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ABSTRACT

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Some sociolectal, dialectal and communicative aspects of word order variation in Late Middle English

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1   Introduction

1.1   The problem and rationale

The present dissertation discusses the influence of interspeaker accommodation on intraspeaker variation in Late Middle English as far as main clause word order syntax in the context of non-operator fronting is concerned. Intraspeaker variation is examined through two case studies based on the prose works of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Capgrave. Intraspeaker variation is examined in the social and linguistic contexts of late mediaeval London and East Anglia since interspeaker accommodation is claimed to mainly have been realised in these contexts. The main objective of the dissertation is to point out links between the sociolinguistic components of intraspeaker variation and the communicative components of interspeaker accommodation.

The fate of V2 word order in the history of English can be considered as an overresearched issue with a long tradition of scholarship. Overresearched though it may seem, the sheer number of studies tackling the why's and how's of an inflecting language with SOV base word order and V2 main clause word order changing into an analytic language with SVO base word order with V3 main clause word order clearly reflects the genuine importance of investigations. Traditionally focusing on the question of internal grammar change and language acquisition, these investigations have recently been given new impetus from the versatile theoretical and methodological innovations of the so-called variationist approach[1]. Mainly it is this approach that made possible the fine-grained analyses of data together with new ways of interpretations called for in Fischer *et al.* (2000: 129, 132, 136). The study of intraspeaker variation is therefore considerably aided by the adoption of new research methods and tools including corpus linguistics, which works with computerised corpora. The recent advance in the field of computerised corpora is acknowledged in this study by the fact that besides a traditional hardcopy corpus, the present research is based on a computerised corpus of parsed and tagged texts which is called the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English* (henceforth *PPCME*). The present study aims to use these aforementioned theoretical and methodological innovations to better grasp the connections between intraspeaker variation and interspeaker accommodation. This is important as the understanding of these connections can take us closer to the understanding of the real-time changes themselves.

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[1] This is also called variation(ist) theory (see e.g. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 16).

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1.2   Main research questions and hypotheses

The first main research question is whether there is any connection between the character of word order variation found in Geoffrey Chaucer and John Capgrave and word order variation in their sociolinguistic context. The hypothesis is that the nature of intraspeaker variation is influenced by the sociolinguistic context.

The second main research question is about the existence of any connection between the word order variation in the examined works and the target audience of these works. The hypothesis is that in the aforementioned two authors interspeaker accommodation determines intraspeaker variation to a large extent.

1.3   Basic terminology and data scope

For basic terminological clarity, it needs to be noted that in the present abstract booklet and in the dissertation the term 'word order' equals the more precise term 'constituent order'; the shorthand adopted here is a widespread and convenient convention.

What concerns the linguistic data, its scope includes declarative affirmative main clauses, i.e. main clauses with non-operator fronting (fronting is also generally called topicalisation). However, subject XPs in first constituent position are excluded as they do not prove to be diagnostic of either the V2 (illustrated in (1-2) below) or V3 (illustrated in (3-4) below) word order variants. Fronted XPs can be of various kind; as an illustration, consider examples (1-4) below: in (1) one can find a fronted adverb; in (2) a fronted NP object; in (3) a fronted PP; in (4) a fronted AdjP.

(1)   Offten wold he wepe in ympnis & Psalms redyng, ... (*Gilbert* 72.11)[2]
       'He would often weep while reading hymns and psalms ...'

(2)   This cercle wole I clepe the Lymbe of myn equatorie, that was compowned the
       Yer of Crist 1392 complet, the laste meridie of Decembre. (*Equatorie* 938.25)
       'I will call this circle the hand of my equatorie, the composition of which was
       finished on 31 December, 1392.'

(3)   With þe girdill þei girt his nek ful deuoutly ... (*Gilbert* 127.22)
       'With the girdle they girt his neck in full devotion …'

(4)   Meke he was a-mongis hem as on of hem, as it is seyd in Salamon: … (*Gilbert*
       69.21)
       'He was meek among them as if he were one of them, as it is said in Solomon: …'

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[2] See the longer title of the work in Section 3.

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1.4   Structure

Divided into seven chapters, the dissertation is structured with regards to the aforementioned two research questions; Chapters 5 and 6 are the core parts, reached by way of various introductory and preliminary chapters on the theoretical background and previous work, with an important bridging chapter on methodology.

The brief introductory **Chapter 1** is followed by two chapters which introduce and evaluate the main accounts of syntactic change including word order variation and change in English in particular. Whereas **Chapter 2** gives an overview of syntactic variation and change from a diffusion trajectory perspective (Kroch 1989, 1999; Denison 2002), **Chapter 3** concentrates on the various accounts for the loss of V2 in English (Kroch and Taylor 1997; Kroch *et al.* 1994; Kroch 1999; Haeberli 2000a, 2000b; Fischer *et al.* 2000; van Kemenade 1987).

Chapter 4 addresses mainly methodological questions and provides a new diagnostic / quantification tool that can be used to quantify the exact share of the three examined underlying competing main clause word orders in Late Middle English. This precision is necessary for a sociolinguistic account which accepts competition of multiple variants, and previously there had not existed any methods or even willingness to quantify the share of underlying word order structures from that of surface word order distributions.

Chapter 5 discusses how Geoffrey Chaucer's idiolect is related to the various sociolects and the dialect mix spoken in late mediaeval London, at least as far as main clause word order syntax is concerned. It is also pointed out with the same concession how John Capgrave's idiolect is related to the East Anglian dialect. This chapter shows that the choice of the two authors is not arbitrary as they have a common East Anglian background, which is claimed to be reflected in their word order syntax to a certain extent.

Chapter 6 introduces the concept of linguistic accommodation (Coupland *et al* 1991; Auer and Hinskens 2005) to explain the variational character of word order in the two authors' idiolects. It is found that intraspeaker variation is connected to interspeaker accommodation as far as Late Middle English main clause word order syntax goes. In this chapter, linguistic accommodation is also examined from a social network perspective, too (Milroy 1987). The result of this latter examination renders a foregoing tentative proposal for an integrated model of accommodation viable.

Finally, **Chapter 7** summarises the main theses of the preceding three chapters and draws up new perspectives and directions for further study.

2   Methods

To assess the nature of word order variation in the two authors, frequency counts were conducted. The search for the relevant structures was helped by a search programme called *CorpusSearch* in the case of texts included in the computerised corpus called *PPCME* (Kroch and Taylor 2000). Even in this case the results were double-checked against the manual counts. Manual counts were conducted in the case of texts not included in *PPCME*. To ensure maximum adequacy of statistical input, even these manual counts were double-checked. Then the data was statistically analysed, followed by sociolinguistic and communicationwise evaluation in the light of the two research questions.

In order to be able to assess the nature of intraspeaker variation, a diagnostic device based on surface frequencies was developed. With its help one can identify not only the word order type of texts without syntactic variation but also that of texts with different combinations of competing syntaxes. Apart from its application in the present study, this diagnostic device can be used to verify some previous claims on the trajectory of V2 and V3 syntaxes. On some of the accounts by Kroch and Taylor (1997) and Haeberli (2000b) some preliminary tests were conducted for the sake of the illustration of further applicability.

3   Database

The corpus which was examined contains five English prose works by Geoffrey Chaucer:

- *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*;
- *Equatorie of the Planetis*;
- *Boethius*;
- *The Parson's Tale*;
- *The Tale of Melibee*.

The second part of the corpus includes the four English prose works by John Capgrave:

- *Life of Saint Gilbert*;
- *Life of Saint Augustine*;
- *Sermon*;
- *Abbreuiacion of Cronicles*.

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4   Findings: main theses and answers to research questions

4.1

It is claimed that akin to Northern CP-V2 (Kroch and Taylor 1997), East Anglian CP-V2 may have derived from the language contact between Old English and Old Norse. Contact with the Scandinavians presumably resulted in the loss of verbal agreement morphology (Kroch and Taylor 1997; cf. Fischer *et al.* 2000), which can be claimed to have been decisive for the appearance of the systematic CP-V2 syntax through imperfect second language acquisition, accommodation and first language acquisition based on modified and ambiguous input. In addition, East Anglian CP-V2 is shown to have been well preserved into the second half of the 15th century due to the region's peripheral geographical position and self-contained nature. This CP-V2 can be found to a larger extent in those works of John Capgrave which target local audiences (see below).

4.2

Medieval London's dialect mix was constantly changing due to the changing nature of immigration feeding the City's population (Ekwall 1956; Keene 2000; Samuels 1989; Kristensson 2001; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003), which was characterised by weak links and loose-knit social networks. Such a dialect mix may have been used to a larger extent in open social spaces with weak-tied commercial relations. By contrast, in craft districts forming more or less segregated close-tied neighbourhoods it was possible to retain one's vernacular dialect and sociolect forms, which may have typically been used in intraneighbourhood and intrafamily interactions. On the basis of the above it is claimed that in London English there could co-exist many retained vernaculars besides the unstable dialect mix. These basically two distinct types of idiom must have been used in different interactions, in different social spaces and, consequently, with different audiences of interlocutors.

4.3

It is shown that Chaucer's syntactic diglossia may have been compatible with this dichotomy in London English. Chaucer is reprofiled as an upper class / upper middle class London City speaker with a vernacular CP-V2 typical of the East Anglian dialect, which he used in texts written for intrafamily use. Besides his vernacular syntax, Chaucer had a mix of CP-V2, IP-V2 and V3 syntaxes in works written for wider audiences, which syntactic mix may have been typical of the unstable London dialect mix. Besides, this mixed syntax could also have been typical of the

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emerging standard or the language of the Court, as hypothesised and projected by Chaucer, which is in accordance with the identity projection model (Auer and Hinskens 2005).

To summarise the claims in Sections 4.1-4.3 above, as far as word order variation is concerned, the intraspeaker variation in Capgrave and Chaucer reflects the special sociolinguistic history of the East Anglian dialect (language contact) and London English (dialect contact), respectively. Thus the answer to the first main research question is affirmative.

4.4

When addressing the second main research question about the existence of any connection between the word order variation in the examined works and the target audience of these works, interspeaker accommodation (Coupland *et al.* 1991) and audience design (Bell 1984, 2001) were considered. It is argued that accommodation to the dialectally defined target audience may have been the most important factor to influence intraspeaker variation, since even the occasionally equally well-performing text type influence was claimed to be derivable from these dialectally defined audiences.

More specifically, it is argued that Chaucer used different word order syntaxes in texts targeting different audiences. Attributable to Chaucer on syntactic grounds, the holograph *Equatorie* targeted his son, and thus it is claimed to actually represent Chaucer's vernacular syntax, which is of the CP-V2 type. His *Astrolabe*, targeting his son and being a copy, comes very close to this vernacular syntax, and the diversion may be due to the copying process. His *Parson*, *Melibee* and *Boethius*, all of which targeted wider audiences, have a much larger share of V3.

A similarly marked difference in usage frequencies attributable to interspeaker accommodation can be seen in the case of Capgrave's works. It was argued that Capgrave's native syntax, which is to be found in the *Sermon*, must have been predominantly CP-V2 with a slight colouring from IP-V2. By contrast, in his other works, *Augustine*, *Gilbert* and the *Chronicle*, one can see a three-way competition between CP-V2, IP-V2 and V3, with a considerable extent of intrusion of the V3 syntax. It was claimed that the variable share of V3 in his works could have resulted from the accommodation to the variable share of V3 in the language of the target audience: whereas the *Sermon* targeted a local East Anglian audience which possibly retained a high per cent of the native CP-V2 syntax, by contrast, his *Augustine* and *Gilbert* targeted East Midlands female audiences possibly having a larger share of the incipient standard's V3 syntax. Finally, his *Chronicle* possibly targeted a nationwide audience with an even larger share of the incoming V3 syntax.

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4.5

In order to link intraspeaker variation and interspeaker accommodation, I also focused on the social network position of the authors and their audiences by integrating the knowledge of social network dynamics (Milroy 1987) and Communication Accommodation Theory (Coupland *et al*. 1991) in a new model. Inspired by and developed from Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg's (2003) arguments, this integrated model of accommodation in social networks was then tested and verified through the findings for Chaucer and Capgrave. It is argued that accommodation in weak-tied networks results in the diffusion of innovations via weak intragroup and intergroup links. Accommodation in strong-tied networks, by contrast, does not support the spread of innovations; instead, variants already prevalent in the network are preserved and actively accommodated to. Finally, it is also claimed that due to the fleeting nature of interactions and complex agendas of the interlocutors, switches can happen to a different extent in every interaction, evident in different usage frequencies in different text types.

4.6

Text type influence was also investigated and assessed in relation to other influencing factors, target audience in particular. It was claimed that at first sight the influence of the target audience may seem rather indirect. However, the adjustment process can also be interpreted in a more direct way: ultimately, text types can equal audiences. Accordingly, the linguistic characteristics of the text type can be the linguistic characteristics of the audience associated with the text type. As a further dimension, to this generic association one can add a particularist one, according to which individual texts themselves can equal audiences. Accordingly, the linguistic characteristics of individual texts can be the linguistic characteristics of the audiences associated with those texts. In a strict sense, this tentative view renders both entire text types and individual texts no more than projections of the audience. In fact, the implicational scale based on Bell (1984; 2001) is consistent with this claim. Speaker agency and design, however, must not be ignored.

The main conclusion drawn from the claims in Sections 4.4-4.6 is that the attested intraspeaker variation in the two authors was possibly due to accommodation to the aforementioned different audiences having characteristically different word order syntax. This answers the second main research question affirmatively.

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5   Summary of novel scientific results

- Developing a new quantification/diagnostic tool to define the relative share of various underlying competing V2 and V3 syntaxes;

- Assignment of the *Equatorie* to Geoffrey Chaucer on grounds of its word order syntax;

- Definition of Geoffrey Chaucer's vernacular word order syntax;

- Linking the nature of intraspeaker main clause word order variation in Geoffrey Chaucer to the linguistic heterogeneity of late medieval London English, apparent in the social structure of the city;

- Linking the appearance of CP-V2 syntax in East Anglia to English-Scandinavian language contact and explaining its retention partly with geographic and demographic factors;

- Linking intraspeaker main clause word order variation to interspeaker accommodation (= accommodation to the target audience) in the case of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Capgrave.

- By developing Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg's (2003) ideas further, differentiating between weak-tied and strong-tied accommodation, with the help of which the connection between intraspeaker variation and interspeaker accommodation could be made more explicit in the case of Chaucer and Capgrave.

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