

English as a Mixed V2 Grammar: Synchronic Inconsistency and Diachronic Development from the Perspective of First Language Acquisition

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the word order of questions and declaratives in present-day English and classifies it as a mixed V2 grammar. Within a cue-based approach to language acquisition and change extended to a Split-CP model of clause structure, I use some child language data to show that mixed V2 systems are easily learnable. Discussing some historical data from Old and Middle English, I argue that the choice between V2 and non-V2 was a dependent on a productive syntactic rule which was sensitive to information structure. The survival of certain remnant cases are accounted for by reference to language acquisition.

2. ENGLISH AS A MIXED V2 LANGUAGE

❖ English normally characterized as a non-V2 language:

- (1) Anna **liest immer** Zeitungen. (German)
*Anna reads always newspapers
- (2) Bücher **liest sie** nur im Sommer.
*Books reads she only in the summer.
- (3) **Liest sie** Zeitschriften?
*Reads she magazines?
- (4) Was **liest sie** im Winter?
*What reads she in the winter?

❖ Residual V2 (Rizzi 1996), subject-auxiliary inversion in questions.

- (5) **Is she** reading newspapers?
- (6) What **does she** normally read?

❖ ‘VP inversion’ in declaratives (with *be*), or ‘locative inversion’ (e.g. Bresnan 1994).

- (7) An excellent appetizer **is the squib ravioli with garlic sauce**. (from Birner 1995, p. 242)
- (8) ...inland from the small, pretty harbor town that’s called a haven **squats the town of Heart’s Rock**. (from Birner, 1995, p. 241)

❖ Non-*be* inversions not necessarily locative (Birner 1995).

- (9) Second, to this rule **would apply**, optionally, **a rule we may call Verb Second...**
(from Birner 1995, pp. 244)

❖ Birner (1995): Preposed element ‘discourse-old’, postposed element ‘discourse-new’ (Prince 1992).

- (10) We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea and milk. **Also complimentary is red and white wine**.
- (11) A: Mom, where is my gym shirt? I’m late.
B: **#In the hall closet is your gym shirt**. (from Birner, 1995, p. 237).

- ❖ No exact match between unaccusative verbs/inversion (Levin&Rappaport-Hovav 1995).

(12) *On the streets of Chicago **melted a lot of snow**.

(13) From his pulpit **preached no less a person than Cotton Mather**.
(from Birner, 1995, p. 246)

✚ ...the verb “may not represent new information in the discourse” (Birner 1995, p. 246).

(14) I sat alone in an office while across the hall the sound engineer, the pop-eyed, silent but hyper James Hill, worked behind a heavy wooden door lined with On the third floor **worked two young women called...** (from Birner 1995, p. 253)

(15) The hot August sun beat down on the children as they walked down the street. Johnny was spooning up soggy sherbet out of a cardboard cup; in Maria’s sticky hand **melted a chocolate-chip ice cream cone**. (from Birner 1995, p. 254).

3. V2 AND A THEORY OF CUE-BASED ACQUISITION AND CHANGE

- ❖ Cue for V2 syntax (from Lightfoot, 2006, p. 86):

(16) $_{CP}[XP \text{ } _C V \dots]$

- Must be obligatory (UG requirement), for learnability reasons.
- Must be robustly expressed in primary linguistic data.

(17) þa he onweg adrifen wæs, **cwom he** to Cent. (Early OE, V2)

when he away driven was came he to Kent

‘When he was driven away, he came to Kent.’

(from Bech 2001, p. 53)

(18) Soo **the kyng returned** hym to the toure ageyne. (Late ME, non-V2)

so the king returned him(self) to the tower again

So the king returned to the tower again.’

(from Bech 2001, p. 56)

- ❖ Both V2 and non-V2 attested in non-subject-initial declaratives in historical texts. Explained as **grammar competition**, Lightfoot (1999), Kroch&Taylor (1997).

(19) & of heom twam **is eall manncynn** cumen. (OE, V2)

and of them two is all mankind come

(20) Ælc yfel **he mæg** don. (OE, non-V2)

each evil he can do (from Kroch and Taylor 1997, p. 302, orig. from Pinzuk 1991)

- Statistical shifts in input, caused by external or language-internal factors ⇒ cue may drop to critical level for language acquisition ⇒ children ignore it, develop a grammar without V2, although grammar of previous generation had it – to a certain extent.
- Language change is not gradual, but abrupt and ‘**catastrophic**’, reflecting a new parameter setting in the I-language of individual speakers.

How is the word order of present-day English learnable, given the obligatory nature of the cue? And how could such a system have developed?

4. CUE-BASED ACQUISITION AND CHANGE IN A SPLIT-CP MODEL

- ❖ Split-CP model: Illocutionary force reflected in different heads in the CP domain (Westergaard&Vangsnes 2005, revised in some later work).

Table 1: Examples of syntactic heads in the CP domain and corresponding clause types.

Syntactic head	Clause type
Int°	<i>Wh</i> -questions
Pol°	<i>Yes/no</i> -questions
Top°	Declaratives
Excl°	Exclamatives
Fin°	Embedded declaratives
Wh°	Embedded questions
etc.	

- ❖ Verb movement is the result of an EPP head feature, [X°_{EPP}], on syntactic heads in the CP ⇒ many different V2 grammars.
- Norwegian: ‘Classical’ examples of V2 in subject-initial declaratives (V-Neg/Adv), non-subject-initial declaratives, and *yes/no*-questions (V-S).
 - (21) Vi **drikker ikke** fransk vin/*vi ikke drikker fransk vin. (V2)
we drink not French wine
 ‘We don’t drink French wine.’
 - (22) Italiensk vin **drikker vi** ofte/*italiensk vin vi ofte drikker.
Italian wine drink we often
 ‘Italian wine we often drink.’
 - (23) **Drikker han** mye vin?
drinks he much wine
 ‘Does he drink much wine?’
- Non-V2 in embedded clauses, embedded questions, and exclamatives:
 - (24) Det finnes noen studenter [som **aldri drikker** vin/*som drikker aldri vin]. (Non-V2)
it exist some students who never drink wine
 ‘There are some students who never drink wine.’
 - (25) Jeg lurer på [hva **han drikker**]/[*hva drikker han].
I wonder on what he drinks
 ‘I wonder what he drinks.’
 - (26) Så stor **du er** blitt!/*Så stor er du blitt!
how big you are become
 ‘How big you have become!’
- Variation across present-day V2 languages with respect to the mixed word order.
 - (27) Ég velti því fyrir mér [hvort hún **sé ekki** lögð af stað]. (Icelandic) (Non-V2)
I wonder whether she is not gone away
 ‘I wonder if she hasn’t left.’
 - (28) They asked me **was I** going to the party. (Belfast English, from Henry 1994, p. 275)
 - (29) Hvor **er han** sød! (Danish)
where/how is he sweet
 ‘How nice he is!’
- No strict V2 in *wh*-questions in Norwegian dialects - variation represents diachronic change in progress V2 ⇒ non-V2 (Vangsnes, 2004, forthcoming, Westergaard 2005).

- (30) Kåles bil **kjøpte du**?/Kåles bil **du kjøpte**? (Nordmøre dialect)
which car bought you/which car you bought
 ‘Which car did you buy?’ (from Áfarli 1986:98, 100)

Table 2: The value of the [X°_{EPP}] feature on syntactic C-heads in different V2 grammars.

Language	[Int° _{EPP}]	[Top° _{EPP}]	[Pol° _{EPP}]	[Excl° _{EPP}]	[Wh° _{EPP}]	etc.
Standard Norwegian	+	+	+	-	-	
Nordmøre dialect	-	+	+	-	-	
Danish	+	+	+	+	-	
Standard English	+	-	+	-	-	
Belfast English	+	-	+	-	+	
etc.						

- Functional architecture provided by UG, value of [X°_{EPP}] learned from input cues.

(16') $CP[XP_C V...]$ (from Lightfoot, 2006, p. 86)

Table 3: Examples of cues for V2 in a split-CP model.

Cue	Presence in the Input
IntP[<i>wh</i> Int° V...]	+ (English, Standard Norwegian) - (Nordmøre dialect)
TopP[XP Top° V...]	+ (Norwegian, German etc.) - (English, Italian etc.)
PolP[Pol° V...]	+ (Norwegian, German, English etc.) - (Italian)
WhP[(<i>wh</i>) Wh° V...]	+ (Belfast English) - (Norwegian, English)
etc.	

- No global cue for V2 syntax, but separate cues for each clause type.
 - Children search selectively for cues, scanning the relevant contexts only.
 - No overgeneralization of word order between clause types.
- ❖ Both V2 and non-V2 attested early – no overgeneralization, despite different input frequencies: *yes/no*-questions 28.4%, exclamatives 1.0% (Westergaard, forthcoming).

- (31) så **tegne** æ mamma. (Ina.02, age 1;10.4) (V2)
then draw.INF/PRES I mommie
 ‘Then I draw mommie.’
- (32) **ser** du nokka? (Ann.07, age 2;1.7)
see.PRES you something
 ‘Do you see anything?’
- (33) se her ka **Ina gjør**. (Ina.04, age 1;11.22) (Non-V2)
look here what Ina does
 ‘Look here what Ina is doing.’
- (34) kor store mage **han har**. (Ina.27, age 3;3.18)
where/how big stomach he have.PRES
 ‘What a big stomach he has!’

❖ Data from English child language: no overgeneralization of subject-auxiliary inversion.

(35) what you writing? (Eve.13, age 2;0)

(36) Sue # what **are you** folding? (Eve.15, age 2;1)

(37) why **we can't** find the right one? (Adam.26, age 3;3.04)

✚ Consequences for language change:

- Word order change should typically affect only one clause type:
Declaratives in the history of English, *wh*-questions in present-day Norwegian dialects
Additional example: Loss of V2 in Imperatives in present-day Belfast English – other V2 constructions (e.g. embedded questions) unaffected (Henry 1994).

But how could a system with variability *within* a clause type be learnable – and develop?

5. V2 IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH

❖ ‘Optional’ word order already in OE:

(19') & of heom twam **is eall manncynn** cumen. (OE, V2)

and of them two is all mankind come

(20') Ælc yfel **he mæg** don. (OE, non-V2)

each evil he can do (from Kroch and Taylor 1997, p. 302, orig. from Pinzuk 1991)

Table 4: The percentage of V2 vs. non-V2 word order in non-subject-initial declarative main clauses across the OE and ME periods, based on 5000 main clauses from various text samples.¹

Word order	Old English		Middle English	
	Early (900-1000)	Late (1000-1150)	Early (1150-1350)	Late (1350-1480)
V2 (XVS)	69.7% (368)	70.9% (312)	51% (246)	31% (187)
Non-V2 (XSV)	30.3% (160)	29.1% (128)	49% (236)	69% (416)

- V2 preferred with full DP subjects, non-V2 with pronouns.
- But: DPs also attested non-V2 clauses, see Bech (2001), Haeberli (2002).

(38) For þrim þingum **Hælend eode** on westen. (OE)

for three reasons Savior went into wilderness (from Bech 2001, pp. 3-4)

❖ Tromsø dialect: Questions with the monosyllabic *wh*-elements *ka*, *kor*, *kem* (‘what’, ‘where’, ‘who’) allow ‘optional’ non-V2 word order.

(39) Ka **drakk ho?**/Ka **ho drakk?** (V2/Non-V2) (Tromsø dialect)

what drank she

‘What did she drink?’

- Frequency in sample of Tromsø dialect: **45.3%** V2 (Westergaard 2003).
- V2: Subject: DP/dem. pronoun *det* Verb: *be*
- Non-V2: Subject: pers. pronoun Verb: all other verbs

¹ The percentages in this table are based on raw data from a corpus investigated by Bech (2001).

- (40) kor **er mitt fly?** (INV, file Ole.17) (V2)
where is my plane
- (41) kor **vi lande** henne? (INV, file Ole.17) (Non-V2)
where we land LOC
 ‘Where should we land?’

Table 5: Subjects and verbs in *wh*-questions (N=300) in a sample of spontaneous speech in the Tromsø dialect, with V2 (45.3%) and non-V2 (54.7%), adult female speaker.

Subject/Verb Types	V2		Non-V2	
	<i>be</i>	Other V	<i>be</i>	Other V
Full DP/ <i>det</i>	128	5	27	19
Pronoun	1	2	4	114

- V2 with informationally new/focused subjects (often a full DP)
 Non-V2 with informationally given subjects (often a personal pronoun)
 - Result of verb movement to a low CP head (Top°), which attracts informationally light elements, typically *be* or pronominal subjects.
- ❖ Historical English data: V2 with subjects conveying new/focused information, non-V2 with informationally given subject. Syntactic movement to low TopP, as in Norwegian.
- ❖ Mixed word order in *wh*-questions attested early; subject/verb preferences as in adult speech, cf. (40) and (41). Early sensitivity to information structure (Westergaard 2003).
- (42) kor **e babyen?** (Ina.06, age 2;1.0) (V2)
where be.PRES baby.DEF
 ‘Where is the baby?’
- (43) ka **du skal** finne? (Ina.05, age 2:0.5) (Non-V2)
what you shall find
 ‘What do you want to find?’

Table 6: The percentage of full DP vs. pronominal subjects in non-subject-initial declaratives in ME in a variety of texts (5000 main clauses, raw data from Bech 2001).

Word order	Early ME		Late ME	
	DP	Pron	DP	Pron
V2	76.0%	24.0%	76.5%	23.5%
Non-V2	13.2%	86.8%	50.2%	49.8%

Why does V2 survive in certain cases, and why with *be*/other informationally light verbs?

6. V2 AND PARTICULAR VERB TYPES

Table 7: Subjects and verbs in *wh*-questions (N=771) in a sample of spontaneous speech of the Kåfjord dialect, with V2 (14.8%) and non-V2 (85.2%), female speaker.

Subject/Verb Types	V2		Non-V2	
	<i>be</i>	Other V	<i>be</i>	Other V
Full DP/ <i>det</i>	106	3	140	97
Pronoun	3	2	19	401

- ❖ Information structure pattern of the mixed grammar links *be* to V2 word order.
- ❖ V2 with *be* is an extremely early acquisition in questions/declaratives:

(44) wo is de Kugel? (Simone, stage I) (German)
where be.PRES the marble
 ‘Where is the marble?’ (from Clahsen, Penke&Parodi 1993/94)

(45) what is that ? (Eve.15, age 2;1)
 (46) where de> [//] where is a man? (Eve.16, age 2;1)

(47) her er sekken. (Ann.03, age 1;10.2) (Norwegian)
here be.PRES backpack.DEF
 ‘Here is the backpack.’

(48) no er det den. (Ole.01, age 1;9.10)
now be.PRES it that
 ‘Now it is that one.’

Table 8: Frequency of *be* in non-subject-initial declaratives (V2) in Norwegian child language.

Speaker	Files	Age	% of <i>be</i>
Ina	Ina.01-09	1;8.20 - 2;2.12	59.2% (61 out of 103)
Ann	Ann.01-08	1;8.20 - 2;1.28	76.1% (108 out of 142)
Ole	Ole.01-08	1;9.10 – 2;2.12	85.5% (189 out of 221)
Investigator	Ole.14	Adult	23.5% (28 out of 119)

- ❖ Roeper (forthcoming): children are sensitive to *classes* of categories.

(49) what **calls that?** (from Roeper, forthcoming – no age given)

- ❖ Children also sensitive to information structure ⇒ speakers can invoke FocP in certain cases and move informationally light verbs when subject should be focused.

(8’) ...inland from the small, pretty harbor town that’s called a haven **squats the town of Heart’s Rock**. (from Birner, 1995, p. 241)

7. SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

- ✚ Split-CP model accounts for:
 - early acquisition of word order in different clause types, e.g. V2 in questions and (generally) non-V2 in declaratives in present-day English.
 - loss of V2 in only one clause type (declaratives in the history of English)
- ✚ Early acquisition of *be*+sensitivity to information structure and *classes* of categories ⇒
 - remnant cases of V2 in declaratives (with *be* and other light verbs)

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