vocalism state, primary and derivative suffixes, person, tense and modality), main characteristics of the syntactical construction (number and kind of complements, particles, sentence type, dependent clauses). The card also contains the sentence in full and, for some

languages, a suitable standard translation into the nearest language (Sanskrit, Avestan, Hittite, Gothic, Old High German and Old Saxon into modern German, Old English into modern English, etc.). In the case of translations, the sentences are recorded in both languages.

The file is processed by a special program on DBase IV basis, which allows combined searches of part or the whole of the features registered, The program, that we have named Rama-Indra, has been developed by some colleagues of the Faculty of Physics, at the University of Salamanca. It has easy routines for adding and deleting data, consulting and analysing. The card lists, ordered upon various criteria (root, preverb, etc.) are easily reached. The printing of the cards containing the texts renders the philological study of the texts simple.

4. INFORMATION PROCESS: GOALS

First, we are looking for statistically significant correlations among the features selected. The underlying hypothesis is that there must have been an effective influence of the syntactical phenomenon of preverbatum upon the development of the morphological verbal systems themselves. This influence could be indirectly detected by the study of frequency or collocations. We have seen, for instance, that in Sanskrit imperative uses of motion verbs are without exception preverbed. Such correlations could provide meaningful glances at the development of morphological categories occurrences. Here, of course, results can only be rightly evaluated if comparative evidence can be adduced.

Secondly, we are trying to get a “fresh perspective” on the syntactical sense of preverbatum by concentrating attention on it and by considering the rest of syntax as its circumstance. This is certainly onesided, but this change of perspective will be productive, we think, so far as it represents the complementary onesidedness to the usual syntactic and semantic perception.

5. INFORMATION PROCESSING: METHOD

Leaving aside the prejudgment against the central role that particles play in the verbal expression structuration, we look at the text series assembled by one correlation or the other and try to find semantic similarities and differences. Here we have no prejudged analysis method: each researcher, facing each language and kind of text, must find the most significant features of the constructions under exam, and then inform the other researchers, in order to undertake corresponding searching processes in cognate languages. The method rests open.

The basis is a systematical analysis of constellations among the features fixed on the cards. First, we play rather freely with them, just to obtain the random significant statistics. Surprises arise: in the Rigvedic research, the most advanced so far, we have observed that one constellation of two preverbs is represented with only one root, and all the occurrences are directly or indirectly related to the god Indra. Such evidences show the possibility of application of this research to plainly philological aims. This is quite consequent: we are not examining oral speech, and the correct approach to the written language is the philological one.

We conceive the available systems of grammatical description as alternative approaches to the linguistic object. The different syntactical frameworks of European or American structuralism, generative grammar, valency and dependence grammar, functional grammar, etc. can be taken as a suitable way of description when the facts observed and the interest they raise just meet into a constellation that suggests precisely one of these frames and not another. None of them is the right one in itself, each is good enough for a given purport. So the methodological definition of the description aims must be a conscious one, because only the aims determine and justify the selection of a conceptual alternative for the description.

In this sense, it is an “open method”, especially open for the philological perspective. We postulate that linguistic descriptions are of little worth in

themselves, and we try to put them at the service of the better understanding of texts. Our comparative perspective has this purpose too.

6. STATE OF THE GENERAL PROJECT

At present only preliminary work has been done in most of the fields. It includes the software preparation, which must be specific for each language processed, the discussion of bibliography about preverbs, and methodological debates regarding the card design. Only the Rigvedic research shows a complete file of the occurrences and some analyses on the preverb *upa-*. This work provides the cues for a better planning of other files which are being composed now.

For the Germanic languages we distinguish between primary and secondary preverbation, which diachronically represent two complete cycles of just the same phenomenon. Differential research should be done in this domain.

7. STATE OF THE WEST GERMANIC LANGUAGES RESEARCH: GOTHIC

Die Gotische Bibel (The Gothic Bible) is the most advanced study in this particular field of the Germanic languages. Pilar Fernández Álvarez, who had previously written a grammar of Gothic, is applying her perfect knowledge of the text to this new study. It has been computerized, following the edition of W. Streitberg (Heidelberg, 1971). The card for this language, the same as for the other Germanic ones, includes localization (author, chapter, verse, type of sentence), preverb kind, position and number, verb morphology (tense, person, modality) and sentence or clause type. 21 different preverbs bound to the selected motion verbs (*gaggan* “go”; *galeipan* “go”, “come”; *qiman* “come”; *rinnan* “run”; *steigan* “go up”; *pragjan* “run”; *wandjan* “go back”) have been found: *af-*, *afar-*, *ana-*, *and-*, *at-*, *bi-*, *du-*, *faur-*, *faura-*, *fra-*, *ga-*, *hinder-*, *inn-*, *mip-*, *pairh-*, *ufar-*, *und-*, *ur-*, *us-*, *ut-*,

wipra- , in alphabetical order, and the occurrences have been fixed, both of these verbs and their preverbs.

So far the results are as follows:

Gaggan occurs 22 times, with the preverbs: *af-*, *afar-*, *at-*, *du-*, *faur-*, *faura-*, *ga-*, *inn-*, *mip-*, *pairh-*, *ufar-*, *us-*, *ut-*, *wipra-*.

Qiman occurs 40 times. It appears with: *ana-*, *faura-*, *fra-*, *ga-*, *mip-*, *us-*.

Leipan, which is never found unprefixated, occurs 174 times, with the preverbs: *af-*, *bi-*, *ufar-*, *us-*, *ga-*, *inn-*, *pairh-*, *mip-*, *hindar-*.

Steigan occurs 22 times, with: *at-*, *us-*, *ufar-*, *ga-*.

Pragjan appears only once, with the preverb *bi-*.

Rinnan presents 38 occurrences , with the following preverbs: *du-*, *ur-*, *bi-*, *ga-*, *und-*, *at-*, *and-*.

Wandjan occurs 35 times, with: *ga-*, *us-*, *at-*.

From this point the research is advancing, even if it is too early to offer conclusions.

8. OLD HIGH GERMAN

For Old High German some texts have already been computerized: *Tatian* (E. Sievers's edition, Paderborn, 1892), *Isidor* (H. Eggers's edition, Tübingen, 1964) and *Die Benediktinerregel* (U. Daab's edition, Tübingen, 1959). The research, the same as that in Gothic is being carried out by Mariãa Pilar Fernãndez Aãlvarez, who has also written a grammar of Old High German.

The preverbs found in the corpus, 20 (23 forms), are the following: *ab-*, *ar-/er-*, *bi-*, *fora-*, *fur-/for-*, *furi-*, *fram-*, *gi-*, *in-*, *int-*, *nidar-*, *thuruh-*, *ubar-/obar-*, *uf-*, *ufar-*, *umbi-*, *uz-*, *widar-*, *zi-*, *zuo-*.

The partial results refer only to *Tatian*: This text including the verbs: *faran* “travel”; *gangan* “go”, “come”; *queman* “go”, “come”; *stigan* “go up”, “go down”; *wenten* “go back”; *werban* “go”, “go back”, with the following preverbs and occurrences:

Gangan occurs 207 times, with: *ar-*, *bi-*, *fram-*, *furi-*, *gi-*, *in-*, *int-*, *ubar-*,
uf-,

umbi-, *uz-*, *uuidar-*, *zi-*, *zuo-*.

Faran appears 36 times, with the preverbs: *ab-*, *ar-*, *fur-*, *fora-*, *furi-*, *thuru-*, *uuidar-*.

Queman occurs 10 times, with: *ar-*, *bi-*, *fora-*, *fram-*, *obar-*, *uf-*, *uz-*.

Stigan presents 62 occurrences, with the preverbs: *ar-*, *gi-*, *in-*, *nidar-*, *uf-*,

Wenten occurs 17 times, with: *gi-*, *uuidar-*.

Werben occurs 9 times, with the preverbs: *ar-*, *gi-*, *uuidar-*.

The number of occurrences in each of the preverbs has been fixed, but, the same as regarding Gothic, the doubtful instances must be reexamined before any results can be taken in mind as data.

9. OLD ENGLISH

No Old English text has been computerized yet. Most time has been spent in reading and discussing the numerous studies published, even if none of them covers the field of our research (the reference is given in the bibliography accompanying this paper), and in the careful selection of the texts.

The Bible has been chosen to enable the comparison with Gothic. Alfred's translation of *Cura Pastoralis* allows the comparison with Latin (the same as the texts in Old High German), and is at the same time a good example of the free use of the Latin texts, characteristic in Old English if compared with the other Germanic languages, a phenomenon due in part to the vague

sense of many of the prerverbs in the historical time, which enables a choice not determined by meaning. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* allows the study of the preverb evolution in Old English, embracing all the period, including older material than that of the time in which it was written and *The Peterborough Chronicle* going as far as the beginning of Middle English. Aelfric and Wulfstan's *Sermons* are representative of the spoken discourse, the one especially chosen for the Project.

Even as it is, we consider our Project wide and deep enough to be worth of being known by our colleagues. All advice and suggestion will be welcome, and we are open to any farther information on it, if requested.

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