

The relation between the loss of V2 and the loss of empty expletives in the history of English

Old English (OE) has word order patterns which are reminiscent of the Verb Second (V2) phenomenon found in modern Germanic (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987). This syntactic property has been lost to a large extent in the history of English and its loss is an issue which has received considerable attention in the literature (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987, Platzack 1995, Roberts 1993). However, the discussions in the literature generally raise two main problems. First, detailed data describing the change are rare. And secondly, no satisfactory explanation has been given for why this change occurred. The goal of this paper is to make a contribution to both of these points.

In OE, two contexts have to be distinguished in which V2 can occur (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1991): (i) fronting of an operator; (ii) fronting of a non-operator. Given that in the first context Modern English exhibits residual V2, it is mainly context (ii) which is important for the discussion of the loss of V2 in English. Within this context, an important distinction has to be made. If the subject is pronominal, fronting of a non-operator generally leads to 'XP-subject-V' orders rather than to V2. Genuine V2 with non-operator fronting is thus restricted to clauses containing a non-pronominal subject. Given these observations, the main issue that arises with respect to the loss of V2 in English is the question how V2 orders got lost in clauses with a non-pronominal subject and a fronted non-operator.

In the first part of this paper, I will consider some empirical issues concerning this change on the basis of data drawn from two parsed corpora (The Brooklyn-Geneva-Amsterdam-Helsinki Corpus of OE and the Penn-Helsinki Corpus of Middle English). I will start by discussing the situation in OE and I will show that, contrary to what seems to be suggested sometimes in the literature, the frequency of non-V2 orders with non-pronominal subjects is already by no means negligible. As for Middle English, the data that I will discuss confirm to a large extent the observation made by van Kemenade (1987) that by around 1400 V2 is being lost. I will conclude this section by focusing on remaining cases of V2 which still can be found throughout the 15th century.

The second part of this paper deals with the question why V2 in contexts of non-operator fronting was lost in the history of English. I will show that previous analyses of this loss are not satisfactory and I will propose an alternative analysis which also explains the observation made by Hulk & van Kemenade (1995:249) that "[t]he loss of verb second and the loss of expletive *pro*-drop coincide historically".

In the recent literature (cf. e.g. Pintzuk 1991), it is generally assumed that V-fronting in OE targets two distinct positions: C when an operator is fronted and the inflectional head below C when a non-operator is fronted. In the latter case, two scenarios are distinguished. Subject pronouns move to a position preceding the inflectional head occupied by the verb (hence the orders 'XP-subject-V'), whereas non-pronominal subjects can occur in a lower position (hence the frequent occurrence of 'XP-V-subject' (i.e. V2) in this context). As pointed out by Haerberli (to appear b), this contrast between pronominal and non-pronominal subjects is similar to a contrast found in a different context in the modern Germanic languages. In some languages like German, the word order 'C-adjunct-subject' is possible with non-pronominal subjects but not with weak subject pronouns, which generally have to be adjacent to the C head. This contrast can be analyzed in terms of a higher subject position to which subject pronouns move obligatorily and a lower subject position which can be occupied by non-pronominal subjects. Thus, there is a parallelism between OE and some modern Germanic languages with respect to the distribution of pronominal and non-pronominal subjects. This parallelism is illustrated for main clauses in (1) below. SU1 is a higher subject position to which subject pronouns move obligatorily, whereas

non-pronominal subjects can remain in a lower subject position SU2 (FP=an inflectional projection below C, e.g. AgrSP).

- (1) a. Old English: [CP XP [FP SU1 V SU2 ...]]
 b. Modern Germanic: [CP XP V [FP SU1 **adjunct** SU2 ...]]

The question that arises then is what allows non-pronominal subjects to occur in the lower subject position SU2. For context (1b) (i.e. 'C-adjunct-subject' orders), Haerberli (to appear a) proposes that an important factor is the licensing of expletive *pro* because non-pronominal subjects can remain in SU2 as the result of the insertion of an empty expletive in SU1. This proposal accounts for example for the contrast between German, a language with empty expletives and 'C-adjunct-subject' orders, and West Flemish, a language which does not license empty expletives and exhibits strict C-subject adjacency. If this analysis is extended to (1a), subject-verb inversion in the context of non-operator fronting can be analyzed as the result of the occurrence of an empty expletive in SU1. As a consequence, once empty expletives are lost in the history of English, subject-verb inversion in the context of non-operator fronting cannot be derived any more, for the same reason that 'C-adjunct-subject' orders cannot be derived in West Flemish. Instead, fronting of a non-operator always leads to 'XP-subject-V' orders. We thus can explain the loss of V2 in English and its co-occurrence with the loss of empty expletives in terms of assumptions which have been motivated independently on the basis of properties of the modern Germanic languages.

To conclude this paper, I will discuss two additional points in more detail. First, I will reconsider the data discussed in the first part of the paper in the light of the analysis proposed in the second part. And secondly, since agreement morphology has traditionally been considered as the property which licenses empty expletives, I will discuss, on the basis of comparative evidence from the modern Germanic languages and French, how the loss of empty expletives (and, hence, the loss of V2) can be related to diachronic developments in the verbal agreement system of English.

References

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