english corpus linguistics

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Syntactic Dislocation in English Congregational Song between 1500 and 1900

A Corpus-based Study

1   Introduction

(1)   *PSALM C.*

     Jubilate Deo.

     O all you landes, the treasures of your joy,
     In merry shout upon the Lord bestow:
     Your service cheerfully on him imploy,
     With triumph song into his presence goe.

(Sidney Herbert 1599)

These first lines of the 100th psalm, versified by Mary Sidney Herbert, are difficult to understand when read or heard for the first time. The main reason for this is the 'unexpected' order of the clause constituents.

All three main verbs, *bestow*, *imploy*, and *goe*, are situated at the ends of clauses, while a different constituent order is expected. Since all three clauses are imperatives, the verbs do not need an explicit subject. However, *bestow*, for instance, requires a direct object (*the treasures of your joy*) and an adverbial denoting the recipient of the action (*upon the Lord*). Due to the syntactic rules of English, both of these constituents must follow the verb, instead of preceding it (see Quirk 1985: 50, 53).[1]

So regarding syntactic expectations, the stanza would look as in (1b), while (1a) gives Mary Sidney Herbert's version (underlined constituents are required by the verb):

(1a)   *O all you landes, <u>the treasures of your joy,</u>*
     *In merry shout <u>upon the Lord</u> **bestow**:*
     *<u>Your service</u> cheerfully <u>on him</u> **imploy**,*
     *With triumph song <u>into his presence</u> **goe**.*

(1b)   *O all you landes, **bestow** <u>the treasures of your joy</u>*
     <u>upon the Lord</u> in merry shout:
     ***Imploy** <u>your service</u> cheerfully <u>on him</u>,*
     ***goe** <u>into his presence</u> with triumph song.*

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1   I will argue in 2.2.3 that this word order can be assumed as expected already in Early Modern English.

Why would the author alter the order of the clause constituents when it violates syntactic rules and reduces comprehensibility?

A first and obvious reason is rhyme. The text is written in four-line stanzas with the rhyme scheme ABAB: *joy* rhymes with *imploy*, and *bestow* with *goe*. Rhyme in this case seems to overrule syntactic requirements.

A further imaginable reason are metrical constraints. In the above example, all four lines of the stanza contain ten syllables, and every second syllable is stressed. Reordering the clause constituents according to syntactic rules might disrupt this sequence of unstressed and stressed syllables. The last line of the stanza is an example of this: Supposing that the preposition *into* receives stress on the second syllable[2], *With triumph song into his presence goe* has regular stresses on every second syllable. The repositioned alternative, *goe into his presence with triumph song*, however, does not follow the regular pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables[3]:

(2a)   regular pattern: ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
With triumph song into his presence goe

(2b)   irregular pattern: / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ /
goe into his presence with triumph song

Apparently, both rhyme and metre can play a role in reordering clause constituents.

Another reason for constituent movement, although less obvious, might be the application of rhetorical devices, or figures of speech. Certain constituents are perhaps regrouped for stylistic reasons. Example (3a) contains a repositioned object, but the clause in (3b) would work perfectly with respect to metre and rhyme:

(3a)   <u>*The mornings voice*</u> *Thou mak'st rejoice,*

(Barton 1644)

(3b)   *Thou mak'st rejoice the mornings voice*

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2   Although in Present Day English, *into* is stressed on the first syllable, it can be assumed that the preposition could also be stressed differently in Early Modern English. Stress placement on the second syllable can be traced back to Old English *in tó* (see OED entry 'into'), and apparently Shakespeare also uses this stress placement in iambic metres, e.g. *Y'are falne into a Princely hand* (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1623) and *If you can looke into the Seedes of Time* (*Macbeth*, 1623).

3   In the following, I will only distinguish between stressed syllables (symbol: /) and unstressed syllables (symbol: ˘). Questions of primary and secondary stress do not play a significant role with regard to the topic of this study.

Barton assumedly wants to emphasize the object by fronting it. In this case, emphasis is a rhetorical device that might cause the dislocation of clause constituents.

Principally, one must clearly distinguish between prose and verse when examining word order. Comparing Mary Sidney Herbert's stanza to the prose equivalent that very likely served her as model text[4], it can be noticed that generally, SVX order[5] must already have been established at the time, with the verbs in imperative clauses preceding objects and obligatory adverbials:

> *A Psalme of praise.*
>
> 1 **Sing** *ye loude <u>vnto the Lord</u>, all the earth.*
> 2 **Serue** <u>the Lord</u> *with gladnes:* **come** <u>before him</u> *with ioyfulnes.*

<div align="right">(Geneva Bible (1560), emphasis added)</div>

As will be shown, the dislocation of clause constituents out of their syntactically expected positions is a phenomenon which can be found in English congregational song to a considerable extent. But is it a typical, if not constitutive feature of this genre?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary not only to analyse the phenomenon linguistically, but also to take a look at the history of the genre, since non-linguistic developments might have an impact on the degree of deviating constituent order.

English congregational song is an essential part of religious life in England.[6] Many of these songs have a long-lasting tradition and are popular and well-known among churchgoers beyond denominational lines. The genre consists of several subtypes of congregational song, most importantly metrical psalms and hymns. While metrical psalms form the musical basis of Protestant congregational worship in England especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, hymnody gains more and more acceptance from the 18th century on, having started, however, in denominations dissenting from the Protestant faith. Only in the 19th century, English hymns become prevalent also in the Anglican Church.

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4   Mary Sidney Herbert does not name her sources, but scholars have shown several analogies between her psalms and some glosses in the Geneva Bible which go beyond the contents of the respective biblical psalms. See, for instance, Osherow 2009: 24, Clarke 2009: 170.

5   'X' represents any obligatory clause constituent apart from subject and verb. In 2.1 and 2.2, I will comment in detail on the syntactic terminology used in this study.

6   Congregational song constitutes a core genre in the religious domain. In terms of its function, it belongs to the second sphere of religious communication (see Kohnen 2012b: 177), because the Christian community addresses God. Considering their contents, however, some subgenres of congregational song should rather be located in the first sphere (God addressing the Christian community) since they are versified Bible passages.

The main formal difference between metrical psalms and hymns is that psalm versifications are of course based on Bible passages, whereas hymns are freely authored, in most cases without any model texts. As will be shown in this study, the transition from the one major subtype of congregational song to the other is clearly reflected in the data, above all in decreasing proportions of dislocated constituents.

1.1   Aims of this study

The main aims of this study are to analyse the phenomenon of syntactic dislocation in English congregational song from the 16th to the 19th century, to examine its development and discover its motivations. I will show that this feature is indeed an essential characteristic of the genre, and that poetic factors, i.e. metre and rhyme, can be assumed as primary causes of syntactic dislocation.

Congregational song comprises two dominant subgenres, metrical psalms and hymns. As will be demonstrated in the analysis, the degree of syntactic dislocation differs considerably in both subgenres, and also depends on general changes in poetic diction.

Moreover, the co-occurrences of certain syntactic and poetic criteria form two typical patterns of dislocation. The first pattern, which is mainly inherent in metrical psalms, is characterized by short constituents that are positioned between subject and verb. The second pattern, which is predominant in hymns, is marked by longer constituents in clause-initial position.

As will be shown, the phenomenon of syntactic dislocation is inherent to verse, and not to prose. This study basically only covers English congregational song as a genre, but at the end of the study I will have a look at other genres to demonstrate that only with a considerable delay, the findings for congregational songs comply with general trends in poetry. At the same time, the high frequencies of syntactic dislocation are mostly unique to congregational song.

In a final step, I will discuss what the findings of this study mean for the classification of congregational song as a religious genre, and explain the importance of this work for corpus linguistics and historical text linguistics.

1.2   Limits of this study

This thesis is primarily a single-genre study. It provides an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of syntactic dislocation in congregational song and shows the interaction of syntactic, poetic, rhetorical, and extra-linguistic factors.

Apart from the comparison to samples of prose and of secular verse (see chapter 7), there is no genre which can be contrasted with congregational songs

over the whole period in question. The main reason is that, despite its heterogeneity, no other verse genre is as stable in terms of poetic requirements as congregational song.

Furthermore, this study cannot definitely answer the question why one word order pattern was chosen over the other. Possible reasons can be complex, and if several causes of dislocation are found, the author's intention or preference cannot ultimately be determined. What this study does is to analyse the single factors quantitatively, to show developments and make them comparable, and to demonstrate the interaction of the criteria that might play a role in the dislocation process.

1.3　　This study in the context of previous research

The present study belongs to the field of historical text linguistics. More specifically, it is a corpus-based, diachronic genre study. There are quite a few corpus-based, diachronic analyses of changes in individual genres.[7] Yet, none of them is directly comparable to the present approach since none of them deals with verse genres.

One reason why this has usually not been attempted yet is that many linguists avoid analysing poetry because of what is called 'poetic licence'. They argue that word order in poetry, as opposed to prose, lacks representativeness.[8]

What is more, congregational song has only rarely been seen as one genre, starting with metrical psalmody in the course of the Reformation and ending with the hymns of the Victorian era. There are, however, good reasons to consider the various subtypes of church song[9] as one genre.

Still, some linguistic discussions of English poetry exist, of course. There are overviews which look at English verse in a rather general way, e.g. Leech (1969), Bradford (1993), Hobsbaum (1996) or Fabb (2002). Other studies examine a particular author (e.g. Tarlinskaja 1987) or a specific work (e.g. Minkova 1996, Agari 2001). Some focus on the interplay between metrical and

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7　Studies of this kind usually emerge in connection with genre-based corpus projects, such as the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC)* or the corpus of *Middle English Medical Texts (MEMT)*. For more information see Kohnen (2012b: 172f).

8　Görlach, for example, states that concerning word order, "much greater freedom [than in prose] is found in EModE poetry" (1991: 108). Rissanen calls instances of misplaced objects in EModE exceptional and attributes them to demands of rhythm, metre, or emphasis (1999: 267f; see also Fischer et al. 2000: 162). I will take this topic up again in 8.3.

9　What is excluded here is liturgical chant. For a definition and distinction of terms see 4.1.

syntactic constraints, usually from the perspective of generative metrics (e.g. Halle and Keyser 1971, Kiparsky 1975, 1977, Youmans 1983).[10]

Only Redin (1925) approaches the syntactic phenomenon under investigation in his work on constituent order in English verse from Pope to Sassoon. Unfortunately, his figures are not useful as comparative data because Redin considers word order deviations only in relation to the number of verses the poet wrote, i.e. the number of lines. My approach, however, contrasts the numbers of word order deviations with the instances of constituents in expected positions in the clause.

Linguistic analyses of music genres are even rarer than discussions of poetry. Apart from the genre examined in this study, the only other music genre that has been assessed linguistically are pop songs. Here, Kreyer and Mukherjee (2007) conducted a corpus-linguistic pilot study of pop song lyrics in order to reveal stylistic patterns and variation in the genre.

As said before, congregational song has only rarely been considered as one genre at all. Instead, most studies dealing with singing in church are limited either to metrical psalmody or to hymnody. Hamlin (2004), for instance, discusses metrical psalmody from a socio-historical point of view, while Arnold (1991, 1995, 2004) and Watson (1999) are concerned with hymnody. Others deal with the musicological aspects of psalmody or hymnody and connections to other kinds of church music, such as anthems or motets (e.g. Dearnley 1970), or they offer a practical overview of English hymnody, with the intention that readers might want to perform the pieces themselves (e.g. Temperley 1979).

As to the statistical methodology applied in this study, only Kohonen (1978) uses a similar quantitative approach in his investigation of constituent order in English religious prose at the turn from Old to Middle English. Apart from the similar methodology, Kohonen's study also provides information on the word order development in Early Middle English, which is relevant to the definition of syntactic dislocation (see 2.2.2).

All of the works mentioned above are only helpful to a certain extent since they are either too general, or are limited in that they concentrate on only one poetic feature, author, or work.

The subsequent study, however, will for the first time show the interaction of syntactic, poetic and extra-linguistic factors over a period of 400 years. This can be done because – as will be shown later on – the respective genre is relatively stable in its structure and also its purpose.

As there have not been any linguistic studies on congregational song before, the corpus used in this study had to be compiled from scratch. It comprises ca. 120,000 words stemming from 60 different songbooks. The corpus spans four

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10 The present study will use a few procedures applied in generative metrics (see chapter 3), but the focus will be on the interaction of syntactic, poetic, and non-linguistic factors.

centuries, starting with the 16th and ending with the 19th century, and for every century 15 works by different authors were chosen. Samples of ca. 2,000 words were then taken out of these songbooks.[11]

Concerning the selection of authors and texts, emphasis was put on variety. I tried to capture the different types of congregational song (metrical psalms, canticles, hymns, etc.), diverse denominations, and various degrees of popularity, from royally approved songbooks to creations that were meant for one small parish only. Furthermore, five out of the 60 authors are female, to also consider gender as a criterion.

Statistical methods applied in the study are, apart from basic calculations, such as mean and range, of course, significance tests and correlation analyses. Factor analysis is of no use in this case because the criteria under investigation work on different descriptive levels, and above all they are not independent from one another, as correlation analyses will show.

1.4   The structure of this thesis

In chapter 2, the linguistic terminology that is essential for this study will be presented. As different kinds of nomenclature exist, it is important to distinguish the classification of syntactic functions that is used here from other categorizations. I will furthermore look at the development of constituent order in English because only when the order of obligatory clause constituents has become relatively fixed, marked cases can be distinguished. On these grounds, I then proceed to define syntactic dislocation. I will differentiate three subtypes according to their syntactic function: dislocated objects, complements, and obligatory adverbials.

Finally, I will discuss comments from contemporary authors of congregational song to show that syntactic dislocation was indeed perceived as improper and ungrammatical.

The first part of chapter 3 looks at poetic factors, principally metre and rhyme, and describes in what ways congregational song is subject to rather rigid poetic constraints. The second part gives an overview of rhetoric devices that might play a role in syntactic dislocation. In a third step, I will discuss the nature of Hebrew poetry as it is found in the Bible. Most authors of congregational songs did not know any Hebrew, let alone recognize the typical features of Hebrew poetry. Yet, since English translations of the Bible imitate these characteristic structures to a certain extent, and since authors of congregational songs often used these English Bibles as source texts, some Hebrewisms find

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11 The selection and the sampling processes of the single songs will be described at greater length in chapter 5.

their way into Bible versifications in English. As will become clear in the course of the study, there is an intrinsic connection between the linguistic style of the psalter and the kind of syntactic dislocation found in metrical psalmody.

Chapter 4 deals with the historical development of congregational song. It will be shown that the genre is rather heterogeneous in that it encompasses a variety of subgenres, from metrical psalmody and other versifications of biblical passages to newly authored hymns without any model texts. At the same time, genre conventions are so rigid that the different subtypes can well be considered one genre. The historical overview will focus on the two main subgenres of congregational song, metrical psalms and hymns.

As congregational songs are brought to life only by performance, I will also look at the connection of text and music, and discuss whether the musical setting in any way influences the corresponding text.

The subsequent chapter introduces the corpus of this study. Here, the basic data of the corpus, the design parameters and the process of compilation will be described. Moreover, I will take a look at difficulties in the compilation process.

Chapter 6 contains the analysis of syntactic dislocation in the corpus and goes into detail with poetic factors and rhetorical devices on the one hand, and syntactic criteria on the other.

A quantitative analysis will show that the poetic factors metre and rhyme can in the vast majority of cases be assumed as causes of syntactic dislocation. Generally, dislocations due to rhyme are more frequent than dislocations due to metre, and the latter type also decreases over time. For rhetorical devices, a quantification is hardly feasible, but examples will show the diversity of figures of speech that can be assumed as triggers of syntactic dislocation.

The syntactic analyses will reveal that syntactic dislocation is indeed a characteristic feature of congregational song, since roughly every third dislocatable constituent is indeed dislocated. Moreover, there is a close connection between the change in subgenre from metrical psalms to hymns, and the degree of syntactic dislocation. Apparently, psalmody was in much greater need to dislocate clause constituents than hymnody. Comparing the different obligatory constituents that are dislocated, it turns out that all subtypes, i.e. dislocated objects, complements, and obligatory adverbials, on the whole develop similarly. However, dislocated objects can be considered as the typical kind of syntactic dislocation already due to their frequency. Despite the overall similar development of the three subtypes, there are several differences in detail. Variation is, for instance, found in the amount of subject-verb inversion after a fronted constituent. Syntactic criteria that are relevant in the analyses are constituent order, the presence of auxiliaries, and length and internal phrase structure of the dislocated element.

In a final step, these syntactic criteria, and the poetic factors metre and rhyme will be examined collectively. It will become apparent that several

developments are closely linked to each other. Interestingly, two major patterns of syntactic dislocation evolve, which are manifested most clearly in object dislocation. The first pattern is predominantly found in metrical psalms, and declines rapidly with the advent of hymnody. Basically, this pattern contains monosyllabic constituents, i.e. usually pronouns, which are situated in medial position between subject and verb. Often, auxiliaries play a role in this kind of dislocation, and when the dislocated constituent is unstressed, the auxiliary receives stress, e.g. *dydst* in *For thou Lorde dydst* <u>*vs*</u> *make* (Seager 1553).

The second pattern, which is present from the beginning of congregational song but becomes dominant in hymnody, consists of fronted constituents that are typically determinate noun phrases. Dislocated objects of this type can, for instance, be found in the example discussed at the beginning of this chapter, e.g. <u>*Your service*</u> *cheerfully on him imploy* (Sidney Herbert 1599).

Although the degree of dislocation decreases from the 17th century onwards, its prominence increases due to the decline of the first, but the prevalence of the second pattern.

In chapter 7, the linguistic results of chapter 6 will be compared to figures from other genres, in order to be able to assess the findings of this study and integrate them into the larger picture. It will become apparent that syntactic dislocation is only found in verse genres, and that especially Middle English verse texts offer values similar to those of early congregational song. As to the distribution of the two dislocation patterns, Early Modern English ballads also resemble congregational song. Interestingly, most other kinds of verse only make use of the second pattern. This leads to the conclusion that the first pattern, which apparently made its way into congregational song through Middle English poetry and perhaps also through ballads, was retained as an archaic element only in congregational song, while in other poetry the second pattern became prevalent much earlier. Proportions suggest that the increased use of syntactic dislocation in the times of metrical psalters can primarily be ascribed to the occurrence of the first pattern.

In the final chapter, I will offer recapitulary conclusions and then discuss the meaning of the results for congregational song as a religious genre. I will argue that syntactic dislocation adds to the conservative character of congregational song within the continuum of religious language because it is an archaic feature in verse genres.

Furthermore, I will look at the implications of this study for the fields of corpus and text linguistics. Here, I will primarily discuss the lack of corpus-based, diachronic studies of verse genres, and reconsider the definition of congregational song as a genre.