

## Non-canonical word order in South East Wales – Understanding socio-syntactic patterns

While the phenomenon of right dislocation through which a sentence such as *I like it* can become *I like it, me* is tied to syntactical processes (Lambrecht 2001), research has shown that there are pragmatic and social factors at play as well (Birner and Ward 1998, Durham 2011, Moore 2020). In order to better understand how social and syntactic aspects of non-canonical word order interact, this paper will examine three different yet related types of non-canonical word order, namely left dislocation, right dislocation and fronting (examples 1-3) using a Welsh English corpus of 140 sociolinguistic interviews collected in four communities in South East Wales (Cardiff, Barry, Pontypridd and Caerphilly).

- 1) And my mother, she's got all the furniture now, like, that he made (Caerphilly-MM)
- 2) And he trained three grand national winners, my brother. (Pontypridd-OM)
- 3) But the vegetables I never really have to worry about  $\emptyset$  too much. (Barry-YF)

All three of these non-canonical word order types are known to occur more frequently in some grammatical contexts than others (e.g. right and left dislocation are more frequent as subjects rather than objects), but also to be influenced by social factors. For example, fronting is reported to be found more in Yiddish English (Prince 1981) and Welsh English (Paulasto 2006) than in other varieties of English.

Some of these differences are thought to be due to substratum effects which is particularly relevant for South East Wales, as linguistically, the varieties spoken in Caerphilly and Pontypridd are said to be part of the more traditional and more Welsh influenced Valleys dialect area, while the other two varieties are thought to be part of a more English English influenced dialect area containing the conurbation covering Newport, Cardiff and Barry (Awbery 1997). This means that as well as a straightforward comparison between the urban centre (i.e. Cardiff) and smaller areas, this paper will be able to examine whether the varieties with a stronger Welsh substratum have more instances and more types of focus fronting.

Considering the over 1500 tokens of the three features across the corpus, this paper will demonstrate that while there are clear social differences (e.g. across communities, age groups and speaker sex), the more syntactic constraints are shared across the four areas for the most part. Because there are differences across studies in terms of what is counted as fronting (Paulasto 2006 only considered complements whereas Toth (2024) included temporal adverbials as instances of fronting), the paper will also discuss what should be included and excluded in analyses of this type. Overall, it will demonstrate the value of considering such features within both a syntactic and sociolinguistic perspective as this allows the best understanding of the processes underway.

## References

- Awbery, Gwenllian. 1997. The English Language in Wales. In Hildegard L.C. Tristram (ed.). *The Celtic Englishes*. 86–99. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Birner, Betty J., and Gregory Ward. 1998. *Information Status and Noncanonical Word Order in English*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Durham, Mercedes. 2011. Right dislocation in Northern England: Perception meets reality. *English World-Wide* 32(3):257-279.

Lambrecht, Knud. 2001. Dislocation. In Martin Haspelmath, Ekkehard König, Wulf Oesterreicher and Wolfgang Raible, eds. *Language Typology and Language Universals: An International Handbook*. Vol. 2. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1050-78.

Moore, Emma. 2020. The role of syntax in the study of sociolinguistic meaning: Evidence from an analysis of right dislocation In Karen V. Beaman, Isabelle Buchstaller, Susan Fox & James A. Walker (eds). *Advancing Socio-grammatical Variation and Change: In Honour of Jenny Cheshire* (pp. 73-90).

Prince, Ellen. 1981. Topicalization, focus-movement, and Yiddish-movement: A pragmatic differentiation. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* 7: 249-264.

Paulasto, Heli. 2006. *Welsh English Syntax: Contact and Variation*. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.

Toth, Isaac Fader. 2024. *Welsh English Syntactic Fronting and Substratum Interference: A Comparative Corpus Study*. Unpublished MA dissertation from the University of Oslo.



Figure 1 - Map highlighting the four South East Wales communities studied (Ordnance Survey 2025)