THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUBJECT-VERB INVERSION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE CONTACT[*]

Eric Haeberli (eric.haeberli@lettres.unige.ch)

1. INTRODUCTION

Old English (OE) exhibits frequent occurrences of subject-verb inversion when a non-subject is in clause-initial position. Such word orders are reminiscent of the Verb Second (V2) phenomenon as found in all the modern Germanic languages with the exception of present-day English. In the Middle English (ME) period, the OE subject-verb inversion syntax starts being lost. There is an extensive literature on what has often been referred to (somewhat misleadingly, cf. section 2 below) as "the loss of V2" in the history of English and various proposals have been put forward to explain this loss (cf. e.g. Haeberli 2002a/b and references cited there). However, the historical developments exhibit certain peculiarities that have generally not been accounted for in the literature. In this paper, I will consider four of these peculiarities and I will explore to what extent they could be dealt with by invoking language contact as a factor influencing the diachronic developments. More specifically, the focus will be on the role Anglo-Norman and/or continental French may have played in this connection.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief description of the subject-verb inversion syntax found in Old English. In section 3, the developments in Middle English are discussed and four problematic issues with respect to these developments are identified. Sections 4 and 5 then consider the plausibility of addressing these issues in terms of language contact and more specifically with reference to Anglo-Norman/French influence. It is argued that for three of these issues, contact with Anglo-Norman/French may have played a role whereas such an account seems less likely for the fourth issue. Finally, in section 6, some further points are discussed that bear on the question of Anglo-Norman/French influence on Middle English syntax, and section 7 summarizes the paper.

2. SUBJECT-VERB INVERSION IN OLD ENGLISH

The V2 property as found in all the modern Germanic languages except present-day English (PDE) is characterized by the general occurrence of the finite verb right after the clause-initial constituent (i.e. in second position) regardless of what the nature of this constituent is.[1] A consequence of this is that when the clause-initial constituent is not a subject the order of the subject and the finite verb is inverted, which leads to the characteristic inversion property of V2 languages.

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[1] Languages may vary as to whether V2 is available in main clauses only or both in main clauses and subordinate clauses. Here we will focus on V2 in main clauses as early English does not seem to have had productive V2 in subordinate clauses (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1997).

In OE, cases of subject-verb inversion can regularly be found when some other constituent is fronted (cf. e.g. van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1999). This is illustrated in (1) (fronted constituent in brackets, finite verb in bold print, subject in italics). The OE data used below are taken from *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (henceforth YCOE; Taylor et al. 2003).

(1)   a.   [ðæt] **wat** *ælc mon*   (Bo:36.107.17.2101)
              that knows every man
              'Everyone knows that.'
      b.   And [egeslice] **spæc** *Gregorius* be ðam …   (WHom_10c:48.866)
              And sternly spoke Gregorius about that
              'And Gregorius spoke sternly about that …'

In (1a), an object is in initial position whereas in (1b) it is an adverb that has been fronted. In both cases the subject follows the finite verb, and we thus get word orders that are reminiscent of languages characterized by the V2 property.

However, the syntax of inversion in OE does not fully correspond to that found in genuine V2 languages. There are at least four ways in which OE differs from a typical V2 system. First, a distinction between pronominal and full DP subjects has to be made in OE as inversion is possible with full DP subjects (cf. 1) but not with pronominal subjects (cf. 2a). The only exception to this observation can be found in some specific contexts (henceforth "genuine V2" (GV2) contexts) such as questions, negative clauses and clauses introduced by some short adverbs (in particular *þa, þonne* 'then') where subject-verb inversion also occurs with pronominal subjects (cf. 2b/c).

(2)   a.   [þæt] [*þu*] **meaht** swiðe sweotole ongitan   (XSV…)   (Bo:34.88.14.1689)
              that you can very easily understand
      b.   [hwi] **sceole** *we* oþres mannes niman   (XVS…)   (ÆLS [Abdon-Sennes]:183.4831)
              why should we another man's take
              'Why should we take those of another man?'
      c.   [ða] **aras** *he* hal & gesund.   (XVS…)   (Bede_4:32.380.16.3796)
              then arose he uninjured and healthy
              'Then he got up uninjured.'

The above observations are confirmed by quantitative evidence based on ten OE text samples from YCOE. In contexts other than GV2, subject-verb inversion occurs in only six out of 391 (1.5%) of the clauses examined with an initial non-subject and a pronominal subject (Haeberli 2002a). Four of the six cases of inversion are from the same text (Orosius), and seven out of the ten text samples show no inversion at all. Thus, non-inversion as in (2a) is nearly compulsory with pronominal subjects in OE.

The second property that distinguishes OE/EME from typical V2 languages is the fact that even with full DP subject's inversion is not systematic, as example (3) illustrates.

(3)   [ðone] *Denisca leoda* **lufiað** swyðost   (XSV)   (WHom_12:56.1190)
              that Danish people love most
              'The Danish people love that one most'

According to a sample from the YCOE examined in Haeberli (2002a), non-pronominal subjects invert with the finite verb in 75.3% (1437/1909) of the cases. Non-V2 orders of the type shown in (3) thus occur with a non-negligible frequency of about 25%.

Thirdly, even if the finite verb does invert with the subject, it may not always be placed in second position. This is shown in (4).

(4)   [Ðysne yrming] [æfter his forðsiðe] **wurðodon** *þa hæðenan* eac for healicne god
                                                                    (WHom_12:60.1194)
         This poor-wretch after his decease worshiped the heathens also instead high God
         'After his decease, the heathens also worshiped this poor wretch instead of God.'

In a corresponding example in a true V2 language, the finite verb would follow the fronted object rather than the time adjunct.

Finally, we can also observe a systematic absence of inversion after clause-initial subordinate clauses.

(5)   [gif he hine forsyhð], *his sawul* **sceal** þrowian þæt ylce wite
                                                                    (ÆHom_21:291.3223)
         if he him scorns, his soul must endure the same punishment
         'If he scorns him, his soul must endure the same punishment.'

Whereas initial subordinate clauses generally give rise to subject-verb inversion in true V2 languages, inversion in such a context is almost non-existent in OE.

In summary, although OE has certain similarities with modern Germanic V2 languages, it cannot be entirely assimilated to these languages and the common practice of referring to OE as a V2 language is therefore somewhat misleading. Most recent analyses of OE capture this difference by assuming that, with the exception of GV2, OE subject-verb inversion generally does not involve V-to-C movement as in the modern Germanic languages but only V-to-I movement (cf. Pintzuk 1999 and much subsequent work). What is important for our purposes, however, is the fact that OE nevertheless had various types of subject-verb inversion that are no longer grammatical in PDE (cf. 1a/b, 2c) and that these inversion word orders were very frequent.

3. THE LOSS OF THE OE/EME SUBJECT-VERB INVERSION SYNTAX

The observations made for OE above also hold to a large extent for early Middle English (EME, cf. Kroch & Taylor 1997). However, after the EME period, the OE/EME subject-verb inversion syntax starts being weakened considerably. This development has been extensively discussed in the literature under the label "loss of V2" (cf. e.g. Haeberli 2002a/b and references cited there). A central question in the literature has been why the productive OE/EME subject-verb inversion syntax was lost during the ME period. Various potential causes for this change have been proposed, ranging from external ones (language and dialect contact; cf. Kroch and Taylor 1997, Kroch, Taylor and Ringe 2000) to internal ones (e.g. loss of empty expletive subjects; Haeberli 2002b). We will return to the scenario outlined by Kroch et al. in section 4 when discussing language contact as a potential factor influencing ME syntax. As for the alternative explanations, we will not review them in detail here. What is crucial for our purposes here is simply the fact that these analyses generally do not account for at least four "side events" that occur during the general loss of productive subject-verb inversion. These four issues are listed below:

(I)   In what I called "genuine V2" (GV2) contexts above, the syntax of inversion remains more or less stable throughout the history of English. Thus, in questions and negative contexts, fronting of a non-subject element still gives rise to inversion in PDE (e.g. *When will he leave? Never again would I do that.*). What has changed over time is the nature of the element that inverts with the subject (any type of verb in OE/ME, auxiliaries only in PDE), but the basic inversion property has been maintained. However, there are some elements that were mentioned among the GV2 contexts above that do not form part of this group anymore in PDE. Whereas adverbs like *þa, þonne* ('then') (and to a lesser extent *nu* 'now') systematically gave rise to subject-verb inversion in OE/EME even with pronominal subjects (cf. 2c), their descendants no longer do so in PDE (**Then did he leave*). One of the unanswered questions with respect to the syntactic developments in ME is why *þa* or *þonne*, contrary to interrogative and negative elements, lost their ability to trigger systematic subject-verb/auxiliary inversion.

(II)   A second question is based on the observation that the frequency of subject-verb inversion, although declining substantially outside GV2 contexts during ME, never drops to 0% until today. Some examples of PDE subject-verb inversion are given in (6) (from Bresnan 1994:78, Schmidt 1980:6/8/9, Stockwell 1984:581).

(6)   a.   [Another very generous person] **is** *Mr. McDonald*.
       b.   [Plainly detectible] **were** *the scars from his old football injury*.
       c.   [In this rainforest] **can be found** *the reclusive lyrebird*.
       d.   [Across the river] **lived** *seven dwarfs*.
       e.   [Now] **comes** *the time* to make peace.
       f.   [Thus] **ended** *his story*.
       g.   [In the year 1748] **died** *one of the most powerful of the new masters of India*.

PDE inversion can be found for example with *be* in contexts of predicate fronting (6a/b) and with main verbs (typically unaccusatives) in some very restricted contexts (e.g. locative inversion (6c/d), with certain clause-initial adjuncts (6e-g)).

       However, there are contexts in which there was a complete loss of subject-verb/auxiliary inversion in the history of English. Thus, as shown in (7), inversion with transitive verbs and inversion of the type "Auxiliary-Subject-Main Verb" are now entirely ungrammatical in PDE while they systematically occurred in OE/EME.

(7)   a. * [In this rainforest] **can find** *a lucky hiker* the reclusive lyrebird.
       b. * [In this rainforest] **can** *the reclusive lyrebird* **be found**.

       Table 1 below shows the status of subject-verb inversion in various contexts in OE and late ME (1350 to 1500). The Old English data are based on 7 texts from the YCOE (Boethius, Chronicle, Cura Pastoralis, Ælfric's Letters, Ælfric's Lives, Apollonius, Wulfstan). The Middle English data are taken from *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English 2* (henceforth PPCME2; Kroch and Taylor 2000), and more specifically from 21 texts or text samples containing more than 50 main clauses with a non-pronominal subject that is preceded by some constituent (except subordinate clauses, question words, negation, *þa, þonne, nu*). For both OE and ME, smaller samples were used for the section on subject pronouns. The labels m2, m3 and m4 in Table 1 refer to the ME periods introduced in *The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*.

TABLE 1 *Main clauses with an initial constituent (except question words, negation, þa, þonne, nu) preceding subjects in texts from OE and from 1350 to 1500*

text (date)	Inversion with transitive V and full DP subject	Inversion with other V and full DP subject	Inversion with pronominal subject
OE text samples	**59.5%** (314/528)	**81.3%** (1123/1381)	**1.5%** (6/391)
M2 (1250-1350)			
Earliest English Prose Psalter (c1350)	**30.4%** (7/23)	**65.2%** (60/92)	**25.4%** (16/63)
M2/4 (comp. 1250-1350, ms. 1420-1500)			
Richard Rolle (c1440/50 (a1348/9))	**40.3%** (39/97)	**65.2%** (60/92)	**15.4%** (6/39)
M3 (1350-1420)			
Old Testament (a1425 (a1382))	**0.0%** (0/28)	**3.0%** (2/66)	**2.1%** (1/47)
New Testament (c1388)	**0.0%** (0/19)	**10.2%** (9/88)	**0.0%** (0/103)
Purvey, Prologue to the Bible (c1388)	**1.1%** (2/181)	**20.8%** (44/212)	**0.0%** (0/25)
Trevisa, Polychronicon (a1387)	**2.6%** (5/190)	**25.6%** (124/485)	**0.0%** (0/48)
Wycliffite Sermons (c1400)	**44.1%** (126/286)	**40.5%** (161/398)	**15.1%** (13/86)
Brut/Chronicles of England (c1400)	**22.0%** (22/100)	**68.0%** (198/291)	**7.1%** (6/85)
Mandeville's Travels (?a1425 (c1400))	**34.0%** (55/162)	**80.0%** (431/539)	**3.1%** (1/32)
Chaucer (Boethius, Melibee, Parson, Astrolabe; c1380/1390)	**71.0%** (76/107)	**73.6.%** (265/360)	**50.0%** (95/190)
Cloud of Unknowing (a1425 (?a1400))	**50.0%** (6/12)	**78.0%** (64/82)	**19.9%** (42/211)
Mirror of St. Edmund, ms. Vernon (c1390)	**80.6%** (29/36)	**89.4%** (59/66)	**15.4%** (23/149)
TOTAL m3	**28.6%** (321/1121)	**52.5%** (1357/2587)	**18.5%** (181/976)
M3/4 (comp. 1350-1420, ms. 1420-1500)			
ME Sermons, ms. Royal (c1450 (c1415))	**9.1%** (1/11)	**31.4%** (11/35)	**6.6%** (4/61)
Mirk's Festial (a1500 (a 1415))	**21.0%** (41/195)	**51.4%** (197/383)	**3.6%** (1/28)
Mirror of St. Edmund, ms. Thornton (c1440 (?1350))	**69.4%** (25/36)	**83.3%** (50/60)	**52.5%** (105/200)
TOTAL m3/4	**27.7%** (67/242)	**54.0%** (258/478)	**38.1%** (110/289)
period m4 (1420-1500)			
Life of St. Edmund (c1450 (1438))	**0.0%** (0/20)	**10.8%** (4/37)	**0.0%** (0/72)
Book of Margery Kempe (c1450)	**5.9%** (8/136)	**36.5%** (101/277)	**12.6%** (16/127)
Malory, Morte Darthur (a 1470)	**14.9%** (34/228)	**36.7%** (202/550)	**12.9%** (30/233)
Gregory's Chronicle (c1475)	**3.9%** (5/129)	**44.4%** (190/428)	**0.0%** (0/59)
Siege of Jerusalem (c 1500)	**12.5%** (3/24)	**50.0%** (27/54)	**4.4.%** (4/91)
Capgrave's Chronicle (a1464)	**20.0%** (44/220)	**74.0%** (553/747)	**51.7%** (31/60)
TOTAL m4	**12.4%** (94/757)	**51.5%** (1077/2093)	**12.6%** (81/642)

     Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 show the contrast between verb types with respect to subject-verb inversion in clauses with non-pronominal subjects. Whereas the frequency of inversion with transitive verbs drops from nearly 60% in OE to an average of 12.4% in the 15th century, inversion with other verbs remains at a relatively high level until the end of the ME period (average of 51.5%). These data and the observations related to PDE in examples (6) and (7) thus raise the following questions to which no answers have been given so far in the literature: Why was subject-verb inversion not lost in all contexts? Why was it maintained mainly with unaccusative verbs and *be*?

(III) If we now turn to column 4 of Table 1, we can observe that non-negligible frequencies of subject-verb inversion can be found with pronominal subjects in many ME texts. This phenomenon is illustrated in (8).

(8)   a.   [On þe same maner] **schalt** *þou* do wiþ þis lityl worde GOD.   (Cloud, 78.361)
              'You ought to do the same with this little word 'God'.
       b.   and [þe cherch of Lincoln] **gaue** *he* to Herry Beuforth…   (CapChr, 210.3756)
              'and he gave the church of Lincoln to Herry Beuforth…'
       c.   & [many tymes] **haue** *I* feryd þe wyth gret tempestys of wyndys
                                                                           (Kempe, 51.1160)
              'and I have frightened you many times with great tempests'
       d.   And [many mervayles] **shall** *he* do   (Malory, 47.1555)
              'And he shall do many marvels.'

Such orders were to a large extent ruled out in OE and EME. Thus, we find an increase with subject pronouns in the ME period that goes against the general trend of a decrease in inversion. The question that remains to be answered in this context is why subject-verb inversion emerged with pronominal subjects in ME.

(IV) Table 1 also shows that the frequencies of inversion vary considerably across texts. For example, while some texts in the period m3 have reached a PDE-like stage with hardly any inversion, others from the same period still have inversion rates of well over 50% even with transitive verbs. The final question that therefore arises is why authors vary so much in their use of subject-verb inversion in late ME.

4. ME SYNTAX AND LANGUAGE CONTACT

As pointed out earlier, issues (I) to (IV) have remained problematic in the literature so far. The goal of the remainder of this paper is to explore whether the hypothesis of influence on ME syntax through language contact could help us shed some light on these puzzles.

A contact scenario has already featured prominently in one of the recent analyses of the general development of the subject-verb inversion syntax in ME. Kroch and Taylor (1997) and Kroch, Taylor and Ringe (2000) indeed argue that the loss of productive subject-verb inversion in English is due to dialect contact between northern and southern varieties of English and that the variation between these dialects is ultimately the result of contact with Old Norse. It is well known that, following a major Scandinavian population influx into the north and east of England in the late OE period, English was substantially influenced by Old Norse. Clear evidence for this influence can be found for example in the (unusual) borrowing of functional items such as the third person plural pronouns *they/them/their*. Norse features must have first been introduced in the northern parts of England and then spread southwards through dialect contact. According to Kroch et al., such a development also accounts for the loss of productive subject-verb inversion in ME. They argue that the subject-verb inversion syntax in ME was not dialectally uniform and that the OE/EME inversion pattern described in section 2 above was in fact a southern feature whereas a regular V2 system (as in modern Germanic) was found in the north. The claim related to the northern variety is based on a text from 1400 (*The Northern Prose Rule of St Benet*) that exhibits systematic subject-verb inversion even with subject pronouns. As for the origin of this V2 syntax in the north, Kroch et al. relate it to imperfect second language learning by Scandinavians. Assuming a true V2 syntax for the north and the OE/EME type of syntax described in section 2 for the south,

contact between the two varieties during the ME period may then, according to Kroch et al., have had the following effects. In the north, the absence of inversion with subject pronouns in the speech of the southerners led northern speakers to postulate a (PDE) non-V2 grammar in addition to the V2 grammar. In the south, however, speakers postulated a V2 grammar in addition to the grammar with the OE/EME inversion patterns. We thus obtain a three-way grammar competition from which the PDE non-V2 grammar emerges as the winner.

According to Kroch et al.'s scenario, the PDE non-V2 grammar originated in the north and then spread southwards. Given that it is fairly uncontroversial that certain other features spread from the north to the south during the ME period, Kroch et al.'s proposal does not seem to be implausible. It is somewhat weakened, however, by the fact that the evidence for the systematic northern V2 grammar is based on one single text.[2] Furthermore, some questions arise as to exactly how the three-way grammar competition described above emerged and how it then led to the elimination of productive inversion as found in two out of these three grammars. Finally, a contact scenario may not be necessary since, as pointed out earlier, there are language-internal factors that can be argued to account for the loss of productive subject-verb inversion in the history of English (cf. e.g. Haeberli 2002b). However, a multi-causal account of these developments can of course not be ruled out. So let us assume that variation between the south and the north did indeed have an influence on the developments in the syntax of subject-verb inversion in ME. The question that arises then is whether such a hypothesis can shed any light on the issues raised in section 3.

Looking at Kroch et al.'s discussion, it would be conceivable that the dialect contact scenario can provide insights into issues (III) (inversion with subject pronouns) and (IV) (variation among texts). Kroch, Taylor and Ringe (2000:374ff.) compare two late ME manuscripts of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*, the Vernon manuscript, which is of southwestern origin, and the Thornton manuscript, which is of northern origin. They observe that neither of the two manuscripts exhibits the OE/EME inversion pattern featuring a general absence of inversion with subject pronouns or the systematic V2 grammar found with *The Northern Prose Rule of St Benet* (cf. also Table 1 above). Kroch, Taylor and Ringe interpret this finding as evidence for language mixture and propose that the occurrence of inversion with subject pronouns in the southern manuscript (Vernon) could be considered as a sign of northern influence. Hence the potential relevance of this proposal for issue (III). Furthermore, Kroch, Taylor and Ringe observe that the two manuscripts differ in their frequencies of inversion, with the northern manuscript having a substantially higher rate of inversion with pronominal subjects than the southern manuscript (+46% according to their data). This variation can be related to the fact that inversion with subject pronouns is originally a northern feature and hence still represented more strongly in northern late ME texts. Thus, Kroch et al.'s approach may also account for some of the variation across texts observed in question (IV).

Although these conclusions seem to be plausible at first sight, there is one aspect of the comparison of the two *Mirror of St. Edmund* manuscripts which does not fit easily into the picture. It is the fact that with full DP subjects, both manuscripts have similar and very high frequencies of inversion (around 80%). If the northern variety were more influenced by a systematic V2 grammar than the southern variety, we would expect the southern manuscript to have a lower rate of inversion with both subject pronouns and full DP subjects. But a contrast can only be observed with pronouns. Furthermore, as Table 1 shows, the high rate of inversion with full DP subjects in the Vernon manuscript is an unexpected property of a southern text in the period 1350-1420. All other texts have considerably lower figures at this

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[2] Note however that Kroch et al. provide some additional, although once again very limited, supporting evidence for distinctly northern word order patterns by making ingenious use of interlinear glosses from the OE period.

time. Hence, the evidence from the *Mirror of St. Edmund* manuscripts is not entirely clear-cut and must therefore be treated with caution.

The role of dialect variation in the ME development of inversion is further investigated by Warner (2005) in a study based on a number of texts of different dialectal origins. Warner observes that the frequency of inversion with pronominal subjects is somewhat higher in northern texts than in southern texts. However, the average percentage differences are not as high as in the comparison of the two *Mirror of St. Edmund* manuscripts and, once again, no obvious dialectal contrast seems to be found for inversion with full DP subjects.

In summary, although dialect variation may not be excluded as a factor involved in issues (III) and (IV), the evidence is not sufficiently clear-cut so as to settle (III) and (IV) on the basis of this hypothesis alone. Furthermore, dialect contact does not seem to contribute anything to a better understanding of issues (I) and (II). Let us therefore consider an alternative potential source of change, one that is of a similar nature as that proposed by Kroch et al. More specifically, the option that I would like to explore here is the potential effect of contact with French. Following the Norman Conquest, French established itself as an influential language in England and, due to the large number of lexical items of French origin that entered English during the ME period, the significant role French played in the development of the English language is uncontroversial. Borrowing of lexical items from French also had important consequences on morphology (new derivational morphemes) and phonology (changes in the stress pattern) (cf. e.g. Denison and Hogg 2006:17). However, as far as syntax is concerned, the contributions made by French seem less striking. Nevertheless, occasional references to French as the source of syntactic changes in ME can be found in the literature. For example, in Fischer's (1992) overview article of ME syntax, there are four indexed references to potential French influence. The contexts in which French influence is mentioned is the rise of *do* (1992:273), the development of the periphrastic genitive (1992:226), the temporary emergence of postnominal adjectives (1992:214), and the emergence of wh-relatives (1992:299ff.). One can also find reference to French influence in other contexts as for example the emergence of indirect objects introduced by *to* (Allen 2006:214/5). Furthermore, Ingham (2005) explores French influence on recessive features of ME syntax (including the one mentioned in issue (III) above).

From the point of view of their basic syntactic properties, interaction between the two languages would not be implausible. Old French (OF) was a rather systematic V2 language, but subject-verb inversion started being weakened in Middle French (MF) as shown by the increase in the frequency of 'XP-Subject-V…' orders in the 14th and 15th centuries (cf. e.g. Adams 1987, Roberts 1993, Vance 1997). Thus, in the area of the grammar and in the time period (i.e. late ME) that are relevant for our purposes, French is rather similar to English. Effects of contact with French may therefore not necessarily have led to major syntactic innovations that are as striking as the introduction of new lexical items. Instead they may have involved more subtle aspects of features that are already to some extent available in English.

From the point of view of the status of French in the relevant period (i.e. late ME), influence that goes beyond the lexicon would certainly be conceivable as well. For example Rothwell (1998) points out that "[t]he scribal class of medieval England, responsible in large measure for the enrichment of later Middle English, was in varying degrees a trilingual one". Transfer of syntactic features in the writing of such multilingual authors would not be entirely unexpected. The continued importance of French in late ME is also stressed by Kristol (2000:38/9):

> Even if some sources, in particular a passage from *Manière de langage* from 1396, affirm that French is still the language of refined conversation in certain circles of the English high society, … the linguistic situation in medieval England should without doubt be described as a code

diglossia: orality essentially belongs to English whereas French occupies an important part of written usage.[3]

More specifically with respect to syntax, Ingham (2005:22) speculates that "with late C14 English we may not be looking at the product of an organic development of English from EME onwards, but rather at the reflex of Anglo-Norman linguistic practices on which bilingual writers were calquing their English syntax".

Given these observations, it would in principle not be implausible that the four peculiarities of late ME syntax observed in section 3 can be related to contact with French. Note however that the types of influence that would be required for issues (I)/(II) on the one hand and issues (III)/(IV) on the other are not of exactly of the same nature. Thus, issues (III) and (IV) (variation among authors, increase of inversion with pronouns) could simply imply occasional influence on the writing of LME authors that may not have profoundly affected the grammar of English (creating what, in the context of subject-verb inversion, may look like vestiges of a more productive inversion grammar; cf. Ingham 2005). Issues (I) and (II) (inversion with 'then', differences with respect to verb types), however, would imply more substantial influence on the grammar of English, i.e. even in the long term (loss of an option in (I) or introduction/maintenance of an option in (II)).

In the next section, I will reconsider the four issues raised in section 3 and explore to what extent contact with French could have had an impact on these different aspects of late ME grammar.

5. EXPLORING FRENCH INFLUENCE AS POTENTIAL ANSWERS TO (I) TO (IV)

5.1. Why did *þa/þonne* ('then'), contrary to interrogative and negative elements, lose their ability to trigger systematic subject-verb/auxiliary inversion?

As pointed out in section 2, the adverbs *þa/þonne* ('then') systematically trigger subject-verb inversion with both full DP and pronominal subjects in OE (GV2, cf. example 2c). The later developments with respect to inversion with *þa/þonne* and their ME equivalents is shown in Table 2. Table 2 is based on the same ME texts as used for Table 1 and, in addition, includes the Early ME texts from the PPCME2 (period m1).

TABLE 2 *Inversion in main clauses with initial* then *in ME (same texts as in Table 1 + Early ME (m1))*

	Full DP subject	*Subject pronoun*
m1 (1150-1250)	**94.5%** (171/181)	**86.5%** (173/200)
m2 (1250-1350)	**100%** (3/3)	**71.4%** (5/7)
m2/4	**37.5%** (9/24)	**50.0%** (20/40)
m3 (1350-1420)	**36.8%** (127/345)	**42.9%** (146/340)
m3/4	**50.6%** (176/348)	**39.5%** (139/352)
m4 (1420-1500)	**30.4%** (219/720)	**30.2%** (191/632)

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[3] Même si certains témoignages, en particulier un passage de la *Manière de langage* de 1396, affirment que le français est toujours la langue de conversation soignée dans certains milieux de la bonne société anglaise, … la situation linguistique en Angleterre médiévale doit sans aucun doute être décrite comme une diglossie codique: l'oralité appartient essentiellement à l'anglais, alors que le français occupe une partie importante des usages écrits.

A minor decrease in inversion can already be observed in the ME period m1 as 13.5% of the clauses with a subject pronoun and 5.5% of those with a full DP subject exhibit non-inversion. By the end of 14th century, inversion has become a minority pattern, with frequencies that are similar to inversion in general in particular with full DP subjects. For example, if we consider inversion with all verbs in period m3 in Table 1, we obtain a frequency of 45.3% (1678/3708) whereas in Table 2 we have an even lower frequency of 36.8% in the same period. Inversion with pronominal subjects, however, is still more frequent with *then* in period m3 (42.9%) than with other clause-initial constituents (18.5% in Table 1).

Could the decline of inversion with *then* in ME be related to French influence? Various pieces of evidence suggest that such a scenario is possible. As pointed out by Ingham (2006a), subject-verb inversion in continental French (CF) seems to decline faster in contexts with an initial temporal adjunct than in other contexts. In support of this claim, Ingham gives the following frequencies for inversion with initial time adjunct in chronicles for three different periods: 1230-1275: 89%; 1290-1340: 30%; 1340-1400: 31%. This is in stark contrast with clauses with initial objects in the same texts. There, the rate of inversion is 100% in all periods. Ingham (2006b) makes very similar observations for chronicles written in Anglo-Norman (AN), i.e. the variety of French that should be even more revealing from the point of view contact scenarios with ME. On the basis of the data provided by Ingham for chronicles from the 2nd half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century (2006b:38-40), we obtain a frequency of inversion in clauses with an initial time adjunct and a full DP subject of 55.8% (with unaccusatives 69.6%, with verbs other than unaccusatives: 27.2%). This rate of inversion is again considerably lower than with initial objects (85.7%) or with initial place adjuncts (100%) in the same texts. Thus, both in CF and in AN, initial time adjuncts seem to be the weakest triggers of inversion in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Observations made by other authors point in the same direction. For example, with respect to a Middle French equivalent of *then*, Vance (1997) confirms that its capacity to trigger inversion was weakened early in Middle French. She notes that in the 15th century text *Saintré* "the monosyllabic adverb *lors*, one of the first elements to participate in CSV[4] in early MidF, has completely ceased to trigger inversion" (1997: 347).

More specifically in connection with French influence on English, we can also refer to Kroch and Taylor's (1997) study of inversion in the *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, a Kentish text from 1340 which is a fairly close translation of the French work *Somme le Roi*. Kroch and Taylor (1997:312) show that with clause-initial objects the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* behaves very much like OE and early ME: Inversion occurs in 82% of the clauses with a full DP subject and in 8% of the clauses with a subject pronoun. However, a completely different picture emerges for inversion with *then*. With full DP subjects the rate of inversion is as low as 25% and with pronominal subjects it is 58%. This deviation from the OE pattern is unexpected at first sight. However, the observations made in the previous paragraph and the fact that we are dealing with a translation from French make an explanation in terms of French influence very likely. The translation context may then simply be one manifestation of a more general effect of contact with French.

In summary, whereas in OE and early ME *then* distinguished itself from many other constituents in that it triggered systematic subject-verb inversion, CF and AN temporal adjuncts in the 13th and 14th centuries were distinctive in the opposite way as they were weaker triggers of inversion than other constituents. This salient property of temporal adjuncts in CF/AN could then be argued to have contributed to the decline in inversion with the temporal adjunct *then* in ME. It should also be pointed out that such CF/AN influence would have occurred within an ME context that seemed favourable to a weakening of inversion with *then*.

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[4] I.e. non-inverted order with some constituent C in a pre-subject position.

As mentioned in section 2, GV2 is also found in OE questions and negative clauses. It has therefore often been proposed that GV2 triggers can be unified by means of the semantic notion of operator. Thus, GV2 arises when an (overt or empty) operator occurs in clause-initial position. However, a temporal adverb like *then* does not form a natural class with operators, and it would therefore have had a marked status as a trigger of GV2 in OE and early ME. Thus, the elimination of *then* from GV2 contexts would have been a natural development from a purely language-internal point of view, but contact with French may have provided the necessary impetus to set this development in motion.

5.2. Why was subject-verb inversion not lost in all contexts? Why was it maintained mainly with unaccusative verbs and *be*?

As Table 1 shows, ME is a period during which we can observe a considerable decline in subject-verb inversion. It is important to point out, however, that the establishment of the inversion syntax as we know it from PDE continues in the Early Modern English period. There are indeed various types of inversion that can still regularly be found at the end of the ME period but are ungrammatical or very restricted in PDE. For example, the subject in passives often occurs post-participially, as shown in (9).

(9) a. [Than] *was mad* **pes** on þis maner …   (CapChr, 88.1704)
         'Then peace was made in this way…'
     b. and [with him] *was coroned* **Helianore, doutir to þe kyng of Spayn**
                                                              (CapChr, 127.2913)
         'and with him Eleonore, the daughter of the king of Spain, was crowned'

According to the data provided in Haeberli (2002c), full DP subjects occur with a frequency of over 13% in the post-participial position in main clauses during period m4 of the PPCME2 (1420-1500). In PDE such orders can be found only in very restricted contexts (e.g. locative inversion) and these restrictions must have been introduced in the modern period.

Although the developments in the subject-verb inversion syntax continue beyond the period during which French influence can plausibly be argued to be relevant, the emergence of some basic trends can nevertheless be situated within this period. In particular, as shown in Table 1, the loss of inversion with transitive verbs is in clear progress throughout the ME period, whereas we find stagnation with other verbs in the 14th and 15th centuries. The issue that arises therefore from the point of view of potential French influence is why the ME decrease in inversion affected transitive verbs much more than other verbs. Could French have contributed to such a distinction between verb types? A positive answer to this question cannot be entirely ruled out, but it seems somewhat less plausible than in the context discussed in the previous subsection.

Some support for the French influence hypothesis may be obtained from the observation made in the literature that a distinction with respect to verb type also played a certain role in French inversion in the relevant periods. For example, according to Vance (1995), there is a gradual increase in the proportion of passive and unaccusative verbs among the clauses with the order 'XP-verb-subject' from the early 13th century to the late 15th century. In other words, the frequency of inversion with transitive verbs seems to decline.[5] Furthermore, Ingham's

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[5] Note that the distinction of verb types made by Vance (and also by Ingham (2006b) discussed below) is not exactly the same one as ours in Table 1. Our distinction is between transitive verbs and all other verbs (i.e regular intransitive (i.e. unergative) verbs as well as unaccusatives) whereas the distinction made for French is between unaccusatives and all other verbs (i.e. unergatives and transitives). The reason why no attempt is made in Table 1 to isolate unaccusatives is that it is notoriously difficult to delimit this verb class precisely. For the purposes of

(2006b:38) data based on CF chronicles from 1250 to 1350 suggest that when inversion is optional it is slightly favoured with unaccusative verbs. Thus, in clauses with an initial time adjunct and a full DP subject, we find a frequency of 74.5% (143/192) inversion with unaccusatives as opposed to 61.0% (130/213) with other verbs. As for AN chronicles from the same period (1250-1350), Ingham's (2006b:38) figures indicate an even stronger contrast between verb types. Whereas inversion in clauses with an initial time adjunct occurs at a rate of 69.6 (243/349) with unaccusative verbs, the corresponding frequency for other verbs is 27.2% (46/169).

Although verb type seems to play a role in the subject-verb inversion syntax in French, it is nevertheless doubtful whether this role was strong enough to influence ME. The data given by Ingham (2006b) concern only a very specific context, namely clauses with initial time adjuncts. In other types of clauses, the syntax of inversion in 13th and 14th century CF/AN is, as Ingham's (2006b:39/40) other data show, still very robust regardless of verb type. Even in the 15th century, inversion with full DP subjects remains fairly productive, as Vance's (1997:350) frequencies of inversion ranging from 50% to 73% suggest (cf. Table 3 in the next subsection for details). Furthermore, Vance's (1995) data show that the increase in the proportion of unaccusatives in clauses with inversion is most striking in the 15th century, with frequencies rising from around 50% in the 13th and 14th centuries (*Queste* (1220) 49%; *Joinville* (1306) 56%) to around 70% in the 15th century (*Saintré* (1456) 69%; *Commynes* (1491) 78%). What these data suggest is that, although there is a development towards favouring subject-verb inversion with some verbs and disfavouring it with others in medieval French, the development may not be sufficiently advanced at what seems to be the latest relevant period for influence on ME syntax (i.e. before the 15th century). As a matter of fact, Ingham's (2006b) comparison of CF and AN discussed in the previous paragraph may even suggest the opposite scenario. The contrast in inversion between unaccusatives and other verbs is stronger in AN (69.6% vs. 27.2%) than in CF (74.5% vs. 61.0%). So one might wonder whether it was not rather ME that influenced French, as shown by the lower inversion rate with verbs other than unaccusatives in AN, rather than the other way round.

In conclusion, chronologically French seems to be lagging behind the developments in English with respect to the loss of subject-verb inversion. It therefore seems to be a rather unlikely source directing English towards a system in which inversion is ruled out with transitive verbs but survives with other verbs, in particular unaccusatives and *be*. A different explanation has thus to be found for this development. One possibility is that there are two fundamentally different ways to derive subject-verb inversion in OE already, and only one of them is lost in ME (i.e. Germanic inversion, but not a kind of "free" (Romance) inversion). But the question remains as to exactly how and why those cases of inversion survived that we now have in PDE.

5.3. Why did subject-verb inversion with subject pronouns emerge in the ME period?

As shown in Table 1, cases of subject-verb inversion with pronominal subjects can regularly be found in ME texts although this option is generally ruled out in OE. This is a surprising development given that the ME trend is towards eliminating inversion rather than towards increasing it. Compared to the issue I examined in the previous subsection, this particular puzzle seems to be more amenable to an explanation in terms of French influence again. Consider for example the following quantitative data on subject-verb inversion in OF and MF provided by Vance (1997:350).

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comparing the data, we will assume that figures for verbs other than unaccusatives in the French data reflect trends for transitive verbs even though they also include unergatives.

TABLE 3 *Main clauses with an initial constituent preceding subjects in OF/MF texts*

	Inversion with a pronominal SU	*Inversion with a full DP SU*
Queste (1225)	97.0% (97/100)	96.8% (122/126)
Joinville (1306)	58.5% (24/41)	79.4% (50/63)
Froissart (c. 1375)	36.6% (15/41)	73.3% (33/45)
Quinze Joies (1420)	37.8% (17/45)	67.5% (27/40)
Jehan de Saintré (1456)	24.3% (9/37)	50.0% (30/60)
Commynes (1491)	18.3% (11/60)	73.4% (80/109)

Although there is a decrease in inversion with subject pronouns in the 14th century which is much more substantial than with full DP subjects, the frequencies remain high (i.e. higher than in almost all ME texts).

These observations are to a large extent confirmed by Ingham's (2006b) CF and AN chronicle data from 1250-1350. In CF, subject-verb inversion with a pronominal subject is entirely productive, with a rate of inversion of 61.9% (13/21) with an initial object and of 10.6% (5/47) with initial time adjuncts (the latter context being less favourable to inversion in general, cf. section 5.1 above). In AN, inversion with pronominal subjects occurs even more robustly. All clauses with an initial object feature inversion (20/20), and among clauses with an initial time adjunct 60.6% (20/33) invert the verb and the subject pronoun.

In summary, we can find entirely productive subject-verb inversion with pronominal subjects throughout OF and MF, and in particular also in 13th and 14th century AN. The innovative ME inversion word order with subject pronouns could therefore clearly have been calqued on CF/AN usage.

Although such an account would seem plausible, other factors cannot be entirely excluded as elements contributing to the temporary rise of subject-verb inversion with pronominal subjects. As discussed in section 4, dialect contact emerges as a potential factor from the observations made by Kroch and Taylor (1997) and Kroch, Taylor and Ringe (2000). Furthermore, language-internal factors may also have played a role. Within the analysis of the decline of inversion in ME outlined in Haeberli (2002b), I propose that the rise observed with subject pronouns was a side effect of a more general attempt by language learners to accommodate inversion patterns in the input that could no longer be derived in the way they used to be derived in OE/EME (2002b:104). More precisely, it is proposed that this situation led language learners to temporarily postulate V-to-C movement as an option and that this option then also derived inversion with subject pronouns.

5.4. Why do authors vary so much in their use of subject-verb inversion?

Turning finally to the variation across authors observed in Table 1, French once again seems to be a plausible source of explanation for certain patterns. In this case both the presence and the absence of French influence may be relevant, the former as a factor favouring inversion and the latter as a factor disfavouring inversion. Consider for example the data given for period m3 (1350-1420) in Table 1, repeated here in Table 4.

TABLE 4 *Main clauses with an initial constituent (except question words, negation, 'then')*
preceding subjects in ME texts from 1350-1420

text (date)	Inversion with transitive V and full DP subject	Inversion with other V and full DP subject	Inversion with pronominal subject
M3 (1350-1420)			
Old Testament (a1425 (a1382))	**0.0%** (0/28)	**3.0%** (2/66)	**2.1%** (1/47)
New Testament (c1388)	**0.0%** (0/19)	**10.2%** (9/88)	**0.0%** (0/103)
Purvey, Prologue to the Bible (c1388)	**1.1%** (2/181)	**20.8%** (44/212)	**0.0%** (0/25)
Trevisa, Polychronicon (a1387)	**2.6%** (5/190)	**25.6%** (124/485)	**0.0%** (0/48)
Wycliffite Sermons (c1400)	**44.1%** (126/286)	**40.5%** (161/398)	**15.1%** (13/86)
Brut/Chronicles of England (c1400)	**22.0%** (22/100)	**68.0%** (198/291)	**7.1%** (6/85)
Mandeville's Travels (?a1425 (c1400))	**34.0%** (55/162)	**80.0%** (431/539)	**3.1%** (1/32)
Chaucer (Boethius, Melibee, Parson, Astrolabe; c1380/1390)	**71.0%** (76/107)	**73.6%** (265/360)	**50.0%** (95/190)
Cloud of Unknowing (a1425 (?a1400))	**50.0%** (6/12)	**78.0%** (64/82)	**19.9%** (42/211)
Mirror of St. Edmund, ms. Vernon (c1390)	**80.6%** (29/36)	**89.4%** (59/66)	**15.4%** (23/149)
TOTAL m3	**28.6%** (321/1121)	**52.5%** (1357/2587)	**18.5%** (181/976)

As Table 4 shows, the frequencies of inversion are particularly low in the translations of the Old and the New Testament, in Purvey's *Prologue to the Bible*, and in Trevisa's *Polychronicon*. In clauses with a transitive verb and a full DP subject and in clauses with a subject pronoun, the rates of inversion are 0% or very close to 0%. Regular occurrences of inversion can only be found with full DP subjects and intransitive/unaccusative verbs. In other words, the pattern of inversion in these four texts is very close to that found in PDE. This is strikingly different from the other texts included in Table 4, which still have frequent occurrences of inversion in any type of context.

The question that arises then is why the four texts mentioned above should be so much more advanced in the loss of subject-verb inversion than the others? The bible translations referred to in Table 4 are the late versions of the Wycliffite Bible. This revision is often assumed to have been led or possibly even done by John Purvey, the author of the third text sample with a low frequency of inversion (*Prologue to the Bible*). Thus, three out of the four texts with a low rate of inversion can be attributed to Wyclif and his followers, and maybe more specifically to John Purvey. In this connection, the following observations by Berndt (1972) seem relevant for our purposes.

> Growing vernacular-consciousness and a more critical attitude towards customs and conventions favouring the use of French for specific purposes or on special occasions … are not only reflected in the writings of Higden, Holkot or Pseudo-Ingulph. … Scarcely different in essence are utterances to be found in the works of Wyclif and his followers in the later fourteenth century who passionately defend the use of English in religious writings (*Angli debent de racione in isto defendere lingwam suam*) and, in pointing out the right of Englishmen to have the Holy Scriptures translated into English, declare that … *Crist tau¥te his disciples oute þis prayer; but be þou syker, noþer in Latyn, noþer in Frensche, but in þe langage þat þey usede to speke, for þat þey knewe best.* (1972:348)

Given this context, it would be plausible to argue that Wyclif and his followers' writings reflect a variety of English that is close to the vernacular and that disfavours the use of features transferred from French. One consequence of this could be the avoidance of

inversion patterns that may have become obsolete in the vernacular but are maintained through French influence.

Let us then turn to the fourth text with a particularly low rate of inversion in Table 4, John Trevisa's translation of Ralph Higden's Latin text *Polychronicon*. There are two elements that can be mentioned as possible explanations as to why this text patterns with the Wyclif texts. First, it has been suggested that Trevisa was influenced by Wyclif. Thus, Fowler (1993) repeatedly links Trevisa to Wyclif, as the following citations show:

It is, however, possible to argue that Trevisa was influenced by Wyclif. … Wyclif's 'favorite historian' was Higden; Trevisa translated Higden's *Polychronicon*. … (1993:5)
As a whole, however, the list is not inconsistent with Caxton's statement that Trevisa translated the Bible, and the thesis that he worked with John Wyclif … on a translation of the Bible during the 1370s. (1993:17)
Moreover, Trevisa unmistakably if obliquely defends the translation of scripture in his 'Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk upon Translation', prefixed to the translation of the *Polychronicon* (1387). A similar defence, in almost the same words, recurs in the preface to the later version of the Wycliffite Bible itself. (1993:18)

According to these observations, Trevisa might be included in the account given above in terms of attitudes to the vernacular among Wyclif and his followers.

But there may be another source of influence on Trevisa in language matters and that is the author of the work he translated, Ralph Higden. Thus, Berndt (1972:348) points out that Higden was opposed to "not only the use of French in this country but also the use of French elements in English itself, the tendency of even the common people to 'frenchify (*francigenare*)' their language, which he, like others of his contemporaries, considers a 'corruption of the native tongue (*nativae linguae corruptio*)'".

Given the above observations, absence of inversion in certain late 14th century texts may be due to the authors' attempts to favour the vernacular and resist external influences like those exerted by French. However, there is one text whose syntactic properties do not quite fit into what I have proposed in the previous paragraphs. The *Wycliffite Sermons* show a relatively high frequency of subject-verb inversion even with transitive verbs (44.1%) and a slightly lower but still substantial rate with subject pronouns (15.1%). This is unexpected if inversion was indeed a residual pattern maintained through French influence in late ME and if such influence was disfavoured among Wycliff and his followers. At present, I can only mention one feature of the *Wycliffite Sermons* that may be relevant for an explanation of its unexpected syntactic behaviour. Warner (1982:18) points out that the *Wycliffite Sermons* "represent a variety of English which has been influenced by contact with Latin". This suggests that the *Wycliffite Sermons* may not reflect vernacular usage to the same extent as other texts we have considered. However, the high frequency of inversion could not be straightforwardly accounted for in terms of Warner's (1982) observation because Latin is not known to have productive V2.

In contrast to the texts discussed so far, we can also find texts with rather high frequencies of inversion in the period 1350-1420. *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, *Mandeville's Travels*, Chaucer's prose texts, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Mirror of St. Edmund (ms. Vernon)* have frequencies of inversion ranging from 22.0% to 80.6% with transitive verbs, from 68.0% to 89.4% with verbs other than transitives and from 3.1% to 50.0% with subject pronouns. French seems a plausible source of influence for at least some of these texts. Thus, the first part of *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, from which the PPCME2 sample is taken, is a translation of the French *Brut d'Engleterre* (cf. Kroch and Taylor 2000). Similarly *Mandeville's Travels* is an anonymous translation of a French work. French inversion patterns may therefore have been transferred to the English translation.

However, while the frequencies of inversion with transitive verbs (22% and 34% respectively) and other verbs (68% and 80%) are rather high in these two texts, the French influence does not seem to be sufficiently strong to lead to high frequencies of inversion with subject pronouns (7.1% and 3.1%).[6] Furthermore, with respect to *Mandeville's Travels*, Kroch and Taylor (2000) point out that "[t]he translator writes very good English, but often misunderstands the French text". Although this observation suggests that we are not dealing with a proficient bilingual here, it does not entirely exclude the possibility of French interference in the translation. But a detailed comparison of the French sources and the English texts may be needed to shed more light on the extent to which the inversion patterns found in English are influenced by those found in French. I will have to leave this for future research.

French influence can also be argued to play a role in Chaucer's writing. As is well known, Chaucer had close links to France and French. He had French family connections and spent time in France on government business (cf. e.g. Benson 1987a). Furthermore, as pointed out by Rothwell (1998), "[i]t must not be forgotten that Chaucer the administrator was in contact with both Anglo-French and Anglo-Latin for many years in his varied daily work …". Finally, among the prose texts considered in Table 4, we find one translation (*Melibee*) and two texts (*The Parson's Tale* and *Boethius*) for the writing of which French sources were probably also used (cf. Benson 1987b, Hanna and Lawler 1987). Thus, it would not be implausible to assume that French influence contributed to the strikingly high frequencies of subject-verb inversion in any context in Chaucer's work (frequencies of 71% (transitive), 73.6% (other), 50% (subject pronouns).

An alternative or complementary account of Chaucer's frequent use of subject-verb inversion is briefly suggested by Kroch and Taylor (1997:324, fn. 16). Based on their claim, mentioned in section 4, that subject-verb inversion was more systematic in northern varieties of English than in the south, they propose that "Chaucer's syntax may be of a piece with his East Midlands phonology, since the East Midlands were part of the Danelaw" and that "[h]is language may, therefore, indicate a certain conservative regionalism compared to the developing London standard". However, as observed in section 4, the dialectal contrasts with respect to inversion in ME are not as clear-cut as one might wish, and it may therefore not be sufficient to relate Chaucer's use of inversion entirely to his dialectal origin. French influence could therefore still be considered at least as a factor reinforcing the use of inversion.

Having considered cases in which resistance to French or contact with French can be argued to play a role in the absence or presence of inversion, let us conclude this section by pointing out that some of the variation observed across different texts cannot easily be related to French in any way. Thus, for example the two remaining texts from Table 4, *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Mirror of St. Edmund (ms. Vernon)*, have very high rates of inversion (50% - 78% - 19.9% for the *Cloud* and 80.6% - 89.4% - 15.4% for the *Mirror*) but they do not have any obvious links to French. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is assumed to be a text of central north-east Midlands origin and could therefore be argued to be accounted for in terms of Kroch et al.'s hypothesis of northern influence. The Vernon manuscript of the *Mirror of St. Edmund*, however, is of southern provenance and it is therefore also problematic for the dialect contact hypothesis (cf. also section 4). This text is a translation from Latin, but as pointed out above already in connection with the *Wycliffite Sermons*, it is not clear how Latin could have influenced the use of subject-verb inversion. Some aspects of the variation in inversion in ME texts therefore remain to be investigated in future work.

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[6] This is somewhat different in a text from the period 1420-1500 that can also be linked to French sources. In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the frequency of inversion with subject pronouns is almost identical to that with transitive verbs (12.9% vs. 14.9%).

5. The *et* V construction

In the previous sections, I discussed issues related to the syntax of subject-verb inversion in ME and the way in which French may have contributed to the loss of some option (systematic inversion with 'then'), the retention of some option (inversion with unaccusatives), and the extension of some option (inversion extended to subject pronouns). If contact with French had had a very strong influence on syntactic features of late ME texts, one could potentially also expect to find instances where French introduced an entirely new option. We should therefore consider constructions that are licensed in Old and Middle French but not (or only very marginally) in OE and EME and see whether this construction emerges (or increases in frequency) in later ME.

A case in point would be the so-called '*et* V' construction, a cross-linguistically unusual construction commonly found in MF and to some extent also in OF. In this construction, illustrated in (10), subject-verb inversion occurs right after *et* ('and') in clauses with full DP subjects (example from Vance 1997:48).

(10)   et **dona** *li quens* bone seurté que ja mes nel guerroieroit.
                                        (*La Queste del Saint Graal* 120,21)
          And gave the queen good assurance that never NEG-him would-wage-war
          'And the queen gave good assurance that she would never wage war with him.'

This construction is not characteristic for OE[7], so if French influence on ME syntax was very strong, one might expect '*et* V' to be transferred with a certain frequency to ME.

This expectation does not seem to be borne out. Out of around 7'200 non-negative conjoined main clauses with a DP subject in the texts shown in Table 1, only 43 (0.6%) show the order '*and* V'. Thus, '*and* V' looks like a very marginal construction in late ME. We can even observe a weakening of this word order option in the ME period, as its frequency was higher in early ME (60 out of around 1400 clauses (4.3%)). Thus, the conclusion seems to be that French influence was not strong enough to establish '*and* V' as a type of inversion used in ME with a certain regularity.

However, some additional observations should be made in this connection. Although the '*et* V' construction was a common construction in CF, it was much less so in AN. In the CF texts from 1250 to 1350 examined by Ingham (2006b), inversion occurs in 63.5% (66/104) of all clauses introduced by *et* and containing an unaccusative verb and in 38.1% (40/105) of the clauses with other verbs. In AN texts from the same period, Ingham (2006b) finds much lower frequencies of inversion. With unaccusative verbs, the rate of inversion is 20.1% (29/144) whereas with other verbs, clauses introduced by *et* are never inverted (0/109). The overall frequency of inversion in AN is thus only 11.5%, compared to 50.7% in CF. Hence, assuming that the main source of influence on ME was AN rather than CF, the rarity of '*and* V' in ME is less surprising. This construction may not have been sufficiently salient in AN for writers to transfer it to ME. The '*et* V' construction is therefore not as useful as expected as a testing ground for establishing the level of French influence on late ME syntax. At present, it is not clear whether any other construction could be considered that would allow us to see whether French influence was sufficiently strong as to lead to the emergence of some new option in the clausal syntax of late ME writers.

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[7] Cases of subject-verb inversion in the absence of a clause-initial constituent (i.e. verb first, V1) do occur in OE declarative clauses, most frequently when the verb is negative. However, this option is independent of the presence of the presence of a conjunction.

6. Conclusion

Starting from the observation that the development of the syntax of subject-verb inversion in the ME period shows some unexpected features, I examined the hypothesis that these features could be accounted for in terms of language contact within the context of the multilingual situation found in ME and more particularly in terms of contact with French. The discussion has shown that French influence on late ME syntax is plausible as a factor contributing to: (i) the loss of *then* as a distinctive trigger for inversion; (ii) the temporary increase of inversion with subject pronouns; (iii) variation among different ME texts. However, French influence seems at best a minor factor in the preservation of inversion in some very restricted contexts. Due to the fact that information on the exact sociolinguistic context in general and more specifically on the context in which individual texts were written is sparse, contact analyses are difficult to establish conclusively for developments occurring in medieval languages. However, to account for three out of the four syntactic issues addressed here, French influence seems as likely a hypothesis as others that have been proposed in the literature.

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