Some more on the history of present-tense –s and zero: West Oxfordshire, 1837

0. Introduction

In this article I consider the English present-tense, third-person indicative paradigm, as evidenced by one informant, a London footman called William Tayler. William Tayler was born in 1807 in Grafton, West Oxfordshire, a hamlet which lies between Oxford and Swindon in the Vale of the White Horse. He came to work for a wealthy London lady and her daughter when in his late twenties. In his thirtieth year he kept a daily diary, providing data on his written present-tense verb system. Linguistic evidence from footmen is relatively rare: they belonged to that echelon of society that had received sufficient education as to enable literacy in both reading and writing, but were unable to stay at school long enough to completely master written Standard English.

There are three present-tense markers present in William Tayler’s written system: the auxiliary verb do (‘he does go’), the suffix –s (‘he goes’), and zero, that is, the bare form of the verb (‘he go’). William Tayler’s writing is found to be low on auxiliary affirmative declarative (known as ‘periphrastic’) do, nonstandard third-person -sful at 9%, and also nonstandard third-person zero-ful at 7%. Hitherto, the language of West Oxfordshire (bearing in mind that he may have been influenced by London English) has been thought to be –sful, and possibly also do-ful, but not zero-ful, although to my knowledge, no studies have focussed on West Oxfordshire in the early nineteenth century. Hypothesising as to the reason why he had third-person indicative zeroes in his present-tense indicative system, I examine and discard the possibility of hypercorrection, and suggest that William Tayler’s zeroes may have been an interim stage between the retreat of periphrastic do, and the advance of –s. A scenario of do go → go → goes is posited.

I am indebted to Dr Ann Saunders for her help with access to William Tayler’s diary, and to his present-day descendant and owner of his diary and scrapbook, Mrs Wynne Wooding. I thank Mrs Wooding for her permission to transcribe William Tayler’s diary, and also for her kind hospitality. Dr Marcelle Cole, Prof Juhani Klemola, Dr Arja Nurmi and Prof Peter Trudgill are thanked for reading earlier drafts. My thanks to Prof Juhani Klemola for permission to reproduce his map, Dr Jonathan Robinson, Lead Content Specialist: Sociolinguistics & Education, British Library, for locating the SED Sound Recording extracts, and to Prof Peter Trudgill for raising the issue of hypercorrection. Some of the data in this paper has been presented at the Seventy-second Southeastern Conference on Linguistics, North Carolina State University and University of North Carolina, 2005, and at the first Workshop on Southern Englishes, University of Brighton, 2014. Errors are my own.
1.0 William Tayler’s third-person verb morphology, as evidenced in his diary of 1837

In 1837 William Tayler kept a diary because:

January 1 1837 As I am a wretched bad writer many of my friends have advised me to practise more to do which I have made many attempts but allways forgot or got tired so that it was never atended to I am now about to write a sort of journal to note down some of the chief things that come under my observation each day this I hope will induce me to make use of my pen every day

He was disappointed in his experiment, as his entry for the 22nd of October reads:

October 22 Sunday is come once more the weather continue very fine and much to dry for the farmers I am got quite tired of this writeing as I do not improve as I expected I should but I neglect writeing for two or three days sometimes then I take up my pen and hurrey it over any how I am a regular dunce and allways shall be I was born a dunce I live a dunce and I shall die a dunce we had company to dinner today

He almost never punctuates. William Tayler was born in Green Farm at Grafton and probably went to school at Langford, two miles away, where there were probably six schools of various levels. He probably lived in the locality until adulthood, but by the time we meet him he had been living in London for several years. Exactly how many is not clear, but long enough to learn the art of being the single footman in a wealthy household, which is to say, the chief servant and administrator. Linguistically his grammar would have been set by the time he left Grafton, and may have been moderated somewhat by his time in London. Further, his speech is likely to have begun to be influenced in an upward-prestige direction before he left Oxfordshire as he entered the household of a local squire when he first went into service, and we know from his diary that he was ambitious. At the least, his speech cannot have been too rural or outlandish for his rank and place, as his employer lived at Cumberland Gate, now Marble Arch, opposite Hyde Park, which was then one of the most fashionable places in town. She would have been able to afford the very best in servants, and William Tayler clearly came up to the mark, as he stayed in the household until she died. His granddaughter when aged 92 reported that she remembered him as being “every inch a gentleman” (Wise (ed.) 1962 [1998]: 88). As well as keeping a diary he kept a scrapbook, and he sent both home to Grafton for his family to read, and they have been kept by his descendants ever since. The diary is published, but not in edition that is suitable for linguists as too much of the

---

2 Information taken from Saunders’ and Wise’s research, presented in Wise (ed.): 1962 [1998]).
The scrapbook is unpublished, but contains no linguistic information.

Before examining William Tayler’s verb morphology, here follows a short summary of what one might expect of the Grafton present-tense system, based on previous studies.

1.1 Previous studies

I am unaware of any studies pertaining to West Oxfordshire in the first half of the nineteenth century, but there is evidence of what speech in this region might have been like in the second half. The Survey of English Dialects, gathered by eleven fieldworkers between 1948 and 1961, collected verb morphology from speakers who would have been acquiring their language in the late nineteenth century, which is to say, about three generations after William Tayler was born in 1807. Klemola (1996) analysed answers given to the SED questionnaire from informants in the South West of England, and also fieldworkers’ recordings of informants’ spontaneous conversation and off-questionnaire notes. From this data we learn that as well as the present-day Standard English present-tense paradigm (which marks all persons with zero, except for third-person singular, which is marked with –s), some southern speakers retained earlier periphrastic do, and some southern speakers had generalised –s to all persons. Map 3.9a is taken from Klemola (1996: 53), and shows the distribution of periphrastic do and the generalized –s marker in SED informants’ speech.

---

3 This edition has been used by a historian, writing about Masculinity and the English Working Class: Studies in Victorian Autobiography and Fiction. (Ying S. Lee, Routledge, 2007).
This map is an overview of the distribution south-western speakers who gained their system around 1870-90. It shows that the South-West is not uniform with regard to verb morphology. The part of the South-West with the big black dots is -sful, but not categorically so, and this is where Grafton lies. The adjacent part to the west, shaded dark grey, shows affirmative declarative do (also not categorical), and there is a thin light-grey transition zone between the two – effectively the two systems are to a large extent in complementary distribution, so that if your speech contained periphrastic \textit{do}, you did not have nonstandard generalised -s, and if you were -sful, you lacked periphrastic (that is, unstressed affirmative declarative) \textit{do}. Klemola (1996: 49–60) discusses the generalised -s marker, and reports that Elworthy (1886: xlvi) hypothesised that when speakers dropped the rule which allowed unstressed periphrastic \textit{do} in affirmative declarative sentences, they did not switch directly to the standard English rule where only third-person singular forms receive the inflectional ending -s; rather, they generalised -s to all persons. If this is so, then Map 3.9a is a snapshot of the retreat of periphrastic \textit{do}, and the advance of generalised -s.
Grafton lies in the Thames Valley, close to the borders with Wiltshire and Berkshire. Across the Vale of the White Horse, along the Thames Valley on the Oxfordshire/Berkshire border, lies the town of Reading. Cheshire (1982) studied the spontaneous speech of some children in the town of Reading in the late 1970s (so about seven generations after William Tayler’s acquisition of grammar), and she also analysed some recordings of older Reading speakers pronouncing word-lists (about six generations after him). She found generalised –s and auxiliary do, reporting that there were in fact three forms in Reading (1982: 34-38): do, does, dos [duːz]. Reading speakers used dos [duːz] as a full verb only, does most frequently as a full verb, but that by contrast, nonstandard do (i.e. he/she/it do) preponderated as an auxiliary verb. Cheshire also analysed tokens of have, and found that nonstandard –ful has mainly occurred when used as a full verb, but nonstandard  zero-ful have (he/she/it have) preponderated as an auxiliary. Thus, she found that nonstandard, zero forms correlated with auxiliary function:

but it hurts my dad more than it do her (Mandy)
the doctor have allowed me (Mrs Ling)
he haven’t written to me (Mrs Dell)

Just as Cheshire found three forms of do in Reading, William Tayler has three kinds of have: have, has, haves/havents:

11 Jan John Tayler the shoe maker from Turnham Green has called to see me this morning haves lunch, sits gosiping till dinner time and then sits gosiping until tea time and now he is gone home so much sitting indoors do not suit him

May 12 Began to draw a little to day havents done any thing to it for six weeks before

Turning now to the Sound Recordings of the Survey of English Dialects, the following third-person zero tokens occur in the more southern and western parts of Wessex:

Slimbridge, Gloucestershire:
when the sun get out in the day
when it get cool in the afternoon

Merriott, Somerset:
him go right through the tother side the lane

---

4 I am grateful to Dr Jonathan Robinson for locating these tokens in the SED Sound Recordings. Joseph Wright in his English Dialect Grammar writes of the third-person singular ending being “often dropped, especially in the s.Midl, eastern and southern dialects”. See also Wakelin (1977: 119-120), writing about South-western dialects, and for earlier instances, see Bailey and Ross (1988: 199).
oh ah this go right to Yeovil there
that grow a lot of rush

Steeple Ashton, Wiltshire:
you mean what come beside the post like that, come beside the post like that, doesn’t he?

Portesham, Dorset:
on comes the thatcher and thatch hine in, you see

Peter Tavy, Devon:
that mean to say that we carried cattle we carried sheep and we carried ponies

Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and part of Devon are within the periphrastic-do region; that is, the –sless region on Klemola’s map 3.9a. Elworthy’s hypothesis was that as affirmative do receded, -s took its place. However it looks as though it was not a binary transition directly from the one to the other but that the zero morpheme was also present in the system.

So far, then, we are armed with the knowledge that parts of the South-West were –sful but that more western parts of the South-West were doful in the late nineteenth century, when the elderly informants of the mid-twentieth century acquired their grammar. We have seen from the SED Sound Recordings that the doful part of the South-West also had indicative third-person zeroes. We have learnt that syntax matters, because auxiliaries can still be zeroful, even in –sful areas. I now turn to some sixteenth-century data, in order to introduce the notion of the subjunctive, as it used to be. Here is a witness’s court testimony from the London Court of Bridewell and Bethlem of 1576:

She saieth that Mrs Esgriges said that yf m[r] Recorder medle with her she would stop his mouthe/ She saieth that Sineor deprosp[er] the Italian Do kepe Elizabeth Cowper and paid xs a weke for it
(MS Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell and Bethlem, fo 23, 23v, June 1576)

In Wright (2001) I discussed the forms and functions of the Early Modern subjunctive, as it seemed to me that these may well be alive in various American Englishes (Wright 2001, see also Wright 2002, 2003). The Early Modern subjunctive was governed by conditional and concessive links, signalled by if, until/til, as though, although, so, as, so as, unless, whether, and (in the sense of ‘even though’, ‘in the case that’), except, and other link markers. The verb medle is governed by the conditional link if. It is a subjunctive, and the subjunctive marker was, from Old English times, a zero morpheme. However the second zero here is in the indicative mood: Sineor Deprosp[er] the Italian do kepe Elizabeth Cowper. It is in a subordinate clause – but practically all court testimony is; that alone doesn’t account for the zero. This zero is marking an auxiliary verb, just as Cheshire found preponderating in Reading. It is unlikely to be marking habitual aspect,
as discussed by e.g. Ihalainen (1976). When one works with historical data one often has isolated tokens, where quantification isn’t an option. Therefore, regularity of patterning is crucial – the only way to distinguish random individual errors from genuine grammar is to see if the form in question behaves in context like the grammar of known reference points. Here, the fact that we have an auxiliary verb makes it very much more likely that it is a genuinely grammatical indicative zero, as opposed to a clerk who missed the – s off his verb when he sneezed, was hit on the head by a conker, or was stung by a wasp.

---

5 The wider context is:

She saieth that Thomas wysse and his wiffe in the white friers are bawdes And he is a whoremonger And kepeth Elizabeth Cowper and others and his wiffe knoweth it & also she plaith the harlott And he knoweth it And they kepe the dore one for another while they be naught And yf any prevy serche come ther house must not be serched She saieth that M’ Esgriges said that yf yf M’ Recorder medle w’th her she would stop his mouthe/ She saieth that Sineor deprosper the Italian Do kepe Elizabeth Cowper and paid xs a weke for it And wise of whitefriers would carrie her to M’ Prosper and leve her ther all night and goe his waye Also she saieth that many prentices resorte to wises And ther haue company appoyned for them And she saieth Marget Goldsmith did burne Senio’ deprosper at his owne house by charingecrosse She saieth also that to John Shawe and his wife dwelling nere St Laurens churche many prentices sarrntes sarrntes and others doe resorte And they lyve of noe other thinge but bawdery and lewdnes/ (MS Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell and Bethlem, fo 23, 23v, June 1576).

Note “he is a whoremonger And kepeth Elizabeth Cowper” and “Sineor deprosper the Italian Do kepe Elizabeth Cowper”, where kepeth/do keep are in free variation in the third-person singular indicative present tense. As this is taken from a longer list of pimps who kept Elizabeth Cowper, and noting further periphrastic constructions did burne (i.e. ‘gave a venereal disease to’), doe resorte, I interpret do in do keep as a semantically-empty syntactic tense-carrier, not as emphatic. Klemola (1996: 75-106 argues that South-Western periphrastic do is not a habitual aspect marker, despite much assertion to the contrary by dialectologists. His argument is firstly to point out that the original claims were made by nineteenth-century dialectologists who used the term ‘habitual’ to mean ‘simple present’ (and who were subsequently misinterpreted by twentieth-century linguists); and secondly to demonstrate simple present Verb Phrases and periphrastic do Verb Phrases in free variation in the SED corpus, regardless of aspect, as in keepeth/do keep and resorte/doe resorte above.

6 One could explain this particular zero away by positing a non-London court witness – a regional speaker from somewhere else where indicative zeroes preponderated in 1576 (presumably, East Anglia) – but that puts one in the position of having to explain away every third-person indicative zero in a London text. Effectively, one would have to posit an East-Anglian speaker every time one met a third-person indicative zero in a text produced anywhere in the country, which does not tally with Kytö’s finding of background zero at 2% (see next paragraph).
What about the history of zero? As well as marking the subjunctive, zero has long been a third-person singular indicative marker too. Rissanen (1999: 227): “In the earliest periods of English, the subjunctive was used even in factual statements in some contexts, particularly in certain types of subordinate clauses.” The frequency ratio of indicative zero was historically low – Kytö (1993: 118) plots it at 2% in the Helsinki Corpus – so zero was low-frequency overall, but very long-lasting. Nevalainen, Raumolin-Brunberg and Trudgill (2001) report that Holmqvist (1922: 136) attributed the origins of indicative third-person zero to fifteenth-century East Anglia and that his explanation for the zeroes is due to analogical levelling across the paradigm. Nevalainen, Raumolin-Brunberg and Trudgill (2001) also consider language contact as a possible reason for higher rates of zero in East Anglia. By 1570-80, they found that four Norfolk family members were using zero (as opposed to –th) at the high ratios of 44%, 70%, 77%, 41% (2001: 194), and thereafter, East Anglia has been the main centre of third-person indicative zero. Notwithstanding, zero has been present in the relevant period all over the country at 2%, so its presence in Grafton, Reading, and Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon (as attested in the SED Sound Recordings) does not, as such, require explanation. However, a heightened ratio above 2% does.

1.2.1 William Tayler’s third-person verb morphology: singular

What kind of present-tense indicative system did our footman have? To start with third-person singular: William Tayler’s diary contains 212 third-person singular present-tense indicative tokens, excluding the verb to be, modals, and the verb ought. Out of the 212 tokens, 168 are standard and take –s, which is 79%, and 44 are non-standard and take zero, 21%. 21% zero is considerably less that the sixteenth-century East Anglian data (41-77%), but considerably more than background expectations (2%). In my count I excluded the verb to be, modals, ought, and I excluded forms that were actually past tense:

March 7 I was told when I got home they wouldent go out becaus I had got a cold therefore I sit by the fire and read the history of England which allways is to me very interesting

March 8 I went this evening to take my watch to be cleaned met a man I knew on the way I ask him to have something to drink but he would not

William Tayler’s past tense of sit is sit, and his past form of ask is ask – note the consonant cluster reduction in past-tense ask. I also excluded a few potentially unclear subjects:

---

7 See Holmqvist (1922: 109, 136) for third-person zero in Shakespeare’s writings.
April 2 the fashions and backbiteing their neighbours is the chief that the female part of the gentry talk or think about and the men folk are but very little better but they talk more of polatics and gambleing

Excluded, because one could argue that the subject, part, although technically singular is semantically plural, consisting of all the women.

July 29 it was with such violence that the water flew into the air out of sight foaming and frothing like a boiling furnace and the wind blows a mist from the waves that regularly pickle the streets houses and every body and every thing from the saltwater

Excluded because the singular subject, mist, precedes its plural postmodifier, waves, so that waves ends up closest to the verb. If these examples had been included, the zero count would be a bit higher, but they are so few not to make much difference. I have omitted subjunctive zeroes, of which I find six: two marking a hypothetical state, and four in if-clauses:

January 22 I can then git a cup of coco which I am very fond of and a rowl or something of the kind any one that like to have lunch there it is for them but as I have breakfast so late I want no lunch

May 14 they have the hot water come up in a hurn that has a place in the middle for a red hot iron which keep the water boiling as long as the iron keep hot with this they make their tea themselves

Note the concessive subjunctive in the as long as clause, preceded by an indicative zero.

March 8 I think this something such a start as the man coming to the house where I lived in portland place and ask if his sister live there

April 2 and if a servant girl happen to be in the famley way her character is rueind at once as no lady will take them after and would think it quite shocking to have such a person in their house

Note singular them, referring to a servant girl (or such servant girls in general);

May 18 if a person wish to see the ways of the world they must be a gentlemans servant then they mite see it to perfection

Dec 30 if a person wish to see life I would advise them to be a gentlemans servant they will see high life and low life a bove stairs as well as life below they will see and know more than any other class of people in the world

Note the flip from singular subject to plural subject (a person to they must be; a person to I advise them).
The other third-person zeroes are indicative:

August 27 I first of all went to the Irvanites Chapple this is a sect that follow the opinion of the religious principles of the late Mr Irvine they preach principally from the Bible they have what is called the unknown tongue that is some person preach at times that the congregation cannot see this they pretend is the voice of God

*A sect that follow* is an example of a singular noun that may have been treated as plural; cf. ‘a group of us think that …’ v. ‘a group of us thinks that …’.

William Tayler’s system is variable, with –s and zero in free variation:

March 20 here has been a great deal of snow
March 21 here have been some snow

March 24 the weather continues very cold
September 8 The weather continue so very wet

February 27 the parson say he Christened 87 Children at the Church where he does duty
April 5 o no says she

August 3 This day has been spent as usual
December 17 This is Sunday and have been spent by me as most Sundays are

Feb 9 an old lady who has been bothering me
March 7 A person that have been bothering me

1.2.2 William Tayler’s third-person verb morphology: plural

Out of a total of 180 plural tokens, William Tayler used 153 standard zero forms, 85%, and 27 –s forms, 15%. William Tayler does exhibit the Northern Personal Pronoun Rule (or *they*-constraint), where pronouns (especially *they*) block a suffix on an adjacent verb, but not on subsequent ones. He exhibits this rule non-categorically:

January 1 they are also very quiet good sort of people but very gay and sees a great deal of company they made their money in the East indies but since then has lost a great deal of it

April 2 gentles folks fancy themselves ill when they are not and sends for the doctor
April 2 sometimes they go abroad and sometimes stays in some hiding place in England

It is not categorical, there are counterexamples of they + zero, but only two, and both with auxiliary have:

April 2 some men servants are very fond of talking of the chances they has had of kissing their mistresses

May 14 they has been servants but being unsuccesful in getting places they took a publick house

The first-person pronoun could also block the suffix in the same way:

July 12 I go to the sea side two or three times a day and amuses my self

July 19 I get up every morning at half past six and goes out on the beach looking at the boys catching crabs and eels and looking at the people batheing there are numbers of old wimen have little wooden houses on wheeles and into these houses people goe that want to bathe and then the house is pushed into the water and when the person has undressed they get into the water and bathe and then get into the woden house again and dress themselves then the house is drawn on shore again
The Chain Pier, Brighton, John Constable, 1824–1827, with bathing machines in background

Coordinated and subordinated noun phrases favour –s.\textsuperscript{8}

November 9 young gentlemen generally place their affections on some poor but pretty girl and takes her into keeping and when tired of her turns her off and gets another

but the inverse pattern also occurs:

January 30 one has got it and have treated us with gin

March 17 the tailor has brought home my jacket for which he want a sovering

\textsuperscript{8} Bailey and Ross (1988: 199) found this distribution in their analysis of the language used in seventeenth and eighteenth century British ship’s logs.
In clauses governed by the pronoun *they*, out of a total of 64 third-person plural tokens, 61 take zero, and only 3 take –s. William Tayler’s idiolect was –sful, but the pronoun *they* had the power of blocking the suffix.

1.2.3 William Tayler’s first-person verb morphology: singular

Out of 318 first-person singular tokens, 43 are marked with –s, that is, 13.5%:

August 16 This day has been spent about the same as most of my others the first thing **I** do in the morning is to get up at half past six **goes** to the waters side **stays** until eight **comes** home **haves** my breakfast **gets** theirs ready at nine up stairs then **cleans** the knives **fetches** their breakfast down at ten **does** a fiew other little jobs and then **goes** out for a walk a little before eleven and **comes** home a little before one **gets** their lunch ready and **haves** my own dinner by two **rests** my self until three then **goes** for a ride with the ladies until four **comes** home **haves** my tea gets their dinner things ready at five **waits** on them at dinner **brings** it down and **clears** my part of it away by half past six **taks** a walk or **sits** down and **reads** until eight then **takes** up their tea **brings** it down a little after eight **goes** for a nother walk by the waters side for half an houre then **comes** home and **haves** my supper **goes** to bed a little before eleven

Of the tokens governed by a pronoun, only 3 out of a total of 192 tokens take the –s form, so the pronoun *I* can also be said to block a suffix, as well as the pronoun *they*. Cole (forthcoming) has proposed that the subject-type constraint is most salient in regional Englishes, that whether a verb is governed by a pronoun, or by a Noun Phrase, conditions variation between competing morphological variants. Therefore, I pooled all the finite present-tense indicative verbs (766 tokens) and divided them into those governed by pronouns (362) and those governed by Noun Phrases (404). Of those governed by a Noun Phrase, 104/404 were nonstandard (26%), whereas of those governed by a pronoun, only 12/362 were nonstandard (3%). A [pronoun + verbal suffix] combination was therefore contraindicated in William Tayler’s system. Bear in mind that William Tayler moved to London at some point in his young adulthood; his regional grammar may not have been fully traditional.

1.2.4 William Tayler’s auxiliary verb morphology

Does syntax make a difference? In fact there are 285 tokens of auxiliary *have* but only 21 tokens of auxiliary *do*, making the point that Klemola (1996) discussed, which is that the –sful areas and the doful areas do not overlap, presumably because when *do* moved out, –s moved in. Most of William Tayler’s uses of auxiliary *do* are with negatives, or as

---

9 Wakelin (1972) also reports that the –s ending is less frequent in the West Country when immediately preceded by pronouns (Wakelin 1972 [1977]: 119).
pro-verbs (e.g. April 16 “this is sunday which has passed as most of my sundays do”). The only affirmative declarative examples are:

January 11 So much sitting indoors do not suit him all though my pantry is a very comfortable room. I did intend to have gon out but here are two more people has just called on me.

April 2 I know menservants do kiss the mistres in preference to the maid but this only happen sometimes

April 2 I dont mean to say these things happen with all the gentry not by a very great deal it mite not happen once in twenty famleys but it do happen

These tokens may all be read as emphatic do: did intend contrasts with what actually transpired; do kiss contrasts with the more normal pattern, and do happen stresses that these things do indeed occur, although not very often. All take contrastive but. Therefore, they are unlike the unstressed periphrastic do tokens marked in dark grey on Klemola’s map 3.9a. By c.1870 when the SED informants gained their systems, the Grafton area of West Oxfordshire was a doless, -sful area; William Tayler’s diary shows that this stage had already been reached by 1837.

Turning to auxiliary have: a comparison of auxiliary versus full-verb usage is as follows (see Appendix for raw numbers):

- pronoun + aux have = nonstandard 4%
- NP + aux have = nonstandard 23%

$v$

- pronoun + full-verb have = nonstandard 10%
- NP + full-verb have = nonstandard 29%

There is not a lot of difference: whether auxiliary have or full-verb have, Noun Phrases are more likely to govern nonstandard morphemes than pronouns. 21 of the 22 nonstandard variants of have occur within auxiliaries rather than full verbs. Cheshire’s observation from her Reading data that auxiliary and full-verb usage differs is also borne out by West Oxfordshire footman William Tayler, 140 years earlier.

2. Might William Tayler have been hypercorrecting?

At this point we need to consider the possibility that William Tayler was hypercorrecting. It might be that he had been taught when learning to write that all persons except for the third-person singular should be zeroful, but when writing, he overapplied the rule. This raises a theoretical point: sheer numbers of witnesses would

---

10 I thank Peter Trudgill for raising this hypothesis.
make no difference if all had been schooled the same way. If we were to find several hundred thousand witnesses, who had all been subject to the same tuition, they would – in theory – all hypercorrect in the same direction. If lots of people who were –ful learnt to write and all hypercorrected, then third-person zero would, in this way, become introduced into the written English of lots of Southern speakers. It need say nothing at all about their speech, just their writing. However I suggest that William Tayler was not hypercorrecting, and that we can be certain of this because his –ss and zeroes pattern not randomly, but in the same way that other southern data does:11

- Pronouns block a suffix. Recall that of verbs governed by a pronoun, only 12/362 were nonstandard (3%), whereas of those governed by a Noun Phrase, 104/404 were nonstandard (26%). The subject-type constraint is operative, as noted by Cole (forthcoming) elsewhere in England.
- *have*: nonstandard forms occur in the auxiliary, not in the full verb, as found by Cheshire (1982) in Reading.
- the NPPR (*they*-constraint) is operative non-categorically, as it was in Early Modern London English.
- the Early Modern subjunctive still functions non-categorically (it was also non-categorical in the Early Modern period), and is marked by zero.
- co-ordinated verbs flock together, either [zero + -s, -s, -s, -s, etc.] as in the November 9 and August 16 extracts above, or [-s + -0, -0, etc.]:

April 2 some men servants are very fond of talking of the chances they *has* had of kissing their mistresses but I dont believe but very little of what is said on this matter people that talk in this manner are generally a set of lien drunken weak minded swagering fellows that talk nearly for talkings sake notwithstanding I know menservants *do* kiss the mistres in preference to the maid but this only *happen* sometimes.

June 5 Have been out this morning to see friends have been to Hanpstead with the Carriage to look after a lodging for Miss P who *pretends* she is ill and *want* a little country air the fields and hedges are improveing very fast everything *look* butifull

If William Tayler were hypercorrecting, then none of these patterns should be discernible. The distribution of zero and –s should be random. Therefore, I conclude that

11 This pattern of third-person singular zero, nonstandard first-person and third-person singular –fulness, pronoun subjects blocking –s endings, and plural –s preferred in coordinated and subordinated clauses, is also reported by Bailey and Ross in their study of seventeenth and eighteenth-century British ship-captains’ logs (Bailey and Ross 1988: 199) (the ratios, however, are not the same; see also Bailey, Maynor and Cukor-Avila (1989: 295)).
the zeros in his writing cannot be explained away as hypercorrections, but constituted part of his grammar.

3. Hypothesis: that do-loss resulted in zero, before generalised –s filled the empty slot

William Tayler, coming from Grafton in West Oxfordshire, was from the part of the country that Klemola (1996) plotted from SED data as being -sful. William Tayler was born in 1807, and SED informants were born c. 1870. Klemola (following Elworthy 1886) hypothesised that –s entered after periphrastic do had left the system; that periphrastic do had been present (as it had been in Early Modern London, at ratios of over 10% (Rissanen 1999: 240) for earlier generations), but by 1807 when Tayler was born was completely gone. However William Tayler has not only indicative nonstandard –s, but also indicative nonstandard zero. The overall combined ratios of nonstandard –s and nonstandard zero in his diary are:

nonstandard –s, all persons: 67/766, 9%
nonstandard zero, all persons: 50/766, 7%

9% and 7% are very close together. Might it be that when periphrastic do dropped out, what was left sounded like zero morphology (i.e. it do seem that ⇒ it seem that), and that the entry of –s happened not simultaneously with do-loss, but subsequently? If so, William Tayler’s diary is a snapshot of –s entering ex-do slots, which had not been categorical, so that the new pattern was a mix of –s and zero.

Appendix

Breakdown of how the auxiliary verb morphology percentages were reached:

285 tokens of auxiliary have, made up of:
1sg: 158 tokens, comprising 153 x have (97%), 4 x nonstandard has (2.6%), 1 x havents (0.4%) (3%)
1pl: 16 tokens, comprising 16 x have (100%) (all standard)
3sg: 77 tokens, comprising 69 x has (90%), 8 x nonstandard have (10%)
3pl: 34 tokens, comprising 26 x have (76%), 8 x nonstandard has (24%)

Total 21/285 = 8% nonstandard usage

56 tokens of full verb have, made up of:
1sg: 10 tokens, comprising 9 x have, 1 x haves (nonstandard 10%)
1pl: 14 tokens, comprising 14 x have (100%)
3sg: 4 tokens, comprising 4 x has (100%)
3pl: 7 tokens, comprising 7 x have (100%)
Total $1/56 = 2\%$ nonstandard usage (just one token of full-verb *have* is nonstandard, but this one token makes a ratio of 10\%.)

Auxiliary verb *have* subject-type constraint:

Pronoun subjects:

1pl: 16 x *we have* (100\%)
1sg: I *have/has/havents*: 158 tokens, of which *have* x 153 (standard, 97\%), *has* x 4, *havents* x 1 (nonstandard, 3\%)
3sg: she/he/it *has*: 20 (all standard, 100\%)
3pl: they *have/has*: 20 tokens, of which *have* x 17 (standard, 85\%), nonstandard *has* x 3 (nonstandard, 15\%)

= total of 214 pronoun subjects in all persons.

Pronouns governing nonstandard verbs = 8/214, 4\%  

NP or null subjects:

no 1\textsuperscript{st} person tokens
3sg: 55 tokens, of which standard *has* x 48, nonstandard *have* x 7 (nonstandard, 13\%)
3pl: 12 tokens, of which standard *have* x 7, nonstandard *has* x 5 (nonstandard, 42\%)

= total of 67 NP subjects in all persons.

NPs governing nonstandard verbs = 16/71, 23\%  

Full verb *have* subject type constraint:

= 56 tokens of full verb *have*, made up of:

pronoun subjects: 35
1sg: 9 x I *have* (90\%), 1 x *haves* (nonstandard, 10\%)
1pl: 14 x *we have* (all standard, 100\%)
3sg: 4 x she/he/it *has* (all standard, 100\%)
3pl: 7 x they *have* (all standard, 100\%)

NP subjects: 14
1sg: no tokens
1pl: no tokens
3sg: 3 x *has* (75\%), 1 x *have* (25\%)
3pl: 10 tokens: 7 x *have* (70\%), 3 x *has* (30\%)
35 full-verb have tokens governed by a pronoun; nonstandard = 1/35: nonstandard (3%)
14 full-verb have tokens governed by NPs, nonstandard = 4/14: nonstandard (29%)

References

Manuscripts

London, Guildhall Library, MS Minutes of the Court of Governors of Bridewell and Bethlem: Microfilm Reels MS33011/3, 7 May 1576 - 19 November 1579.


Printed Works


