Aspects of English historical syntax

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Introduction

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Grammar is grammar

- In structuralist and generative grammar
  - strings are grammatical or ungrammatical
  - analysis of unambiguous sentences is unique
  - speaker's grammar is consistent and coherent

- Are we sure?

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Plan of talk: five case studies

- Unreal conditionals
- *That*-clause complements
- Prepositional passive
- Analysing *run over*
- Gradual word class change

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Unreal conditionals

Innovation and retention

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Double marking of unreality

- Extra *have/'ve/of* in protasis, often parallel to apodosis.

  If I'd ve put your real age <pause> you'd've said (1985-93 BNC, spoken)

  If I'd ve jumped sooner maybe I'd've been picked up sooner. (1943 COHA)

  If I'd of been there I'd of flogged that a long while ago and got rid of it (1992 BNC, spoken)

  if you'd of been with her like you usually was, like you should of been, that bear never would of took the both of you (2002 COCA)

Denison (1998, 2012)

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Two 'national treasures'

Alan Bennett

Judi Dench

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Indirect quotation

IN THIS third collection of excerpts from his diaries [...] Alan Bennett complains that people see him as "cosy and essentially harmless". **<u>Even if he stabbed Dame Judi Dench with a pitchfork</u>** he would, he hazards, still be reckoned a teddy bear.

(*Sunday Times*, 16 Oct 2016)

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Indirect quotation

Even <u>if he stabbed</u> Dame Judi Dench with a pitchfork

- *If*-clause protasis, past *stabbed*

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'Direct quotation'

"I am in the pigeonhole marked 'no threat' and **<u>were I to stab</u> Judi Dench with a pitchfork** I should still be a teddy bear," he writes at the end of 2005. He worries that his work – that he – is considered cosy.

(Miranda Sawyer, *The Guardian*, 2 Oct 2016)
(clause also London Review Bookshop website, ?15 Oct 2016)

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'Direct quotation'

<u>were I to stab</u> Judi Dench with a pitchfork

- Inverted protasis, past subjunctive *were*

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Original

(Book of the Week, BBC Radio 4, 27 Oct 2016)

I shall still be thought to be kindly, cosy and essentially harmless. I am in the pigeon-hole marked "no threat" and **<u>did I stab</u> Judi Dench with a pitchfork** I should still be a teddy bear.

(2016 Alan Bennett, *Keeping on Keeping On*, entry for 20 Dec 2007)

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Original

**<u>did I stab</u> Judi
Dench with a pitchfork** I should still be a
teddy bear.

- Inverted protasis, past *did*

History of inverted protases

18th century, court of George III

- Example from 'Image to Text' project:

Ah how you would feel for me **<u>did You know</u>
what I have gone through on her account**

(1781 Charlotte Gunning)

Inverted vs *if*-protases in ARCHER 2

	Had (perf. aux.)		*Were*		*Should*		*Could*	
	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*
1650-99	28 (57%)	21	11 (41%)	16	10 (38%)	16	1 (25%)	3
1700-49	21 (51%)	20	17 (57%)	13	6 (25%)	16	4 (17%)	19
1750-99	13 (41%)	19	12 (43%)	16	2 (10%)	19	2 (13%)	13
1800-49	9 (38%)	15	7 (30%)	16	13 (46%)	15	6 (26%)	17
1850-99	11 (30%)	26	0 (0%)	20	3 (60%)	2	0 (0%)	8
1900-49	2 (17%)	10	0 (0%)	9	2 (67%)	1	0 (0%)	12
1950-	2 (7%)	28	1 (5%)	19	0 (0%)	3	0 (0%)	15

Denison (1998: 300, Table 3.11)

Inverted vs *if*-protases in ARCHER 2

	Had (perf. aux.)		*Were*		*Should*		*Could*		*Did*
	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*	Inverted	*If*	Inverted
1650-99	28 (57%)	21	11 (41%)	16	10 (38%)	16	1 (25%)	3	3
1700-49	21 (51%)	20	17 (57%)	13	6 (25%)	16	4 (17%)	19	3
1750-99	13 (41%)	19	12 (43%)	16	2 (10%)	19	2 (13%)	13	2
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Inversion protases in PPCMBE[1]

- *had* ×72 (full range of dates in corpus)
- modal ×38
  - *should* ×26, *could* ×9
  - *would* ×2 (latest 1745), *can*[!] ×1 (1808)
- past *be* ×37
  - *were* ×32, *was* ×5 (1745 ×4, 1808)
- *did* ×4 (1763, 1830 ×2, 1876)
  We should not be doing justice to our subject <u>did we not place</u>
  on record the very decided opinions [...] (POORE-1876,163.54)
- past tense non-auxiliary V ×0

Unreal *if*-protases in PPCMBE[1]

- ×449 approx.
  - past tense V, *be, have* ×318
  - *did* ×21

    and <u>if they did not cut</u> them all to pieces he would be damned (RYDER-1716,174.394)
  - past tense modal ×110

- In PPCMBE (1700-1914), past tense *if* protases outnumber inverted protases 3:1
  - (both totals may include a few real conditionals)

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Inversion protases in PDE

- Overall frequency has declined through ModE period
- Fewer verbs now invert there: *had, were, should, …*
- What about *did*?
  - Biber et al. (1999: 851-3, 919): No
  - Quirk et al. (1985: 1084): not mentioned, implicit No
  - Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 753, 970): not mentioned
  - journalist or subeditor on *The Guardian*: ?No
  - Denison (1998: 299-300): examples up to 1993
  - Visser (1963-73: 767): 'nowadays only in literary style'

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Is *did I* protasis grammatical?

- Depends not just on speaker but on register. 'Passive' grammaticality not same as ability to use.
- Almost as if Alan Bennett is wilfully retaining or reviving a dying usage. Does same for *could*:

  Could I slip into the seat behind, I would put a hand on my young shoulder and say, 'It's going to be all right'. (*ibid.* 2014)
- Would he use these in everyday conversation?
- Grammaticality not either-or

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That-clause complements

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V + *that*-clause in student work

1. Hundt's study (2009), which **advocates that** the subjunctive is in fact replacing the periphrastic […]
2. this **highlights** once more **that** […]
3. with Poussa **criticising that** the French influence was sporadic
4. Sweet **defines that** "grammar may be regarded either from a theoretical or practical point of view. […]"
5. This study has **displayed that** older participants have more stable and confident results than […]
6. Follet (1966) […] **poses that** the informality of *try and* leads to […]
7. Steven Pinker, (1994) **puts forward that** chimps often just imitate the messages of the trainer
8. which can be reinforced by Milroy et al, who **utters that**, "In other locations […]"

✔
?*
*
*
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V + *that*-clause or V + N-*that*?

You have to **accept that** this could happen again. (2015, COCA)

If you just **accept the fact that** there's no self […] (2007, COCA)

*The aforementioned authors **espouse that** students from the age of four to eight are aware of racial difference (2011, COCA)

Poland also **espoused the idea that** the COMECON Members should […] (1990, COCA)

Denison (2011)

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Factual and suasive verbs

verb	N-that	that
accept, acknowledge, add, affirm, allege, allow, announce, assert, assume, believe, (claim), concede, confirm, consider, convey, (deduce), (determine), demonstrate, deny, disclose, discover, doubt, emphasise, establish, explain, (find), forget, guarantee, hold, imagine, (indicate), infer, (judge), maintain, mention, observe, (point out), (predict), (presume), ?pronounce, propose, prove, recognise, regret, repeat, report, see, (show), state, (stipulate), stress, submit, suggest, (suppose), suspect, understand	✓	✓
*advance, articulate, back up, challenge, communicate, contradict, convey, **define**, discuss, dispute#, encourage, endorse, enlarge upon, espouse, **express**, oppose, promote, put across, **put forward**, question#, rule, support, sustain, underline, **underscore, utter***	✓	✗
*advocate, analyse, bring to the surface, cite, clarify, contest, criticise, **deem [OK?], deliberate, depict, describe, display, exemplify, explicate, highlight, identify, illustrate, inform, instigate, interpret, moot, portray, pose, posit [OK?], propound, publicise, quote, reflect, refute, reinforce, reiterate, respect, rule out, solidify, stand, summarise, take into account, uncover, update, view, welcome, yield***	?	?

Erroneous usage?

> '... communication verbs controlling *that*-clauses (apart from *say*) are most frequent in academic prose'

- Such verbs are needed to avoid risk of plagiarism.
  - Word processor thesaurus for 'elegant variation'?
- Students in question tend to be relatively unskilled writers, insecure about written expression.
  - Asking them about grammaticality not helpful.
- Once written down, usage can get entrenched.

Biber et al. (1999: 668)   28

Error vs. innovation

- Distinction crucial to Kachru's concentric circles model.
- In historical linguistics, some errors turn out (with hindsight) to be innovations.
- The sporadic occurrence of 'new' *V-that* patterns has affinities with learner English and with new Englishes.
- These are ***native speakers*** using (misusing?) words and patterns ***in writing*** that would be rare or non-existent in their everyday conversation.

Hundt & Mukherjee (2011)   29

Systematic research in corpora

- Tagged and lemmatised corpus distinguishes e.g.
  - *advance, display* V ~ *advance, display* N
  - *that* CONJ ~ *that* D
- Search COHA for   **[display].[v*] that.[cst]**
- Accuracy 5/41 = 12% (*display* = N ×18, *that* = D ×18)
  - Perhaps tagger trained on data without marginal examples
- And then only 1/5 somewhat relevant!
  but all this accomplished was **to display that** the poor creature's teeth have been yanked out (1990 COHA)

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Prepositional passive

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Reanalysis in the active?

Vulcanus..foond thee lyggyng by his wyf allas.
Vulcan … found you 'lying by' his wife alas (c1385, *MED*)

- V [$_{PP}$ P NP]   >   [$_V$ V + P] NP
- intransitive verb   'transitive' [group-]verb

Þis maiden..feled al so bi her þi Þat sche was yleyen bi.
this maiden … felt also by her thigh that she had-been 'lain by'   (c1330(?a1300), *MED*)

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Or analogy in the passive?

- Structure of new prepositional passive is vague, related to
  - active equivalent
  - other kinds of stranding pattern
  - other kinds of passive
- Many features not really new:
  - passive participles
  - stranded prepositions (e.g. in relative and infinitive clauses)
  - *do, let, send, set, tell,* (?)*tend* – lexical verbs with early prepositional passives – already had conventional passives
- Cf. 'serial relationship' and recent work on micro-changes

Quirk (1965), Dreschler (2015), Denison (in press)   34

Analysing *run over*

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Prepositional verb in *OBC*

- Many examples in *Old Bailey Corpus* where horse or carriage runs out of control:

  it [= a Hansom cab] was going very fast – it knocked the men down and <u>ran over them</u> (1878)

  the man <u>was run over on the legs</u> (1864)

- Preposition *over* describes trajectory of moving vehicle across and above obstacle or victim
- Prepositional verb *run over*

Denison (in press)   36

Unclear examples in *OBC*

a young woman with a child in her arms endeavour'd to stop the horses; I called to her to let them go, as I saw she <u>would be run over</u> else (1770)

the prisoner came up and told me I was not to go too fast, for if I did I <u>should get run over</u> (1849)

- Meaning of *over* uncertain from PDE point of view:
  - trajectory of moving vehicle?   **preposition**
  - trajectory of victim out of upright position?   **resultative adv particle**

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Clear phrasal verb only later

- If adverbial particle, have transitive phrasal verb *run over* 'injure with a vehicle', cf. *knock down*

  a.   She [...] got on her bike and roared off. My father tried to stop her by standing in her way, so she <u>ran him over</u> and broke his leg quite badly (BNC)

  b.   Someone's going to <u>run a little child over</u> soon because the lollipop lady is busy asking drivers to move on. (BNC)

- Clear corpus examples (e.g. COHA) and metalinguistic discussion only from mid-20th century
- (But *OED* now 1860-)

OED s.v. *run* v. PV1, 1   38

Unclear examples in *OBC*

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the prisoner came up and told me I was not to go too fast, for if I did I <u>should get run over</u> (1849)

- Meaning of **_over_** ambiguous.
- Meaning of **group-verb _run over_** perhaps clear:

  is [*run over*]$_V$ 'NP$_{Patient}$ is struck, falls and is injured'

- Patient role crucial for prep. passive, appropriate also for passive of phrasal verb. Vague as to whether victim falls **under** horse or carriage.

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Reanalysis or micro-steps?

- Structure also vague, especially at first.

- Apparently reanalysed structures, or something closely similar, had prior existence with other exponents or in other contexts.
  - Prepositional passive in ME and *run over* in 20th c.
- Innovation 'sneaks in' where least salient.
- Structural change (or changes, if analysed in terms of micro-steps) arise from vagueness rather than ambiguity.

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Gradual word class change

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Decategorialisation

Word class of *long* in certain idiosyncratic uses:
  The chair will ensure that I don't **take long**.

- Has been argued to be
  - N (because 'object' of normally transitive verb)
  - Adj (because meaning ≈ 'a long time')
  - Adv (because adjunct of time)
- Closest to Adv, but has affinities with N and Adj.
- Better to look at VP *take long* than at each word.

Denison (to appear)   42

Category space
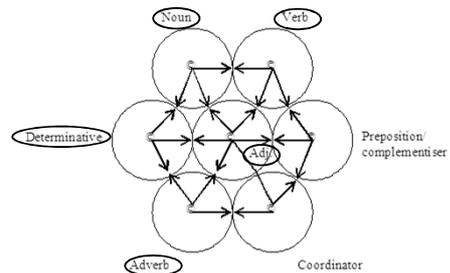
Aarts (2007: 240), Denison (2016)   43


Examples from 'Image to Text'

- Mental state passive participles become adjectives.
- Intensifier (*very*) *much* implies still a verb:
  I am **very much flattered** by what you tell me of her Majestys honouring me with her obliging inquirrys (?1777-82)
  I have been **very much shocked** & am **extremely distrefsed** by the Death of Col¹ Cathcart (1794)

- Intensifiers *very* or *too* imply adjective:
  My head is **too confused** to dwell longer upon this painful subject. (1810)

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Intensifier with mental state V

Legend:
☐ **Very/too**
▦ **(Very/too) much**

x-axis: 1650-99, 1700-49, 1750-99, 1800-49, 1850-99, 1900-49, 1950-
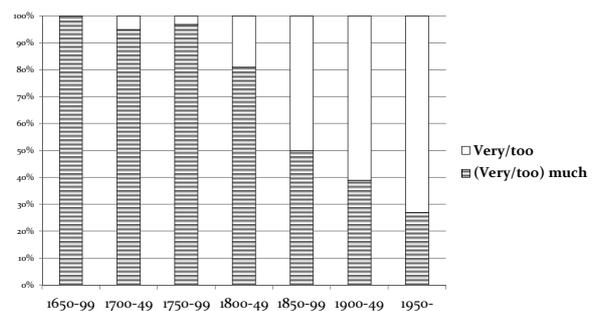
Date from ARCHER2, based on Denison (1998: 230)   45

Unclear examples

- Where both Adj and V readings are available, many examples have no intensifier or other clue as to word class.
- If there is little discernible difference of meaning, example is vague rather than ambiguous.
- Arbitrary for linguist to insist that the word must be either V or Adj.

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Word class not always clear-cut

Word classes are theoretical constructs devised to capture syntactic and other analogies. It is no more than a convenient fiction to assume that speakers and hearers operate with precisely those analogies and no others.

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Conclusion

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Grammar is grammar?

- Is it really the case that
  - strings are grammatical or ungrammatical?
  - **Not always**
  - analysis of unambiguous sentences is unique?
  - **Not always**
  - speaker's grammar is consistent and coherent?
  - **No**
- Grammar is **messy**.
- But simplifying assumptions often work well enough.

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Last slide!

- Presentation can be downloaded from

http://tinyurl.com/DD-download

- Comments welcome!

Domo arigato gozaimashita

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