

Randolf Quirk and C. L. Wrenn. 1955. *An Old English Grammar*. Methuen.

III SYNTAX

94. **General.** The notes on syntax that follow are written with the aim of providing the student of our earliest literature and language with a guide to the outstanding features of OE usage. We are not therefore attempting a systematic description of OE syntax as a whole. Many relatively minor features must be ignored in order to leave room for major ones and in order that these major patterns should not be obscured and overshadowed by a plethora of minor ones which certainly co-existed with them; these, for the purposes of the ordinary student, may be treated as *ad hoc* exceptions when he meets them in his texts and reads an editor's notes on them. Much must be omitted too that shows little difference from present-day usage, in order to leave room for that which shows a great deal. On the other hand, in the constructions dealt with, we shall seek to explain OE structure from time to time by reference to the parallelism existing with Mod.E. structure. As occasion arises, attention is also drawn to the possibility of Latin influence and to the differences in usage between poetry and prose in OE.

An excellent synopsis of OE syntax appears in N. Davis, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer* (Oxford 1953); see also P. S. Arden, *First Readings in Old English* (Wellington, N.Z. and London 1951); a fuller treatment is given in F. Mossé, *Manuel de l'Anglais du Moyen Âge* (Paris 1945). For OE syntax viewed in the light of subsequent usage, the student is referred to K. Brunner, *Die Englische Sprache* 11 (Halle 1951).

Functions of the Cases

NOMINATIVE

95. The nominative might be loosely defined as the case of *activity*; thus it is the case for the subjects of verbs: *hē sǣde* 'he said', *se cyning ofslægen wæs* 'the king was slain'; it is also used for the subject of verbs omitted by ellipsis after *than* and

for the complement of the subject with verbs like 'be', 'call': *sē wæs betera ðonne ic* 'he was better than I', *þū eart fruma* 'thou art the beginning', *God is gehāten sīw hēhste ēcnes* 'God is called the highest eternity'. The nominative is used in direct address, there being no vocative inflexion: *Ðū iunga man* 'You, young man', *Ēalā lēof hlāford* 'Oh, dear master'.

Hātan often takes the nominative also when its subject is distinct from what is named: *on þām dæge þe wē hātað hlāfmæsse* (accus. would be *-an*) 'on the day that we call Lammas'.

ACCUSATIVE

96. In direct antithesis to the nominative, the accusative might be called the *passive* case, indicating that something is done to the referent of the word so inflected. It is above all else an inflexion showing a relationship to a verb.

Direct Object. The accusative is used for the sole object of the majority of OE verbs: *hē ofslōg þone aldormon* 'he killed the governor'. This object is sometimes a reflexive pronoun: *hiene bestæl se here* 'the raiders stole away'; other verbs taking an accusative reflexive include *onmunan* 'care for', *onscunian* 'be afraid', *restan* 'rest', *war(e)nian* 'take warning', *wendan* 'go'.

Some impersonal verbs are construed with an accusative object: *hine nānes ðinges ne lyste* 'he desired nothing'. The object of a verb may be cognate with it (*singað . . . song nēowne* 'sing a new song'), or it may be an infinitive with its own subject (which is in the accus.): *ne hýrde ic snotorlicor . . . guman þingian* 'I have not heard a man speak more wisely'. A few OE verbs take two accus. objects: *þā ācsode man hine hwylcne cræft hē cūde* 'then someone asked him what skill he professed', *ne meah-ton wē gelæran lēofne þeoden . . . rād ænigne* 'we could not persuade the dear prince of any good counsel'.

Usually however two objects with a single verb appear in different cases. Verbs of depriving, requesting, accusing often have accus. of the person and gen. of the thing: *Ic ðē . . . Bearn Alwaldan, biddan wylle miltse þinre* 'I would pray thee for thy mercy, Son of the Almighty'. Verbs of telling, answering, giving usually have accus. of the thing and dat. of the person: *Hē þām bātwearde . . . swurd gesealde* 'he gave the boatguard a sword'. On this type of verb and others which are construed with cases other than the accus., see §§ 95, 103, 106, 107. 'Double

objects', as in Mod.E. 'they crowned her queen', are expressed in OE as an accus. and a *tō*-phrase: *hine hālgode tō cyninge* 'consecrated him king'.

97. **Adverbial.** The accus. is used to state extent of space or time. Space: *ic heonan nelle fleon fōtes trym* 'I will not flee from here as much as a foot', *him wæs ealne weg wēste land on þæt stēorbord* 'there was waste land all the way to his starboard'. Time: *ealle þā hwile þe þæt lic bið inne* 'the whole time that the body is inside', *ic wolde ðætte hī ealne æt ðære stōwe wæren* 'I should like them to be always in that place', *þā sæton hīe þone winter æt Cwātbrycge* 'they then stayed that winter at Bridg-north'.

In *hām*, we find the accusative used for direction: *ārīs, and gecyrr hām* 'arise and go home'.

98. **Prepositional.** As in other IE languages, many prepositions implying movement or destination in space or time are used with the accusative: *fore* 'before', *geond* 'throughout', *in* 'into', *ofer* 'beyond', *on* 'into, against', *ongēan* 'towards', *þurh* 'through', *wið* 'against, towards, along', *ymbe* 'around'; *for* takes the accus. when it means 'as, in place of': *hiora cyningas hī weorþodon for godas* 'they worshipped their kings as gods'.

Again as in other IE languages, many of these prepositions were used also with the dative when the situation is static, though the selection of case with these prepositions does not consistently rest on this mobile-static distinction.

GENITIVE

99. The genitive is a case of very complex functions in OE and none of the many attempts to classify these functions has been wholly successful. This is partly because many actual examples of the genitive may be interpreted in more than one way, and partly because by the very act of classifying, of naming categories and of inevitably forcing them into a genetic relationship we erect artificial barriers between functions which are intimately related, and make the distinction between others seem greater than it is. However, some kind of schematisation

of the complexity seems necessary, and provided we always remember that most of the categories shade off into others, it may be helpful to study the genitive in the following classification.

There are two primary groups of usage: subjective (or active), and objective (or passive); thus *his* in *his murder* may be subjective or objective according to whether the male person referred to did the killing or was himself killed:

He might have got off but for his murder of the other girl.

He was a fine man and it is hoped that his murder will be avenged.

100. The **subjective** genitive is common and idiomatic in OE; for example: *Grendles dæda* 'Grendel's deeds', *þæs bisceopes bodung* 'the bishop's preaching'. Closely associated with it are the **possessive** genitive (as in *hiora scipu* 'their ships') and the genitive of **origin**: *ides Scyldinga* 'the lady of the Scyldings', *Bēowulf Geāta* 'B. of the Geats'. Here too belongs the **instrumental** genitive, as in *nīða ofercumen* 'overcome by afflictions'.

101. The **objective** genitive is illustrated by *folces weard* 'protector of the people', *tō his feōnda slege* 'to the defeat of his foes', *tōēacan þæs landes scēawunge* 'besides the surveying of the land'. The following are associated with it:

genitive of **measure**: *fōtes trym* 'the space of a foot', *sē wæs fīstiges fōtgemearces lang* 'it was fifty feet long', *ānes mōnðes fyrst* 'the space of one month';

descriptive and defining genitive: *in Myrcna mægðe* 'among the people of the Mercians', *māres lifes man* 'a man of glorious life', *ār wicinga* 'the messenger of the Vikings', *ic wæs . . . miccles cynnes* 'I was of great lineage', *wīges heard* 'brave in war', *earfeþa gemyndig* 'mindful of hardships', *frōð feores* 'advanced in age';

partitive genitive: *wundres dæl* 'small wonder', *sum hund scipa* 'a hundred ships', *fela tæcna* 'many signs', *hūsa sēlest* 'best of houses', *ānra gehwelc* 'each one', *ān heora* 'one of them'.

Sometimes *fela* and often *sum* appear without the genitive: *fela þearfan sētan geond þā stræt* 'many poor people sat in the street', *sume hi sædon* 'some of them said'; moreover, even during the OE period, some of these relationships were coming to be expressed by *of* (with the dative) instead of by the genitive: *sume of ðām cnihtum* 'some of the men'. A special case of the partitive genitive consists of *sum* preceded by a numeral; this idiom was much used to express the numbers of a man's followers: *Gewāt þā twelfa sum* '(he) then departed, one of twelve', i.e. 'with eleven companions'.

102. **Adverbial**. Related to one or other of these forms of the objective genitive is the adverbial use of the genitive: *dægges ond nihtes* 'by day and night', *Godes þonces* 'through God's grace', *wordes oððe dæde* 'by word or deed', *ealles* 'entirely', *þæs* 'so much, thereafter', *þā hē þā wæs þiderweardes ond siō operu fierd wæs hāmweardes* 'when he was going there and the other levy was on the way home', *riðeð ælc hys weg* 'each rides on his way'.

Hence the use of the genitive inflexion (particularly *-es*) in the formation of adverbs; see § 166; in *nihtes* 'by night', *-es* shows a generalisation of the masc. and neut. gen. sg. for adverbial purposes: the normal gen. sg. of this fem. noun has *-e*.

103. A number of verbs take a genitive which is also closely related to the categories of the objective genitive. Many examples can be classed according to the function of the genitive (thus *brūcan* 'enjoy' may be said to take a partitive genitive, *fægnian* 'rejoice' a descriptive genitive) or according to the meaning of the verbs (thus the genitive may be said to accompany verbs of depriving, rejoicing, and using); but neither method can be applied simply, still less exhaustively. In the end, the student is probably best served by noting all the common verbs which regularly or in a special context behave in this way:

āmyrran 'hinder (from)', *bedælan* 'deprive (of)', *belīðan* 'deprive (of)', *āgeotan* 'drain (of)', *benæman* 'deprive (of)', *beneah* 'enjoys' (§ 95, note), *berýpan* 'despoil', *bestrypan* 'strip', *berþufan* 'need', *bīðan* 'wait for', *blissian* 'rejoice (at)', *brūcan* 'enjoy', *(ge)cunnian* 'try', *ēhtan* 'pursue', *fægnian* 'rejoice', *fan-*

dian 'try', *gefeōn* 'rejoice', *gȳman* 'notice', *gyrnan* 'desire', *hēdan* 'look after', *helpan* 'help' (see also § 107), *hogian* 'intend', *latian* 'delay', *gelyfan* 'believe', *nēōs(i)an* 'visit', *nēōtan* 'use', *ofhrēowan* 'pity', *onfōn* 'receive', *onmunan* 'care for', *reccan* 'care', *strȳnan* 'beget', *swīcan* 'cease', *twēō(ga)n* 'doubt', *þurfan* 'need', *þyrstan* 'thirst (for)', *wealdan* 'rule', *wēnan* 'expect', *wilnian* 'desire', *wundrian* 'wonder (at)', *gewyrcean* 'strive after'.

Some verbs, governing two objects, may take genitive and accusative; thus *geǣmeti(gi)an* 'free, empty', *biddan* 'ask', *lettan* 'hinder', *gelystan* (impers.) 'desire', *sc(e)amian* (impers.) 'shame'; others may take genitive and dative; thus *geunnan* 'grant', *forwyrnan* 'refuse', *ofþyncan* (impers.) 'be displeased with', *onlēōn* 'lend', *gestȳran* 'restrain', *tilian* 'gain', *līdian* 'grant', *þancian* 'thank', *gewanian* 'deprive', *wyrnan* 'withhold'.

104. **Prepositional.** No preposition in OE takes the genitive exclusively and only a few take this case at all; note however: *andlang þæs fūlan brōces* (~*ealdan weges*) 'along the dirty stream (~old road)'; *tō*, especially with reference to time, as in *tō þæs þe* 'until', *tō hwilces tīman* 'at what time'; *wið*, meaning 'towards', as in *þā spearcan wundon wiþ þæs hrōfes* 'the sparks flew towards the roof'.

DATIVE (AND INSTRUMENTAL)

105. The functions of the OE dative, like those of the genitive, are very complex. This is partly because this case had largely come to express the functions of the old instrumental in addition to those of the dative proper. In the following outline the term 'instrumental' will, unless otherwise stated, be used to describe not an inflexion but a function, which was expressed with the instrumental case insofar as distinctive forms remained (see §§ 48, 50, 65f) but more generally with the dative.

106. **Dative object.** The dative is frequently concerned with *sharing*, and this can be most clearly seen where the dative is used for the 'indirect' (personal) object with transitive verbs: *þe him hringas geaf* 'who gave him rings', *þinum māgum lāf folc ond rīce* 'bequeath people and kingdom to your kinsmen'.

sege þinum lēōdum miccle lāþre spell 'report to your people a much more disagreeable message'.

In late OE, *tō* came to be used with the indirect object just as in Mod.E.; thus *gyfan (tō) ǣnigum* 'give (to) anyone'. With a few verbs, notably *cwēdan* and *sprecan*, *tō* was normal OE practice: *hē cwæp tō mē (mihi dixit)* 'he said to me'.

107. The dative was used for the sole 'object' of many intransitive verbs, the cognates of which in Mod.E. are regarded as transitive (for example, 'help', 'answer', 'follow'), and it was used also with several common impersonal verbs and with other verbs used reflexively. The following list comprises the commoner OE verbs which were construed with a dative:

ætwindan 'escape (from)', *ætwtitan* 'reproach', *andswarian* 'answer', *ārian* 'honour', *bedrēōsan* 'deprive (of)', *bēōdan* 'offer', *beorgan* 'save', *betæcan* 'entrust', *bodian* 'announce', *gebiddan* (reflex.) 'pray', *bregdan* 'pull', *cyrran* (reflex.) 'submit', *(ge)dafenian* 'suit', *dēman* 'judge', *derian* 'harm', *gefeōn* 'rejoice', *fylgan* 'follow', *gefremman* 'benefit', *fulgān* 'accomplish', *fylstan* 'help', *helpan* 'help', *hȳrsumian* 'obey', *līcian* 'please', *gelyfan* 'believe', *linnan* 'cease (from)', *losian* 'be lost', *miltsian* 'pity', *mislīmpian* (impers.) 'go wrong', *genēalæcan* 'approach', *genyhtsumian* 'suffice', *ofteōn* 'withhold', *ōleccan* 'flatter', *onfōn* 'receive', *sælan* 'happen', *sceððan* 'injure', *gespōwan* (impers.) 'succeed', *þegnian* 'serve', *þēow(i)an* 'serve', *þingian* 'intercede', *þūwian* 'serve', *geþwærian* 'allow', *geþwærlæcan* 'agree to', *þyncan* (impers.) 'seem', *wealdan* 'rule', *wīsian* 'guide', *gewitan* (reflex.) 'go', *wiðstandan* 'resist'. Verbs construed with a dative and an accusative include: *ālēogan* 'deny', *ālȳfan* 'allow', *becwēdan* 'bequeath', *odþringan* 'deprive', *odwendan* 'deprive', *þingian* 'mediate'.

For verbs taking gen. and dat., see above, § 103. Both *weorðan* and *wesan* appear on occasion with dative pronouns, usually classed as reflexive: *hē weard him on ānon scipe* 'he got aboard a ship', *hē weard him aweg* 'he went away', *Ādām sceal . . . wesan him on wynne* 'Adam shall live in joy'. Before the end of the OE period, there are many signs that accus. and dat. were no longer sharply distinguished in verb ~ (pronoun) relationships; on this see K. Brunner, *Die Englische Sprache* II. 39-40 (Halle 1951) and C. L. Wrenn, *Trans. Phil. Soc.* 1943, pp. 29-30.

108. **Possessive.** In a frequently recurring pattern where we have (though not necessarily in this order) *subject—verb—(object)—preposition—noun*, the *noun* is defined by a noun or pronoun in the dative; this use of the dative is usually called 'possessive': *hē . . . sette his . . . hond him on þæt heāfod* 'he placed his hand on his head', *Dyde him of healse hring gyl登ne* '(he) took from his neck a gold ring'. A special case of this idiom occurs with the preposition *tō*: *þone God sende folce tō frōfre* 'whom God sent as the people's comfort', *hælepum tō helpe* 'as the heroes' aid' (*Beowulf* 1961; but note the use of the genitive instead in line 1830: *hæleþa tō helpe*), *fremdum tō gewealde* 'into the hands of foreigners'.

109. **Locative.** Even in OE, place is rarely indicated by the dative without a preposition; there are however examples in *Beowulf*, such as *wīcum wunian* 'to live in the dwelling' (l. 3083, but cf l. 3128: *on sele wunian* 'to live in the hall').

110. **Temporal.** The temporal use of the dative can be seen in expressions like *hwīlum* 'at times', *sumum dæge* 'on a certain day' (or, with the instrumental inflexion, *sume dæge*; *þy dōgore* 'on that day'). This usage is frequent, but at the same time prepositional phrases are also common: *æt sumum cirre* 'at a certain time', *on þysum* (or, with the instr. form, *þys*) *gēare* 'in this year'.

111. **Dative Absolute.** This idiom, not very frequent in OE, is modelled directly on the Latin ablative absolute; the notional relationship involved is usually temporal or modal (see §§ 152ff). Thus, *gefullumigendum Gode* (L. *deō favente*) 'with God helping', *him spræcendum hī cōmon* (L. *eō loquente veniunt*) 'while He was speaking, they came', *gewunnenum sige* 'victory having been won', *āstrehtum handbredum tō heofenlicum rodore* 'having stretched out his palms to the heavenly sky'. For further reading on participial constructions, see § 159, note.

112. **Instrumental.** This function, expressed through the dat. or instr. inflexion, was very important in OE and at the same time is among the most difficult for present-day English speakers to understand. The instrumental can be defined in

several ways since its range is considerable, but broadly speaking it has to do with the *means* or *manner* of an action: *hondum gebrōden* 'hand-woven', *mundum brugdon* 'you brandished (with) your hands', *hine þā heāfde becearf* 'then (he) cut his head off (cut him off as regards the head)', *wearð ðā him . . . gelufod* '(he) then became beloved by Him', *fýrbendum fæst* 'firm with forged bands', *wundum wērig* 'exhausted through wounds', *dōme gedýrsod* 'made precious through glory'. It includes the characteristic **comitative** function seen in expressions like the following: *worhte Ælfred cyning lýtle werede geweorc* 'King A. built a defence-work with a small force'.

Prepositions are also used: *erede mid horsum* 'ploughed with horses', *hē wæs bepæht fram ðām tungelwilegum* 'he was deceived by the astrologers'; similarly, *mid* with the dative came to be used for the comitative function: *him cēnlíce wið feaht mid lýtlum werode* 'he fought boldly against him with a small force'.

Through their ready acceptance as indications of means and manner, the endings *-e* and *-um* (usually with adjectives and nouns resp.) came to be widely used in the formation of adverbs: *hlūde* 'loudly', *wide* 'widely', *miclum* 'greatly', *styccemælum* 'piecemeal', *unwearnum* 'irresistibly' (see also § 166).

113. Two uses of the instrumental inflexion are worthy of special mention. Causal expressions involving *þy* (*þon*), *hwý* (*hwon*) are very common: *ðy hē þone feōnd ofercwōm* 'therefore he overcame the enemy', *Hwý sceal ic . . . ðeōwian?* 'Why must I serve?'; compare also, with prepositions, *fordon* (*fordy*) 'for this reason', *tō hwon* 'why'. Secondly, we have the expressions of comparison which survive in the Mod.E. pattern 'the more the merrier': *Hige sceal þē (= þy) heardra . . . þē (= þy) ure mægen lýtlað* 'mind must be the sterner as our strength lessens', *sege þinum leōdum miccle lāþre spell* 'give your people a much more disagreeable message (a message more disagreeable by far)', *mārða þon mā* 'the more glories', *þy læs ðe hit eow æðryl þince* 'lest (by that much less) it may seem tedious to you'.

114. **Adjectival.** Numerous adjectives (generally signifying nearness or an emotional relationship) are used with the dative: *gelic wæs hē þām leōhtum steorrum* 'he was like the bright stars', *him wæs lād* 'it was disagreeable to him (he was reluctant)'.

AN OLD ENGLISH GRAMMAR

So also, *neāh* 'near', *lēof* 'dear', *hold* 'loyal', *nȳdbedearf* 'necessary', and several others.

Comparatives sometimes take the dative but are more usually followed by *þonne* and the nominative; within a few lines in the Alfredian translation of Bede we find *mih̄tigra þē* and *cræftigra . . . þonne þū*, both meaning 'mightier than thou' (cf above, § 95).

115. Prepositional. The dative is the chief case used with prepositions. For example, *æfter* 'after', *ǣr* 'before', *æt* 'at', *bī, be* 'beside', *betwēonan* 'between', *būtan* 'without', *for* 'before', *fram* 'from, by', *mid* 'with', *of* 'from', *tō* 'to, for'. Several prepositions, taking the accusative when there is motion, have the dative when there is none; for example, *ofer* 'beyond', *on* 'in, on', *under* 'under', *wið* 'opposite, against, with'.

In some frequently recurring phrases, notably *æt hām* 'at home', *tōdæg* 'today', the dative inflexion was to a large extent dropped quite early in the OE period.