

A Cognitive Aspect of Optional Subjecthood in English*

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The English language has developed from a language with optional subjecthood into a language with obligatory subjecthood due to a general reduction of inflections. Two types of subject omission, pro-drop and conjunction reduction, have been reported in the history of English. Old English with rich inflections had both referential pro-drop and conjunction reduction. Middle English with much lesser inflections still witnessed pro-drop and conjunction reduction, but in such a decreasing way that modern English with a loss of inflections developed from Middle English hardly has either pro-drop or conjunction reduction. This paper explores both the phenomena relating to optional subjecthood in Old, Middle, and Modern English in light of the cognitive processes of the universal, hierarchical constraints that are assumed to be inherent in English speakers' cognitive faculty. It is found that optional subjecthood in Old, Middle, and Modern English is correctly captured in terms of the distinct rankings of the proposed constraints, and that it is closely related to whether each of Old, Middle, and Modern English has rich inflections.

Keywords : *history of English, Old English, Middle English, Modern English, optional subjecthood, constraints, pro-drop, conjunction reduction, inflections*

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Introduction

As the English language has developed from Old English (450-1100) into Middle English (1100-1500), and then to Modern English (1500-present), several grammatical changes have followed. Optional subjecthood in English from the Old to Modern English period has been one of the topics of keen interest for researchers in the history of English.

Old English with rich inflections had both referential pro-drop and conjunction reduction. As Mustanoja(1960: 138-139) notes, Middle English with much lesser inflections still showed pro-drop and conjunction reduction, but in such a decreasing way that modern English with a loss of inflections developed from Middle English hardly has either pro-drop or conjunction reduction. In other words, the omission of the subjects becomes less and less frequent during the Middle English times, so that the English language in the Modern times constitutes a language with a great loss of inflections and almost obligatory subjecthood.

Pro-drop, one of the topics of this paper that relates to optional subjecthood, has been widely attested in various languages including Italian and Spanish. The null-subject or pro-drop parameter has been discussed very productively and broadly in Rizzi (1980, 1982), and Jaeggli and Safir (1989). It has been argued that languages that have a null-subject parameter allow null-spelled-out subjects, and show lack of *that*-trace effects and overt expletives, and allow for free subject inversion, long *wh*-movement of subjects, and empty resumptive pronouns in embedded clauses (see Chomsky 1981:240). Sentences in these languages have syntactic subjects, some of which are deleted or otherwise rendered phonetically null in the course of the derivation.¹⁾

1) Assuming UTAH(Uniform Theta-role Assignment Hypothesis) stating that a predicate should assign a unique thematic role to each of the arguments in the initial step of derivation, the

This study on null subjects in the history of English includes the examination of the data in three periods: Old English (450-1100), Middle English (1100-1500), and Modern English (1650-present). The data concerning Old English comes from the Old English Concordance (hereafter OEC), the Bosworth-Toller dictionary (BT) and its supplement (BTs) and secondary sources. The data on Middle English is mainly based on the Middle English Dictionary (MED) and some primary and secondary sources. And the data on early Modern English are mainly from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).

In order to provide an optimality-theoretic approach to the historical change of optional subjecthood in English, three universal hierarchical constraints were proposed in this study: Economy_{Non}, Economy_{Non-nom} and Full Interpretation. Throughout the historical process, the hierarchy among these three constraints has varied to allow different results with respect to the presence of the subject in English.

Section 2 examines the so-called “pro-drop” phenomenon in Old, Middle and Modern English. Section 3 develops a constraint-based approach to the optionality of subjecthood examined in section 2. Section 4 deals with the conjunction-reduction phenomenon as a subpart of the subject optionality issue, and section 5 shows that it can be nicely explained by slightly changing the hierarchy of the three constraints. Finally, section 6 is a conclusion of this paper.

It will be shown in this paper that optional subjecthood of Old, Middle, and Modern English is correctly captured in terms of the distinct rankings of the proposed grammatical constraints and that it is closely related to whether each of Old, Middle, and Modern English has rich inflections.

subject, even though it is phonetically null, must receive a thematic role from the predicate. Thus the absence of the subject in the sentence should be considered as a phonetical issue, not a syntactic one.

Pro-drop phenomenon in the history of English

This section examines the so called “pro-drop” phenomenon in Old, Middle and Modern English. Old English is one of the pro-drop languages, which optionally omits the subject when the subject has its coreferential antecedent somewhere in the context. As Mitchell (1985: 628) observes, an omitted subject can be recovered from a noun or pronoun in the same clause, or in a neighboring clause or subordinate clause, or in a distant clause in Old English. Middle English also shows the pro-drop of a referential NP, even though the non-expression of the subject occurs less and less frequently as the language progressed towards the end of the Middle English period. And Modern English is not a pro-drop language, except some residue cases which will be shown later.

First, consider the following Old English data where subjects can be phonetically null:

{Old English}

- (1) Nap nihtscua, norþan [e] sniwde.
grew-dark night-shadow from-north snowed
‘The shadow of night grew dark, it snowed from the north.’
- (2) ðeah ðe hi næfre leorningchihtas næren, [e] wilniað ðeah lareowas to beonne
though that they never pupils not-were desire though teachers to be
‘although they were never students, they yet desire to be teachers.’
- (3) hit swa swiðe rinde þæt hie hæfdon wæter genog
it so much rained that they had water enough
‘It rained so much that they had enough water’
- (4) He wæs geconstnod swa a mann
he was tempted as a man
‘He was tempted as a man.’

Examples in Old English above show the full optionality of pro-drop subjects. In other words, they may or may not be phonetically null spelled-out depending on the context. What this implies is that during the Old English period English speakers had some cognitive system which may recover the antecedent of the subject that is null spelled-out in order to satisfy some economy principles or constraints. Constraints will be shortly discussed in the next section.

Now let us consider the early Middle English which also shows optional subjecthood:

[Early Middle English]

- (5) a. for he hadde power of confessioun, as [e] seyde hemself, ...
 ‘for he had power of confession, as [he] said himself ...’
- b. for he hadde power of confessioun, as he seyde hemself, ...
 ‘for he had power of confession, as he said himself ...’

In the above Middle English example (5a), the third person singular subject “he” is phonetically silent because there is a coreferential antecedent in the previous clause. On the other hand, the subject was phonetically realized in (5b), suggesting optional subjecthood of Middle English. Thus, it seems clear that, during the period from Old to Early Middle English, speakers enjoyed the full optionality of subjecthood, though the non-expression of the subject becomes less and less frequent towards the end of the Middle English period.

However, English from the Late Middle to Modern English period has required the presence of the subject. Consider the following examples from Late Middle English.

[Late Middle English]

- (6) a. *And fayn I wolde my sowle saue. perfore [e] do it nouȝt
(Castle of Perseverance 531)
 and gladly I would my sould save. Therefore do it not

‘And I am eager to save my soul. Therefore I don't do it.’

- b. And fayn I wolde my sowle saue. þerfore I do it nouȝt
and gladly I would my sould save. Therefore I do it not

(7) a. ??He it me tok. And ʒit {e} ʒeuiþ not þis grace.

(Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess* 48)

He it me tok and yet gives not this grace.

‘He took it for me. And yet he does not give this grace.’

- b. He it me tok. And ʒit he ʒeuiþ not þis grace.

He it me tok and yet he gives not this grace.

As shown in the above examples, overtly realized subjects are strongly favored over non-expressed subjects in Late Middle English.

Next, let us look at the following Modern English data which requires the presence of the subject:

[Modern English]

(8) a. Although they were never students, they yet desire to be teachers.

b. *Although they were never students, {e} yet desire to be teachers.

(9) a. John was astonished. He kept silent.

b. *John was astonished. {e} kept silent.

As we see in the examples, the unpronounced subjects make the whole sentences ungrammatical. Considered from the historical perspective, the non-expression of the subject in English gradually disappeared in the long period of time along with its morphological inflections being reduced..

In what follows, Optimality Theory will be adopted to account for the optional subjecthood during the historical development of English.

A Constraint-Based Account

This section develops an optimality-theoretic approach to account for the optionality of subjecthood examined in section 2. The initial step to be put forward is to propose relevant constraints or principles with respect to the pro-drop phenomenon. For the purpose of an explanation of this phenomenon we need to motivate economy principles which will be necessary to explain the phonetic silence of the subject. We will refer to them as Economy_{NOM} and Economy_{NON-NOM}, whose definitions are given below in (10).

As a next constraint it is necessary to motivate a principle which requires us to use as many expressions as possible if they provide a complete interpretation of a sentence. We will refer to it as Full Interpretation principle or constraint. Thus the three constraints motivated so far can be summarized as follows:

(10) Constraints for Pro-drops in English

- (A) ECONOMY_{NOM}: The subject is deleted, which has its coreferential Nominative antecedent somewhere in the context.
- (B) ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}: The subject is deleted, which has its coreferential non-Nominative antecedent somewhere in the context.
- (C) FULL INTERPRETATION (FI): The expression should be spelled out for interpretation.

The interconnection among these three constraints during the period of historical change produced different results with respect to the presence of the subject in English. For a proper account of pro-drop in Old and Middle English, the following hierarchy is proposed:

(11) Ranking of the Constraints for Pro-drop in Old & Early Middle English

$$\text{ECONOMY}_{\text{NOM}} = \text{ECONOMY}_{\text{NON-NOM}} = \text{FI}$$

From the perspective of the constraint-based approach, it is interesting to note that English from the Old to Middle English period allowed full optionality of the presence of the subject because these three constraints were totally unordered with respect to one another. The tableau below illustrates straightforwardly why the optionality is freely allowed:

(12) English from Old to Early Middle English period

INPUT	ECON _{NOM}	ECON _{NON-NOM}	FI
Null-Subject			*
Overt Subject	*		

Since all three constraints share the same hierarchy, both the null subject and the overt subject will be selected as optimal candidates. This thus means that people enjoyed complete optionality of subjecthood during the Old to Early Middle English period.

Differently from Old English, English from the Late Middle to the Modern English period has required the presence of the subject because Full Interpretation always takes higher hierarchy over the other two constraints, Economy_{Non}, and Economy_{Non-nom}, as seen in the following:

(13) Ranking of the Constraints for Pro-drop in Late Middle and Modern English

$$FI > ECONOMY_{NOM} > ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}$$

(14) Tableau for the Subjecthood of the Late Middle to Modern English period

INPUT	FI	ECON _{NOM}	ECON _{NON-NOM}
Null-Subject	*		
Overt Subject		*	

By slightly changing the hierarchy of the constraints, a seemingly complicated optional subject phenomenon in English can nicely be accounted for.

Furthermore these constraints can also apply to the somewhat weird null-subject data from Present-day English(PDE), as illustrated in (15-16):

(15) a. He explained the difficult situation.

Beats me.

b. He explained the difficult situation.

??It beats me.

(16) a. The difficult situation is really hard to understand.

Beats me.

b. The difficult situation is really hard to understand.

??It beats me.

In Present-Day English, the subjects in the sentences (15-16) are preferably null-spelled out for some reason. Strangely enough, it is rather ungrammatical if the subject is pronounced. Under the current OT mechanism this null subject phenomenon can also be accounted for by slightly changing the constraint hierarchy as follows:

(17) Ranking for pro-drop of Present Day English

$ECONOMY_{NOM} = ECONOMY_{NON-NOM} > FI$

(18) Tableau For pro-drop of Present Day English

INPUT	ECON _{NOM}	ECON _{NON-NOM}	FI
(15a) [E]			*
(15b)		*	

(19) Tableau For pro-drop of Present Day English

INPUT	ECON _{NOM}	ECON _{NON-NOM}	FI
(16a) [E]			*
(16b)	*		

As we examined so far, the optionality of subjecthood in English can be nicely accounted for by proposing three constraints and modifying the hierarchy among them in an appropriate fashion. In what follows we will explore another type of null-subject phenomenon, the so-called conjunction reduction, in terms of the interaction of a set of the constraints motivated so far.

Conjunction Reduction in the History of English

In the first half of this paper, we discussed pro-drop in English, a type of optional subjecthood, which is a natural linguistic phenomenon in such Romance languages as Italian and Spanish. In the latter half of this paper, we will discuss in detail conjunction reduction in English, which is viewed as an extension of pro-drop to the coordinate structures in English. Section 4 discusses the phenomenon in depth, and Section 5 exclusively investigates it in light of the universal, hierarchical constraints that are assumed to be inherent in English speakers' cognitive faculty.

Conjunction Reduction in Old and Middle English

We noted in sections 2-3 that Old English is one of the pro-drop languages, which optionally omits the subject when the subject has its coreferential antecedent somewhere in the context. As Mitchell (1985: 628) observes, an omitted subject can be recovered from a noun or pronoun in the same clause, or in a neighboring clause or subordinate clause, or in a distant clause in Old English. We observed in sections 2-3 that Middle English also shows the pro-drop of a referential NP, even though the non-expression of the subject occurs less and less frequently as the language progressed towards the end of the Middle English period. And Modern English does not constitute a pro-drop language, except some residue cases, shown in (15-16).

The phenomenon that relates closely to pro-drop in the history of English is called conjunction reduction. The example (20) is from Old English, and (21) is an example from Middle English.

{Old English}

- (20) þ wearþ him; ærest ege ... and _____ i gefor on Brutti þæt lond
(Elmer 49)
then was him(DAT) first afraid and _____ proceed in Brutti that land.
'Then he was first afraid and went to the land of the Brutti.'

{Middle English}

- (21) that knyght smote down sir Trystramus; frome hys horse, and _____ i had a grete falle.
'That knight smote down sir Tristramu from his horse and [he] had a great fall'

As is shown above, the subject in the second conjunct in the coordinate clause is deleted, being coreferential to the Dative NP in the first conjunct. On the other hand,

the subject in the second conjunct in (21) is deleted, being coreferential to the Accusative NP in the first conjunct. It follows that the subject in the second conjunct in a coordinate clause may be deleted under identity with the oblique experiencer in the first conjunct in Old and Middle English.

With regard to the motivations for non-expression of the subject in Old and Middle English, we argue that rich inflections are closely related to the subject-deletion phenomena. As Baugh & Cable (1993:50-54) note, the most fundamental feature that distinguishes Old English from Modern English is its grammar. Old English constituted an inflectional language like Latin. The subject and object in Old English had distinctive forms. Further, Old English had inflectional endings to indicate many of the other relations marked by case endings, like Latin. However, Middle English became different from Old English in regards to inflections. The inflectional endings for the nouns in Middle English were seriously disturbed, and the changes in Middle English grammar may be described as a general reduction of inflections (Baugh & Cable 1993: 154-155).²⁾ Even though Middle English became a language with much less inflectional endings than Old English, it was more inflected than Modern English. This is why pro-drop including conjunction reduction still occurred in Middle English, even though much less frequently than Old English, and why it doesn't occur in Modern English.

Consider if the oblique NP in the first conjunct that induced deletion of the subject in the second conjunct is a subject. Conjunction reduction has been utilized as a test for subjecthood in many Germanic languages (Zaenan et al. 1985) and in Old English (Cole et al. 1980, Bynon 1985, Lightfoot 1979, Allen 1995, etc.). They basically assume that the subject in the second conjunct is deleted, being coreferential to the subject in the first conjunct. They argue that the experiencer *him* in the Dative Case

2) To cite an example, in the London English of Chaucer, the forms *stān*, *stānes*, *stāne*, *stān* in the singular and *stānas*, *stāna*, *stānum*, *stānas* in the plural were reduced to three: *stān*, *stānes*, *stāne*. The only distinctive termination was the -s of the possessive singular and of the nominative and accusative plural (Baugh & Cable 1993: 155-156).

in (20) is a subject.

However, as H. Kim (1997: 215) notes, this test is problematic for subjecthood in Old English, because a clear non-subject with the ordinary verb in the first conjunct could also be deleted when occurring in the second conjunct clause, as shown in the Old English example (22) below and the Middle English example (21).

{Old English}

(22) His_i forme gefeoht wæs wið Atheniense & _____ ; hie oferwonn
his first fight was against Athens them over-won
'His first fight was against Athens and [he] overcame them.'

Thus, the claim that the oblique experiencer in (20) is a subject is on the wrong track. The correct characterization of the phenomenon at hand is that the subject of the second conjunct in a coordinate clause in Old and Middle English may be deleted under identity with the oblique experiencer in the first conjunct, which may not be a subject.

Conjunction Reduction in Modern English

English grammar in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is characterized more by the survival of certain forms and usages that have since disappeared than by any fundamental developments. The great changes that reduced the inflections of Old English to their modern proportions had already taken place. Modern English lost most of the inflections that had been used in the Old English times. The only inflections retained in the noun were those marking the plural and the possessive singular (Baugh & Cable 1993: 235). In Modern English, the subject and the object do not have distinctive forms, nor do we have, except in the possessive case and in pronouns, inflectional endings to indicate the other relations marked by case endings in Latin.

The great loss of inflections in Modern English goes hand in hand with the general loss of pro-drop including conjunction reduction.

Consider the following examples:

- (23) a. *His_i first fight was against Athens and ______i overcame them.
b. His_i first fight was against Athens and he_i overcame them.
- (24) a. *That knight smote down sir Tristramus_i from his horse and ______i had a great fall.
b. That knight smote down sir Tristramus_i from his horse and he_i had a great fall.
- (25) a. *They hired Sue_i and ______i teaches Architecture.
b. They hired Sue_i and she_i teaches Architecture.

In a pro-drop language, the omission of the subject in an independent clause can be recovered contextually from any other NP as well as a subject in the preceding clause or context. We argue, following H. Kim (1997: 216), that the pro-drop phenomenon in Old and Middle English was extended to the coordinate structures in those times. It follows that conjunction reduction per se does not occur in Modern English, which is not a pro-drop language.

Even though conjunction reduction per se does not occur in Modern English, it is still possible to delete the subject of the second conjunct in a coordinate structure, when it is coreferential to the subject of the first conjunct, as shown below.

- (26) a. They_i fired John and ______i hired Bill.
b. ^{??}They_i fired John and they_i hired Bill.

Here we extend the notion ‘conjunction reduction’ to cover subject-deletion in a coordinate clause shown in (26) in Modern English.

An Account of Conjunction Reduction in Old and Middle English

We noted in the previous section that the subject in the second conjunct in a coordinate clause may be deleted under identity with the oblique experiencer in the first conjunct in Old and Middle English. We also noted that the so-called conjunction reduction is an extension of pro-drop to the coordinate structures in those times. In the first half of this paper, we came up with the constraints $ECONOMY_{NOM}$, $ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}$ and FULL INTERPRETATION to give an account of pro-drop in the history of English.

We put forth the same constraints to yield a characterization of the cognitive working of the human mind relating to the phenomenon of conjunction reduction, which is viewed as another type of pro-drop.

(27) Ranking of the Constraints for Conjunction Reduction in Old & Middle English

$$ECONOMY_{NOM} = ECONOMY_{NON-NOM} > FI$$

The relevant examples are repeated here:

- (28) a. þ wearþ him_i ærest ege ... and ______i gefor on Brutti þæt lond
then was him(DAT) first afraid and _____ proceed in Brutti that land.
‘Then he was first afraid and went to the land of the Brutti.’
- b. þ wearþ him ærest ege ... and he gefor on Brutti þæt lond
then was him(DAT) first afraid and he proceed in Brutti that land.
- (29) a. that knyght smote down sir Trystramus_i frome hys horse, and ______i had a grete falle.
‘That knight smote down sir Tristramu from his horse and [he] had a great fall’
- b. that knyght smote down sir Trystramus_i frome hys horse, and he_i had a grete falle.

We observe here that, even though both the (a) and (b) examples above are

grammatical, the (a) examples are regarded optimal, compared with the (b) examples. This might be due to the cognitive working of the human mind that has a preference for “simplicity” or “economy”.³⁾

The following tableau gives the characterization of the cognitive processes that relate to the production of the sentences under consideration.

(30) Tableau for Conjunction Reduction in Old & Middle English

INPUT	ECON _{NOM}	ECON _{NON-NOM}	FI
(28a) (29a) ES			*
(28b) (29b)		*	

The examples (28a) and (29a), where the subject of the second conjunct is omitted, being coreferential to the oblique NP in the first conjunct, are in violation of the lowest ranked FULL INTERPRETATION, and thus are selected as optimal. On the other hand, (28b) and (29b) are predicted less optimal than the (a) examples in violation of the higher ranked ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}.

What this means is that the non-expression of the subject in the second conjunct in a coordinate structure, which is coreferential to the oblique experiencer in the first conjunct, is preferred in Old and Middle English.

3) An anonymous reviewer suggested that the following rankings of the constraints could be used as coexisting grammars in the sense of Kroch & Talyor (1997) to account for the grammaticality of (28a, 29a) and (28b, 29b).

(i) ECONOMY_{NOM} = ECONOMY_{NON-NOM} > FI

(ii) FI > ECONOMY_{NOM} = ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}

Even though these coexisting grammars could explain the data under consideration, they fail to account for the preference matter that appear in those examples. We suggest (27) to give an account of the preference matter in (28a, 29a) and (28b, 29b).

An Account of Conjunction Reduction in Modern English

It was pointed out in 4.2 that the great loss of inflections in Modern English goes hand in hand with the general loss of pro-drop including conjunction reduction. Thus, conjunction reduction per se that occurred in Old and Middle English does not occur in Modern English, as shown in (31).

However, in 4.2, we extended the notion “conjunction reduction” to cover subject-deletion in a coordinate clause in Modern English, as shown in (32).

- (31) a. They_i hired Sue_i and she_i teaches Architecture.
 b. *They_i hired Sue_i and ______i teaches Architecture.

- (32) a. They_i fired John and ______i hired Bill.
 b. ??They_i fired John and they_i hired Bill.

We propose the following ranking of the constraints for conjunction reduction in Modern English.

(33) Ranking of the Constraints for Conjunction Reduction in Modern English

$$\text{ECONOMY}_{\text{NOM}} > \text{FI} > \text{ECONOMY}_{\text{NON-NOM}}$$

The following tableau will account for the sentences in (31a-b).

(34) Tableau for Conjunction Reduction in Modern English

INPUT	ECON _{NOM}	FI	ECON _{NON-NOM}
(31a) $\text{[ECONOMY}_{\text{NOM}}]$			*
(31b)		*	

The sentence (31a) is in violation of the lowest ranked $ECONOMY_{NON-NOM}$, while (31b) is in violation of the higher ranked FULL INTERPRETATION. Thus, the former is chosen as optimal.

The cognitive processes that relate to the sentences in (32a-b) can be represented in the following tableau in terms of an interaction of the set of universal constraints under consideration.

(35) Tableau for Conjunction Reduction in Modern English

INPUT	$ECON_{NOM}$	FI	$ECON_{NON-NOM}$
(32a) [CF]		*	
(32b)	*		

The sentence (32a) is selected as optimal in violation of the lower constraint FULL INTERPRETATION, while the sentence (32b) constitutes the less optimal candidate in violation of the highest constraint $ECONOMY_{NOM}$.

To summarize, we have seen that the phenomenon of conjunction reduction in the history of English is correctly captured in terms of an interaction of a set of universal cognitive constraints that are assumed to function actively in English speakers' cognitive faculty.

Conclusion

The English language has developed from a language with optional subjecthood into a language with obligatory subjecthood due to a general reduction of inflections. Two types of subject deletion have been reported in the history of English: referential

pro-drop and conjunction reduction.

Old English with rich inflections had both referential pro-drop and conjunction reduction. Middle English with much lesser inflections still witnessed pro-drop and conjunction reduction, but in such a decreasing way that modern English with a loss of inflections developed from Middle English hardly has either pro-drop or conjunction reduction. In other words, the omission of the subjects becomes less and less frequent, until the English language has progressed into a language with a great loss of inflections and almost obligatory subjecthood.

In the first half of this paper, we explored the non-expression of the subject, pro-drop, in Old, Middle, and Modern English. In 3, we investigated the phenomenon in light of the cognitive processes of the universal, hierarchical constraints that are assumed to be inherent in English speakers' cognitive component.

In the latter half, we thoroughly discussed conjunction reduction, another type of subject deletion, in Old, Middle, and Modern English. In section 4, we pursued an account of conjunction reduction in terms of a set of universal constraints that are taken to function actively in the cognitive component of the human mind.

To conclude, the optional subjecthood of Old, Middle, and Modern English is correctly captured in terms of the distinct rankings of the proposed cognitive constraints and that it is closely related to whether each of Old, Middle, and Modern English has rich inflections.

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〈요 약〉

영어의 수의적 주어 현상의 인지적 양상

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이 논문의 목표는 첫째, 고대, 중세, 현대 영어에 나타나는 수의적 주어 현상을 다양한 문헌에 기초하여 기술적으로 자세히 고찰하고 역사적 변화에 대한 동기를 살펴보고, 둘째, 최근 영어사 연구에서 큰 역할을 하고 있는 인지적 제약(constraints)에 기반하여 수의적 주어 현상의 역사적 변화에 대한 원리적인 설명을 하는 것이다. 영어사에서 두 유형의 주어 생략-영 주어(pro) 탈락과 등위절 주어-이 고대, 중세, 및 현대 영어에 나타났는데, 고대 영어는 풍부한 굴절 체계의 영향으로 영주어 탈락과 등위절 주어 생략이 다 같이 나타났고, 굴절이 많이 약화된 중세영어에는 여전히 이 두 현상이 나타났으나 발생정도가 점점 감소 추세였으며, 따라서 소유격과 대명사를 제외하고는 굴절이 상실된 현대 영어에서는 영주어 탈락과 등위절 주어 생략 그 자체가 거의 사라지게 되었다. 이 논문에서는 영어발달사적 관점에서 고대, 중세, 현대 영어의 주어 생략현상이 문법적 측면에서 세 가지 제약들의 위계(hierarchy) 변화로 발생하였고, 형태적 측면에서는 굴절체계의 변화로 발생하였음을 보였다.

주제어 : 영어사, 고대영어, 중세영어, 현대영어, 선택적 주어 생략현상, 등위절 주어 생략, 경제성제약, 완전해석제약, 굴절현상, 최적후보