
A MULTIFACTORIAL APPROACH TO WORD ORDER CHANGE: AN INTRODUCTION

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One central objective of work on language history is to identify the cause of change. Grammatical change has tended to be envisaged as caused by a single factor. To illustrate, the loss of the verb-second word-order in Medieval French has traditionally been attributed to the loss of the case system (Brunot & Bruneau 1949, von Wartburg 1971): as the nominative/accusative case-marking is lost, there would be an increasing pressure to put the subject (and object) in a defined position. Even assuming that there is still a case system in Medieval French at the period when V2 is still functional, such explanations may not however apply to other languages: Medieval Italian uses and loses V2 while displaying no traces of nominal case marking. Apart from empirical issues of chronology, a further challenge to single causal factor approaches lies in modelling the connection with the caused phenomena in a way that is testable. The argument that loss of case may lead to ambiguity in the functions of DPs, and thus to the adoption of SVO over XV seems conceptually plausible, but testing it is not easy, and not necessarily conclusive (see Pinkster 2018 ; on ambiguity and language change, see the recent discussions by Serzant 2023, Rosenkvist 2023, De Smet & Markey 2021, Zehenter 2022).

A potentially more fruitful general model for grammatical change has been developed through the notion of micro-cues. Such micro-cues would structure some properties of a language, like V2 word-order, and make it possible for new generations of learners to acquire them (Lighfoot 1999). As these cues change for independent reasons (such as phonetic reduction or change in pragmatic role), the acquired structure thus evolves. An example of a micro-cue for V2 word-order is proposed by Westergaard (2014).

- (1) (25) Micro-cue for V2 in declaratives (adult version): DeclP[XP
Decl°V ...]

This proposed micro-cue is an instantiation of the V2 structure itself. Elements associated to the structure may also be considered. The role of asseveration particle *si* (> Lat. *sic* "thus") is repeatedly identified as a correlate of Medieval French V2 (Wolfe 2018, Ledgeway 2008, and references therein). Thus, both internal and external types of micro-cues may be found to support word order acquisition. The consequence is that there may be multiple correlates of acquisition and evolution of word order. This would account for the fact that languages with a given word order need not to have all the same set of micro-cues (as suggested by a comparison of the data assembled by Samo 2018 for V2): Venetian has widespread enclisis when it has high V2, but French does not. Variation in the availability of micro-cues would explain why as proposed by Poletto (2019), there is more than one way to lose V2 (see also Wolfe 2021).

Thus, a multifactorial model has implications for the methodological approach to word-order change. Such an approach supposes the identification of the repertoire of potential correlating micro-cues and their respective weight through time and across languages. Such an approach has methodological antecedents. In particular, the Labovian framework has put forward methods to identify multiple variables that associate to the evolution of grammatical phenomena. However, whether these variables accompany or determine the change is a question that remains to be addressed. In other words, is a probabilistic model as proposed by Torres Cacoullos & Travis (2019) for null subjects powerful enough to frame an explanation, or are categorical models necessary? Validation of such a categorical model would have considerable potential impact on the general understanding of syntax itself. If micro-cues are indications of the underlying analysis to be attained by learners, is it necessary to have general syntactic parameters? Do we need a V2 option as part of the repertoire of syntactic options available to learners of a language? If not, this would mean that there are different ways to achieve a V2 construction in different (varieties of) languages. These issues call for quantitative and qualitative evaluations of correlates of change that answer the following research questions:

- Whether word order relates to identified micro-cues, and whether this relation is specific to word order
- What quantitative and qualitative methods can be proposed to identify micro-cues

- Which cues are associated in a stable way to a phenomenon, and which vary, and why
- Whether micro-cues relate to the enterprise of defining the finite set of properties of human language

This Special Collection on multifactorial approaches to syntactic change focuses on word order phenomena. Studies are brought together that probe the converging factors leading to diachronic change in word order. Five of the studies relate to V2, and one is on OV. Languages explored comprise the better-known cases of English (Kemenade, Hinterhölzl and Struik) and French (as the central Romance variety studied here by Wolfe, who also considers Venetian); as well as less extensively discussed Welsh (Currie), Basque (Duguine and Kaiser), and Eastern Armenian (Giorgi); to which is added the survey of Germanic and Romance by Samo. As the issue of sentential word order has been analyzed through the cartographic model, it features in five of the contributions, and Currie uses a constructional perspective.

The micro-cues identified are as follows:

- Prosody. According to Kemenade, Hinterhölzl and Struik, prosody is a central factor in the loss of V2 in the Middle English period. Middle English sees the grammaticalization of modals and auxiliaries, such that they cannot bear stress anymore, which must then be transferred to the XP. This accounts for the restriction on the construction to focusable XPs, and short unstressed verb.
- The change in auxiliary. Analytic verbs in Archaic Basque allowed material between the *wh* and the verb to be inserted, obscuring the V2 word order in interrogatives. That is made visible by the loss of those analytic verbs and the subsequent cliticisation of the auxiliary in Old Basque. In Modern Basque however, V-to-T movement takes place before T-to-C movement does, which ensures a host (the lexical verb) for the auxiliary sitting on C, and therefore results in a V2 order with strict *wh*-verb adjacency.
- The loss of particles. The loss of V2 in Welsh is correlated quantitatively to the gradual loss of a preverbal particle (*y*), combined with changes in the syntax of fronted adverbials. These evolutions lead Welsh to adopt not a SVO, but a V1 word order.
- Intervention effects. Intervention effects are used by Samo to tease apart the predictions made by the Edge Feature and the featural Relativized Minimality models. The prediction relates to the differential

rate of argument vs. non-argument fronting over the subject – the EF model predicting no difference, and the fRM a stronger intervention effect with arguments than with non-arguments. The examination of 10 treebanks leads to conclude that non-arguments are more often fronted, which is interpreted as non-arguments being less likely to be blocked by standard locality effects, supporting the fRM.

- Loss of movement of the initial XP. Wolfe points to the growth of base-generated XPs under V3. Movement is further restricted due to the increasing unavailability of Focus in the Left-Periphery. The restriction on movement of the XP would be destabilizing the previous obligatory V2 system.
- Informational conditions. Modern Eastern Armenian has the Focused item or a *wh* in preverbal position followed by the clitic auxiliary, in a V2 pattern. A V3 pattern may however arise when the Focused item is preceded by the subject. Thus, the predominantly periphrastic nature of the indicative verbal forms and the clitic nature of the auxiliary account for the competition between conservative V2 and innovative SVO.

This helicopter view does not exhaust the factors identified in each contribution, many of which concentrate on the joint role of prosody, the syntax of XPs and subjects, and informational factors, and most of which touch upon the role of expletive subjects (see [van Gelderen 2022](#)). Some factors may be language specific, such as the clitic status of the auxiliary in Old Basque and Modern Eastern Armenian. But some factors are stable across languages, and it is to be hoped that those documented here across a number of them will serve as inspiration to future inquiries documenting and quantifying the multifactorial nature of grammatical change.

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