Sylvie Hancil
Deparment of Linguistics
Edinburgh University
e-mail address: sylvie@ling.ed.ac.uk

Abstract

In Old English, the periphrastic form *beon* + V *-ende* form is generally said to be in free variation with the simple form. But a careful examination of the periphrastic form within the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* , and *Orosius* helps us to note a few tendencies with respect to its semantic interpretation. We shall make an attempt to see to what extent the type of verbs, the locative, temporal and subjective adverbials, and the word order pattern contribute to the identification of a specific semantic meaning of the periphrastic form in Old English.

The OE *beon* + V *-ende* and its semantic interpretation

0. Introduction

In OE the periphrasis *beon* + V *-ende* is attributed various meanings such as follows:

- activity going on:

Oros. 292.23 *Theodosius wæs ℘encende hu he Gratianus his hlaford gewrecan mehte*
'Theodosius was thinking how he could avenge his lord, Gratianus'.

- permanence or unlimited duration:

Ælfred, Lives of the Saints 4.42 *℘es bræð is Criste se ðe is clænysse lufigend*
'this fragrance is from Christ who is lover of purity'.

- characteristic / description:

Oros. 12.35 *℘æt seo ea bið flowende ofer eal Ægypta land*
'that this river floods over all Egyptians' land'.

- repetition:

Chron. 1110E *he æfre ℘as leode mid here and mid ungylde tyrwigende wæs*
'he was ever harassing the people with a host and with a heavy geld'.

But when we carefully examine the occurrences of the OE periphrasis within the *Anglo- Saxon Chronicles* and *Orosius* , we can notice a few tendencies with respect to its semantic interpretation, esp. when we look at what kind of verb types and adjuncts it collocates with.

1. Verb types

Let us start with the verb types occurring with the OE periphrasis within the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* .

26 periphrastic forms *beon* + V-*ende* are to be found within the *Anglo- Saxon Chronicles* . The distribution is as follows:

• **Activity verbs (25)** :

dynamic verbs (16)

(*on -*) *feohtan* (7) 'fight'
wyrcan (1) 'make, work'
winnan (2) 'fight'
erian (1) 'plough'
tilian (1) 'make a living (for oneself)'
forðbringan (1) 'bring (forth)'
smeagan (1) 'consider'
tyrwian (1) 'exasperate'

non-dynamic verbs (9):

healdan (1) 'keep'
wunian (1) 'stay, live'
flotian (1) 'float'
standan (1) 'stand'
sittan (2) 'sit'
byrnan (1) 'burn'
dreogan (1) 'suffer'
scinan (1) 'shine'

• **Punctual verbs (1):**
fyrclian (1) 'flash'

• **Achievement verbs (0):**

• **Stative verbs (0)**

As shown above, the class of verbs which appears in the PF most of the time in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* is that of activity verbs (25 out of 26); only one punctual verb occurs in the PF (*fyrclian*), but no achievement or stative verb collocates with the PF.
Therefore, in the vast majority of the cases (25 out of 26 cases), thePF is associated with activity verbs, which are topologically represented with two separate boundaries, and therefore have a non-empty internal structure. The PF focuses on the internal structure of the verb, hence the semantic interpretation of an activity going on. Conversely, if we admit , for the time being, that the PF cannot but focus on the (non-empty) internal structure of the verb, then this accounts for the incompatibility of the PF to occur with achievement and stative verbs, for instance, since in both cases, no verb can be topologically represented with two separate boundaries: achievement verbs are topologically represented with two merged boundaries, and stative verbs, with two open boundaries. This is corroborated by the results. No PF collocates with either an achievement verb or a stative verb in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* . Nevertheless, one occurrence of punctual verb is found, which verb is topologically represented with two merged boundaries.

2.Types of adjuncts

As for the types of adjuncts occurring in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* , it is to be noticed that the most frequently used adjuncts turn out to be the subjective (16), temporal (17), and locative (15) adjuncts. An adjunct can be both classified as temporal and subjective, and therefore will be counted twice in the survey.

Nb of **Locative** adverbials: 15 **(57.7% of PF)**

Nb of [Time adverbials]$_{cont}$: 6 (23.1% of PF)
Nb of [Time adverbials]$_{discont}$: 11 (42.3% of PF)
Total of **time** adverbials: 17 **(65.4% of PF)**

Nb of manner adverbials: 6 (23.1% of PF)
Nb of intensifying adverbials: 10 (38.5% of PF)
Total of **subjective** adverbials: 16 **(61.6% of PF)**

2.1 Locative adjuncts

List of locative adjuncts (15):

755A *on ℘one cyning*	1031A *neh ℘an lande ... nyxt*
755A *ymb ℘a gatu*	1031A *℘ar ... on ℘an scipe*
855A, 1001E *℘ær*	1052D *on Gleawcestre*
867A *here*	1085E *on Normandige*
878A *of ℘am geweorce*	1106E wið *℘es steorran*
994E *on ða burh*	1110E *ofer eall ℘a heofon*

In the case of locative adverbials, given that they occur in nearly 60% of all the instances in the PF, we could well say that they represent a possible piece of evidence of the locative origin of the PF.

2.2 Time adjuncts

List of time adjuncts (17):

Indication of continuity (6)	**Indication of discontinuity (11)**
755A simle	755A o℘ ℘æt (2)
855A Xii mona℘	755A, 871A o℘
1031A whenne...	755A, 994E, 1052D, 1085E, 1110E ℘a
1066C lange on dæg	1098E forneah
1098E ealle *℘a* niht	1104E to ℘ysan timan
1100E æfre	

Out of 17 instances of temporal adverbials, 6 occurrences underline the duration of an activity and 11 occurrences mark the discontinuity of an activity . The temporal adverbials represent a bit more than 65% of all the occurrences of the PF.

Because the PF has been interpreted as focusing on the activity going on, it is no wonder that it is associated with temporal adjuncts showing duration as in the aforementioned examples.

By contrast, one might feel all the more puzzled by the collocation of adjuncts associated with the notion of discontinuity. Indeed, at first sight, the notion of continuity indicated by the PF seems to be incompatible with that of discontinuity marked by some temporal adverbials. The purpose now is to reconcile the two notions.
It was previously mentioned that the PF in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* focuses on the internal structure of verbs, topologically represented with two separate boundaries. Hence the semantic interpretation of an activity going on. Now, if an activity is going on, it means that when you consider the topological representation of the verb in the PF, namely the two separate boundaries of the topological representation of the verb, you are not taking into account the second boundary,

Hence the effect of discontinuity. In other terms, the semantic interpretation must be formulated in such a way that it encapsulates both the notions of continuity and discontinuity described above: the PF in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* is a marker of temporal discontinuity.

Now when the PF is used with a temporal adverbial indicating discontinuity such as *oþ þæt*, it is in accordance with its semantic interpretation of discontinuity. Let us consider the following example:

871A ***onfeohtende wæron*** *oþ niht*

The verb *onfeohtan* is topologically represented with two separate boundaries. The presence of the PF with this verb shows that the end of the activity of fighting is not considered; in other words, the second boundary is not taken into account. This semantic interpretation is explicitly underlined by the presence of the temporal subordinate clause introduced by *oþ*. The noun *niht* represents the limit that is to be reached and the temporal conjunction *oþ* indicates that this limit has not been reached yet. Therefore, the conjunction *oþ* marks a discontinuity, as well.

As for the examples with temporal adverbials indicating continuity, the following reasoning can be made. Let us take this example:

1066C *lange on dæg* ***feohtende wæron***

The verb *feohtan* is topologically represented with two separate boundaries. The use of the PF shows that the second boundary of the topological representation of the verb is not considered, and consequently it marks a discontinuity within the activity of fighting. It follows from this that the activity is interpreted as going on. The temporal adverbial *lange on dæg* precisely focuses on the activity going on, namely the continuous phenomenon, which is a consequence of our interpretation of the PF as indicating discontinuity.

Thus, the two notions of discontinuity and continuity have been reconciled.The examination of the temporal adverbials collocating with the PF in the*Anglo- Saxon Chronicles* has helped us to understand and reformulate the semantic interpretation of the PF more precisely on the temporal level. The interpretation of the PF as being a marker of temporal discontinuity is borne out by the figures, since in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* the adverbials showing discontinuity (11) outnumber those indicating continuity (6).

2.3 Subjective adjuncts

Let us now have a closer look at the subjective adverbials, those marking the presence of the narrator. Their distribution is as follows:

Intensifying adjuncts (10)	**Manner adjuncts (6)**
755A *Ac*	918C *mid riht hlaford*
755A *simle*	918C *dome*
994E *festlice*	1066C *heardlice*
994E *unasecgendlice (yfel)*	1100E *þurh yfelra manna rædas*
1001E *fæstlice*	1100E *þurh his agene gistunga*
1031A, 1086E *swa*	1110E *beorhte*
1066C *swyðe*	
1100E *æfre*	
1110E *swiðe*	

Out of 16 subjective adverbials, 10 are intensifying adverbials, and 6, manner adverbials. The subjective adverbials represent a bit more than 60% of all the occurrences of the PF.

Consequently, the subjective element, showing the presence of the narrator within the semantic interpretation of the PF, has to be emphasized.

The PF in the *Anglo- Saxon Chronicles* tends to be semantically interpreted as **a temporal marker of discontinuity by the narrator**. It has been shown in the examples discussed that the temporal marker is always explicitly present, since the PF is associated with activity verbs in 25 cases out of 26, and can be reinforced by the presence of temporal adverbials. As for the subjective element, it is always implicitly present, and can be explicitly indicated by the use of subjective adverbials such as manner and intensifying adverbials. Most importantly, all that has been discussed so far is to be considered at the **sentence level**. We would like now to consider cases in which an aspectual interpretation of the PF, i.e. an interpretation that takes into account the internal structure of the verb in the PF, turns out to be problematic if they are interpreted at the sentence level. We shall now consider a few examples taken from *Orosius* .

3. Beyond the sentence level

Orosius 158/27 with *slean* 'kill':

þeh þe Romane sume hwile hæfdon swiþor fleam geþoht þonne gefeoht, ær þan hie gesawon þæt mon þa elpendas on þæt gefeoht dyde. Ac siþ þan hi þa gesawan, hie hie gegremedan, þæt hie þa ***wæron*** *swiþe* ***sleande*** *þe hie fylstan sceoldon; 7 Pirruses here weard for þæm swiþost on fleame.*
'The Romans for some time rather thought of retreating, than continuing the battle, till they observed the elephants brought forwards, when they knew, from former experience, that they would turn against the army which relied upon them. Pyrrhus was therefore defeated.'

The verb *slean* 'kill' is used with the periphrastic form. It is an achievement verb, topologically represented with two merged boundaries.Therefore, it has no internal structure and cannot be interpreted at the sentence level, as in the previous example. Let us have a closer look at the context.
This passage narrates another attack on the Romans by Pyrrhus. The Romans knew 'from former experience', namely according to what they had already experienced with the elephants in *Orosius* 158/10, that the use of the elephants greatly contributed to the defeat of Pyrrhus's army, and not to their victory, as it was originally planned. The PF of *slean* is used at a point in the narrative to break the continuity of the sequence of events and provides the reader with an interpretation of the events at stake. The commentary favoured by the use of the PF *wæron sleande* is made at the **discourse level** and is underlined by the presence of the intensifying adverbials *swa* and *swiðe* . It contrasts well with the commentary provided by the relative clause *þe hy fylstan sceoldan* , which was supposed to be the expected event.

Another example, this time involving a stative verb, is worth mentioning. It occurs in *Orosius* 232/21:

þa ongunnon Romane þa mæstan sace him betweonum up aræran, þeh ic hit nu scortlice secgan scyle, cwæð Orosius, hwa þæs ordfruman wæron. þæt wæs ærest Marius se consul, 7 Lucius, 7 Apulcius, 7 Saturninus, þæt hie adræfdon Metellus þone consul on elþeode, se wæs consul ær Marius. Hit ***wæs*** *þa swiþe* ***oþ þyncende*** *þam oþrum consulum, Pompeiuse 7 Caton; þeh þe hie mid þære wrace þæm adræfdan on nanum stale beon ne mehton, hie þeh þurhtugon þæt hie ofslogon Lucius 7 Saturninus.*

‘The Romans began a most fatal civil war, and I shall now shortly state (quoth Orosius) what was the cause of those dissentions. Marius the consul, together with Lucius, Apuleius and Saturninus, drove Metellus into banishment, whom Marius succeeded as Consul. This measure, however, was not approved of by the Consuls Pompey and Cato, who when the Marian faction could not prevail against them by their arts, put both Lucius and Saturninus to death.’

Ofðincan is a stative verb, and it is topologically represented with two open boundaries.Therefore, it has no internal structure.The use of the PF with this verb cannot possibly be interpreted with a temporal meaning at the sentence level. The author narrates what brought about the civil war among the Romans: not everybody approved of Metellus’s banishment. And this is precisely when the PF of *ofðincan* occurs as a means of making a commentary about Metellus’s banishment. The use of the PF brings about a discontinuity in the chain of narrative events. The commentary, then made at the discourse level, is emphasized by the use of the intensifying adverbial *swyðe* and the presence of the subordinate clause introduced by *þeah þe*.

4. Word order pattern and PF

It is to be noticed that the discontinuity interpretation associated with the use of the PF can also be linked to a switch in the word order pattern in a few cases, and, more generally, to a specific word order pattern in the majority of the cases.
This can be illustrated in the following example from *Orosius* 130/30, in which the narrator examines the circumstances under which Alexander has killed his father. The occurrence of the PF of *hienan* coincides with a change in the word order pattern from VS to SV.

Orosius 130/30:
7 osloh he. To ecam þam þe he hynende wæs ægðer ge his agen folc. . ge oðera cyninga . he wæs sinþyrstende mannes blodes .
‘and he slew him. Thus was he always killing either his own people, or other kings, so thirsty was he of other men’s blood.’

Provided we follow Hopper’s (1979) statement that a background function is associated with the use of the SV word order pattern, we can see that the PF is most of the time inserted within the word order pattern S (X) $V_{\text{-ende}}$ (21 out of 26 cases) , as shown in the first section. More especially, the PF clearly coincides with a change in the word order pattern in 6 instances out of 26, hence in more than 23% of the total instances of the PFs in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* :

755A S X $V_{\text{-ende}}$ Be in main clause
994E S X $V_{\text{-ende}}$ Be in main clause
1031E [[temporal clause] V_1 S $V_{\text{-ende}}$ X 7 Be S $V_{\text{-ende}}$ X] in subordinate clause
1052D Be S X $V_{\text{-ende}}$ in main clause
1110E S X X $V_{\text{-ende}}$ (Be) in main clause

It might well have been the case --- but this is just the stage of speculation --- that the PF, because it was inserted within this kind of word order pattern, acquired the background function, normally associated with this kind of word order pattern. Or rather, it would also be worth hypothesizing that the two means of expressing a background function --- the word order pattern and the PF--- were in competition, and when the V_2 word order disappeared and the SV pattern was definitely established, the only relevant way of expressing a background function relied on the presence of the PF of a given verb.