The Rise of do-support in the History of English

*Do* plays a central role in Present-day English verbal structure. Its use as a periphrastic auxiliary is one of the most striking features of PdE syntax as compared with Standard Average European or with older stages of English itself. However, the emergence of the auxiliary *do* is one of the most intriguing developments in the history of English syntax, taking place in Middle and early Modern English and spreading from the southern areas toward the northern ones. By the end of the 18th c. *do* becomes an obligatory element of the structure of English. (NICE properties: Negatives, subject/verb Inversion, substitute verb ‘Code’ and for Emphasis). Traces of similar periphrastic use can be found at the early stages of other Germanic languages but *do* has not been grammaticalised in the same way as in English; indeed, corresponding constructions are still current in some German, Dutch and Frisian dialects.

### Old English

The OE verb *don* ‘to do’ was used as:

(a) a FULL LEXICAL verb (cf. 1a)
(b) SUBSTITUTE *do*, it replaces a lexical verb used elsewhere in the clause to avoid repetition (cf. 1b, b’)
(c) a CAUSATIVE verb (cf. 1c)

(1)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Ne mot ic <em>don</em> þæt ic wylle</td>
<td>not may I do what I want</td>
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<td>‘I am not allowed to do what I want.’</td>
<td>Mt. Bos. 20,15 (B&amp;T)</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>gif he aðor <em>dyde</em>, oððe ofergimde, oððe forgeat, oððe tobræc ænig þing</td>
<td>if he any-of-the-following did either neglected or forgot or violated any thing</td>
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<td>‘If he did any of the following: either neglected or forgot or violated anything.’</td>
<td>BenR xlv 71.15 (Denison 261)</td>
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<td>b’.</td>
<td>..he miccle ma on his deaðe acwealde, ðonne he ær cæcæ <em>dyde</em></td>
<td>‘He killed many more in death than he did when he was alive.’</td>
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<td>he much more in his death killed than he before alive did</td>
<td>(Judg. 16.27)</td>
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<td>c.</td>
<td>And treowa he <em>dæð</em> færlice blowan and eft raðæ asearian</td>
<td>And trees he causes suddenly bloom and again quickly wither</td>
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<td>‘And trees he does (=causes) to bloom suddenly and again to wither quickly.’</td>
<td>(HomU 34)</td>
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### Middle English

These uses continue in ME when they are joined by a new type: PERIPHRASTIC *do*.

(a) as a FULL LEXICAL verb

(2)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>þis he <em>dyde</em> eall for þes biscopes luuen.</td>
<td>this he did all for the bishop’s love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘This he did all for love of the bishop.’</td>
<td>c1123 Peterb.Chron. 1123.73 (Denison 256)</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Me <em>dide</em> cnotted strenges abuton here hæued one put knotted strings around their heads</td>
<td>‘Knotted strings were tied around their heads.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Knotted strings were tied around their heads.’</td>
<td>c1155 Peterb.Chron. 1137.23 (Denison 256)</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Y most <em>do</em> as hothyr men dothe, ar ellys Y most kepe style.</td>
<td>‘And trees he does (=causes) to bloom suddenly and again to wither quickly.’</td>
</tr>
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</table>
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I must do as other men do or else I must be inactive.’
1478 Let.Cely 22.34 (Denison 256)

(b) as a SUBSTITUTE verb

(3) Hire ne did ne oc. ne smeart. þo þe hie bar ure louerd ihesu crist. her not did neither. neither ached nor smarted when she bore our Lord Jesus Christ
... Ac elch œder wimman dod. akeð. and smeartø sore. þan hie beð mid but each other woman does aches and smarts sorely when she is with
child bidstonen
child(birth) afflicted
a1225(?a1200) Trin.Hom. 179.34 (Denison 261)

(c) as a CAUSATIVE verb

(4)

a. þe biscop of Wincestre ... did heom cumen þider. the bishop of Winchester caused them come thither
‘The bishop of Winchester had them come there.’
c1155 Peterb.Chron. 1140.22 (Denison 256)
b. þis ymage is made after þee. J dude it an ymageoure Casten after þi vigoure this sculpture is made in your-likeness. I caused it a sculptor cast after your face
‘This sculpture is made in your likeness. I had a sculptor cast it in the likeness of your face.’
c1400 (?a1300) Kalex. (Ld) 7681
c. preyng you þat ye wolde do them spede them in þat matier praying you that you will cause them speed themselves in that matter
‘Asking them to cause them to succeed/hasten in that matter.’
1460 Paston 55.4 (Denison 257)

PERIPHERASTIC do is first found in 13\textsuperscript{th} c rhyming verse from the southwest of England.

(5)

a. His sclauyn he dude dun legge his pilgrim’s-cloak he did down lay
‘He laid down his pilgrim’s cloak.’
c1300 (?c1225) Horn 1057 (Denison 264)
b. toward þe stude þat þe sonne: In winter does a-rise.
towards the place that the sun in winter does arise
c1300 Sleg.Patr.Purg (Ld) 205.191 (Denison 264)

- Affirmative sentences
  ⇒ At the earliest stages of development, up to the 15\textsuperscript{th} c. periphrastic do was used in affirmative sentences (further examples in (6)) and reaching its peak in the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} c.; in questions and negations it becomes common in the 16\textsuperscript{th} c.

(6)

a. I confess I did mislike the Queenes Mariage with Spain. (Throckmorton)
b. ...for I did learne the Resons of my disliking
c. I did see the whole Consent of the Realm against it.

⇒ The decrease in the popularity of do-periphrasis in affirmative sentences (in the 17\textsuperscript{th} c.) was as rapid as its rise. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} c. it is used in the same way as today. The decline may have been due to the regularisation of the auxiliary system, which gave each auxiliary a
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functional slot in the overall syntactic-semantic pattern of VP. In this system *do* + infinitive was redundant. However, many 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} c. grammarians treat the simple form and *do*-periphrasis as equal alternatives. The first ones who point that *do*-periphrasis in affirmative sentences is emphatic are Gill (1619), Wallis (1653). Dr Johnson (1755) calls the ‘superfluous’ use of *do* ‘a vitious mode of speech’.

- **Questions**

  => The earliest recorded instance of *do*-periphrasis in questions occurs in Chaucer’s verse but it remains uncommon throughout the 15\textsuperscript{th} c.

  (7) what became of the kynge of Castell ... *made he* ony recovery, or *dyd he close* hymselfe in ony of his townes
    Berners Froissart IV 282 (Rissanen 1999: 244)

  => Rapid increase in the 16\textsuperscript{th} c (as in the affirmatives). In the second half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} c the majority of yes-no questions are formed with *do*. Non-periphrastic inversion continues longer in *wh*-questions.

  => By the 18\textsuperscript{th} c the use of *do* in questions is very close to PdE yet it is still easy to find non-periphrastic questions, especially with high-frequency verbs, such as *know, think, say, speak, come, go*. The use of non-periphrastic structures is also a marker of archaic style. As late as the 18\textsuperscript{th} c many grammarians point out that *do* can be omitted in questions.

  (8) a. What *didst* thou loose lacke?
    Shakespeare, Henry IV III.iii (Rissanen 1999: 244)

  b. What *doe* you call him?
    Shekespeare, Henry V III,vi (Rissanen 1999: 244)

  (9) a. *Think’st thou* so Nurse, What sayest to Wat and Nicke?
    [HC] Middleton 20 (Rissanen 1999: 244)

  b. What *say’st thou*?
    [HC] Lisle 122 Ci (Rissanen 1999: 244)

  c. In the Name of Wonder, Whence *came ye*?
    [HC] Farquhar V.ii (Rissanen 1999: 244)

- **Negative sentences**

  => The earliest unambiguous instances of *do*-periphrasis in negative sentences appear in the late 14\textsuperscript{th} c.

  => Rapid increase from in the 16\textsuperscript{th} c.

  => From the 17\textsuperscript{th} c onwards it increases steadily at the expense of simple verb + negative and the usage is established in the 18\textsuperscript{th}c. Non-periphrastic negation is not uncommon in the 18\textsuperscript{th} c. especially with high-frequency verbs (see 9 above and 10 below).

  (10) *I speake not* nowe to simple men
    [HC] Essex 14 (Rissanen 1999: 245)

  It is natural to assume that the use of *do* in negative sentences is connected with the tendency to locate the negative particle not before the verb.

- **Origins of periphrastic *do***

  Most linguists agree that periphrastic *do* developed from one of the earlier uses of *do*
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(theories of borrowing from Celtic or French influence are now generally ruled out). A full lexical verb is not a likely candidate (not normally followed by an infinitive). Similarly, a ‘substitute’ do is rather unlikely because usually a clause or phrase intervenes between do and the infinitive.

⇒ Most frequently the ‘causative’ do has been regarded as the originator of periphrastic do.

(11)
a. þe king *dede* þe mayden arise .....  
   ‘The king did (=made) the maiden rise’  
   (Havelok 205)
b. He *dude* writes sende .....  
   he  did  letters send  
   He sent letters or He had letters sent  
   (Horn 1001)

In (11a) we have an oblique noun phrase (þe mayden) that functions as object of do and as subject of the infinitive (arise). Sentences like (11a) are usually unambiguously causative. (11b) has no such noun phrase and can therefore in principle be interpreted as non-causative. In that case did can be regarded as semantically empty.

⇒ Other theories claim that it developed from a ‘substitute’ kind of do, through the weakening of its basic meaning.

⇒ Denison suggests that do in sentences like (11b) might have developed a perfective meaning. This could nicely explain the non-occurrence of do with the main verbs be/have and most of the auxiliaries.

⇒ Other likely triggers: 1) to avoid ambiguity with certain verbs (do set, did set versus set pres., set past.); 2) phonotactics Thou didst imagine vs. Thou imaginedst; 3) pragmatic and stylistic considerations (emphasis, demands of balance and rhythm especially in poetry).

⇒ Rissanen (1999:240): “Although it may be impossible to find a decisive answer to the question of the origins of do-periphrasis, the role of spoken language seems important in accounting for its later development. Textual evidence implies that the periphrasis has always been favoured in discourse situations more typical of speech than of writing.”