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Language contact effects on syntax and pragmatics: a case study from early English

DGfS 2014 AG6

Background and issues

- Two types of V2 in Old and Middle English: V to C and V to “F” (lower head position in the C-domain, presumed to be distinct from T)
- Both types of V2 are lost (except with auxiliaries in questions and negative-initial clauses) at different stages, and much differentiated between various contexts.
- Triggers for type 1 are primarily syntactic, those for type 2 are a mix of syntactic and pragmatic triggers
- Aim: tease apart factors (and their interaction) in the loss of both types of V2: syntactic change, loss of morphology, pragmatic developments, dialect contact/multilingualism effects (late L2 acquisition – pragmatics).

Type 1 V2 (Old English)

V to C movement ; Trigger: specific types of first constituent

Diagnostic: categorical inversion of all types of subject (nominal and pronominal)

Hwi wolde God swa lytles þinges him forwyrnan (*ÆCHom* -I, 1.-14.2)

Why would God so small thing him deny

`Why should God deny him such a small thing?'

Ne sceal he naht unaliefedes don (*CP* 10.61.14)

Not shall he nothing unlawful do

`He shall not do anything unlaw-ful'

þa wæs þæt folc þæs micclan welan ungemetlice brucende, (*Or* 1.23.3)

Then was the people the great prosperity (G) excessively partaking

`Then the people were partaking excessively of the great prosperity'

Type 2 V2 (Old English)

V to “F” movement; Trigger: Interplay of various factors; **Diagnostic:** inversion largely of nominal subjects, not of pronominal subjects (underlying broad idea is that the finite verb separates discourse-given from discourse-new subjects)

On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes sawle gegodod (*ÆCHom I,1.20.1*)
in two things had God the man's soul endowed
'With two things God had endowed man's soul'

Forðon we sceolan mid ealle mod & mægene to Gode gecyrran (*HomU19*
(*BIHom 8*) 26)

Therefore we must with all mind and power to God turn
'Therefore we must turn to God with all our mind and power'

Be ðæm we magon suiðe swutule oncnawan ðæt ... (*CP 26.181-.16*)
By that, we may very clearly perceive that ...
'By that, we may perceive very clearly that ...'

C and F are both external to the VP

[CP XP C [FP Subject position 1 F [TP Subject position 2 T... [VP]]]]
Vf (1) Vf (2)

þere coupe *no man* it aquenche wip no craft
there could no man it quench with no craft
[*Trevisa Higden* (Rolls) I. 223]

V2 variation in Middle English 1

Type of first constituent

Type 1 V2 triggered by Wh-, Ne, Pa (discourse link)

In Type 2 V2

- link with the previous discourse:
 - personal pronoun
 - independently used demonstrative pronoun
 - pronominal adverb like *there* (cf. the Dutch R-pronouns and their German counterparts and combinations thereof with a preposition (e.g. *daarheen* 'there-to', *daarop* 'there-on', *daaraan* 'there-on', *daarmee* 'therewith', *daarvan* 'there-of', *daarom* 'there-about', *daarvoor* 'there-for', *daarna* 'there-after').

V2 variation in Middle English 2

2) Type of finite verb

- Auxiliaries
- Transitive/unergative intransitive lexical verbs
- Unaccusative lexical verbs (where nominatives may be in low position, often clause-finally)

þonne ælce dæge **beoð manega** acennede þurh hys mihte
on worulde (ÆHom 6.116)

when each day are many.NOM given birth through his power
on world

‘when every day many are given birth through his power on earth’

forðam þe him **burston ut butu his eagan** (ÆLS(Alban)
116)

because that him burst out both his eyes (N, pl)

‘... because both his eyes burst out of him,...’

V2 variation in Middle English 3

3) Information status of the subject

In early Middle English (1150-1350), the higher subject position (Spec, "F") is reserved for pronominal subjects and nominal subjects that refer back to an antecedent in the preceding discourse. The lower subject position is for new (generic, indefinite, focused) subjects.

[Context: discussion of alms-giving]

Al swa þet water acwencheð þet fur. swa **þa elmesse acwencheð þa**
sunne (CMLAMBX1,39.487)

As the water quenches fire, so the alms quench the sins

[Context: listing of venomous properties a serpent]

Swa **haueð þe douel** nih and onde to monne. (CMLAMB1,153.435)

So hath the devil envy and hatred towards man

'likewise the devil has envy and hatred towards men'

Data

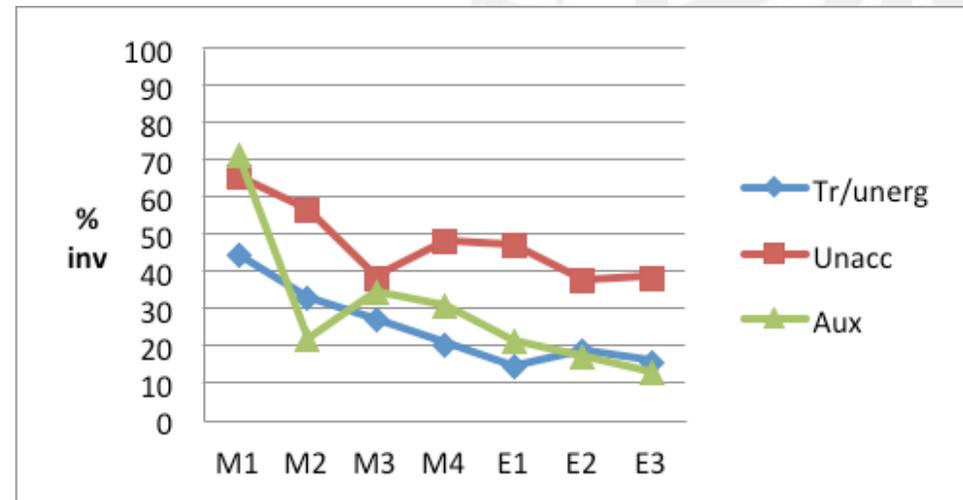
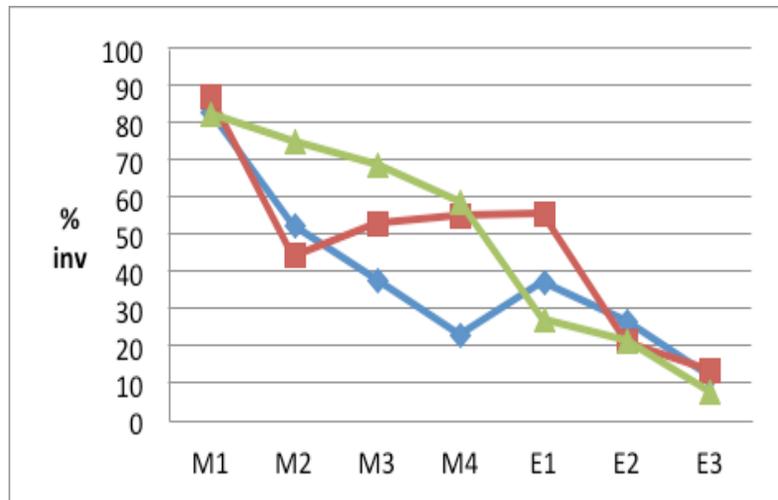
PPCME (Kroch and Taylor 2000)

- Converted to html by Erwin Komen
- Further enriched with coding of unaccusative verbs
- Further enriched with referential information on NPs

Loss of type 2 V2, i.e. inversion of NP subjects after adverbs, then vs. nonthen, ME and EME

Then (type 1, triggers V to C)

Nonthen (type 2 V2)



What changed in Type 2 V2?

The position of nominal subjects became preverbal, regardless of IS status. Neutralization of IS distinction. This sets in in the M3 period (1350-1420), leading to further overgeneralization of the preverbal subject position, while the clause-final subject position in unaccusatives was continued → **overgeneralization of the IS-driven pattern**

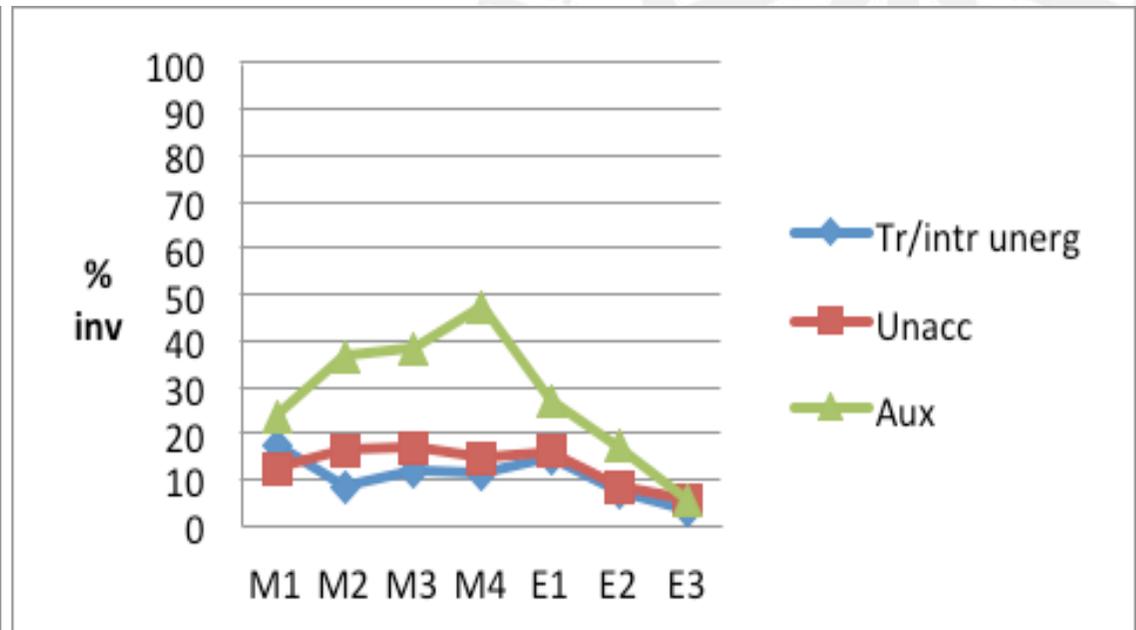
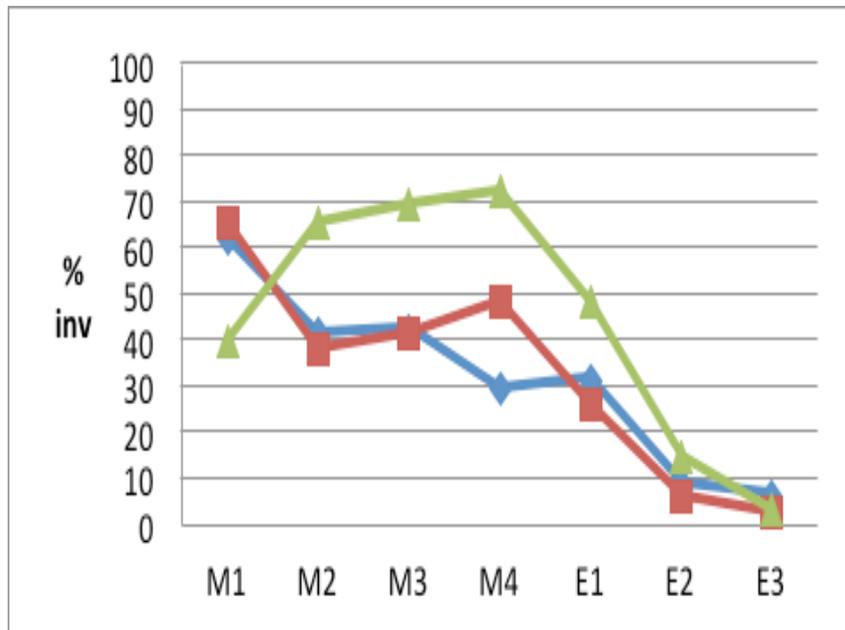
Case study of clauses introduced by *so*, with nominal subject

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Given Subjects				
Inversion	0% (0/32)	7.1% (1/14)	36.4% (12/33)	36.8% (7/19)
Non-inversion	100% (20/20)	81.8% (9/11)	53.2% (57/107)	60.3% (76/126)
Non-given subjects				
Inversion	100% (32/32)	92.9% (13/14)	63.6% (21/33)	63.2% (12/19)
Non-inversion	0% (0/20)	18.2% (2/11)	46.8% (50/107)	39.7% (50/126)

The loss of type 1 V2: inversion of pronoun subjects after adverbs, then vs. nonthen, ME and EME

Then

Nonthen



What changed in type 1 V2 (V to C)?

Adverbs of the then-group over the Middle English period first increasingly trigger higher frequencies of inversion of pronominal subjects. Hypothesis: **overgeneralization of syntactic V2**. After Middle English, the then-group drops out of the pattern

NOTE: the structure of V to C movement continued to be available in questions

Note: comment by Joel Wallenberg that this pattern is due to overrepresentation of Northern texts in late ME

Dialect contact, koineization

Sorace (2005): Interface hypothesis, specifically the syntax/pragmatics interface → type 2 V2 the more susceptible

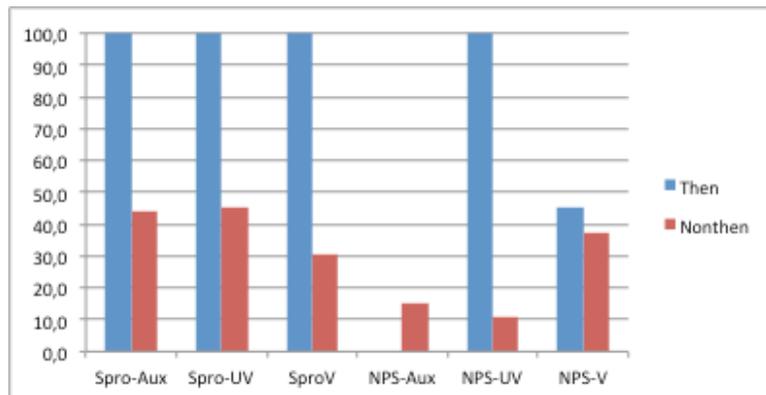
Kroch and Taylor (1997): dialect contact between Northern and Southern V2 grammars

Howell (2006), following up Kerswill and Williams (2002) on koineization (new varieties resulting from dialect contact, Milton Keynes, C17 Amsterdam...)

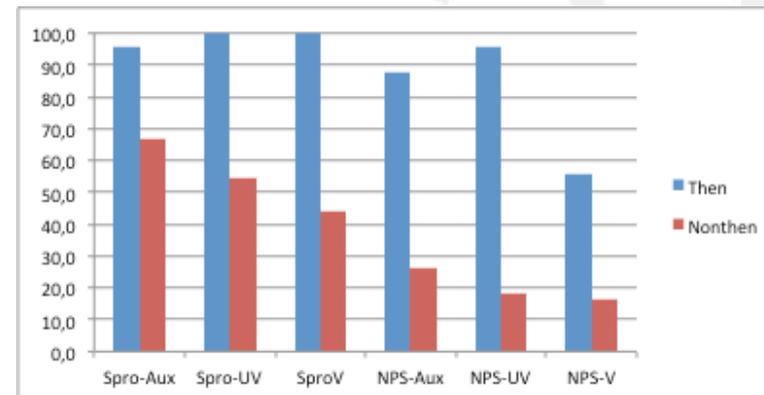
1. Majority forms in the mix, rather than minority forms, win out. (clauses with preverbal subjects, including S-initial ones)
2. Marked regional forms are disfavoured.
3. Phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexically simple features are more often adopted than complex ones (either SVO OR V2)

... London? V2 profiles of London texts:

late C14 Melibee

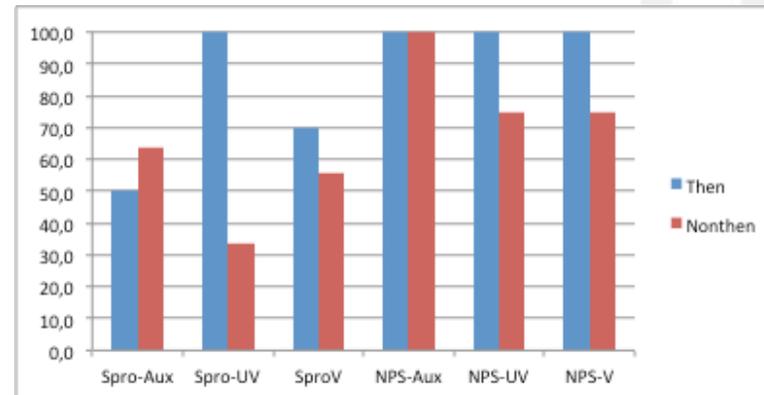


Parson

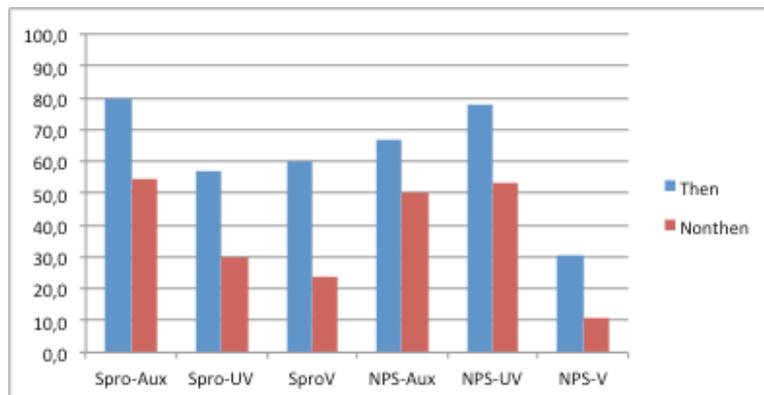


V2 profiles of London texts:

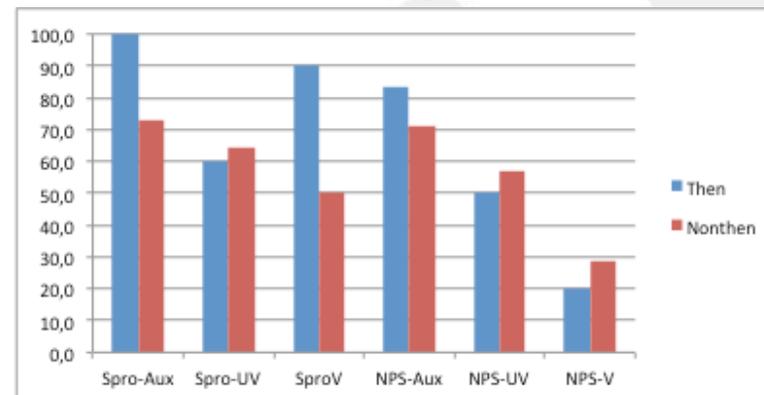
C15, Caxton's
Reynard the Fox



C16, Thomas
More (1513)



Roper (1555)



Observations and outlook

A considerable amount of teasing out of dialectal features still to be done, since texts are not even internally homogeneous, let alone within and across dialects

The increase of inversion with pronominal subjects in late ME is strong and cross-dialectal, except in south-easternmost dialects (presumably a case of syntactic change), pace Joel Wallenberg

(a few?) London texts stand out in maintaining type 1 V2 longer than dialect averages.

Further work:

V2 profiles of texts of known dialectal provenance

Aggregate texts per dialect area and across periods

Statistics

Thank you
Questions?

