'Hreran mid hondum hrimcealde sæ': On verb attraction in Old English

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Abstract

This paper deals with a phenomenon in Old English syntax labelled 'verb attraction'. In an Old English clause with two verbs, such as an auxiliary verb and the following non-finite verb, or an object-control verb such as *hatan* 'to command' plus the infinitive verb form in the infinitive clause governed by *hatan*, verb attraction makes the non-finite verb form leave its canonical syntactic position to become adjoined to the higher finite verb. The paper explores some properties of clauses where verb attraction is at work, and ends with a consideration of the usefulness of verb attraction in poetry.

Keywords: Old English syntax, verb syntax, verb attraction, adjunction to finite verb, Old English word order.

1. Introduction

The presentation of a feature of Old English word order in the current article will be couched in the general framework of Government and Binding Theory (for which see Haegeman 1994). For various modifications to the framework which for reasons of space cannot be presented here the reader is referred to Johannesson 2015.

As described within the chosen framework, Old English had three standard positions for the verb in the clause: the verb stem was base generated under V in the verb phrase (VP), it could be moved to the I node in the inflection phrase (IP) to merge with its inflection features, and it could be further moved to the C node in the complementizer phrase (CP) as part of a topicalization process. It should be pointed out here that Old English could have verbs in clause final position; in order to capture this feature, the I node will have to be placed to the right of the VP it takes as its complement.

In a clause with two verbs, such as an auxiliary and a following non-finite verb, each verb must have its own VP and IP, since each verb will have its own complementation pattern (as shown by the complements of the verb stem in the VP) and its own tense and agreement properties (as

specified by a bundle of features in the I node), and each verb will have at the minimum two positions at its disposal, V and I. Section 2 below will discuss clauses with auxiliary verb + a non-finite main verb. In some examples the verbs will be seen to behave as expected on the basis of the brief discussion above; in others, however, the non-finite verb will be seen to move away from its regular position and be adjoined to the finite auxiliary, wherever that happens to be. The movement of the non-finite verb to a position next to the finite verb is the phenomenon that here will be referred to as 'verb attraction'. Section 3 will deal with the object-control verb *hatan* 'to command', which takes as one of its complements an infinitive clause (CP). This combination of a governing verb (*hatan*, which in all the examples studied is finite) in the matrix clause and an infinitive verb form in the complement clause will again open up for the possibility of verb attraction across the CP boundary. Section 4, finally, will provide a brief conclusion.

2. Auxiliary + main verb

The standard constellations of finite auxiliary + non-finite main verb are illustrated in examples (1) (auxiliary and main verb under their respective V), (2) (auxiliary under V, main verb under I) and (3) (both verbs under their respective I); the relevant verbs are underlined. Since the higher IP encloses the lower IP, the auxiliary in V will inevitably precede the main verb, and the auxiliary in I will inevitably follow it. The derivation of the relevant parts of examples (1)–(3) is shown in (1′)–(3′).

(1)   … hi cwædon þa sume þæt se læce <u>sceolde asceotan</u> þæt geswell; þa dyde he sona swa, and þær sah ut wyrms.[1] (**ÆLS (Æthelthryth)** 61) '… some of them then said that the physician should lance that boil; then he straightway did so, and there oozed out pus.'

(2)   Hit gelamp æt sumum sæle þæt ða deofulgyldan þe ða gyt ungeleaf-fulle wæron. gecwædon þæt hi <u>woldon</u> þone apostol to

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heora hæþenscipe <u>geneadian</u>. (*ÆCHom I, 4* 213.194) 'It happened on one occasion that those devil-worshippers who had not yet come to the faith said that they wanted to force the Apostle to their paganism.'
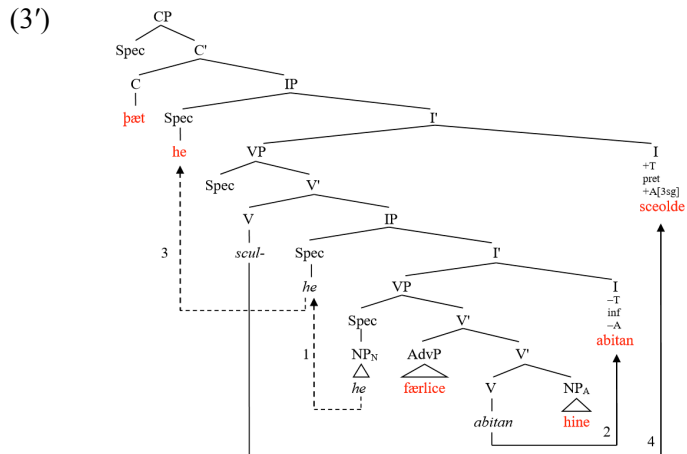
(3)   Symon þa ða he þam folce ætwunden wæs. getigde ænne ormætne ryððan innon þam gete þær petrus in hæfde þæt he færlice hine <u>abitan sceolde</u>. (*ÆCHom I, 26* 393.135) 'Simon, when he had got away from the crowds, tied an enormous mastiff inside the doorway of Peter's dwelling so that it suddenly would devour him'.
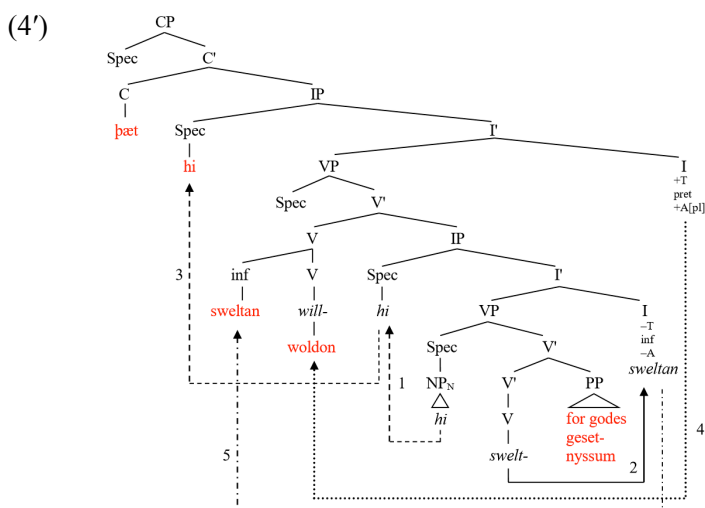
(1′)

(2′)

(3′)
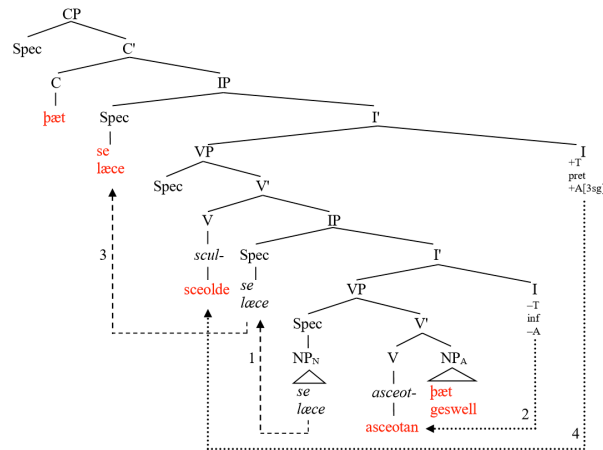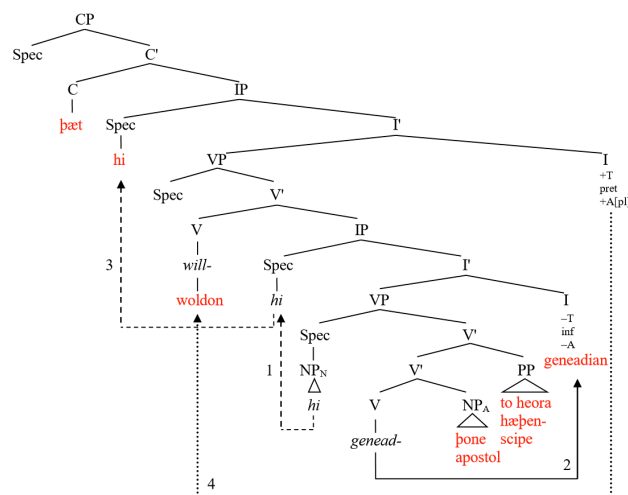
But it is easy to find exceptions to the regular patterns. In the following three examples ((4)–(6)) the main verb is placed before the auxiliary (marked by underlining), although they are obviously in the early part of the clause and would have been expected to appear in the opposite order.
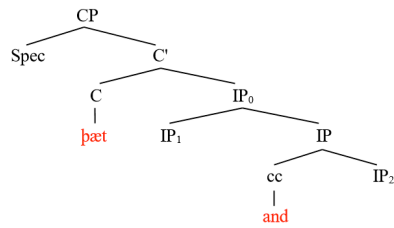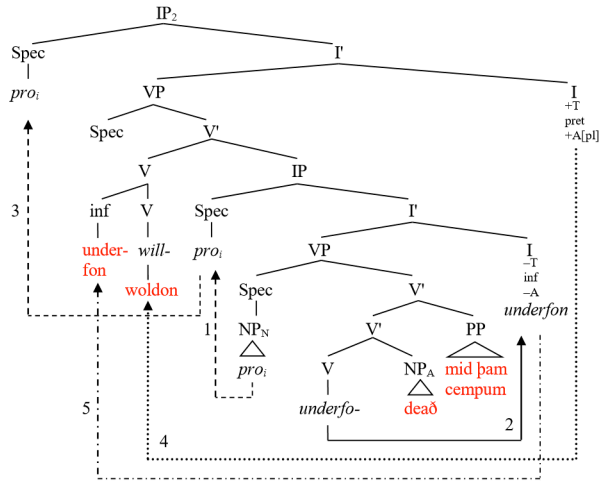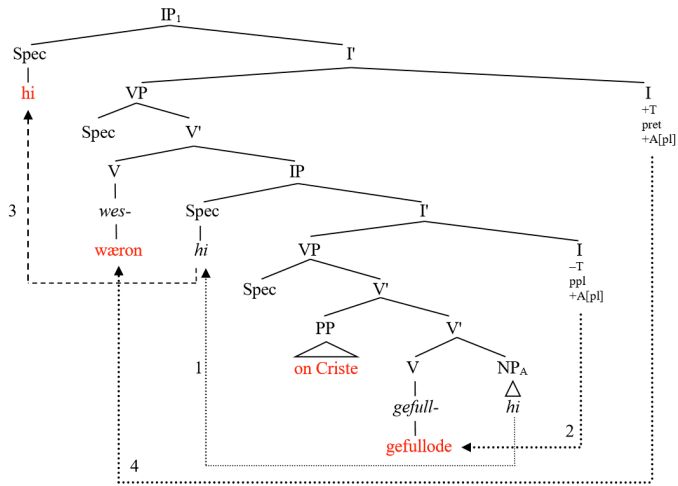
(4)   Hwæt þa six gebroþra hi sylfe þa tihton and seo modor samod secgende him betwynan þæt hi <u>sweltan woldon</u> for godes gesetnyssum, and hi cwædon þus, God sylf gefrefrað us swa swa Moyses geswutelode on ðære fiftan bec, þæt is þæt God gefrefrað his ðeowan. (**ÆLS (Maccabees)** 120) 'Lo, then six brothers urged themselves and the mother along with them, saying among themselves that they would die for God's laws, and they said thus, "God Himself will comfort us just as Moses proclaimed in the fifth book, namely that God comforts His servants."'

(5)   He het beheafdian siðð an þa hundseofontig cempan, butan heora hwilc wolde awegan his geleafan, ac hi ealle efston anrædlice to slæge, and Claudies twegen suna cwædon þæt hi wæron on Criste gefullode, and <u>underfon woldon</u> deað mid þam cempum, for Cristes geleafan. (**ÆLS (Chrysanthus)** 227) 'He then commanded that the seventy soldiers were to be beheaded, except those who would deny their faith, but they all hurried with determination to the execution, and Claudius's two sons said that they were baptized in Christ, and would receive death together with the soldiers because of their belief in Christ.'
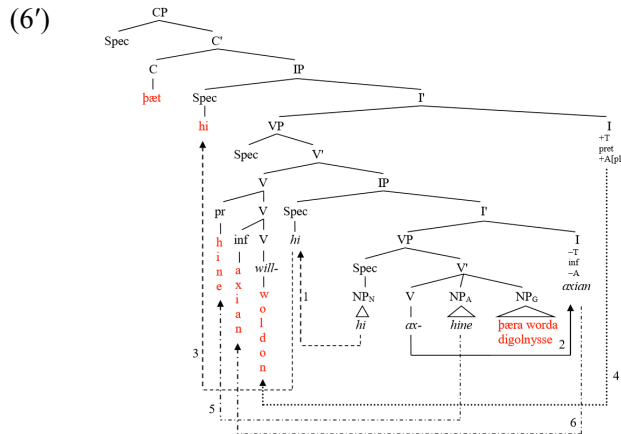
(6)   Medemmicel hwil is, þæt ge me ne geseoð, and eft is lytel fæc, þæt ge me eft geseoð, forðan þe ic fare nu to minum heofonlican fæder. Þa wundrodon hi swiðe þære sægene him betwynan, and se hælend þa oncneow, þæt hi hine <u>axian woldon</u> þæra worda digolnysse, and geandwyrde him þus: Soð, soð ic eow sæcge, þæt ge sceolon wepan and on mode heofian and þes middaneard blissian. (**ÆHomM 5 (Ass 6)** 19) "'It will be a short while until you do not see me, and again it will be a short while until you see me again, because I go now to my heavenly Father." Then they wondered very much among themselves about this saying, and Jesus then understood that they would ask him about the secret of the words, and answered them thus: "Amen, amen I say to you, that you shall weep and lament in your minds, but this world shall rejoice."' (John 16:16-20) (p. 16)

The detailed analysis of the relevant parts of the examples in (4′)–(6′) shows that the derivation of each example proceeds in a regular fashion, but at the end verb attraction brings the non-finite verb in the final movement to the side of the finite verb where it is adjoined (for adjunction, see Haegeman 1994: 384–88). Please note that in (5′) two IPs are shown in succession (for reasons of space), followed by a coordination structure which shows how IP_1 and IP_2 are combined and how the joint IP (IP_0) is subordinated to the conjunction *þæt*.

(4′)

(5′)

(6′)

CP — Spec — C' — C (þæt) — IP — Spec (hi) — I' — VP — Spec — V' — V — pr (hine) — V — inf (axian) — V (will-woldon) — IP — Spec (hi) — I' — VP — Spec — NP_N (hi) — V' — V (æx-) — NP_A (hine) — NP_G (þæra worda digolnysse) — I (−T, inf, −A, æxian) — I (+T, pret, +A[pl])
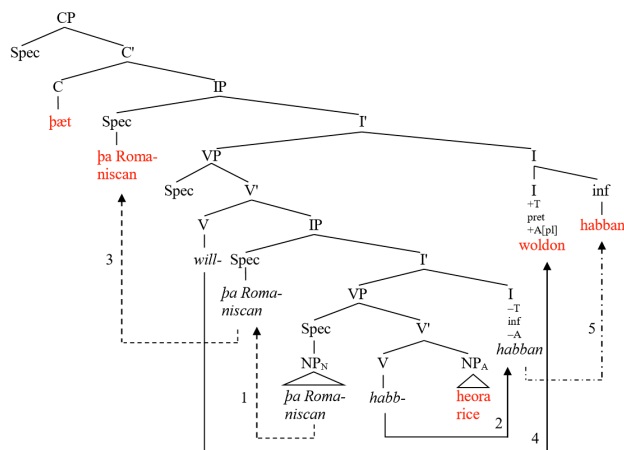
In the next three examples, (7)–(9), we can see the two verbs together at the end of the clause, again in the 'wrong' order.

(7)   Hi cwædon, þæt þa Romaniscan heora rice <u>woldon habban</u>, and hyt eac syððan gelamp, swa swa hi foresædon þa, þæt æfter Cristes æriste and upstige to heofonum comon þa Romaniscan leoda and þæt land gehergodon and þa burh Hierusalem besæton mid fyrde, oð ðæt hi hungre acwælon. (**ÆHomM 4 (Ass 5)** 66) 'They said that the Romans wished to have their country, and so it also happened later on, as they then predicted, that after Christ's resurrection and ascension into Heaven, the Romans came and harried the country and besieged the city of Jerusalem until they /the inhabitants/ died of hunger.'

(8)   & þa cende hio sunu, hire frumbearn, <on> þas niht þe nu toniht wæs, & hio <mid> <claðum> <hine> <bewand> & on binne alegde, forþan þær ne wæs oðeru stow on þam gisthuse þæt hio þæt cild <u>meahte onasettan</u>. (**HomS 1 (ScraggVerc 5)** 22) 'And then she gave birth to a son, her first-born one, on this very night, and she wound him with cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no other place at the tavern where she could lay the child.'

(9)   He þa Decius se casere, þa he for into Efese mid ðrymme and mid prasse, he ða his heortan hof swa upp ofer his mæðe, swilce he god wære: ongan ða timbrian deofolgyld on cirican, and bead þæt mid him ðærrihte ælc man be his heafde deofle <u>sceolde offrian</u>;
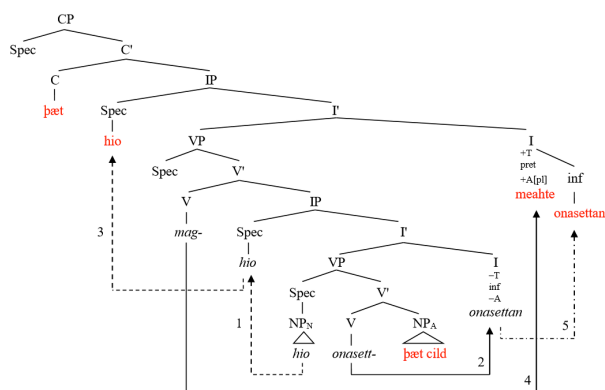
and gehwa dyde swa for ðæs caseres ege, and elles ne dorston, ac ælc hine sylfne on lichaman and on sawle mid þam hæþengylde earmlice gefylde. (**LS 34 (SevenSleepers)** 23) 'He then, Decius the Emperor, when he entered into Ephesus with force and pomp, his heart then swelled up beyond measure, as if he were a god; he erected an idol within the church and commanded that each man with him on pain of his head should make sacrifice to the devil; and everybody did so for fear of the emperor, and did not dare to do otherwise, and each defiled himself, body and soul, miserably with that heathen-worship.'

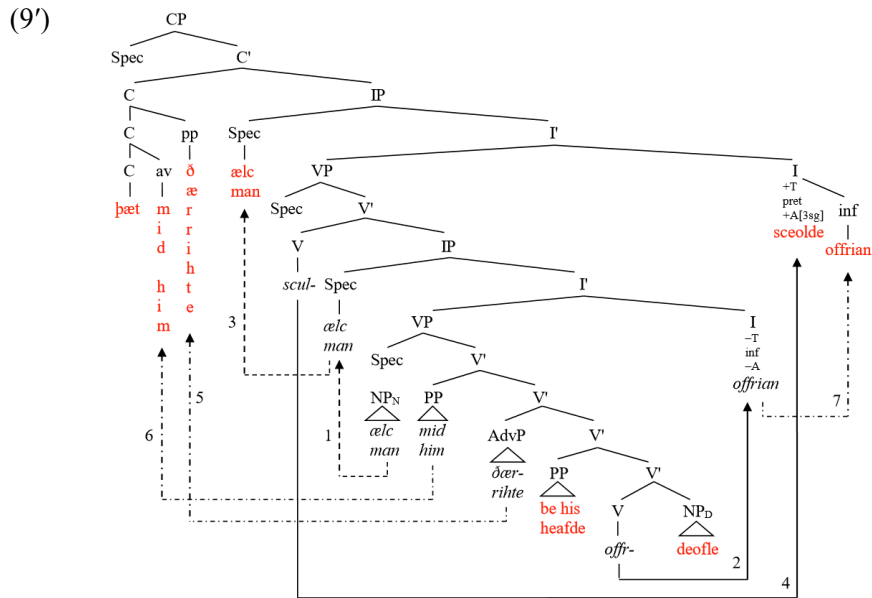The derivation of the relevant parts of the examples are presented below in (7′)–(9′).

(7′)

(8′)

(9′)

CP
Spec C'
C IP
C pp Spec I'
C av ð ælc VP I
þæt mid æ man +T
him r Spec V' pret
r +A[3sg] inf
i V IP sceolde offrian
h *scul-* Spec I'
t ælc
e man VP I
3 Spec V' −T
inf
5 NP_N PP V' −A
ælc mid AdvP V' *offrian* 7
1 man him ðær- V'
6 rihte PP V'
be his V NP_D
heafde *offr-* deofle
2
4

3. Hatan + *infinitive clause*

The Old English verb *hatan* 'to command' is, like its modern English counterpart, an object control verb: the verb takes an accusative object, which refers to the person who is commanded to do something, and an infinitive clause as complement, specifying what the referent of the object NP is to do. The subject of the infinitive clause is never spelt out, but has the same reference as the object in the matrix clause. In many Old English texts the object is never spelt out, either: to the Anglo-Saxon mind, commands were given by persons in authority (kings and noblemen, queens and ladies, governors, bishops), and the presence in their vicinity of servants and soldiers, ready to carry out their commands, could typically be taken for granted, as will actually be the case in most of the examples below.

The first example below, (10), is maximally explicit, in that the object of *hatan* is expressed and the two verbs stay within their respective CPs, as is shown in (10′).

(10)   Ond se gerefa þe hi cwellan het, se wæs sona mid swa miclum
        sare gewitnad, þæt he nolde læng libban, ac <u>he het his agene men
        hine sændan</u> on ðone sæ, ond þa sædeor hine sona forswulgon,
        þæt his ne com þy furðor an ban to eorðan. (**Mart 5 (Kotzor)** (Ja 19,
        A.21)) 'The official who had commanded that they should be killed, he was
        shortly after punished by such great pain that he no longer wished to live, but he
        commanded his own men to send him on the sea, and the sea-beasts straightway
   devoured him, so that not a single bone came to land.'

(10′)
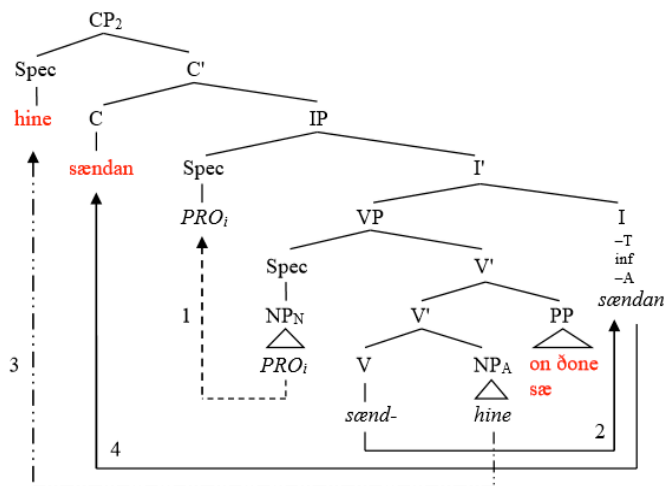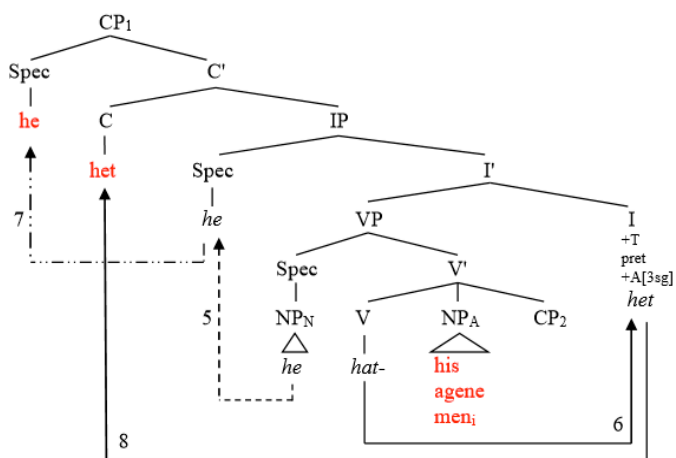
The verb *hatan* can be found in any of its possible positions, V, I or C, when verb attraction is activated. The V position is the least frequent one in the material investigated, but at least one example can be found in the corpus. In (11) below the matrix clause is a relative clause, where the relative pronoun (in this case *ðas* 'whose', along with the rest of the phrase in which it is embedded) is topicalized. The verb will nevertheless not move to C, since the C position in a relative clause is filled with a relative particle (either *þe* or, as in this case, zero). As the analysis in (11′) shows, the author has left the form *het* under V (rather than move it to I), and the infinitive *macian* has been raised from the infinitive clause to be adjoined to the finite verb there.

(11)   Her Ingild forðferde, ðas swyster Cuðburh macian het þæt mynster at Winburnan. (**ChronF (Baker)** 718.1) 'In this year Ingild passed away, whose sister Cuðburh commanded that the Abbey at Wimborne should be erected.'

(11′)
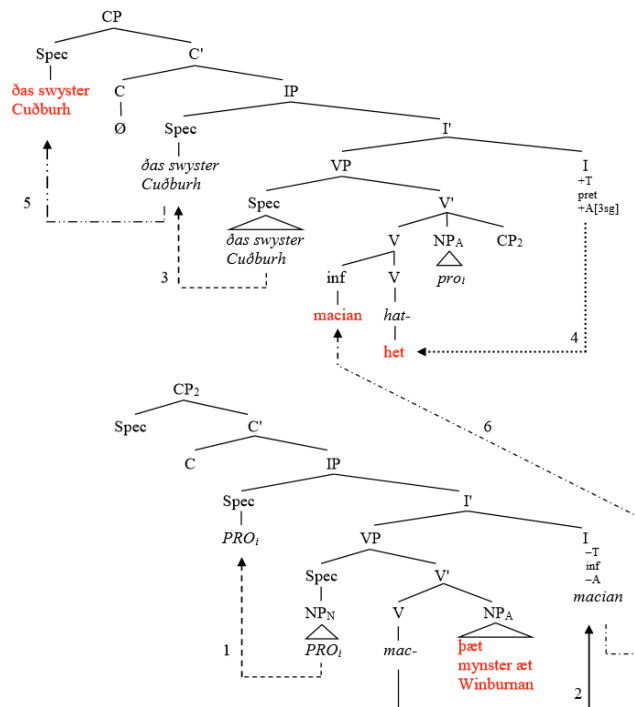
In the following two examples the finite verb, *het*, is placed in I, and the non-finite verb has moved up to piggy-back on it at the right edge of the clause.

(12)   Se ðeodric wæs Amulinga; he wæs cristen, þeah he on þam arrianiscan gedwolan þurhwunode. He gehet Romanum his freondscipe, swa þæt hi mostan heora ealdrihta wyrðe beon. Ac he þa gehat swiðe yfele gelæste, & swiðe wraðe geendode mid manegum mane: þæt wæs toeacan oðrum unarimedum yflum þæt he Iohannes þone papan <u>het ofslean</u>. (**Bo** 1.7.6–10) 'This Theodoric was a descendant of Amal; he was Christian, although he persevered in the Arian heresy. He promised the Romans his friendship, so that they might enjoy their ancient rights. But he fulfilled those promises very evilly, and ended very cruelly with many a crime: that was, in addition to other countless evils, that he commanded that the Pope John should be killed.

(12′)
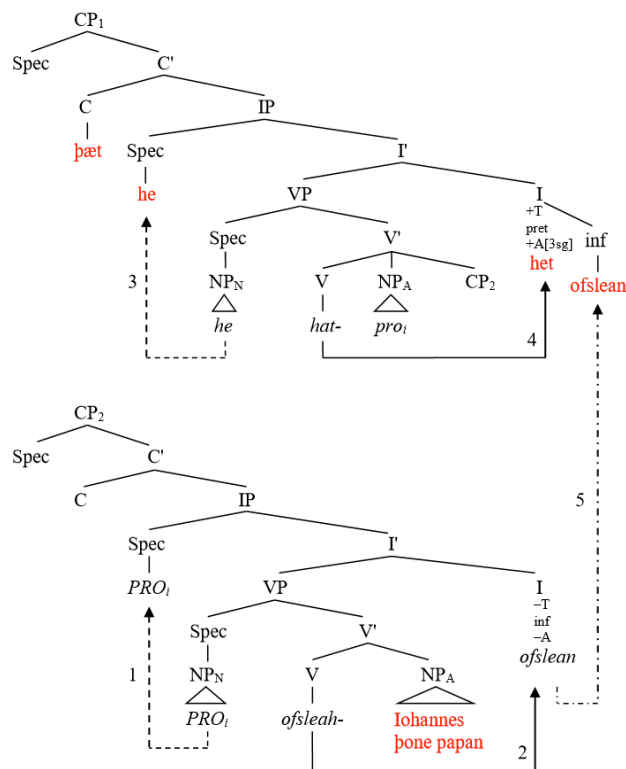
(13)   Ða bæd Constantia Constantinum hire fæder þæt he þære
       eadigan Agne ane cyrcan arærde, and hire sylfre ane ðruh þær
       <u>het gesettan</u>. (***ÆLS (Agnes)*** 287) 'Then Constantia asked her father
       Constantine to raise a church to the blessed Agnes, and commanded that a
       sepulchre should be placed there for herself.'

(13′)
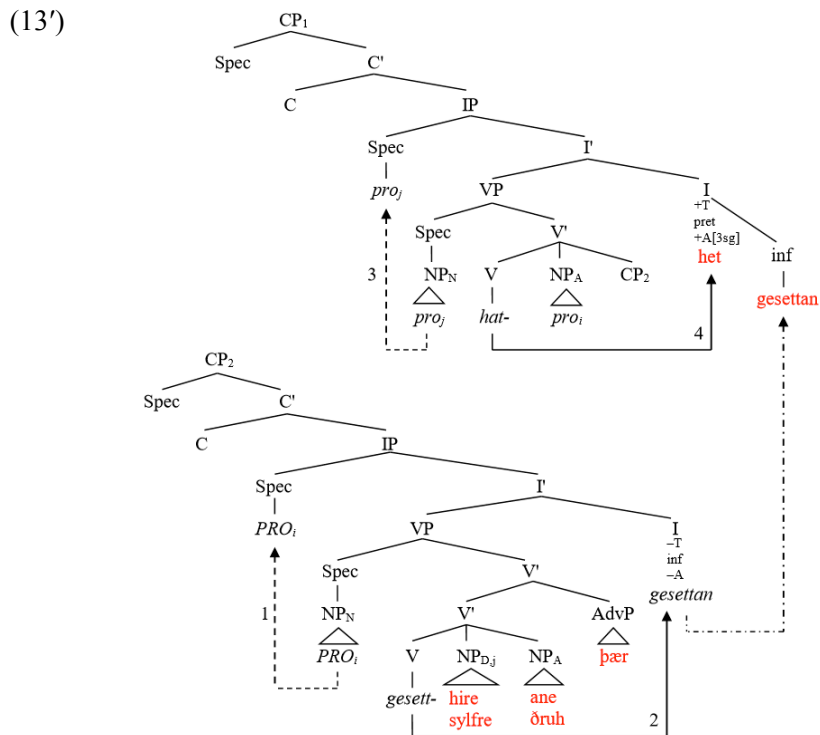
In the next group of examples ((14)–(16)) we find the finite verb, *het*,
having moved up to C in connection with topicalization (in these
examples not part of a relative clause), and the infinitive verb is capable
of moving up to join *het* there as well as a result of verb attraction, as
shown in the derivations in (14′)–(16′).

(14)   Þa het he, <Pilatus>, swa don: <u>het gan</u> his men to. (**HomS 24 (Verc
       1)** 255) 'Then he, Pilate, ordered [them] to do so: [he] ordered his men to go
       about their work.'

(14′)
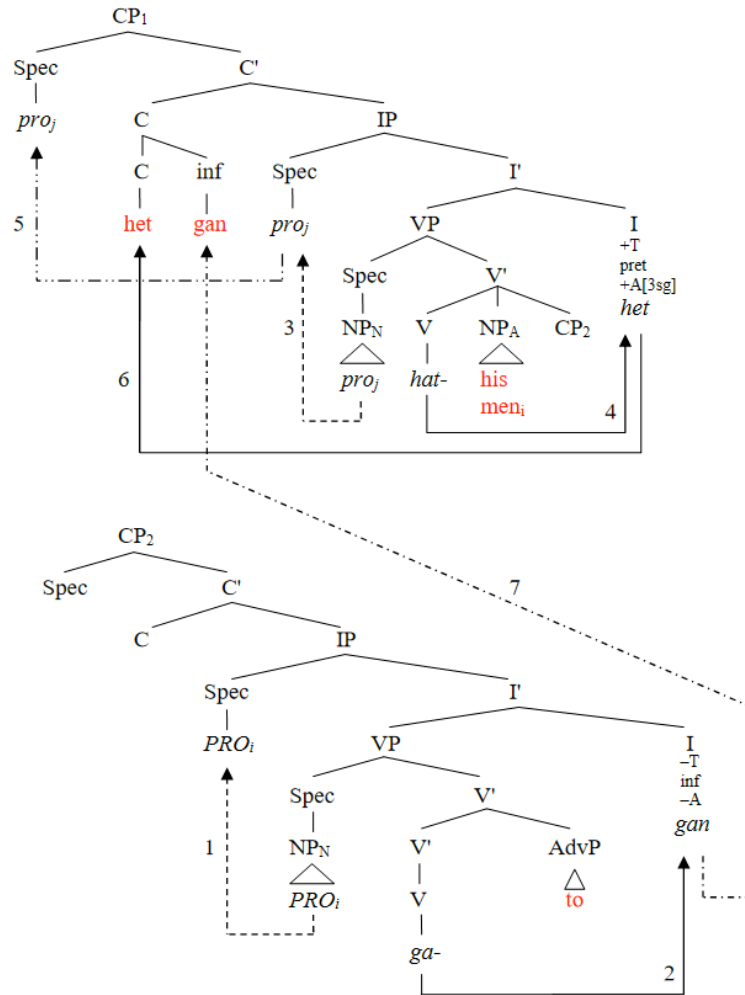
(15)   Þa æfter þære lare, he <u>het alætan</u> ut þone halgan Petrum his scip
on ðære dypan, and het hy aweorpan heora net on fixnoðe.
(**ÆHom 15** 16) 'Then after the teaching he commanded St Peter to let his boat
out on the deep, and commanded them to cast out their nets for fishing.'

(15′)
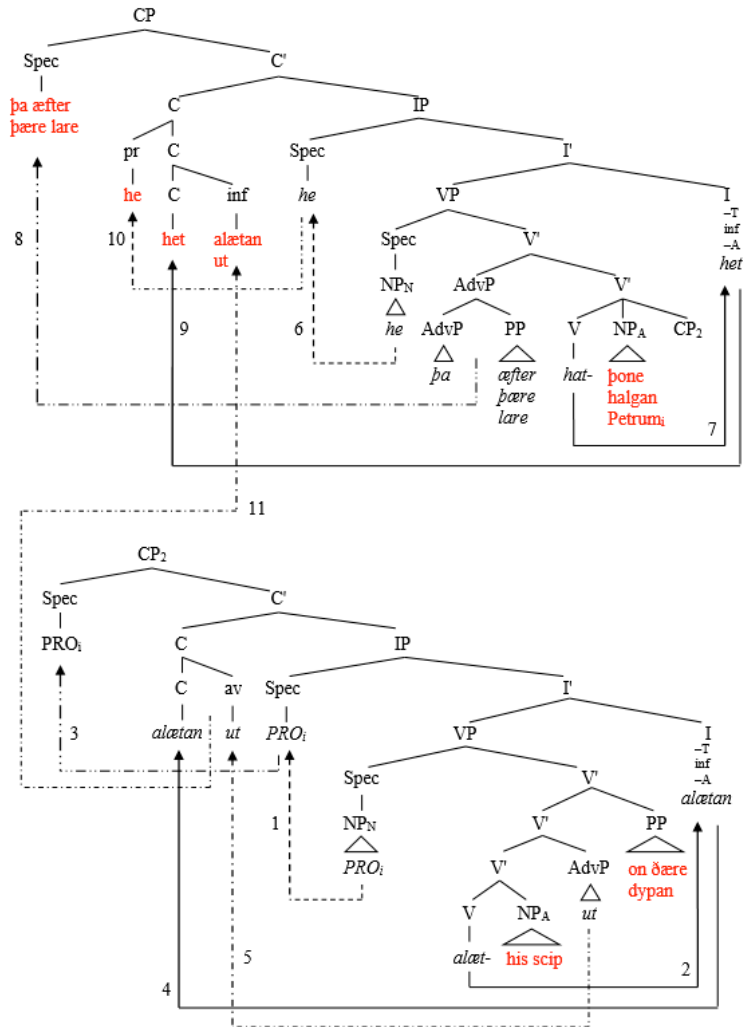
(16) On ðone ilcan dæg bið þæs halgan cnihtes þrowung sancti Iusti,
      se wæs VIII wintre þa he martyrdom þrowode for Criste. Þone <u>het</u>
      <u>beheafdian</u> sum rice mon, se wæs on naman Ritsoalis. (**Mart 5
      (Kotzor)** (Oc 18, C.1–3)) 'On the same day is [celebrated] the martyrdom of the
      holy boy Saint Justus, who was eight years old when he suffered martyrdom for
      Christ. A powerful man who was called Rictovarius commanded that he should
      be beheaded.'

(16′)

CP
Spec   C'
þone
  C   IP
  C   inf   Spec   I'
  het beheafdian sum VP   I
                    rice   +T
                    mon Spec   V' pret
                              +A[3sg]
                         NP_N V NP_A CP_2 *het*
                         3 *sum* *hat-* *pro_i* 4
                            rice
                            mon
                    5   6

CP_2
Spec   C'
  C   IP   7
         Spec   I'
         PRO_i VP   I
                         –T
                Spec   V' inf
                         –A
         NP_N V NP_A *beheafdian*
         1 *PRO_i* *beheafd-* *þone*
   2
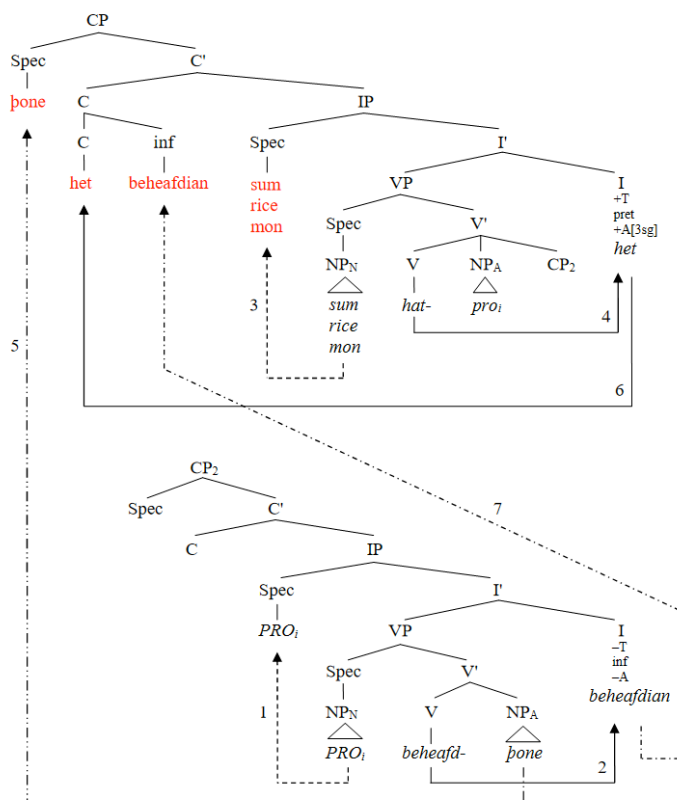
4. Conclusion

Verb attraction yielded structures that Anglo-Saxon writers and readers must have found pleasing and attractive, since we can find examples in different kinds of linguistic contexts (the harvest has only begun). To a present-day reader the results may seem odd, but it cannot be denied that there is a neat regularity to the derivation process underlying verb attraction examples: add one more movement after a regular clause structure has been achieved, and you will have your verb attraction structure.

There is one genre where the usefulness of verb attraction should be obvious, namely poetry. For reasons of space we will have to confine ourselves to a consideration of verse 4 of the *Wanderer*: "hreran mid

hondum hrimcealde sæ" 'to stir with [his] hands the ice-cold sea'. Taken in isolation, the verse looks as if the adverbial "mid hondum" has insinuated itself between the verb and its object, which in the context of a VP should not be possible. A more reasonable interpretation is that the verb, that most mobile of Old English clause constituents, has moved some way away from its object. Such an interpretation is confirmed by a consideration of the full sentence, as shown by the way it is presented in the *Toronto Corpus*: no verse boundaries to catch our attention, so that we can focus on the syntactic structure of the clause (17). The derivation of the syntactic structure (17′) confirms that verb attraction is really at work here: it is the device that allows the *scop* to use "hreran" as an alliterating verb in the very position where it is.

(17)   Oft him anhaga are gebideð, metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig geond lagulade longe <u>sceolde hreran</u> mid hondum hrimcealde sæ, wadan wræclastas. (**Wan** 1) 'Often the lonely traveller hopes for grace, the Lords mercy, although he dejected beyond the sea long must stir with [his] hands the ice-cold sea, tread paths of exile.'

(17′)
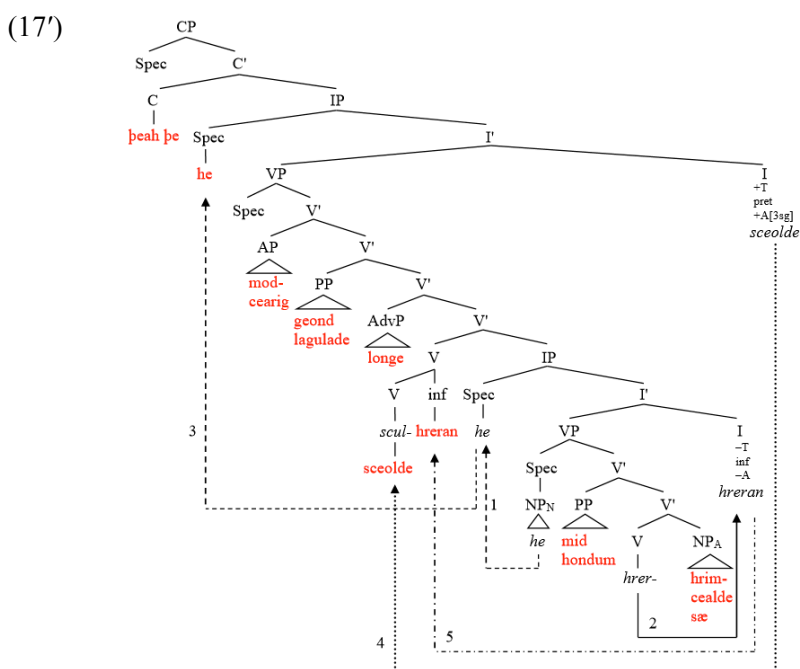
Verb attraction is clearly a phenomenon the study of which enriches our understanding of the possibilities of Old English syntax.

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