Studies in Linguistic Variation and Change 3

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Corpus-based Research in English Syntax and Lexis

Edited by

Fabienne Toupin, Sylvain Gatelais and Ileana Sasu

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume consists of a selection of papers from the *Fifth International Biennial Conference on the Diachrony of English* (CBDA-5) held in Tours, France, in July 2017. CBDA-5 was dedicated to the memory of Professor Xavier Dekeyser, who had so kindly and unfailingly supported CBDA since the beginning.

CBDA is a relative newcomer to the world of internationally recognized conferences addressing the history of the English language. The main objective of the conference, created in 2008, is to provide colleagues working in France and abroad with an opportunity to explore linguistic phenomena from a diachronic perspective and to discuss their theoretical implications. A second goal is to awaken interest in France in the study of English from a variationist perspective, across a number of fields including dialectology, historical and socio-historical linguistics. Since 2008, CBDA has been organized every two years alternately by the universities of Amiens, Tours and Reims-Champagne-Ardenne (on the Troyes campus).

Ever since its creation, CBDA has enjoyed the financial backing of two research groups: LLL (*Laboratoire Ligérien de Linguistique*, UMR 7270) and *Corpus* (EA 4295), joined more recently by CIRLEP (*Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherches sur les Langues et la Pensée*, EA 4299). Their precious support is gratefully acknowledged here. More specifically, concerning the organization of CBDA-5, the organizers wish to express their gratitude to the LLL team and to the University of Tours for their help and support.

In all, some 30 papers were presented at CBDA-5. The abstracts are available on the conference website (www.cbdaconference.org/). After a process of double-blind peer review, 6 of these, duly revised and reshaped as full articles, appear in the present volume, while other papers might have been published elsewhere.

The editors extend their warmest thanks to Dominique Boulonnais, Hubert Cuyckens, Catherine Delesse, David Denison, Sylvain Gatelais, Élise Louviot, Philip Miller, Ayumi Miura, Olivier Simonin, and Olga Timofeeva for all their tireless work in the process of reviewing the papers. Their suggestions and corrections have not only facilitated the editors' tasks but were also greatly appreciated by the contributors to this

volume. We are also indebted to all the contributors for their patient cooperation. Last but not least, we should like to thank Adam Rummens at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for the assistance he gave us during the preparation of the manuscript for publishing.

Tours, November 2019
The Editors

Professor Xavier Dekeyser in 2000 at the University of Antwerp

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, the development of corpus-based linguistics has provided historical linguists with new means of investigation, thus opening up new perspectives for researchers and enabling them to base their conclusions on much larger sets of data. This volume reflects a diversity of approaches to corpora. Some of the authors have resorted to wide-ranging lexicographic sources (such as the *Middle English Dictionary*). Others find it more relevant to make the best of the new opportunities offered by morphosyntactically-tagged corpora such as the *Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English* or the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus*. Yet another contributor to this volume has set up her own corpus by putting together various documents drawn from digital sources or gathered in archive centers. In all cases, it appears that in-depth observation of genuine, large or very large sets of data provides the basis for the linguists' conclusions.

The first section of the book will be of particular interest to those interested in syntactic and morphosyntactic variation in English at different periods of its history, and in what we as linguists can learn from observing variation at work, both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

Gaëlle Le Corre is concerned with southern American vernacular English. She examines variation in subject-verb agreement in letters written by low-ranking, semi-literate soldiers from Virginia during the Civil War. These letters are an invaluable source of information about the language spoken by the less literate white population during the 19th century, but have so far been neglected by linguists. Yet speakers from Virginia played a key role in the development of the southern varieties of English.

The author focuses on three aspects of variation, viz. the absence of verbal *-s* with third-person singular subjects (a phenomenon known as the Northern Subject Rule), the generalization of verbal *-s* in the present tense, and the *was/were* competition in the past tense use of *be*. Gaëlle Le Corre's aim is to answer two questions: i) Are the variations found in her corpus similar to those observed in other studies on 19th-century southern

American English? ii) What is the influence of British dialects in the use of particular variants?

The author's observations are by and large similar to those made in other corpora of southern American English from the same period. Zero marking in the third person singular, a feature which may have originated in East Anglia, is only slightly more frequent in the Virginian letters than in those written by soldiers from southern Carolina. The generalization of verbal *-s* in the present tense is to be found too, subject to the same syntactic constraints as have been observed in similar corpora. This feature is rooted in Scots-Irish Vernacular English, but the influence of southern British English is also perceptible as *-s* is often found with lexical verbs in iterative or durative statements, a characteristic usually associated with South-West vernacular English. Finally, in relation to the past-tense *be* paradigm, the findings are in line with one of the patterns found by Montgomery in 2004 in letters from North Carolina. Additionally, they might support Montgomery's "change in progress" hypothesis, as both *was* and *were* compete with the pronoun *you*.

The Virginian Confederate letters are thus of great value both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

Raffaela Baechler investigates the distribution of the definite article in Early Middle English, a period in which the determiner exhibits a particularly rich variety of forms.

One of the author's aims is to demonstrate that variation should not only be considered as a symptom of language change – as it usually is – but as a part of the language system itself, which, if studied appropriately, provides us with very useful insights into the kind of mechanisms operating in a language (for example where language change starts in a language system, and how it spreads within the system). She therefore selects three manuscripts allowing for dialectal comparison: *Vices & Virtues* (Essex, first quarter of the 13th century), the *Lambeth Homilies* (Worcestershire, c. 1200), and Laȝamon's *Brut* (Wiltshire, third quarter of the 13th century). These texts or large parts of them are transcribed and morphosyntactically tagged in *A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English*.

After discussing previous work by Jones, Smith, Allen, and McColl Millar about the forms of the definite article, Raffaela Baechler describes the source of her data and the method used in her investigation. She then builds up the paradigms of the definite article, based on her observation of the manuscripts, and comments on the distribution of these forms synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, the author's main conclusions are i) that *þane* and *þene* are not in complementary distribution,

but in free variation with differences in frequency; ii) that the selection of *þare* (a reflex of an Old English feminine form) by masculine and neuter nouns can be accounted for by a change of gender in some nouns; iii) that the use of *þam*/*þan* (a reflex of an Old English masculine or neuter form) with feminine nouns, on the other hand, cannot; iv) that the forms *þVne* and *þVn* (where V stands for a vowel) are not quite in free variation but distributed according to case (in all manuscripts) or to the noun suffix (in the *Lambeth Homilies*). Diachronically, Raffaela Baechler demonstrates how some of her findings support the hypothesis that a prepositional case has emerged.

The second part of the book is given over to various processes of change in medieval English specifically.

In her paper, Fuyo Osawa takes up the Double Object Construction attested in Present-day English in such examples *as Latifah gave Eric [= Indirect Object] a kiwi fruit [= Direct Object]*. This construction has attracted much attention in the literature, but mostly from a synchronic perspective; relatively little work has been done from a diachronic viewpoint, apart from studies focusing on the emergence of the prepositional *to*-constructions.

The author makes two claims. The first is that appearances are deceptive, in that the contemporary construction is not the reflex of the Double Object Construction attested in Old English, but rather a Middle English innovation. Her second claim is that the development of the contemporary construction was made possible by the change from NP to DP in the course of the Middle English period.

Fuyo Osawa begins by examining the syntactic and semantic properties of the contemporary Double Object Construction, and by a theoretical discussion of the construction within the Minimalist framework. She then goes on to the Old English apparent counterpart of the construction and examines it in detail, giving several examples. Since it does not display the syntactic and semantic features that characterize the modern construction, the author concludes that there is no supporting evidence for the presence of the Double Object Construction in Old English. In the final section of her contribution, the author shows that the Present-Day English construction is in fact a Middle English development which can be dated to the 15th century. To be more precise, the emergence of the Double Object Construction is one of the syntactic innovations which resulted from the emergence of a function system in English, i.e. DP (for "Determiner Phrase"). The emergent D(eterminer) made possible the

Double Object Construction, in which the Indirect Object is in the Specifier position, while the Direct Object is located in the Complement position. Before concluding, Fuyo Osawa discusses in some detail the theoretical implications of the structure she posits.

Working from the perspective of Noam Chomsky's minimalist program, Harumasa Miyashita and Hisao Tokizaki explore the interface between phonology and syntax in the history of English. They argue that the massive borrowing of Old French words into Middle English brought about a change in the Old English word stress system, thereby inducing the change from OV (i.e. the basic word order in Old English) to VO order, firmly established by the end of the Middle English period.

To show this, they examine the frequency of Old French loanwords in *Ancrene Wisse* and the so-called *Katherine Group*, which consists of five texts (*Sawles Warde*, *Hali Meiðhad*, *St. Katherine*, *St. Juliana*, and *St. Margaret*). All these texts were written in a variety of Middle English known as AB language, a standardized dialect in use in the West Midlands in the 13th century and characterized by a large number of French loanwords and word order variation. The authors' investigation is based on the editions compiled in the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English*, 2nd edition (PPCME2), a syntactically annotated electronic corpus created by Kroch and Taylor.

The study shows a significant correlation between the word order patterns in these texts and the frequency of Old French loanwords. With very few exceptions, the objects containing native Old English words (strictly governed by the Germanic Stress Rule, which assigns word stress to the stem-initial syllable) tend to appear in OV order, while those featuring Old French loanwords (governed by the Romance Stress Rule) generally appear in VO order.

These findings are consistent with Hisao Tokizaki's stress-based theory of linearization, which predicts that the relative order of a head and its complement is determined by the location of word stress. More specifically, languages with word-initial stress show a tendency to choose OV order, while languages with right-hand stress choose VO order.

Richard Ingham's paper proposes to reassess the long-term lexical effects of acquisition by the French-speaking population in the post-Norman Conquest period, paying particular attention to the obsolescence of native Old English verbs and their replacement by French-origin verbs.

Traditionally, French lexical influence on English is described in terms of loan vocabulary acquired by a native English-speaking population. Richard

Ingham rather envisages the creation of an elite register of English used by French speakers during the process of shift. His theory is based on the premise that an imperfect acquisition of English among the French-speaking population is likely to have given rise to a non-native variety influenced by French. He also hypothesises that Francophone speakers drew on their native tongue to fill their vocabulary gaps in the more challenging lexical areas.

This speculative scenario might account for the disappearance of whole blocks of English verbs which would have posed a greater acquisitional challenge than verbs whose denotation was more straightforwardly accessible. To test this hypothesis, Richard Ingham contrasts the retention rates of two samples of Old English verbs in Middle English. It appears that a very high proportion of Old English mental activity and communication verbs died out between the mid-13th and 15th centuries. By contrast, physical activity verbs display a much higher survival rate, almost 50% of them surviving from the Old English period.

The loss of a vast number of mental activity verbs can be ascribed to what is known in the language acquisition literature as their "observational opacity", which makes them harder to learn for L2 speakers. The underlying reason is that their denotation requires an understanding of the mental state of the participants in an event, rather than the observation of the external circumstances of an event, as is the case with physical action verbs.

Yana Chankova's paper invokes semantic, information-structural and prosodic factors in an attempt to determine to what extent they can affect the linearization principles of weight, definiteness and pronominality, based on V_{fin}-DO(Acc)-$V_{non\text{-}fin}$-IO(Dat) orders (or DOS orders, for short) in Old English and Old Icelandic constructions involving trivalent verbs of the *give*-class. Data have been collected from *The York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose* (2003) and *The Corpus of Íslendinga Sögur,* (1998). The current proposal defines DOS as a displacement operation that applies optionally to raise the direct object into a left-phrasally-adjoined target position and diverges from the weak version of semantic / discourse / informational analyses which assume that Topic and Focus are purely semantic features accessible at the syntax-semantics interface, as well as from the strong version whereby Topic and Focus attract movement of constituents to dedicated functional projections.

Consequent upon the analysis, DOS is viewed as a means of signalling that the alternative constituent order can be interpreted in connection with semantic / information-structural factors, to a greater extent, at least, than

the base-generated order of constituents can be. Base-generated word order favours unmarked interpretation i.e. default sentence focus, DOS or disruption of base order cautioning against using the default focus. In the most common case, DOS has the following effect on interpretation: the ex-situ direct object is construed as information-old, topical, specific, presupposed, defocalized, etc., and the indirect object receives default focus in its in-situ position, hence an information-new, non-presupposed, focused, accentuated, etc., reading. DOS, in addition, seems to be capable of focusing material within the V_{fin} ..... $V_{non\text{-}fin}$ frame: DOS may mark the direct object as receiving non-default focus, i.e. the direct object becomes focalized without being located in the default focus domain.

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PART I:

MORPHOSYNTACTIC VARIATION IN TWO DIFFERENT VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

SUBJECT VERB CONCORD IN THE LETTERS OF VIRGINIAN SOLDIERS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

GAËLLE LE CORRE

Introduction

This study examines variation in subject-verb agreement in the letters penned by low-ranking, semi-literate soldiers from Virginia during the Civil War. The 170,000-word corpus on which this study is based is composed of 354 letters written by 75 privates, corporals and sergeants from Virginia (1861-1865). Even though these letters provide a great wealth of information about the language spoken by the less literate population during the nineteenth century, this wonderful source of information remains little documented so far (Dylewski 2013, Ellis and Montgomery 2011, Ellis 2013). Most of the studies conducted on nineteenth-century written corpora mainly focused on the Carolinas (Montgomery, Fuller and DeMarse 1996; Montgomery and Schneider 2001; Trüb 2006; Dylewski 2013) and Tennessee (Brown 1990). However, Virginia played a key role in the birth and development of the Southern varieties more generally. These letters are thus of great value both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

Three different types of variations will be analyzed, namely the absence of verbal *-s* with third-person singular subjects, the generalization of verbal *-s* in the present tense as well as the *was/were* variation in the past tense *be* paradigm. These linguistic features find their origin in various parts of Great Britain.

The absence of verbal *-s* is said to have originated in East Anglia (Fisiak & Trudgill, 2001). Wright (2001) showed that this variation was also found in the London area as early as the sixteenth century. The generalization of verbal *-s* is conditioned by specific syntactic constraints, namely the "*Subject Type Constraint*" and "*Position Subject Constraint*" (Montgomery, Fuller & DeMarse, 1993, Montgomery, 1997, Trüb, 2006, Bismark 2010). This phenomenon, known as the Northern Subject Rule, is said to be inherited from Northern Middle English (Pietsch, 2005). Verbal *-s* is a common feature of the dialects of Northern England, Scotland and

Northern Ireland. However, it can also be found in the South-West of England (Geoffrey & Tagliamonte 1999), where it can be used to indicate habitual aspect.

The objective of this study is to better assess the variations in subject-verb agreement that could be found in the non-standard English spoken by the Virginian white population in the second half of the nineteenth century. Given the fact that Virginia English is one of the cradles of Southern American English, this study may help us to better understand the different linguistic influences that shaped Southern American English. This study aims to evaluate whether we observe similar features in the non-standard vernacular spoken in Virginia. Even though verbal *-s* and the use of the verb stem in third-person singular are often associated today with African American Vernacular English (Schneider, 1997, Geoffrey & Tagliamonte, 1999), the instances found in this corpus tend to prove that this feature was also shared by Virginian white speakers in the nineteenth century.

This paper will thus try to answer the following questions:

1) Are the variations observed in the corpus similar to other studies conducted on nineteenth-century Southern American English?
2) What is the influence of British dialects in the use of zero marking and verbal *-s* in nineteenth-century Virginia English?

1. The Virginia Civil War Corpus (VCWC): content and methodology

The corpus on which this analysis is based is composed of 354 letters written by 75 informants for a total of approximately 170,000 words. Among those letters, 177 are drawn from the Internet, mainly from the digital history project, hosted by the University of Virginia, entitled "*The Valley of the Shadow*".[1] The rest of the corpus is composed of primary sources collected in several archive centers in Virginia.

[1] Edward L. Ayers, "*The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*", 1993-2007, [on line], retrieved from: http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/.

Sources	Number of Soldiers	Number of Letters	Number of Words
Internet Archives			
The Valley of the Shadow	26	144	78, 954
Russel County, Virginia during the Civil War	10	29	10,955
The Guilder Lehrman Institute of American History[2]	1	4	3,882
Library archives			
University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville	6	27	6,276
Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond	13	105	52,222
Virginia Historical Society, Richmond	4	16	5,916
Swem Library, Williamsburg	3	3	3,004
Virginia Library, Richmond	12	26	10,563
TOTAL	**75**	**354**	**171,772**

Table 1: the Virginia Civil War Corpus (VCWC)

1.1 Soldiers' Geographical and Social Origins

The present corpus is composed of letters that were penned by soldiers who belonged to the lowest strata of the military hierarchy. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the interest of this corpus is that it comprises letters composed by a rather homogeneous community of writers who were all from Virginia, and who belonged to the same social class. Most of

[2] Source: "*I take up my pen*" – Complete transcripts from the exhibition, The Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History, 2011. [On line] (Consulted on 6 April 2011). Retrieved from: http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/american-civil-war/interactives/i-take-my-pen-letters-from-civil-war/transcripts.

the soldiers refer to farming in their letters, which leads us to believe that most of them were laborers. The soldiers' written style is characterized by an ingenuous or phonetic spelling, an inconsistent use of capital letters, as well as a lack of punctuation:

1) Nathanial Robertson & Neal gilbert left here a few days **a go**, to […] **the harse pittle** […] [VCWC, Pvt John Booker]
2) Dear wife I will try and right you afew lines more to see if I can here from you it seams like you have fore gote me though I may Be mistaken you may write all the time and the Letters may not Come too hand. [VCWC, Pvt Copland]

It is undeniable that the fact that soldiers were literate enough to write to their families introduces a bias. However, these letters are the closest to possible "nonstandard speech patterns of the period" (Schneider 2003:31) and offer valuable information on the non-standard forms used by the common people of the time.

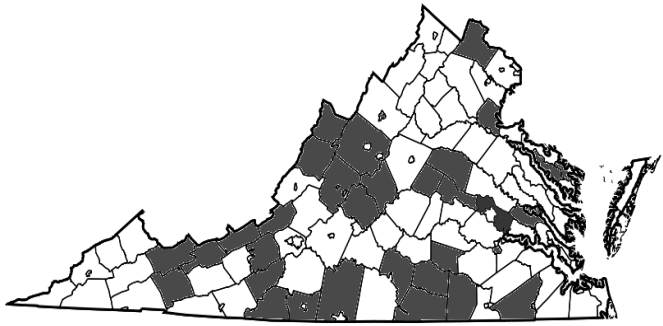
Most of the soldiers' geographical origins are specified in the archives catalogues. Some of their home counties or home towns are also mentioned on the envelopes, on which the soldiers clearly stated their parents' or wives' addresses. Some soldiers even explicitly referred to their home counties in their letters, as shown in the following example:

3) Joseph is well and all the rest of our **Floyd *boys*** […] [VCWC, EPPERLY C.]

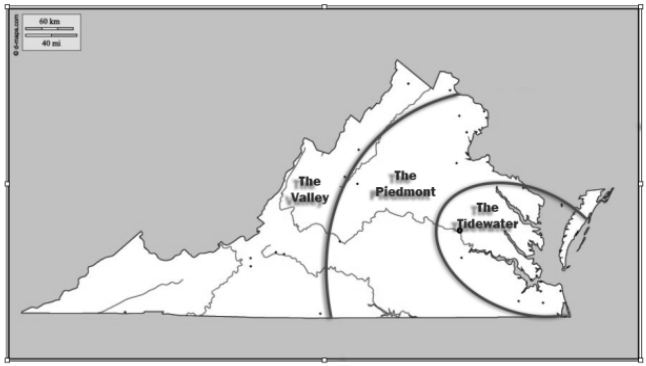
The rank of each soldier is usually specified in the archives' catalogues. When it is not the case, this piece of information can be obtained from the Internet, thanks to the *Soldiers and Sailors Database* website. The genealogy website *Ancestry.com* also provides valuable information about the soldiers' birth dates, death dates, occupation and residences.

Thirty counties are represented in the corpus, which encompass the three linguistic areas generally associated with Virginia (Lucke 1949: 14; Read 1934: 602). Most of the letters collected on line were penned by soldiers who were from the Blue Ridge Mountains, mainly from Augusta and Russel Counties. The *Valley of the Shadow* project collected letters and diaries written by two American communities in Augusta County, Virginia and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. The letters from Russel

county are drawn from Gregory Lepore's website devoted to the history of this county during the Civil War.[3]



Map 1: Geographical origin of the soldiers[4]



Map 2: Main dialectal areas in Virginia (adapted from Lucke 1949)

[3] Source: Gregory Lepore, "*Russel County Virginia, Civil War Letters*", [on line], retrieved from: http://russellvets.org/home.html.
Digital versions of most of the letters published are also included on his website.
[4] Base map: Wikipedia, "*List of Cities and Counties in Virginia*", April 17 2018, [on line], retrieved from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_and_counties_in_Virginia.

2. Third Person Singular Forms

2.1 Background

In contemporary Standard English, the conjugation of verbs in the present tense is only determined by one rule – the addition of the inflection *-s* when the verb agrees with a subject in the third person singular, the other persons remaining uninflected.

In Old English, the inflections for the third person singular and all persons of the plural ended with *-þ* (Chevillet 1994: 66). The use of the third person singular suffix *-(e)s* originated in the north, the form being first attested in the Northumbrian dialect in the tenth century; *-(e)s* occurred both with singular and plural forms. The morpheme *-(e)s* then spread southward during the Middle English period, appearing in London in the fifteenth century.

Verbal *-s* first appeared with the second person singular;[5] it was then used with the second person plural and was later extended to the other persons of the plural, to be finally extended to the third person singular (Holmqvist 1922: 15).

According to Stein (1987: 419) and Holmqvist (1922), the use of the suffix *-s* instead of the dental fricative *-(e)th* in the third person singular became the regular ending in London speech as early as the 1600s. The verbs *do* and *have* are known to have adopted the suffix *-s* much later than other main lexical verbs (Lass 2006: 163).

At the beginning of the sixteenth century *-s* was probably informal, while *-th* "was neutral and/or elevated" (Lass 2006: 164). By the end of the century, *-s* was most likely the spoken norm while *-th* remained a metric variant (Lass, *ibid.*). *-S* may have been first used in colloquial language and appeared later in written texts (Curme 1977, Jespersen 1909/1949). Some scholars argue that the spread of verbal *-s* was a change from below, which emerged in the lower strata and in everyday spoken language, and superseded *-th* towards the end of the century (Nevelainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996: 107).

Even though only three occurrences of the suffix *-th* appear in the VCWC, they are quite revealing of the influence of the King James Bible on the soldiers' speech. Before universal education became compulsory towards the end of the nineteenth century, "the two other linguistic models to which uneducated English speakers had been exposed were the King James Bible and the popular lyrical and folk traditions" (German 2011:

[5] The development of this flexion may have been helped by the fact that the original form was *-st* in Old English.

135). The soldiers resort to this religious rhetoric every time they want to give solemnity to their speech, especially when they grieve the loss of loved ones or when they mention their possible death.

4) I am well and hearty but it pained me when I read in your kind letter the death of your brother… god **giveth** and then **taketh** away. blessed is the name of the Lord. [VCWC, Jesse Rolston][6]
5) By the mercies of a great & good God I am still spared I cannot be to thankfull for the many special providences that has protected me thus far. His loving kindness has been very grate towards me & my prayer is that I may so walk as **becometh** one of his true followers. [VCWC, William Brand][7]

A third form for the third person singular, namely the uninflected verb form, was also competing with the *-s* and *-th* suffixes. According to Holmqvist (1922) and Wakelin (1977), the development resulted from the loss of *-þ* and the absence of replacement by *-s*. Today, the third person singular verb stem is a well-known linguistic feature of Norfolk, Suffolk and Northern Essex.

Trudgill (2001: 182) argues that zero marking originated in Norwich and has become a common feature of East Anglia English since at least 1700. Trudgill (2001: 185) believes that the development of the third person singular verb stem in East Anglia in the present tense coincides with a period during which the suffixes *-th* and *-s* were competing among native speakers. The development of the verb stem is "a contact feature which developed as a result of the presence of large numbers of non-native speakers" [8] who used English as a *lingua franca* and who consequently did not master the person marking system of English verbs. This feature, which originated in Norwich, spread to the whole region of East Anglia.

As early as the end of the sixteenth century, -Ø was no longer circumscribed to East Anglia. Wright (2001: 240) notes the presence of this variable in the minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell and

[6] "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord **giveth**, and the Lord **taketh** away; Blessed be the name of the Lord!" (King James Bible, Job 1:21).
[7] "And Jesus answering said unto him: 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it **becometh** us to fulfil all righteousness'." (King James Bible, Mathew 3:15).
[8] Most of these non-native speakers came from the Low Countries (modern Belgium and the Netherlands) and arrived in Norwich to flee the Spanish persecution. "The population in Norwich in 1576 was 16,236. Of that number, approximately 6,000 – about 37% – were Dutch-and-French speaking aliens." (Trudgill 1998: 143)

Bethlem prisons in London, written between 1575 and 1648. On October 2, 1607, prisoners from Bridewell started being sentenced to transportation to Virginia. Based on those findings, Wright (*ibid*.) invokes Mufwene's "Founder Principle" (1996: 84) to account for the use of zero marking in Southern American Vernacular English and African American Vernacular English. As observed by Godfrey and Tagliamonte (1999: 94): "the greatest variability of verbal *-s* across the grammatical paradigm in British English was between 1500 and 1800, [which] corresponds to the time period of the largest migrations from Britain to North America".

In the United States, zero marking in the third person singular is usually associated with African American Vernacular English (Traugott 1976: 96; Brandes and Brewer 1977: 334). The presence of the uninflected verb stem is considered by some linguists as a remnant of a previous creole stage (Jackson 1987: 44). However, this hypothesis is contradicted by the fact that zero marking is not only attested in Great Britain but also among Southern white speakers (Francis 1958: 522). Besides, in contemporary African American Vernacular English, zero marking is far from being a steady phenomenon, the presence of uninflected verb forms ranges between 0% and 84 %, depending on the region and the community of speakers. This variability was already observed in Early Black English[9] since there was "an identical use of both *-s* and zero in all grammatical persons, with the suffix occurring most frequently in the third singular (Schneider 1989: 70-77).

2.2 Zero marking in the third person singular in the VCWC

With only 101 instances listed (4.5%), zero marking appears sporadically in the VCWC. However, certain patterns seem to emerge when we study the contexts in which this feature occurs.

[9] Schneider's analysis is based on slave narratives collected in The Federal Writers' Project (1935) and published in 1972 (Rawick).

Auxiliaries *Do* and *Have*

In the VCWC, 46 instances out of 57 with auxiliary *do* remain uninflected when the verb is used in negative constructions in the third person singular, which represents a frequency rate of almost 75%.[10] Schneider (1980: 80) also noted the absence of flexion with *do* forms in Early Black English.

6) David Argenbright is at home again, he is detailed for Hospital duty though **he dont know** where [VCWC, Bosserman]
7) Jimey is quite sick & have bin for the last week, I dont no whats the mater with him, **he have weekened** down [unclear: as] fast for the last week as I ever saw any one, **he dont eat** any thing scercely a tall [VCWC, John Booker]
8) John said tell Eline he intends giving her a scolding **he have not received** but one letter from her [VCWC, Oliver Gathright]

In Early Middle English, lexical *do* and *have* resisted the use of the morpheme *-s* both in negative and affirmative statements (Holmqvist, 1922). This Middle English feature may have been preserved by nineteenth-century Virginian speakers.

9) William Cely **do ys** partte whell in keeping of hym (Cely letters, p.64; Holmqvist, 1922: 134)
10) and yf ze **have no** monysche byd that ze schuld borrow. (Paston Letters, p.140, Holmqvist, 1922: 115)

The very high frequency rate of unmarked negative auxiliary *do* in the VCWC leads us to believe that the uninflected form was the norm for these speakers, who did not perceive this variation as stigmatized. Dylewski (2013: 212) observed a similar phenomenon in confederate soldiers' letters from South Carolina. Sloan (2000: 61) listed a frequency rate of 66.7% of uninflected *do* forms in negative contexts in the letters penned by four overseers in the *Antebellum* South. Even today, the uninflected *do* form in negative statements remains a widespread phenomenon in American English vernacular dialects (Wolfram 2008: 480). Its persistence in contemporary Devon English (Godfrey and Tagliamonte 1999: 102) may underline the link between these varieties of English.

[10] The absence of flexion seems to be circumscribed to negative statements since only 1 uninflected occurrence is observed in an affirmative statement (cf. Table 2).

	-s	∅
Be copula	1289	0
Be auxiliary	215	0
Have auxiliary	308	11
Have lexical verb	58	0
Lexical verb	350	44
Do auxiliary, negative	11	46
Do auxiliary, affirmative	12	1
TOTAL	**2243**	**101**

Table 2: -∅ flexion in the 3rd pers. sg. in the VCWC

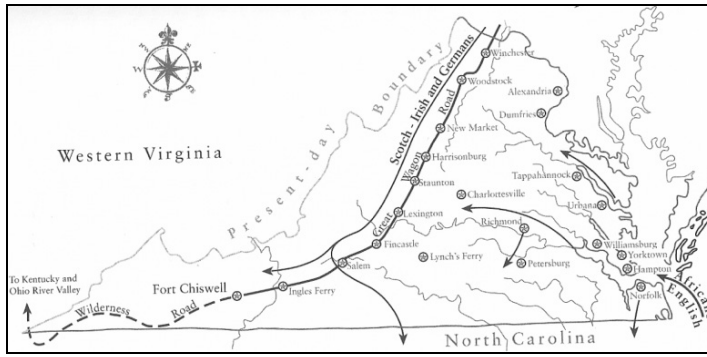
Lexical Verbs

With a frequency rate of 10.7%, the use of the verb stem with lexical verbs may be a little more widespread in Virginia than in the Northwestern part of South Carolina where Dylewski (2013: 216) observed frequency rates close to 5%. Even if these findings should be supported by other comparative studies, they may indicate that zero marking was a little more common among Virginian speakers.

11) I have not much fathe in him but mabe I Juge rong **he take** the same grounds that the dunkerds do [VCWC, Schreckhise]
12) John **send** his love [VCWC, Molie Grove]
13) **She say** she wants to see you very bad & make haste to come home, Mr. Nelson. [VCWC, Nelson]

The origin of this specificity might be explained by the fact that many migrants from East Anglia and London came to Virginia at the very beginning of its colonization, and thus implemented this variation in the area, which became perhaps more deeply rooted in the local vernacular.[11]

[11] Bailyn (1986: 217) analyzed the geographic origins of the population who landed in Virginia between 1773 and 1776 and found that 80% of the migrants came from the South of England (mainly from London). However, as early as 1730, the Scots-Irish also represented an important part of the population which settled mainly in the north of the Shenandoah Valley (Fisher and Kelly 2000). By comparison, half of population in the upland region of South Carolina was of Scots-Irish origin (Doyle 1981: 72-76).



Map 3: Internal migration movements in Virginia (Fischer & Kelly 2000: 133)

Forty-four uninflected forms appear with lexical verbs in the VCWC in the third person singular. Among them, six may be analyzed as subjunctive forms.

In Old English, the subjunctive was formed by the addition of the morpheme *-e* for the singular and *-en* for the plural. In Middle English, *-e/Ø* replaced these morphemes.

According to Wright (2001: 244), "this system persist[ed] into the Early Modern period, although with a diminishing frequency". In the Bridewell depositions, Wright (*ibid*.: 245) observed statements in which the subjunctive mood was used in clauses of condition introduced by the conjunction *if*. She goes on to say that the suffix *-s* "has not gone in completion in all contexts", so that early modern Londoners could choose to mark condition clauses introduced by the conjunction *if* either with the uninflected form or with the suffix *-s*.

14) Then said will[ia]m Clyfto[n] by Gogg[s] wound[s] the boy hath a mansharte and **yf he holde** that opynion still he shall never lacke as longe as Icangett a grote **yf he sticke** to yt [fo 163v, 28 Jan. 1576] (Wright, 2001: 245)

Zero marking could also be found when the action of the main clause was conditioned by the fulfillment of the action of the subordinate clause. The zero morpheme is found in both contexts in the VCWC:

15) if **sickness get** in our family I will strain all the nerves I have I will raise the blockades and come home let the consequences be what it may [VCWC, Rolston]

16) I beleave the Dimcrats will raise against them **if the war last** much longer [VCWC, James Booker]
17) they think that after awhiele that **if my family get** sick that I can come to see you [VCWC, Jessee Rolston]
18) pick out your sead corn **be fore it get** too scarce. [VCWC, Rolston]
19) nothing more at present but remember your dare **husband untel deth sepperrate** ous. [VCWC, Knick]
20) if I had it in power he would not get one **til the last man in his company get** one. [VCWC, John Booker]

These instances could be the result of the same process that leads to zero marking in other contexts. However, the fact that the subjunctive *be* form occurs in conditional subordinate clauses leads us to believe that these instances are relics of the Middle English system.

21) you said something in your letter about the cow as she is so unruly sell her if you can get 35 or 40 dollars in good hands Jane as she is to big **if you be** sure she is in richmond wright to Mr Edward.[VCWC, Gathright]
22) **if you be** so kind as to send me some money as I am in want of some assistance at the preasant time and shall be more than obliged to you [VCWC, John Hite]

As stated by Wright (2001: 249), the two systems co-existed in the speech of Early Modern Londoners. The fact that this feature can still be observed in the soldiers' letters more than a hundred years later may be explained by the fact that the vast majority of migrants who settled in Virginia between 1607 and 1654 sailed over ships leaving from London.

These instances of zero marking found in the VCWC seem to be in line with Wright's findings; she observes the use of zero marking in the Bridewell court minutes for the indicative mood as well as the subjunctive mood, especially in conditional clauses. Even if the instances found in the VCWC are rather scanty, they may confirm Wright's belief that zero marking was "picked up and passed on by generations of American Southern White Vernacular English (ASWVE) speakers and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers."

3. Verbal *-s*

Montgomery & Fuller (1996: 213-214) argue that African nineteenth-century American Vernacular English speakers had at their disposal from three to six verbal *-s* morphemes, each governed by specific constraints. The use of *-s* marking with a plural subject still remains today a specific feature of rural and ethnic varieties in the Southeast of the United States (Wolfram 2008: 419).

1/ Verbal morpheme *-s* with third-person singular subjects, as found in Standard English.

23) **it looks** like they intend to march us to death [VCWC, Gilmer]

With a frequency rate of 95%, verbal *-s* in the third person singular is the dominant form in the VCWC, except for auxiliary *do* in negative contexts.

2/ Verbal morpheme *-s*, historical present, used to report past events in a more dynamic and vivid way.

24) **We march** from Mannassas Junction a bout a forinate a go [Wilson, VCWC]

The use of the morpheme *-s* as a historical present is found only once in the VCWC. However, it is worth noting that the absence of the morpheme *-ed* in past contexts or in indirect speech is quite common in the VCWC.

25) I have stade all nite with him an **we talk** sum surtain [Gilley, VCWC]
26) [he] said to granpa that he **wants** to meet him their if he never got home. [VCWC, Guilmer]

3/ Verbal morpheme *-s* with first-person singular pronoun, in place of *I am*.

The use of verbal *-s* with *be* in the first person singular is almost absent in the VCWC since only two instances have been listed. The paucity of data available does not allow us to draw any solid conclusions on the use of verbal *-s* in this context.

27) tel them **I** have bin unwell but **is** improveing [VCWC, Nelson]
28) **I** have bin unwell fir some time but **is** getting better now [VCWC, Trout]

4/ Verbal morpheme *-s* with third-person plural nominal, but not pronominal, subjects.

Studies on earlier vernaculars and modern varieties (Montgomery 1989, 252; Poplack and Tagliamonte 2001: 167, Wright 2001: 238, Trüb 2006: 252; Wolfram 2008: 479) reveal that two major constraints govern plural *-s* marking. The first one concerns the type of subject – a pronoun seems to disfavor verbal *-s* (except for the third person singular).

The data gathered in the VCWC abide to the current linguistic standards since verbal *-s* with subject pronouns is quite a rare phenomenon. Even though a few examples may be found in the VCWC, the presence of a pronoun seems to highly disfavor the use of verbal *-s*. A similar phenomenon was observed in the letters penned by soldiers from South Carolina (Dylewski 2013).

Subject Pronoun	**∅**	**%**	**-s**	**%**
I	3683/3699	99,60%	16/3699	0,40%
You	509/515	98,90%	6/515	1,10%
He/she/it	53/986	5,40%	933/986	94,60%
We	716/718	99,90%	1/718	0,10%
They	337/342	98,50%	5/342	1,50%

Table 3: Verbal *-s* with a pronominal subject in the VCWC

29) My little brother, majer, is well and is running all about end Johny. **When these lines reaches** you, you must write to me, **how you is, how you all is coming on** and write me how the war Is and write me the particulars. [VCWC, Nelson]
30) Well, Mr. Nelson, the children all told me to tell you howddy and **says they loves** you so good. [VCWC, Nelson]

According to Montgomery (1997) and Montgomery and Fuller (1996), migrants from Northern Ireland have imported this variable on the American continent. However, verbal *-s* may also have been imported by