SYNTAX AND INFORMATION HAND IN HAND? ON EXTRAPOSITION AND INVERSION FROM LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH TO CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH[1]

0. INTRODUCTION. SYNTACTIC TOPICS

It is generally assumed that the word-order changes which led to the present-day syntactic configuration of English sentences took place and mainly finished during the ME period. In this paper,[2] I shall investigate the principles governing two relevant configurational operations common both to contemporary and to earlier English: subject inversion and subject extraposition. To that end, I will use data from the periods following the standardization of the English syntax, namely late Middle English (lME henceforth) and early Modern English (abbreviated as eModE or eMod).

With the aim of justifying the selection of the research topics just mentioned, I will assume the following principles:

(a) English declarative speech is, formally speaking, a verb-second language, irrespectively of the deep pattern one wants to ascribe to it.

(b) If, as a consequence of (a), the verb occupies the *second* position of a sentence, then every element occurring in preverbal position in declarative utterances will be said to go in *first* position. I will use the label 'syntactic topic' (or simply 'topic' henceforth) for that constituent(s) in first position, partially drawing on Halliday's (1967, 1985: 39)

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systemic concept of 'theme, and even more on Downing and Locke's (1992: 222) proposal.

(c) The justification of the syntactic topics of English sentences is absolutely relevant as far as the configuration of English (external) word-order and English syntax are concerned.

That granted, let us move to a further matter, that is, the splitting of the whole set of syntactic topics in English into five classes:

(i) lexical subjects (external arguments on most occasions), which are said to constitute the unmarked option in English declarative sentences;

(ii) complements and modifiers (adjuncts);

(iii) sentence modifiers (the so-called disjuncts, conjuncts, etc.;

(iv) dummy, representative, anticipatory, expletive or pleonastic subjects, that is, grammatical items such as *it* or *there*, whose only goal is to be slot-fillers so as to maintain the non-pro-drop principle postulated by the theory of grammar. as far as contemporary English is concerned.[1] Since arguments have been levelled against the characterization of these dummy elements as subjects, I shall prefer the (more neutral) label 'dummy topic';

(v) absence of subjects, that is, sentences with covert first position, or if one prefers, with verbs located initially. In order to couch this class in the terminology suggested in (iv), I will use the label 'null topic. '

In the course of this research, as already pointed out, I will examine two illustrations of, respectively, types (iv) and (v) in the near history of the English language: subject-extraposition & *it*-insertion —hence abbreviated as EX/IT— and subject-inversion —INV— reflected in (1) and (2) respectively:

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[1] In Haegeman's (1991: 53) words, "[*i*]*t* is not a referring expression: it does not refer to an entity in the world, a person or an object; it cannot be questioned (…). On the basis of these observations we formulate the hypothesis that *it* plays no role in the semantic make-up of the sentence and that its presence is required (…) simply for some structural reason". See Postal & Pullum (1988) for a detailed account of English dummy items.

(1) yt was enacted ordeigned and graunted by auctorite of the same p~liament, that for x. yeres then next folowyng sev~all Comyssions of Sewers shuld be made to dyv~s p~sones, (Q M4 STA LAW STAT2 p. 524)[1]

(2) And wyll ye se this more manyfestly by . iij. lykenesses. (Q E1 IR SERM FISHER p. 316)[2]

To round off this introduction, a final note seems in order here. In actual fact, the different 'folders' of the classification specified in (i) to (v) above are not exclusive at all. For instance, most of the examples with dummy and null topics like (3) and (4) comprise preverbal constituents which deserve topical characterization according to my definition of topic:

(3) Notwithstanding certaine it is, that if those Schoole men to their great thrist of truth, and vnwearied truaile of wit, had ioyned varietie and vniuersalitie of reading and contemplation, they had prooued excellent Lights, (Q E2 EX EDUC BACON p. 20V)[3]

(4) to whom is apropred loue and charite, (Q M3/4 IR SERM ROYAL p. 10)[4]

Whether we opt for a gradation in terms of central and modifying topics or for a multiple configuration of the syntactic topics in the vein of, for instance, systemic studies, I contend that subjects are core topical elements, and thus both their 'dumminess' and their 'covertness' must be treated as specific thematic systems on their own.

1. COLLECTING THE DATA. THE CONCEPT OF EX

The data have been collected from two popular computerised corpora: the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts* for the lME and eModE sections, and the *Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of Contemporary English* for the contemporary samples (PDE). I explored the first seven one-spaced ASCII

[1] *The Statutes of the Realm. Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain*, Vol. II, Dawsons of Pall Mall, London, 1963 (1816).

[2] Mayor, J. E. B. ed. 1935 (1876): *Sermons by John Fisher. The English Works of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. Part 1*, Early English Text Society, London.

[3] Bacon, F. 1970 (1605): *The Twoo Bookes of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning (1605)*, Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm, Amsterdam.

[4] Ross, W. O. ed. 1940: *Middle English Sernons, Edited from British Museum Ms. Royal 18 B. XXIII*, Early English Text Society, London.

print-out pages of every prose sample, which amount to the totals pictured in Table 1.

Table 1: Temporal and numeric distribution of the data

PERIODS	SECTIONS	WORDS explored	corpus TOTALS	Corpus
Late Middle	MEIV (1420-1500)	approx. 98,000	213,850 w	
Early Modern	eModI (1500-1570)	approx. 98,000	190,160 w	Helsinki
	eModII (1570-1640)	approx. 100,000	189,800 w	
	eModIII (1640-1710)	approx. 97,000	171,040 w	
Contemporary	1961	approx. 160,000	± 1,000,000 w	LOB

The relevant examples fall into three groups: EX/IT,[1] witnessed in (1) above; INV[2]; and EX. I have preferred to split the INV type into proper INV and EX, the former comprising those declarative sentences in which the subject immediately follows either the full verb-group or the first verbal element, as in (2) above. On the contrary, those examples including material between the verb and the postverbal subject have been labelled 'EX,' as instanced in (5) and (6):

(5) Nowe schewe+t [vs]$_{object}$ +tan +tis word 'oure' +te largenesse and +te curtesye of God oure fadre, (Q M3/4 IR RELT VICES4 p. 100)[3]

(6) that$_{nexus}$ is [euil wonne]$_{subj. compl.}$ who shal blame Reynart (Q M4 NI FICT REYNARD p. 9)[4]

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[1] In this paper, I will treat EX/IT as a homogeneous thematic system, even though I am aware of the fact that EX/IT of clauses and EX/IT of NPs are usually accounted for in different ways in the relevant literature — for a quick review of the literature on extraposition, see, among others, Reinhart (1980), Baltin (1982), McCawley (1988) and Iwakura (1994), who evaluate traditional studies such as Rosenbaum (1967), Ross (1967), Higgins (1973), Williams (1975), or Emonds (1976).

[2] For a quick summary of the theoretical proposals couched in the generative tradition, refer to, for instance, McCawley (1970), Baltin (1982), Chomsky (1986), Coopmans (1989), Rochemont & Culicover (1990), who criticize Emonds (1976), Stowell (1981) and Safir (1985) in detail, and Authier (1992).

[3] Francis, W. N. ed. 1942: *The Book of Vices and Virtues. A Fourteenth Century English Translation of The Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orleans*, English Text Society, London.

[4] Blake, N. F. ed. 1970: *The History of Reynard the Fox. Translated from the Dutch Original by William Caxton*, English Text Society, London.

This EX-class is a two-pronged pattern: on the one hand, it resembles INV on the basis that there is no preverbal subject, either lexical or dummy; and, on the other, it is similar to EX/IT since it is formally identical to the latter, except for the dummy element. In fact, as pointed out in, for instance, Visser (1970), Butler (1980) or Traugott (1992), the appearance of *hit*, either dummy or demonstrative, was optional in these constructions in OE. Put more graphically, sentences like *It is a pity that he went* and *Is a pity that he went* were both possible in OE.

2. DISTRIBUTION OF EX/IT, EX AND INV

For reasons of space, three related patterns have been left out of the picture, namely the thematic system of subject-inversion after direct-speech quotes (7), subject-inversions in stage directions or asides (8), and the connection between EX/IT and right-dislocations like (9).

(7) "Yea I se," quoth I, "that … (Q E2 XX PHILO BOETHEL p. 57)[1]

(8) (^Enter Mistris^) Page, (^Mistris^) Ford, (^Master^) Page, (^Master^) Ford, Pistoll, Nim, Quickly, Host, Shalow. (Q E2 XX COME SHAKESP p. 43)[2]

(9) It must come now - the showdown between Anne Vardon and her greatest enemy (LOB L22 p. 82)[3]

Nevertheless, since the systems in (7) and (8) should be doubtlessly regarded as part of the general one of INV, I have just for the record included them in Table 2, which portrays the number of attested examples (under #) and the percentages (under %) with respect to the whole number of clauses identified in the material selected:

Table 2: EX/IT, EX, INV, quotes and stage directions

	EX/IT		EX		INV		Quotes		Stage dir.		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	claus.

[1] Pemberton, C. ed. 1899: *Boethius. Queen Elizabeth's Englishings of Boethius.* Early English Text Society, London.

[2] *The Merry Wives of Windsor. Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. A Facsimile Edition Prepared by H. Hoekeritz with an Introduction by C. T. Prouty*, Geoffrey Cumberlege & OUP, London.

[3] (Anon) "Whispering Tongues Blamed Her." *Secrets,* March 4, 1961 (9-11).

lME	132	2. 6	21	0. 4	304	6. 1	34	0. 6	0	0	4940
eModI	86	2. 1	45	1. 1	334	8. 2	74	1. 8	0	0	4048
eModII	116	1. 9	4	0. 0	164	2. 8	118	2. 0	7	0. 1	5846
eModIII	101	2. 2	4	0. 0	123	2. 7	14	0. 3	8	0. 1	4468
PDE	219	3. 1	0	0	84	1. 2	45	0. 6	0	0	6876
TOTALS	654	2. 5	74	0. 2	1009	3. 8	285	1. 0	15	0. 0	26178

If we put aside the figures corresponding to the quotes triggering inversion and the stage directions, both strategies being highly dependent on the type of text and still operative in PDE as minor thematic systems, Table 2 makes it possible to assess that EX/IT is an active system during the periods under research in about 2-3 per cent of the clauses.[1] On the contrary, INV decreases dramatically, its occurrence frequency going from 6.15 per cent in lME and 8.25 in eModEI to simply 1.2 per cent in Cont. English.[2] This is in keeping with Jacobsson's (1951), Fischer's (1992), Breivik & Swan's (1994) and Kytö & Rissanen's (1993) testimonies of the decline of the INV system. As far as EX is concerned, the numbers attest that its use is very restricted in both lME and eModE, the zero examples found in PDE not being surprising at all.

Apart from concluding that the extraposition of subjects and their replacement with, for instance, dummy *it*s has succeeded in the history of the English language, the data in Table 2 purport further interesting facts. EX/IT is a consolidated thematic system in PDE, comparable to, for instance, the topicalization of objects (3.3 per cent of the cases, as pointed out in Pérez Guerra (forthcoming)). INV, far from being as important as in lME and eModEI, remains a residual system in our time, possibly limited to a few grammatical environments which automatically trigger inversion. Let us underscore the fact that in the first two periods under consideration, an average number of 7 clauses out of one hundred illustrated some sort of subject-inversion, whereas less than 2 are depicted in PDE.

These conclusions are not at odds with the fixation of word-order at all. The consolidation or, better, continuation of the system EX/IT does not wreak havoc with the establishment of a, formally speaking, SV order, since it

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[1] H_0='time does not affect EX/IT.' Correlation results: R-squared=0.13.
[2] H_0='time does not affect INV.' Correlation results: R-squared=0.71.

plausibly incorporates the subject *it* in first position and, subsequently, the verb. In saying this, I do not mean that EX/IT is used as a means of supporting and fixing SV word-order, which is rejected in, for instance, Butler (1980), but simply that the resulting structure with *it* as a dummy item in ME is in keeping with the succeeding configuration of English declarative sentences, and thus is not repudiated by 'analogical' reasons.

On the other hand, as best I can determine, the fact that simple EX (without *it*-insertion) no longer holds in PDE in none of the 6,876 examples identified in my database demonstrates the tendency already mentioned towards 'subjected' sentences, and the avoidance of, let us say, strange material in postverbal position not easily interpretable[1] --not internally subcategorised by the predication, not necessarily agreeing with verb, not bound to any pro-subject, not prosodically detached from the sentence like a dislocated element.

With respect to INV, even though it skews previous judgements on the succeeding word-order pattern, it is maintained alive almost as a, in Stucky's (1987: 379) words, "lexically signaled configurational variant" and not as the "permutational variation" it used to be in earlier English. Put another way, INV in Contemporary English is mostly determined by triggering devices, whereas in ME and eModE (and also in OE, as pointed out by Butler (1980)) the scope of the system was wider, which due to space restrictions I will not have the opportunity to show.

In the following sections, I shall limit myself to showing the results of research in progress concerning two variables: (a) the length of the postverbal subject (§2. 1), and (b) the sort of information it carries (§2. 2).

2. 1. LENGTH OF POSTVERBAL SEGMENTS

Table 3 reflects the average length (number of words) of the postverbal subject in the three systems under discussion. It must be mentioned that when the rightward constituent comprised 15 words or more, it was given the conventional value of □ — in further calculations, □ is numerically translated

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[1] H_0='time does not affect EX.' Correlation results: R-squared=0.39 (0.6 if the eModI data are disregarded).

as 17. The data between brackets stand for the lowest and highest values registered.

Table 3: Length of postverbal subjects

	EX/IT	INV	EX
lME	12 (2-□)	3. 1 (1-□)	7. 3 (1-□)
eModI	11. 6 (2-□)	5. 4 (1-□)	11. 2 (2-□)
eModII	10. 7 (1-□)	4. 1 (1-□)	11 (4-□)
eModIII	11. 8 (2-□)	6 (1-□)	12. 7 (7-□)
PDE	12. 7 (2-□)	6. 6 (1-□)	NO INSTANCES

In view of this table, some concluding remarks seem in order:

- In broad outline, as ascertained when I dealt with Table 2, the strategy EX/IT shows little variation with respect to the length of the postverbal subject (11-12 words). This feature helps us demonstrate that the system was already fixed, at least, in ME.[1]

- EX is more similar to EX/IT rather than to INV on the grounds of the length of the rightward subject. As pointed out above, EX was a clear alternative to EX/IT in OE, which is also corroborated in the light of the results in lME and eModE.

- Whereas EX/IT and EX can mostly be explained by, at least, principles of the sort of 'heavy subjects tend to be extraposed, the figures of INV show smaller subjects, and even short subjects in lME. Unlike in OE (see Stockwell (1984: 576)), it seems to be the case that, in the periods under research, the system is less dependent on subject length, even though a tendency towards longer subjects is observed in the course of the eModE period, which, I recognise, does not fall within the purview of the tentative explanation that INV is lexically justified.

2. 2. COMMUNICATIVE POTENTIAL OF POSTVERBAL SEGMENTS

To capture the informative content of the rightward subjects in the systems under research, I applied the classification pictured in Table 4 to every postverbal constituent functioning as the 'logical subject' of the sentence. Although the typology created ad-hoc may be considered too simplistic since, for instance, it does not individualise repetitions, or the *l*-type may be presumed too vague, I strongly believe that it proves sufficiently functional for the syntactic purposes of this study.

Table 4: Informative typology

referring	extralinguistically referring (*e*)	referentiality of the segment element is not textual but extralinguistic (deictic [=Prince's (1979, 1981) *situationally inferrable*]) or universal.
	inguistically referring (*r*)	given, shared segment; the constituent is explicitly mentioned in the previous two-three sentences [=Prince's (1979, 1981) *textually evok*ed]

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[1] H_0='time does not affect the length of the EX/IT segment.' Correlation results: R-squared=0.12.

low referring (*l*)		only some semantic features or a non-head part of the constituent are *r* [=Prince's (1979, 1981) *inferrable*] in the previous two-three sentences, or the distance between the segment and its previous semantic or linguistic referent is longer than two-three sentences.
nonreferring	properly nonreferring (*n*)	new, unshared segment; it is neither semantically nor linguistically evoked in the previous two-three sentences.
	postreferring (*p*)	the referent of the segment must be found after it (in the following one-two sentences)

Examples (10) to (14) illustrate the classification just suggested:

(10) And her ys not to be forgotyn of my parte the myghtye and father-lye provydence of God, who never fayellethe any man that trwelye putes hym truste yn hyme. (Q E1 NN BIA MOWNTAYNE p. 204)[1] [EX: *e* postverbal segment, since *God*, etc. belongs to the register of permanent knowledge]

(11) And bee it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid That if such Sheriff Goaler or Keeper of Prison being duely su~moned to appeare before the said Justice or Justices of the Peace shall (…) refuse (…) such Sheriff Goaler or Keeper (…) shall … (Q E3 STA LAW STAT7 p. 75)[2] [EX/IT: *r* postverbal segment, since *Sheriff Goaler or Keeper of Prison* was mentioned in the immediate pre-text]

(12) & were made & edefied diuerce temples in his name which after were destroied by the commandment of king Alexander of macedone who perauenture had enuye of his glorie (Q M4 XX PREF CAXTON p. 35)[3] [INV: *l* postverbal segment, since *his name* is *r*]

(13) aftyr hir tubele & hir gret fere it xuld ben schewyd vn-to hir sowle how +te felyngys xuld ben vndyrstondyn. (Q M4 IR RELT KEMPE p. 55)[4] [EX/IT: *n* postverbal segment, since *how the feelings should be understood* is informatively brand-new]

(14) as is +tis word '+tat is,' (Q M3/4 IR RELT VICES4 p. 102) [INV: *p* postverbal segment, since *this words* is followed by its referent]

The results of the application of the typology in Table 4 to the examples in the database are sketched in Table 5.

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[1] Nichols, J. G. ed. 1859: *The Autobiography of Thomas Mowntayne. Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Chiefly from the Manuscripts of John Foxe the Marty-rologist*, Camden Society, London.

[2] *The Statutes of the Realm. Printed by Command of His Majesty King George the Third in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain*, Daw-sons of Pall Mall, London, 1963 (1820).

[3] Crotch, W. J. B. ed. 1956 (1928): *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*. Early English Text Society, London.

[4] Meech, S. B. & H. E. Allen eds. 1940: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society, London.

Table 5: Communicative potential of postverbal subjects (percentages)

		lME	eModI	eModII	eModIII	PDE
EX/IT	r	31. 0	55. 1	40. 2	43. 5	36. 8
	e	-	-	-	-	-
	l	22. 1	15. 5	22. 4	27. 1	39. 6
	n	46. 7	29. 4	37. 3	29. 2	23. 5
	p	-	-	-	-	-
INV	r	32. 1	11. 8	24. 8	10. 6	11. 4
	e	1. 6	0. 6	0. 5	0	-
	l	13. 7	5. 6	26. 7	16. 9	34. 5
	n	52. 0	81. 8	45. 9	72. 1	54. 0
	p	0. 4	5. 7	1. 7	0. 2	-
EX	r	14. 8	8. 4	9. 0	-	-
	e	0	3. 3	-	-	-
	l	31. 6	27. 9	38. 6	-	-
	n	53. 5	60. 2	52. 2	100	-
	p	0	-	-	-	-

As far as the sort of information carried by the extraposed or inverted constituent is concerned, different proposals can be found in the literature. For instance, the rightward segment in an EX/IT construction is usually surmised to be informatively unshared or new, on the basis that the structure keeps track of the general principle of end-focus — see, among others, Hinds (1975) drawing on Charleston (1960), Enkvist (1979), Creider (1979) or McCawley (1988). On the contrary, there are some others (Svoboda (1968), for instance) who believe that the extraposed subject is constructionally marked as thematic, which is in keeping with its given informative content.

Table 5 throws some light onto the aforementioned alternatives and, in fact, casts a great deal of doubt on the generalised assumption. The extraposed segments in EX/IT constructions are, from eModE to PDE, in more than 70 per cent of the cases, either fully (_r_) or semi- (_l_) referring, and only nonreferring (_n_) in scarcely 25 out of one hundred examples. It must, however, be mentioned that in lME the percentages of _r_, _n_ and _l_ were much more balanced, not only in the EX/IT system but in the others as well. If we add the results of _r_ and _l_ segments in each of the three systems, we will reach the conclusion that, in broad outline, 45-50 per cent are referring (_r+l_) and 45-50 are nonreferring (_n_) at all. In consequence, from a communicative point of view,

the differences between EX/IT, INV and EX in lME were somewhat blurred according to my data.[1]

Going back to the decrease of nonreferring postverbal subjects in the EX/IT system (just 23. 5 per cent in PDE), especially divergent if compared to the results shown by INV and EX, we must conclude that end-focus does no longer hold as the best justification of the EX/IT system, but syntactic heaviness and length, as already witnessed in the previous section.

Regarding INV and EX, we again come across contradictory views about the degree of predictability of the postverbal subjects. Quirk *et al* (1985) analyse inversion as an end-focus operation, which lets the extraposed or inverted subject be interpreted as the (generally unshared) focus of the sentence. Similarly, Stockwell (1984: 576) speaks of inverted subjects as "new or suprising". Takahashi (1992: 138) joins the pragmatic fuctions of these segments, to wit, counter-expectation, surprise, emphasis, suspense and vividness, in his "subtopically-presentational-focus-emphasizing function". And, in the same vein, Jacobsson (1951) and Birner & Ward (1992) assert that the constraint that verbs in INV structures are pragmatically unimportant follows from the fact that the sentence final position is reserved for informatively new segments, and the verb position (sentence initial position) for given segments. On the contrary, Green (1980) holds that in most cases of inversion it is the last part of the sentence that contains old information.

In view of Table 5, a first scrutiny reveals that in those periods of which I have enough data EX and INV behave much alike, that is, in more than 50% of the examples the postverbal material is absolutely nonreferring (*n*), and the levels of full referentiality are dramatically lower. More specifically, only 10-11% of the entries in eModEIII and PDE are *r* as far as INV is concerned.

Once we embrace the view that the EX strategy disappears since its goal is perfectly accomplished by either EX/IT or INV under the new conditions of, particularly, word-order in English, the data in Table 5 marshal the fact that two strong communicative tendencies must be identified with respect to the two succeeding systems. Whereas the postverbal subjects in EX/IT do not usually contain brand-new information, those belonging to INV constructions

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[1] H_0='the thematic system (EX/IT, INV, EX) does not affect referentiality (*r+l* versus *n*) in lME.' At 95%-significance two-factor Anova-test, F=0.035 and p=0.96, which leads us to reject H_0.

do more easily. Thus, a daunting consequence arises here: informative conditions by themselves do not justify EX/IT, whilst it seems to be the case that they are perfectly capable of characterising INV. The most obvious flaw of the second part of this statement is how to conciliate the fact hinted in previous sections that INV is, historically speaking, more and more grammaticised, with the consideration that, at the same time, it is the informative configuration of English sentences (old information precedes new information) that best describes INV. In this paper I will not attempt the major issue of supporting either one or the other alternative, but will simply reflect the tendency shown by INV towards an increase of partially referring subjects (*l*), from 13. 7 in lME to 34. 5 in PDE, which could possibly evidence an inclination against the communicative explanation and, thus, in favour of the lexically configurational one.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper I have dealt with the thematic systems of subject-extraposition plus *it*-insertion and subject-inversion, which illustrate the classes of dummy and null syntactic topics, respectively. In treating the aforementioned systems, the identification of a third one, subject-extraposition without *it*-insertion proved pertinent. This third strategy comprised those verb-first examples containing material between the verb and the rightward subject.

The relevant proposals found in the literature were confronted with actual data taken from the *Helsinki Corpus* and the *LOB Corpus*, which made it possible to trace the evolution of the systems from the end of the Middle English period to present-day language. A statistical presentation of two variables concerning the postverbal subjects, namely their 'length' and their 'communicative potential' led to interesting conclusions, some of which rejected part of the generally assumed proposals.

To sum up, once extraposition without dummy-insertion has disappeared as a configurational alternative, two opposite strategies can be observed. On the one hand, the system involving subject-extraposition with dummy-insertion, consolidated in the language as early as in ME times, was shown to mostly follow the principle of 'heavy-subject shift, as demonstrated by the average length of the subjects (11-12 words). On the other hand, the tendency of placing segments carrying unshared information seemed to be

the rationale tentatively governing subject-inversion, the postverbal subjects in inverted structures conveying brand-new information in more than half of the cases, even though the data showed a progressive increase of semi-referring subjects in later periods.

Consequently, EX/IT was described as an exclusively syntactic device which not only fills the subject position with a dummy element, as required by SV conditions, but also succeeds in offering a pattern in which heavy subjects do not appear preverbally. Unlike EX/IT, the vast majority of INV-cases cannot be explained by the length-explanation, the communication-based justification not being conclusive either. Further research on the contexts accepting INV would demonstrate that the configurational possibilities of inverted structures have noticeably decreased during the period under research. This, in my opinion, points out towards the characterisation of INV as a grammaticised strategy, on its way to abandoning the 'club' of the thematic systems.

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