

The history of Locative Inversion in English: innovation, continuity, or both

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Matrix phenomenon Locative Inversion (LI) (1) stands out in Present Day English (PDE) for subject inversion, resembling historical Verb Second (V2) (2) in a strict SVX system. LI typically involves a preposed spatio-deictic XP, an unaccusative verb, and an inverted DP subject.

(1) [*Out of the water*] [*emerged*] *a crocodile*.

PDE

(2) [*And longe tyme after*] [*come*] *Cadwalayn azeine fram Irlande...* **Middle English c. 1400**

And long time after came Cadwalayn back from Ireland (CMBRUT3-M3,101.3035)

The subject falls finally as the internal argument of an unaccusative or coerced unergative verb (Roberts 2010), both of which fall under broad focus. The preposed locative encodes the Subject of Predication (SoP) (cf. Cardinaletti 2004), a discourse category specified for [+aboutness] but lacking d-linking characteristic of given topics (cf. Rizzi 2018). A discourse {u δ } -feature (Miyagawa 2017) on C specified for SoP attracts the {i δ _{SoP}} -bearing locative to Spec,CP when the subject DP remains low (Sluckin 2021), ruling out embedded LI. A silent expletive-like argument values T's EPP_{D/ φ } (Coopmans 1989; Bruening 2010; Sluckin 2021).

(3) [CP[XP_{LOC}{i δ _{SoP}} *In the cave*]_j][C_{{u δ _{SoP}}}][TP_{pro}_{exp}{iD, φ }]_j[T_{uD,u φ }][vP_v*appeared*]_{SC}[DP_{Molly}]]_j]

Problem: Some consider LI a residual of V2 (Brinton & Stein 1995; Mohr 2005), i.e., the V-to-C operation present in Old and Middle English (OE and ME), but LI is not V2 as the subject cannot intervene between auxiliaries and infinitives, e.g., **In the room was a boy sitting*. Moreover, the claim that LI emerged in Early Modern English (EModE) (Brinton & Stein 1995; Haerberli 1999) is problematic; simply standing out from EModE does not mean it was absent before but obscured by V2. Indeed, V2 Dutch shows a LI-like distribution (Zwart 1992), where movement of a locative XP to or through Spec,TP bleeds expletive *er*. Thus, three diachronic scenarios are imaginable: (i) LI was actuated *ex-nihilo* during the loss of V2, (ii) LI was present but obscured by V2, (iii) a predecessor LI was reanalysed to the current constellation.

Methodology: I present a corpus study using the YCOE (Taylor et al. 2003) and PPCHE (Kroch et al. 2000 et seq.) from Old English to Modern British English (c.850 to c.1915). I control for heavy vs light subjects - the former facilitate pseudo-LI inversions (Culicover & Levine 2001); temporal vs spatial XPs; and LI-incompatible elements. Historical V2 is contrasted with Dutch LI.

Results: Modern LI is distinguishable from EModE, coinciding with a decrease in preposed temporal XPs, yet structures resembling LI resisted the loss of other V2-inversions (c.1450) in late ME until c.1530 (cf. Warner 2007). Thus, LI apparently co-existed with V2 in ME. However, neither OE nor ME show Dutch-style constraints on LI: a preposed locative XP and TP expletive *þær* 'there' could co-occur in unaccusative/impersonal contexts, while, in contrast to Dutch, *þær* was not obligatory with preposed temporals. In OE, Unlike in PDE, embedded topics were limited to elements describable as SoP, e.g., locative arguments of unaccusatives, oblique experiencers, and promoted subjects (cf. Pintzuk 1999; Allen 1995; van Kemenade 1997). In short, embedded preposing was conditioned by discourse and argument structure.

Proposal: In OE, T hosted {u δ _{SoP}} which could be valued by spatio-deictic XPs and oblique subjects in clauses lacking an external argument. {u δ _{SoP}} migrated from T to C during ME as unambiguous evidence for SoP on T was lost: **Stage 1:** Dative experiencers/impersonal verbs disappear in ME, limiting evidence for {u δ _{SoP}} on T to fronted spatio-deictic XPs; other preposed XPs front to Spec,CP; **Stage 2:** The development of a strong-subject related EPP for {uD, u φ } on T (Kroch & Taylor 1997; Fuß 2003, 2008; among others) coinciding with the rise of overt expletive *there* in the 13th to 15th centuries. The result was that evidence for {u δ _{SoP}} on T was simply too opaque for acquisition and {u δ _{SoP}} was fully reanalysed as a feature of C in line with all other discourse-driven fronting operations by EModE at the latest, although probably during ME given the demonstrable resistance to the loss of V2-related inversion.