Word Order & Sentence Structure

M&R §§143–153

Word order in present-day English

- headclause: SVO   *Jack eats carrots.*
- subclause: SVO   *I know [that Jack eats carrots].*

     ~~*I know [that Jack carrots eats]*~~*.*

 adv + headclause: SVO   *Then Jack ate a carrot.*

     ~~*Then ate Jack a carrot*~~*.*

- adv + headclause: VS   *Then came the aftershock.*
    - only with certain intransitive verbs
- imperative: VO   *Eat carrots!*
- interrogative with *to be*: VS   *Why was he here?*
- interrogative with *aux*.: vSV   *What have I done?*

In short: word order in positive statements is rigidly SVO, while interrogatives and imperatives start with the verb.

Word order in Old English

Numerous constructions are valid. Here are some:

- headclause SVO   *God lufode Iācob.*
- headclause VSO   *Wæs hē Osrices sunu.*
- headclause SOV   *Þū þæt cwǣde.*
- subclause SOV   *Ic wāt [þæt þū mē gehȳrst].*
- adv + headclause VSO   *Ðā slōg se wind þone lēg on þæt hūs.*
- adv + headclause SV   *Þā sēo fǣmne cwæð: …*
- adv + headc. + prep. VSiO   *Þā cwæð se engel tō hyre: …*
- adv + headcl + prep. ViOS   *Þā cwæð him hǣlend tō: …*
- prep. + headclause VSO   *On þǣre tīde cwæð Petrus "X".*
- prep. + headclause SVO   *On ðǣm dæge hē gemētte āne ēa.*
- subclause SiOV   *Ic wāt [þæt hē inc ābolgen wyrð].*
- subclause iOVS   *Ic wāt [þæt ūs cymð se Mæssias].*

Word order in Old English

In summary:

- SVO is default in headclauses, but expect variations

  Hēo cūðe Godes ǣ.

- an initial adverb is often immediately followed by a verb

  Ðonne byrnð sēo eorðe.

- when a clause contains multiple verbs, the main verb
  occurs in (near-)final position

  Hē wolde hine tō deaðe gedōn.

- in subclauses, all verbs occur towards the end

  Hē arn þā tō þām hǣlende [þā hē hine gesēah].
  [Þā hē hine slēan wolde] þā fēoll hē underbæc.

- Imperatives are V(S)(O), much like in Modern English

  Ǣt þisses ofetes!
  Wes þū on ofeste!

Sentence structure

Note:

- the use of pronouns to recapitulate
    ("Mama she done told me")

- the use of pronouns to anticipate
    Þæt mē is sorga mǣst, þæt Adam sceal mīnne stōl behealdan.

- the splitting of groups within a subject/object
    Her cōm Port on Brytene and his twēgan sunan.

Sentence structure

Note:

• conjunction-adverb correlation

Þonne wē sind gelāðode, þonne sind wē untīgede.
Þā þā hē slēp ðā genam hē ān rib of his sīdan.
NB contrast "Þā andswaredon þā Iūdēas." (pronoun)

þā ... þā "when ... then"
þonne … þonne "when … then"
þǣr ... þǣr "where ... there"
þider ... þider "whither ... thither"
gif ... þonne "if ... then"

When in doubt, the clause with VS is nearly always the headclause.