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Information-structural characteristics of Middle English temporal adverbs

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Abstract. The article deals with the properties of temporal adverbs while marking information-structural components of XII-XV cen. English sentence. It investigates the interrelation of specific adverbs (*thenne, nou, after, tōdai* and *tomorwe*) with sentence Topic and Focus groups. Some regular patterns allow to identify the correlation between adverbial usage and sentence word order (direct and inverted), as well as, establish, which temporal adverbs have the highest information-structural response.

Keywords: sentence information structure, Focus, Topic, Old vs. New information, temporal adverbs, word order

Information structure (IS) theory focuses on relations of semantic groups. It presents the basis for sentence content, as well as, means of grammatical manifestation. The recent studies in IS framework concentrate on syntactic markers of IS components: ellipsis, referring expressions, word order, particles and adverbs [3; 6] Yet, the correlation between IS and Middle English temporal adverbs (*thenne, nou, after, tōdai, tomorwe*) in simple sentences requires further investigation. A pilot study was conducted in reliance on *Middle English Corpus of Prose and Verse* with 625 sentences selected for analysis. The initial hypothesis suggests that temporal adverbs irrespective their semantics are either sensitive to IS marking (e.g. *thenne*), may correlate with certain word order types (*nou, thenne*), or be resistant to IS component identification (*tōdai*).

Specifying IS, the representatives of generative paradigm refer to such domains as Old vs. New information, Topic vs. Comment, Focus vs. Background [4; 7]. The opposition Old/New information is associated with the taxonomy of inferred familiarity presupposing such types of information in the discourse: evoked > unused > inferable > containing inferable > brand-new anchored > brand-new. Therefore, E. Prince [8] singles out four information types:

Table 1. Types of Information in the Discourse

	Hearer-old	Hearer-new
Discourse-old	Evoked	Not-registered
Discourse-new	Unused	Brand new

The main factors determining information structuring are its discourse status and special aspects of data acquisition by the hearer. Discourse and hearer new information presupposes no previous reference to it. Hearer old and discourse new information concerns the state of things known to the hearer. Discourse and hearer old information implies its early mentioning in the text. Hearer new and discourse old information is not registered since the speaker unconsciously expects the hearer to follow the discourse. It should be noted that some language constructions sensitive to information status are generally associated with a fixed order in the discourse. This results from previous information reference or its being a part of a common ground [8].

In the present study we also propose to single out Topic/Comment and Focus/Ground structures. Their correlation with Old and New information for the speaker and the hearer are still the matter of hot debate in modern philological schools and traditions [Cf. 1; 2; 11; 14]. Topic is the element available and salient in the previous discourse, the essence of the sentence. The part of a sen-

tence providing more information on Topic is Comment. Topic mostly correlates with old information [13: 6], however it may present new one, as well. Focus introduces the most important information; therefore it bears focal stress, while the other sentence components establish its Ground. Focus, expresses new information, however, in some instances contextually old information representation may be observed. In one of the most renown Rizzi's framework [10] IS components are coded by the formula: [ForceP Force[_{TopP*} Top[_{FocP} Foc[_{TopP*} Top[_{FinP} Fin[IP...]]]]]], where ForceP identifies correlation of a sentence and context; TopP is the "essence" of the sentence; FocP is new information; FinP manifests such elements as tense, mood, voice, etc. Thus, Topic and Focus are sandwiches between ForceP and FinP [12].

The findings suggest that the most sensitive to IS component marking is adverb *thenne* (Cf. *Old English þanne, þænne, þonne*), recorded with such word order types as *þanne+VS(X)(X) – 81%*, *X+þanne+VS(X)(X) – 12,5%*, *þanne+SV(X)(X) – 6.5%*. E.g.

(1) **Thanne** hadde I been in blisse and nat in wo (Chaus. The Cant. Tales). – Then I'd have been in bliss and not in woe.

In this example, *Palamon* states that he should have served *Theseus*, and then everything would have been quite different for him. The placement of *þanne* before the verb marks the latter as sentence Focus, highlighting a hypothetical change of activity (discourse and hearer New information). Sentence (1) can be graphically represented as follows:

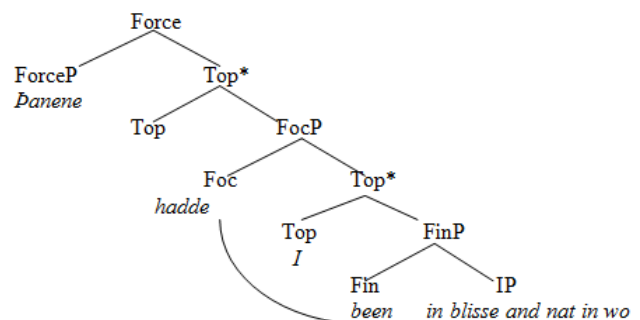


Fig. 1 Derivational model of IS sentence with *þanne+VS(X)(X)*

Examples of *X+þanne+VS(X)(X)* and *þanne+SV(X)(X)* are given in (2) and (3) respectively:

(2) And in the nyght **þanne** wolde he take his way (Chaus., The Cant. Tales). – And at night he would take his way.

The author relates about *Palamon's* misfortunes: he hides in the woods after the escape from prison and is willing to go to Thebes (*wolde... take his way*), which is

discourse and hearer new information. Adverb *thenne* marks the verb *wolde* as sentence Focus, highlighting the main character's volition to get to his destination. The graphic interpretation of sentence (2) is given in Fig. 2:

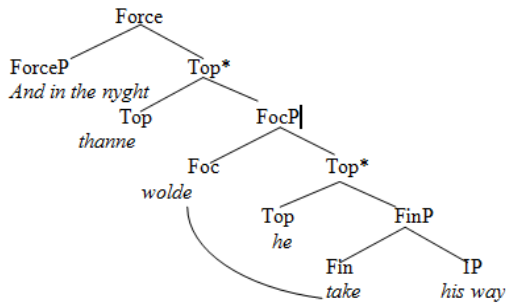


Fig. 2 Derivational model of IS sentence with X+thanne+VS(X)(X)

(3) But **thenne** they doubted and were aferde and delyuerd Iudas to her (Legends of the holy rood [folio Cxxxii:2]). – But then they doubted and were afraid and delivered Judah to her.

The abstract informs about the search of the Holy Cross. Judah warns people against telling the Queen where this place is; however, she commands to burn the people. Being frightened so much they have to bring Judah to her. Adverb *thenne* marks pronoun *they* (people) which represents discourse and hearer Old information. The delivery of Judah to the Queen (*delyuerd Iudas*) is discourse and hearer New information. The derivational model of sentence (3) looks thus:

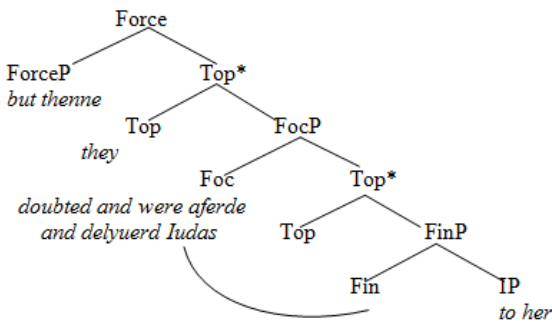


Fig. 3 Derivational model of IS sentence with *themne+SV*

Adverb *thenne* in sentence (3) marks the subject as Topic, while Focus phrase is formed by the verbs and the objects (*doubted and were aferde and delyuerd Iudas*).

In the first two models the adverb causes subject-verb inversion and introduces discourse New information. In these instances the speaker intends to indicate a change of activity. It predominantly concerns the instances in which the protagonist's actions are unexpected or the speaker arrives at specific conclusions. The contextual analysis proves that such utterances are aimed at limelighting important facts. Therefore, *thenne* before the verb identifies it as sentence Focus. Placement of *thenne* before the subject turns to be rare (6.5%): the subject identifies discourse and hearer Old information and functions as sentence Topic.

Adverb *nou* (*nu*), which refers to Old English *nu* ("now, at present, immediately; now that", also used as an interjection or an introductory word), is registered in such ME simple sentence patterns as: *nou+VS(X)(X)* – 50%, *nou+SVX* – 4.2%, *X+nou+VS(X)(X)* – 8.3%, *XSV+nou+X* – 12.5%, *XVS+nou+X* – 25%. E.g.

(4) **Nou** wringeþ hi here honden þis breþren eueruchon (Jacob and Iosep; ME Poem, 13th Cen.). – Now they twist their hands, these brothers everyone.

The extract narrates about the misfortunes of brothers. They are peacefully sleeping when suddenly their hands get twisted by someone. Therefore, *wringeþ* in sentence (4) shows a change of activity and represents discourse and hearer New information, while personal pronoun *hi* and demonstrative pronoun *þis* before the noun *breþren* indicate that the information is discourse and hearer Old.

The notation for the derivational model of sentence (4) looks thus: [ForcePnou[FocP *wringeþ*[TopP *hi* FinP[Fin[IPhere honden þis breþren eueruchon]]]]. Adverb marks sentence Focus and may invert the order of elements. This is also true for other models *XSV+nou+X*, *XVS+nou+X*, where the speaker emphasizes the object, which is discourse and hearer New. The pattern *nou+SVX* waives in this view: the subject manifests discourse and hearer Old information, being sentence Topic. E.g.

(5) **Nu** þu scalt læn leosen & losie þine freonden (c1275(?a1200) Lay. Brut (Clg A.9): 16533). – Now you will learn a lesson and loose you friends.

The use of personal pronoun (*þu*), which refers to one of Layamon's Brut characters (*Hengest*), demonstrates discourse Old information and *læn leosen & losie þine freonden* (learn a lesson and loose you friends) highlights discourse and hearer New information. The sentence derivational model is introduced in Figure 4:

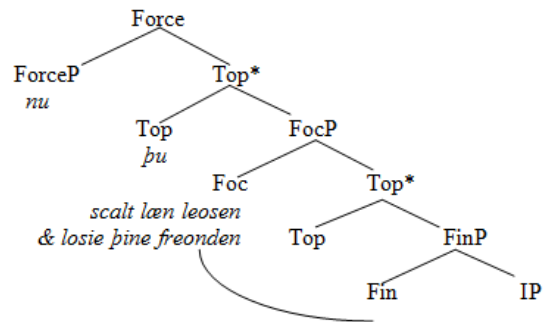


Fig. 4 Derivational model of IS sentence with *nu+SVX*

Thus, *nu* marks sentence Topic *þu*, while *scalt læn leosen & losie þine freonden* belongs to Focus Phrase.

Models with adverb *tōmōrwe* have the following variations: *tōmōrwe+SVX* (37.6%), *SV+tōmōrwe+X* (28.4%), *tōmōrwe+X(X)VS* (17.3%), *tōmōrwe+VS* (13%) and *S+tōmōrwe+VX*(3.7%). Except for model *tōmōrwe+SVX*, the adverb codes sentence Focus. The proceeding information is discourse and hearer New. Pattern *Tōmōrwe+SVX* is registered, when adverb hereof marks contrastive Topic, the information is inferable, that is discourse and hearer Old. E.g.

(6) tomorwe I wol nat faille / With oute wityng of any oother wight / That heere I wol be founden as a knyght (Chauc., The Cant. Tales, The Knight's Tale). – Tomorrow I will not fail (without the cognizance of any wight) To come here armed and harnessed as a knight.

In sentence (6) adverb *tomorwe* introduces discourse and hearer old information, which also functions as sentence Topic expressed by the personal pronoun *I*. The main character states that he has no weapon at the moment, however the next day he is willing to come as a knight and fight with his opponent for the lady he loves.

Fig. 5 demonstrates sentence (6) derivational model:

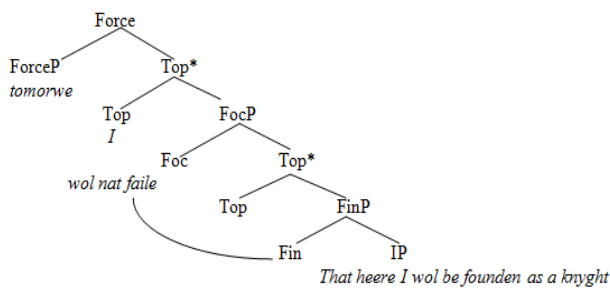


Fig. 5 Derivational model of IS sentence with *tomorwe*+*SVX*

Adverb *after* does not affect the order of elements. It is emplaced clause initially, medially and finally. The main patterns, thus vary significantly, e.g. *after*+(X)(X)SV(X)(X), *after*+XV(X)S, *after*+VSXX, X+*after*+XS(X)V, X+*after*+VS(X)(X), SVX+*after*+X, S+*after*+XV(X). In the initial position *after* amounts to 63% and precedes the contrastive Topic, marking discourse and hearer Old information. Operating in final (31.8%) and medial (5.2%) positions, the adverb refers to Focus phrase and identifies discourse and hearer New information. Cf.:

(7) And after was she maad the lodesterre. (Gower CA (Frf 3), 1.999). – And after she was made a guiding star.

(8) Þe king sette to fleonne, & al þa ferde eafter. (St.Kath.(1) (Einenkel) 17). – The king set to flee and all the army after him.

(9) Wes Maxence ouercumen ant fleah into Alixandre; Constantin walde efter ant warpen him þeonne (St.Juliana (Bod 34) 69/758). – Was Maxence overcome and fled into Alexandria; Constantine would after rush him then.

The notations for derivational models (7), (8), (9) look as follows: [_{ForceP}Force And after [_{TopP*}Top was she maad [_{FocP}Foc the lodesterre [_{TopP*}Top [_{FinP}Fin [IP...]]]]], [_{ForceP}Force [_{TopP*}Top Þe king [_{FocP}Foc sette to fleonne [_{TopP*}Top & al þa ferde [_{FinP}Fin [IP eafter]]]]], [_{ForceP}Force [_{TopP*}Top Constantin [_{FocP}Foc walde efter ant

warpen [_{TopP*}Top him þeonne [_{FinP}Fin [IP...]]]]].

Adverb *tōdai* is documented with such word order types as *SVX+tōdai+X* (65%), *SVX+ tōdai* (10%), *SV+tōdai+XV* (5%), *SXV+tōdai+X* (5%), *tōdai+SVX* (5%), as well as, in combination with *nu*: *S+nu tōdai+XV* (7,5%) and *nu todæig+SVX* (2.5%). Examples (10)-(12) illustrate some of the highlighted models:

(10) Ic Wulfere gife to dæi Sancte Petre and þone abode Saxulf. þas landes and þas wateres and meres (Peterb. Chrron, an. 656). – I Wulfere give today to Sain Peter and Abbot Saxulf the lands, the waters ans seas.

(11) Today þou scalt ben icrounet biforn þe king of heuene (St. Marg., 264). – Today you shall be crowned before the king of heaven.

(12) Þe helend nehlechede to-ward ierusalem þare burh to dei (Lamb. Hom, 3). – The Savior approached Jerusalem the city today.

The findings suggest that the placement of *today* determines either the adverb belongs to Topic or Focus phrase. Thus, with most common model *SVX+tōdai+X*, *tōdai* marks discourse new information in 54% of instances and is a part of Focus phrase. In 46% of examples *tōdai* presents discourse and hearer old information, or discourse new and hearer old one (inferable), manifesting sentence contrastive Topic. Analysis of *SVX+tōdai*, *S+nu tōdai+XV*, shows that the adverb marks discourse new information, belonging to Focus phrase. It should be also noted that in construction *nu todæig+SVX* it represents discourse old information, viz. unused, still marking sentence Focus. With the rest of the models *tōdai* refers to Topic phrase and presents discourse old information.

Temporal adverb are one of the means of IS marking. However, not all of them equally influence IS. Some are information sensitive and can cause subject-verb inversion (*thenne*, *nou*). Some adverbs though do not affect the order of elements, still mostly mark sentence Focus (*tōmōrwe*). Adverb *after* either refers to Topic or Focus in relation to its sentence placement. Regarding adverb *tōdai*, with the exception of some patterns, it may enter both Topic and Focus phrase.

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Андрушенко Е.Ю. Информационно-структурные особенности среднеанглийских темпоральных адverbов

Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению свойств темпоральных адverbов в процессе маркирования информационно-структурных компонентов английского предложения XII-XV ст. Исследована взаимосвязь определенных адverbов (*thenne, nou, after, tōdai* и *tomorwe*) с топик- и фокус-группами предложения. Выявлены закономерности, которые позволяют установить соответствие между применением отдельных адverbов и порядком слов в предложении (прямым и инверсированным), а также установлено, какие из темпоральных адverbов отличаются наибольшей "информационно-структурной чувствительностью".

Ключевые слова: *информационная структура предложения, фокус, топик, старая / новая информация, темпоральные адverbы, порядок слов*