An interpretation of late Middle-early Modern English *do*-support using comparisons with the present day northern Italian Camuno dialect

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The diachronous development of *do*-support (DS) is a long-standing issue in historical English syntax. In its earlier stages, DS was optional and pragmatic. Although several favouring factors have been noted, they have not all been used in one coherent interpretation of the grammaticalizing structure. A cross-linguistic comparison to synchronic variation the extant Camuno dialect(s) in northern Italy (Swinburne, 2021) may help provide an appropriate model. Some Camuno dialects have a 'do' auxiliary, *fa,* a reflex of Latin FACERE, in an interrogative structure highly reminiscent of present day English.

> Fe-t   nà   a Milà?   (Camuno-Esine)
> do-SCL.2SG go.INFIN to Milan? 'Do you go/are you going to Milan?'

In Camuno the interrogative support verb is homophonous with a causative verb *fa,* but the constructions differ in the position of non-subject clitics: for *fa* 'cause', clitics 'climb' to the support verb, for *fa* 'do', they remain on the supported verb.

Elicitation experiments show preferences for DS use based on supported verb semantics, manner > result > stative. This is explained by *fa* 'do' being a fully lexical manner verb sharing a subject with compatible supported verbs. Speakers also report a DS question indicates presupposition, seeks confirmation, elicits opinion, and interrogative pronouns have a specific reference; impersonal questions with (optional) DS are not allowed. Together this suggests a biclausal structure for DS and the 'old material' in an embedded clause.

Almost all these traits have been reported from historical English but not synthesized under one model. Ellegård (1953) noted two kinds of *do* within Middle English, a *do* 'do' (originally in southwestern dialects) and a *do* 'cause' (mostly in eastern dialects) and hypothesized an origin for *do* 'do' from *do* 'cause' via reinterpretation of ambiguous forms. Ellegård's data is however equally compatible with a separate origin for the support verb *do* from a lexical manner-activity verb 'do' and a contact-induced replacement of *do* 'cause'. Roberts (1993) suggested two types of DS, the earlier form with a lexical verb predominant pre-1575. The earlier structure was conceived as a French-style *faire-par* causative with lexical *do* as a raising verb with small clause complement. Yet, if a causative origin were dropped, the structure could instead be one of control with *do* assigning the subject.

Ellegård showed a DS preference for non-stative > stative, and transitive > intransitive verbs. Later Ecay (2015) added unergative > unaccusative. Viewed semantically, this yields the same pattern of use of manner > result > stative. Syntactically, greater use with transitive verbs is explained by a developing preference for maintaining the V-O adjacency, which makes sense only if English is already abandoning verb raising to T at that time (1450-1550, as per Haeberli & Ihsane, 2016). (The absence of a transitive/intransitive preference in Camuno is then due to the verb still raising to T in the declarative.)

Finally, Stein (1990) reported the semantic/pragmatic traits of affirmative 'do' in its use as a 'highlighter' or 'intensifier' of the seminal content of a passage and a 'subjective', i.e. opinion-seeking quality – an observation as yet unconnected to a syntactic model. The alternative model for the early English DS suggested here is therefore one with a subject-assigning lexical *do* verb embedding a clause which represents 'old' information. During grammaticalization *do* is semantically bleached, becomes an auxiliary, and the structure simplifies to a monoclause.

Keywords

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