

STRATEGY AND TACTICS IN OLD ENGLISH DOCUMENTARY TEXTS

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1. The study of communicative/linguistic strategies is important both from a linguistic perspective *per se* and from the point of view of stylistics and poetics. It helps linguists to achieve a better comprehension of the processes determining the form of a particular text as well as of the general process involved in the communicative activity leading to the creation of any text as such. Those more interested in the stylistic aspect of language can get a better insight into the specific use of the possibilities available to a writer at a certain point of time in order to create a (literary) text able to fulfill a certain goal in a certain context. That is, through the study of communicative or verbal strategies we can learn a lot about the activity effectively carried out by the author of any text, be it literary or not.

The study of strategies soon reveals its interdisciplinary character; i.e. as the principles underlying verbal strategies are the same as those implied in any kind of human activity, it does not constitute a «purely linguistic» study. A «strategic consideration» of texts implies, therefore, an activity-based perspective of language. In this sense, too, the study displays a fundamentally social character, given the fact that any activity is social, it is carried out in a certain social situation and pursues some socially-determined goal.

In this paper and through the analysis of some Old English documents, writs and charters, we have tried to identify the possible strategies underlying a particular type of text—that of documentary prose—and the different tactic elements used to realize those strategies.

The selection of the texts in our corpus answers to the following reasons:

- 1) They are relatively simple, both in general (rhetoric) structure and with regard to the linguistic elements used.
- 2) They belong to a very specific type of texts, very tightly defined and subjected to considerable constraints, which can be considered as *script*, i.e. as the

type of text where very few elements are free or, to put it differently, where the strategies are well-defined from the very beginning, with a very small margin of variation or modification.

3) They are imported, i.e. they may represent only the English version of foreign (probably Roman-Italian) texts. This might lead us to suppose that the «author» of a charter, following the strategies of foreign documents, limits himself to merely transliterate them into English words. This would be even more true for some older charters written mostly in Latin with only certain words or phrases in English.

The study of strategy and tactics in texts such as these may be of interest, as it seems easier to identify the processes involved, easier indeed than in the case of more complex texts, whose variability and the number of whose elements leads us into very difficult textualization processes. The definition of a) the strategies available to an Old English (learned) writer, and b) the different possibilities of their linguistic realization is of obvious importance for the study of other types of (more sophisticated, also literary) texts, in the same way as it is necessary to know the *rules of grammar* in order to identify the specific use a writer makes of them. And we think that the study of charters, writs, etc. can constitute a useful approach to those *rules of textual grammar*.

At the same time, it might well be that both strategies and tactic elements available to an Old English writer with a knowledge of non-English communicative strategies and tactics, are at least partially different from those available to a more traditional author, let's say to the poet of the *Finnsburh Fragment*.

These texts, then, seem to us a very good point of departure for those more complicated and interesting. The paper constitutes, therefore, a first step in a wider research project on communicative strategies of Old English texts.

2. We shall define a *textual strategy*, following Nils Enkvist (1987: 4), as «a goal-determined weighting of decision-affecting factors». Or to put it differently, as *a succession of acts leading to a specified goal, in dependence of contextual constraints*, according to the meaning the word «strategic» acquires in military doctrine or in complex games such as chess.

Two basic points need emphasizing: a) the strategy is always *directed* toward a goal; b) the selection of one strategy is also dependent on contextual conditions, i.e. the characteristics of the receiver, as well as of the text as such. This all means that a writer (we are limiting ourselves to written texts) has to decide upon the best strategy leading to his particular goal in the particular conditions of the communicative situation.

All this is clear and even obvious, although there are many theoretical issues that could be discussed upon in this respect. However, we are not interested in that theoretical dissertation here, but on the practical application of the concept to the study of real texts. Nevertheless, we could point out a couple of aspects which call for further theoretical elucidation. We could ask, for example, a) whether it is possible to achieve the same goal through different strategies; b) whether and to what extent the selection of strategies is free when the type of text

does not determine those strategies which are *necessary*; and c) whether some types of texts determine (more or less automatically) the strategy or strategies to be used, leaving no room for free selection. In fact, this would be the case of those texts termed *scripts*, as the type has been defined by Schank & Abelson (1977), Dropp (1983), and many others. And, on the other hand, as Robert de Beaugrande (1987) has shown, variability in the use of strategies can become a defining-criterion for the identification of a text as literary. More precisely, in a literary text a wide variety of mutually independent strategies can be used. Thus, it would be possible in principle to establish a *continuum* from *scripts* to *literary texts* on the basis of the strategies (and the number of strategies) the writer needs to elaborate a particular text successfully.

It remains to be said that not only text-production is «strategy-governed»; the process of text comprehension is also based on strategies: the reader uses those strategies available to him to understand the text. And we can consider that the production of a text is partially based on the expectance that the reader will possess and use certain strategies. It is very likely that there exists a considerable isomorphism between production and understanding strategies.

2.1. The distinction between *strategy* and *tactics* is not straightforward. Although we can certainly set up a differentiation, we must take into account the fact that what we call a strategy in a particular text can become a *tactic movement* in another. The definition of strategy vs. tactics is therefore relative. For example, <avoiding ambiguity> is the central strategy in Old English charters and writs, as we shall see, but it may well constitute a tactic movement in a more complicated text, a literary one, for instance. It is convenient, however, to maintain the distinction, as it proves undoubtedly very useful in the study of particular texts (and also in more theoretical terms).

2.2. We will consider the composition of the text as governed by one or several strategies realized by means of partial strategies or tactic movements, which in turn are to be realized by means of the grammar of the language. In the case of Old English documentary prose of the type commented on here, the composition of all the texts will be understood in this way. In other words, we will set up several strategical levels, leaving the application of the terms *tactic movement* or *strategy* to individual choice.

3. To begin with our analysis of the texts, we must determine their contextual conditions and goal. For this type of text, the main «overall» goal can be defined as follows:

<perform any of certain socially-determined legal actions at any moment after the actual composition of the text>.

That is, we can consider the texts to be *performative* in a very concrete sense of the word.

As for their main contextual constraint, it can be defined as follows:

<the text must serve its purpose (= achieve its goal) with full independence of any external factors, i.e. independently of who the future recipient may be or of any changes in the conditions in which the process of reading may take place>

As a consequence, we may expect that the strategies used will be those which guarantee the achievement of the goal (perform an action) *and* which comply with that (very strong) condition: the text, in other words, must be *self-sufficient*. Probable candidates are, therefore, the following two strategies:

- (1) <indicate precisely the legal act to be complied>
- (2) <eliminate any possible ambiguity in interpretation>

(1) will guarantee the fulfillment of the desired act, (2) on the other hand, will allow the text to be independent of any changes that might occur in those future situations in which it has to perform that legal act.

3.1. An analysis of the texts in our corpus (basically those contained in both of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Readers*) shows the existence of both strategies, realized by several sub-strategies (or tactic elements, or strategies of a lower level). We can identify sub-strategies tending to make the goal of the text precise in two aspects: a) to show clearly that the text belongs to that special type which we have called «charter» or «writ»; b) to show clearly which is the legal act performed by the text. These sub-strategies aiming to the clear identification of the type and goal of the text can be defined as follows:

- (3) <mark the overall (or rhetoric) structure of the text in such a clear way that the reader does identify it with no ambiguity>
- (4) <mark the legal action as to avoid any ambiguity>

They are in turn realized by different tactic elements. For (3):

- (5) <follow the general structure of the type of text>

That is, no alteration of the general *script* should be undertaken. In our texts, the *script* can be defined as follows:

{a text must have three main parts: (1) Introduce the persons involved in the act, indicate the type of act, and (optionally) introduce the conditions, events, etc. leading to the realization of the text; (2) Present the facts, stipulations or conditions concerning the act as such; (3) Indicate those persons who avail the value of the text}.

All texts have these three parts, although with a certain amount of variation in their inner structure. In the (very rare) case of the lack of one of those parts, it is always the third which is wanting.

The three parts can be renamed as follows: *Introduction*, *Core-text* and *Validation*. The introduction offers information on the person or persons realizing the legal act (and writing or ordering to write the document/ text), also serving as a clarification and introduction to the core-text as such; the core-text, in turn, contains the conditions, stipulations, and facts relevant to the situation; and the

validation refers to the whole act of composition of the document; in other words, it points not to the core-text, but to the text as a whole. These parts are not original or exclusive to the English texts, the overall structure being imported, as has already been said. Nevertheless, we can consider this tripartite division as important for a general study of communicative strategies in Old English, as it introduces a distinction between the *content* (core-text), the specification of the *act* explained in the content, and the consideration of the *text as a whole*, something which we cannot find in traditional Germanic or Anglo-Saxon texts. The existence of strategies devised to mark this tripartite division (which can be observed in English texts of later origin) might be explained as strategy-borrowing, something also visible in other types of documentary texts, such as laws.

For the three parts just mentioned the following tactic elements are typical:

(6) <Use specific formulae to mark the beginning of each part>

According to it, the validation of the document is usually marked by a list of witnesses, and frequently by specific reference to the document itself. The introduction is marked by means of formulae such as *Dis is Ædelflæde cwyde, Ic Oswald bisceop, Dis is geðinge Eadwaldes, Her swutelað on ðissum gewrite, Ic Ælfred dux hatu writan & cyðan on ðissum gewrite*, etc., where the following lower level elements are generally used: 1) Personal pronouns (*ic, we*); 2) Proper Nouns; 3) Noun complementations, usually in the form of titles; 4) specific lexical items which identify the particular type of document and the legal act to be realized: *geðinge, gewrit, foreword*, or their verbal equivalents: *writan, cyðan*, etc... And 5) the deictic demonstrative *ðis* (but not the so-called «article» *se, seo, ðæt*); *ðis*, on the other hand, is very seldom used in the body of the text; it can therefore be characterized as a typical resource for the first and third parts of the document; in the first part, *ðis* is used cataphorically, in the third one it can be used both cataphorically (in formulae such as *ðis wæs gedon be ðyssa witena gewytnessæ ðe herwið nyðan awritene standað* [Ælfweard, 1016-23]; & *ðis seondan ðara monna noman ðe ðæt gedafedon & mid Cristes rodetacne gefæstnedon* [Werfrið, 904]) and anaphorically (*Ceolnoð arc'episc' ðiss writo & festnie* [Badanoð, 845-53]; *ðis is Ælfredes ærfegewrit* [Ælfred, 871-79]). Finally, the core-text is very frequently introduced by the word *ærest*, except in those cases where the document offers a narrative, when it explains, for instance, how certain lands came to be owned by a certain person, church, etc., or when the underlying intention is that of witnessing a fact of special importance (as is the case of the text titled «A family dispute in Herefordshire», *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, p. 57-58).

3.2. Going deeper into the core-text, we can identify a further general strategy, which can be defined as follows:

(7) <avoid any possible ambiguity in the content of the core-text>

This strategy is realized through several tactic movements:

(8) <specify the participants as clearly as possible>

This, in turn, is achieved through the use of proper nouns, noun complementations and occasionally through the article *se*.

Another point is the adequate identification of the objects concerned. The corresponding sub-strategy would be:

- (9) <identify the important objects mentioned as clearly as possible>

The clearest example can probably be found in the descriptions of land-boundaries. In the numerous texts of this sub-type, we find quite a few examples like the following, where the presence of demonstratives proves worthy of remark:

- i) «...ðonon wiðufan ðæs wælles heafod on odencole. ðonon to ðæm beorge ðe mon hateð æt ðæm holne. ðonon on secgwælles heafod. ðonon on ða burg eastwearde. ðonon on ða lytlan burg westwearde». [Æðelwulf, 847]

We must point out, however, that the use of a demonstrative in such cases is also typical of English Latin charters:

- ii) «...in illa antiqua monumenta...sicque ad illos gabulos...in illum fontem...» [Cynewulf, 778],

or in Old High German charters:

- iii) «...danan in daz steinina houc, danan in den diutuueg, in die huruuninun struot die dar heizzit Giggimada, danan in Pleihaha in den steininon furt...» [Würzburger Markbeschreibung: *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, p. 7].

However, the frequency with which the so-called article occurs in this type of texts is much higher than in any other throughout the whole Old English period, and even higher than in the Latin documents. So we have to draw the conclusion that the use of *se* is typically English (or Germanic) and that this is, therefore, another proof of its value as an identification mark for those elements specially important for the comprehension of the text.

We can here consider the article as a linguistic realization of the sub-strategy used in order to enhance the possibility of non-ambiguous identification of an object.

We must still point out that the article *se* is used for both intra- and extratextual reference. In the core-text very few cases of *ðis* occur, and all of them with intratextual reference, to refer for instance to lands mentioned in a previous part of the text. It is precisely what could be expected, as the core-text refers, grossly speaking, to the outside world, while the introduction and the validation parts refer to the core-text or to the text as a whole. As a consequence, an intratextual deictic such as *ðis* finds its natural place outside the core-text.

The identification of nouns is also marked by other means, such as noun complementation: apposition, relative structures, etc. That is, we find those elements which serve the last general sub-strategy or tactic movement as defined above. We can also find deictic words, especially *forecwæden*, which can be considered another means to guarantee the continuity (or cohesion) of the text through the continuity of the lexical items (or, in other words, through the correct identification of the cognitive schemas activated).

For the creation of a documentary-prose text, it seems fundamental to indicate with precision which information items are the most important throughout the core-text. Therefore, a new sub-strategy is used:

- (10) <specify as clearly as possible the relative importance of the information items>

This sub-strategy is realized mainly through word-order. With a frequency higher than average in other types of prose texts, the position of the verb marks the beginning of the most important elements in the sentence; i.e. what we could call the *rheme* or the information nucleus. The difference in word-order between main and subordinate clauses is practically non-existent for example:

- iv) «...ic bebeode on godes naman *ðæt* mon agefe *ðæt* lond inn higum to heora beode him to brucanne on ece *ærfe*, swæ him liofast sie». [Badanoð, 845-53]

As can be seen, the verb *agefe* is in the usual position for main-clauses, the important information (*ðæt lond...ærfe*) being in clause-final position.

Another example:

- v) «Æc ic bebeode minum *æfterfylgendum* ðe *ðæt* lond hæbben *æt* Burnan *ðæt* hiae simle ymb xii monaðforan to ðære tide gegeorwien ten hun hlafa...» [Oswulf, 805-10]

Incidentally, from the perspective of sentence grammar this could be explained in terms of movement of heavy elements, but it can be perfectly understood in communicative terms as movement of *communicative heavy elements*.

Word-order is moreover *iconic* in practically all of the texts: in the case of a narrative, word-order reproduces the order of events; in the description of landmarks it reproduces the itinerary to be followed along the boundaries of the lands donated, etc.

Moving onwards in our analysis, it seems obvious that legal acts are more important than the personality of the agents who have to perform them, and this must also be clearly stated in the document. This is achieved by our next sub-strategy:

- (11) <specify as clearly as possible that events are more important than agents>

which is realized by the enormous frequency of impersonal constructions, especially the generic pronoun *man/mon*:

- vi) «Gif hit ðonne festendæg sie, selle mon uuæge cæsa, & fises, & butran...» [Oswulf, 805-10]

but also passive-like constructions:

- vii) «...& toll & team sy agifn into ðam mynstre...» [Ælfward, 1016-23]

The next point that should be taken into account by the writer of one of these documents is the precise identification of the relationship existing between the

events presented, as well as what we could call the inner organization of the core-text. This leads us to sub-strategy (12):

- (12) <identify the relationship existing between the events as well as the inner organization of the core-text>

This is achieved on the one hand by means of word-order, as we have seen, but especially through the use of the textual particles *ða* and *ðonne*. The distribution of these forms corresponds exactly with what has been stated by different scholars, *ða* being a marker of actions, *ðonne* a marker of events of the non-active type. As Enkvist and Wårvik (1987: 231) expressed it, *ða* is a «marker for important information and for the structure of the narrative».

We find this particle only in narrative core-texts, such as the following, belonging to the charter called «A family dispute in Herefordshire». This text is a narrative written down as an intervention in a law-suit:

- viii) «Hit gelamp ðæt hire fæder aborgude xxx punda æt Godan, and betæhte him ðæt feos to anwedde: and he hit hæfde vii winter. Ða gelamp emb ða tid ðæt man beonn ealle Cantware to wigge, to Holme. Ða nolde Sigelm hire fæder to wigge faron mid nanes mannes scette unagifnum, and agef ða Godan xxx punda, and becwæð Eadgife his dehter land, and boc sealde. Ða he on wigge afeallen wæs, ða ætsoc Goda ðæs feos ægiftes, and ðæs landes wyrnde, oð ðæs on syxtan geare. Ða spræc hit fæstlice Byrhsige Dyrincg...» [lines 6-12]

Donne is used in the same way, i.e. to foreground information and to create a subdivision or structuring of the text, but only in the case of a non-narrative; for instance, it is used for stipulations or conditions:

- ix) «Gif me God bearnes unnan wille (...). Gif me ðonne gifede sie ðæt ic bearn begeotan ne mæge, ðonne is min willa ðæt hit hæbbe min wiif, ða hwile ðe hia hit mid clenisse gehaldan wile (...). Gif min wiif ðonne hia nylle mid clenisse swæ gehaldan (...), ðonne foen mine megas to ðæm londe (...) Gif hire ðonne liofre sie an mynster to ganganne (...), ðonne agefen hie twægen mine mægas (...) hire twa ðusenda (...) [lines 4-20]

As can be seen, *ðonne* marks the main conditions which, in turn, can be further developed but without the use of the particle. That is, *ðonne* is also a mark for important information and for the inner organization of the text, when this is not a narrative, i.e. when the events portrayed are not actions.

We find it also in the description of land-boundaries, where it is partially a translation of Latin *inde* or *deinde*. It alternates with *ðanon* and other rarer forms, and can be taken as a mark for temporal or local sequence. But in Old High German we find only *danan* which has a clear local/ temporal value, and the frequency of *ðonne* seems to reflect that general value just mentioned above. Moreover, we feel that the alternation of *ðonne* with other local expressions, such as the prepositions *from* or *of*, and even *ðanan*, seems to point to particularly important landmarks or perhaps to general changes in direction. This could only be verified with a detailed reference to the actual sites, an interesting piece of research which we have not been able to do. Here is an example:

- x) «...ærest on merce cumb, ðonne on grenan pytt. ðonne on ðone torr æt mercecumbes æwielme, ðonne on ðone dic, ðær esne ðone weg fordealf, ðonon of dune on ðælles heafod. ðonne ðær ofdune on broc oð tiddes ford. ðonne up on broc oð heottes dic to ðære flodan. fram ðære flodan ofdune ðær fyxan dic to broce gæð. & ðonne ofdune on broc oð sæ. ðonne fram dyrelan stane up on broc oð smalan cumb. fram smalan cumbes heafde to græwastane. ðonon wiðufan ðæs wælles heafod on ondencolc...» [lines 3-12]

It is worth noting that in the equivalent Old High German charters consulted, the equivalent of *ðonne*, i.e. *danne/thanne*, is not used; Old High German does not use any equivalent of *ða* for textual marking, either.

Da and *ðonne*, therefore, serve the sub-strategy of establishing a clear inner structure or, in other words, that of specifying the relationship between the events.

4. The conclusions we could draw from this analysis of English documentary prose texts could be summarized as follows:

- 1) The selected text-type, with its clearly confirmed rigid selection of strategies and tactic movements, can be characterized through the feature of *self-sufficiency*. This fact conditions the sub-strategies or tactic movements essential to put those strategies into effect.
- 2) Even where, by definition, there is little choice, one may find a considerable amount of variability, mainly within the core-text of the documents, which proves the existence of a continuum from the non-literary to the literary texts, according, among other things, to the number of strategies used.
- 3) Last and most important, there are enough hints to prove that the study of strategy and its realization through tactic movements, even in partially imported texts, confirms the linguistic and mainly textual use of typical and purely verna-

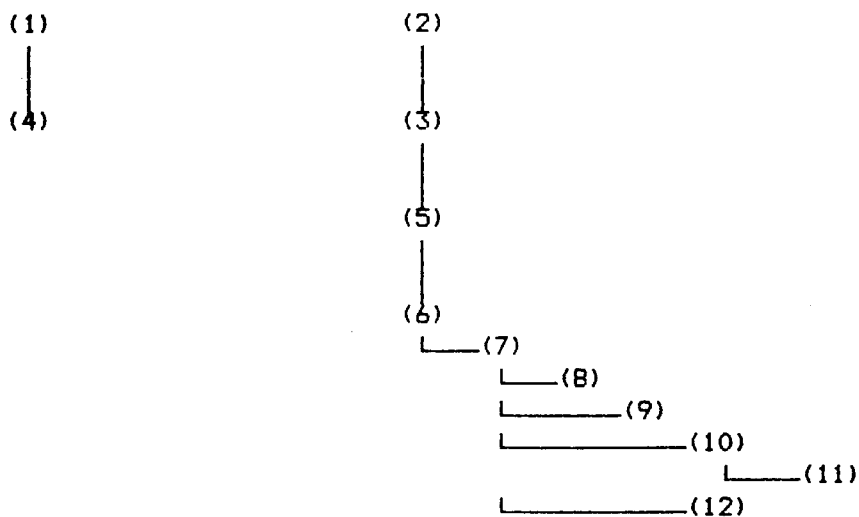


Figure: Strategic hierarchy

cular Old English elements, such as deictics, word-order and right-branching, as well as of a more transparent disposition of background and foreground information.

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