

Interpreting the Sociolinguistics of DO NOT in the 16th and 17th Century.

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In earlier English there is a long period of competition between the types of (1) and (2) as the use of finite DO in questions and negative declaratives replaces the use of the simple finite verb, see in particular the discussion of Kroch 1989.

- (1) she does not deserve it, ... (317-4)
why do I spend my time in tittle-tattle with this idle fellow? (215-8)
- (2) I question not your friendship in the matter, ... (291-23)
Well, madam, how like you it, madam, ha? (301-13)
Thomas Otway, *Friendship in Fashion* 1677

An interesting problem emerges from the figures underlying Ellegård's major study (1953): the relative levels of DO in questions and negative declaratives differ dramatically in different periods. Before 1575 negative declaratives are 25 years behind questions in their adoption of DO. After 1600 they lag by over a century. The transition involves a very rapid decline in the proportion of DO in negative declaratives from 38% in 1550-75 to 24% in 1575-1600. How can we account for this? The problem is of particular interest because the drop coincides with the period when Kroch 1989 identified a change in English grammar involving DO (see also Roberts 1985, 1993). However, although a grammatically based account of the difference of level between questions and negative declaratives in the 16th century is proposed in Han 2001, Han and Kroch 2000, Han notes that the sudden drop in DO forms remains an outstanding question (2001: 294).

I shall show that both the drop in DO in negative declaratives and its continuing low level is to be explained in large part not as a grammatical but as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. My data is a reconstitution of Ellegård's data base of English plays and prose 1500-1710.

An examination of DO in respect of stylistic variation and age grading in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will show major differences. I shall claim that the seventeenth century situation is comprehensible if DO NOT suffers hostile evaluation at that period, and that this can be held to account for a substantial amount of the difference between questions and negative declaratives in the recorded data.

In conclusion, I use regression techniques applied to information about the internal properties of texts and the ages of their authors to argue for a sociolinguistic interpretation of two major puzzling features of the history of DO NOT, thus altering the evidential base for historical syntax.

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