

*'Therefore dyd my hert reioyce':  
On the Decline of Subject-Auxiliary Inversion in the History of English*

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In the early stages of the English language, the finite verb regularly occurred in second position and, therefore, in a position preceding the subject when the clause-initial element was a non-subject (i.e., Verb Second (V2), subject-verb inversion). However, V2 in Old English was not as regular as in the modern Germanic languages (e.g. Dutch, German). While it was systematic with certain initial elements (negation, interrogative elements, the adverb *then*), with others subject-verb inversion was rare with pronominal subjects and common but not systematic with nominal subjects. In Present-Day English, only few contexts allow inverted word orders. The English language therefore underwent an important change in this domain over the centuries.

Although the “loss of V2” has been regularly discussed in the literature (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987 and much subsequent work), several aspects of this change have yet to be thoroughly examined. This paper aims to address some remaining issues in this domain and shall provide an overview of the diachronic trajectory of V2 with auxiliaries (auxiliaries *be* and *have*, *do* and modal verbs) during the history of English. The development of auxiliaries is of particular interest as inversion has been lost in English except in very specific contexts, for instance, interrogative clauses. This work is based on prose data collected from four main periods – Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English and Late Modern English – spanning from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to 1914: *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (Taylor et al. 2003) and the three *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpora of Historical English* (Kroch et al. 2000, Kroch et al. 2004, Kroch et al. 2016), which are analysed by means of logistic regression models.

My presentation will examine the development of V2 in the history of English with respect to the following factors: (i) type of subject (nominal vs pronominal); (ii) type of initial constituent (*then* vs any other initial non-subject, with an emphasis on a few specific adverbials which still allow for inversion in modern English). Finally, I will make a brief comparison between different genres, between prose and verse texts from the Middle English period, using the *Parsed Corpus of Middle English Poetry* (Zimmermann 2021). Both ME corpora display a similar change in the syntax with respect to the use of subject-auxiliary inversion.

**References:**

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