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Word order change, architecture and interfaces: Evidence from V2 word orders and their loss in the history of English

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Present-day English stands out in the Germanic context as a language that has quite limited Verb Second (V2) word order, in *wh*-questions (*why did you go there?*) and in exclamatives with initial negatives (*Not one of them did he find useful!*). V2 here stands for a word order X-Vf-subject. Early English has been shown to have a wider range of "V2" word orders, where X is more variable, Vf includes lexical finite verbs, and the subject is often not inverted with Vf, especially when it is a pronoun. This paper presents a detailed case study of the history of V2 word orders, showing that the attested synchronic variation and the pathways of change crucially involve interaction between syntactic constraints, information structure and pragmatics, and prosody, illuminating how syntactic change is subject to pressure from interface conditions.

From the earliest stages, English has more (patterned) variation than we know so far of the other Old Germanic languages. I distinguish three V2-like patterns in OE, which are subject to different constraints and follow different trajectories of change and loss over the Middle and early Modern English periods. One factor that they have in common is that verb fronting of lexical finite verbs was lost over the 16th century, leaving auxiliary fronting only:

- 1) questions, initial negatives and clauses introduced by *then* which show categorical inversion of all types of finite verb and subject. This pattern was partially lost (following adverbs like *then*) over the 16th century and became restricted to auxiliaries in questions and negative-initial clauses;
- 2) X-initial clauses with transitive/unergative intransitive verbs, which mostly show inversion of nominal subjects, but not of pronominal subjects; this pattern was lost over the late 15th century;
- 3) X-initial clauses with unaccusative verbs, which show more inversion of nominal subjects. It can be shown that nominative subjects often occur in low positions in the clause which are essentially object positions. This can but need not represent a typical V2 pattern, and was not lost, living on in present-day English as complex inversion and locative inversion (*In the tank are sitting all of the pots.*)

I present a fine-grained corpus study, based on the on the relevant parsed corpora for OE, ME and EME, further enriched with information about finite verb type, noun type, Information status of the subject, and weight calculations for X, Vf, and subject. This will serve to identify the factors differentially determining the development and loss of V2 word orders (1) and (2) over the Old, Middle and early Modern English periods:

- 4) for initial X: weight, discourse linking, focality, operator status
- 5) for Vf: weight, verb type (auxiliary, unaccusative, transitive/unergative intransitive)
- 6) for subjects: weight, NPtype (bare, quantified/negated, indefinite, definite, demonstrative, proper), Information status (given vs. new)
- 7) syntactic structure, which in OE and early ME allowed for differential positions for nominal and pronominal subjects.

I will argue that the pattern in (1) (when following adverbs like *then*) was lost as auxiliaries were reanalysed as function words over the 16th century, losing primary stress on the stem, leaving the clause-initial prosodic foot unheaded. The pattern in (2) was lost due to the reduction/levelling of discourse-motivated syntactic positions.