

INVESTIGATING ANGLO-NORMAN INFLUENCE ON LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH SYNTAX¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on some word order developments in the Middle English (ME) period and explores the question whether these developments might have been influenced by contact with Anglo-Norman and/or continental French. The issues to be considered are related to what has generally been referred to (somewhat misleadingly) as the Verb Second (V2) phenomenon. As extensively discussed in the literature, Old English (OE) exhibits frequent subject-verb inversion when a non-subject is in clause-initial position. Such word orders are reminiscent of the V2 phenomenon as found in all the modern Germanic languages with the exception of present-day English. In the Middle English period, the OE subject-verb inversion syntax is lost to a large extent, but the development exhibits certain peculiarities that have remained unexplained. The aim of this article is to consider whether some or all of these peculiarities could be related to Anglo-Norman/French influence.

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

2. SUBJECT-VERB INVERSION IN OLD AND EARLY MIDDLE 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.² 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.

In OE and Early Middle English (EME), 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).

- (1) a. [ðæt] **wat** *ælc mon* (Boethius, 36.107.17)
that knows every man
'Everyone knows that.'
- b. And [egeslice] **spæc** *Gregorius* be ðam ... (Wulfstan, 202.46)
And sternly spoke Gregorius about that
'And Gregorius spoke sternly about that ...'

¹ I would like to thank the participants in the Workshop on Anglo-Norman and Middle English held at the University of Central England, Birmingham, for comments and discussion. Special thanks go to Richard Ingham for suggestions that made me explore the issues presented in this paper.

² 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 (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 and EME does not fully correspond to that found in genuine V2 languages. In particular, there are two ways in which OE/EME differ from a typical V2 system. First, a distinction between pronominal and full NP subjects has to be made in OE/EME as inversion is possible with full NP 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). The second property that distinguishes OE/EME from typical V2 languages is the fact that even with full NP subjects inversion is not systematic, as example (2d) illustrates.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|--|----------|--------------------|
| (2) | a. | [þæt] [þu] meaht swiðe sweotole ongitan
<i>that you can very easily understand</i> | (XSV...) | (Boethius, 88.14) |
| | b. | [hwi] sceole we opres mannes niman
<i>why should we another man's take</i>
'Why should we take those of another man?' | (XVS...) | (ÆLS 24.188) |
| | c. | [ða] aras he hal & gesund.
<i>then arose he uninjured and healthy</i>
'Then he got up uninjured.' | (XVS...) | (Bede 4:32.380) |
| | d. | [ðone] <i>Denisca leoda</i> lufiað swyðost
<i>that Danish people love most</i>
'The Danish people love that one most' | (XSV) | (Wulfstan, 223.54) |

The above observations are confirmed by quantitative evidence based on ten OE text samples from *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (henceforth YCOE; Taylor et al. 2003). 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. In the same kind of context, non-pronominal subjects invert with the finite verb in 75.3% (1437/1909) of the cases found in another sample taken from the YCOE. Non-V2 orders of the type shown in (2d) therefore occur with a non-negligible frequency of about 25%. Finally, it should be pointed out that the above quantitative observations also hold to a large extent for EME (cf. Kroch & Taylor 1997).

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

After the EME period, the OE/EME subject-verb inversion syntax starts being lost. 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 (Scandinavian/northern English); cf. e.g. Kroch and Taylor 1997, Kroch, Taylor and Ringe 2000) to internal ones (e.g. loss of empty expletive subjects; Haeberli 2002b). It would go beyond the scope of this paper to review these proposals in detail. What is essential for our purposes is that there are at least four aspects of the development of subject-verb inversion in ME that remain difficult to explain in terms of any of the accounts proposed so far. These four aspects 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 any more 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, their descendants do not do so any more 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 (3) (from Bresnan 1994:78, Schmidt 1981:6/8/9, Stockwell 1984:581).
- (3) 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 (3a/b) and with main verbs (typically unaccusatives) in some very restricted contexts (e.g. locative inversion (3c/d), with certain clause-initial adjuncts (3e-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 (4), inversion with transitive verbs and inversion of the type “Auxiliary-Subject-Verb” are now entirely ungrammatical in PDE while they systematically occurred in OE/EME.

- (4) 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 1350 to 1500*

<i>text (date)</i>	<i>Inversion with transitive V and full NP subject</i>	<i>Inversion with other V and full NP subject</i>	<i>Inversion with pronominal subject</i>
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)	73.7% (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)	2.7% (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)	80.1% (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)	12.7% (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% (27/27)	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% at the end of 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 (3) and (4) 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 (5).

- (5) a. [On þe same maner] **schalt** þou do wiþ þis lityl worde GOD. (Cloud, 78.323)
 b. and [þe cherch of Lincoln] **gaue** he to Herry Beuforth... (Capgrave, 210.11)
 c. & [many tymes] **haue** I feryd þe wyth gret tempestys of wyndys (Kempe, I, 51.110)
 d. And [many mervayles] **shall** he do (Malory, 47.79)
 e. [þis question] **wolde** I knowe of you (Private Letters, Mull, I, 126.623)

Such orders were to a large extent ruled out in OE. 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. EXPLORING ANGLO-NORMAN INFLUENCE AS POTENTIAL ANSWERS TO (I) TO (IV)

As pointed out earlier, there have been generally no conclusive answers to the questions raised in (I) to (IV) in the literature so far. The goal of the remainder of this paper is to explore whether Anglo-Norman/French influence on ME syntax could help us to account for these puzzles. But before considering each specific issue from this perspective, let us start by making some general observations.

First, if we look at the literature on ME, we notice that, in stark contrast with the developments in the lexicon, contact with French has generally not been considered as a very important factor in the development of ME syntax. For example, in Fischer's (1992) overview article of ME syntax, there are only 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.). However, one can also occasionally 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, ME underwent changes that are rather similar to those found in

French. Furthermore, from the point of view of the status of French in 14th century England, substantial 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 unexpected. The continued importance of French in late ME is also stressed by Kristol (2000:38/9):

“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.”³

And 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 are 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 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)).

4.1. (I) 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 NP 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))*

	<i>Full NP subject</i>	<i>Subject pronoun</i>
<i>m1 (1150-1250)</i>	94.5% (171/181)	86.5% (173/200)
<i>m2 (1250-1350)</i>	100% (3/3)	71.4% (5/7)
<i>m24</i>	37.5% (9/24)	50.0% (20/40)
<i>m3 (1350-1420)</i>	36.8% (127/345)	42.9% (146/340)
<i>m34</i>	50.6% (176/348)	39.5% (139/352)
<i>m4 (1420-1500)</i>	30.4% (219/720)	30.2% (191/632)

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 NP subject exhibit non-inversion. By the end of 14th century, inversion has become a minority pattern, with frequencies that are similar to

³ 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.

inversion in general in particular with full NP 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 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 NP 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 CSV⁴ 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 Inwit*, 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 Inwit* behaves very much like OE and early ME: Inversion occurs in 82% of the clauses with a full NP subject and in 8% of the clauses with a subject pronoun. However, a completely different picture emerges for inversion with *then*. With full NP 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 distinctive 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*. 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.

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

4.2. (II) 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 (6).

- (6) a. [Than] *was mad* **pes** on þis maner þat ... (CapChr, 88.1704)
b. and [with him] *was coroned Helianore, doutir to þe kyng of Spayn* (CapChr, 127.2913)

According to the data provided in Haeberli (2002c), full NP 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 (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, we find a frequency of 74.5% (143/182) 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 69.9% (243/349) with unaccusative verbs, the corresponding frequency for other verbs is 30.4% (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 so as 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,

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 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.

inversion with full NP subjects remains fairly productive, as Vance's (1997:350) frequencies of inversion ranging from 50% to 73% suggest (cf. Table 3 in the next section 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 unaccusative verbs and other verbs is stronger in AN (69.9% vs. 30.4%) 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.

4.3. (III) Why did subject-verb inversion with pronominal subjects 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).

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

	<i>Inversion with a pronominal SU</i>	<i>Inversion with a full NP SU</i>
Queste (1225)	97% (97/100)	98% (122/126)
Joinville (1306)	59% (24/41)	79% (50/63)
Froissart (c. 1375)	37% (15/41)	73% (33/45)
Quinze Joies (1420)	38% (17/45)	68% (27/40)
Jehan de Saintré (1456)	24% (9/37)	50% (30/60)
Commynes (1491)	15% (11/60)	73% (80/109)

Although there is a decrease in inversion with subject pronouns in the 14th century which is much more substantial than with full NP 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 4.1 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. Thus, Kroch et al. (2000) argue that dialectal variation may have had an influence on the development of inversion in ME. This proposal is based on the hypothesis that, due to Scandinavian influence, a more systematic V2 syntax that featured inversion with both full NP subjects as well as pronominal subjects developed in the north and that properties of this northern grammar spread southwards through dialect contact. The evidence for Kroch et al.'s hypothesis is rather limited (a single text from the north with systematic V2), but some support for a dialectal component in the ME developments in inversion comes from Warner's (2005) observation that the frequency of inversion with pronominal subjects is indeed somewhat higher in northern texts than in southern texts.⁶ Finally, language-internal factors may also have played a role. Within the analysis of the decline of inversion in ME outlined in Haerberli (2002b), it is proposed that the rise observed with subject pronouns is a side effect of a more general attempt by language learners to accommodate inversion patterns in the input that could no longer be derived (2002b:104).

4.4. (IV) 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*

<i>text (date)</i>	<i>Inversion with transitive V and full NP subject</i>	<i>Inversion with other V and full NP subject</i>	<i>Inversion with pronominal subject</i>
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)	2.7% (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)	80.1% (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)

⁶ However, contrary to what one might expect, no obvious dialectal contrast seems to be found for inversion with full NP subjects.

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 NP 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 NP 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 tauZte 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 disfavors 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 Sermon* 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 80.1%) 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%).⁷ 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 already in section 4.3, 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

⁷ 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%).

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 mentioned in section 4.3 (cf. footnote 6), 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 *Mirror* 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.

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 early ME 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 (7), subject-verb inversion occurs right after *et* ('and') in clauses with full NP subjects (example from Vance 1997:48).

- (7) *et dona li quens bone seurté que ja mes nel guerroiéroit. (La Queste sel 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 OE⁸, so if French influence on ME syntax was important, 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 an NP subject in the texts shown in Table 1, only 43 (0.5%) 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

⁸ 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.

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.

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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