

Embedded inversion in Welsh English: Contact effects and markedness

Julia Bacskai-Atkari

University of Amsterdam / University of Potsdam

j.bacskaiatkari@uva.nl / julia.bacskai-atkari.1@uni-potsdam.de

The 6th International Conference on English Language and
Anglophone Literatures Today
Novi Sad, 29–30 October 2022

Introduction

canonical word order in English: SVO

- (1) a. It was a bird.
- b. Mary will say something.

Inversion

subject–auxiliary inversion (modal verbs, auxiliaries, copulas) in main clause interrogatives (constituent questions and polar questions):

- (2)
- What **was** it?
 - What **will** Mary say?
 - Was** it a bird?
 - Will** Mary say something?

Embedded interrogatives

no inversion in embedded interrogatives in Standard English:

- (3)
- a. I don't know [what it was].
 - b. I don't know [what Mary will say].
 - c. I don't know [if it was a bird].
 - d. I don't know [if Mary will say something].

Welsh English: inversion common in embedded questions
(Paulasto et al. 2021)

Proposal

→ question: how this phenomenon can be explained

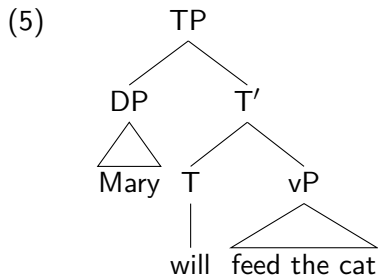
proposal: both contact effects (external factors) and the syntactic paradigm (internal factors) decisive

Basic syntactic properties

English declaratives can be analysed as TPs – SVO order, no V2
(↔ other Germanic languages)

(4) Mary will feed the cat.

Structure



no movement to CP

Main clause interrogatives

main clause interrogatives are CPs

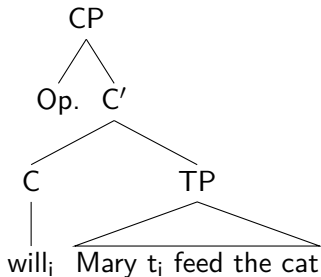
- (6) a. **Will** Mary feed the cat?
b. What **will** Mary do?

movement operations:

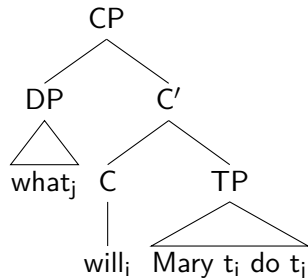
- T-to-C movement
- *wh*-movement to [Spec,CP] in constituent questions

Structures

(7) a.



b.



Embedded interrogatives

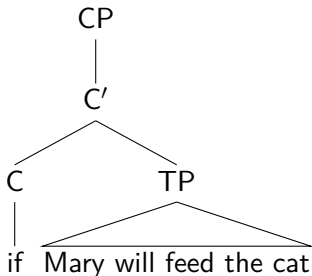
- (8) a. I don't know [if Mary will feed the cat].
b. I don't know [what Mary will do].

no T-to-C movement but evidence for CP:

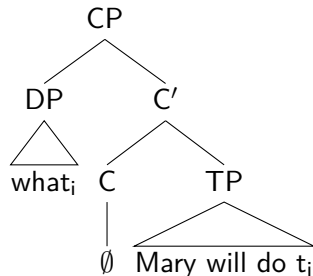
- *wh*-movement
- overt complementiser (*if*)

Structures

(9) a.



b.



Paradigm

pattern in (9b) exceptional in the interrogative paradigm in English (marked pattern) – C not lexicalised overtly (Bacskai-Atkari 2020c)

→ asymmetries in Standard English both between main and embedded clauses and between constituent questions and polar questions

Celtic contact in Welsh English

embedded inversion common in Welsh English:

- (10) a. Did you see [what kind of coal **was** it]?
(SAWD: Gn 9: 3; Paulasto et al. 2021, 95)
- b. I don't know [what time **is** it].
(Penhallurick 2008, 104, citing Parry 1999, 119)
- c. I asked them in the camp, [**would** they like the plums].
(NWC, Criccieth: 2e; Paulasto et al. 2021, 95)
- d. I'm not sure [**is** it Caerleon or not].
(Penhallurick 2008, 104, citing Parry 1999, 119)

important: such embedded clauses are intonationally integrated
(not direct quotations)

Celtic contact

embedded inversion most likely influenced by Celtic contact
(Paulasto et al. 2021, 95, citing Thomas 1994, 138 and
Penhallurick 1991, 210)

Welsh: similar word order in questions, especially in colloquial
Welsh (Paulasto et al. 2021, 95–96, citing King 1993, 305–310
and Thomas 1994, 138)

Main clause *wh*-questions

- (11) Beth **glywaist** ti wedyn?
what hear.PST.2SG you then
'What did you hear then?' (Borsley et al. 2007, 106)

Embedded *wh*-questions

- (12) Gofynnais [beth **oedd** yr achos].
asked.1SG what was the cause
'I asked what the cause was.'
(Ellis Wynne, *Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg*)

Main clause polar questions

optional question particle in literary language:

- (13) a. A **fydd** Gwyn yn yr ardd?
Q be.IMPF.3SG Gwyn in the garden
'Will Gwyn be in the garden?'
(Borsley et al. 2007, 36)
- b. **Fydd** Gwyn yn yr ardd?
be.FUT.3SG Gwyn in the garden
'Will Gwyn be in the garden?'
(Borsley et al. 2007, 36)

Embedded polar questions

- (14) a. Gofynnais [a **oedd** Siân yn defnyddio cyfrifiadur].
asked.1SG Q was Siân AUX using computer
'I asked whether Siân was using the computer.'
(Awbery 2009, 411)
- b. Gofynnais [**oedd** o'n sylweddoli beth roedd o
asked.1SG was AUX realise what he of
newydd ei neud].
new AUX do
'I asked him whether he realised what he had just
done.'
(Gareth F. Williams, *Awst yn Anogia*)

Celtic influence

further evidence for Celtic contact effect: similar structures in Irish English (Filppula 2008) and in Scottish English (Miller 2008)

analogy with Celtic: same word order in embedded clauses as in main clauses – inflected verb clause-initial

prevalence of embedded inversion in Welsh English: common but not the dominant pattern – total share in all embedded questions 9.3% (Meriläinen & Paulasto 2017, 684–685), with higher rates for older speakers (Paulasto et al. 2021, 97)

→ no sharp, parametric distinction from other varieties of English

Markedness

similarity to main clause questions: cognitive factors (ease of processing) also relevant, as evidenced by e.g. learner Englishes (Paulasto et al. 2021, 96)

similar structures in other varieties as well, e.g. Colloquial American English (Murray & Simon 2008), Appalachian English (Montgomery 2008), Newfoundland English (Clarke 2008)

→ Celtic contact probably reinforcing a more general tendency

Standard English

recall the Standard English interrogative paradigm for overt elements in C:

	Main clause	Embedded clause
Constituent question	fronted V	∅
Polar question		<i>if</i>

Syntactic tendency

exceptional slot: C not lexicalised overtly → marked pattern

syntactic tendency in English:

- C specified as [fin] and [Q] lexicalised overtly by a [fin] element (finite verb or finite complementiser, Bacskai-Atkari 2020c, 2022) – no extra null element required, transparent configuration
- preference for lexicalising C also in relative clauses (see van Gelderen 2004, 2009, Romaine 1982, Montgomery & Bailey 1991, Tagliamonte et al. 2005, Herrmann 2005, Bacskai-Atkari 2020a,b)
- related to the general tendency of lexicalising [fin] in Germanic resulting in V2 (Bacskai-Atkari 2020c, see also Pittner 1995)

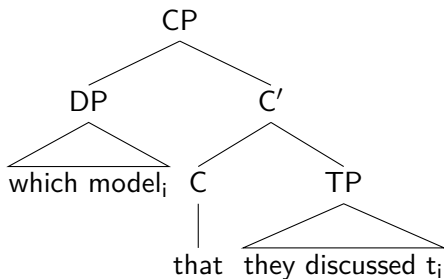
Doubly filled COMP

one option to overcome the marked gap: doubly filled COMP patterns (Bacskai-Atkari 2020c, 2022, see also Chomsky & Lasnik 1977)

- (15) They discussed a certain model, but they didn't know [which model **that** they discussed].
(Baltin 2010, 331)

Structure

(16)



Doubly filled COMP varieties

interrogative paradigm for overt elements in C in doubly filled COMP varieties:

	Main clause	Embedded clause
Constituent question	fronted V	<i>that</i>
Polar question		<i>if</i>

Welsh English

Welsh English can exhibit the following paradigm for overt elements in C:

	Main clause	Embedded clause
Constituent question	fronted V	
Polar question		

Analysis

maximally unmarked pattern regarding the C position

two possibilities:

- Welsh English pattern solely governed by markedness (paradigmatic effects and/or processing factors) – major factor: analogy with main clauses → symmetrical arrangement between constituent and polar questions expected
- Welsh English pattern also affected by the lexicalisation requirement on [fin] in questions → asymmetrical arrangement between constituent and polar questions expected (polar questions have the [fin] option by *if* anyway)

Evidence from corpora

embedded inversion more frequent in constituent questions than in polar questions (Paulasto et al. 2021, 96–98; similar to other varieties showing embedded inversion, see Meriläinen & Paulasto 2017)

→ grammatical factors also play a decisive role

Conclusion

embedded inversion in Welsh English

- influenced by language contact (Welsh)
- markedness plays a role in terms of processing
- syntactic factors also important – fronting primarily in environments where C would not contain an overt element otherwise

→ language contact in the given case reinforces more general tendencies in the language



Thank you!

Danke!



Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the German Research Fund (DFG), as part of my project “Asymmetries in relative clauses in West Germanic” (DFG-BA 5201/2), carried out at the University of Konstanz.

References I

- Awbery, Gwenllian. 2009. Welsh. In Martin J. Ball & Nicole Müller (eds.), *The Celtic languages*, 359–426. London: Routledge.
- Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2020a. Changes affecting relative clauses in Late Modern English. In Merja Kytö & Erik Smitterberg (eds.), *Late Modern English: Novel encounters*, 91–115. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2020b. English relative clauses in a cross-Germanic perspective. *Nordlyd* 44. 93–115.
- Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2020c. German V2 and Doubly Filled COMP in West Germanic. *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 23(2). 125–160.

References II

- Bacskai-Atkari, Julia. 2022. Discourse-driven asymmetries between embedded interrogatives and relative clauses in West Germanic. In Nicholas Catasso, Marco Coniglio & Chiara De Bastiani (eds.), *Language change at the interfaces: Intrasentential and intersentential phenomena*, 189–214. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Baltin, Mark. 2010. The nonreality of doubly filled Comps. *Linguistic Inquiry* 41(2). 331–335.
- Borsley, Robert D., Maggie Tallerman & David Willis. 2007. *The syntax of Welsh*.
- Chomsky, Noam & Howard Lasnik. 1977. Filters and control. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8(3). 425–504.

References III

- Clarke, Sandra. 2008. Newfoundland English: Morphology and syntax. In Edgar W. Schneider (ed.), *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean*, 492–509. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Filppula, Markku. 2008. Irish English: Morphology and syntax. In Bernd Kortmann & Clive Upton (eds.), *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*, 328–359. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- van Gelderen, Elly. 2004. *Grammaticalization as economy*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- van Gelderen, Elly. 2009. Renewal in the left periphery: Economy and the complementiser layer. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 107(2). 131–195.

References IV

- Herrmann, Tanja. 2005. Relative clauses in English dialects of the British Isles. In Bernd Kortmann (ed.), *A comparative grammar of British English dialects 1: Agreement, gender, relative clauses*, 21–124. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- King, Gareth. 1993. *Modern Welsh: A comprehensive grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Meriläinen, Lea & Heli Paulasto. 2017. Embedded inversion as an angloversal: Evidence from Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes. In Markku Filppula, Juhani Klemola & Devyani Sharma (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of World Englishes*, 676–696. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

References V

- Miller, Jim. 2008. Scottish English: Morphology and syntax. In Bernd Kortmann & Clive Upton (eds.), *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*, 299–327. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Montgomery, Michael & Guy Bailey. 1991. *In which*: A new form in written English. *American Speech* 66. 147–163.
- Montgomery, Michael B. 2008. Appalachian English: Morphology and syntax. In Edgar W. Schneider (ed.), *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean*, 428–467. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Murray, Thomas E. & Beth Lee Simon. 2008. Colloquial American English: Grammatical features. In Edgar W. Schneider (ed.), *Varieties of English 2: The Americas and the Caribbean*, 401–427. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

References VI

- Parry, David. 1999. *A grammar and glossary of the conservative Anglo-Welsh dialects of rural Wales*. Sheffield: National Centre for English Cultural Tradition.
- Paulasto, Heli, Rob Penhallurick & Benjamin A. Jones. 2021. *Welsh English*. De Gruyter.
- Penhallurick, Robert. 1991. *The Anglo-Welsh dialects of North Wales*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Penhallurick, Robert. 2008. Welsh English: Morphology and syntax. In Bernd Kortmann & Clive Upton (eds.), *Varieties of English 1: The British Isles*, 360–372. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pittner, Karin. 1995. The case of German relatives. *The Linguistic Review* 12(3). 197–231.

References VII

- Romaine, Suzanne. 1982. *Socio-historical linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tagliamonte, Sali, Jennifer Smith & Helen Lawrence. 2005. No taming the vernacular! Insights from the relatives in northern Britain. *Language Variation and Change* 17. 75–112.
- Thomas, Alan R. 1994. English in Wales. In Robert Burchfield (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the English language, vol. V: English in Britain and overseas: Origins and development*, 94–147. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.