

A syntactic change with lots of data: The rise of *do*-support with possessive 'have' in American English

Syntactic changes often proceed via competition between an innovative and a conservative variant of a linguistic variable. The grammar system, as described by a specific syntactic theory, employs the linguistic variable independently in a number of different contexts. Consequently, the innovative variant should increase with the same slope in all the environments it is used in, a prediction known as the Constant Rate Hypothesis (Kroch 1989).

In this talk I will present one of the most substantial empirical investigations of this hypothesis to date. The changing linguistic variable concerns the recent (in fact, ongoing) rise of *do*-support with possessive *have* in American English. The syntactic theory I use is a standard account of Modern English clause structure, in which auxiliaries and lexical verbs realize two different, respectively a higher and lower, head positions. American possessive *have* changes from the former to the latter type. This theory thus predicts changes in four distinct environments: (i) possessive *have* should develop *do*-support with sentential negation, (ii) under subject-auxiliary inversion and (iii) in ellipsis contexts. (iv) Further, possessive *have* should also change its order relative to certain elements diagnosing the lower head position. The relevant variation is illustrated in (1) for the sentential negation environment.

- (1) a. There, now, add the salt and pepper fixings, and the king himself **hasn't** a slicker supper.
(Hoffman, C. F. Greyslaer: *A Romance of the Mohawk*, 1840)
b. The farming community of 900 people **doesn't have** a single fast-food restaurant.
(Cicero, K. *Weight loss x 2*, 2005)

Large amounts of data are collected from the diachronic 400-million-word *Corpus of Historical American English* (Davies 2010). Logistic regression models are used to answer the question if the four contexts do indeed change at the same rate.

Kroch, Anthony. 1989. 'Reflexes of Grammar in Patterns of Language Change.' *Journal of Language Variation and Change* **1.3**, 199–244.

Davies, Mark. 2010. *The Corpus of Historical American English: 400 million words, 1810-2009*. <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/>