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Full-verb Inversion in Written and Spoken English

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Introduction

Over the past few years, *full-verb* inversion, as one instantiation of a large variety of noncanonical word-order phenomena, has been a favourite topic of research in English linguistics from a functional perspective (cf. Birner 1996; Dorgeloh 1997; Chen 2003; Kreyer 2006 among others). This study is a further contribution to this line of research and attempts to present a comprehensive corpus-based analysis of full-verb inversion in written and spoken Present-day English texts.

Despite the above-mentioned body of research on inversion, there are still aspects which either call for further clarification or have been utterly neglected. For instance, in recent work on inversion, there is not complete agreement as regards the distribution of full inversion in written fictional and non-fictional texts. On the one hand, works such as Green (1982), Denison (1998) or Biber et al. (1999) suggest that the construction is more frequent in fictional texts. On the other hand, studies such as Kreyer (2006) claim the opposite, that is, that full inversion is more common in non-fictional texts. The first aim of this study is to clarify this point. It will be demonstrated that fictional and non-fictional written English texts do not differ in the overall distribution of the construction, but rather in the different types of full inversions used, and the different functions that these inversions serve in both genres.

A second aspect which will be examined in the study is full inversion in the spoken language. Surprisingly enough, inversion in this mode of communication has not yet received the attention it deserves, since most work on the topic has been restricted to the written language. It has often been claimed (cf. Green 1982; Dorgeloh 1997; Chen 2003; Kreyer 2006) that full inversion occurs mainly in written discourse, but these claims have not yet been backed up by a detailed corpus-based analysis. The in-depth analysis of full inversion in the spoken language provided in this study will demonstrate that full inversion also occurs in the spoken language, and that

speech and writing do not differ greatly in the amount of full inversions used, but rather in the different types of full inversions occurring in each of those media and in the functions full inversion serves.

The corpora used to analyse the behaviour and distribution of full inversion in written and spoken texts were the *Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus of British English* (FLOB; compilation date: 1991), the *Freiburg-Brown Corpus of American English* (FROWN; compilation date: 1992), the *International Corpus of English: the British Component* (ICE-GB; compilation date: 1990-1993), and the *Corpus of Spoken Professional American English* (CSPAE; compilation date: 1994-1998). The analysis of the corpora has been performed manually in some cases, and with automated searching systems in other cases.

The study is organised as follows. Chapter 1 contains some theoretical preliminaries. Section 1.1 provides a definition of the term 'full-verb inversion', section 1.2 offers an account of inversion types excluded from the analysis, section 1.3 presents a classification of the construction based on formal criteria, and section 1.4 examines several constructions which exhibit similarities to full-verb inversion, but fall nevertheless beyond the scope of the analysis.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on English full-verb inversion and outlines the motivations for the present study. Though the review covers generative accounts of inversion (cf. 2.1), the main focus is on analyses carried out within a functional framework (cf. 2.2). Among these, special attention is paid to Dorgeloh (1997), Chen (2003), and Kreyer (2006), which are analysed in 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5 respectively as they are the most comprehensive studies of full inversion to date.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the corpus-based analysis. It first provides a general description of the corpora (cf. 3.1 and 3.2), the sampling techniques (cf. 3.3), and the methodology used (cf. 3.4).

After these preliminaries, the core of the analysis is developed in chapter 4, which offers an in-depth analysis of the distribution and behaviour of full-verb inversion in written and spoken Present-day English. Section 4.1 concentrates on the analysis of the data retrieved from the written corpora, whereas 4.2 discusses the results retrieved from the spoken corpora.

Chapter 5 contains a summary and the main conclusions reached in this investigation.

Finally, Appendices I and II contain a more detailed description of the samples analysed in the computerised corpora.