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### Free variation of do in Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover*

Modern English, spoken in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a language quite different from Present Day English. An abundance of texts from this period are available and can be used to analyze the changes from Modern English to Present Day English. In this essay sentence structures and the use of do in Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (1673) will be analyzed and compared to Present Day English. Firstly, the use of do in negative declarative sentences will be discussed and compared to the findings of Ellegård (1953). Secondly, the occurrence of do in negative sentences with the verbs have, let and dare will be discussed with reference to what Yadomi (2013) found. Thirdly, three different negative sentences structures with the verb know were examined with reference to Baghdikian (1982). Finally, the use of do in affirmative declarative sentences will be discussed with reference to Bækken (1999).

In Modern English the verb do was used less consistently and there was more free variation. In present day English do-support is obligatory in negative declaratives with verbs other than forms of "to be". In *The Dutch Lover* negative declaratives could be made with or without the use of do:

- (1) "*Alon*. I **care not**, nothing shall hinder my Design"
- (2) "*Alon*. But there's a damn'd Custom that **does not** at all **agree** with Men."

The graph below is adapted from Ellegård (1953, 162) who investigated the use of do from Old English to the beginning of the eighteenth century. The graph shows the percentage of do-forms in various sentence types. Showing that the use of do in negative declarative sentences was rising rapidly in the 17th century. Around 1673, when *The Dutch Lover* was written, do was used in about 55% of all negative declarative sentences according to the findings of Ellegård (1953).

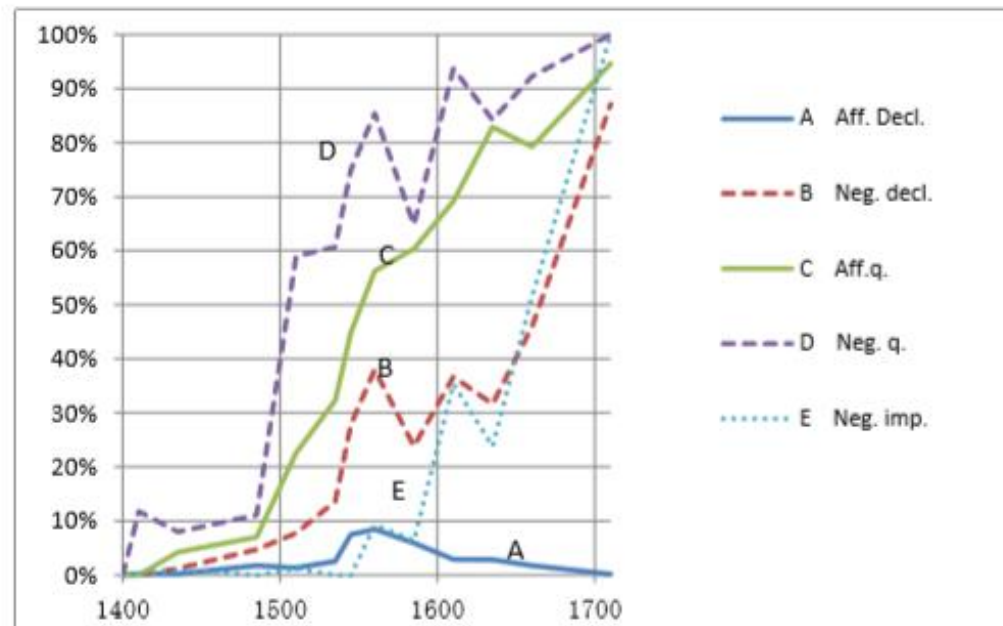


Figure 1: Percentage of do-forms from 1400-1700

In the first two acts of *The Dutch Lover* the use of do in negative sentences was in free variation. Some verbs displayed a greater tendency to resist dummy-do than others. In his analysis of negative construction in six of Shakespeare's plays, Yadomi (2013, 7) points out that the verbs *have*, *dare* and *let* never take the do form. This was mostly in line with my analysis, the verb *dare* (or the older form *durst*) never occurred with a do form. Neither did forms of *to have*. However, in the text examined there was exactly one occurrence of "do not let" and one occurrence of "let not":

(3) *Clar.* Nay, good *Dormida*, **let not** want of Sleep **make** thee testy.

(4) Love me—but **do not let** me **know**'t too much.

This shows that there is a difference between the Early Modern English in the plays of Shakespeare (1564-1616) and the examined text of Aphra Behn (1640-1689). Indeed, in Present Day English the verb *let* always takes a dummy do in negative sentences or questions.

This shows that Aphra Behn's text contains language more similar to Present Day English when compared with the language of Shakespeare.

Baghdikian (1982) investigated the use of do in negative sentences and found out that at the end of the 16th Century there is a tendency to use auxiliaries and do more frequently than finite full verbs in negative sentences. The pattern auxiliary + not + infinitive was the most dominant pattern in negative sentences (Baghdikian 1982, 155). In the first two acts of *The Dutch Lover* the same pattern was found when looking at the constructions with the verb know. Interestingly, the verb know occurs both as an auxiliary or as a main verb, and also one time with do.

(5) *Alon.* Madam, I will, but **know not** where **to carry** ye (auxiliary+not+infinitive)

(6) *Fran.* I **know not**, but she seems of Quality. (verb+not)

(7) But **do not know** her Name. (do+not+verb)

In the text examined, out of all construction with know, constructions with know as an auxiliary were the most common with 6 out of 11 sentences. There were 4 sentences with know as a main verb, and one sentence showing do support. This corresponds roughly to the percentages that Baghdikian (1982) found in his corpus study. In negative sentences, auxiliary constructions were the most common with an occurrence of 65% whereas construction without an auxiliary had an occurrence of 34%. Do constructions occurred in 1% of the negative sentences (Baghdikian 1982, 157). It has to be noted that his corpus contains texts that were written around 1600 and that constructions with do were on the rise.

As figure 1 supports, in negative constructions do-support became the norm in Present Day English, however, affirmative declarative constructions with do died out. In Modern English the situation was unsettled concerning the use of do. In *The Dutch Lover* affirmative declarative sentences with do can still be found. Either with subject-verb inversion or without:

(8) That's kindly said; and now **do I find** I shall be.... (with inversion)

(9) Now **do I want** *Lovis* extremely...

(10) for know **I do adore** her (without inversion)

(11) To night **these Strangers do** my Heart **possess**

When examining the occurrence of do periphrasis in affirmative declarative clause in *The*

*Dutch Lover*, looking at clauses that started with an initial element other than the subject,

there were 3 occurrences of do with inverted structure and 8 with a non-inverted structure.

All of these sentences were with a transitive verb. This is in line with the findings of Bækken

(1999, 112) who found that such sentences still occurred at the time when *The Dutch Lover*

was written but that these sentences were getting more rare, in his corpus he found 5 of such

occurrences with inverted structures in the period 1680-1730. Whereas for non-inverted

structures he found 21.

To conclude, the use of do was very unsettled in Modern English. All sentence types could be made with or without the use of do in this time period. This is very different from Present Day English where do is obligatory in many constructions. The most obsolete use of do in Modern English is found in affirmative declarative sentences. This use of do has now completely died out. To understand what were the factors underlying this language change a thorough and complete corpus study would be necessary. There does not seem to be a consensus in the academic field concerning the causes of this language change. Some scholars have argued that do originated as a colloquial form in low status contexts, others point out that do is typical of formal and literary style (Wischer 2008). It has to be noted that the text examined was relatively small, and therefore it can not be said to exemplify Modern English completely. However, research of other scholars did correspond to what I found. Do was in complete free variation.

## References

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