Noun Phrase Word Order Variation in Old English Verse and Prose

Dissertation

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Abstract

While there has been some two-hundred years of research on Old English (OE) syntax, comparatively little of this aims at large-scale comparisons of verse and prose word order. Recent digitization of many OE texts, including poetic works, provides new tools for the explicit comparison of OE verse and prose texts; however, a thorough investigation of poetic syntax demands attention to poetic form. Investigating several aspects of clausal word order in OE verse, Pintzuk (2001) concludes that “metrical constraints outranked syntactic constraints in the poetry” and that “further investigation of the limits of metrical constraints [is] necessary” (2). My study addresses that need by providing a corpus-based comparison of OE verse and prose syntax, specifically of noun phrase (NP) word order, and with reference to verse structure. NP modifiers included in my analysis are possessive pronouns, common and proper noun genitives, adjectives, participles, quantifiers, and demonstratives.

For my analysis, I consider NP word order variation in the York-HelsinkiParsed Corpus of Old English Poetry and the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose, making use of TIGERSearch corpus search software. Because of the effects of syntactic weight on word order, I control for this factor. Then, for the OE poetic text of Beowulf, I also consider how NP word order relates to metrical structure,
alliteration, and NP position within the line as well as linguistic factors such as animacy and the presence of compounds in the NP.

My findings suggest several differences between OE verse and prose syntax in terms of overall frequencies of different NP types and word order patterns, especially as related to the relative frequency of postnominal modifiers. In particular, syntactic weight is an important factor in determining prose word order, but this factor plays a different role in verse. Specifically, while syntactically light NPs prefer prenominal position in OE prose, this is not always the case in verse. Furthermore, NPs with fewer modifiers are more common in verse, and consistently, postnominal modifiers are more common in OE verse than in prose. However, closer examination of these forms within their metrical context suggests that contrary to Pintzuk’s claims, instead of verse constraints consistently outranking syntactic constraints, both metrical and syntactic constraints are constantly in tension in the construction of OE verse. And while frequencies of different NP types vary between OE verse and prose, often as a function of these metrical constraints and stylistic considerations, NP word orders in verse are consistently also found in OE prose, if at considerably lower frequencies. Furthermore, variations in NP word order in verse sometimes represent stylistic flourishes or subtle differences of meaning. It is argued that an awareness of more common NP word orders as well as more marked forms aids in the interpretation of OE literary texts.

Considering this aspect of OE syntactic structure, I explore one facet of OE poetry, as a dense form of human expression that is tied with more everyday forms of the language of the period. Studying OE texts in this way provides a unique historical
perspective, addressing a previously understudied area of the history of the English language and English literature.
Dedication

For my parents

and

In memory of Bill Provost
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1.1 Introduction

When Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney produced his best-selling translation of *Beowulf*, he took on at least two distinct challenges: both rendering the Old English of the original poem into Present-day English and rendering the historical poetic structure into a contemporary poetic form. A comparison of the two texts side by side makes the differences in both linguistic and poetic structure readily apparent, with these differences reflecting considerable changes in English syntax and lexicon as well as changes in metrical structure. However, Kiparsky in a landmark article on the relationship between linguistics and poetic theory claims that “[o]f all art forms, literature, and especially poetry, has the greatest continuity of form in the Western tradition” (1973: 231). In other words, if one compares artistic innovations in various media, there are more considerable changes in other art forms. For instance, there have been substantial changes over time in the representation of depth in the visual arts. Kiparsky suggests that in comparison the historical changes in verse form are relatively less substantial, and that this relative “continuity of form” relates to the constraints of language as an artistic medium.

In this article, Kiparsky outlines the beginning of a debate on the role of linguistic research in the understanding of poetics. He claims that poetic form in the Western
tradition, as well as more generally, exhibits such continuity as a result of its being integrally tied to linguistic form (233), and that the relative continuity seen in poetic tradition may be a corollary to Universal Grammar, a basic structure which underlies all human languages (243). He does, however, acknowledge the type of stylistic variation that defines some of the differences between Heaney’s *Beowulf* and the original text, and he argues that “[t]he extent to which special rules for poetic language have been acceptable is an important stylistic variable in English poetry” (238).

By means of a large-scale, quantitative and qualitative corpus analysis, in this study, I address this question of stylistic variation with respect to one area of syntactic structure: the structure and internal word order of noun phrases (NPs) in Old English (OE), comparing verse to prose. This research not only illuminates the relationship between one aspect of OE verse and prose syntax, but also, when situated in the larger body of literature on the relationship between linguistics and poetry, sheds light on the question of poetic structure as a reflection of linguistic structure, and the changes in this relationship over time.

There has been a recent resurgence of interest in the relationship between linguistic and poetic form, as evidenced by the symposium entitled “A comparison of models for meter: Corpora and other sources of evidence for metrical theory and method” held at the 2010 annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America. However, while there are many studies in this area considering Modern or Early Modern English (e.g. Kiparsky 1975, Halle and Keyser 1999, Youmans 2009) and even – if to a lesser extent – Middle English (e.g. Youmans 2010), such research on Old English is comparatively
under-represented. There are important studies in some areas of Old English poetic syntax (e.g., Mitchell 1975, Donoghue 1987, Minkova and Stockwell 1992, Blockley 2001).

Still, little of this research gives large-scale quantitative accounts of syntactic patterns that would help tease apart the word order patterns in poetry from those found in prose. Furthermore, much of this research focuses on word order variation at the sentence level, leaving a comparative lack of documentation of word order patterns within NPs. Thus, in this study, I shed light on the question of the structural relationship between OE verse and prose by considering a previously under-studied area of syntactic structure.

To do so, I provide a quantitative analysis of NP variation as represented in the York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry and the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose. Both of these corpora make use of morphological and syntactic annotation, with the prose corpus consisting of around 1.5 million parsed words of Old English, and the verse corpus consisting of around 71,490 words. I used the software TIGERSearch, a corpus search program, to search these corpora for all instances of NPs, and I further sorted TIGERSearch results with a short Python program. Then, given the special attention that metrical data demands, using the OE poetic text of *Beowulf* as a sample, I have added additional information for each NP about its position in the line of poetry, the half-line’s metrical form, and the formation of the words including whether or not they are compounds. This step is vital to a deeper understanding of the relationship between poetic and linguistic form.

Investigating several dimensions of sentence word order in the Old English verse corpus, Pintzuk (2001) concludes that “metrical constraints outranked syntactic constraints
in the poetry, and therefore further investigation of the limits of metrical constraints is necessary” (2). Thus, considering patterns of NP word order variation not only as more generally related to text type, but also with specific consideration of these metrical factors, this study aims to provide a quantitative analysis of the word order patterns found in OE verse and prose texts. Factors considered are the verse-prose distinction, metrical form, line position, and date of manuscript, as well as linguistic factors including whether or not the NPs are simple two-word phrases or involve more complex structures.

This study considers the position and frequency of a number of modifying elements in OE NPs, including adjectives, participles, different types of genitives and possessive pronouns, determiners (e.g., *þa* “the” and *se* “the”), and quantifiers. Corpus results in this area show that, as expected, NP word order in verse is more flexible than in prose. However, each of the different modifiers, and even different subtypes (e.g., common noun genitives as compared to proper noun genitives) show different frequencies of appearing before or after the head noun, especially in the verse data. These patterns of variation may be useful in providing insight into the relative strength of different NP word order constraints in OE more generally. Though prenominal position of these elements is systematically preferred in both prose and verse texts, with this preference being even more marked in prose, the fact that there is variation in the strength of this preference in verse may provide unparalleled insight into the overall strength of these preferences in Old English. Poets may be more willing to compromise an expected word order in the case that they are not violating a highly ranked constraint. This type of argumentation may seem to present a potential problem of circularity in logic; however, if one is able to find
other types of linguistic criteria, such as animacy, that may help explain the word order preferences, these factors reinforce the idea that there are certain linguistic constraints that factored into the word order patterns seen in OE texts.

In addition to considering NP word order variation, this study also outlines the types of NPs that are overall the most frequent in different prose and verse texts, for instance comparing the relative frequency of pronouns to other NPs, and further considering explanations for these patterns. While pronouns are among the most frequent NPs in OE prose, common nouns are actually the most frequent NPs in OE verse – a pattern that holds true across most of the individual texts included in the corpora. Additionally, among NPs with common nouns as the head noun, those with adjectives are more frequent in OE verse than in prose, sometimes being even more frequent than common nouns modified by only a determiner. These differences may be understood by recognizing that both common nouns and adjectives (but only very rarely pronouns) carry metrical stress and alliteration in OE verse and thus play a more significant role in the overall poetic structure.

Indeed, different linguistic and metrical constraints operate in tandem in the construction of OE verse. Metrical factors have a clearer impact in some aspects of NP variation, as seen in the differences in distributions of the most frequent types of NPs in OE verse and prose. Still, linguistic factors in other cases play a larger role than previously recognized. For instance, in regard to the placement of genitivés, animacy plays a key role in a poet’s decision to place the genitive before or after the head noun. In particular, a poet is more likely to place the proper noun genitive before the head noun in
the case that the head noun is inanimate (as compared to those NPs with animate head nouns). Some poets even split the elements of an NP across half-line or line boundaries in these cases, a feature which is relatively uncommon in OE verse, where sentence constituents tend to correspond with line and half-line boundaries. This willingness to produce a less prototypical (and in terms of metrical parsing, a less optimal) alignment between verse structure and linguistic structure in favor of preserving a preferred word order suggests competition between metrical constraints and syntactic constraints. These findings show that rather than “metrical constraints outrank[ing] syntactic constraints” consistently, as Pintzuk suggests, there are areas in which syntactic constraints compete with metrical constraints, and that both metrical and syntactic constraints are constantly in tension in the construction of OE verse.

The further investigation of the competition between metrical and syntactic structure crucially informs our understanding of the composition of poetry, and also sheds light on two key points: how the continuity and variation represented in the world’s poetry are a reflection of certain syntactic commonalities in all languages, and how all languages vary and change. This study’s contributions to the understanding of the relationship between OE verse and prose syntax inform a larger body of literature considering similar questions both for OE and for later stages of the language. Together, this body of research provides a look at how changes in poetic structure relate to changes in linguistic structure. This study aims to provide an important link in this area between metrical studies and the study of language change and syntax, helping to illuminate, as Kiparsky puts it, “the intrinsic limits of poetry” (233) as well as the intrinsic limits of language.
1.2 Previous Research on Old English Syntax in Verse and Prose

Considering the more linguistic end of this scholarship, there is considerable research in the area of historical English poetic syntax, and Old English poetic syntax in particular (e.g., Mitchell 1975, Donoghue 1987, Minkova and Stockwell 1992, Blockley 2001). However, little of this research aims at providing large-scale accounts of syntactic patterns that would aid in relating word order variation in poetry to that found in prose. And of the research that does exist, since much of it focuses on clausal word order and verb phrases, this leaves a comparative lack of documentation of NP word order patterns, such as those related to the placement and frequency of different types of demonstratives, genitives, adjective phrases, and prepositional phrases. Variation in the position of these elements is of interest in its own right with regard to the development of English NP structure, but also as there may be a relationship between NP word order and clausal word order (Hawkins 1979). Given the open question of the place of poetic data in historical syntax, as well as potential insights regarding the NP and the English language’s shift away from right-headed structures, this study aims to provide an investigation of developments in OE NP structure, of differences in NP word order between verse and prose texts, and of possible insights verse texts may shed on our understanding of OE syntax as a whole.

1.3 Why Study Old English Noun Phrases?

There are a number of reasons why NP structure is a useful focus given the larger question of the differences between OE prose and verse syntax. In terms of situating this study within the previous literature, as mentioned, much of the existing research
comparing OE prose and verse syntax focuses on clausal word order and verb phrases (e.g., Blockley 2001, Minkova and Stockwell 1992, Campbell 1970). Thus, a study of OE NP structure as it varies in prose and verse would complement previous literature, and in more ways than one. In particular, the varying frequencies of right headed or left headed structures (including the structure of NPs) may be understood as related to the changes in English clausal word order from SOV to SVO (Nagucka 1992: 18). This structural change, then, may be more fully understood through consideration not only of the changes in clausal word order, but also of the related changes in NP word order.

The study of OE NP word order is also promising in terms of the consideration of the relationship between verse and syntactic constraints. For instance, Kuhn’s laws1 affect clause-initial constituents including full NPs by disallowing demonstratives in particular metrical positions (Minkova and Stockwell 1992: 144). One would expect variation in NPs found in verse related to this particular metrical constraint among others, and NP structure is also responsive to other metrical and alliterative considerations. For instance, as discussed in section 1.1, there is competition in proper noun genitive word order constraints related to animacy and meter. This competition between OE verse constraints and semantically related word order preferences for genitives highlights a tendency in OE syntax which is not immediately apparent in the later OE prose (as the later prose typically

1 These laws of Germanic poetic metrics and word order, as formulated by Hans Kuhn in 1933, concern the position of words belonging to different classes, for instance “sentence particle” (including such items as conjunctions and pronouns), in relation to elements of metrical structure, such as dips. For further discussion, see Orton (1999) or Mines (2002).
prefers genitive + head noun order in the case that the genitive is a proper name [+animate] (Rosenbach 2002: 178)). This variation related to animacy, however, is predicted by theories of language variation and animacy, and is also found in later stages of the language in the variation between genitives and of-constructions (Rosenbach 2002: 138-142). In particular, in the OE verse corpus, there is more variation in proper noun genitive word order in the case that both the genitive and the head noun are animate. This is similar to the appearance of constructions such as son of John Doe, in which the animate possessor follows the animate possessum, at later stages of the language’s development. In these examples, the effects of the animacy hierarchy are clear: animate nouns are more likely to precede inanimate nouns in genitive constructions, but variation in word order follows from the presence of two animate nouns. Thus the addition of verse constraints, in the OE verse, has the potential to highlight tendencies in the overall syntax, which might be less visible in prose, but which may represent speakers’ passive competence, if not their typical performance.

For all of the reasons discussed above, the consideration of NP word order, in relation to differences between verse and prose syntax, contributes to our broader understanding of both OE syntax and OE verse. It crucially illuminates a change in OE

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\(^2\) The fact that these works were written for, and presumably comprehended by, an audience suggests their possible usefulness in the study of OE syntax. As Joseph (1990) points out, “A hearer’s ability to comprehend a particular work can be taken as a reflection of at least passive competence on his/her part” (6). Certainly our knowledge of the audience is limited; but in the case that word order patterns found in the verse reinforce patterns in the prose, we can imagine that an audience would have comprehended these constructions.
syntax which may also be related to the better studied shift from SOV to SVO word order; it highlights an aspect of OE poetic variation; and it addresses a gap in the previous literature.

1.4 General Noun Phrase Word Order Patterns

While chapters on individual NP modifiers include a more detailed discussion of previous research related to those modifiers in OE, this section provides a brief introduction to general OE NP word order patterns. Mitchell (1985: 68-79) outlines the basic internal word order of OE NPs in prose when qualifying elements precede the head noun, as seen in figure (1) below:

(1) quant. + poss., dem. pronoun + numeral + *oper* + adj., participle + genitive + **head noun**

As can be seen, the position immediately before the noun is occupied by a genitive-marked noun, and the position before that by an adjective or participle, then *oper* “other”, then any numerals, then demonstratives or genitive pronouns; then finally in the most distant position from the head noun is the quantifier *eall* “all, every”, *sum* “some, a certain”, or *manig* “many”. Mitchell states that one “striking difference between the prose and poetry” (71) is that in verse these elements may be separated from the head noun, in which case they precede or follow the head noun. Furthermore, there are varying rates in the postpositioning of these elements in prose and verse (75). It is important to note in Mitchell’s observation of these varying rates of postposition that figure 1 above represents a generalization, and that variation in both prose and verse was possible. My focus is as
much general NP word order patterns as it is the variation within those patterns, the extent to which there is variation associated with different modifier types and associated with other factors, metrical and extralinguistic.

1.5 The Relationship between Old English Prose and Verse Syntax

With regard to the possible relationship between Old English prose and verse syntax, scholars have outlined a number of potential positions. Blockley (2001:2), focusing her discussion on clause structure and distinguishing between dependent and independent clauses, suggests three different possible relationships: that OE verse is in “a state of syntactic near-chaos”; that there was a single system of syntax, in which verse syntax had an important impact on the development of prose syntax (Campbell 1970); and that there were two distinct systems with one for prose and one for verse (Andrew 1940). The first position possibly acknowledges misconceptions of the “free word order” of OE, and Blockley argues for the last position, connecting the idea of a distinct poetic diction with distinct poetic syntax (2, 16).

Minkova and Stockwell (1992) outline still more possible relationships between OE verse and prose syntax. In particular, they mention Campbell’s position (that of verse syntax influencing prose syntax) as well as the possibility that only time and language change account for differences between prose and verse syntax (Pintzuk 1988, Hock 1985). They also mention the position of Kemenade (1987) that OE verse was so radically different from OE prose that its language can be thought to shed no light on OE syntax as a whole, and the contrasting view of Mitchell (1985) that verse syntax “was made up of a selection of ordinary prose patterns” (3959). Lastly, they outline their own
stance that “[t]here is a syntax common to verse and prose, with special conventions for verse rhythmical or otherwise, which introduce apparent violations of the syntax found in prose” (142). Assuming this last position, there seems to be no reason why OE verse could not serve as useful data in the study of OE syntax as a whole, given proper consideration of these poetic constraints. Indeed, with a systematic treatment of meter and alliteration, we may entertain the idea in historical syntax, as in historical phonology, that these very constraints may also serve to highlight patterns of variation which may be less visible, but nonetheless operative, in the prose.

In the following section, I discuss one of the possible relationships between OE verse and prose syntax, as outlined above: namely that OE verse syntax is more archaic than OE prose syntax. This possibility is of particular interest from the perspective of language change, and must be addressed to contextualize the other possibilities with regard to the relationship between OE prose and verse syntax.

1.5.1 Is Old English Verse Syntax More Archaic?

It is frequently claimed that OE verse syntax is more archaic than OE prose syntax, e.g., Pintzuk (1988), Hock (1985), Hutcheson (1995), this claim commonly being based on findings related to clausal word order. However, even given this claim, there are still at least two possible explanations (or a combination) which may account for any archaic

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3 Indeed, the relationship between word order and the verse-prose distinction as well as that between rhythmical and non-rhythmical texts is a complex one. Even in the case of Aelfric’s rhythmical prose writings, Davis (1997) finds that metrical considerations affect word order variation in verb phrases.
structures in poetry. On the one hand verse may simply constitute a more conservative register, using certain lexical items or syntactic structures that long ago fell out of common parlance. There is even some evidence that this inclination towards linguistic conservativism on the part of some OE poets may have inspired a kind of linguistic innovation. For instance, some OE poems from later in the period actually exhibit higher frequencies of postpositions (as opposed to prepositions) than do earlier poems. Lapidge (2006) speculates that this may be evidence of certain OE poets deliberately producing a more archaic style, to the point of even superceding the previous usage of this older feature.

On the other hand, another contributing factor to the relative archaism of OE verse might simply be that it is older than OE prose. The dating of these texts is notoriously difficult (Shippey 1972: 83, 84), though attempts to date OE poetry, through reference to phonology as compared with prose texts, have had some degree of success. Lapidge (2006: 178, 179), for instance, asserts that “no surviving Old English prose dates from earlier than the end of the ninth century, whereas some Old English poetry, notably Genesis A and Beowulf, dates from at least a century earlier.” Thus, it is entirely possible that some of the discrepancies in syntactic patterns between OE prose and verse are indeed the product of time and language change. If these poems are indeed our earliest samples of Old English, then it becomes all the more important to consider them as a data source in research on language change, and to understand to whatever extent possible the effects that verse constraints had on the word order, so as to better contextualize the syntactic patterns found therein.
1.6 Old English and Corpus Linguistics

Large-scale research on syntactic variation and change in the history of the English language has become considerably more feasible with the creation of digitized linguistic corpora. Since the first publication of the Helsinki Corpus of English texts in 1991, the variety and range of historical English corpora and corpus tools have increased dramatically. By 1997, the Dictionary of Old English (DOE) Corpus, boasting “at least one copy of every surviving Old English text” and more than three million words of Old English running texts (Healey), became available to the public. This new resource provided a dramatic expansion of the previously available searchable Old English texts in the Helsinki Corpus, which total only 413,250 words. These resources have helped facilitate dozens of both lexical and grammatical studies on the history of the English language.

Still further computational innovations in the area have made yet a wider range of linguistic research more easily accessible. In particular, the creation of the parsed Old English corpora used in this study – The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose and The York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry – has facilitated the large-scale study of syntactic structure independent of particular lexical items, which often must be used as anchor points in searches conducted on running-text corpora like the Helsinki Corpus and the DOE corpus. These new corpora, which include morphological and syntactic annotation of words and phrases, enable researchers to search for structural annotation rather than just surface lexical forms. This study capitalizes on
this new functionality by including the results of searches for many different types of NPs, including those with different word orders and different types of modifiers.

However, as many research challenges as the creation and use of such parsed corpora address, they also introduce a set of new methodological challenges and considerations. The results of these corpus searches are only as reliable as the annotation provided in the corpora themselves and the search terms used to process the corpora. Because of this, great care must be invested in their creation and use. A description of the process of creating one of these corpora illustrates the great lengths the researchers went to in trying to ensure accurate annotation.

Pintzuk (2001), in her research report on the creation of the York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry, describes the process as follows:

There were seven basic steps to the annotation process:

· Pre-processing of the Helsinki Corpus data to format the texts for the Brill tagger

· Initial POS\(^4\) tagging by the Brill tagger

· Correction by the RA\(^5\) of the Brill tags

· Pre-processing of the POS-tagged data to format the texts for the Collins parser

· Initial syntactic annotation by the Collins parser

· Correction by the RA of the Collins syntactic annotation

· Post-processing of the annotated text to verify tags and format, and to add IDs (3)

\(^4\)Part-of-Speech

\(^5\)Research Assistant
As can be seen from this description, the annotation for this corpus involved both automated and individual human judgments and corrections. In terms of the automated portion of the annotation, Pintzuk explains that “both the Brill tagger and the Collins parser are ‘trainable’ on text that is already annotated, and ‘learn’ rules based on morphology, word order, cooccurrence, and context” (3). However, just as humans sometimes make mistakes in labeling, so do machines (based on the rules and input data provided by the researchers); thus both computational procedures and researcher judgment were employed in labeling the sentences in the corpora, in an effort to ensure the highest level of accuracy. To accomplish this, at different steps in the process, Old English researchers checked each sentence individually to verify and, if needed, correct the analysis.

In reality, of course, historical linguists and philologists have been using corpora long before these technical innovations. Perhaps the biggest difference with contemporary corpora is their relative ease of searchability, which in turn allows researchers to study larger quantities of text more efficiently. But there are certain well-known challenges associated with using typeface editions of Old English texts in general, whether performing computerized searches or simply reading them on a page. One particular issue affecting the study of Old English relates to the interpretation of spacing and punctuation in the manuscripts. Editors of modern editions of Old English texts commonly attempt to impose some form of contemporary spacing and punctuation standardization, and thus the spacing and punctuation we read in modern editions are a product of an editor’s judgment, which is not always a direct reflection of these features in the manuscript. Even with an
Old English manuscript in hand, deciphering how best to interpret spaces and punctuation and the extent to which they may shed light on syntactic structure (or not) can be challenging.

This trouble in interpreting spacing and punctuation contributes to larger problems of syntactic interpretation both on the sentence level and within sentence constituents. For instance, Blockley (2001:3), considering both punctuation and lexical ambiguity of forms such as þa, which can mean “when” or “then,” points out the difficulty of distinguishing between main clauses and subordinate clauses in Old English. She estimates that “this sort of ambiguity occur[s] in the beginning of about one out of every dozen clauses” (3). While this clausal level ambiguity presents less of an issue for the analyses offered in this study (which focuses on NP-internal structure and word order), there are other types of structural ambiguity which do affect the interpretation of OE NPs. In particular, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between an NP consisting of a genitive or adjective plus a noun and a compound noun consisting of the same or similar parts. For instance, in discussing such structural ambiguities, Russom (1987: 92) provides the form domesdæg as an example, pointing out that while the Clark Hall dictionary considers this form a compound, Campbell (1972) argues against this form as a compound. Thus, it can often be difficult to provide a conclusive analysis of whether two such elements form a compound or a head noun and modifier.

It should be noted, however, that these ambiguities in how to interpret certain types of noun-noun and other common collocations persist in the analysis of Present-day English, independent of considerations of spacing, punctuation, and the difficulties of

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representing manuscript texts in typeface. For instance, see Bauer (1998) and Giegerich (2004) for a discussion of some of these difficulties with relation to noun compounds, such as *kitchen sink* and *watch maker*, in Present-day English. In other words, while the need to make a decision about how to annotate these forms in a corpus or how to represent them on a page may seem to be a problem related to the corpus or the modern text editions, it is indeed an issue already embedded in the manuscripts and the language itself. Such forms would be difficult to interpret with or without corpora and modern publications of OE texts. Thus, in this study, I also consider forms which are represented as compounds as distinct from simplex forms, realizing that I may not be able to distinguish fully between a compound form and genitive noun combination, but attempting to consider at least the impact of apparent compound forms on word order and whether they pattern more like a noun plus its modifier in terms of word order as related to other modifying elements.

1.7 Challenges in Studying the Syntax of a Dead Language

While some of the challenges associated with the study of OE NP variation are also relevant in the study of Present-day English, many of the difficulties in studying English morphosyntax from a socio-historical perspective arise from limitations associated with the data. In such historical studies, written texts are obviously the only primary data available for the analysis of a given historical variety. However, there are many challenges associated with the use of written texts as sole or primary data: for instance, there are issues related to the relationship between speech and writing, the application of methods designed and ideally suited for speech to written texts, the potential “unreliability” of some
written texts depending on the research question, and, most basically, the limitations of a finite corpus. Scholars interested in historical English syntax then must work within the constraints of the data available, for instance attempting to understand better the relationship between speech and writing. A further consideration then is which written genres may best represent speech. Researchers must pay critical attention to textual issues involved in transmission, making appeals to statistics to give a better impression of the grammaticality of different constructions over time (in the absence of native speaker judgments), and making reference to patterns in related languages or later stages of the same language. Each of these difficulties associated with the use of written texts as data as well as scholarly attempts to address these problems is addressed more fully in the following section.

1.8 The Relationship between Speech and Written Language

Many linguists have researched and theorized about the relationship between different written registers and speech. Some of this research directly focuses on the comparison of different registers and the types of variation found in each, e.g. Biber (1998), Biber and Finegan (1992). Other research more briefly or indirectly treats the question in an effort to put forward the idea that their analyses might also be relevant for speech data, although based on written data, in the case that the written data is taken to be reflective of speech. For instance, Rissanen (1991) in an analysis of do-periphrasis argues that “[p]ractically the only way to get information on the expressions typical of the spoken language of past centuries is through observations based on the types of writing which can be assumed to represent the oral mode of expression” (324). Of course, the challenge here
is that the best a researcher can do in attempting to postulate the relationship between
different written genres and speech in a historical variety, with no recorded speech, is to
“assume.” Based on these types of assumptions, Rissanen compares text types such as
trial records and diaries with other text types such as histories, travelogues, and
biographies, suggesting that the first two categories (trial records and diaries) might be
more representative of speech. Then, based on this assumption, and a relatively higher
frequency of do-periphrasis represented in the first group of text types than the second, she
argues that “do-periphrasis follows different patterns in spoken and written levels of
language.” These types of findings are often dependent on the number of instances of a
construction preserved as well as the type of construction under consideration. Indeed,
some issues in syntax are more easily studied using texts than others; for instance, studies
in word order of high frequency constructions (such as noun phrases) lend themselves to
this type of data. Of course at the end of the day we cannot really know the relationship
between any particular text type and speech in a historical period for which there is no
actual speech preserved, but the study of variation across recorded text types may help us
move toward a greater understanding of the structure of the language more generally.

The relationship between speech and text figures less prominently in some other
research, though the same ideas are represented. For instance, Allen (1980) in introducing
her analysis of movement and deletion in OE claims to be “confident that written Old
English differs less from the spoken language than did the writings of later periods when
there had been more time for literary conventions for English to develop” (263). While
this claim might seem reasonable, it is certainly difficult to prove; and indeed there are
other points of view. For instance, Campbell (1970) argues that instead prose was
influenced by poetic conventions and poetic language. Again, it is difficult to say the
extent to which OE prose was a reflection of patterns found in OE speech (as opposed to
those found in OE prose or even poetry) when no OE speech is preserved.

This question of the relationship between different text types and the speech of a
given time period is still an issue at later stages of the language’s development, when there
is more data to consider. There is considerable variation in views with regard to which
text types might best represent speech. Text types which have been put forward variously
by Biber and Finegan (1992), Rissanen (1991), and Allen (1980) are sermons, diaries, trial
records, and literary dialogues, among others. While one can see how any of these text
types could be understood as being more representative of speech in various ways than
certain other text types, like essays or medical literature, there is still a lot of diversity
represented in these text types. And the question remains of which – if any of these –
might correlate with speech productions at any given period. Even if this question could
be answered for contemporary English, which is part of the aim of Biber’s research, one
can not automatically assume that the relationships between different text types and
registers has been stable over time (which his research does not). Thus, while researchers
may make informed arguments as to the possible relationships between speech and writing
at different periods in the language’s history, and may even develop some kind of
intuitions about the language, there really is no replacement for actual speech data.

1.8.1 The Validity of Written Texts
Thus, it becomes important to establish the validity of written texts, in the absence of native speakers, as a possible source of linguistic data, this issue being addressed by Schneider (2004: 83). In particular, the very process of writing something down obviously loses some of the information that would have been available in a spoken performance. Furthermore, there are some constructions that are relatively limited to written forms of the language, seldom if ever, appearing in speech.⁶

What makes historical work more complicated, though, are issues pertaining to textual transmission. For instance, Milroy (2000) points out with regard to Middle English texts that some variation may be attributed to “the result of their textual history,” in particular that some texts “may have been copied from exemplars in different dialects, and scribes may have varied in the extent to which they ‘translated’ into their own dialect” (20). Thus, this process leaves an open question when considering the data represented in the text: namely the extent to which variations and structures represented in the text are a product of the first writer(s)’ language use or that of the later writer(s) or copyist(s). This can obviously be an important question, perhaps especially in the case that there is a time gap between the first and second copy of the text or regional distance between the two copies, as is commonly the case with OE manuscripts. While this is a serious problem, to some extent these issues may be addressed if multiple copies of a text survive, and in some cases the text itself may reveal information about its history.

⁶For further discussion of written-register-specific constructions, see Joseph (2000).
For instance, Shippey (1972: 84) provides poetic examples in which apparent violations of expected patterns of alliteration or meter in a particular manuscript copy may point to linguistic change. He includes examples from *Genesis A* from the *Junius Manuscript*, in which a half-line such as *hea beorgas* “high mountains” appears abnormally short, with only three syllables where one would expect at least four. Given a pattern of similar evidence, he interprets this as an instance where the later scribe recopied an earlier manuscript, using a more contemporary phonological representation. In an earlier period the inflected form of the noun in that verse would have been disyllabic, and this longer form would have produced a metrical verse. The shortened line may be taken as evidence for the loss of intervocalic /h/ and contraction between the period of the poem’s composition and its being recorded in the manuscript.

Indeed, there is a wealth of literature concerned with this type of linguistic evidence for the dating of OE texts, and there are a wealth of opinions on the topic, as well. While there were a number of early researchers in the area of chronological studies such as Kaluza and Sievers, Amos (1980) raises considerable skepticism about such scholarship and its ability to date OE texts. Fulk (1992), however, provides a very comprehensive treatment of linguistic features ranging from the loss of intervocalic /h/ to the contraction of negated indefinite pronouns and how these features, when understood in constellation with one another, suggest the relative dates of OE verse texts. Thus, while it is not an uncontroversial idea, it appears as if in some cases, information about the textual history of a piece may be recovered. Even so, Fulk does not make absolute claims, reflecting that there is still the potential for unknowns with regard to very early
texts, and the possibility that a given text has been recopied by one or more hands — thus obscuring the patterns represented in the language.

1.8.2 Insight into Spoken Old English from Verse Texts

Considering as many text types as possible — including verse texts — provides a more thorough picture of the language as a whole, which is all the more important in the presence of complications associated with textual transmission and a lack of native speakers. In the field of English historical linguistics, poetry has been excluded from some studies on the basis that the art of the verse may obscure underlying tendencies in the language (e.g., Allen 1980, Kemenade 1987). It has, however, been relied upon as crucial evidence in others precisely because of these same poetic constraints (e.g., Kiparsky 1973; Minkova 1997, 2000, 2001). In general, these different stances tend to correlate with the aspect of the grammar which is being investigated, with phonological theory making use of verse evidence, and syntactic theory steering away from this type of data. Minkova even claims that metrical patterns in OE verse allow us to study OE stress and intonation more generally in a way that is not available in prose texts.

I argue similarly in this study that OE verse data allows us greater insight into OE NP word order and grammaticality more generally in that it represents the competition between syntactic and metrical constraints. In some cases, poets choose to abide by the expected prose word order, and in other cases, they invert the expected word order or even divide up the NP constituent, with intervening text or caesura. Observations of the circumstances under which a poet uses an unexpected word order and the frequency with
which he7 does for each type of inversion or other deviation from the prose norm may
provide insight into the relative grammaticality of less frequent constructions. These
constructions might include ones which are not well-attested in prose, but which
nonetheless may have been part of an OE speaker’s grammar.

1.9 A Survey of Verse Considerations

In order to understand the relationship between OE verse structure and OE verse
word order, as Pintzuk (2001) suggests, a more direct consideration of some of the
features of verse structure is necessary in addition to comparison of different word order
frequencies found in verse and prose texts. A simple comparison of verse and prose word
order does illuminate some of the differences between the two, but consideration of verse
structure helps the analysis move from descriptive to explanatory analysis by addressing
the relationship between different elements of verse structure and word order. Features
for consideration in this type of analysis of OE verse include meter and alliteration.

With reference to the study of meter, Cable (1991) points out, as will be familiar to
any student of OE verse, that “Sievers’ Five Types have been the traditional starting point
both for teaching Old English meter and for theoretical inquiry” (7). Cable outlines and
exemplifies these basic verse patterns (subdividing D verses) as follows8:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
A / \ x \ | \ / \ x \\
\end{array}
\]
gomban gyldan

---

7 The usage of ‘he’ is not generic in this context, but it is instead meant to reflect the actual
identity of OE poets to the best of our knowledge.

8 In this table, x indicates an unstressed position, / indicates a primary stress, \ indicates a
secondary stress, and | indicates the foot division of the verse.
Bliss (1962: 36) outlines these same types as follows, presenting a single basic D type and a slightly different pattern for the type C line:

A  / x | | x
B  x / | x /
C  x / | | x
D  / | | x \
E  / \ x | /

These slight differences highlight the fact these verse types represent abstractions to some extent. The stress of one syllable is heard in relation to the stress of other syllables, and short syllables that would ordinarily not receive stress may be interpreted as having resolved stress when they are together. Even recognizing the abstraction of verse types, Bliss subdivides these basic verse types further, considering in more depth features such as the number of unstressed syllables in the verse. He applies this more detailed system of metrical classification to the entire text of *Beowulf*. This resource, because of its level of granularity in description, is taken as the basis here in discussions of the relationship between meter and NP word order.
While this system of classification is largely descriptive, there have also been attempts at explaining the distribution of metrical patterns represented in verse. The field of generative metrics – introduced by Halle and Keyser (1966), and further developed by the work of Kiparsky, Hayes, Youmans, and others – seeks to explain metrical structure in terms of unbreakable rules applied in a certain order. Comparatively, a newer Optimality-Theoretic approach (see, for instance, Golston 1998 and Fitzgerald 1998) deals with metrical constraints that may or may not be broken, and thus concerns itself with tendencies in verse texts rather than hard and fast rules.

Getty (2002) has recently supplied an Optimality-Theoretic analysis of *Beowulf*, which outlines and argues the significance of different theoretical constraints in the construction of Old English verse, some of these constraints arguably having an impact on word order. Getty outlines constraints pertaining to boundaries between lines and half-lines as well as alignment of word boundaries and metrical boundaries. For instance, he argues for constraints such as ones that dictate that “[b]oundaries between adjacent half-lines should be maximally distinct” (243) and that the optimal OE verse structure “[a]llign[s] the head of a metrical foot with the metrical foot’s left margin” (237). Such constraints – related to the ability to distinguish the boundaries of metrical structures, half-lines, and full lines – may also have an impact on word order. In particular, Getty shows that there is a significant distribution in the placement of compounds relative to half-line boundaries:
Table 1.1. Compounds vs. non-compounds at the right margin of a-lines and b-lines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Compounds</th>
<th>Non-compounds</th>
<th>Compounds in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a-lines</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b-lines</td>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from Getty 2002: 250)

Using these findings, Getty argues “that compounds are discernibly more frequent at the right margin of a-lines and discernibly less frequent at the right margin of b-lines” and further that compounds may be used to help disambiguate half-line boundaries. Given the frequency of compounds in OE verse, these findings may be useful to consider in helping to explain some of the word order choices in the verse.

Furthermore, there are interactions between metrical structure, half-line, and alliteration. Bliss (1962) actually goes so far as to separate “a-verses” with double alliteration.

---

9 Here a-verse and b-verse refer to the first and second half line in a line of OE verse. While the visual representation of half lines is a product of contemporary editing practices, the regular distribution of metrical shapes, as outlined above in the discussion of Siever’s verse types, as well as the regular patterns of alliteration serve to outline a structure in which lines of OE verse are best understood as being divided into halves. Bliss divides the verses as he has because a-verses allow double alliteration, and there are differences in the frequencies of certain metrical types that relate to whether or not there is double alliteration, as is discussed in more detail below.
alliteration,” “a-verses with single alliteration,” and “b-verses” (122) when providing his figures on the frequency of different metrical types. This division is with good reason: some metrical subtypes appear only in one such category or another as related to their placement within the larger verse structure. For instance, Bliss’s subtype aI and a2 appear only in a-verses with single alliteration; and with the exception of subtype IDI and ID2, all other type D lines (including 10 other subtypes) appear exclusively in a-verses with double alliteration (122). Thus, as can be seen from these examples, there are significant interactions between verse structure and alliteration, meaning that each of these features might be significant in word order choices, such as illustrated by Getty for compounds.

In the extent to which OE verse word order with NPs differs from OE prose word order, the question remains as to the relationship between this variation and verse structural features such as those outlined above. Similar questions arise concerning the frequencies of different NP types in OE verse and prose. For instance, Chapter Two discusses one important stylistic feature of OE verse: the frequency of syntactically light NPs. While there are fewer pronouns in most verse texts compared to prose texts, there are also fewer demonstratives, and NPs in general tend to be a bit shorter. Certainly crisp language that tries to avoid unnecessary words is a stylistic feature of English verse from many periods. Thus it is certainly conceivable that the shorter NPs in OE verse are a deliberately chosen feature of OE verse style, and end in and of themselves, as much as they could be a function of verse constraints related to meter and alliteration. There are of course further considerations related to variation in style which may not be directly connected to metrical or alliterative considerations, for instance a poet’s use of
hyperbaton\textsuperscript{10}. It appears that the \textit{Beowulf} poet makes use of variations in word order for such effect, as well, as is discussed more fully in Chapter 3. All of these factors may help illuminate the relationship between OE prose and verse word order and explain some of the differences between them.

1.10 Other Sources of Variation

Even considering the factor of time and language change, within the broad categorizations of Old English prose and verse, there is obviously much room for variation, as associated with particular works, writers, or text types. For instance, the Boethian \textit{Meters}, with verse and prose versions which have both been at one point attributed to King Alfred (though not without some controversy), “have at times quite distinct vocabulary and inflections, so that if we knew nothing at all about the texts, they might well have been ascribed to different places or times” (Shippey 1972:83). This case highlights the difficulties in attempting to attribute OE texts to particular writers, locations, and times. And even these distinctions are oversimplifications of the reality of the transmission and preservation of many OE texts. For instance, Shippey points out the example of \textit{The Dream of the Rood} which is written in late West Saxon, but which may be connected to an earlier work in a North Northumbrian dialect, thus with “the chain of transmission stretch[ing] for 250 years and a thousand miles” (84). Thus, not only are time and author potential factors in variation, but also of course is regional variation.

With regard to regional variation, Campbell (1959: 10) goes so far as to say that “it is not

\textsuperscript{10}This is the reversal of normal word order, generally for stylistic effect.
possible to draw a dialect map of England in the Old English period,” highlighting the uncertainty of our knowledge of the regional identification of particular texts. Thus, as can be seen, there are any number of extra-linguistic factors which may have influenced syntactic variation in OE, many of which we have limited knowledge about.

Furthermore, as many OE texts are translations from Latin or were inspired by Latin originals, there is the lingering question of the amount of influence Latin word order may have had on OE prose and verse syntax. In some cases of syntactic variation, it is apparent that Latin word order had a minimal impact on OE word order. For instance, Nunnally (1992: 363), looking at the OE translation of the gospel of Matthew, concludes that “Latin word order is not significantly influencing OE genitive placement.” However, translation from Latin has been shown to have an impact on variation in the structure of prepositional phrases, at least in terms of frequency in the choice between prepositions or postpositions (Taylor 2008). As can be seen, then, the potential influence of Latin may also be a relevant factor in accounting for patterns in OE syntactic variation; and the influence of this factor seems to vary depending on the text type and the construction itself. This is another area in which consideration of OE verse data may be especially helpful since much of it was composed originally in OE, not as a translation from Latin. These texts provide us another opportunity to study OE syntax without the influence of translation.

As seen in this discussion, however, there are many factors which may contribute to variation in OE syntax in addition to the simple verse-prose distinction, which in itself may be complicated by the existence of metrical prose, such as some of Ælfric’s writings
(Cable 1991: 42). Though some of these factors may be difficult to pin down, due to issues of textual dating and attribution, it is important to be aware of these issues and to consider them to whatever extent possible, making use of as many different texts and text types as possible. Through this consideration, these points may inform the larger picture of the variation between OE prose and verse syntax, in general and with regard to NP structure.

1.11 Conclusions

While the complexities in the comparative study of OE verse and prose NP word order are significant, the tools and resources for the language now more than ever make investigation in this area more accessible. Though it is not possible to know the structure of spoken OE, from a syntactic perspective, the study of verse in conjunction with the study of prose may help to illuminate a wider range of OE speakers’ competence. Furthermore, from a verse structure perspective, this investigation helps to illuminate some of the ways in which this historical English verse differs from the prose of the time, possibly helping to shed light on the larger question of the relationship between the two – whether it reflects language change, one type of writing influencing the other, or some other relationship. In addressing both of these questions, this study aims to make contributions to both the study of OE poetic style and the study of OE syntax.
Chapter Two: Relative Frequencies of the Most Common NP Types

2.1 Introduction

To situate NP-internal word order variation within the larger picture of OE NP variation, in this chapter, I consider what types of NPs are most common in OE prose and verse texts and their relative frequencies. In doing so, I look at the distribution of pronouns, proper nouns, and common nouns with and without determiners and adjectives, inasmuch as these simple patterns account for the majority of OE NPs in both prose and verse texts. Interestingly, while there is considerable consistency in frequency distributions within OE prose texts and within OE verse texts, prose and verse patterns are distinct from one another. The largest differences between overall frequency patterns in these two bodies of texts relate to the usage of pronouns, determiners, and adjectives – with verse texts overall making less frequent use of pronouns and NPs composed of a determiner and a common noun than prose texts do, and making more frequent use of adjectives than prose texts.

These broad frequency patterns for different NP types in OE texts are outlined and discussed in more detail in the following sections, including a discussion of a few texts whose NP usage seems to differ from the rest of the corpus: the verse compositions *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Meters of Boethius* and the medical handbooks *Lacnunga*, 33
Bald's Leechbook, and Quadrupedibus. The overall differences between prose and verse texts with regard to the most frequent NP types are explained in terms of metrical considerations, especially as related to stress and alliteration; and further issues of content and structure, especially as related to text type, are considered in relation to the exceptional texts. While distinctions between verse and prose texts (with overall consistency within these broad categories) with regard to most frequent NP types point to one dimension in which NP usage differs across these broad textual lines, cases of variation within the collections of verse and prose texts point to a finer picture of variation across text types beyond the basic verse-prose distinction.

2.2 Methods

To gather the data for this chapter I used a combination of TIGERSearch corpus search software and a short Python program of my own authorship to sort the TIGERSearch results. I used TIGERSearch to search for all instances of NPs in each individual file in the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (YCOE) and the York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry (the York Poetry Corpus). For each file, I then used the export tool of this program to generate context-free rules (e.g. NP → N^D, NP → D^N N^N\textsuperscript{11}, etc.) for all instances of NPs found. Rather than listing rule types, this tool lists rule tokens. In other words, each individual instantiation of

\textsuperscript{11} These example rules read as “an NP consists of a dative-marked common noun” and “an NP consists of a nominative determiner followed by a nominative common noun” where a “^” simply serves as a marker for indicating that the given case information (e.g. “D(ative)”, “N(ominative)”, etc.) is connected with the part of speech immediately preceding.
the rule NP \( \rightarrow N^D \) is recorded in a file rather than a single entry documenting that that particular rule was used in the given text. Thus, the product of these searches was a series of files, one associated with each of the files in the two corpora, with a list of context-free rules for the sentences containing NPs (in other words, most – if not all – sentences in the file).

I then ran these files through a Python program that sorted the context-free rules, counted the total number of instances of each type of NP rule, and reported an ordered list of the most frequent NP rules for each file. The following sections report the results of these searches and address possible explanations for the distributions found across texts.

2.3 Comparison of Verse and Prose Patterns: Quantitative Results

As can be seen in Table 2.1 below, pronouns are by far the most common NPs in OE prose texts, with only 7 of 81 total texts considered having some other type of NP as its most frequent type:
Table 2.1. Distribution of Prose Texts by Frequency of Common NP Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Det + Noun</th>
<th>Plain Noun</th>
<th>Proper Noun</th>
<th>Adj + Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Counts represent number of texts in the prose corpus in which a given rule type appears at a particular frequency (e.g., for 74 of the 81 total prose texts considered, the most frequent NP type is a pronoun; for 29 of 81 total texts, the second most frequent NP type is a Det + Noun).  

Even in those few exceptional texts in which pronouns are not the most common NPs, rules for pronouns are still relatively high frequency compared to these other frequent NP types, with pronoun rules being the second or third most common type of rule in these cases. NPs consisting of unmodified common nouns (without determiners, adjectives, or any other form of modification) and NPs with determiners appear at similar rates across prose texts. It is worth noting, however, that in six prose texts, unmodified common nouns are the most frequent NP type, whereas this is not true of NPs consisting of a

Note that the rule types represented in Figures 1 and 2 are the overall most frequent NP rules used in the corpus, with this table representing only these rules and their relative frequency for easy of comparison between different prose texts and between prose and verse texts. Some individual texts also make relatively frequent use of other overall less frequent rules (e.g., NP –> PROS^D N^D, a rule involving a possessive pronoun and NP –> NP CONJP, a rule for a coordinated NP). Since these rules are not used in all texts, they are discussed on an individual text basis in the case studies in this chapter.
determiner and a noun for any OE prose texts. Unmodified common nouns, as a highest frequency NP type, are discussed further in our consideration of common NP rules in OE verse. Finally, NPs with adjective modifiers are uniformly the least common of these different NP types in prose. This aspect of the frequency distribution also contrasts with the distribution of NP usage seen in OE verse, as discussed below.

While pronouns are clearly the most frequent NP type in OE prose, unmodified common nouns are the most frequent type in OE verse, with 10 of 12 verse texts having such NPs as their most frequent NP type, as seen in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2. Distribution of Verse Texts by Frequency of Common NP Rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Det + Noun</th>
<th>Plain Noun</th>
<th>Proper Noun</th>
<th>Adj + Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2. Counts represent number of texts in the verse corpus in which a given rule type appears at a particular frequency (e.g., for 2 of the 12 total verse texts considered, the most frequent NP type is a pronoun; for 10 of 12 total texts, the second most frequent NP type is a pronoun).

While pronouns are by no means uncommon in verse texts, they are comparatively less frequent than unmodified common nouns in most texts, with only two exceptions: *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Meters of Boethius*, which are considered in more detail in
section 2.5. A further difference between OE verse and prose texts concerns the frequency in usage of NPs with adjective modifiers. While this is the least common NP type across OE prose texts, it is used at a relatively higher frequency in OE verse texts, with NPs consisting of just a common noun plus a determiner being the least frequent of these more common NPs in OE verse.

Both verse and prose texts included in the corpora show relative consistency in terms of their most frequent NP types, though the verse and prose patterns are distinct. This difference opens the question of what factors might account for these discrepancies, in particular whether poetic factors may have had an influence of the writer’s choice between pronouns and other types of NPs. An examination of several lines of Beowulf helps illustrate how these different NP types fit into the metrical structure of the poem and how different types of NPs can be employed to fit different alliterative and metrical demands of the verse.

2.4 Comparison of Verse and Prose Patterns: A Closer Look

The description of the location where Grendel and his mother live, lines 1357b – 76a, is of particular interest for this type of comparison between verse and prose styles. Similarities in content and structure between this section of Beowulf and Homily XVI of the Blickling Homilies have been noted by several scholars (e.g., Morris 1874–80, Collins 1985, Brown 1938, Wright 1993) and finally discussed in Jack’s edition of Beowulf. These observed similarities have led to exactly the kind of discussion on the relationship between the verse and prose documents discussed in Chapter One. In particular, Morris concludes that the composition of the homily was influenced by the writer’s exposure to
Beowulf, while Collins concludes that these lines in Beowulf were likely influenced by the poet’s knowledge of the homily, and Wright suggests that both texts might have been influenced by a separate common source rather than one directly influencing the other (Jack 1994: 109, 110). While these divergent interpretations of the relationship between the prose and the verse texts underline the difficulties in precise dating of OE manuscripts and compositions and the potentially unknowable historical relationships between some texts, detailed linguistic comparison can highlight the structural relationship between two texts, and given a larger sample, more broadly between genres.

To consider the structural similarities and differences in NP usage in these two stretches of text, we first consider the first few lines of this much-discussed passage in Beowulf, which are as follows:

- *dyrnra gasta.*  
  “of mysterious ghosts.”
- *Hie dygel lond.*  
  “They secret land.”
- *warigeað, wulfhleoþu.*  
  “the wolf-slopes, windy headlands,”
- *windige næssas.*  
  “windy headlands,”
- *frecne fengelad.*  
  “the perilous fen paths”
- *ðær fyrgenstream.*  
  “where a mountain stream”
- *under næssa genipu.*  
  under headlands’ mists
- *niper gewiteð.*  
  downwards goes under the headland’s mists,”
- *flood under foldan.*  
  “a flood under the earth.”
- *Nis þæt feor heonon.*  
  “is-not it far from here”
- *milgemmaerc.*  
  “a flood under the earth.”

39
Most readily apparent in this passage in terms of NP structure and usage is the string of NPs at the start of the first sentence, many of which take the same form of adjective plus common noun: *dygel lond*, *windige næssas*, and *frecne fengelad*. It is worth noting that the poet includes two noun-noun compounds, *wulfhleoþu* and *fengelad*, in this list, the first of the two being unmodified. The use of compounds is a very well-known aspect of OE poetic diction. However, as previously discussed, it is often difficult to know how any given speaker of OE might parse these items – either as single lexical items or as modifiers + nouns, and undoubtedly, there was variation depending on the compound or collocation in question and perhaps even between speakers. Thus, it is difficult to know whether the poet intended structural parallelism or structural variation by including in a list of nouns plus adjectives a noun-noun compound in which the first noun in some way loosely describes the second. What we can note in terms of structure, and what does illustrate one of the more general trends in the quantitative results, is the lack of determiners used with these nouns. In this way the NPs are parallel in structure.

(Beowulf 1357 – 1364)
Determiners, however, are used in OE verse as seen in the usage of *se mere* in 1362b. As unstressed syllables, determiners do not alliterate. And in this line, the minimum number of syllables has already been met; thus the determiner does not seem to be playing a central role in contributing to metrical well-formedness. Further consideration of the meter of this verse, however, may help shed light on the use of this determiner in its context.

Consideration of the metrical subtype of this verse as related to other subtypes suggests some mild competition between optimal verse form and content. Bliss annotates this verse as subtype 2CIb (with a metrical stress pattern of x x / | / x). With 80 other instances of this verse pattern in b-verses within the text, it is not really a rare subtype in that position. Important to note, however, is that subtype 2CIa (with a stress pattern of x / | / x), which is what subtype the verse would be *without* the determiner *se*, is a bit more common, with 114 instances in b-verses as annotated by Bliss (126)\(^{13}\). By the time three unstressed syllables precede the first stress, as in subtype 2C1c (x x x / | / x), the number of b-verses fitting the pattern drops to only 44, with considerably fewer such instances of all of these patterns in the a-verses. Looking at this trend, one might conclude based on frequency of these subtypes that 2CIa, with only one unstressed syllable before the first stress, is the most optimal, with each additional unstressed syllable preceding the first stress being a little less optimal. However, adding extra unstressed syllables in this position does result in well-formed verse types: Bliss even documents one case of a type

\(^{13}\)Note that though the metrical pattern of this line *without* the determiner is more common, this does not imply a later interpolation of the determiner.
CI verse with five preceding unstressed syllables. These types of lines are very infrequent though.

If frequency of use is an indicator of a poet’s preference for particular metrical structures, the fact that the poet has used a slightly less frequent metrical sub-type (by including the determiner) where a more frequent one was easily possible (if the determiner was left out) points to the importance of the content carried by the word – likely the definiteness added by the determiner. This is not just a lake, but the lake – quite possibly the metaphorical lake of fire associated with hell, if the scholars connecting this passage with the *Blickling Homilies* are correct. Thus this determiner may be important to the meaning of the line. Minimally, the fact that the expansion of unstressed syllables, which allows the presence of this determiner, is only available in this pre-stress position points to one of the major restrictions associated with the use of determiners in OE verse. This fact alone helps to illustrate why NPs with determiners are relatively less common throughout OE verse texts than throughout OE prose texts.

Higher frequency of adjective usage in NPs is also one of the features that distinguishes OE verse texts from OE prose texts, as outlined in the quantitative results. In the *Beowulf* passage above, the introductory sequence of NPs consisting of nouns plus adjectives illustrates how OE poets commonly employ adjectives within the verse structure. Adjectives carry metrical stress, and as such they also commonly alliterate. As seen in the first sentence, the adjective *dygel* in the NP *dygel lond* alliterates with the adjective *dyrnra* from the a-verse, connecting the b-verse with the a-verse. The same is true of the adjective *windige* in the b-verse of the following line, alliterating with
warigeað and wulfheopu in the a-verse. Adjectives may also alliterate with their head nouns, such as in frecre fengelad in line 1359a, creating double alliteration in the a-verse. Since OE poets commonly align verse boundaries with syntactic boundaries, adjectives also provide a convenient way for a single NP to take up an entire verse, as in 1358b and 1359a. Thus adjective plus noun sequences can be useful in both alliterative and metrical terms in the composition of OE verse.

NP choice in prose texts is obviously not informed by these criteria. And analysis of the following section of prose from the Blickling Homilies, thought to resemble the lines of Beowulf discussed above, reveals some similarities in terms of phrasing and content, but different patterns of usage associated with adjectives and determiners:

*Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær
So St. Paul was looking on northward this earth, where
“So St. Paul was looking towards the northern region of this earth, where

ealle wætero niðer gewitað, ond he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne harne stan;
all waters down flow, and he there saw over the water a gray stone;
all waters flow down, and he saw there above the water a gray stone

ond wæron norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, ond ðær wæron
and were north of the stone grown very frosty groves, and there were
and in the north, very frosty groves had grown from the stone, and there were

þystrogenipo, ond under þæm stane wæs niccra eardung ond wearga.
dark mists, and under the stone was water-masters’ dwelling and evil-creatures’.
dark mists, and under the stone was the dwelling of water monsters and evil creatures.”

*(Blickling, Homily XVII)*

Jack (1994: 110) points out similarities between the these two passages such as the phrase hrinde bearwas in 1363b of Beowulf and hrimige bearwas in Homily XVI, under næssa genipu in 1360a of Beowulf and þystrogenipo in the same homily, and niþer gewiteð in
Beowulf 1360b and the exact same collocation niðer gewitað in the homily. While some of these similarities might warrant a comparison, there are still clear structural differences in the NPs seen in these passages.

One difference between the passages relates to the use of adjectives. There are no examples of just an adjective plus a noun as the sole components of an NP in the Blickling passage, as there are in the Beowulf passage. One NP with an adjective includes further modification of the head noun – sumne harne stan, and the other includes intensification of the adjective – swiðe hrimige bearwas. Presumably these differences may be understood as a product of the relatively more frequent determiners and quantifiers in the prose texts and the fact that prose NPs can more easily accommodate additional modification, either of the noun or of the adjective, as they do not experience any pressure to align with the smaller spaces dictated by verse boundaries.

In terms of other types of NPs that may be interpreted as having modifiers, compound forms, e.g., middangeard, and þystrogenipo, must also be noted in this passage. Given 359 instances of middangeard in the YCOE corpus, we can assume that the editor’s assessment of this form as a compound (as opposed to a noun plus modifier) is reasonable: the collocation of the two elements involved is so common that speakers likely considered it a cohesive unit. With only one attestation of þystrogenipo in the YCOE corpus, its interpretation as a compound is more of a judgment call. Even so, if this form did constitute a noun and its modifier (as opposed to a compound), it would still be a minority construction in this passage, in which adjectives are avoided or are part of longer NPs. Overall adjectives are less frequent in this passage than in the Beowulf passage, and
though the sample of text considered is small, this pattern does support the more general quantitative findings reported in section 2.3.

Another difference between the two passages in terms of NPs is in the frequency of use of determiners, with demonstratives being more common in the Blickling prose passage. For instance, both references to őæm stane include a demonstrative. The pattern of usage is similar to that seen in Present-Day English usage in which an indefinite is used to mark new information (the stone is introduced as sumne harne stan), and a definite article is used to indicate given information (the stone is subsequently referred to as őæm stane). We also read about pisne middangeard, ealle watero, and őæm watere. Even given this short passage, we see the writer make use of a range of demonstratives and quantifiers. This is, of course, not to say that this text does not include completely unmodified common nouns. For instance, in addition to the genitives niccra and wearga, the passage also includes the previously mentioned unmodified compound form þystrogenipo.

Interestingly, this compound is one of the very terms that is thought to show similarity to a verse in Beowulf (under næssa genipu 1360a). This is interesting in that compounds are commonly thought to be a feature of OE poetic style, and unmodified common nouns are the most frequent NP type in Beowulf and in most OE verse texts. Thus, we might expect the compound form in the verse text. However, in addition to fitting better syntactically into the verse structure, the actual line in Beowulf (under næssa genipu nîher gewited (1360)) allows for double alliteration in the a verse. Here we see that poetic considerations interact with syntactic rules and structure, and that
generalizations about NP usage and poetic style (such as the preference for compound forms) are precisely that – generalizations, thus lacking the nuanced specificity that seems to be called for here.

2.5 Variation Across Prose Texts

While there are certain clear generalizations with regard to the relative frequency of different common NP types in prose and verse texts, there is also variation. In this section, we consider an exception to the generalization that pronouns are the most frequent of NP types across prose texts.

One clear exception to this generalization is found in medical handbooks. Of the seven texts in the prose corpus in which pronouns are not the most frequent NP type, three are medical handbooks: Quadrupedibus, Lacnunga, and Bald's Leechbook. And only four medical handbooks in all are included in the corpus, with the Herbarium being the only additional text of this type that does not fit this pattern. For both Lacnunga and Bald's Leechbook, unmodified common nouns are the most frequent NPs, followed by common nouns plus determiners, then pronouns, and finally common nouns with adjective modifiers. Quadrupedibus follows a similar pattern with unmodified common nouns being the most common and nouns with adjectives being the least, but pronouns are more frequent than common nouns with determiners in this text.

The relative consistency within this text type in terms of NP usage can be understood by considering the larger structure and function of these texts. As these texts aim to introduce the reader to remedies for a range of ailments, they make frequent
reference to an assortment of new conditions and treatment materials, as seen in the particularly noun-heavy sentence in (1) from Bald’s Leechbook:

(1)  *Wiþ bræcseocum men, cost, gotwoþe, eluhtre, betonice, attorlaðe, cropleac,*  
*With lunatic man costmary goatweed lupine betony attorlathe garlic*  
“For a lunatic man, a man should sing a mass over costmary, goatweed,

*holecersan, hofe, finul, asinge mon ðæssan offer*  
*holecersan hofe fennel sing out man mass over*  
*betony, attorlathe, garlic, holecersan, hofe, and fennel”*  

(Bald’s Leechbook)

The discussion of ailments and treatments that are new to the discourse, as would be the case with the introduction of each new remedy such as the one above, lends itself to the use of indefinite nouns – the unmodified common nouns that are so common to this text type. Thus the discourse structure and function of these texts inform the writers’ choice of NPs.

2.6 Variation Across Verse Texts

Just as there are exceptions to the NP frequency patterns found in OE prose texts, so there are exceptions within the collection of verse texts. Recall in particular from section 2.3 that in the majority of OE verse texts, unmodified common nouns are the most frequent NP type, with pronouns being the second most frequent type. In this regard, verse texts as a group show more consistency than prose texts, which as a whole show great consistency in their preference for frequent pronoun usage but then show more variation in the types of NPs which are the next most frequent. The comparative consistency within the verse texts may be thought of in terms of the impact of metrical demands on the poet’s selection of different NP types. For instance, on average, NPs with
adjectives are more frequent than NPs with just determiners in OE verse texts. As
discussed, the probable explanation is that adjectives help with alliteration and fleshing
out verses while determiners are unstressed and are more restricted in terms of the poetic
contributions they make and the places they can appear. One would expect similar
findings associated with pronouns; if sequences of function words are more or less
restricted to appearing in dips, this restriction alone might decrease their frequency. This
is of course not to mention a potential stylistic preference in terms of diction, in which
more colorful and descriptive NPs help give a verse composition its poetic style.

Still there are exceptions, and with different possible explanations. In particular,
both *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Meters of Boethius* use pronouns as their highest
frequency NP type (more like prose texts). Closer examination reveals an important, but
somewhat unexciting, explanation for this deviation from the expected pattern in *The
Rood*: this text makes frequent use of the first person. With nominative case pronouns
being the single most frequent NP type in *The Rood*, 41 of 77 of these pronouns are *ic.*
Thus the increased frequency of pronouns is related to the interaction between form and
content – namely through the frequent use of first person: the combination of first person
pronouns with other pronouns being used at more typical frequencies in the text results in
an overall higher frequency of pronouns. Though there is a structural difference between
this text and other OE verse texts, the source of the variation is not purely a reflection of
the poet’s structural choices so much as it is a reflection of this difference in content,
which is then in turn reflected in the structure.
There does not appear to be so simple an explanation for the higher frequency of pronouns in *The Meters of Boethius*. There is no such preponderance of one pronoun over another, as in *The Dream of the Rood*. Again, with nominative case pronouns being the single most frequent NP type in *The Meters*, of the 254 total nominative case pronouns, 62 are *he*, 50 are *hi*, 36 are *ðu* or *þu*, 25 are *hit*, 23 are *hio*, 17 are *ic*, 9 are *we*, and 8 are *ge*. Overall, pronouns are simply more frequent in this verse composition than in many other OE verse texts, and this higher frequency of pronouns is more in line with patterns seen in OE prose texts.

This deviation in NP type frequency may help shed light on the creation of *The Meters of Boethius*, and in particular the relationship between the verse and prose versions of this text. As Anlezark (2004) points out, “It has long been assumed that the phrasing of the Old English *Meters* text points to direct use of the Old English prose as a source, with the versifier making no direct use of Boethius’ original Latin” (10). Though the authorship of these pieces is not uncontroversial, Anlezark takes the position that both pieces were indeed composed by Alfred in the manner described in the preface to the prosimetric version (with the prose serving as a model for the verse). He bases this assessment, among other things, on commonalities in the “words and phrases” between the texts (10).

This syntactic detail concerning NP usage might also be understood as suggesting a relationship, in terms of composition history, between the prose and verse texts. In both texts, nominative case pronouns are the most commonly attested NP type, a pattern that is generally found in OE prose, but not verse, texts. Of course, one would need to know the
relative rates of pronouns to common nouns and proper nouns in Latin to rule out the possibility of Latin’s grammar having an influence on the verse text. However, for our purposes, it is interesting to observe that a verse text that is based on a prose text does indeed exhibit a feature common to prose texts (and in particular the prose text which is assumed to have been a reference in the metrical composition): an elevated frequency of pronouns. This correlation suggests that even something so simple as the relative frequencies of different NP types has the potential to provide information about a text’s history.

2.7 Discussion and Conclusions

While the study of NP-internal word order variation, as discussed in subsequent chapters, has great potential to shed light on certain interactions between syntactic and metrical constraints as well as historical changes in the language, in reality the types of NPs that cannot show internal word order variation (those with only one word – pronouns and unmodified common nouns and proper noun) are some of the most common OE NP types, in both prose and verse texts. As such, these forms in large part contribute to the texture of OE documents.

A comparison of the highest frequency NP types in OE verse and prose documents reveals a relative degree of consistency within these broad textual categories. Furthermore, the fact that the highest frequency NP type in verse documents, the unmodified common noun, is different from that in prose documents, the pronoun, points to some basic structural differences between two types of texts. Undoubtedly, verse constraints contribute to this difference.
Still, even given these generalizations, and the insights to be gained from them regarding NP usage in OE verse and prose texts, it is further possible to identify texts that deviate from the norm in terms of NP type frequency. Some of these deviations point to more subtle text type differences, such as those associated with medical handbooks, while others might point to the history of the text’s composition, such as with the *Meters of Boethius*. A greater understanding of both the generalizations and the exceptions in the usage of high frequency NP types in prose and verse texts helps flesh out our picture of OE NP variation while also highlighting some important structural differences between different OE genres.
Chapter Three: Genitives

3.1 Introduction

Though genitive variation, both in Present-Day English and historical varieties, has received much attention in the literature (e.g. Allen 2008; Rosenbach 2002, 2005; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1994; Jucker 1993; Nunnally 1985; Altenberg 1982), these treatments have focused on prose writing, with little explicit comparison of the patterns found in prose and verse texts.

In Present-Day English, we may choose between the genitive, as in (1), and an of-construction, as in (2), in many contexts:

(1) the tree’s leaves

(2) the leaves of the tree

Constructions as seen in (2) were quite rare in Old English, occurring in only 1% or less of the total cases until 1100, and then greatly rising in frequency between 1200 and 1300 (Fries 1940: 205). Instead variation related to the position of genitive-marked nouns, which appeared before or after the head noun, as seen in (3) and (4):

(3) in Caines cynne (Beowulf 107a)

(4) sunu Beanstanes (Beowulf 524a)
Even within OE prose texts, there are different frequencies of prenominal and postnominal position associated with different types of genitives and possessives – common noun genitives, proper noun genitives, and possessive pronouns. From the earliest documented period, in prose, proper nouns have strongly preferred prenominal position. Some of the factors related to this variation, and resulting in such a strong prenominal preference for proper noun genitives (especially those with human referents) include animacy, topicality, and comparative weight of the possessor and possessum (i.e. the number of words and the complexity of syntactic structure in the genitive-marked item relative to the head noun) (Rosenbach 2002: 178). Possessive pronouns, such as min and eower, are yet more categorical in their preference for prenominal position in OE prose, with variation being nearly limited to vocatives (Mitchell 1985: 163) for similar reasons, related to weight and animacy. Common noun genitives, which are less frequently animate and which vary in weight, show more variation between prenominal and postnominal position in OE prose.

Less is known of the relative frequencies of prenominal and postnominal genitives in OE verse, how these patterns relate to those found in prose, and the specific factors accounting for these differences in verse texts. Presumably verse structure, alliteration, or other poetic considerations must at least in part account for some of the differences (see Chapter one for further discussion of some of the more general possible explanations of differences between OE verse and prose). In her study of historical English genitive variation, Allen briefly comments on NP word order in OE verse. She reflects a sentiment similar to that found in the more general discussions of OE verse: “As is hardly surprising,
in poetry we find more freedom, probably reflecting both more archaic possibilities and
the pushing of the grammar to its limits in order to suit the demands of the metre, but there
are limits here too” (2008: 70). Still, what precisely these limits are is less well-known.

This chapter offers a direct comparison of genitive usage and genitive word order
variation in a large sample of OE prose and verse texts as well as a case study of genitive variation in Beowulf. First, I show that the frequencies of different types of genitive modifiers vary between prose and verse texts, with possessive pronouns being less
common in verse than prose, and common noun genitives being more common in verse
than prose. Furthermore, two-word NPs consisting of an unmodified genitive and an
otherwise unmodified head noun are much more frequent in verse texts. Finally, there are
differences in the frequency of postnominal genitives, especially proper noun genitives
and possessive pronouns in lighter NPs, this difference being further highlighted due to
the overall increased frequency of light NPs in verse.

Weight appears to be an important factor in genitive variation in OE prose, with
light syntactic weight predicting prenominal genitive position in two-word NPs, regardless
of whether the possessor is a common noun, proper noun, or possessive pronoun. In OE
verse, however, weight does not appear to have the same effect on word order with proper
noun genitives and possessive pronouns. Yet while weight has considerably less of an
effect on genitive word order choices in the verse, it does still have an impact sometimes,
especially in the case of heavy NPs, with modification on both the head noun and a
common noun genitive. Thus, we see that one important factor in genitive word order
variation in OE prose has only limited effect in OE verse word order choices. Still, other

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linguistic variables – in particular, animacy – that are relevant in genitive word order variation in OE prose have a clear impact on genitive word order choices in OE verse. How each of these factors plays out in actual poetic usage is explored in more detail through consideration of the *Beowulf* text.

3.2 Methods

This chapter includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis to illuminate the patterns of genitive usage and word order found in the corpora. For quantitative comparisons of prenominal and postnominal genitives in the verse and prose corpora, I have searched for instances of NPs with common noun genitives, proper noun genitives, and possessive pronouns – tagged N\(^G\) for common noun genitives, NR\(^G\) and NPR\(^G\) for proper noun genitives in the prose and verse corpora respectively, and $PRO^A$, $PRO^D$, $PRO^G$, $PRO^N$, $PRO^I$ for possessive pronouns (which agree with their head – being accusative, dative, genitive, nominative, or instrumental as marked by the letter following “\(^A\)”). Since one of the primary factors this analysis considers is weight, I have excluded all instances of postmodified genitives, following Rosenbach (2005) and Altenberg (1982), since the weight and structure of postmodifiers vary considerably, making it difficult to control for. To consider the factor of weight, premodification, including such items as adjectives, determiners, and other genitives, is considered.

Thus I have searched for all instances of NPs with common noun genitives, proper noun genitives, and possessive pronouns with premodification on both the genitive-
marked noun and the head noun,\(^{14}\) as in (5); premodification on the genitive-marked noun but not the head noun, as in (6); premodification on the head noun but not the genitive-marked noun/possessive pronoun, as in (7); and no modification on the genitive-marked noun/possessive pronoun or on the head noun, as in (8).

(5)  \textit{ealle eowres landes wæstmas}  \hspace{1cm} \text{(otest, Deut:28.42.4906)}
    all our land’s growth

(6)  \textit{haliges lifes mann}  \hspace{1cm} \text{(aelhom, AHom_30:45.4103)}
    holy life’s man

(7)  \textit{þin wuldres tacn}  \hspace{1cm} \text{(blick, HomS_26_[BIHom_7]:87.78.1101)}
    thine of glory sign

(8)  \textit{lifes leoht}  \hspace{1cm} \text{(aelhom, AHom_1:287.154)}
    life’s light

In (5), \textit{ealle} is accusative and modifies the head noun, and the possessive pronoun \textit{eowres} has genitive case marking and modifies \textit{landes}; thus with modification on both the head noun and the genitive-marked noun, this is the heaviest NP type considered. In (6), the adjective \textit{haliges} is marked for genitive case and modifies \textit{lifes}, thus being an example of a modified genitive with an otherwise unmodified head noun. In (7), \textit{þin} is declined accusative and modifies \textit{tacn}, thus being an example of an NP with additional modification on the head noun, but none on the genitive. In (8), there is clearly no additional modification on either the genitive-marked noun or the head noun, thus making this syntactically the lightest NP considered.

3.3 Relative Frequencies of NPs with Genitives in Verse and Prose

\(^{14}\)Note that modification on the head noun here is defined as having a modifier \textit{in addition to} the genitive-marked noun.
First, as noted in Chapter Two, frequencies of different types of NPs differ between OE verse and prose. This section compares the relative frequencies of NPs with common noun and proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns in the verse and prose corpora. As such, this section includes counts for all NPs with possessive pronouns, common noun genitives, or proper noun genitives regardless of modification and regardless of whether the genitive or possessive forms are prenominal or postnominal. The relative frequencies of each of these NP types, further subdivided by the case of the head noun, and compared with the total number of NPs in that case, are displayed in Tables 3.1 and 3.2:

Table 3.1. Genitives and Possessive Pronouns in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Possessive Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possessive Pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^N</td>
<td>57,871</td>
<td>2,859 (4.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^N</td>
<td>68,317</td>
<td>2,514 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^N</td>
<td>33,296</td>
<td>1,183 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^N</td>
<td>59,436</td>
<td>2,694 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2. Genitives and Possessive Pronouns in OE Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Possessive Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possessive Pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>5,724</td>
<td>153 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>5,866</td>
<td>101 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>4,060</td>
<td>71 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>16 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>5,274</td>
<td>134 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen by comparing Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, possessive pronouns are more common in OE prose than verse; common noun genitives are more common in OE verse than in prose; and there are relatively equal frequencies of proper noun genitives in nominative and accusative NPs, but fewer in dative and genitive NPs. According to Kuhn’s laws, possessive pronouns do not appear in the same category as nouns in OE verse, which are the typical forms to carry metrical stress and alliteration. Instead, possessive pronouns may be patterning more like determiners, which also show a decreased frequency in OE verse. Given the metrical importance of nouns, it makes sense that using more common noun genitives would be a strategy poets could employ to meet alliterative or stress requirements in verse. The greater number of proper noun genitives in OE prose, related to their more frequent use as part of dative and genitive NPs, may point to a wider range of proper noun genitive usages in prose, as compared to the formulaic
introductions in which proper noun genitives commonly appear in verse, as are discussed in section 3.6.

3.4 Prenominal and Postnominal Genitives and Possessives in OE Prose

In this section, we consider the relative frequency of prenominal and postnominal common noun and proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns as related to weight, measured by premodification. It is shown that, as characterized in previous research on smaller prose sample (e.g. Rosenbach 2002, McLagan 2004, Allen 2008), for the larger corpus of prose data, both proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns strongly prefer prenominal position, and common noun genitives exhibit relatively more variation in word order. This preference for prenominal position is especially pronounced for light NPs, in which both the head noun and the genitive are unmodified. For NPs with modified head nouns and genitives, postnominal position, in contrast, is preferred.

3.4.1 Common Noun Genitives

The following figure displays the relative frequencies of common noun genitives as related to modification of the head noun and the genitive:
As can been seen in this graph, overall, prenominal genitives are more common than postnominal ones, but there are clear patterns of usage pertaining to weight. While prenominal position is overwhelmingly preferred in the case that neither the head noun nor the genitive is modified, postnominal position becomes a bit more common when the genitive is modified. And there are more equal frequencies of postmodification and premodification when the head noun has additional modification. Finally, postnominal position is overwhelmingly preferred when both the head noun and the genitive are modified. Thus, while modification of either the head noun or the genitive increases the likelihood of a postnominal genitive, it appears that modification of the head noun is an
especially important factor in predicting postnominal position: the addition of modification
to the head noun results in significantly more frequent postnominal genitives, even without
modification on the genitive. The combination of the two results in an overwhelming
preference for postnominal genitive position.

This pattern bears some similarities with patterns found in Present-Day English
genitive variation, but it is not identical. In Present-Day English, modification on the
possessor alone has a larger effect, with heavier possessives appearing much more
frequently postnominally, as *of*-constructions (e.g. the leaves of the tree) (Rosenbach 2002).
Similar to what is seen in later stages in the language, modification does increase the
frequency of a postnominal possessor, but the strongest effect in OE prose is with NPs that
have modification on both the head noun and the genitive.

3.4.2 Proper Noun Genitives

As with later stages of the language, OE shows a strong tendency for proper noun
genitives in prenominal position in its prose writings. However, much as with common
nouns, weight has an effect on the word order patterns found with proper noun genitives.
Figure 3.2 below shows the relative frequencies of NPs with varying weights of head
nouns and genitives:
As can be seen in this figure, unmodified, prenominal proper noun genitives with unmodified heads are by far the most frequent type of NP with a proper noun genitive. This word order is almost categorical for unmodified NPs. Prenominal position is also the overwhelmingly common variant even in the case that the head noun or the genitive are modified. However, there are two important similarities between the distribution seen in Figure 3.1 above for common noun genitives and the distribution seen here for proper noun genitives. In particular, additional modification on the head noun is more likely to promote postnominal genitive position than is modification on the genitive itself. And NPs in which
both the head and the genitive are modified are significantly more likely to have
postnominal proper noun genitives. Since these are relatively infrequent constructions,
without sorting out the effects of weight, it appears that proper nouns systematically appear
prenominally (just due to the fact that lighter NPs, which prefer this position, are so much
more frequent). However, modification plays an important role in genitive word order with
proper nouns much in the same way that it does with common nouns in OE prose; and
postmodification is preferred in the case of these heavy NPs.

3.4.3 Possessive Pronouns

The distribution of prenominal and postnominal possessive pronouns in OE prose
differs dramatically from that of common noun genitives and proper noun genitives, as seen
in Figure 3.3 below:
Prenominal position of possessive pronouns is almost completely categorical in OE prose. Mitchell (1985: §163) and Allen (2008: 96) argue that the few exceptions are exclusively vocative case (e.g., *Fæder ure* “our Father”). However, this is not entirely true. Certainly, the vast majority of these exceptions are vocative, but some are not. For instance, see example (9) below:

(9) Soðfæstnesse þine and halwendnesse ic gesæde.
   Truthfulness your and salubrity     I declared.
   “I declared your truthfulness and salubrity.”
   (cobenrul.BenR:2.11.3.172)

Significantly, this example involves a coordinated NP, which is heavier than an NP with a single unmodified head noun, as is the case for the majority of the instances in the graph.
above. In the same way that postnominal position is much less likely for common nouns and proper nouns, especially in the case that they are light NPs, it is nearly impossible for possessive pronouns in OE prose. However, example (9) shows that postmodification, even in the absence of a vocative NP, is a part of the grammar, if somewhat marginal.

3.5  Prenominal and Postnominal Genitives and Possessives in OE Verse

It is widely held that verse word order is more “flexible” than prose word order, at many stages in the language’s history, and certainly during the OE period. While in some ways genitive word order is actually more restricted in OE verse due to metrical constraints, it certainly does differ from prose word order, most especially for proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns, both of which appear at more relatively equal frequencies prenominally and postnominally. This section outlines the relative frequencies of prenominal and postnominal position for common noun and proper noun genitives as well as possessive pronouns, comparing the patterns seen in the verse with those previously outlined in the prose.

3.5.1  Common Noun Genitives

One of the biggest differences between the distribution of NPs with common noun genitives in OE verse and that found in prose is the comparatively overwhelming frequency of NPs with otherwise unmodified head nouns and unmodified genitives, as seen in Figure 3.4 below (compare with Table 3.1):
Comparatively, in OE prose, both NPs with modified genitives and those with modified genitives and modified head nouns are more common than otherwise unmodified NPs with common noun genitives. However, within this category of light NPs, the frequency of postnominal genitives is similar to that found in OE prose, with prenominal position being much more frequent. Those NPs with modified genitives also show similar patterns as found in OE prose. Interestingly, NPs with modification on the head but not on the genitive show relatively higher frequencies of the “expected” word order (prenominal genitive) in OE verse than they do in prose, which shows relatively more equal levels of prenominal and postnominal genitive position in this category. This is the biggest deviation from the prose pattern. Indeed, even the pattern of higher frequency postnominal
genitive position in the case of a modified head and a modified genitive is preserved.

Overall, common noun genitive position relative to the head shows considerable similarity in OE verse and prose, refuting – at least for this feature – the idea that OE verse syntax is systematically different from prose syntax. However, genitive or possessive position is not in its entirety an area in which OE verse and prose syntax are in close correspondence. The following sections reveal the discrepancy between frequencies of postnominal position for proper nouns and possessive pronouns in OE verse and prose.

3.5.2 Proper Noun Genitives

While the factor of weight has similar effects on common noun genitives and proper noun genitives in OE prose, if to different extents, and it is also shown to be an important factor in NP word order with common noun genitives in OE verse, it appears not to be such an important factor with proper noun genitive word order in OE verse. As seen in Figure 3.5 below, proper noun genitives appear at comparatively equal frequencies in prenominal and postnominal position:
While the factor of weight does not appear to be functioning in the same way as it did with common nouns in the case of proper noun genitives in OE verse, the distribution of proper noun genitives and that of common noun genitives do have in common a higher frequency of light NPs without other forms of modification. So again, it is not so much the fact that the OE verse has a relatively high frequency of postnominal proper noun genitives all by itself that makes it remarkable, but that these postnominal proper noun genitives are found in light NPs, a tendency that directly contrasts with patterns seen in OE prose, where postnominal genitives are mostly found in heavy NPs.

3.5.3 Possessive Pronouns
Possessive pronouns show a similar distribution to proper noun genitives in OE verse: they demonstrate an elevated frequency of postnominal position, as seen in Figure 3.3 below:

![Graph showing Possessive Pronouns in OE Verse](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prenominal Genitive</th>
<th>Postnominal Genitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenominal Genitive</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postnominal Genitive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3. Possessive Pronouns in OE Verse

As can be seen in this graph, prenominal and postnominal possessive pronouns are at similar levels of frequency in OE verse, a pattern which contrasts strongly with that found in OE prose, where prenominal position is almost categorical. While there is evidence that possessive pronouns can appear postnominally in OE prose, even in the case that the NP is not vocative, it is certainly a very low frequency occurrence. The combination of these facts suggests that possessive pronouns are one feature where the poet is taking a low
frequency grammatical construction and exploiting it for poetic ends. This is considered in more detail in section 3.6.

3.5.4 Summary and Comparison

As can be seen in this section, genitive and possessive elements do not behave uniformly in terms of word order in OE verse. While it is incorrect to say for these items that OE verse demonstrates a completely unique grammar (i.e. making use of postposed elements in the verse that are never postposed in the prose), it is also incorrect to say that the distribution of prenominal and postnominal genitives and possessives is the same as it is in prose. Each of these categories – common noun and proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns – must be considered separately, as common noun genitives do appear to be subject to many of the same weight-related constraints in verse as in prose, while proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns do not seem to be so affected by weight, or at least not in the same way that comparable NPs in prose are.

How each of these different genitive and possessive types is used in OE verse is considered in more detail in the following section, making use of the text Beowulf, to explore how these NPs fit within and function in verse structure.

3.6 Proper Noun Genitives in Beowulf

The following section considers the usage of proper noun genitives with a human referent in Beowulf. Since animacy is known to be an important factor in genitive word order variation, and since some proper nouns are not animate, this specific subset of proper nouns (i.e. those with human referents) is considered. Indeed, animacy is shown to be an important factor in the proper noun genitive word order in this text. In particular,
inanimate head nouns are more likely to take an animate proper noun genitive in prenominal position than in postnominal position. Still, even given the fact that the same linguistic factor of animacy has an impact on both OE verse and prose texts (with animate nouns preferring prenominal position in prose), there is a considerable difference in terms of the frequency of postnominal proper noun genitives between this text (and OE verse as a whole) and OE prose, as you will recall from previous discussion. In particular, the numbers of prenominal and postnominal proper noun genitives in the poem are roughly the same, while prenominals greatly outnumbered postnominals in prose. Thus, in this section, we also explore some of the ways that proper noun genitives are used in the poem, with a particular eye towards the role of verse considerations and poetic effect in accounting for the difference between patterns found here and those found in prose.

3.6.1 Verse Factors

Table 3.3 below displays the distribution of genitive-marked proper nouns designating a human referent. Though it initially appears as if the distribution of this feature in Beowulf is quite different from that in prose (in which most comparable genitives precede the head noun, as discussed in the previous section), further consideration of linguistic variables as well as poetic constraints illuminates some of the factors involved in the variation.
Table 3.3. Proper Noun Genitive Word Order in *Beowulf*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-Gen + N</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + N-Gen</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the first areas to consider in terms of verse constraints having an impact on genitive word order is the meter itself. Using the scansions of lines in *Beowulf*, as outlined by Bliss (1962), a few patterns emerge concerning the meter of lines containing different types of proper noun genitives. In particular, if we divide the proper noun genitive constructions into those whose head nouns are also animate with a human referent, such as *dohtor* or *sunu*, and head nouns which are inanimate, such as *sweord* and *ellendædum*, we are able to see differentiations in metrical patterns associated with this distinction in the lines with such genitives.

Verses containing genitives with head nouns that have human referents show more uniformity in metrical patterns than those containing genitives with inanimate head nouns. In particular, 19/39 genitive constructions of the pattern N-gen + N with a human head noun follow the metrical pattern 2AIa (e.g. *Hoces dohtor* (1076b)), and 39/58 genitive constructions of the pattern N + N-gen with a human head noun follow the metrical pattern IDI (e.g. *sunu Ecglafes* (590b)). The best represented metrical pattern with genitives with inanimate head nouns is 2AIa, with only 5/46 instances (e.g. *Hreðles lafe* (2191b)). Thus, we can see a great deal more consistency in metrical patterns of verses, regardless of word
order, when the head noun of the genitive construction designates a human (as compared with those NPs where the head noun is inanimate).

While these patterns may suggest something interesting happening with the meter as it relates to the linguistic factor of animacy, they may also simply reflect a wider range of inanimate head nouns in the genitives. For instance, compare an assortment of inanimate genitive head nouns found in the poem – *sweord, ade, ellendædum, geweorc* – with a few common head nouns that designate humans – *sunu, þegnas, bearn, mæg*. The inanimate nouns represent a wider variety of syllable counts and metrical patterns, whereas the nouns with human referents are commonly only one or two syllables. Additionally, genitives with inanimate head nouns are more likely to include additional words in the verse besides the genitive and the head noun, for instance, *nefa Swertinges (1203a)* as compared to *Swylce hie æt Finnes ham (1156a)*. This evidence by itself suggests that the variation in metrical patterns found in lines containing genitives with inanimate head nouns may be a product of the wider variety of words participating in those constructions. Thus, while there are correlations between the different NP word orders, even related to animacy, these correlations may be as much a reflection of the poet’s linguistic choices as they are what dictates his choices.

Another obvious poetic factor to consider is the placement of the genitive construction within the verse structure, in particular whether the construction appears in the *a* or *b* verse or split between. One might naively imagine that if the *a* verse were composed first, then this verse in setting the pattern of alliteration might have more of an impact on word order variation in the *b* verse. Thus, one might anticipate a higher frequency of the
less common genitive word order in the \( b \) verse, in response to the alliterative pattern established in the \( a \) verse. However, while proper noun genitives are generally more likely to occur in the \( b \) verse, genitive word order variation appears to be only mildly correlated with whether the genitive appears in the \( a \) verse or the \( b \) verse.

Alliteration, however, clearly has an influence on genitive word order in some cases. For instance, consider the lines in (10) and (11):

(10)  \( Da \ ic snude gefrægn \)  \( sunu Wihstanes \)  (Beowulf 2752)
Then I swiftly have heard son of Wihstane

(11)  \( Wiglaf maðelode, \)  \( Wihstanes sunu: \)  (Beowulf 3076)
Wiglaf spoke,  Wihstane’s son

As can be seen in these lines, the same head noun and genitive elements appear in different orders so that the appropriate alliterating syllable is located at the start of the \( b \) verse. In all but two cases (of the total 67) with the unexpected genitive word order (i.e. those with postnominal genitives), the head noun is an alliterating syllable, and we can expect genitive variation to be sensitive to this poetic constraint.

Alliteration also has an impact on NPs being divided across verse boundaries, with the proper noun genitive in the \( a \) verse and the head noun in the \( b \) verse. In particular, such division occurs when the genitive and the head noun alliterate, as in (12) and (13):

(12)  \( ond Higelaces \)  \( heordgeneatas \)  (Beowulf 261)
and Higelac’s  hearth-companions

(13)  \( þæt he Hroðgares \)  \( ham gesohte \)  (Beowulf 717)
that he Hrothgar’s  home had sought
In these examples, the poet has chosen to span the NP across the verses with the genitive-marked proper noun in the a-verse and the head noun in the b verse, thus meeting the requirements for alliteration in both the a and b verses.

However, there still remains something puzzling about the distribution of these split NPs with proper noun genitives. Already having a limited occurrence with NPs with proper noun genitives, this split configuration is limited almost exclusively to those NPs with the usual prose word order (i.e. those with prenominal genitives). Genitive constructions which follow the more common word order are much more frequently split between verses, with 17/73 instances of such genitive constructions being split between an a and b verse, and only 1/67 genitive constructions with the unexpected word order appearing split between verses. The one instance of a split NP with a postnominal proper noun genitive has the head noun in the preceding b verse and the genitive in the following a verse, as seen in (14):

(14)  
searoniðas fleah  
cunning enmity fled  

Eormenrices,  
of Eormenrice  
Geceas ecne ræd  
chose eternal gain  

(Beowulf 1200b-1201)

Thus, it does not fit the pattern outlined above in which alliteration might be related to the poet’s choice of NP placement within the verse structure. This example with the postnominal genitive also differs in that there is another element separating the head noun and the proper noun genitive – the verb fleah. Thus, in several ways this example seems to differ from those in (12) and (13) above.
Can the dramatically higher frequency of NPs with prenominal proper noun genitives in which the head noun is separated from the genitive by caesura be explained purely in terms of alliteration? While such NPs in which the head noun and the genitive alliterate are more common with prenominal proper noun genitives in the poem, this condition alone is not sufficient for the poet to select the strategy employed in (12) and (13) of splitting the NP, as can be seen by examples such as (15) and (16), which do not split the alliterating NP across verse boundaries:

(15)  
Hengestes heap
Hengest’s company
(16)  
Biowulfes biorh
Beowulf’s barrow

Furthermore, postnominal proper noun genitives that alliterate with the head noun also appear in the poem, as seen in (17):

(17)  
eaforum Ecgwelan
sons of Ecgwela

Thus, while alliteration of the head noun and the genitive correlates with splitting the NP, that factor alone does not predict this positioning of the NP within the verse structure. At least for the head nouns, we can assume that the poet often has many potential lexical items from which he can choose, thus there is no reason to assume that the selected head noun would be the only possible option. In other words, we can not assume that the poet could not have selected other head nouns for the postnominal proper noun genitives, which would have resulted in alliteration in those cases, and thus met the same specifications as
the prenominal genitives that are split from their head nouns. How then do we interpret the lack of postnominal proper noun genitives that are split from their head nouns by caesura?

There are at least two distinct possibilities – one more related to verse structure and one more related to syntactic structure. Perhaps it is more difficult to process a genitive which is separated (by caesura or linguistic material) from its head noun when the typical word order (genitive + head noun) is not followed, and so the poet avoids it. Or perhaps there is some metrical advantage to splitting prenominal proper noun genitives from their head that is not present for postnominal genitives. We return to this question in sections 3.7 and 3.8 in our discussion of common noun genitives and possessive pronouns, as the verse patterns associated with their usage shed light on this question. Certainly, the frequency of postnominal genitives in *Beowulf* differs markedly from the OE prose patterns with this type of genitive construction, and it is clear that verse considerations do have an impact on proper noun genitive word order. However, it is often difficult to parse out the extent to which linguistic choices have an impact on verse structure versus verse structure having an impact on linguistic choices.

It is clear, however, that some of the same linguistic factors that influence proper noun genitive word order are still at work in *Beowulf*, even given the dramatically different frequencies of postposed proper noun genitives. The following section considers in particular the influence of animacy on genitive word order.

3.6.2 The Linguistic Variable of Animacy
There is a strong pattern of correlation between genitive word order and the animacy of the head noun, as displayed in Table 3.4. In particular the animacy of the genitive as well as the animacy of the head noun have an impact on genitive word order.

Table 3.4. Genitive Position and Head Noun Animacy in *Beowulf*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Noun Type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Inanimate</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-gen + N</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + N-gen</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In *Beowulf*, proper noun genitive constructions whose head noun has a human referent are significantly more likely to have the genitive-marked noun follow the head noun, $\chi^2 (1, n = 140) = 21.97$, $p < .001$.

An animacy-based account of genitive word order (e.g. Hawkins 1981, Anschutz 1997) suggests that the “more animate” noun should precede the “less animate” noun. This pattern is clearly illustrated in *Beowulf*, given the significant differences in distribution related to noun type, with the inanimate head nouns showing the strongest preference for N-gen (animate) + head noun (inanimate) word order. In other words, the effects of animacy on word order are clearest here when the genitive is animate and the head noun is inanimate. This combination results in the predicted word order pattern of more animate nouns preceding less animate nouns. In the case that both nouns are equal on the animcy hierarchy (i.e. both having human referents), we would expect more word order variation.
This is borne out in the *Beowulf* data. The influence of head noun animacy with proper noun genitives is less noticeable with OE prose as proper noun genitives so frequently precede the head noun in any case. Thus verse, due to the interaction of poetic and linguistic constraints, illuminates an underlying tendency in the syntax. We take a closer look at some specific examples in *Beowulf* in the following section.

3.6.3 Genitive Variation within the Poem: A Closer Look

While variation in proper noun genitive word order seems to be relatively common in *Beowulf*, accounted for by a combination of poetic and linguistic considerations, as mentioned previously, what appears to be more marked is a line break or a phrase intervening between the possessor and the possessum. The following sections offer a closer look at different types of proper noun genitive constructions in *Beowulf*, addressing which variations may be considered general trends in Old English syntax, which are less typical word orders that are a product of verse constraints, and which are reflections of some other type of stylistic effect.

3.6.4 Genitives That Fit the Expected Pattern

Genitives that fit the typical prose word order pattern of possessor followed by possessum, and which have no intervening text or line breaks, are the best represented category in the poem, but only slightly. Given the fact that these genitives, as seen in (18)-(20), are also represented in Old English prose, one can assume that they would be a familiar structure to speakers of Old English.

(18) Unferð maþelode, Ecglafes bearn

*Unferð spoke, Ecglaf’s son* (Beowulf 499)
These examples may be thought of as reflecting the basic word order for Old English genitives in the case of proper nouns with human referents, and thus it is unsurprising to find these unmarked forms well-represented in *Beowulf*.

3.6.5 Genitives That Do Not Fit the Expected Pattern

While genitives of the reverse word order, with possessum followed by possessor, are almost as frequent as the expected word order in *Beowulf*, the majority of these examples are of genitive constructions whose head noun has a human referent, as in (21)-(23):

(21)  *Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*  
Beowulf spoke,  Son of Ecgþeow  (Beowulf 529)

(22)  *Da wæs swigra secg sunu Ecglafes*  
Then the man was more silent, the son of Ecglaf  (Beowulf 980)

(23)  *Sweona leodum, segn Higelaces*  
of the Swedes people  standards of Higelace  (Beowulf 2958)

Indeed, many of the tokens representing this genitive word order pattern are of the formula, “Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes.” Still many others are of a similar formula, with the genitive in the second half line representing an appositive including something about the person’s family or lineage, whether it be identifying the person as someone else’s father, or more commonly as someone else’s son. Perhaps this may even
be seen as a stylistic variant, similar to the formal introductions of Present-Day English such as “John Doe, son of Mr. and Mrs. Doe.” Though there is a clear pattern of usage, for some of these more subtle variations, it is often difficult to determine which variants would have resulted in perceived differences in meaning and style, and which variants would have passed more or less unnoticed.

3.6.6 Genitives Spanning Line Breaks

Genitives following the expected word order but divided by line breaks are far more remarkable in Beowulf, with only four total instances in the poem, as seen in (24)-(27) below:

(24)  
\textit{Ic eom Hroðgares}  
I am Hroðgares  
\textit{ar and ombiht.}  
herald and officer.  

(25)  
\textit{We synt Higelaces}  
We are Higelac’s  
\textit{beodgeneatas.}  
table companions.  

(26)  
\textit{Ic eom Higelaces}  
I am Higelac’s  
\textit{mæg and magoðegen}  
kinsman and young retainer.  

(27)  
\textit{Dær wæs Beowulfes}  
There was Beowulf’s  
\textit{mærðo mæned;}  
glory related;  

81
Again, the challenge remains of interpreting these exceptions. Though the word order is as expected, the difference in meter and alliteration at the line break would clue an audience into some discontinuity between the possessor and the possessum.

Comparing the examples of this pattern, we see that the first three examples are of the same syntactic pattern with the copula followed by the proper noun genitive and then a line break followed by the head noun. As each of these lines in (24) – (26) also involves an introduction, this structural variant might additionally represent a stylistic effect. In this structure, the speaker aligns himself with another significant person, either Hroðgare or Higelace, with this structure emphasizing the relationship between the speaker and that person. While the metrical and alliterative differences signaling a line break would have been subtle enough, one can expect that an attentive listener might have been sensitive to these changes. Thus, it is entirely possible that this poetic variation could carry meaning.

3.6.7 Intervening Text

Also uncommon in the text of Beowulf are genitives split by line breaks with intervening text between the possessor and possessum, as seen in (28)-(29):

(28) syðþan Æschere’s
since Æschere’s

on þam homclife hafelan metton
on the waterside-cliff head came upon (Beowulf 1420b-1421)

(29) syððan he Hroðgare’s, victory-blessed man
since he Hroðgare’s, hall cleansed (Beowulf 2351b-2352)

82
The lines in (28) stand out especially given their content: referring to the discovery of a severed head. Given the fact that line breaks between possessor and possessum are so uncommon in Beowulf, and intervening text even more so, it seems that these lines do not reflect a random fact of the flexibility of Old English poetic syntax. Instead, there may be an intended parallel between the amazing structure of these lines and their equally amazing content. Æschere and his “hafelan” are quite literally separated in the physical text of poem, much as in the content that these lines reflect. One may even argue for an element of suspense in the anticipation of the possessum, given the situation and the delay between the genitive and its head noun.

To put this observation in context, we may consider other instances of heads in Beowulf. For instance, one sees a similar pattern associated with the verb becarf, in the circumstance that someone’s head is actually being cut off, as in (30) and (31):

(30)  
And hine þa heafde becarf.  
And then cut off his head.  
(Beowulf 1590)

(31)  
And ic heafde becearf  
And I head cut off  
in ðam guðsele  
in the battle-hall  
Grendes modor  
(of) Grendel’s mother  
(Beowulf 2139)

Here the verb beceorfan actually takes two arguments, an accusative and a dative, the grammar itself dividing the elements being cut. In this example, we can see that this type of division reflected lexically and grammatically was something known to speakers of Old English. These examples – together with the corresponding linguistic evidence that
that it encouraged possessor possessum word order with no intervening phrases – make examples such as (28) all the more remarkable.

3.6.8 Discussion of Proper Noun Genitive Variation in Beowulf

As seen in this section, a combination of verse and linguistic factors is responsible for the word order variation associated with proper noun genitives in NPs in Beowulf, meeting metrical constraints and creating poetic effect. In particular, the poet sometimes varies word order and the placement of the NP within the verse structure (i.e. whether cleanly within a verse or split between the a and b verse) to ensure an alliterating syllable at the start of the b verse. There are key differences between prenominal and postnominal proper noun genitives in terms of their placement within the verse, however: in particular, NPs that are split between the genitive and the head are limited almost exclusively to those with prenominal genitives. This feature is considered in more detail in the following sections to address the extent to which it yields insight about poetic or linguistic constraints operational in the poem.

In terms of linguistic insight, the poem provides unique evidence of the importance of animacy of the head noun even in NPs with proper noun genitives. Whereas the animacy of the head noun would not appear to be an important factor in proper noun genitive word order in OE prose, chiefly because prenominal position is so commonly preferred, the competition between verse and linguistic constraints highlights the fact that for proper noun genitives, it is not only the animacy of the genitive that has an impact on word order but also the animacy of the head. In other words, while in prose writers very
frequently chose prenominal position for proper noun genitives (obscuring the relevance of relative animacy as a factor in proper noun genitive variation), we can assume that the relative animacy of the genitive and its head noun was a factor which could be relevant in an OE speaker’s word order preferences, as is seen in OE verse. A similar finding is presented in the following section on possessive pronouns in the poem.

3.7 Possessive Pronouns in Beowulf

Like proper noun genitives, postnominal possessive pronouns are present at an elevated level in Beowulf (as well as in the more general verse corpus) relative to the frequencies found in the prose corpus. This section considers how and when these different word orders are used, and in particular, the impact of animacy of the head noun on word order variation.

3.7.1 Verse Factors

As can be seen in Table 5 below, possessive pronouns appear at relatively equal frequencies in postnominal and prenominal position, and NPs split between the possessor and the possessum along verse boundaries only appear in the case of postnominal position.

Table 3.5. Possessive Pronoun Word Order in Beowulf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poss + N</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + Poss</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85
While this pattern is similar to that found with proper noun genitives in that both exhibit an elevated level of postnominal position possessors, it contrasts with the pattern for proper nouns in that in this case only postnominal possessors are split for their heads, whereas it was almost exclusively prenominal possessors that were split with proper noun genitives. This combination of facts suggests that it is not purely a grammatical distinction that is being indicated by the poet’s willingness to split certain NPs but not others. If it were grammatical, we might expect that both proper nouns and possessive pronouns would pattern more similarly, for instance with postnominal possessors being more capable of being separated from their heads, perhaps indicating a difference in underlying structure. Instead, the difference appears to be related to metrical considerations. In particular, most of the proper nouns in *Beowulf* are longer than the possessive pronouns, and the need for a certain number of syllables or a certain heavy stress associated with a proper noun might incline the poet to treat possessive pronouns and proper nouns differently.

### 3.7.2 Animacy of the Head Noun

One area in which there appear to be similarities between proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns in terms of word order, however, is with animacy of the head noun. As seen in Table 3.6 below, possessive pronouns with inanimate heads are more likely to appear in prenominal position, with more variation in word order in the case of animate heads.
Table 3.6. Possessive Pronoun Position and Animacy in Beowulf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Noun Type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Inanimate</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-gen + N</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + N-gen</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the same pattern found with proper noun genitives in the poem, and helps to explain the elevated frequencies of postnominal possessors for both of these categories. In the case that both the possessor and the possessum are animate, there is less of a preference for prenominal possessor position in the verse, which contrasts with the strong preference in prose resulting from possessor animacy and weight factors.

Revisiting those examples of postnominal genitives in the vocative, we may posit a more systematic analysis then. It is not just that the vocative for no particular reason allows for postnominal position of possessive pronouns. Instead, the use of vocative almost always correlates with a human animate head noun. Thus these cases of postnominal possessive pronouns in OE prose appear under the same conditions that they do in OE verse (i.e. with an animate possessor and an animate possessum). In other words, as with proper noun genitives in verse, cases in which both the head noun and the possessive element are animate are those which are mostly likely to include a postnominal possessor. Again, this result relates to the animacy heirarchy. If a more animate possessor (relative to the possessum) is one factor that commonly correlates with prenominal position, in the case that both the possessor and possessum are equal on the animacy hierarchy (i.e. they both
designate humans), this factor no longer has the same impact. Thus we see more variation in word order.

3.7.3 Discussion of Possessive Pronoun Variation in *Beowulf*

As seen in this section, the possessive pronoun patterns with the proper noun genitive in terms of frequencies of postposition in *Beowulf*, and the explanation for this pattern is the same in both cases. The animacy of a head noun combined with the animacy of the possessive element allows for postnominal position of the possessor. Though this pattern is most visible in the verse, it also is exhibited in OE prose, which allows for postnominal possessive pronouns in the case of vocatives (with animate possessors and possessums).

3.8 Common Noun Genitives in *Beowulf*

Common noun genitives in *Beowulf* differ from the other NPs under consideration here in terms of word order preferences in that they more closely mirror prose norms. This makes sense in that the factor contributing to the elevated levels of postnominal possessives in the case of possessive pronouns and proper noun genitives is that they are systematically animate, while common nouns frequently are not. Thus, postnominal genitive position is much less frequent in *Beowulf* than prenominal position, as is also the case with the larger prose corpus.

As can be seen in Table 3.7, there are also different patterns associated with the placement of common noun genitives within the verse structure:
Table 3.7. Common Noun Genitive Word Order in *Beowulf*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N-Gen + N</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + N-Gen</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>415</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns are both more likely to appear in the b-verse, common noun genitives are better represented in the a-verse. Additionally, there is more of an even split between prenominal and postnominal genitives that appear divided by line or half-line boundaries. This contrasts with possessive pronouns, which are most likely to be split from their head noun in the case that they are postnominal, and with proper noun genitives, which are most likely to be split from their head nouns in the case that they are prenominal.

3.9 Discussion and Conclusions

As can be seen in this chapter, the different genitive and possessive types (i.e. common noun genitives, proper noun genitives, and possessive pronouns) show rather different distributions of prenominal and postnominal position. This alone might lead one to think that there is a relative disparity between these different types of possessives, opening the question of whether possessive pronouns are more like determiners or common noun genitives are more like adjectives, for instance. However, upon closer examination, the word order for each of these different categories of possessives is influenced by the same factors. In prose, weight is shown to be an important factor in genitive word order.
variation, with light NPs almost systematically preferring prenominal position, and heavier NPs with modification on the head and the genitive preferring postnominal position of the genitive. With proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns, which are both light possessors and both animate, the prenominal genitive position is almost categorical in the corpus data. This would make sense given the importance of the factor of weight.

However, in poetry, where the preference for prenominal modifier position in the case of light NPs is relaxed in favor of poetic constraints, the importance of animacy as a factor becomes more visible. Thus one of the key differences between OE prose and verse genitives is the comparatively much higher frequency of postnominal proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns. This discrepancy can be explained in terms of animacy, and the reranking of constraints (in particular the lesser importance of weight) in response to the demands of meter.

Thus, we can see that not only the animacy of the possessor element is relevant in the grammar of OE, but so too is the animacy of the head noun, a fact which is relatively obscured in the prose data due to the factor strength of the animacy of the genitives themselves in the case of proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns, combined with the effects of weight. Indeed, this is the same pattern as seen in Present-Day English, in which animate nouns prefer to appear before inanimate ones, but two animate nouns do not show such a categorical preference for prenominal position of the genitive (Rosenbach 2002). Consider, for instance, such examples as the one previously discussed (e.g. John Doe, son of Mr. and Mrs. Doe). In relaxing one constraint (i.e. weight), OE verse
highlights the importance of another (i.e. relative animacy), shedding light on an otherwise
less noticeable aspect of OE syntax, and of English more generally.
Chapter Four: Adjectives

4.1 Introduction

Like genitives, adjectives in OE can appear either prenominally or postnominally, as in (1) and (2):

(1) *wraetlicne wyrm* (Beo 891 a)
wondrous serpent

(2) *wigbord wraetlic* (Beo 2339 a)
shield wondrous

And as with genitives, there is debate on whether these different word orders represent different underlying syntactic structures. Pysz (2009: 287) argues for different underlying structures in some cases, and emphasizes “the importance of recognizing the difference between adjectives in true postposition (predicative in nature) and those in false postposition (attributive in nature and treated on par with attributive adjectives).” More traditional accounts (e.g. Brook 1955, Quirk and Wrenn 1955) focus more on the surface word order, accounting for variation in terms of the inflectional system that allowed a modifier to be more or less clearly connected with a noun regardless of prenominal or postnominal position.

In addition to potential structural differences, there may also be semantic or pragmatic differences associated with the variation in adjective position. Fischer (2000,
2001) is concerned with differences in meaning related to the position of the adjective. She argues that OE adjective position demonstrates some of the same iconicity\textsuperscript{15} as discussed by Bolinger (1972) and Stavrou (1996) for Spanish and Modern Greek respectively. In particular, Fischer (2000, 2001), with Bolinger and Stavrou, argues that there is a connection between prenominal adjective position and an inherent or pre-existing property of the noun, as well as a connection between postnominal adjective position and a more temporary possession of such a property. Raumolin-Brunberg (1991) makes a similar argument for a later stage of English, that of the Early Modern period, and this same distinction might be preserved in some cases in Present-Day English. For instance, Fischer (2001: 251) and Bolinger (1967:4) discuss the following examples:

\begin{align*}
(3) & \quad \text{the responsible man} \\
(4) & \quad \text{the man responsible}\textsuperscript{16}
\end{align*}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{15} Note that Fischer discusses these examples as being “iconic in that the meaning is determined by the linear order of the elements: what is perceived first, colours the interpretation of the rest of the utterance” (256).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{16} Note that this construction commonly takes an adjunct, as in “the man responsible for the crime.” However, Fischer (2001: 256) discusses the example without an adjunct, using the sentence “He is the man responsible.” Presumably even in this sentence there may be an implicit adjunct supplied by the context or previous discourse. These differences in modification patterns associated with the adjective phrase reinforce that we are likely not dealing simply with word order variation, but actually two distinct syntactic structures, predicative and attributive adjectives. The regular differences in meanings associated with this difference in adjective position, as discussed by Fischer, however, still stand regardless of the underlying syntactic structure.}
In (3), being *responsible* is an intrinsic quality of the man, whereas in (4), the man is *responsible* for something in particular, and this state is not necessarily representing anything about the innate character of the man.

Thus, needless to say, in light of these distinctions, this chapter does not attempt a variationist analysis of adjective position in OE NPs, in the sense of Labov (1972), in which the two forms must meet the criterion of “sameness,” being “two ways of saying the same thing” (271). Instead, it considers the relative frequencies of prenominal and postnominal adjectives in OE prose and verse, with an eye towards not only the morphosyntactic factors that correlate with one position versus the other but also the differences in meaning associated with these positions.

Much as with the discussion of genitive position within OE NPs, comparable discussion for adjectives centers on findings from prose texts. While Pysz (2009) offers a detailed corpus-analysis of the question of adjective position for NPs in OE prose, she clearly states that “OE poetry lies outside the remit of this monograph” (42). And while Fischer (2001) notes “that especially in poetry, linear order [of the elements in the NP] may still be used to express these differences [in meaning],” such as those alluded to above, she “[had] not had enough time to look at examples in poetry in any systematic fashion” (271). These works are excellent for outlining some of the factors to be considered in this word order variation. However, these brief nods to poetic data leave open various questions concerning the difference between OE verse and prose syntax for this feature. A more detailed analysis of adjective position in OE verse with a side-by-side comparison of prose patterns is needed to understand further not only how and why the
word order patterns differ between verse and prose, but also the ways in which this
variation may correlate with differences in meaning, such as those discussed by Fischer.

I argue that as with genitives, adjectives appear relatively more frequently in
postposition in OE verse than they do in prose; and, as with genitives, syntactic weight –
which is an important factor in prose word order – plays less of a role in the position of
the adjective in OE verse. Another structural factor, however, does correlate with
adjective position in OE verse. In particular, the use of both compound nouns and
compound adjectives correlates more frequently with postnominal adjective position than
it does with prenominal position.

These usages are explored in more detail making use of the Beowulf text –
considering this variation as it relates to alliteration and meter as well as stylistic
considerations and differences in meaning. In particular, I argue that while patterns of
alliteration may help account for some of the elevated frequency of postnominal adjective
position, in many other cases, namely those in which the head noun and the adjective
alliterate within a single verse, this is clearly not what determines the position of the
adjective. Some instances of postnominal adjectives reflect more general rules in prose
associated with particular lexical items or morphemes, such as the tendency of negated
adjectives beginning with un- and adjectives ending with -weard to appear postnominally.
However, in some cases where the word order deviates from the prose norm, it appears
that the type of iconicity suggested by Fischer (2001) is being employed for stylistic effect
and to highlight subtle differences in meaning.

4.2 Methods
The quantitative results in this chapter are derived from TIGERSearch corpus
searches of the prose and verse corpora for NPs modified by various types of adjectives
and participles. In particular, all items tagged NP with a noun, tagged either N^A, N^D,
N^G, N^I, or N^N, and either a positive, comparative, or superlative adjective, tagged
ADJ, ADJR, or ADJS with matching case information (i.e. ^A, ^D, ^G, ^I, ^N) are
considered in the OE prose corpus. Comparatively, since the verse corpus is considerably
smaller, and since comparative and superlative adjectives are already a low frequency
occurrence, the York-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Poetry does not distinguish
between positive, comparative, and superlative adjectives in its tag set. Thus, searches for
such adjectives in the verse corpus involved the single tag ADJ, with case information.

For comparative purposes, adjectival participles have also been included in the
analysis in this chapter, though these counts are kept separate. Searches for these items
included all instances of NPs with head nouns modified by either a present or past
participle, tagged in both the verse and the prose corpus as VAG for present participles or
VBN for past participles, and again marked for case agreement.

To consider weight as a variable, and to facilitate comparisons across different
types of modifiers (with varying rates of postmodification), as with the genitives,
premodification is the factor used to measure weight in this analysis, with all instances of
NPs with other forms of postmodification being excluded to control for this factor. Thus
examples such as (5), with additional premodification of the head noun, are included in
the modified head noun category, while examples such as (6) are excluded:
In particular, with these examples, I count the demonstrative *þæt* in (5) as additional modification of the head noun, making this an example of an NP with additional modification on the head noun but not on the adjective. And I exclude (6) because of its dependent clause, *pe his Sunu is*, since I want to control for the effects of postmodifiers such as this on adjective position.

Examples with premodification on the adjective are considered, with and without other forms of modification on the head noun, as in (7) and (8):

(7) *an swiðe welig wif*  
    (Rood, LS_5_455.479)  
    a very wealthy woman

(8) *swiðe heah clif*  
    (Aelhom, AHom_8:106.1217)  
    very high cliff

Finally the lightest NPs, with no other modification on the head noun and no modification on the adjective, are also considered, as seen in (9) and (10):

(9) *synful man*  
    (Aelhom, AHom_15:29.2154)  
    sinful man

(10) *handcraeftas gode*  
    (InspolX,WPol_2.1.1_[Jost]:80.110)  
    manual-skill good

These quantitative results are supplemented with a quantitative and qualitative analysis of adjective usage in *Beowulf*.

4.3 Relative Frequencies of NPs with Adjectives in Verse and Prose
While two-word NPs with just an adjective plus a noun are among the more frequent NP types in OE verse, as seen in Chapter Two, adjective modifiers taken as a whole (without regard for word order or other modification on the head noun or adjective) are relatively more common in OE prose. Thus the effect seen in Chapter Two may be understood in context of the fact that NPs with adjectives in OE verse tend not to include other forms of modification, resulting in a single simple and higher frequency NP rule: Adj+N, compared with the prose, which makes use of a wider range of modifiers.

As seen in Table 4.1 below, comparison of the total number of adjectives – positive, comparative, and superlative – in OE prose with the total number found in OE verse reveals that adjective modification is only more frequent for nominative case nouns in OE verse. There are relatively comparable levels of adjective modification for accusative-marked NPs in the prose and verse corpora, and lower levels of adjective modification for dative and genitive-marked nouns in the verse texts. This pattern shows some similarities with that found for genitive frequencies, where nominative case nouns are the ones that show the most elevated frequency of modification, with dative and genitive nouns having less modification. These patterns correlate with the relative obliqueness of the noun, with more oblique NPs taking less modification.
Table 4.1. Adjectives in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Adjective Type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>Superlative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>57,871</td>
<td>10,436</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>10,950 (18.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>68,317</td>
<td>14,538</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>15130 (22.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>33,296</td>
<td>5,362</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5519 (16.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>59,436</td>
<td>8,946</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>9682 (16.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Adjectives in OE Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>5724</td>
<td>1112 (19.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>5866</td>
<td>449 (7.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>4060</td>
<td>190 (4.7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>32 (30.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>5274</td>
<td>1226 (23.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparatively, participles functioning adjectivally are considerably less frequent in both prose and verse. As seen in Tables 4.3 and 4.4 below, while already a very low-frequency occurrence in the prose, participial adjectives are only negligibly represented in OE verse:

While the percentage of instrumentals with adjectives appears to be higher than figures for other cases, it is worth noting that this percentage may not be as reliable due to the small sample.
Table 4.3. Participles in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Participle Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>57,871</td>
<td>233 (.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>68,317</td>
<td>325 (.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>33,296</td>
<td>99 (.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>59,436</td>
<td>321 (.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Participles in OE Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Participle Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>5724</td>
<td>5 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>5866</td>
<td>5 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>4060</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>5274</td>
<td>10 (.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This might relate to the fact that participles commonly take modification, while verse NPs systematically favor less modified forms, with a head noun and a single modifier, if any.

Still, the poets seemed to have no difficulty in producing simplified NPs with genitive and adjective modifiers; minimally, these patterns point to a difference in usage between ordinary adjectives and participial adjectives.

4.4 Prenominal and Postnominal Adjectives in OE Prose

This section breaks down the basic frequencies outlined above into prenominal and postnominal adjective and participial usages in prose texts, divided by the relative weight of the adjective phrase and the noun plus its other modifiers. Adjective position relative to the head noun is shown to be related to syntactic weight, with lighter NPs...
preferring prenominal adjective position with adjectives in positive form, and heavier NPs preferring postnominal adjective position with comparable adjectives. Comparative and superlative adjectives, however, appear almost without exception in prenominal position in OE prose, a pattern noted in previous literature (e.g. Fischer 2001, Haumann 2002) and argued to be correlated with the morphological distinction between strong and weak\textsuperscript{18} adjectives, where comparative adjectives almost consistently decline weak, and weak adjectives prefer prenominal position. Finally, compared to both comparative and positive form adjectives, adjectival participles show higher frequencies of postnominal position, even when postnominal modification possibly associated with the verbal element of these items is controlled. These distinct patterns highlight the differences in usage between true\textsuperscript{19} adjectives and participles as well as between different types of adjectives themselves.

4.4.1 Adjectives in Positive Form

As can be seen in Table 4.5 below, prenominal adjective position is overall much more frequent than postnominal position in OE prose. As with the genitives, light NPs (i.e., those with unmodified adjectives and otherwise unmodified nouns) as in (9) and (10) above, strongly, almost categorically, prefer the prenominal position. And as with

\textsuperscript{18}Weak adjectives are those that most commonly appear with determiners, having a reduced inventory of inflectional endings to mark case and number; while strong adjectives have a fuller inflectional paradigm for marking case and number and are used in the absence of determiners.

\textsuperscript{19}Here I use “true” to distinguish between adjectives that are not verbal in nature and participles functioning adjectivally.
genitives, NPs with modification on the adjective as well as additional modification on the head noun, such as in (7), are the most likely to have postnominal adjective position.

Table 4.5. Adjective Position and Modification in Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modification</th>
<th>Adjective Position</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prenominal Adjective</td>
<td>Postnominal Adjective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Modified</td>
<td>95 (58.6)</td>
<td>67 (41.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective Modified</td>
<td>502 (96.9)</td>
<td>16 (3.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun Modified</td>
<td>17,453 (97.5)</td>
<td>446 (2.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Modified</td>
<td>13,434 (98.8)</td>
<td>170 (1.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The biggest difference between adjective position and common noun genitive position with regard to weight is that in the case that either the modifier or the head noun has additional modification, this has less of an impact on the position of an adjective than it does for a genitive. NPs with additional modification either on the adjective or on the head noun are only marginally more likely to have a postnominal adjective. Overall, with positive form adjectives, there is an overwhelming preference for prenominal position in the prose data, with the exception of NPs with heavy head nouns and heavy adjective phrases.

4.4.2 Comparative and Superlative Adjectives
As mentioned previously, there is little variation in the position of comparative and superlative adjectives in the prose corpus: both of these forms almost categorically prefer prenominal position, as in (11) and (12):

(11) \textit{geongran men} \quad \text{(GregdC, GD}_2\{C\}: 16.135.23.1634)
younger men

(12) \textit{arwyrðestan hiwe} \quad \text{(Mart3, Mart}_5\{Kotzor\}:Ja17,A.20.134)
most honorable appearance

While these forms strongly prefer to be declined weak with some kind of determiner, it is also possible to find these forms in prenominal position declined as weak adjectives \textit{without} a determiner, as in the examples above. Fischer (2001: 265) connects the word order tendencies here with the strong versus weak morphological distinction, which may be taken to signal a theme versus rhyme distinction. In particular, she argues that “the comparative refers back to a positive form and as such functions anaphorically, and is thus non-salient” (265).

Fischer notes, however, that there are exceptions to this word order preference in OE prose, as seen in examples (13) and (14):

(13) \textit{sio sibb betre} \quad \text{(Cura, CP:47.361.5.2441)}
the relationship better

(14) \textit{þa adle foreweardre} \quad \text{(Laece, Lch}_II\{1\}:1.13.2.82)
the disease earlier

While such examples are low-frequency, it is important to note their existence, especially once we turn our discussion to verse, which allows for both prenominal and postnominal position of comparative and superlative adjectives.

4.4.3 Participles

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Compared to true adjectives, both present and past participles functioning adjectivally have higher frequencies of postnominal position in OE prose texts. Possibly shedding light on this, Pysz (2009: 287) postulates that many postnominal adjectives are reduced relatives rather than attributive adjectives that are simply appearing in a postnominal position. If this is the case for some postnominal adjectives, it seems all the more likely in the circumstance that the adjectival element has verbal qualities, which might help explain the increased frequency of postnominal participles.

One of the more obvious differences in terms of adjective position between the participial forms and true adjectives, as seen by comparing Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below with Table 4.5 above, appears in the case that both the participle and the head noun are modified:
Figure 4.1. Present Participles in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both Modified</th>
<th>Modified Participle</th>
<th>Modified Noun</th>
<th>No Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenominal Participle</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postnominal Participle</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2. Past Participles in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Both Modified</th>
<th>Modified Participle</th>
<th>Modified Noun</th>
<th>No Modification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prenominal Participle</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postnominal Participle</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the numbers of preposed and postposed adjectives in positive form are relatively equal for this category (with preposed adjectives being more common), postposed participles are much more frequent than preposed ones in the case of a heavy head with a heavy modifier. And for NPs where either the head noun or the participle is modified (but not both), there is also an elevated frequency of postnominal participle position, where the occurrence of postnominal adjectives is negligible. Only with light NPs are the frequencies of participles and true adjectives in postposition relatively equal. Overall, participles tend to occur more frequently in postnominal position than true adjectives.

4.5 Prenominal and Postnominal Adjectives in OE Verse

This section outlines the relative frequencies of prenominal and postnominal adjectives and participles in OE verse, ultimately comparing those patterns to the ones outlined above for the OE prose data. It is argued that much as with genitives, weight is less of a factor in determining adjective position in verse than prose.

4.5.1 Positive, Comparative, and Superlative Adjectives

As can be seen in Table 4.6 below, the majority of NPs with adjectives in OE verse involve just the head noun and its adjective or to a lesser extent some other form of modification on the head noun, but none on the adjective. Comparatively, NPs with additional modification on the head noun are the highest frequency NP with an adjective in the prose data. For both of these categories, while postnominal adjective position is considerably less frequent than prenominal position, postnominal position is much more
Table 4.6. Adjective Position and Modification in Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modification</th>
<th>Adjective Position</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prenominal Adjective</td>
<td>Postnominal Adjective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Modified</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective Modified</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun Modified</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Modified</td>
<td>1441</td>
<td>344</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

common in these categories for the verse data than it is for the prose data. Furthermore, though the numbers are small, for NPs in which the adjective is modified, postnominal position is actually more common than prenominal position, a pattern which contrasts with the prose findings. These patterns support the idea (also seen with the genitive data) that the poet is willing to relax the factor of weight in NP-internal word order decisions, presumably in favor of observing poetic constraints.

4.5.2 Participles

As can be seen in Table 4.7 below, both present and past participles functioning as adjectives in NPs are a very low frequency occurrence in OE verse. Given these small counts, we are limited in the types of conclusions we can draw about patterns of prenominal and postnominal participle usage. Still, the numbers we have suggest that as in the prose, postnominal position is more common in the case that both the participle and the head noun are modified. The only instances of a modified participle appear
postnominally, and all but one instance of a head noun with additional modification appear prenominally. This preference for prenominal participle position with otherwise modified NPs is also represented in the prose data.

Table 4.7. Participle Position and Modification in Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modification</th>
<th>Prenominal Adjective</th>
<th>Postnominal Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Modified</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective Modified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun Modified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Modified</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, prenominal position is preferred in the case of light NPs with no additional modification on the participle or head noun. While the preference is not as strongly marked as in the prose data, this simply points again to weight being a less important factor for participle position in NPs in verse, much the same as with adjectives.

4.5.3 Summary and Comparison

In verse and prose texts, there are some important similarities in relative frequencies of prenominal and postnominal genitives, adjectives, and participles. For each of these categories, in OE prose texts, syntactic weight is a factor that correlates with the position of the modifier relative to the head noun. And though both adjectives and participles clearly prefer prenominal position in prose, their frequency in postnominal
position in verse is relatively higher. The extent to which the writer uses syntactic weight in selecting the modifier position is one crucial factor that accounts for a considerable amount of the variation between OE prose and verse word order for NPs.

4.6 Adjectives in *Beowulf*

In this section, we look more closely at the interaction between various linguistic and poetic factors and adjective position within NPs in *Beowulf*. To isolate the impact of these other factors, we must control for syntactic weight, which we already know to have an impact on adjective position, even to some extent within verse. To control for this factor, in this section, we consider only two-word NPs composed just of a head noun and an adjective. In terms of linguistic factors, it is shown that compound forms within the NP, both compound noun and compound adjective forms, correlate with postnominal adjective position, while animacy of the head noun has no impact on word order choices. Other linguistic factors, especially related to the individual preference of particular lexical and morphological items to appear postnominally (as seen in OE prose), are shown to have an impact in verse word order choices, as well. In terms of poetic factors, it is shown that alliteration cannot be used to explain many of the adjectives in postnominal position in the poem (while it may very well be a factor in some cases, which are also addressed). Similarly, while metrical considerations certainly have an impact on word choice and word order, the well-formedness of individual verses is shown not to be a central factor in choosing between prenominal and postnominal adjective position for many NPs. Instead a combination of these factors is considered, as well as the possibility of differences in meaning associated with prenominal and postnominal adjective position.
4.6.1 Distribution of NP Types by Verse

In *Beowulf*, as in the larger verse corpus, prenominal position for adjectives is preferred. As seen in Table 4.8 below, there are more than three times as many prenominal adjectives than postnominal ones. Additionally, there are almost three times as many NPs with adjectives in a verses than b verses, which makes sense given that many of the adjective noun pairs alliterate, with double alliteration being associated with a verses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adj + N</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>359</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + Adj</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>463</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NPs split between the head noun and the adjective are relatively infrequent, with these forms being relatively a bit more common with postnominal adjectives. In such cases, with both prenominal and postnominal adjectives, compounds as part of the NP are common, for example:

(15) *Het him yōlidan*

ordered him wave-ship

*godne gegyrwan*

good to make ready (Beowulf 198b-199a)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Line Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>mid eoferspreotum with boar-spears</td>
<td>(Beowulf 1437b-1438a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heorohocyhtum savagely-barbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>niwtyrwyndne newly-tarred nacan on sande vessel on the sand</td>
<td>(Beowulf 295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ellenrofum courage-strong</td>
<td>(Beowulf 1787b-1788a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fletsittendum hall-sitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With some of these examples, for instance (16), (17), and (18), the compound is of sufficient length as to fill a whole verse. This would suggest that these instances are merely a product of the fact that metrically the compound and the other word forming the constituent could not fit within a single verse. However, this is not the case with (15), suggesting that perhaps there might be an additional factor allowing for these NPs to be split across verse or line boundaries. For instance, NPs with compounds might be treated differently for more linguistic reasons; for examples (15) and (16), perhaps the postnominal position of the adjective is associated with the fact that the head noun is a compound. In this case, splitting up the (morphological) modifying element in the compound and the adjective would be similar to the pattern of coordinated adjectives that is ordered Adj+N+Adj (see Haumann 2003 for further discussion of this pattern in OE prose). It is also worth noting that in (17), while niwtyrwyndne is tagged in the verse corpus as an adjective, there is a verbal component to this item, which may indicate a different underlying structure from other adjective noun combinations. Thus it may be a
combination of linguistic and metrical factors that has produced these NPs split across line and verse boundaries. These different factors are explored in more detail in the following sections.

### 4.6.2 Verse Factors

Among verse factors to be considered, alliteration stands out as one of the most obvious constraints to be considered in terms of potential impact on NP word order. Using the same method employed in considering alliteration with the genitives (i.e. selecting a noun + modifier pair that appears with both possible word orders and then considering this variation within the context of the line), we see that there are cases where the need for alliteration clearly does make a difference in word order.

As can be seen in (19) – (25), the more typical prose word order of adjective followed by noun is well attested for the combination of the adjective *mære* and the noun *þeoden*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(19)</th>
<th><em>mærum þeodne</em></th>
<th><em>min ærende</em></th>
<th>(Beowulf 345)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(20)</td>
<td><em>mæres þeodnes</em></td>
<td><em>ðær hie meahton swa</em></td>
<td>(Beowulf 797)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21)</td>
<td><em>mærne þeoden</em></td>
<td><em>ða ðæs monige gewearð</em></td>
<td>(Beowulf 1598)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22)</td>
<td><em>mære þeoden</em></td>
<td><em>mondreamum from</em></td>
<td>(Beowulf 1715)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23)</td>
<td><em>mærum þeodne?</em></td>
<td><em>Ic ðæs modceare</em></td>
<td>(Beowulf 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24)</td>
<td><em>mærne þeoden.</em></td>
<td><em>Him þæt to mearce weard</em></td>
<td>(Beowulf 2384)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, postnominal adjective position also occurs for this word pair in the poem, as seen in (26) and (27):

(25)  
\[
\textit{mærum þeodne} \quad \textit{þonne his myne sohte}
\]
\[(to a) renowned prince \quad \text{than his purpose required}\]
(Beowulf 2572)

(26)  
\[
\textit{þeoden mærne} \quad \textit{ymb þinne sið}
\]
\[prince renowned \quad \text{concerning your venture}\]
(Beowulf 353)

(27)  
\[
\textit{þeoden mærne} \quad \textit{þegn ungemete till}
\]
\[prince renowned \quad \text{thanne exceedingly good}\]
(Beowulf 2721)

The contrast between these two types of lines highlights the importance of alliteration as a factor in word order variation in this text. In particular, for each of the lines in (19) – (25) with prenominal adjectives within NPs in the a verse, some form of the adjective \textit{mære} alliterates with the first fully stressed syllable in the b verse: \textit{min, meahton, monige, mondreamum, modceare, and myne}. Comparatively, for the lines in (26) and (27), the noun \textit{þeodne} in the a verse, which precedes the adjective here, alliterates with the first fully stressed syllable in the b verse: \textit{þinne} and \textit{þegn}. Thus we can see how the word order variation here correlates with the larger pattern of alliteration.

Furthermore, we can see the poet’s attention to secondary alliteration in that for six of these nine instances, the other word in the a verse NP that is not responsible for establishing the primary pattern of alliteration also alliterates with an unstressed or comparatively less stressed syllable in the b verse. So for the examples in (19) – (25), in five of these lines, some form of \textit{þeoden} shares its initial sound with forms such as \textit{ðær, þa, ðæs, ðæs, þæt, and þonne}; and for one of the examples of the inverse word order, in (27), \textit{mærne} shares its initial sound with the stressed syllable of \textit{ungemete}. Though these
are not the primary patterns of alliteration in the lines, this pattern does seem to point to the fact that the poet is extremely mindful of alliteration in some of these cases, even where the words would be unstressed. This creates a mirror effect in the alliteration in the first set of examples, with the primary alliteration being on the outside, and with secondary alliteration on the inside.

It is clear in these examples at least, that the variation in NP word order between the lines in (19) – (25) and those in (26) – (27) is associated with alliteration, in particular ensuring that the first stressed syllables of the verse alliterate.

However, alliteration alone cannot account for all the variation in terms of adjective position relative to the head noun in Beowulf. As seen in Figure 4.3 below, nearly an equal number of adjective noun pairs alliterate as those that do not:
If the adjective and noun alliterate, then there should be no clear advantage in terms of alliteration (such as the one seen above for *mærne þeoden* versus *þeodne mærne*) for the order in which the adjective and noun appear. Since the initial sounds of the adjective and the noun are the same, presumably this would free up the poet to make word order decisions based on some other factor, as both the noun and adjective have the same alliteration potential related to the b verse.

Metrical considerations are another possible factor affecting the word order, and there are definite metrical shapes associated with different NP word orders. The clearest patterns are associated with dative and genitive-marked NPs following the expected prose
word order of adjective preceding noun. For dative NPs, 62/80 occurrences of this structure are of the verse type 2AIa; and for genitive NPs, 27/37 occurrences are of the same verse type. Overall, this is the most common verse type for two-word NPs with prenominal adjectives. For both of these groups, the most common structure is a combination of a two-syllable adjective and a two-syllable noun, with the root being the stressed syllable and the dative or genitive case marker being the unstressed syllable for both the adjective and the noun. Given this repeated stress pattern (i.e. / x | / x), from a purely metrical standpoint, it would be possible to invert the word order and maintain the same verse shape. However, many of the adjective noun pairs in this group do not alliterate with one another; for instance, consider (28) and (29):

(28)  *heardum clammum*  (Beowulf 1335 b)
      hard grip

(29)  *geongum cempan*  (Beowulf 1948 b)
      young warrior

Thus, to switch the word order would also have an impact on the alliteration pattern within the line. In these examples then, the word order of adjective preceding noun reflects not only the prose word order norms but also alliterative constraints, though metrical constraints are presumably less of a factor given that switching the word order would result in the same metrical shape for the verse.

---

28 Verse type 2AIa represents a verse of the structure / x | / x, with examples of this verse type given in (28) and (29).
For NPs with the postnominal adjectives, verse type 2A3a\textsuperscript{21} is the most common. There are 14/38 instances of this metrical pattern for such accusative NPs and 15/60 instances for nominative NPs. Accusatives and nominatives (both of which at least in the singular form of masculine and neuter a-stems generally have one syllable fewer than their dative or genitive counterparts) are by far the most frequent NP types having postnominal adjectives. Comparatively, there are only five instances of dative and three instances of genitive NPs with this word order (most of which are split between verses). This verse shape is most closely correlated with a compound noun preceding an adjective, as in (30) and (31):

(30) \textit{merewif mihtig} \\
\hspace{1cm} sea-woman mighty \\
\textit{(Beowulf 1519 a)}

(31) \textit{dryhtsele dynne} \\
\hspace{1cm} prince-hall secret \\
\textit{(Beowulf 2320 a)}

While the first and second word do not share the same stress pattern (as is the case with many of the verses of type 2A1a seen above), reversing the word order here would still in most cases results in a well-formed – if somewhat uncommon – verse type, generally type 2A2.

The same is also true of the most common verse shape associated with NPs with prenominal adjectives and compound nouns. For these NPs, the most common verse type is one of type D, such as ID3 or ID2, as seen in (32) and (33):

\textsuperscript{21}Verse type 2A3a represents a verse of the structure /\|/ x, with examples of this verse type given in (30) and (31).
(32)  *steap stanhlíðo*  
steap stone-cliff  
(Beowulf 1409a)

(33)  *atol angengea*  
terrible one-goër  
(Beowulf 165a)

If the word order of these NPs was reversed, this would generally result in a type E line, such as 3E3 or 3E2. Thus we see again that metrical considerations alone, at least in terms of verse well-formedness, do not dictate NP word order.

In the case that both possible word orders (*N* + *Adj* and *Adj* + *N*) would constitute well-formed verse shapes, and the noun and adjective alliterate with one another, both of which are the case for many of the examples seen above, presumably both word orders would be options from the standpoint of metrical and alliterative constraints. Thus while these poetic constraints certainly shape the poem, they alone do not single-handedly inform the NP word order in many of the examples considered here.

4.6.3 Linguistic Factors

We now turn to consider several linguistic factors that might have an impact on the position of an adjective relative to the head noun. The first item considered is the structural factor of compounding and its effect on NP word order, in particular the correlation between postnominal adjective position and compounds. Then differences in meaning as related to adjective position are addressed, specifically the effects of animacy as well as lexically-based patterns of variation that may shed light on differences in meaning associated with adjective position. It is shown that both the structural factor of compounding as well as iconic differences (as discussed by Fischer 2001) can have an impact on adjective position.
As seen in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 below, there is a correlation between compound forms in the NP and postnominal adjective position:

![Bar chart showing the comparison between postnominal and prenominal adjectives for compound and simple forms in Beowulf.](chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Postnominal</th>
<th>Prenominal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compound</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4. Adjective Position and Compound Nouns in *Beowulf*
Postnominal adjectives have relatively higher frequencies of both compound nouns, $\chi^2(1, n = 467) = 21.389, p < .001$ and compound adjectives, $\chi^2(1, n = 467) = 15.715, p < .001$.

The strongest effect is seen with compound nouns: NPs with postnominal adjectives have a compound head noun in 36.8% of the total instances. This is more than twice the frequency of compound nouns in NPs with prenominal adjectives, just 16.0%. Though the percentage of NPs with compound adjectives is smaller, the same pattern emerges: 27.4% of the total NPs with postnominal adjectives have compound adjectives, compared to only 11.6% of the NPs with prenominal adjectives.
While this pattern is presumably morphologically-based, it does correlate with a pattern in the syntax. Namely, instances of two or more adjectives modifying a noun are frequently split with one adjective preceding the noun and the other following (Haumann 2003: 63). It is possible that the modifying element on the compound noun is being treated to some extent as a distinct modifier that would incline the adjective to take the postnominal position (thus splitting the modification as in the syntax when there are two modifiers). Recall also that when an adjective is modified, postnominal position is also more likely, to a small extent in the prose and to a more pronounced extent, from what we can tell from the small counts, in the verse. Furthermore, it is worth reiterating the fact that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between compounds and nouns plus their modifiers. Thus, it is even possible that some of these “compound” forms might have been understood by speakers of Old English more as independent elements.

Structural differences such as those discussed above seem to be one of the important factors correlating with adjective position within NPs in the poem. However, knowing that there may be a difference in meaning between prenominal and postnominal adjective position, especially associated with a permanent quality of the noun versus a potentially temporary one, we might consider semantic differences between the NPs. For instance, animacy had a big impact on genitive word order. Might it be relevant for adjective word order variation? One can imagine that this might be the case if the poet was more likely to ascribe certain immutable qualities to a person than a thing.

However, as can be seen in Graph 6 below, while adjectives are generally more commonly used with nouns that have non-human referents, there is no significant
difference in terms of this factor predicting prenominal or postnominal position of the adjective:

Figure 4.6. Adjective Position and Head Noun Animacy in *Beowulf*

Similarly, there is no readily apparent semantic distinction between the adjectives that appear prenominally and those that appear postnominally. Both lists include color adjectives as in (34) and (35), adjectives reflecting seemingly more objective judgments such as those related to measurements as in (36) and (37), and those reflecting seemingly more subjective judgments related to appearance as in (38) and (39):

(34)  *hrefn blaca*  
raven black  
*(Beowulf 1801a)*
As difficult as it is to group these adjectives into natural semantic categories, it is also
difficult to find regular semantic patterns in the adjectives which prefer prenominal and
postnominal position.

There are certain lexically and morphologically-based patterns associated with
postnominal adjectival position, which do carry over into the poem. For instance, Quirk
and Wrenn (1957:88) point out that adjectives ending in -weard have an increased
frequency of postnominal position. Mitchell (1985: 78, 172) discusses how the lexical
item ælmightig occurs with increased frequency in postnominal position (appearing in
such phrases as “God Almighty” even in Present-Day English, and possibly being a calque
from Latin originally). Fischer (2001: 264) addresses how negated adjectives have an
increased frequency of postnominal position, arguing that this is because this feature
might indicate that these adjectives are further along the verbal cline. From these
examples, we can see that there are some lexically and morphologically correlated patterns
associated with postnominal adjectives.
Indeed, the tiny number of adjectives that fit these descriptions above do appear in postnominal position in the poem. The single instance of an adjective ending in -weard does appear postnominally:

(40) \textit{flet innanweard} \\
\text{hall within} \hspace{1cm} \text{(Beowulf 1976b)}

This is the same pattern we might see in Present-Day English, with the morpheme -weard designating a location or orientation, thus serving as a special kind of adjective.

And while the form \textit{ælmightig} does not appear in the poem, \textit{michtig} in postnominal position does appear, possibly being related to this pattern:

(41) \textit{merewif mihtig} \\
\text{sea-woman mighty} \hspace{1cm} \text{(Beowulf 1519a)}

It is easier to gather the significance of the adjective position in the case of larger samples, however.

In the circumstance that a clear word order preference can be established for a particular item or category of items, deviations from this pattern open themselves to stylistic interpretation. They may also reveal important distinctions in meaning that can enhance the interpretation of the poem. Such is the case for the position of negated adjectives in \textit{Beowulf}. As noted above, negated adjectives appear at an increased frequency in postnominal position in OE prose. Similarly, within \textit{Beowulf}, there are eight instances of postnominal adjectives with the prefix \textit{un-}; comparatively, there are only two such adjectives in prenominal position.

According to Fischer’s interpretation, prenominal adjectives are associated with properties inherent or innate to the noun, while postnominal adjectives are potentially
associated with more transient properties. This distinction is due in large part to the iconic
nature of the ordering of the elements. In particular, prenominal modifiers, being read (or
heard) first, are more closely associated with the noun since their meaning is already
salient in the reader/listener’s mind once the noun is processed. On the other hand,
postnominal modifiers, being read/heard after the noun, are thus processed as more
incidental or simply as an added piece of information.

Considering this insight, we see that adjective position might very well provide the
listener additional information, especially in the case that these more general iconic
associations between position and meaning are accompanied by a deviation from the
expected word order. With the two instances of negated adjectives that appear
prenominally, this may very well be the case. Consideration of word order in one instance
provides a slightly different shade of meaning for the noun phrase in question, while in the
other case, it emphasizes the very meaning of the phrase.

One instance of this unexpected word order pertains to a dangerous path being
traversed:

(42) \begin{align*}
\text{Ofereode} & \quad \text{aþelings} \\
\text{Went across} & \quad \text{nobleman’s son} \\
\text{steep stanhliðo,} & \quad \text{stige nearwe} \\
\text{steap rock-slopes} & \quad \text{path narrow} \\
\text{enge anpaðas,} & \quad \text{uncuð gelad,} \\
\text{narrow one(person)-path} & \quad \text{unknown way} \\
\text{neowle næssas,} & \quad \text{nicorhusa fela.} \\
\text{precipitous headland} & \quad \text{watermonster-homes many} \\
\end{align*}

(Beowulf 1408-1411)

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In this section, uncuð gelad may be taken simply as a path that is unknown to the traveler, or if the position of the adjective is taken to suggest an innate quality of the path, it might be better understood as a secret path or one that is generally unknown. While this distinction does not make a huge difference in terms of the interpretation of the poem, one very famous line from the poem is the only other instance of an unmodified prenominal negated adjective in the text, and in that case, interpreting the meaning of the adjective position may shed light on a larger statement being made.

In this instance, as seen in (43), the position of the adjective reinforces the meaning of this famous line concerning fate, and possibly illuminates a larger question on the relationship between wyrd and God in Beowulf:

(43)  

$Wyrd \text{ oft } nereð$
Fate often saves

$\text{unfægne eorl}$  $\text{ponne his ellen deah.}$
undoomed man  when his courage is good.  (Beowulf 572b-573)

This line is puzzling, as there seems to be some circularity. How could fate not spare the man who is not doomed? A small bit of agency is given back to the man in that at least courage on his part can have some impact on fate, but crucially not if he is not already unfægne. Russom (2010: 245) argues that “[t]he abstract sense ‘fate’ seems inadequate” for this passage, that “[f]rom a Classical or Christian perspective, fate can hardly be conceived of as a savior, and [that] the idea of fate saving someone not fated to die seems bizarrely tautological.” Indeed, as Russom points out, the poet suggests in line 1056, that “Jehovah can overrule wyrd” (245):
This precise relationship, that between God and fate, is one which has been of interest to
scholars of *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon culture (e.g., Blackburn 1897, Klæber 1913, Pizzo
1916, Galliard 1987) for some time. The positioning of the adjective *unfægne* in relation
to *eorl* in line 573, especially when considered with its sole other use in the poem in line
2291, helps shed light on the question of the relationship between *wyrd* and God. In
particular, the position of this adjective (when understood as iconic in the sense of Fischer
(2001)) helps address whether the quality of being *unfægne* is more intrinsically associated
with a person, is assigned by *wyrd*, or has some relationship to God’s favor.

Later in the poem, we see a nominal use of the adjective *unfæge*, as associated
with God’s favor:

(45) *Swa mæg unfæge eadге gedigan*

So may undoomed one easily survive

*wean ond wraesgið, se de Waldendes hyldo gehealdеp.*

misery and exile, who the Ruler’s favor holds.

(Beowulf 2291 – 2293a)

Here the poet goes so far as to make the quality of being *unfæge* the defining feature of the
person. These lines taken in conjunction with (43) and (44) suggest that the quality of
being *unfægne*, in conjunction with either God’s favor or courage, is enough to cause fate
to spare a person. This paints a picture that the quality of being *unfægne* is actually
separate from wyrd’s treatment of a person, and to some degree may even be an intrinsic quality of that person.

Heaney’s translation of the poem does not make this distinction between an intrinsic quality and one assigned by wyrd. He translates the lines in (43): “Often, for undaunted courage/ fate spares the man it has not already marked” (572-573). This again sounds somewhat circular, as if being “marked” or not is a function of fate’s real-time decision making. Minimally, “the man [fate] has not already marked” is different from unfægne eorl. And while Heaney’s text does not strive to be a word-for-word translation of the original text, the distinction here is an important one. The postnominal modification in Heaney’s text takes the form of a dependent clause in which the nature of the man is defined by fate’s actions and with relation to time (as seen by the use of the word “already” and the verb tense in this clause). Thus, the man’s fate comes across as a bit more incidental, a product of fate’s acting upon him or not, and by a certain time.

While it is true that fate itself is the agent in this clause, to remove the agent and to make unfægne a prenominal adjective describing the man, as in the original text, emphasizes the innateness of the quality, if for no other reason than the iconicity discussed above and the removal of the agent.

In the original poem, the prenominal position of unfægne in unfægne eorl serves to emphasize the innateness of this feature. It is the intrinsic quality of this man that he is not doomed, so long as his courage prevails. This can be contrasted with a man who is doomed regardless of his courage, as well as with someone who has no such innate quality (i.e. that of being fægne or unfægne) but instead must wait for fate to “mark” him. Thus if
this quality of being *unfæge* is innate to the man, it is not circular to say that fate will spare him under certain conditions. It *is* possible for fate *not* to spare him if those conditions are not met because fate’s actions and this innate quality are not exactly one and the same as they seem to be in Heaney’s text.

For these lines, Donaldson’s prose translation, in contrast with Heaney’s verse one, does preserve the original NP word order: “Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good.” (12). This choice reflects Donaldson’s more general approach in his translation: “to translate as literally as possible, confining oneself to the linguistic and intellectual structure of the literal” (2002: xi). This is done in an attempt to preserve what Donaldson sees as “the most striking characteristic of the style of the original: extraordinary richness of rhetorical elaboration alternating with – often combined with – the barest simplicity of statement” (xi).

Donaldson balances this preference for loyalty to the original text structure with a desire to maintain at least somewhat idiomatic contemporary English. He states that “[w]hile [his] translation is not intended to be in purely ‘natural’ English, [he has] avoided unnatural expressions unless they performed some function in rendering the Old English style” (xiii). It seems as if this these competing constraints might inform Donaldson’s syntactic choice with the same adjective (i.e. *unfæge*) when it is used at a later point in the poem nominally. Here Donaldson inserts the noun “man” after “undoomed” to convey the nominal sense of *unfæge* in more idiomatic modern English: “So may an undoomed man who holds favor from the Ruler easily come through his woes and misery” (39). This choice preserves some of the close connection between the characteristic of being
undoomed and the person it is describing (through prenominal position), though possibly this connection would be felt even more closely in the circumstance that the adjective itself is nominalized, with that being the single defining characteristic of the man. Presumably, Donaldson’s rendering is the result of his attempt to balance loyalty to the original linguistic and rhetorical structure with the need for readable contemporary English.

Donaldson’s varying treatment of these NPs (i.e., that in one instance he chooses to be loyal to the poet’s original word order and in the other instance, he selects a more ‘natural’ contemporary English construction) points to the many individual decisions that contribute the art of translation. Heaney, with a different style and different objectives in translation, renders both of these adjectives as postnominal modifiers. Similarly to the first lines, he translates the second instance of the nominalized adjective unfæge in the poem: “So may a man not marked by fate/ easily escape exile and woe/ by the grace of God” (2291-2293). Importantly, both of these translators diverge from the poet’s original syntactic choices, if to varying degrees. While Donaldson’s translation is paying explicit attention to balancing the original linguistic and rhetorical structure with the demand for somewhat idiomatic Present-Day English prose, the criterion he employs of whether or not a given construction “performed some function in rendering the Old English style” is difficult to pin down.

This is where syntactic research into word order patterns in OE verse and prose can prove especially helpful to the interpretation of OE verse. Attention to patterns of use within the text and the larger corpus of OE, both statistically and with reference to the
content, can point to stylistic variation that otherwise might not have been immediately noticeable. Given that prenominal position is marked for negated adjectives, it is entirely possible that this subtle but important distinction motivated the poet’s choice in word order. The significance of the prenominal position here, since it is overall more common, however, can be easily overlooked without reference to the behavior of other adjectives in this category, which tend to appear postnominally.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that much as with genitives, one of the crucial distinctions between verse and prose syntax in terms of factors involved in NP word order preferences relates to weight. While this is an important factor in determining the position of adjectives within NPs in OE prose, it is of relatively less importance in verse, especially for lighter NPs. While two-word NPs almost categorically prefer prenominal adjective position, this constraint is relaxed in verse texts in favor of poetic considerations.

Even here however there is an interaction between linguistic and verse constraints. While alliteration and meter clearly inform word order choices in some cases, in other cases linguistic preferences, such as those related to the positioning of compounds, also have a considerable influence on word order. Finally, these differences in word order are not only a product of linguistic and verse constraints, but they may also be used to reflect subtle meaning differences. As such, the better understanding of different patterns in OE prose and verse adjective position as well as the factors influencing those word order choices helps to enhance our understanding of certain adjective usages, crucially informing our interpretations even of some of the most famous lines of Beowulf.
Chapter Five: Determiners and Quantifiers

5.1 Introduction

As has been seen in the previous chapter on adjectives, one common issue faced in research on the behavior of different categories of linguistic elements, in this case what we might consider different “parts of speech,” is the categorization itself. Gradience between different parts of speech highlights the fuzziness of our categories. Corpus annotators must select a part of speech label using the linguistic evidence at hand and their own best judgment. Similarly, most syntactic theories require categories for their rules. However, the boundaries between a participle functioning as an adjective, but with more distinct verbal qualities (e.g., taking a complement) and one that is functioning more purely adjectivally are not always clear.

If ever there were this trouble of assigning items neatly to categories, it most certainly affects the categories of determiner and quantifier in OE as well as the phrase structures related to them. The research for this study does not delve into the theoretical question of whether the constituents considered here would be better described as determiner phrases or noun phrases. However, this is an open question for discussion. For example, Wood (2005) asks, “Is there a DP in Old English?” – and she ultimately argues that there is. This type of argument requires the identification of determiners (as
distinct from adjective or any other category), which Wood attempts by considering whether or not the demonstrative/article takes a complement and if so, the case and number of that complement. She argues that once these items cease to be able to stand alone or the inflection of the complement no longer matches the demonstrative/article, that the item is more clearly functioning as an article.

Still, the identification of determiners in OE is not always clear cut, and some even question their existence at this period in the language’s history. Denison (2009: 287, 288), exploring the gradience between adjectives and determiners, argues that “the evidence for the existence of D is much shakier in earlier English” than it is in Present-Day English. Similarly, Spamer (1979: 247) argues that “the demonstrative was synchronically realized as an adjective.” Due to the fact that the determiner system was only emerging during OE and ME, there may be some fuzziness associated with this category, though for the purposes of this chapter, we make use of the YCOE corpus annotation, which includes items in the se, þæt, seo paradigm and the þes, þis, þeos paradigm under this label. While these items do match in case and number with their head nouns, as adjectives do, they show quite a difference in frequency of postnominal position compared to positive form adjectives.

The category of quantifier is similarly troubled for OE. Though these lexical items are of a different origin from the items that develop into articles, there is still consideration over whether at that period in the language’s development they might best be considered adjectives or a distinct category. Carlson (1978: 295) argues that “a ‘quantifier’ category is not warranted for the Old English period; there is no reason to analyze the
pre-quantifiers as anything but adjectives.” Mitchell (1985) classifies these items as “indefinites” and points out some of the differences between them and adjectives, such as types of modification (or lack thereof). Hutcheson (1993:28, 29) calls these items “quantitative adjectives”, which he contrasts with “qualitative adjectives” in the context of OE verse in that the former category may or may not be stressed, whereas the latter category is almost always stressed. As can be seen, there is variation in terms used to label these items, the discrepancies in terms often reflecting differences in opinion on how to classify them.

The complications associated with defining these categories at this and later points in the language’s history have spawned a range of research considering not only empirical questions but also the theoretical implications concerning such questions, including the distinction between determiner phrases and noun phrases as well as the notion of gradience between syntactic categories. Consideration of the distribution of these elements has been used to shed light on the extent to which different items belong in different categories. And it is in this way that the present chapter contributes to these discussions.

While items in the se, þæt, seo and the þes, þis, þeos paradigms nearly categorically appear preceding the head noun, there is variation in quantifier (or quantifying adjective) position, as seen in (1) and (2):

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\[\text{22Her term for the items that develop into quantifiers at later stages in the language’s development.} \]
Much like positive adjectives, quantifiers strongly prefer prenominal position, especially in lighter NPs. This chapter shows that as with genitives and adjectives, syntactic weight has less of an impact on verse word order for quantifiers. Variation in determiner position within the NP is also considered, especially with relation to the light which verse data can shed upon the more general OE syntax. Unlike with possessive pronouns (which are almost categorically absent in postnominal position in OE prose, but are very well attested in this position in OE verse), postnominal determiners are almost absent from prose texts, and are still rare in verse. However, there are semantic correlations between several of the verse examples of postnominal demonstratives and the sole example of a postnominal demonstrative in the prose. This enables us to hypothesize about more general patterns of usage possibly associated with this low frequency item. Finally, such variation is explored in more detail through the consideration of the Beowulf text.

5.2 Methods

This chapter includes both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of quantifier and determiner position variation. For the quantitative analysis, I searched for all instances of NPs with items labeled D or Q, with matching case agreement. Again, for a comparison with the findings presented in other chapters, all instances of postmodification have been controlled in the quantitative analysis, resulting in counts for light NPs (those with no other modification on the head noun or the quantifier) as in (3), those with additional
modification on the head noun but not the quantifier as in (4), those with additional
modification on the quantifier as in (5), and those with modification on both the quantifier
and the head noun as in (6):

(3) ealle þing \hspace{1cm} (Solsat1, Sol_1:4.2.10)
ealle þing
all things

(4) ealle holig bec \hspace{1cm} (Aelhom, AHom_2:139.318)
ealle holig bec
all holy books

(5) swa manega þeoda \hspace{1cm} (Boeth, Bo: 19.46.9.824)
swa manega þeoda
so many nations

(6) swa monig halwende word \hspace{1cm} (Bede, Bede_4:25.348.22.3515)
swa monig halwende word
so many salutary words

For determiners, since they do not take modification, only instances of NPs whose head
has modification are contrasted with those that do not.

While the categories of determiner and quantifier are somewhat vexed for Old
English, for ease of discussion, the rest of this chapter uses the labels provided by the
corpora to represent the items in the two pronoun paradigms previously mentioned and the
group of lexical items labeled “indefinites” by Mitchell (1985), including such items as
those used above in (3) – (6). This usage does not intend to take a theoretical stance on
the nature of these categories, but instead reflects a focus more on the comparison of word
order patterns found in prose and verse, which may in turn shed light on the more general
theoretical questions.

5.3 Relative Frequencies of NPs with Determiners and Quantifiers in Verse and Prose

As can be seen in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below, one of the defining features of NP
syntax in OE verse is its relatively decreased frequency of both determiners and
quantifiers. While well over a third of the total NPs in the prose corpus have a determiner, generally 10% or less of the NP in the verse corpus include one. The rate of quantifiers is similarly reduced in verse, with between 5% and 10% of NPs in the prose corpus having a quantifier, and only 1% – 2.5% in the verse corpus.\textsuperscript{23}

Table 5.1. Determiners and Quantifiers in OE Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Determiners</th>
<th>Quantifiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>57,871</td>
<td>20,773 (35.9)</td>
<td>5629 (9.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>68,317</td>
<td>22,624 (33.1)</td>
<td>4767 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>33,296</td>
<td>11,870 (35.6)</td>
<td>1714 (5.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>59,436</td>
<td>23,894 (40.2)</td>
<td>5004 (8.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2. Determiners and Quantifiers in OE Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Noun</th>
<th>Total NPs</th>
<th>Determiners</th>
<th>Quantifiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N^A</td>
<td>5724</td>
<td>501 (8.8)</td>
<td>130 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^D</td>
<td>5866</td>
<td>451 (7.7)</td>
<td>70 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^G</td>
<td>4060</td>
<td>213 (5.2)</td>
<td>79 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^I</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>31 (29.5)</td>
<td>19 (18.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N^N</td>
<td>5274</td>
<td>641 (12.2)</td>
<td>129 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{23}Note that NPs annotated as instrumental appear to have an increased frequency of both determiners and quantifiers. This, however, likely does not reflect a difference in structure related to case, but instead the fact that instrumental case markings were generally eroded by the OE period, meaning that these determiners and quantifiers are the easiest way to identify instrumental case.
The relatively decreased frequency of determiners in the verse may reflect the fact that they generally do not carry alliteration and are not generally stressed in the verse, and that they have a limited range of positions in which they can occur.

In terms of the question of the relationship between quantifiers and (other) adjectives, it is worth noting some differences in the frequency of NPs with these different modifiers in the verse corpus. Recall that accusative-marked NPs with adjectives were just as common in OE verse, and adjectives were more common in verse with nominative NPs. Quantifiers on the other hand are systematically less frequent in the verse, with their decreased frequency possibly pointing to a difference in usage. In particular, this may relate to the previously noted fact that quantifiers are only sometimes stressed in OE verse structure, while qualitative adjectives almost consistently are (Hutcheson 1993:28, 29). Thus this decreased frequency of quantifiers in the verse might share similar explanations as the decreased frequency of determiners.

5.4 Prenominal and Postnominal Determiners and Quantifiers in OE Prose

This section discusses the position of determiners and quantifiers in relation to the head noun in Old English prose. While there is some variation with quantifier position, determiner position appears to be almost categorically prenominal from the evidence preserved. For quantifiers, syntactic weight is shown to have the same effect that it does for adjectives, participles, and genitives. Though NPs with modified postnominal quantifiers and additional modification on the head noun are very uncommon, these heavy NPs which also include quantifiers in their structure are also generally infrequent. Comparatively, light NPs are the least likely to have postnominal quantifiers. Overall the
pattern seen of weight predicting postnominal position holds here. Thus the biggest
difference between the behavior of quantifiers and the other categories we have
considered is frequency: postnominal quantifiers are simply generally less frequent for this
category of heavy NPs than they are for other categories of modifiers considered. For
determiners, postnominal position is all but unattested. A single example of what appears
to be a postnominal determiner is discussed, with consideration of what, if anything, this
element tells us about OE NP word order. From the evidence, it is clear that postnominal
position for both of these categories of items is rare.

5.4.1 Determiners

Of course one of the difficulties of historical linguistics (and a finite corpus more
generally) is the problem of attestation. The fact that an item is unattested obviously does
not prove its non-existence. Kemenade (1987), in an analysis of OE preposition stranding,
argues that seemingly marginal examples, as defined by their infrequency, are best not
considered as clear evidence for the existence of a construction within a language.
However, while this conservative approach might be very effective in helping to identify
and analyze the most common features of a language, it runs the risk of dismissing low
frequency, but grammatical, constructions. While it is difficult to make robust
conclusions about these low frequency occurrences and their (un)grammaticality, it seems
just as important to acknowledge their existence and to consider their possible
implications for the grammar.

In the case of determiners in OE, it appears at first as if postnominal position is
either extremely infrequent or perhaps prohibited altogether. However, this is not a case
of a complete lack of attestation. There is one example from the prose corpus that appears
to include a postnominal determiner:

(7) þær þa hean hos & dene & garsecg þone Æthiopia we gesawon
there the high headlands & valley & ocean the of Ethiopia we saw
“There we saw the high headlands and valley and the ocean of Ethiopia.”

(Alex, Alex:31.3.393)

There are a couple of linguistic explanations that might help account for this example.

First, it involves a heavy, coordinated NP, which would be one of the environments
associated with postnominal position for many other modifiers. The NP in question, þa
hean hos & dene & garsecg þone Æthiopia, already includes one demonstrative – þa,
while the last of the coordinated elements has its own demonstrative, as well – þone. The
fact that the first items in the series are plural or feminine while garsecg is masculine and
singular might address the need for an additional demonstrative. And the coordination
itself could be having an impact on the word order choice.

In terms of language change, additionally of interest is the fact that Alexander's
Letter to Aristotle comes from the Nowell Codex, which is also where the text of Beowulf
is found. As is discussed below in section 5.6, this is another text in which postnominal
genitives occur. As both of these compositions are thought to date from relatively earlier

While the maxim unus testis nullus testis “one witness (is equal to) no witness” is widely
applied in historical linguistic research, Condoravdi and Kiparsky (2004) suggest that “it
should not be applied in a mechanical way.” In particular, they argue that “[e]ven a single
occurrence of a construction should be taken seriously, so long as (1) the reading has good
textual and editorial support, (2) the construction itself is rare enough that the existence of
a single token could be due to chance, and (3) there is a principled explanation for the
construction.” This example meets all of those criteria.

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in the period, and no such examples of postnominal demonstratives are found in later OE texts, the example in (7) above could simply represent the use of a construction that might have been available at earlier stages of the language. However, we cannot escape the problem of a lack of attestation: a single occurrence of a feature in the early prose followed by none in later prose is hardly evidence of varying frequencies in its usage, any more than a lack of attestation is proof of the non-existence of a construction. This issue is further considered in our discussion of this feature in OE verse texts.

Finally, the issue of translation must also be considered with this example since it has a Latin source text. However, here the Latin does not readily suggest an explanation for the postnominal position of the demonstrative:

(8)  *Nam et edita coelo promuntoria et oceanum in Aethiopia vidimus*

(Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem 208.25)

The Latin source for the use of the word *garsecg* “ocean” (the noun with the postnominal determiner in the OE text) is *oceanum*, which is followed by a preposition and preceded by a conjunction. Thus it appears as if the postnominal determiner in the OE text is not simply a carryover from the translation, but instead is a feature unique to the OE text.

5.4.2 Quantifiers

Comparatively, while postnominal position is still uncommon for quantifiers, it clearly was available to speakers of the language, as can be seen in Table 5.3 below:
Table 5.3. Quantifier Position and Modification in Prose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modification</th>
<th>Quantifier Position</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prenominal Quantifier</td>
<td>Postnominal Quantifier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Modified</td>
<td>51 (91.1)</td>
<td>5 (8.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifier Modified</td>
<td>338 (97.7)</td>
<td>6 (2.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun Modified</td>
<td>4264 (94.7)</td>
<td>240 (5.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Modified</td>
<td>8528 (99.6)</td>
<td>36 (0.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even with only five instances, the category of NPs with both the head noun and the quantifier being modified is the one with the highest proportion of postnominals, here only 8.9%. This is a dramatically lower percentage than that for some of the other categories we have looked at, such as genitives and adjectives, in which NPs with postnominal modifiers account for half or more of the total NPs in that category. As with other parts of speech considered, NPs in which neither the head noun nor the modifier are modified are the least likely to have postnominal quantifiers. Here this feature accounts for only 0.4% of all light NPs with quantifiers, which is similar to the 0.5% to 1% frequencies of this same feature for adjectives and genitives.

In terms of the question of the relationship between quantifiers and adjectives, these numbers may shed some light. Probably the biggest thing that distinguishes these categories in terms of word order tendencies is their frequencies of postnominal position within heavy NPs. While this is not evidence that at this point in the language’s history
the category of quantifier was completely distinct from that of adjective, it does suggest
some differences in behavior between items in these categories.

5.5 Prenominal and Postnominal Determiners and Quantifiers in OE Verse

As with genitives and adjectives, there is an increased frequency of postnominal
position for quantifiers and determiners in OE verse. While postnominal determiners are
all but non-existent in the available OE prose, they are slightly better attested in verse.
And quantifiers appear in postnominal position at a frequency between that for adjectives
and genitives. Again, as seen in previous chapters, light NPs consisting simply of the
head noun and the quantifier or the determiner are the overall most frequent NP type as
categorized by syntactic weight. This is the case for both prenominal and postnominal
quantifiers and determiners, and this tendency can be understood as a more general feature
of OE verse.

5.5.1 Determiners

While postnominal determiners are not common in OE verse, they do occur. In
the OE verse corpus, there are thirteen instances of postnominal determiners or
demonstratives without further postmodification, as in (9) and (10), and there are eighteen
instances of head nouns followed by a determiner or demonstrative and then an adjective,
as in (11) and (12):

(9) \textit{daeg} \textit{þissum} \\
\textit{day} \textit{this} \\
(\textit{Genesi}, 33.1031.269)

(10) \textit{worda} \textit{þisses} \\
\textit{words} \textit{these} \\
(\textit{Cynew}, 114.55.1086)
These examples, however, may or may not represent the same structure. In particular, it is important to note that adjectives can function as nouns in OE, as in (13):

(13)  *Him se yldesta* andswarode,
      Him the eldest answered

      *werodes wisa,* word hord onleac.
      company’s leader wordhord unlocked. (Beowulf 258-259)

Furthermore, as is well-known, apposition is a defining feature of verse structure. Thus it is possible that (11) and (12) represent a different structure from that in (9) and (10). In particular, this could be understood as a noun and its appositive rather than a noun and its postnominal demonstrative and adjective modifiers.

The examples in (9) and (10), however, show that even if uses such as those in (11) and (12) do not constitute NPs with postnominal determiners, it is possible for just a demonstrative to follow the head noun. For these examples, in *Beowulf* it is consistently the demonstrative *þone* that is used postnominally. Other demonstratives from this paradigm are comparatively unrepresented. However, in other texts from the verse corpus, demonstratives from the *þes, þis, þeos* paradigm are the most common elements to occur in postnominal position. In the one example of such a postposition in the prose corpus, the demonstrative is *þone*, as in *Beowulf*. Thus it appears as if the sample of demonstratives appearing in postnominal position is not evenly distributed.
Furthermore, it appears as if there might be some correlations between lexical items and postnominal position for determiners. In particular, there might be a correlation between this word order and head nouns pertaining to the land or earth. There are three such examples from *Beowulf* as seen in (14), (15), and (16):

(14)  *eordweard pone*  
     earth-guard the  
(14) (Beowulf 2334b)

(15)  *grundwong pone*  
     ground-field the  
(15) (Beowulf 2588a)

(16)  *freodowanong pone*  
     peace-field  
(16) (Beowulf 2959a)

With two of these examples, more than a semantic similarity is shared: the element *wong*, meaning “plain” or “field” appears in the head noun in both (15) and (16). And what scant evidence there is suggests that this co-occurrence is not a coincidence. An NP in one of the riddles also includes this same morpheme:

(17)  *salwonges bearm pone bradan*  
     fertile plain’s bosom the broad  
(17) (Riddle, 181.1.29)

A closer look at the use of this particular element suggests that it is an older form in the language. The element *wong* is somewhat more frequent in verse texts (which are generally thought to be from earlier in the period), though it does appear in prose texts if to a more limited extent. In particular, forms of the word *neorxnawong* “Paradise” appear most commonly in prose texts thought to have relatively earlier dates of composition, as well, for example Bede’s *History of the English Church*, *Blickling Homilies*, *Cura Pastoralis*, and Bald’s *Leechbook*. The fact that many of the instances of postnominal
demonstratives occur with this item suggests that this word order may be more archaic, much like the lexical item they commonly accompany.

The semantic pattern extends beyond this particular word, though. There are two other clear examples of this pattern with semantically related words also represented in the verse corpus:

(18) *eorðe sio cealde*  
    earth the cold  
    (Metboe, 201.29.47.517)

(19) *weorulde pisse*  
    world this  
    (Metboe, 202.29.77.541)

The correlation between this semantic group and the postnominal demonstrative here suggests that perhaps this word order is idiomatic to some extent, or at least most commonly associated with a particular semantic domain. Thus it appears as if there might be a linguistic component to this word order, even in the verse, rather than the word order purely being a reflection of the poet’s attempts to reconcile verse constraints with syntactic ones.

Indeed, this same semantic factor appears to be relevant in the prose example considered earlier, reinforcing that this word order may have been possible, if with a limited semantic domain. Returning to this example, we see that the nouns involved in that phrase also make reference to the land and other topographical features: *þa hean hos & dene & garsecg þone Æthiopia*, in particular *dene*, “valley,” and *garsecg*, “ocean.” Thus considering this example in conjunction with the verse examples suggests a pattern of usage, rather than isolated instances of writer or scribal mistakes.
The case of postnominal determiners seems to be a good example of how considering verse data in conjunction with prose data, even in the face of scant evidence, can help tease out patterns of low frequency, but likely grammatical, usage from possible errors in the text. While more examples of a construction certainly help confirm its grammaticality and its patterns of usage, these larger samples are simply not always available with historical research. This makes the careful consideration of verse data all the more important.

5.5.2 Quantifiers

As previously addressed in our discussion of the prose data, the question of the grammaticality of postnominal quantifiers is not an issue. There is clear evidence for this word order in the prose texts; however, postnominal position is more common in the verse, as can be seen in Figure 5.1 below:
In almost exactly a quarter of light NPs with quantifiers, the quantifier appears in postnominal position. This frequency is compared to the less than 1% of NPs with postnominal quantifiers in the same category in the prose. And again as with other modifiers considered in this research, light NPs far outnumber heavier ones. We are not really able to get much of a sense of the impact of syntactic weight given this distribution, but the data available seem to suggest similar patterns as seen with other modifiers – namely higher frequencies of postnominal position in the verse as well as higher frequencies of simple two-word NPs.

5.6 Determiners and Quantifiers in *Beowulf*
In this section, variation in the position of determiners and quantifiers in relation to the head noun is considered in more detail specifically as it relates to verse structure. It is shown that in addition to the semantic distinctions as discussed in section 5.5.1, there are a couple other patterns of usage that account for many of the remaining cases of postnominal determiners as well as the determiners divided from their head nouns by a verse boundary. Here the presence of an adjective within the NP correlates with both of these groups of examples. Also, much as in the case of adjectives, it is shown that simple considerations involving alliteration cannot alone be used to explain the elevated level of postnominal quantifiers. However, metrical considerations, perhaps even as they interact with patterns of alliteration, do help account for some of the variation.

5.6.1 Determiners

As can be seen in Table 4 below, determiners as a whole are relatively evenly split between the a verse and the b verse, but again these elements being split by verse boundaries is a relatively low frequency occurrence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D + N</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>339</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of these split NPs can be accounted for by a single formula in which the determiner and an adjective appear in one verse, and the head with a proper noun genitive appears in the b verse, as seen in examples (20) and (21) below:

(20)  *sona me se mæra*  
      *mago Healfdenes*  
      at once me the famous  
      son of Healfde

(21)  *Huru se snotra*  
      *sunu Wihstanes*  
      indeed the wise  
      son of Wihstan

In these examples, the determiner and the head noun are divided necessarily given the length and number of syllables of the NP. However, the unstressed syllable still does not appear at the line break, but instead an adjective occupies the right edge of the a verse. Thus, these examples even though they split the determiner from the head noun appear to be relatively unremarkable. The formulaic nature of these splits, however, shows the extent to which determiners tend to appear in the same verse as their head nouns: such splits do not happen in all different types of NPs, but only in cases with longer NPs, and even then only when they fit a certain formula.

Several of the examples of NPs with postnominal determiners (or NPs with substantive adjectives functioning as appositives) are similarly formulaic, as seen in the repetition of the exact NP in examples (22) – (25):

(22)  *sumne besyrwan*  
      *in sele þam hean*  
      one to ensnare  
      in hall the high

(23)  *swiðhicgende*  
      *to sele þam hean*  
      resolute in mind  
      to hall the high

(24)  *swiðhicgende*  
      *on sele þam hean*  
      resolute in mind  
      on hall the high
Here the only element that changes in the verse is the preposition heading the
prepositional phrase for which the repeated NP is the object. And in lines (23) and (24)
even the a verse is repeated. Also of interest is adjective use in this NP; while it is again
hard to draw conclusions based on such a small sample, it is perhaps worth noting that the
adjective *hean* here is the same one used in the prose NP with a postnominal determiner.
Thus both the prose and the verse examples are making use of the same demonstrative and
the same adjective, which may be coincidental, or which may point to a specific pattern of
use. The fact that the poet uses the same NP four times leads one to believe that it does
not simply represent a problem area in reconciling the verse and syntactic structure, but
instead that the phrase might have a certain degree of grammatical acceptability or stylistic
pleasingness.

Metrical and alliterative considerations do not provide immediate explanations of
the word order, however. These verses are of type 2B1a, with a $x / | x /$ stress pattern.
They are four of only seven total instances of this metrical pattern in the b verse, and only
ten instances in the poem altogether. So one must conjecture that the poet’s primary
motivation in selecting this word order was not to use a common metrical shape. Since
the determiner does not alliterate and is not stressed, presumably alliteration is not a major
consideration. Instead it seems that some more subtle verse considerations or perhaps a
preference for the word order itself must be responsible for the repetition of this NP with
marked word order.
5.6.2 Quantifiers

Quantifiers share with determiners, and the other modifiers considered in this research, a relatively low frequency of being split from their head nouns across verse boundaries, as seen in Table 5.5 below:

Table 5.5. NP Word Order with Quantifiers in *Beowulf*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Order</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q + N</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + Q</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is unique about quantifiers, however, is that unlike determiners, quantifiers may appear at the right edge of the a verse (like an adjective), being split from their head nouns even in the case of light NPs, as seen in (26):

(26) *þæt heo on ænigne eorl gelyfde* (Beo 627)
   that she on some man trusted

As in the larger verse corpus, in *Beowulf* they also have a relatively elevated frequency of postnominal position, as compared to the verse norms. But as with adjectives, rules associated with alliteration do not provide an immediate explanation of the unexpected word order. Many of the examples of NPs with postnominal quantifiers have quantifiers and head nouns that alliterate with one another, as in (27) and (28):

(27) *magodriht micel. Him on mod bearn* (Beowulf 67)
    young retainers many to him in mind came
One might assume that reversing the word order would have no impact on the alliteration. However, since these quantifiers do not consistently belong to the category of words that carry stress and alliteration in the poem, it is possible that by reversing the word order, the poet ensures that the first syllable of the quantifier will get full stress and its initial sound will count towards a pattern of double alliteration in the a verse, much the same as with postpositions, which are commonly stressed while prepositions are not (Lapidge). Thus it is entirely possible that alliteration and meter are having a more subtle effect on the position of the quantifier within the NP.

5.7 Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, quantifiers and (perhaps surprisingly) determiners follow some of the same patterns of positional variation as many of the modifiers considered in the previous chapters. The biggest difference with quantifiers is their relatively lower frequency of postposition in the case of heavy NPs in prose, and their lower frequency in verse altogether. These factors in particular are some of the key ways that quantifiers are distinct from adjectives in terms of word order preferences and usage in OE prose and verse. Determiners (or perhaps more appropriately demonstratives) upon closer examination also appear to exhibit some of the same variation as other modifiers. While in the prose they almost exceptionlessly prefer prenominal position, at least one example from the prose corpus suggests that postnominal position was possible. This possibility is reinforced with examples from the verse corpus. While this was a very low frequency
occurrence, and with seemingly idiomatic tendencies, its attestation and its ultimate loss point to the gradual development of the English determiner system from the demonstrative adjectives. Thus, as can be seen in both the case of determiners and quantifiers, though they are rather infrequent in OE verse, consideration of their usage in verse (even the fact that they are relatively low frequency) helps us towards a deeper understanding of their behavior more generally.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

This chapter, in addition to providing a summary and discussion of the central points brought out in the previous chapters, returns to the initial questions posed in the introduction, namely the contribution of this analysis to the study of OE verse and to the study of OE syntax. I argue that in the absence of OE poets and native speakers of the language, detailed analysis of OE verse can help illuminate not only aspects of OE verse structure but also syntactic constraints that were likely at play in the minds of OE speakers, but that are less visible in the prose.

6.1 Summary and Discussion

The previous chapters have outlined some of the key differences between OE prose and verse NP word order, specifically regarding the position of genitives, possessive pronouns, adjectives, participles, determiners, and quantifiers in relation to the head noun. While in prose texts, these items all generally prefer prenominal position even by this period in the language’s history, there is more variation in verse texts. A range of linguistic and poetic factors are shown to account for these discrepancies. In particular, differences in the significance of syntactic weight accounts for much of the variation between prose and verse NP modifier position, with animacy of the head noun and the presence of compounds in the NP also having an impact on NP word order variation in
verse. Finally, verse considerations, related not only to alliteration and meter but also to stylistic variation, are shown to have an impact on NP word order within verse.

In terms of linguistic factors, it is shown that the discrepancies in the frequency of postnominal modifiers in verse and prose are facilitated by the relaxing of the factor of syntactic weight in OE verse. While in prose this factor is shown to have an impact on NP word order (especially with genitive, adjective, and participial modifiers, and to a lesser extent with other modifiers), in verse, the importance of syntactic weight is relaxed in favor of poetic constraints. In particular, in prose, syntactically light NPs (i.e., those with unmodified modifiers and otherwise unmodified head nouns) most strongly prefer prenominal position for modifiers, while heavier NPs with additional modification on the head noun and on the modifier have increased frequencies of postnominal modifier position. This is the same pattern observed in Present-Day English (also known as the principle of end-weight): syntactically lighter elements precede heavier elements (Wasow 2002: 3).

There is variation in the extent to which this factor impacts the position of elements of different syntactic categories in OE prose texts, but the factor is shown to consistently have an impact across many categories, including genitives, adjectives, and participles. For example, while 89.9% of heavy NPs with proper noun genitives and 92.5% of NPs with common noun genitives have postnominal genitive position, heavy NPs with positive form adjectives only have postnominal adjective position in 41.3% of instances. Although there is a considerable gap between genitives and adjectives in the rate of postnominal modification for heavy NPs, the consistent impact of syntactic weight
is seen when the frequencies of postnominal position for these heavy NPs are compared with the frequencies for light NPs. Only 4.1% of common noun genitives, 0.5% of proper noun genitives, and 1.2% of positive form adjectives appear postnominally in OE prose. Thus, in spite of the variation in terms of postnominal position between these categories, the effects of syntactic weight are clear across them.

Comparatively, for OE verse, syntactic weight does not have such a consistent impact on modifier position within NPs. Though the counts are very small, it appears that heavy NPs show an increased frequency of postnominal modifier position, as in the prose. For instance, in the verse corpus, there are more than twice as many heavy NPs with postnominal common noun genitives than prenominal ones. For other categories, the counts of these heavy NPs are too small to reach reliable conclusions, but they seem to point in the same direction as the results from common noun genitives: heavy NPs, however infrequent, are more likely to have postnominal modifiers even in verse. We see the inconsistent effects of weight, however, in that light NPs do not consistently display the opposite behavior, the pattern seen in prose texts. The most remarkable discrepancy here is seen with proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns. A full 38.2% of proper noun genitives and 46.3% of possessive pronouns which are part of light NPs, with no other modification, appear postnominally. These figures represent an overwhelming departure from comparable frequencies for proper noun genitives and possessive pronouns in OE prose.

In these cases, it is shown that the factor of animacy, which in later stages of English also has a considerable impact on genitive variation, significantly affects the
position of possessive pronouns and proper noun genitives. In particular, these possessives, which almost consistently represent animate, if not human referents, are more likely to appear postnominally in the case that the head noun is also animate. This fits with patterns associated with the effects of animacy at later stages in the language’s development, namely that animate nouns are more likely to precede inanimate nouns in an NP with a genitive, but that predictions are weaker for NPs with animate head nouns. The relevance of this factor, however, is otherwise masked in OE prose, which with the exception of heavy NPs, prefers prenominal modifier position.

Other linguistic factors are also shown to have an impact on NP word order in OE verse. Specifically, for adjectives within NPs, if either the head noun or the adjective is a compound form, there is an increased frequency of postnominal position. Since many of these NPs would be of well-formed verse types regardless of word order with the head noun and adjective alliterating (meaning that a switch in word order would have a minimal impact on alliteration within the verse), it is shown that it is likely this linguistic factor is having an impact on the word order variation rather than it being solely poetic constraints dictating the word order. This shows that again a linguistic feature that is otherwise less visible as a factor in word order choices in the prose has an impact on verse word order, and helps us to a more general understanding of a wider range of syntactic constraints affecting OE NP word order.

There clearly is an interaction between NP structure and word order in verse and poetic factors, as well, though. In particular, there are any number of cases in which the word order variation is clearly tied to patterns of alliteration. And one of the most
noticeable differences between OE prose and verse NPs relates to the metrical structure. In particular, the higher frequencies of one-word common noun NPs and simple two-word NPs, as well as the lower frequencies of determiners, are a product of the verse structure which only allows a certain number of stressed positions per verse and limits the possible positions of unstressed syllables such as determiners.

Finally, the poet may employ NP word order variation for stylistic effect or to convey differences in meaning. When more general patterns of NP word order and positioning within verses are established, it is possible to consider variations in these patterns for differences in style or meaning. For instance, for Beowulf, it is argued that the poet is making iconic use of the language in the rendering of Æscheres [...] hafelan and unfægne eorl. In the one instance, this is accomplished with the splitting of a constituent, and in the other, it is accomplished with a word order that is unusual for NPs with negated adjectives but which is importantly thought to connect the adjective more directly with the head noun. These deviations in usual NP structure or word order show evidence of reflecting stylistic flourishes or subtle differences of meaning.

6.2. What NP Word Order Variation Can Tell Us about OE Verse Structure

Finally, as we consider what this type of research might tell us more generally about OE verse structure, we may consider the words of the Beowulf poet. He reflects the following on his art and the process of composition:

\textit{Hwilum cyninges þegn,}
At times king’s thane
“At times a thane of the king”
guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
man filled with eloquent speech of stories recalling
“a man filled with eloquent speech, recalling stories,

se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena
who many of traditional tales
“who recalled many of the traditional tales”

worn gemunde, word oþer fand
multitude recalled words other found
“..... found other words”

soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
correctly linked; man again proceeded
“linked correctly; this man again proceeded to recount”

sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian,
exploit Beowulf’s with skills to recount
“Beowulf’s exploit with skills,”

ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
and in success to recite tale skillful
“and to recite successfully a skillful tale,”

wordum wrixlan.
words to lend/vary
“to vary words.”

(Beo 867b – 874a)

Considering this passage, Jack (1994: 78) suggests that soðe gebunden refers to the alliterative structure that links verses. However, it could also even simultaneously refer to the syntactic structures that bind groups of words. Similarly, while Donaldson (2002:16) translates wordum wrixlan as “to lend words,” Jack glosses the verb as to “vary.” Though this word pair is listed in Clark Hall as an idiom, it may still retain some of the sense suggested by Jack or the more general meaning of the word noted by Clark Hall, “to change.” It seems possible here that the poet is saying he interested in the linguistic
variations within the poem. While it is not possible to talk to the scop to hear in more detail his reflections on OE verse and its structure, what light might the study of word order variation within verse shed on verse structure itself?

The type of investigation presented in these chapters provides insight into the interactions between verse structure and linguistic structure. In addition to the stylistic insights previously addressed, there are other verse insights to be gained from this type of inquiry. For instance, the frequency with which different types of NPs are split across verse boundaries has the potential to provide not only information about linguistic structure but also about verse structure. Similarly, highly marked NP word orders, such as those in which the determiner appears postnominally, help provide evidence for the poet’s metrical decisions. As can be seen from these examples, and as suggested by Youmans (2009), deviations in verse word order are often evidence of metrical constraints at work.

In the tables we saw in Chapter 3, the frequencies with which prenominal and postnominal common noun genitives, proper noun genitives, and possessive pronouns are split from their head nouns by verse or line boundaries varies, but not in any pattern that appears to be primarily syntactically motivated. In other words, neither prenominal nor postnominal genitives are systematically more likely to be split from their head nouns, but there are patterns within categories.

So while for proper noun genitives, those in prenominal position are systematically more likely to be split from the head, for possessive pronouns, postnominal genitives are systematically more likely to be split, and common noun genitives show mixed tendencies. This pattern correlates with the number of syllables generally represented in each of these
categories, with proper noun genitives, which are generally longer lexical items in
*Beowulf*, having one distribution, and possessive pronouns, which are always shorter
items, having another. Given the infrequency of such split constituents, we can conjecture
that where possible, the poet is using syntactic boundaries to help maintain verse structure
or using verse structure to help illuminate syntactic boundaries. Exceptional lines in
which the constituent is split also sometimes provide further evidence of an alliterative
strategy, namely connecting the a-verse and the b-verse with alliterating elements from the
same NP, thus helping to maintain some of the cohesiveness of the constituent across
verse boundaries while capitalizing on the alliteration.

Thus in all these examples we see how consideration of NP word order and
situation within the verse structure can provide us with not only a more detailed awareness
of literary devices and subtle differences in shades of meaning, but also information about
metrical and alliterative considerations within the poem. This type of information informs
our knowledge of OE verse structure as well as our appreciation of the poem.

6.3 The Relationship between OE Verse and Prose Syntax

Returning to the question that motivated this research, we now turn our attention
to how this research sheds light on the relationship between OE verse and prose syntax.
OE NP usage in verse differs from that in prose in two important ways: (1) the increased
frequency of postnominal modifiers, and (2) the increased frequency of light two-word
NPs. We have seen in the previous chapters that this is the NP type with the most major
deviations for prose norms. Heavier NPs tend to follow prose norms in the verse, but as
uncommon as they are in OE prose, they are even more so in OE verse. However, in the
absence of syntactic heaviness (i.e. when both the modifier and the head noun are
otherwise unmodified) pushing the modifier towards postnominal position, other linguistic
and verse factors inform verse word order. Thus, we can see variable behavior in verse
NPs. Heavier NPs do follow the predictions associated with syntactic weight, while
lighter ones do not. But for each of the categories of modifiers considered here, the prose
corpus included at least one or two examples of a sentence with that modifier in
postnominal position.

Now, this of course turns to an equally vexed question in historical syntax of how
to treat examples of structures only documented once or twice in the corpus. It is here that
I would argue that poetic data might be a useful supplement. In the case that there is an
example of a structure in the prose corpus, and there are perhaps a number of other
eamples in the verse corpus, it is at least worth considering whether that construction
might have constituted part of the grammar.

The trend seen over and over in this research is structures being used in OE verse
that are also attested in the prose material, even if at considerably lower frequencies. And
this trend seems to support Mitchell’s view that that verse syntax “was made up of a
selection of ordinary prose patterns” (1985: 3959). Thus at least with regard to NP word
order, it seems to be unnecessary to take even such a position as that of Minkova and
Stockwell (1992), that “[t]here is a syntax common to verse and prose, with special
conventions for verse rhythmical or otherwise, which introduce apparent violations of the
syntax found in prose” (142). In particular, the research presented in these chapters found
no apparent “violations of the syntax found in prose” in the verse corpus. The closest such
example would be with postnominal determiners, but even in that case, there was at least
one example found in prose, which shared semantic similarities with the examples found
in the verse, suggesting that they are part of the same pattern rather than being isolated
anomalous examples.

While one would not want to take a line of OE verse as evidence of how a OE
speaker might ordinarily talk, suggesting that OE prose and verse had different syntactic
rules seems a bit extreme with regard to NP word order. Discrepancies between verse and
prose syntax for this area of structure are ones of frequency and not absolute differences.

Besides providing supplemental examples of constructions, OE verse highlights
linguistic constraints that inform verse word order when syntactic weight is not a factor.
Certainly, verse constraints do have an impact on word order choices, but when the
general preference for prenominal modifier position is overridden, morphosyntactic and
semantic factors such as animacy and the presence of compounds in the NP help account
for patterns of word order variation. These tendencies are in line with similar tendencies
in the language at the time or at later stages in the language’s development (i.e. patterns of
genitive word order asssociated with animacy, and the behavior of “compound” elements
as being similar to the behavior of modified elements). Still, due to the overwhelming
preference for prenominal modifying position for many of these items, these other
constraints which were likely operational in the minds of OE speakers are obscured in the
prose texts. Thus in the same way that verse data can provide unique insight into OE
phonology in a way that prose data cannot, verse data can also provide unique insight into
more general underlying tendencies in OE syntax. In this manner, OE verse data, while
not fully representing native speaker speech productions, does provide unique access to some of the constraints that native speakers seem to have used in processing speech.

In this research, I hope to have shown not only some of the variation between OE prose and verse NP word order, but also some of the linguistic and verse factors that help account for this variation. Perhaps equally importantly, I hope to have illustrated some of the ways that insight into patterns of OE NP word order variation can inform our understanding of OE verse, and some of the ways that OE verse data can inform our study of OE syntax.
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