1 Introduction

In their target paper, Haider and Szucsich (henceforth H & S) argue that the Slavic languages are not to be classified as SVO languages. Rather, Slavic is taken to represent a third word order type in addition to OV and VO (labeled “T3” by H & S), in which the directionality parameter linked to V (or N) is not fixed; that is, it does not assume a head-initial or head-final setting. According to H & S, this kind of parametric underspecification not only allows a wide range of surface word order patterns (analyzed as the result of scrambling in earlier work), but also gives rise to a set of additional syntactic properties such as the absence of superiority effects or the possibility of left branch extractions, which are not found in rigid VO-languages. In this commentary, I take issue with a related additional claim, which is only briefly mentioned in the target paper, namely, that earlier stages of German, Old High German (OHG), in particular, are also to be analyzed as T3 grammars (Haider 2010, 2012, 2014; see also Schallert 2010). According to this hypothesis, we should expect earlier stages of German to exhibit the very same syntactic properties as those highlighted in the target paper for Slavic. However, this expectation does not seem to be borne out by the empirical facts. In what follows, I will first point out some general issues raised by H & S’s proposal before I take a closer look at a set of specific problems pertaining to the syntactic analysis of early German(ic).

2 General issues

2.1 The idea is not entirely new

H & S’s approach in terms of variable head positioning (VHP) seems to be very similar in spirit to the double base hypothesis (DBH) proposed by Susan Pintzuk
(1999) and others to account for the variable word order of Old English (OE) and a number of other languages (cf. e.g. Santorini 1992 on Yiddish and Taylor 1994 on Ancient Greek). The only difference seems to be that H & S assume that the directionality parameter is unspecified, while Pintzuk assumes that both a head-initial and a head-final setting co-exist in a single grammar. As far as I can see, however, the two approaches do not differ with regard to their empirical coverage. Moreover, the approach by Pintzuk is embedded under a general theory of language change in terms of grammar competition (Kroch 1989), which captures quantitative and variationist aspects of word order change. It is unclear how the latter can be accounted for under H & S’s approach.

2.2 The absence of VO-Aux patterns

Due to the basic similarity with the DBH, the VHP faces the same challenges as the DBH. For instance, it is not clear how the order VO-Aux, which seems to be unattested in the world’s languages (the Final-over-Final Condition [FOFC]; Biberauer et al. 2014; Sheehan et al. 2017) can be systematically ruled out if the heads of two projections XP and YP (with YP directly embedded under XP) may precede or follow their complement. In previous work (cf. e.g. Haider 2010), Haider addresses this problem by assuming that VO-Aux orders present a parsing problem (center embedding) which must be repaired by other operations (e.g. verb raising/verb cluster formation). However, this approach does not seem to capture a basic difference of these two phenomena: Despite the parsing problems they create, center embedding structures do appear in the world’s languages; in contrast, FOFC violations seem to be ruled out cross-linguistically. This suggests that center embedding structures can be created by the grammar, while VO-Aux orders should be ruled out by general principles.1

2.3 Overall similarity of T3 and SOV languages

While I basically agree with H & S’s critical assessment of traditional typological approaches that classes Slavic with regular SVO languages, the alternative analysis in

1 See Fuß and Trips (2002) for an analysis of OE that aims at systematically ruling out VO-Aux orders while adopting basic assumptions of Haider’s work such as the Basic Branching Conjecture (BBC).
terms of T3 languages is also not without problems. While the authors highlight the idea that the typological classification of languages should be based on structural properties, the difference between SOV and T3 languages turns out to be rather marginal. In fact, it seems to be confined to a single surface property, namely linear order (in contrast to SOV languages, T3 languages allow for surface SVO/VSO orders). With respect to all other criteria discussed in the paper (cf. Table 1 on p. 3 for an overview), T3 and SOV languages are expected to behave on a par. This raises the question of whether it is really justified to posit a major typological difference or whether we should attribute the surface difference between SOV and “mixed” languages to another well-established parameter, namely the absence/presence of information-structurally driven movement operations (see below for another potential difference between T3 and SOV languages, which H & S only briefly mention, namely the availability of verb raising/verb cluster formation).

2.4 Pathways of word order change

There is general agreement that Proto-Indo-European (PIE), the common ancestor of the Germanic, Romance, Celtic, Slavic languages (and many other families) was an SOV-language (cf. e.g. Lehmann 1993 and the work cited there). If we accept this view, an analysis that treats Slavic and Early Germanic uniformly as T3 languages must assume a number of changes in basic word order type:

- For prehistoric and historical stages of Slavic, a change from SOV (PIE) to T3.
- For prehistoric and historical stages of the Germanic VO-languages, a change from SOV (PIE) to T3 to SVO.
- For prehistoric and historical stages of German, H & S must assume a trajectory for word order change from SOV (PIE) to T3 (Early Germanic) back to SOV (Early New High German (ENHG)/present-day German).

The traditional view that present-day German still reflects the basic OV character of earlier stages does not require a double typological shift from SOV to T3 and back to SOV and thus seems to be the more parsimonious option. Moreover, the idea that SOV languages may shift to T3 languages raises a number of additional questions, since these types are very similar (see 2.3). In particular, we might wonder which kind of evidence/independent change might lead learners to reanalyze syntactic patterns generated by an SOV grammar in terms of a T3 grammar. Furthermore, it is quite mysterious why T3 quite rapidly gives way to strict VO and OV in Germanic, while it remains stable in Slavic.
3 Syntactic differences between Early German(ic) and Slavic

While it is a well-known fact that earlier stages of German, OHG, in particular, exhibited a greater amount of word order variation, including a larger array of surface VO-orders, there are indications that OHG was more ‘OV-ish’ than other early Germanic languages. Evidence in favor of an analysis of OHG as a basic SOV language comes from the placement of elements that generally resist extraposition in OV-languages, quantitative evidence bearing on the distribution of OV and VO orders, and the syntax of auxiliaries/verb clusters. Moreover, it will become clear that the very same criteria for basic word order suggest that early German also differs from the present-day Slavic languages.

3.1 OV/VO and the placement of elements that resist extraposition

Despite their close genetic affiliation and their surface similarity, the early Germanic languages do not exhibit identical syntactic properties. Focusing on Old English (OE) and OHG, I will argue that the relevant (by now well-known) differences do not warrant a uniform treatment of these languages in terms of a T3/VHP grammar. Rather, it will become clear that while OE might fit the bill, OHG is typologically closer to the present-day Germanic OV languages than to Slavic.

In the literature on the OV-VO alternation in early Germanic, it is commonly assumed that the relative ordering of verb and auxiliary, and the position of verbal particles represent indicators of basic word order properties. Cases where the finite auxiliary follows the non-finite verb as in (1a), or where verbal particles precede the lexical verb as in (1b) are commonly taken to signal an OV base (cf. e.g. Pintzuk 1999; but see Elenbaas and van Kemenade 2014 for critical discussion): ²

(1) Indicators of an OV base (Fuß 2018: 238)
   a. (Comp)–S–(XP)–V–Aux–(XP)
   b. (Comp)–S–(XP)–Prt–V–(XP)

² The rationale behind this reasoning is that finite auxiliaries always precede the lexical verb in the Germanic VO languages, which do not permit reordering of elements in the verbal complex. Likewise, OV languages exhibit only preverbal particles, while in the Germanic VO languages, verbal particles generally follow the lexical verb.
Relevant orders are robustly attested in both OE and OHG, as illustrated in (2) and (3). However, as is well known, OE and OHG also exhibit orders where arguments and adjuncts follow the verb (cf. e.g. Pintzuk 1999 for OE, and Axel 2007 for OHG). Some OHG examples are given in (4).

Traditionally, surface VO orders as in (4) are analyzed as the result of extraposition from an underlyingly preverbal position (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987 on OE; Axel 2007 and Sapp 2016 on OHG; but see e.g. Biberauer and Roberts 2005 for an alternative analysis). However, as pointed out by Pintzuk (1999), there are VO orders in OE where an analysis in terms of extraposition runs into difficulties. Relevant cases involve postverbal placement of prosodically light elements such
as pronouns, (verbal) particles, and monosyllabic adverbs, which cannot undergo extraposition in the Germanic OV languages:\(^3\)

(5) a. \textit{swa þæt hy asettan [him] upp on ænne sið}
    so that they set them up in one journey
    \ldots so that they transported themselves inland in one journey’
    (ChronA 132.19 (1001); Pintzuk 1993: 17)

b. \textit{he wolde adræfan [ut] anne æþeling}
    he would drive out a prince
    ‘\ldots he would drive out a prince.’
    (ChronB (T) 82.18–19 (755); Pintzuk 1999: 116)

c. \textit{þæt martinus come [pa] into þære byrig}
    that Martin then came into the town
    ‘that Martin then came into the town’
    (ÆLS 31.490–491; Pintzuk 1993: 17)

According to Pintzuk (1999), orders as in (5) support the hypothesis that basic VO was a structural option in OE in addition to an OV base (see also Haider 2012, 2014). She analyzes these facts in terms of the DBH, i.e., conflicting settings of the head parameter for both V and Infl, which, as noted above, is very similar to VHP/T3. So it seems that, in principle, OE might be amenable to an analysis along the lines proposed by H & S. Next, I would like to address the question of whether this approach is also viable for OHG.

At first sight, it appears that examples with postverbal pronominal elements can also be found in early OHG texts:

(6) a. \textit{(et scies quia dominus exercituum misit me ad te)}
    \textit{dhazs uuerodheoda druhtin sendida [mih] zi dir}
    that the-armies’ Lord sent me to you
    ‘\ldots that the Lord of Hosts sent me to you’
    (Isidor, 236)

b. \textit{(ut subiciam ante faciem eius gentes)}
    \textit{dhazs ih fora sinemu anthlutte hneige [imu] dheodun}
    that I before his face subdue him nations
    ‘\ldots that I might subdue nations before Him’
    (Isidor, 152)

\(^3\) Pintzuk’s conclusion that pronouns, short adverbs and verbal particles do not undergo extraposition in OE is based on the observation that these elements do not show up in postverbal position in unambiguous OV orders (e.g. orders of the type XP-V-Aux), cf. Pintzuk (1999) for details.
However, upon closer inspection it turns out that the word order of the OHG clauses in (6a–b) is identical to the Latin source; in particular, it appears that the post-verbal position of the pronoun in (6a–b) simply mimics the ordering found in the corresponding Latin clause and thus does not constitute clear evidence in favor of the existence of a VO base order option in OHG. Still, there are a few cases where the postverbal placement of a pronominal element (in most cases a reflexive pronoun) cannot be attributed to properties of the source text (cf. e.g. Dittmer and Dittmer 1998; Schallert 2010; among others):

(7) (& qui se humiliat exaltabitur)

and who-there humbles REFL will-be lifted up
‘and he who humbles himself will be exalted’
(Tatian 403,19; Dittmer and Dittmer 1998: 148)

(8) a. (si duo ex uobis consenserint super terram de omni re)

if two of you.PL.DAT agrees on earth of all things
‘if two of you on earth agree about anything’
(Tatian 331,1–3; Dittmer and Dittmer 1998: 161)

b. (ut diligatis Inuicem)

that you.PL.NOM love you.PL.ACC under each other
‘that you love each other’
(Tatian 579,30; Dittmer and Dittmer 1998: 161)

In (7), the postposed reflexive pronoun sih translates a preverbal Latin pronoun; in (8), the Latin text lacks a relevant pronominal element. However, these cases are exceedingly rare in OHG and subsequent historical stages of German (cf. e.g. Axel 2007; Sapp 2014, 2016; Fuß 2018; and Table 1 below). Thus it seems that postverbal placement of object pronouns was not freely available in OHG, which casts doubt upon the claim that OHG was characterized by a mixed OV/VO grammar similar to OE (pace Haider 2010; Schallert 2010; and H & S). Basically the same goes for the placement properties of verbal particles and light adverbs such as thô, dhar, or nû.

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4 Dittmer and Dittmer (1998: 172) count 72 cases where the postverbal placement of object pronouns can be attributed to the word order pattern found in the Latin source in embedded clauses of the OHG Tatian translation.
With respect to the former, Axel (2007: 109) notes that “in contrast to Old English, in OHG there are hardly any cases with post-verbal particles attested in subordinate clauses with particle verbs”.\(^5\) A search conducted in the OHG Reference Corpus (ReA) shows that the bulk of cases where a light adverb follows the verb in an embedded clause comes from Otfrid’s gospel harmony.\(^6\) However, it is a well-known fact that evidence from Otfrid does not always provide reliable cues on OHG word order, since the syntactic patterns are often shaped by requirements of rhyme and meter. This holds also true of deviating word orders involving postverbal light adverbs, as illustrated with (9), where the final position of *thar* ‘there’ seems to be determined by the needs of rhyme:

\[(9) \quad \text{Iz ward állaz io sór, soso er iz gibót thar}
\]
\[\quad \text{it was all always immediately as he it ordered there}
\]
\[\quad \text{(Otfrid, II. 1, 39)}
\]

Thus, it appears that OHG differs from OE in that it exhibits a strong tendency to avoid postverbal placement of light elements that resist extraposition such as pronouns, verbal particles, and light adverbs. This suggests that in contrast to OE, OHG does not support multiple base orders in the VP domain.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) There are a few cases of apparent postverbal placement of verbal particles in Notker’s OHG translations, compare the minimal pair in (ia) and (ib) (Schallert 2010: 381):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{(i) a.} & \quad \text{taz er beiz imo selbemo *aba* dia zungûn} \\
& \quad \text{that he bit him self off the tongue}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
& \quad \text{‘that he bit off his tongue’} \\
& \quad \text{(Notker, Boethius 91,3)}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{(i) b.} & \quad \text{ter imo selbemo dia zungûn *aba*/ beiz} \\
& \quad \text{who him self the tongue off bit}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
& \quad \text{‘the one who bit off his tongue’} \\
& \quad \text{(Notker, Boethius 16,12)}
\end{align*}\]

However, note that it is not clear whether *aba* in (ia) is really a verbal particle. Alternatively, it can be analyzed as an adjective/adverb (from which the verbal particle eventually developed) that modifies the object *dia zungûn* (possibly as part of a small clause).

\(^6\) The search string “pos=/VVPP\|VAFIN\|VVFIN\|VMFIN/ & lemma=/do|dar|nu/ & clause=/CF_I_.*/ & lang="goh" & #1.#2 & #3_i_#1 & #3_i_#2 & #2_=_#4” yields 114 hits, including 54 examples from Otfrid’s gospel harmony and 48 cases from the Tatian translation. The latter are almost exclusively main clauses introduced by ‘and’.

\(^7\) Based on the same line of reasoning, Sapp (2014) concludes from the virtual absence of light elements (both short adverbs and pronouns) in post-verbal position that in Middle High German and Early New High German, the VP was systematically head-final and that there is therefore no evidence for a parametric change from VO, or, mixed VO/OV to OV after the OHG period.
Crucially, OHG differs in this respect also from the Slavic languages, where postverbal placement of pronouns and light adverbs seems to be easily possible. In Polish, for example, relevant orderings are somewhat marked, but perfectly grammatical. This is shown in (10) and (11) for object pronouns and light adverbs, respectively.\(^8\)

(10) a. …že Piotr musiał spotkać go
    that Peter must meet him

b. …že Piotr musiał umyć się
    that Peter must wash himself

(11) …že Piotr nauczyciela musiał spotkać tam/teraz/jednak
    that Peter teacher must meet there/now/still
    ‘that Peter must meet the teacher there/now/still’

To conclude, it turns out that evidence from the placement properties of phonologically light elements that generally resist extraposition suggests that OHG systematically differs from alleged T3 languages such as Old English and Polish. Instead, the relevant facts seem to support the view that German has not been affected by a major change in basic word order throughout its recorded history, revealing a diachronic continuity ranging from OHG over middle high German/early new high German to present-day German.

### 3.2 Quantitative evidence

The impression that OHG is more “OV-ish” than OE is further supported by quantitative evidence. For example, Dittmer and Dittmer (1998) point out that word orders that deviate from the Latin source text in the Tatian translation exhibit a clear preference for preverbal placement of arguments and adjuncts. Table 1 shows that cases of VO order that have no model in the Latin source text are very rare, while there is a large number of OV orders that are independent of or deviate from the Latin source.

In a similar vein, based on a survey of more than 2,500 embedded clauses from OHG, MHG, and ENHG, Sapp (2014, 2016) concludes “that there has been no parametric change in the headedness of the VP from PIE to OHG to modern standard German” (Sapp 2016: 404) and that present-day German extraposition “aside from decreased frequency, is largely similar to the medieval construction” (Sapp 2014: 154), in that it affects essentially the same range of constituents (mostly

\(^8\) I am indebted to Marek Konopka (p.c.) for sharing his native speaker intuitions with me and for providing the Polish examples in (10) and (11).
clauses, PPs, and heavy or focused NPs). This historical continuity would come as a surprise if VO orders were generated by different mechanisms in the various historical stages of German (T3 in OHG/MHG, OV + extraposition in present-day German). Of course, H & S could still say that the few apparently clear-cut cases of VO order suffice to support their view that OHG was characterized by a T3 grammar. But this raises the general question of whether we are willing to accept the notion that the word order options made available by a language’s type of grammar are only rarely exploited, or whether we prefer to attribute the relevant few cases to the workings of other factors (such as marked stylistical operations).\(^9\)

### 3.3 Verb clusters

As noted above, V-Aux order is often taken to be a reflex of a language’s basic OV character (cf. already Greenberg 1963). However, it is a well-known fact that in the Germanic OV-languages, alternative serializations of selecting and selected verb

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\(^9\) Of course, something must be said about the fact that OHG displays VO-patterns with nominal objects that are not any longer possible in present-day German (cf. e.g. Axel 2007, and the chapters in part III of Jäger et al. 2018). Postverbal constituents are typically heavy or focused (or both, cf. Petrova 2009, Petrova and Hinterhölzl 2010, Schlachter 2012, Sapp 2016); in addition, there are a (very) small number of examples that exhibit postverbal given/light elements. Still, if we were to apply a label to OHG, then it would be rather SOV than ‘mixed’ SOV/SVO. This conclusion is further supported by the impression that the attested word order variation cannot be fully attributed to information-structural factors: While (a subset of) VO orders seem to be linked to length/new information, there are good reasons to believe that OV order is the unmarked case, which is compatible with a larger set of pragmatic functions (cf. e.g. Fuß 2018).
are also possible (for different historical stages and varieties of German cf. e.g. Maurer 1926; Behaghel 1932; Robinson 1997; Schmid and Vogel 2004; Schmid 2005; Axel 2007; Sapp 2011a, 2011b). Importantly, as pointed out by H & S, these reordering possibilities are only found in the Germanic OV-languages, while VO-languages exhibit a fixed ordering of finite and non-finite verb forms (cf. e.g. Haider 1993; Vikner 2001). In particular, the formation of verb clusters (in combination with restructuring effects) is a typical feature of many continental West Germanic OV-languages. This is also true of early German (cf. e.g. Robinson 1997). Example (12) shows that in addition to V-Aux order (cf. (2b) above), Aux-V is also a possible serialization in OHG. Moreover, the fact that the order of the finite and the non-finite verb deviates from the order found in the Latin source suggests that verb raising/verb cluster formation was a well-established trait of the early OHG grammar.

(12) (quod enim homo factus est)
\[dhazs\ \ ir\ \ man\ \ uuardh\ \ uuordan\ \ [...]\]
that he man was become
‘that he became a man’
(Isidor, 393; Robinson 1997: 67)

This conclusion is supported by the observation that early OHG also exhibits variable ordering in three-verb clusters:

(13) a. V3–V2–V1
\[fona\ \ huuelihhemu\ \ ædhile\ \ christ\ [chiboran\ uuerdhan\ scoldi]\]
from which nobility Christ born be should
‘from which noble lineage Christ was to be born’
(Isidor, 606; Robinson 1997: 89)

b. V1–V3–V2
\[dher\ \ dhar\ [scoldii\ \ chiboran\ uuerdan]\]
who there should born be
‘who was supposed to be born there’
(Isidor, 421; Robinson 1997: 96)

c. V3–V1–V2
\[dhazs\ \ ir\ \ in\ \ sines\ \ edhiles\ \ fleische\ [quhoman\ scolda\ uuerdan]\]
that he in his nobility’s flesh come should be
‘that He would come in the flesh of his noble line’
(Isidor 559; Robinson 1997: 72)

As pointed out by H & S, this phenomenon seems to be absent in the Slavic languages, which exhibit variable linearization of verb forms (to the extent that auxiliary and modal verbs are available), but crucially “the verbs do not form a cluster of the kind known from OV languages” (H & S, p. 24). The data in (12) and
(13) clearly show that OHG is not subject to such a restriction. Instead, it seems to pattern with the present-day Germanic OV-languages.\(^{10}\)

### 4 Concluding summary

I agree with H & S’s critique that the wide-spread tradition in language typology to class Slavic with uncontroversial SVO languages such as English faces a number of difficulties. In particular, it is fairly obvious that this classification does not do justice to the exceptional behavior of Slavic, missing a number of generalizations. However, it is not clear to me whether the postulation of a third basic word order type really solves this problem. In the discussion above, we have seen that assigning early Germanic and Slavic to the same word order type (T3) seems to suffer from very similar problems in that it does not capture a number of obvious differences between OE, OHG, and Slavic. Classifying all these languages as T3 languages highlights their similarities but also neglects the fact that OHG is closer to the present-day Germanic OV-languages than Slavic, and possibly, OE. So it appears that the VHP/T3 hypothesis, while providing a slightly more fine-grained distinction, ultimately falls prey to the same difficulties as previous typologies: Due to its very nature, it tends to lump together apples and oranges, thereby running the risk of missing important generalizations that can only be captured by a micro-parametric view on linguistic differences.

An adequate theoretical model should capture the fact that despite all similarities, there are significant differences between (and within) the individual early Germanic languages and Slavic. In addition, we must acknowledge that early Germanic is not identical to the present-day Germanic OV-languages. The overall impression that German has moved in its history towards a more consistent OV character, with VO orders representing the residue of a former stage, seems to call for an analysis in which an earlier system undergoes a set of minor changes, which can be analyzed in terms of micro-parametric choices, or growing restrictions on a stylistic operation such as extraposition (cf. Sapp 2014, 2016). However, for the reasons mentioned above, T3 does not seem to be an obvious choice to model the kind of variation we encounter in OHG (although it might be useful as a new approach to the syntactic properties of the Slavic languages).

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\(^{10}\) In previous work, Haider (2010) assumes that verb raising/verb cluster formation is generally available as a strategy to avoid/repair instances of center embedding, which, if used frequently, provides a potential diachronic pathway from T3 to SOV. Still, it seems that the Slavic languages do not make use of this strategy.
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