

## **Stylistics and Syntax Exploitation of Mixed Systems in English\***

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State curricula in English Language Arts are calling for grammar instruction to be folded into the teaching of writing, linguistic diversity/identity, and stylistic variation (as does the new North Carolina Course of Studies). Such a reorientation raises the stakes for teachers who will now teach advanced applications of something that is no longer taught as a subject: grammar. And traditional grammar, which sought descriptive adequacy in coherence, is a myopic guide to a language that provides a wealth of options and alternatives to be exploited by a writer/speaker. This article provides a survey of such choices among alternative morphosyntactic constructions (pre- and postnominal AP, inflected and periphrastic degree and possession), systems (inherent case vs. structural case assignment), and  $\phi$ -features (strong vs. weak inflections) and demonstrates how alternative  $\phi$ -features were put to use by Shakespeare for register in 'Romeo and Juliet.' It is argued that linguists training future teachers of English must familiarize their students with the paradigms of marked and unmarked choices that English so richly provides, or else we set those students up for failure when they are to respond to the changed rules of engagement in teaching grammar at public schools.

### **1. Introduction**

It is an irksome incongruence that English textbooks, like English Language Arts teachers, aim at coherence of statement while the language itself is anything but consistent. English grammar is a mixed system, yet the grammar books continue to focus on its regular, unmarked core.

For hundreds of years, even that coherence-seeking grammar instruction has been under criticism. In 1763, John Ash complained about the standard practice of grammarians who 'have too

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inconsiderately adopted various Distinctions of the learned Languages, which have no Existence in our own' (1763:A3). The chronic failure to achieve comprehensive adequacy in the description of our 'mongrel' (Grambs & Levine 2009:18) English language has resulted, I think, in the collapse of grammar as a scholastic subject.

By way of comparison: The teaching of history in American schools has been under massive assault for decades from authors such as Frances FitzGerald, Thomas Ayres, and James W. Lowen,<sup>i</sup> and apparently to little avail as well:

...I spent much of 2006-07 pondering six new U.S. history textbooks. I did find them improved in a few regards—especially in their treatment of Christopher Columbus and the ensuing Columbian Exchange. I also found them worse or unchanged in many other regards.... It's safe to conclude that *Lies* didn't influence textbook publishers very much. This did not surprise me, because fifteen years earlier, Frances FitzGerald's critique of textbooks, *America Revised*, was also a bestseller, but it, too, made little impact on the industry. (Lowen, xv)

The teaching of grammar in public schools has reached a low point; it is fit to serve as a warning to history teachers. We are facing a breakdown. This has not gone unrecognized by departments of public instruction across the United States, which are now poised to stir the scraps of school grammar into the teaching of writing/editing. That is happening here in the State of North Carolina.

At first glance, such a change in a state's curriculum would appear to free English Language Arts teachers from the frustrations of working with grammar school books that matter-of-factly perpetuate breathtaking nonsense (articles are adjectives, English has an array of tenses, prepositions are prepositions unless they are particles or adverbs, etc.). Far from letting ELA teachers off the hook, however, pressing grammar instruction into service for writing and literature instruction actually ups the ante: It calls for the *application* of grammatical knowledge that is no longer to be taught as a subject in its own right:

Students should also increasingly develop control over grammatical conventions, including sentence formation, usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Most students do not learn grammatical conventions efficiently through memorizing the parts of speech and practicing correct usage and mechanics through drills and exercises, with the assumption that students will transfer what they learn in grammar study to their own writing and speaking. <<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/languagearts/scos/2004/22grades68>>

Put in perspective: Expectations for competence in grammar are not remotely as high as expectations for STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and math), where standards are quite sophisticated. Whereas we expect a student to understand, say, the mathematics of a chemical equilibrium for a weak acid in preparation for an AP exam in chemistry, there is no grammar component in the AP exam for English Language. None.<sup>ii</sup>

Grammar is no more difficult to understand than chemistry, though apparently it appears to be difficult to teach. Teachers and students need a language about language to negotiate such issues as what clauses to set off by commas, what counts as equivalent elements in a series or in a parallel construction, what a tense is so one may keep it consistent over a cohesive stretch of prose, and the difference between grammaticality and usage and the concomitant issues of power and alignment. Beyond that, ELA teachers need to be able to recognize, read about, and talk about the richness and redundancy of marked and unmarked morphosyntax in English, which is precisely what speakers/writers exploit stylistically, from regional variants to high literature, in order to mark register and alignment/power.<sup>iii</sup>

The following is an attempt to showcase the embarrassment of riches that English provides for stylistic variation in offering such marked and unmarked morphosyntactic options. A similar survey could (and ought to) be done at some point for phonological and lexical choices; it would have implications for the study of language variation and dialectology.

## 2. Alternate Morphosyntactic Constructions in English

English has twisted and squeezed itself through so many turns that for a modern reader, Anglo-Saxon texts look like something between goulash and ghoulish. Indeed, in the 2007 movie *Beowulf*,<sup>iv</sup> it is the monster, not the hero, who gets the lines in Old English. But linguistic changes rarely complete at 100%. Regular forms now alternate with archaic or borrowed listed forms, sometimes within the same paradigm. For example, cardinal numerals are inflected as ordinals with the addition of the suffix *-th*, but the paradigm also includes the listed forms *first*, *second*, and *third*.

Remnants of older systems of the language tend to be carried over especially with high-frequency words or standing expressions. We know that a form is irregular when there is no currently productive pattern freely generating others like it: New verbs with a nasal-plus-consonant stem, once perfect candidates for class-three strong verbs, do not pattern with *sink*, *sing*, or *drink*: It's *ding* ('to cause minor damage on a car door,' first documented in 1968) – *dinged* – *dinged*, not *ding* – *dang* – *dung*. But modern speakers are still aware of old patterns. Marked paradigms occasionally 'seduce,' to use Pinker's term (1999:84), core forms into taking up residence in peripheral systems (such as *fling* – *flung* and *sling* – *slung*, *ibid.*). Regular verbs such as *kneel* and *sneak* jumped categories on the power of analogy (280). Those changes can be quite specific, causing the original and the new form to coexist in different contexts. For example, the plural of *louse* is *lice*, except within the context of semantic narrowing: In the song 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend,' the lines 'and that's when those louses / turn back to their spouses' would be essentially unintelligible with the plural *lice* instead of *louses*. Text emphasized with transparent ink is *highlighted*, not *highlit*; political info massaged for public presentation is *spinned*, not *spun*. And it would have been quite a different movie if the title had been 'Honey, I *shranked* the kids' (i.e. gave them psychotherapy) rather than, say, '*shrank* the kids' (i.e. accidentally exposed them to the rays of my miniaturization machine).<sup>v</sup>

The following sections present a sampling of such alternative systems in English, including morphological features of case, tense, and agreement.

### 2.1. Postnominal Adjectives

In some historical expressions, adjectives follow the noun in English because they were borrowed that way from French (*court martial*), evolved from a prepositional phrase (*asleep*, from *on slæpe*), or represent an old partitive construction (e.g. *money enough*, essentially 'of money enough money'). Speakers of English would thus have stored in their lexica syntactic templates (cf. Thiede 2007) that are associated with individual lexical entries, overriding the syntactic setting for pronominal APs, which are ordinarily left branching.

### 2.2. Degree Morphology

Alternative constructions are available also for comparative and superlative degrees expressed on manner adverbs and scalar adjectives. While textbooks emphasize syllable count to explain the choice of *-er/-est* vs. *more/most*, that is an unreliable criterion. For example, a monosyllabic word such as *suave* is preferably construed with *more/most*, whereas the trisyllabic *heavenly* can well take the suffixes to form *heavenlier* and *heavenliest*. A more reliable guide would be native-speaker intuition about whether the adjective sounds Anglo-Saxon vs. Latinate, assigning the suffixes to the former and the periphrastic construction to the latter. For humor, intuition may be flaunted, as in the caption to a recent article on Neandertals in *Scientific American*: '...their demise remains a mystery, one that gets curiouser and curiouser' (Wong 2009: 33). And of course, one also comes across mixed forms such as *more wider* (*Othello* I.iii.107). Such 'pleonastic concord' is as old as the availability of the two constructions itself and can be found in Anglo Saxon forms such as *ma hludre* ('more louder'—González-Díaz 2008: 39, cf. Włodarczyk 2007).

### 2.3. Possessive Morphology

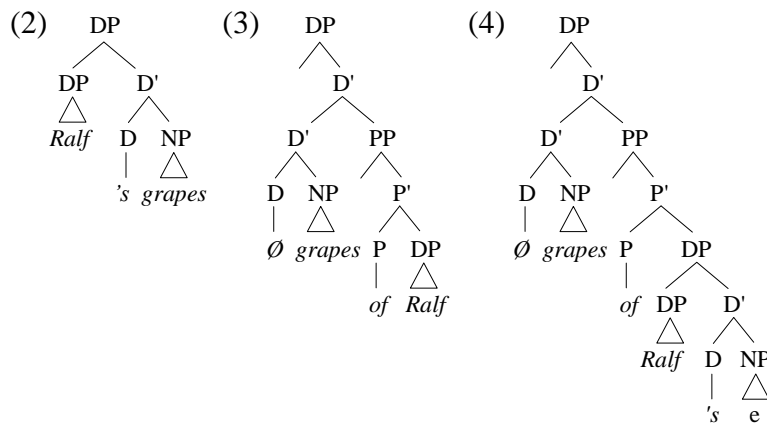
Possessive *-s* was originally a true inflection, added to the nominal head just like our modern plural suffix. That inflection survives in compounds such as *coxcomb* (= *cockscorb*, the crest of a cock's head or the court jester's cap), *doomsday* (*domes dæg*), *Tuesday* (*Tiwesdæg*), *Wednesday* (*Wodnesdæg*); plant names such as *monkshood* (*monkes hoode*); place names such as *Clydesdale* (which could also be a horse or a terrier, depending on the size of the animal); and combinations such as *kinsman*, *landsmen*, *beadsmen*, *craftsmen*, *townsmen*, etc. plus the kin *-women*. The possessive inflectional suffix gradually became a syntactic-functional definite determiner clitic. At the time of transition, in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, we find the forms *the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe*, *the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe*, and *the Wyves Tale of Bathe* all in the same manuscript. The process of grammaticization, if you want to call it that, also gave us regularized forms:

- (1) a. *wolfsbane* (*wolfes bayne* 'wolf's slayer,' which should be \**wolves bane*)
- b. *father's* (which originally did not inflect with possessive *-s*, as in *mines fæder huse* in Ælfric's translation of Luke 15:17)
- c. *old wives' tales* (*Old Wives Tales* up until the 1600s, when the apostrophe was added; it is a translation of the plural construction *γραῶδεις μύθους* in 1 Tim. iv.7).

We have more recent forms by analogy (possibly for stylistic phonotactic reasons) in such compounds as *Greensboro* (from *Greenesborough*, named after Nathanael Greene), *clansman*, *menswear*, or popular places such as *splitsville*, *dullsville* (my alma mater), *Nowheresville*, *Hicksville*, *geeksville*, and *Weirdsville* (2007, directed by Allan Moyle).

English now analyzes the possessive morpheme as a clitic—phonologically appending to the right periphery of the preceding noun phrase, but syntactically heading the determiner phrase that contains the next, as in (2). Concomitant to the loss of the genitive inflection is the loss of the possessive case in English (Thiede 1996).

We see the mixed construction of periphrastic and true inflected possessive as late as the King James Bible's rendition of Luke 15:17 above, *servants of my fathers*. Such 'double-possessive' constructions would appear to reach back to some sort of partitive construction ('servants from among my father's servants') similar to what we see in some postnominal adjectivals such as *money enough* ('of money enough money').



Possessive constructions (2), (3), and (4) are not in free variation; they allow different options of presenting reference. In (2), *grapes* can have only definite reference, because the possessive determiner clitic acts like a definite article. To make *grapes* indefinite in reference, we need construction (3). The so-called 'double possessive' construction in (4) allows reference to an indefinite subset of a definite reference (i.e. 'of all the grapes of Ralf, the existence of which is presumed by the listener/reader, an indefinite subset').

### 3. Structural vs. Inherent Case Assignment

Old English had inherent case independent of position. Ellie van Gelderen (2000, ch.5) sums up the evidence for inherent case marking in Anglo Saxon English. Besides the rich morphology, she finds evidence for theta-role specific case assignment (with verbs and prepositions) and notes the retention of case with fronting (e.g. with passive). Inherent case makes it possible to arrange words in a manner that is no longer feasible in modern English:

- (5) a. Twa and twentig ðusend punda goldes and seolfres man  
 two and twenty thousand pounds gold and silver one  
 ACC GEN<sub>partitive</sub> GEN<sub>partitive</sub> NOM  
 gesealde ðam here of Ænglalande wið friðe.  
 shall give the army of England against peace  
 DAT<sub>indir. obj.</sub> DAT<sub>preposition</sub> DAT<sub>preposition</sub>  
 (Æthelred Treaty with the 'Here' AD 991)
- b. Ða on morgenne gehierdun þæt þæs cyninges þegnas,  
 then on morning heard<sub>3PL</sub> this the king's thanes  
 þe him beaftan wærun, þæt se cyning oflsægen wæs.  
 that were behind him that the king was slayn.  
 (A-S Chronicles s.l. year 755)

Sentence (5 a.) illustrates how inherent case allows a very flexible arrangement of constituents for information management: The direct object ('22,000 pounds of gold and silver') precedes the subject, and the indirect object follows the verb (it usually precedes it in Old English). Sentence (5 b.) is even more remarkable: Note that a demonstrative pronoun, *þæt*, functioning as a resumptive direct object anticipating the nominal clause *þæt se cyning oflsægen wæs*, actually precedes the subject, *þæs cyninges þegnas*, which is extraposed because its attached adjectival clause makes it "heavy." If the nominal clause were merely extraposed, then there would be a trace in the direct object position; here, that position is filled and case marked, and this can only be by direct projection and inherent case.

Inherent case was still part of the core grammar with third-person pronouns as late as Middle English (see also van Gelderen), where we find arrangements such as in the well-memorized line from the *Canterbury Tales*:

- (6) the hooly blisful martir... that hem hath holpen  
 (General Prologue 17-18)

The same construction (topicalization of the direct object to middle field) is no longer idiomatic today (!*who them has helped*). All default case in modern English is structurally assigned.

But let's say we want to topicalize the object of *help*, which is historically dative, then English suddenly readmits inherent case marking to make it happen:



(7) Them, he helped.

If, on the other hand, a structural case position is available, such as in passive, then the object-argument must be base-generated in the subject position with structural case:

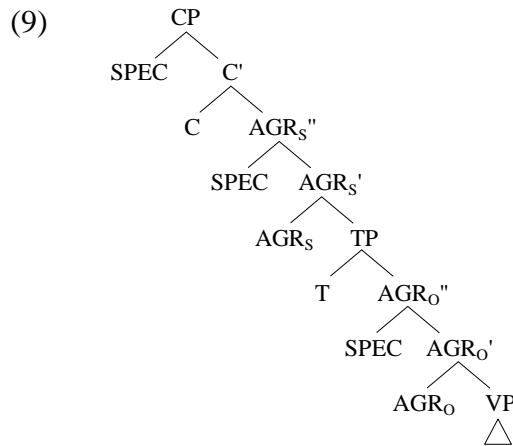
- (8) a. They (\*Them) were helped.  
b. Who(m) did they invite?  
c. Who(\*m) was invited by them?

In German, we would still have to say *Ihnen wurde geholfen*, with dative case on *Ihnen* 'you<sub>PL</sub>', not *\*Sie wurde geholfen*—although I am beginning to sense that language change might eventually make a structural-case option available in German.<sup>vi</sup> Sentence (8b.) is grammatical with *who* or *whom* in [SPEC,CP] because either way the interrogative pronoun is marked for inherent case, and the native speaker chooses whether to select the unmarked or the marked morphology for the word. That choice depends on register (*whom* is considered more formal). Sentence (8c.), on the other hand, is motivated by projection of a logical object into the (structurally case marked) subject position and crashes with inherent case because of double case assignment. The unmarked system (structural case assignment) trumps the marked system (inherent case) to ensure smooth operation of the grammar.

#### 4. Variations in Inflection Features

Since mixed systems in English obviously exist, it is legitimate to ask whether some of the more subtle challenges presented by English inflection to syntactic theory might reflect a mixed system as well, specifically of morphological features associated with tense and agreement.

The Inflection Phrase (IP) has been conceived as a set of two phrases, headed by tense (T) and agreement (AGR). The following model was advanced by Noam Chomsky (esp. 1992:10), based on a model proposed by Jean-Yves Pollock (1989):



Since English tense and agreement morphemes (aside from the listed verbs *BE* and *HAVE*) are mutually exclusive, they are commonly conflated in the literature into a single inflection phrase, *IP*. Chomsky agreed that *T* ultimately rises to *AGR<sub>S</sub>* in the derivational process (1992: 10).

Both tense and agreement have  $\phi$ -features that can, theoretically, be strong, weak, or inert (Chomsky 1992:13). A strong feature will immediately trigger overt raising to that position; a weak feature licenses procrastination of raising until after phonetic spell-out. An inert feature will cause no raising at all. Subject case is assumed to be assigned by *T*, so the modus vivendi for English is strong *T* (no milk; 44), since the language requires a filled subject position (that configuration used to be known as the "Extended Projection Principle," but it is just the consequence of a feature setting). Agreement features in English, on the other hand, are typically weak, so main verbs do not rise overtly (they procrastinate).

The odd verb out, of course, is *BE*, which must have *strong* *AGR* features because it *always* moves to *AGR<sub>S</sub>* overtly, and in the following I wish to explore whether English speakers and writers might be able to switch between strong and weak  $\phi$ -features at liberty, creating marked and unmarked word orders out of need or for stylistic reasons. Such a mixed system is not a challenge to syntactic theory; Chomsky himself speculated that Arabic might have such an alternate set of features, 'with *SVO* versus *VSO* correlating with the richness of visible verb-inflection' (ibid.).

## 4.1. Features of T

### 4.1.1. Strong NP-feature of T

The standard for English clauses is for a determiner phrase to satisfy the subject function in the matrix position of the clause ([SPEC,AGR<sub>S</sub>P] after raising of T to AGR<sub>S</sub>). The presence of an overt subject in that preverbal position is part of standard linguistic knowledge, and reflected in earliest phrase structure rules such as  $S \rightarrow NP + AUXP + VP$ . It makes English an SVO language, possibly as opposed to Irish, where the NP-feature might be weak (Chomsky 1992:44). That default requires no further illustration.

### 4.1.2. Weak NP-feature of T

I would like to carry over Chomsky's hypothesis that "[t]he system tries to reach PF 'as fast as possible,' minimizing overt syntax" (1992:43). I interpret that to entail that procrastination is both possible and desirable. A weak NP-feature of T would allow a subject NP to remain in [SPEC,VP] and to procrastinate with rising to IP until after spell-out, i.e. to move covertly.

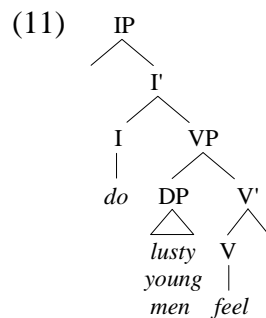
Both Anglo-Saxon and modern English have verb-second constructions, in which the tensed verbal element follows any clause-initial constituent. If that constituent is something other than the subject, the subject will remain in situ as the specifier of VP. Since Old English had typically strong AGR features while modern English AGR is typically weak, it is probably not AGR that allows the V-2 word order. I assume that it is an optionally weak NP-feature of T that licenses such procrastination.

V-2 constructions in modern English are generally known as "locative inversions." But Shakespeare also used them with clause-initial constituents other than locatives. All my Shakespearian examples below (with one exception) are from 'Romeo and Juliet':

- (10) a. Proud can I never be of what I hate (III.v.147)
- b. Such conflict as do lusty young men feel (I.ii.26)
- c. And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's tail (I.iv.79)

Sentences (10a.) and (10b.) clearly indicate that the subject resides between the tensed verbal element and the main verb, of which the straightforward account is that it remained in [SPEC,VP]—see (11).

Sentence (10a.) also clearly indicates that the first constituent resides not in CP, but between C and IP, because I-to-C raising is still possible ('can proud I ever be of what I hate?'). I assume that the first constituent in a V-2 sentence—when it is not a subject—is adjoined to IP, and that topicalization is adjunction to IP in general.



#### 4.1.3. Inert NP-feature of T

An inert NP-feature implies that no structural subject case is available in the matrix subject position. This occurs in infinitives (cf. \**He wants I to succeed him*). Infinitives do allow exceptional case marking, however, where an argument with subject function is case marked as if it were the object of a verb (*He wants me to succeed him*) or of the light preposition *for* (*He wants for me to succeed him*).

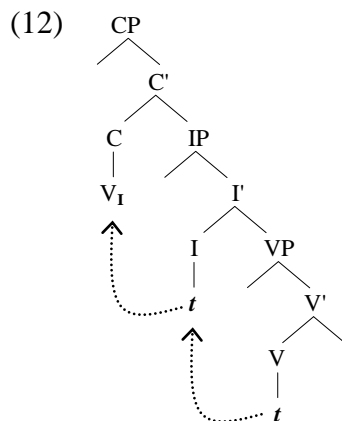
It can be argued that imperatives are likewise structures with inert T, because they also do not license a subject.

Section 4.2. will show how inert T interacts with strong/weak AGR to produce imperatives with main-verb raising/*do*-support.

## 4.2. AGR

### 4.2.1. Strong VP-feature of AGR

The structural feature AGR (verb agreement), assuming a language has it, also comes in two flavors: weak or strong (inert in non-finite clauses). In a strongly inflected language such as German, we assume that the first verbal element, including potentially the main verb itself, rises to the Inflection node (I) prior to phonetic spell-out. In that position, it is available for syntactic fronting in question formation (local I-to-C movement):



In Old English questions, the (strongly inflected) main verb would likewise rise to I and then on to C:

- (13) *Interrogo te, quid mihi loqueris? Quid habes operis?*  
*Ic axie þe, hwæt sprycst þu? Hwæt hæfst þu weorkes?*  
 'I ask you, what say you? What have you of works?'  
 (Ælfric's Colloquium with OE Interlinear Gloss)

If there is a modal verb, the main verb stays in situ and just the modal rises to C:

- (14) *Quid uultis loqui?*  
*Hwæt wille ge sprecan?*  
 'What want you to say?'

In (13), the main verb moved to I, checked its inflection, and then rose, fully inflected for agreement/tense, to C. In Modern English,

that would be a marked construction. Modern English inflection is not strong enough to attract main verbs. Thus, in an interrogative clause with a sole main verb, only the tense/agreement morpheme can move to C, creating the structure *what – TNS/AGR – you – say*, which is rescued by the dummy auxiliary *do* to provide a host body for the inflection—not associated with a morpheme anymore for the second person, but nonetheless still treated as active (thus: *what – do<sub>TNS/AGR</sub> – you – say*).

Yet, as mentioned in the introduction to section 4., we do have at least one verb left that patterns as strongly inflected because it fills so many slots with suppletive forms: *beon* (*be, been*) and the already suppletive *wesan* (*am, are, is, was, were*). This amalgamate main verb still rises to I and is fronted to C (thus: *Is he angry*, not: *!Does he be angry?*). The system is forced to retain the strong-AGR option for the verb *be*, even as all other verbs default to weak agreement.<sup>vii</sup> Strong AGR is also sometimes seen on main verb *have* in frozen expressions (*Have you no shame?*, *Have you any wool?*). To see strong AGR used productively to accommodate meter or to mark register, we turn to Shakespeare:

- (15) a. A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword? (I.i.76)
- b. O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today? (I.i.116)
- c. It is an honor that I dream not of. (II.iii.66)
- d. Do you not see that I am out of breath? (II.v.30)

Opting for strong (15 a., b., c.) or weak (15 c.) AGR preserved the iambic pentameter of each line—but additionally, the choices signal register: The first two lines signal status and are spoken by Lady Capulet and Lady Montague, respectively, and the third line goes to Juliet in a very formal and self-conscious speech situation, so those three lines reflect formal register. The fourth line, (15 d.), comes from Juliet's plain-spoken Nurse; 'See you not that I am out of breath' would also fit the meter, so Shakespeare's choice of weak AGR here signals colloquial plain-spokenness.

Strong AGR also licenses a phonetically empty pronominal *pro* in subject position. The discussion of strong AGR goes back to the discussion of a 'pro-drop parameter' (Hyams 1986 ch. 4, Radford 1990 ch. 8), which turned out to be licensing of a phonetically

empty subject position such as a *pro* specifier of IP (cf. Chomsky 1992: 14, 1995: 77). We certainly see null subjects in OE:

- (16) Nu sculon herigean heofonrices weard  
 now shall praise heaven's protector (Cædmon's Hymn)  
 'Now [we] shall praise the protector of heaven.'

Even Shakespeare still uses the occasional null subject:

- (17) Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages. (Cymbeline IV.ii.261)

Turning on strong AGR for main verbs is an option even with inert T, in imperatives:

- (18) a. O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon (II.ii. 109)  
 b. Do not swear at all (II.ii.112)

Sentence (18b.) is unmarked, with the main verb in situ and the dummy auxiliary *do* in I. Sentence (18a.), however, has the main verb in I, yanked up there by strong AGR. As always, the choices accommodate the meter, but the switch in register additionally suggests increasing urgency (letting go of formality) by Juliet as she speaks to Romeo from her balcony. The marked setting of strong AGR belongs into a more formal register, and as Juliet becomes agitated, her grammar slides back into the familiar default setting of everyday speech.

#### 4.2.2. Weak VP-feature of AGR

Since weak AGR is the well-understood default for English, not much needs to be illustrated in this section except to point out that it interacts with all settings of T just as strong AGR does:

- (19) a. Do you not see that I am out of breath? (II.v.30)  
 b. Such conflict as do lusty young men feel (I.ii.26)  
 c. Do not swear at all (II.ii.112)

In all instances, the main verb remains in situ and AGR is realized on dummy auxiliary *do*. Sentence (19a.) has the familiar strong T features, with the subject in matrix position. Sentence (19b.) has weak NP-features in T and leaves the subject in VP. Sentence (19c.), if I understand the imperative construction correctly, has inert T.

### 4.2.3. Inert VP-feature of AGR

Inert agreement renders a clause nonfinite, so there is probably no way that inert AGR could license a subject position in English (section 4.1.3.). However, casual spoken English sometimes takes the shortcut of combining inert T and AGR, as in the following:

(20) How, turn thy back and run? (I.i.35)

Sentence (20) has neither agreement nor tense, so it is not, strictly speaking, a clause, though it presents as one.

### 4.3. Synopsis of Stylistic Variation in English Inflection

Combining strong, weak, and inert T and AGR potentially yields nine possible combinations, save that inert AGR cannot combine with anything but inert T in English. I found examples of all seven possible English combinations exploited by Shakespeare to express stylistic variation/register. The brief synopsis below shows how an author or speaker of English could select from an array of features to achieve stylistic variation. The resulting forms are not capricious artifacts of language change or mere idiosyncracies; rather, their use and appreciation require knowledge of the paradigm:

*Table 1*

Examples of Shakespeare's use of  $\phi$ -features for stylistic variation in 'Romeo and Juliet'

	T			AGR		
	strong	weak	inert	strong	weak	inert
Why call you for a sword? (I.i.76)	●			●		
And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's tail. (I.iv.79)		●		●		
O, swear not by the moon (II.ii.109)			●	●		
Do you not see that I am out of breath? (II.v.30)	●				●	
Such conflict as do lusty young men feel (I.ii.26)		●			●	
Do not swear at all. (II.i.112)			●		●	
[not possible]	○					○
[not possible]		○				○
How, turn thy back and run? (I.i.35)			●			●



## 5. Discussion and Implications

My argument has been that modern English has alternate morpho-syntactic constructions (pre- and postnominal AP, inflected and periphrastic degree and possession), systems (inherent case vs. structural case assignment), and features (strong vs. weak inflections) in its inventory. They may be grammatically required, such as for *be* as the language's sole remaining strongly inflected verb, or they can be invoked at will. The speaker/writer is in conscious command of those alternatives and selects between them for stylistic choices such as register. Not being able to recognize and describe those choices renders teachers of English unable to systematically impart an appreciation of the mastery of such authors as Shakespeare because the variations will come across as free rather than distributed.

And the linguists are not blameless in this failure to apply the full range of grammar in stylistics. Having something both ways is confusing if your discovery/evaluation procedures aim to *select* between alternatives (cf. Chomsky 1965:§7). Here is what we remember about descriptive adequacy: It is the grammar that describes all the possible structures of a language, without gaps and without unwanted additions. One eventually arrives at such a grammar by comparing grammar models and choosing the better one. The lingering expectation generated by that metaphor is that we will eventually have a single coherent grammar of English. But English has a rather sizeable periphery around its regular core for having gone through such dramatic changes. In the periphery, we encounter remnants of borrowed or formerly regular systems. If indeed the state curricula move to emphasize issues such as language use and stylistic choices, then those of us linguists who teach grammar to future teachers of English Language Arts will set them up for failure if we continue to emphasize the regular core of the language over its wealth of marked constructions, the computational derivation of syntax over the control the speaker/writer imposes, and the general confusion of grammaticality vs. usage.

If we continue to treat the grammar of English like a Procrustean bed, then, I'd say, shame on us.

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Frances Fitzgerald (1980), Thomas Ayres (2000), Joseph Moreau (2004).

<sup>ii</sup> The AP English Language & Composition Exam is three hours and fifteen minutes long and consists of two sections. In Section I, students are given one hour to answer approximately 55 multiple-choice questions. In Section II, following a fifteen-minute reading period, students must answer three free-response questions within two hours. The multiple-choice questions test how well students are able to analyze the rhetoric of prose passages. Through the free-response questions students demonstrate their composition skills by writing essays in response to a variety of tasks that call for rhetorical analysis, synthesis of information sources and argument.' <[http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/english\\_lang/samp.html?englang](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/english_lang/samp.html?englang)>

<sup>iii</sup> An ELA teacher may well end up sending the wrong message here. A sample syllabus posted on line calls for the analysis of James Taylor's song 'Rainy Day Man' and for writing on the board sentences such as: 'Now, rainy day man, he don't like sunshine, he don't chase rainbows, he don't need good times... .' First discussion question: 'Why do they think James Taylor deliberately wrote ungrammatical sentences?' <[http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson\\_view.asp?id=950](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=950)>

<sup>iv</sup> Paramount, 2007. <<http://www.beowulfmovie.com>>

<sup>v</sup> Buena Vista, 1989. Actually, and intriguingly, the true title of the movie is 'Honey, I shrunk the kids.' Rumors of a release title for North Carolina, 'Honey, I done shrank the kids,' are unfounded, and at any rate such a title would phonetically prompt the psychotherapy reading.

<sup>vi</sup> One tongue-in-cheek commercial for a phone directory service already used a catch phrase delivered by actress Veronika Feldbusch: '11880—Da werden Sie geholfen' / that's where you get helped): <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKj-6yKSnLE>>, accessed 12-31-08. Do notice, however, that she did not say 'Da wird Sie geholfen,' with the expected passive morphology for the auxiliary. The agreement pattern appears to point into the direction of a middle voice.

<sup>vii</sup> I am beginning to see occasional signs of regularization, however, especially with *wh*-questions. For example, a search turned up this quote on a relationship counseling site on the Internet (though I have no way of knowing if this was produced by a native speaker): 'Why does he be like this and is he making it all up to control me because sometimes i do not believe what he is saying to me because i no i have not done it and i am shocked by what he says.' [emphasis mine] <<http://www.dearcupid.org/question/my-boyfriend-doesnt-seem-to-trust-me-why.html>>. On another site, I found: 'So if he really didn't like me then why does he be nice to me one minute then mean the next, plus I catch him cutting his eyes at me when ever I walk by him, or if I am working and look up I catch him staring at me.' <<http://www.girlsaskguys.com/Behavior-Questions/18604->>

[this-guy-at-my-job-was-saying-mean-things-about.html](#)>. Both sites accessed March 12, 2009. Finally, let's not forget the lines from one of the success hits by the Supremes, 'You Keep me Hanging On':

Why don't you be a man about it  
And set me free

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