Dialect contact, multilingualism and the loss of V2 in Middle and Early Modern English

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I present an analysis of the factors involved in the trajectory of a major syntactic change taking place during a time of massive interregional contact and multilingualism: the development and loss of V2 over the Middle English (ME) and early Modern English (EME) periods. The focus is on a diagnostic V2 context showing substantial dialect variation in ME: inversion of the finite verb (Vf) and a pronominal subject, the accepted diagnostic for movement of Vf to the highest clausal head position, comparable to V2 in present-day Dutch, German, Scandinavian. The word order template is (1a), exemplified by (1b):

(1)    a.      XP  Vf       pronominal subject …

        b.      Than must þei chese a new pope (Capgrave's Chronicle, 1.313.051)

                Then must they choose a new Pope

                'then they will have to choose a new Pope.'

(1) represents a stable word order pattern in Old English, if largely restricted to contexts where XP introduces a question (which remained stable up to the present day); XP is the negative particle *ne*; XP is a discourse-linking temporal adverb *þa* or *þonne* 'then'. ME saw the rise of considerable variation, loss and extension: the initial *ne*-particle was lost; inversion following *then* continued robustly and was extended to other XPs, such as object topics and other adverbs (up to 20-50%), especially with auxiliary finite verbs. An innovation was inversion following focal negated XPs, gaining ground from the 15th century onward.

        Subject pronoun inversion following objects and (all) adverbs was lost over the late ME and EME periods, cf. van Kemenade 2012; van Kemenade & Westergaard 2012. Kroch & Taylor 1997 attribute the loss of V2 to dialect contact between Northern and Northeastern Scandinavian-influenced dialects with what we may call strict V2 (which includes subject pronoun inversion), and Southern and Southwestern dialects with more variable V2 that initially continued the Old English distribution, with a bias toward inversion following *then*, as above. Eitler & Westergaard 2014 suggest evidence for dialect-specific grammars, framed as audience accommodation in the work of John Capgrave (East Midlands, C15).

        The purpose of this talk is to disentangle in some detail dialectal evidence based on the available parsed ME and EME corpora, supplemented by a selection of texts from the ME dialect corpora (PLAEME and MEG), and the PCEEC corpus which straddles ME and EModE correspondences. The focus is on Northern, Northeastern and East Midlands/London dialects. This picture does not confirm a clearcut distinction between a Northern/Northeastern Scandinavian influenced distribution, and a Southern continuation of Old English patterns. Preliminary results show that generalized pronoun inversion is restricted to the Northern prose version of the Benedictine Rule. On a slightly more lenient appraisal, its distribution is restricted to the North (not including the Northeast, which problematizes the idea that it is due to Scandinavian influence). The East Midlands in ME show an extension (later loss) of pronoun inversion in contexts following a limited number of possible other adverbs, which primarily share properties with Southern variants. (2) summarizes "triggers" for V2 in that area in late ME, which are familiar from work on word order change generally:

(2)    a.      XP: weight (shortness), discourse linking, focality, operator status

        b.      Vf: weight (shortness), verb type (auxiliary, unaccusative, transitive/ unergative intransitive)

This distribution will be shown to be compatible with an approach in which there is competition between variants in a multilingual environment, and the resulting loss of variants with the least distinct linguistic profile. In conclusion, dialect contact must certainly have played a role, but the emerging variants in the 15th and 16th centuries suggest an intriguingly more complex story involving competition, selection, and standardization (perhaps preceded by supralocalization).

**Eitler, T. and M. Westergaard. 2014**. Word order variation in late Middle English: the effect of information structure and audience design. In Bech, K. & K.G. Eide (eds). *Information Structure and Syntactic Change in Germanic and Romance Languages*, 203-232. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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