Towards a parameter hierarchy for verb-movement: diachronic considerations

Ian Roberts
Downing College, University of Cambridge

This talk has three parts. The first part reviews the well-known evidence that the "V-to-T" parameter changed its value in Early Modern English, drawing largely on the evidence and chronology in Warner (1997). The second part attempts to situate this well-known parameter in the theory of parameter hierarchies of Roberts (2011). In these terms, V-movement options are part of the parameter hierarchy which regulates word structure. This hierarchy is given in rough form in (1):

(1)Do all probes trigger head-movement?
r u

Y: **polysynthesis** Do some probes trigger head-movement?
r u

N: **analytic** Y: do all lexical categories move?
r u

Y: ? N:V-movement?
r u

Y: thru EP(V) N: N-mvt?
r u *(N-mvt parameters)*

Y: **(symmetric)V2** N: V/aux-mvt thru part of EP(V)?
r u r u

(other V2-related p's) N: V-to-T? N: SVCs (b)
r u

Y: **French,ENE** N: Aux(v)-to-T?
r u

Y: V-to-v? N: (a)
r u

Y: **NE** N: ?

True macroparameters sit at the top of the network, as here all parametrised heads behave as one. As we move successively down, parameters become more "micro", behaving in a non-uniform, differentiated fashion which is inherently more complex than the systems defined higher in the tree (we see in (1) that the options move from referring to all probes to referring to some probes, to referring to movement of all lexical categories, then V and then aux), and the options have a longer description (the conjunction of all the "dominating nodes" in the hierarchy). Concerning change, assuming that language change is driven by language acquisition (see Lightfoot 1979), we predict that, since acquisition "moves down" the hierarchy, changes will tend to "move up", all other things being equal. Of course, all other things are not quite equal, for at least two reasons: first, since higher positions are more typologically distant, and lower positions closer (since they are distinguished just microparametrically), diachronic movement among higher positions is more difficult than among lower ones; second, because local simplification can lead to global complexity. If (1) is correct, the loss of V-to-T in ENE illustrates this second point, in that it was a move to a relatively more marked grammatical system. The reason for this has to do with the split that emerged in the 16th century between auxiliaries and main verbs regarding V-to-T, which was caused by the grammaticalisation of the auxiliaries, which was in turn a local simplification involving a category change affecting certain former lexical verbs (see Roberts & Roussou 2003).

The obvious gain in markedness arises where all verbs fail to move at all, as can clearly be seen in (1). The third part of the talk will investigate varieties of English where this has happened. A variety at position (a) in the hierarchy has no verb movement and no aux-movement to T (possibly *do*-support applies to all types of *have* and *be*, or inversion is lost and negation expressed without *do*): these may include some kinds of AAVE. At position (b) there is no verb-movement and no distinction between auxiliaries and verbs. This may facilitate serial verb constructions (it is unclear whether SVCs are required by this configuration of properties). Various creoles appear to fit this description.

So we see that (a) this well-known parameter can fit into a plausible parameter hierarchy, (b) the particular development of English (but not, for example, Mainland Scandinavian) in this respect involves a shift to greater global complexity caused essentially by the development of the auxiliary system (and note that this is a typological oddity in Germanic), (c) we can understand certain "further" or distinct developments in other varieties of English that fit well with the hierarchy.