



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

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# Why was DS first used in English?

DS is a fundamental component of many different languages. Jäger (2006) found 'do'-support in over 200 languages from a vast range of different language families. It is particularly well known in Germanic.

- In present day English, DS an obligatory part of the **grammar**.
- In modern German dialects DS is largely optional and has **pragmatic** value.
- In late Middle-early Modern English (1400-1700), DS was optional.

**Was DS first used in English for grammatical reasons (so that the main/lexical verb no longer had to raise) or for some pragmatic reason (thus providing greater powers of expression)?**

# Present Day English 'do'-support (DS)

1. The auxiliary verb 'do' is used as a purely grammatical morpheme to 'support' the main verb in an interrogative, and in a negative declarative, in tenses otherwise without an auxiliary.

✓ **Do** you usually read the news on your computer?

✓ I **do**n't often buy a newspaper.

2. It allows emphasis in an affirmative declarative and an exhortative, in part because the auxiliary provides a location for stress.

✓ I **DO** want to go to the party, it's just....

✓ I **DO** like fresh strawberries.

✓ **DO** have some more!

3. It is used with all 'main' verbs except 'have' and 'be' (i.e. is not semantically selective).

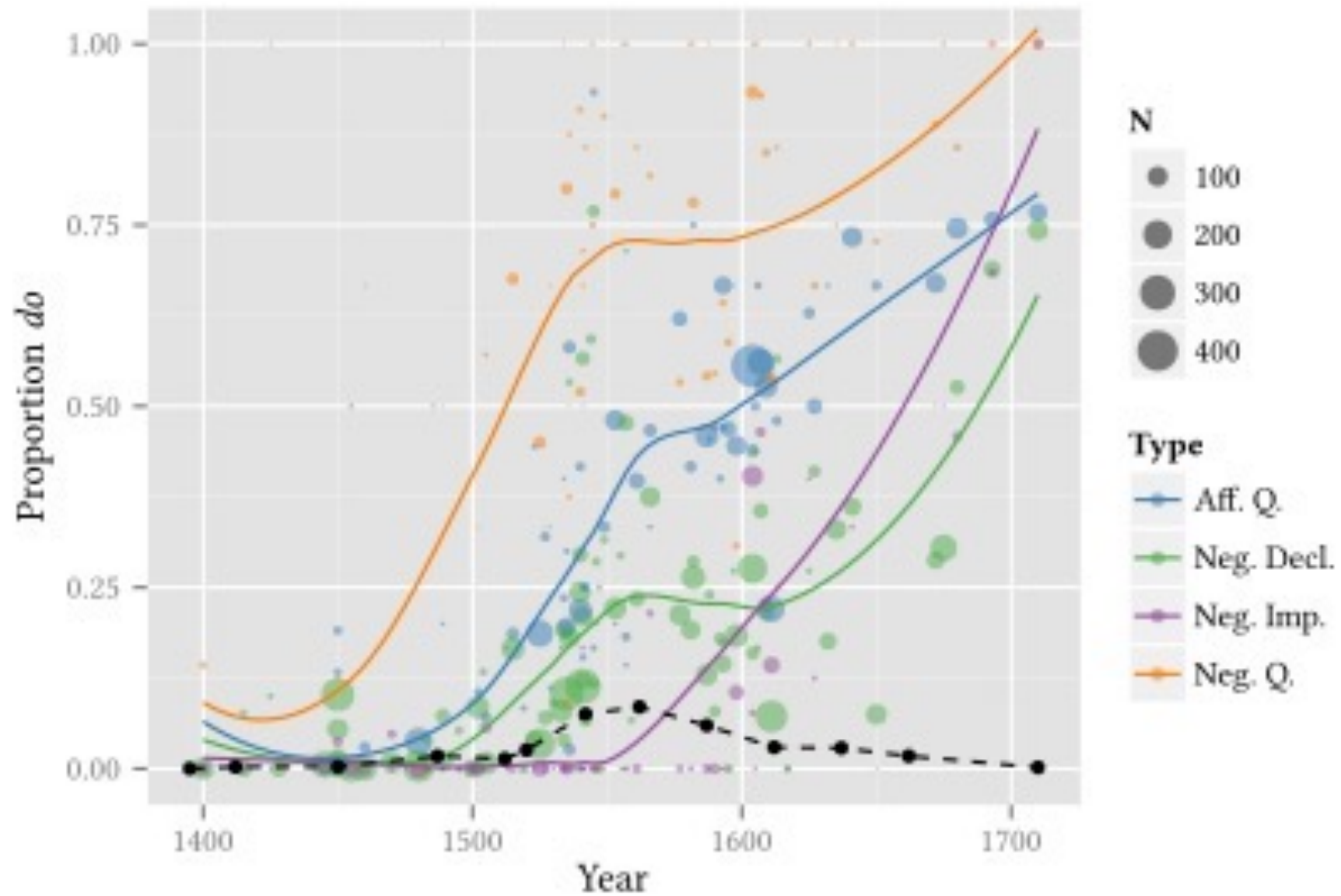


Figure 4.2: Do-support in Ellegård's corpus. Ellegård's estimate of the proportion of *do*-support in affirmative declaratives is represented by the black points (not scaled according to size), and the intervening dashed line gives a linear interpolation between the points.

# 1400-1700 English *do*-support (DS)

1. During this period, DS is **optional** and co-exists with non-supported forms.  
✓ Read you a book, Sire? / ✓ Do you read a book, Sire?
2. DS generally **increases 1400-1700** in negative declaratives, imperatives, and **interrogatives**. With affirmative declaratives, there is a post-1575 decline (Ellegård, 1953).
3. DS was less used with **stative verbs** (Ellegård, 1953) (see later).
4. Although DS and main verb-subject inversion do not have a strong difference in meaning, there are suggestions that DS with affirmative declaratives it is used to '**highlight**' the content of a passage (Stein, 1990).
5. An **origin from a causative** verb *do* via reinterpretation of ambiguous forms has been **suggested** (Ellegård, 1953) (but is not universally accepted).

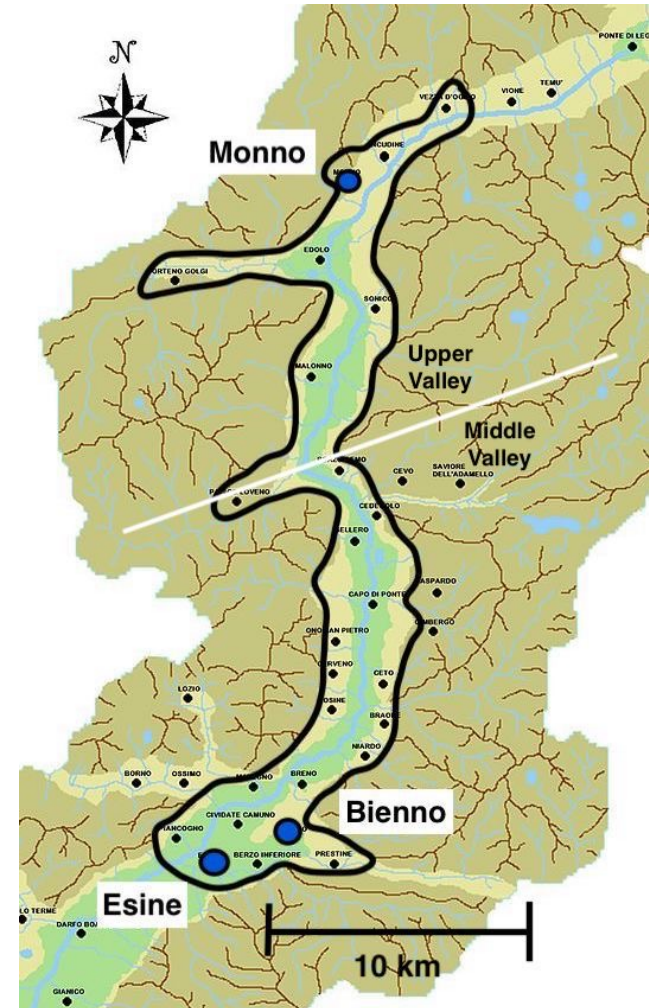
# Modern Camuno *fa* ‘do’-support (FS)

1. In some parts of Val Camonica, FS is **optional** and co-exists with non-supported forms.
2. FS (available only in interrogatives) demonstrates a grammaticalization cline within the valley as adjacent dialects demonstrate a transition from **optional to obligatory**. (Synchronic variation mimics diachronic.)
3. When optional, FS is less used with **stative verbs**. (More to say...)
4. When optional, FS is **presuppositional/emphatic**, and to engage the interlocutor in conversation.
5. Interrogative **support verb** *fa* is homophonous with the **causative** verb *fa* (but clitic position clearly distinguishes the them).

Fa-support (FS) in the Camuno dialect:

There is explicit and implicit knowledge from living speakers

# The northern Italian Camuno dialect





# An example of *fa*-support (FS)

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‘Are you reading “I Promessi Sposi?!”’ (Esine)



**Fé=t**                      lidì                      «I Promessi Sposi» ?!  
do.2=SCL.2SG (YOU) read.INFIN “I Promessi Sposi”

## Differences between English and Camuno

- Camuno uses **post-verbal adverbial negation**, not a pre-verbal clitic like English.

Maria la            lède            mià “I Promessi Sposi”.

Maria SCL.3SG.F read.3SG not “I Promessi Sposi”.

‘Maria is not reading “I Promessi Sposi.”’

- Unlike in English, there is **no need to support the negation** in the negative declarative.

# Differences between modern English and Camuno

- All Camuno dialects (whether or not they have *fa-do*) have *fa-cause* but they are not confused.

Maria la *ghe* fa lidì “I.P.S” *a ho fiöla*.

Maria SCL.3SG.F 3.DAT makes Read.INFIN “I.P.S” *a* her daughter.

‘Maria makes her daughter read “I Promessi Sposi”’

- In the declarative *fa* is always recognized as causative verb (and *clitics climb*) and *a causee* is either syntactically present or understood.
- In the interrogative *fa* could be *fa-cause* (clitics climb) or interrogative *fa-do* (clitics on following infinitival verb).

# FS question meaning: 1. presupposition

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(To the shopkeeper)

Do you sell artichokes?

9a. 'Indì-f i articiòc?

(Inf. 36. Esine)

**SCI: Open question.**

9b. Fì-f vindì i articiòc?

**FS:** The speaker **presupposes** that there aren't any artichokes for sale [because there are none visible].

# FS question meaning: 2. confirmation-seeking

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Does Elisabetta still smoke ?

- 10a. **Fùme-la** amò Elisabeta ? (Inf. 70. Cividate)  
**SCI:** I'm not investigating her! There were no preconceived ideas.  
It's an **open question**.
- 10b. **Ha-la fümà** amò Elisabeta?  
**FS:** Presupposes that there is already an understanding that she still smokes. [So you are looking for **confirmation**.]

[Note: In Cividate *fa* is aspirated as *ha*.]

# FS question meaning: 3. opinion-seeking/old info.

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(The arm is very swollen.)

Could it be broken?

13a. **Pöde-I** eser ròt? ? (Inf. 39. Malonno)

**SCI:** Normal question. [Anyone could be asked this.]

13b. **Fal podé** eser ròt?

**FS:** Said **to the doctor** [because you want an authoritative answer of whether or not it could be true that it's broken.]

[“Is it true (what I’ve heard/suspect): that it could be broken?”]

# FS results by verb classified by subject type

5<sup>rd</sup> experimental phase

Probability of use of FS:

**experiencer** <

**expletive** <

**theme** <

**causer (non-do-er < do-er)** <

**effector (do-er)**

Dataset P5, 19 MV Infs, 4 Qs/verb

Phase 5 (19 MV informants)

Verb	%	FS/HS	Tot
potere (abil/req) 'can, be-able-to'	1%	1	67
pensare che 'think (that)'	3%	2	69
piacere 'please, like'	15%	11	74
aprirsi 'open (intrans)'	28%	19	67
conoscere 'be-acquainted-with'	37%	26	70
crescere 'grow'	43%	31	72
fare (do) 'do'	56%	33	59
cercare 'search'	59%	41	69
dare 'give'	61%	40	66
scrivere 'read'	62%	41	66
arrivare 'arrive'	63%	45	72
fare (caus) 'cause, make'	64%	34	53
mettere 'put'	66%	46	70
trovare 'find'	69%	46	67
mangiare 'eat'	71%	52	73
aprire 'open (trans)'	73%	52	71
comprare 'buy'	78%	56	72
vincere 'win'	79%	55	70
leggere 'read'	82%	59	72
lavare 'wash'	83%	60	72

# Geographic pattern of grammaticalization

Grammaticalization  
of FS:

no activity

activity suggested >

activity described >

Group 2 (agentivists)  
have largely  
grammaticalized  
verbs with effector  
subjects

Group 1: Pragmatists (9 infs)

Verb	%	FS/HS	Tot
potere (abil/req) 'can, be-able-to'	0%	0	36
pensare che 'think'	0%	0	34
piacere 'please, like'	3%	1	36
conoscere 'be acquainted with'	14%	5	35
aprirsi 'open (intrans)'	20%	7	35
crescere 'grow'	22%	8	36
dare 'give'	36%	12	33
scrivere 'write'	37%	13	35
trovare 'find'	39%	14	36
fare 'cause, make'	46%	16	35
cercare 'search'	47%	17	36
mettere 'put'	47%	17	36
arrivare 'arrive'	50%	18	36
mangiare 'eat'	51%	19	37
fare 'do'	53%	16	30
vincere 'win'	60%	21	35
aprire 'open (trans)'	66%	23	35
comprare 'buy'	69%	25	36
leggere 'read'	72%	26	36
lavare 'wash'	72%	26	36

Group 2: Agentivists (10 infs)

Verb	%	FS/HS	Tot
potere (abil/req) 'can, be-able-to'	3%	1	33
pensare che 'think'	6%	2	35
piacere 'please, like'	26%	10	38
aprirsi 'open (intrans)'	38%	12	32
fare 'do'	59%	17	29
conoscere 'be acquainted with'	60%	21	35
crescere 'grow'	64%	23	36
cercare 'search'	73%	24	33
fare 'cause, make'	74%	25	34
arrivare 'arrive'	75%	27	36
dare 'give'	85%	28	33
mettere 'put'	85%	29	34
scrivere 'write'	90%	28	31
aprire 'open (trans)'	91%	32	35
mangiare 'eat'	92%	33	36
leggere 'read'	92%	33	36
trovare 'find'	94%	30	32
lavare 'wash'	94%	34	36
comprare 'buy'	94%	34	36
vincere 'win'	97%	34	35



# Last verbs to grammaticalize in Camuno

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sapere 'know' / volere 'want'

potere (pos) 'could, might' <

potere (abil) 'can, be-able-do' <

pensare 'think' <

piacere 'please, like' <

*fa*-support (FS) in Camuno (in interrogative) &  
*do*-support (DS) in Historical English (in declarative):  
are the pragmatics similar?

FS in an interrogative (Camuno) casts doubt on the interlocutor's  
presumed presupposition.

Fal piazit 'l vi ròh??

'DO you like red wine??' (I have some doubt.)

DS in an affirmative declarative (Historical English) is used for emphasis,  
to confirm or deny the interlocutor's presumed presupposition

'I DO like red wine.' (Even though you doubt this.)

# DS in affirmatives has pragmatic function

Affirmative DS is being used for '**highlighting**' the seminal content of a passage and for conveying **subjectivity** (Stein, 1990).

"...foreground marking is closely connected to ...'**intensity**'. "

"The foregrounding use already represents a special contrastive foil in the shape of assumed normality expectations: **a special circumstance or event is contrasted with a normality** or otherwise 'unmarked' states, actions or circumstances."

"...'**do**' is the **message** to the addressee that he should **share the speaker's evaluation**."

*fa*-support (FS) in Camuno &  
*do*-support (DS) in Historical English

Is there a similar pattern of uptake according to verb  
'activity' and/or subject agentivity?

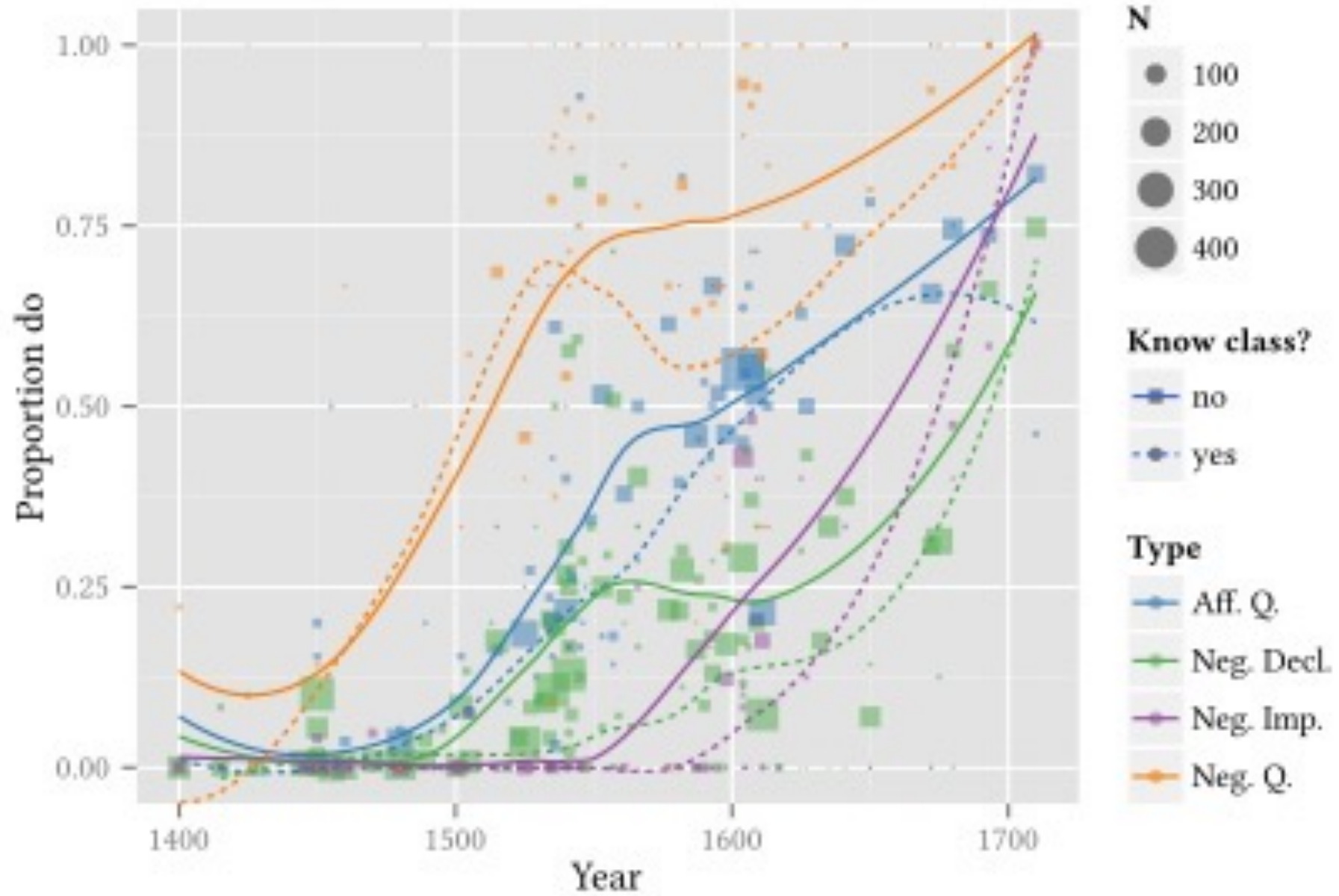


Figure 4.5: The behavior of *know*-class verbs compared to others in Ellegård's corpus.

# From Ecay (2015)

## 'Transitive':

Verbs with effector subjects and mostly manner verbs

## Intransitive:

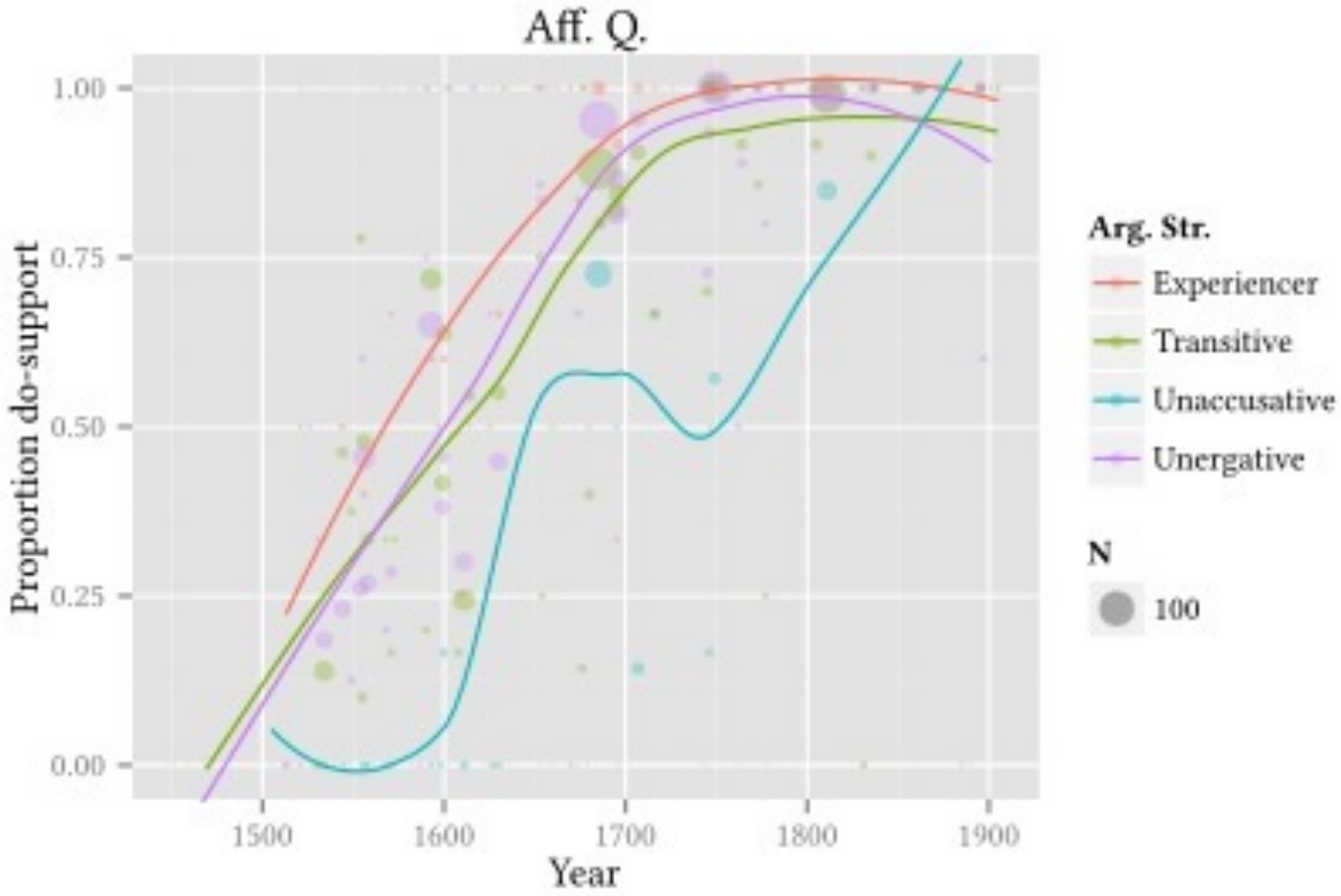
Unergative = manner verbs with effector subjects

Unaccusative = result verbs with theme subjects

## 'Experiencer subject':

Stative verbs but some with long propositional complements

There's a lot of scatter!



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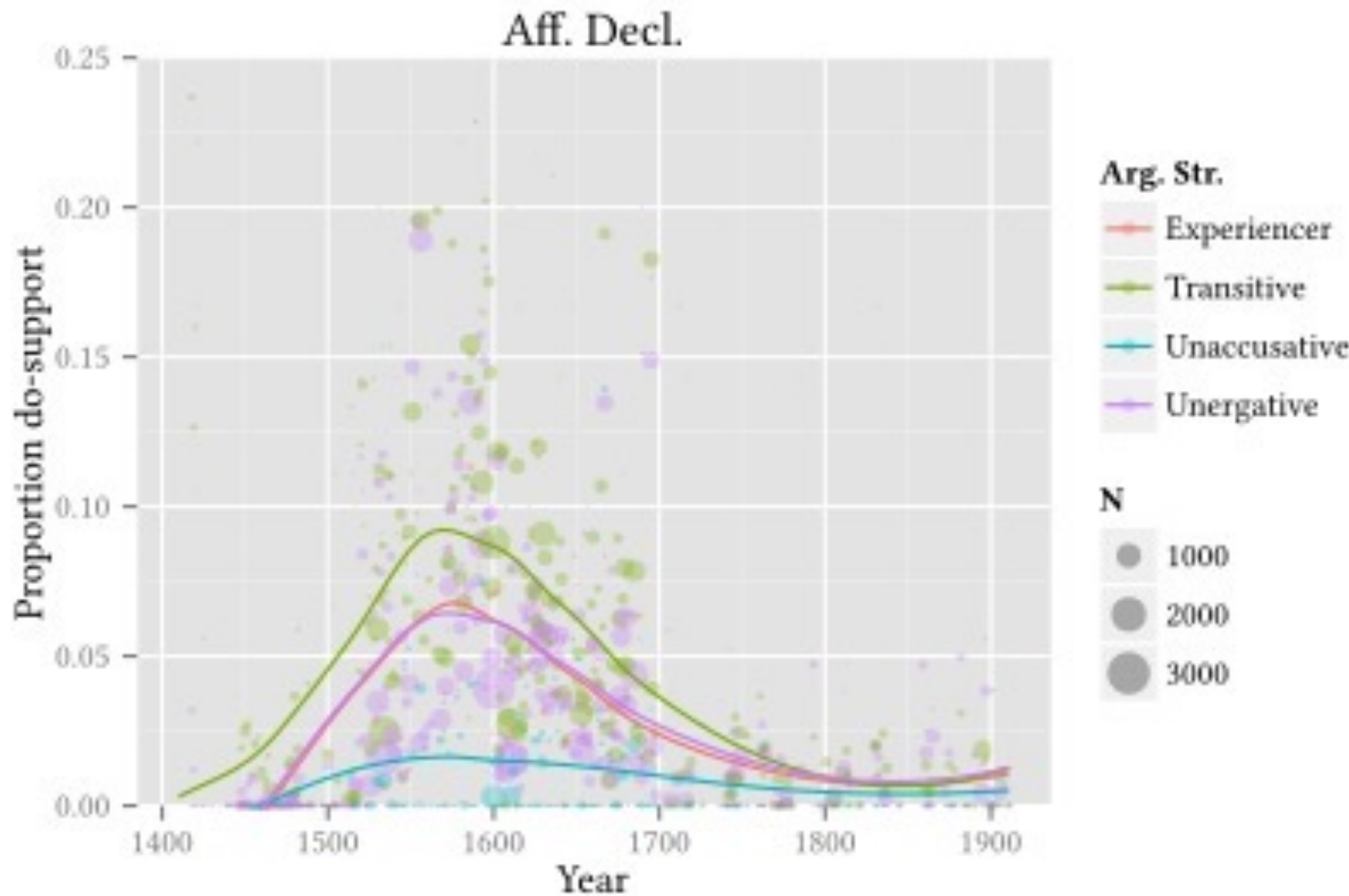
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*fa*-support (FS) in Camuno &  
*do*-support (DS) in Historical English:

A major difference:

English only: preference for DS with transitive verbs.



## Differences between English and Camuno

- Camuno is a **verb-raising language** (as is Romance).  
Maria la **lède hemper** “I.P.S.” dopodisnah.  
Maria SCL.3SG.F **reads always** “I.P.S.” after midday.  
‘Maria **always reads** “I Promessi Sposi” in the afternoon.’
- The finite verb precedes an adverb of frequency.
- Speakers do not expect an adjacency of Vlex-O in the declarative, let alone the interrogative.
- As predicted in Camuno, there is **no preference for FS use with transitive verbs**.

## Differences between English and Camuno

- Camuno is a **null-subject language**, (as is Italian).

Legge “I Promessi Sposi”, Maria? (Italian)

Fa=la lidì “I Promessi Sposi”, (la) Maria?

does=SCL.3SG.F read.INFIN “I Promessi Sposi”, (*the*) *Maria*?

‘Is Maria reading *I Promessi Sposi*?’

- The lexical subject is usually sentence-final and doesn’t intersect the two verbs. The **subject clitic** (probably an agreement marker) intersects the two verbs.
- In Camuno there is **no correlation between FS use and presence of a lexical subject**.

# In English, DS maintains Vlex-O

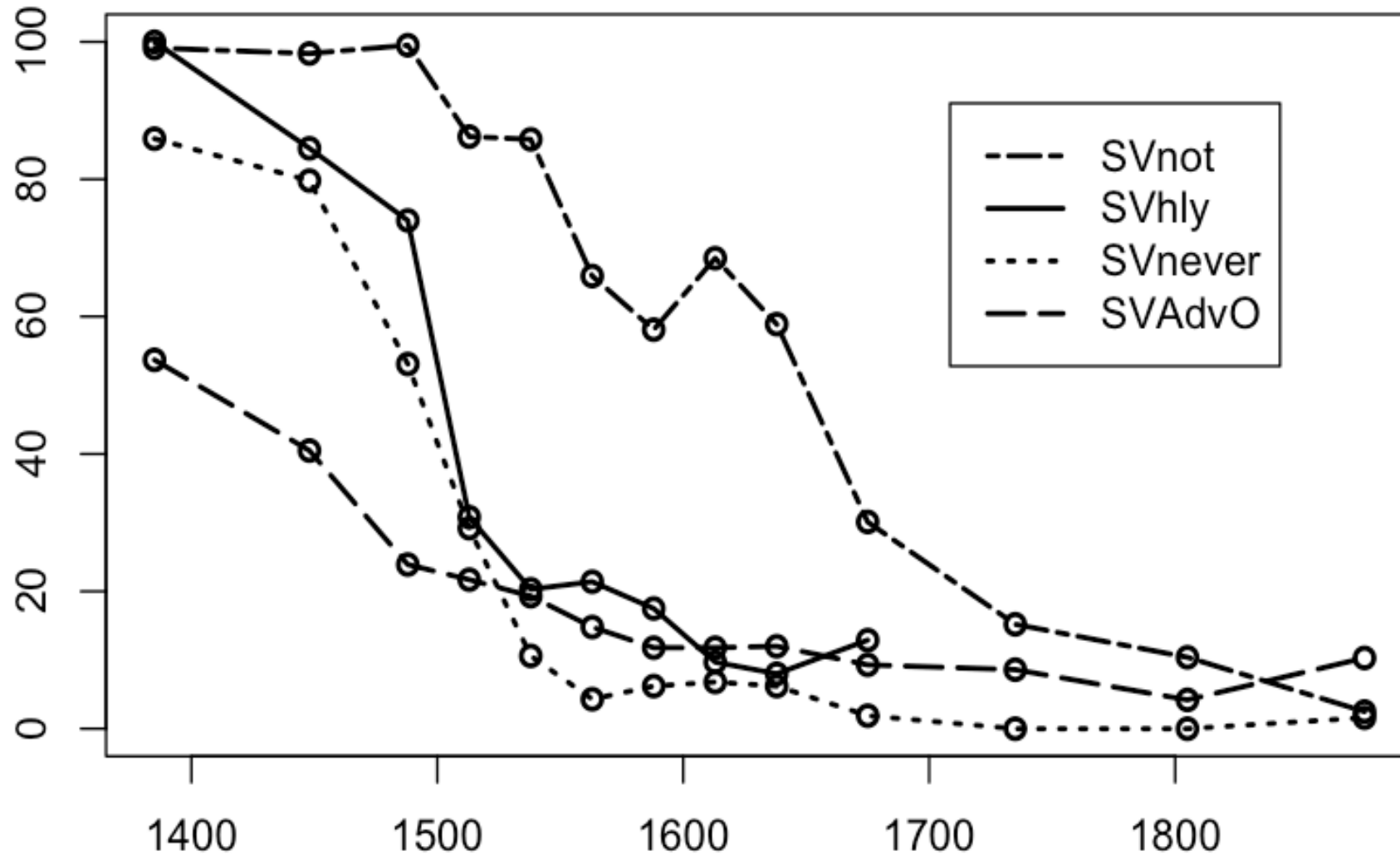
At least for the period where there is sufficient data ~1475-1700, there is a predicable pattern determining DS use with interrogatives, according to **presence/absence of an object, type of object, and type of subject** (Warner, 2002a).

Table 1. Incidence of DO in Yes-no and Adverbial Wh-questions 1465–1575.

	subject	object	DO%	ProbCoeff	n
a	NP	pers prn	96%	0.978	25
b	NP	NP	81%	0.868	57
c	NP	intrans	47%	0.563	96
d	pers prn	pers prn	50%	0.582	131
e	pers prn	NP	43%	0.493	260
f	pers prn	intrans	30%	0.366	475
				Total	1044

From Warner, 2002

# Timing of loss of verb raising



From Haeberli & Ihsane (2016)

## Conclusions

In Camuno and Historical English:

- 'do'-support arises **spontaneously** from a **semantically-rich 'do'** morpheme meaning 'activity', used (prototypically) with an agentive subject.
- Initial use is **with similar verbs** with which the subject of 'do' is most compatible.
- The combination of semantically rich 'do' + lexical verb produces **emphasis** and **highlights** the VP.

In Historical English but not Camuno:

- DS is advantageous in comprehension because it **facilitates a V-O adjacency** already preferred in the language.

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