

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

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Unlike the other Germanic languages, which have a relatively strict verb second (V2) requirement in all main clauses, English is normally characterized as a language with residual V2 (Rizzi 1996), in that it has subject-auxiliary inversion in questions. There are also remnant cases of so-called VP inversion constructions in declaratives, and according to Birner (1995), these occur with informationally light verbs (mainly *be*) and focused subjects. This means that English is a mixed V2 grammar. According to Lightfoot's (1999) theory of cue-based acquisition and change, children acquiring V2 languages are exposed to the cue for V2, and for learnability reasons there must be a UG requirement that this is obligatory. How, then, can the word order of present-day English be learnable? And how could such a system develop?

In this paper I argue for an approach to the synchronic word order facts and the diachronic development of English where child language acquisition and patterns of information structure play a major role. Using a Split-CP model of word order developed in Westergaard & Vangsnes (2005), I argue for a microparametric approach to V2, allowing for many different types of V2 grammars. Examples of adult and child speech from another mixed V2 system (a dialect of Norwegian, where there is optional V2 in *wh*-questions) will be used in the analysis. The paper focuses on the following three issues:

1. How can a change from V2 to non-V2 affect only one clause type (e.g. declaratives in the history of English)? This will be accounted for by the Split-CP model, in which different clause types have different heads in the CP domain. Thus, some heads may have a feature that requires verb movement (e.g. the Interrogative head in English), while others do not (e.g. the head involved in declaratives). Recent work on first language acquisition of a dialect of Norwegian (Westergaard 2005a) shows that children do not overgeneralize V2 from one clause type to another. This also seems to be the case in English, see e.g. Radford (1992). In Westergaard (2005b) this was used to argue that when children scan the input for word order cues, only the relevant clause type is considered. Thus, mixed V2 systems are learnable, and this also explains how only one clause type may be affected by historical change (declaratives in the history of English, *wh*-questions in present-day Norwegian dialects).

2. What causes development towards non-V2 in a mixed grammar? The paper will follow e.g. Bech (2001) in arguing that there was optionality between V2 and non-V2 already in Old and Middle English. Optionality in the syntax often leads to the choice of word order being governed by pragmatic factors (e.g. Bresnan and Nikitina 2003), and I argue that V2 was preferred if the subject conveyed new information, and non-V2 if the subject was given. This corresponds to the situation in *wh*-questions in present-day Norwegian dialects (Westergaard 2003). Recent work in language acquisition has shown that young children are sensitive to patterns of information structure from early on, e.g. De Cat (2003), Westergaard (2003, 2005a), Gordishevsky & Avrutin (2004). Over time, these patterns will lead to what I call an 'information structure drift', i.e. an increase in non-V2 word order caused by the fact that subjects generally tend to convey given information.

3. Why does V2 survive in special cases, mainly with the verb *be*? This will also be accounted for in terms of first language acquisition. In V2 languages, *be* is the first verb to be attested in questions/declaratives with verb movement in early child language, and it is also very frequent. This suggests that the survival of V2 with this particular verb (in English and other languages that have lost/are losing V2) is due to it being an extremely early acquisition.