Reanalyzed vs. Fossilized *how come*: The Michael Montgomery Collection[*]

abstract

> *How come* is an old idiomatic expression, not a modern syntactic construction, and needs to be analyzed against the background of morphosyntactic features that were productive in Anglo Saxon syntax and up to the 16th century. There are several distinct flavors of *how come* sentences; Michael Montgomery's collection for the *Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English* contains three distinct types. This particular use of the verb *come* is historically rooted in Anglo-Saxon (*be*)*cuman* in the sense that someone has an experience resulting in a change of state; the EXPERIENCER is selected as the verb's indirect object and assigned inherent case (Dative; e.g. *hu becom þe swa mycel swyʒe?* 'How did such great speechlessness befall you$_{DAT}$?'). *Becuman* co-existed with *weorðan* and eventually took over its semantic duties as internal language changes rendered *weorðan* obsolete. Concurrent with those changes was the loss of productive inherent Case for the indirect object (Dative), so English had two choices (and took both): The verb *come* (here, in combination with *how*) could be reanalyzed as strongly inflected or fossilize as a modifier (*wh*-element).

1. Introduction

Michael Montgomery was still working on the *Dictionary of Southern Appalachian English* (Montgomery & Heinmiller 2021) when we had a Skype conversation in April 2018. He brought up *how come*, curious about what kind of a syntactic construction(s) he was looking at. He had some additional material to what was already included in the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Montgomery & Hall 2004). Coincidentally, I had just checked out a new book by Andrew Radford, *Colloquial English: Structure and Variation*. Radford includes a chapter on *how-come*. He reviews previous analyses by Arnold Zwicky and Ann Zwicky (1973), Christopher Collins (1991), Masao Ochi (2004), Ur Shlonsky and Gabriela Soare (2011), and Yoshio Endo (2017) before adding his own.[1] Michael sent me a Word file with *how come* samples from Southern Appalachia, culled from written and spoken sources. It contained constructions that Radford's book did not include.

The data fell into three distinct groups, and I will refer to them below as types (1), (2), and (3):

(1) How come it was this: he done me dirt. (Kephart 1922:371, cited in Montgomery and Hall)
(2) …she ran a boarding house there with her girls for years and that's how come her to be in Matewan. (Accord 1989, cited in Montgomery & Heinmiller)
(3) …we knew them people was in town and was lookin' for trouble. That's how come, us in thair,… (Adkins 1989, cited here as transcribed in the original and also included in Montgomery & Heinmiller but without a comma)

The types appear, intuitively, to differ by degree of lexicalization. Type (1) appears to have *come* as a full verb, albeit sans agreement inflection. Something (*it*) changed as a consequence of the speaker's feeling mistreated, so *it* is relationally the subject, or subject place holder (expletive), of the verb *come*. Type (2) cannot be imagined with *it*. The subject of *to be in Matewan* would appear to have object case, and there is no sense that *come* in (2) actually has a subject. That kind of construction looks much more like a template, a frozen syntactic structure that once may have been productive but now just serves as a lattice to be filled in with lexical items (cf. Thiede 2007). In type (3), *how come* appears to have lexicalized to the point of being a single lemma interchangeable with *why*.

Michael himself observed during our Skype call that *how come* is in some instances indeed interchangeable with *why*, but that this is not always so. Moreover, as Anastasia Conroy pointed out, interchangeable does not mean synonymous. Sentence (4), for example, is likely meant as a suggestion, but such a reading is unavailable in (5):

(4) Why don't we go out tonight?
(5) How come we don't go out tonight? (Conroy 2006:6)

The reason, Conroy explains, is that *how come* is factive: It asks for the reason why a presumed situation or event *has come about*. In (5), it is already a given to the speaker that there will be no outing that night, and the speaker wants to know what prompted that change of affairs. Radford concurs that the natural habitat for *how come* is factive (2018:276). That makes sense, because historically, predecessors of *how come* were resultative and denoted a change of state.

2. An Old Construction

How come, writes Claudia Claridge, 'cannot be traced back beyond the 18th century, but has various Early Modern English precursors, which may have influenced it' (2012:177). Claridge appears to be making a distinction between current *how-come* sentences and 'precursors' that look different but are somehow related. There is no straightforward trajectory from the older constructions to current usage because we inherited a mix of forms. Those were either reanalyzed or had fossilized. We can find forms used in Shakespeare's lifetime that parallel the three types we see in Michael's data semantically, though they are different syntactically:

Type (1) precursors:

(6) **c. 1594** – Adriana: 'How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it, / That thou art thus estranged from thyself?' (Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors* II.ii:119-20)
(7) **c. 1595** – Titania: 'Tell me how it came this night / That I sleeping here was found, / With these mortals on the ground' (Shakespeare, *Midsummer* IV.i.:100-02)
(8) **1600** – Mes: 'How comes it that I see the french King here?' … 'How comes it then that underneath his hand / My death is sought…?' (Heywood, *2 King Edward IV*, I.v.)
(9) **1607** or **1608** – Sicinius: 'Sir, how comes't that you / Have help to make this rescue?' (Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* III.i:273-74).
(10) **1642** – Or if that some or all of them awake,
    What is their miserie? what their delight?
    How come they that refined state forsake? (More, *Psychathanasia*, 20)
    (assuming underlying *how come* [~~it that~~] *they that refined state forsake*)

Type (2) precursors:

> (11) **1600** – How come they to be so calme and quiet, but upon a privity and knowledge, both of our puissance and their owne weaknesse? (Livius 283)
> (12) **1621** – Mistresse Arthur: O who can tell me where I am become.
> > For in this darkenesse I haue lost my selfe.
> > I am not dead, for I haue sense and life,
> > How come I then in this Coffin buried? (Anonymous, *Good Wife*, H2)
> > [assuming underlying *how come I then* ~~to be~~ *in this Coffin buried*]

Type (3) precursors:

> (13) **c. 1595** – Helena: 'How came her eyes so bright?' (Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream* II.ii:92)
> (14) **c. 1596/97** – Prince: 'Faith, tell me now in earnest, how came Falstaff's sword so hack'd? (Shakespeare, 1 *Henry IV* II.iv:303)
> (15) **c. 1597** – King: 'Will you not dance? How come you thus estranged?' (Shakespeare, *Love's Labor's Lost* V.ii:210)

Sentences (6) – (9) look functionally similar to (1) *how come it* [*that*]. However, note that they are fully derived in syntax because they consistently have tense and agreement morphology, whereas type (1) forms consistently do not (the verb appears always bare in the corpus). I included (10) *how come they that refined state forsake* in this group on the possibility of ellipsis of *it* and *that* for the sake of meter.[2] Older structures similar to (2) *how come her to be in Matewan* were harder to find, and they are different in one respect as well. The EXPERIENCER pronouns in (10) – (12) are consistently Case-marked for subject; they function as subject of main verb *come*. The sentences of type (2), on the other hand, consistently have an EXPERIENCER with object morphology. Sentences (13) – (15) look similar on the surface to (3) *that's how come, us in there*, but the comma may indicate different semantics. In the precursors, the meaning is clearly 'become' (e.g. *her eyes became bright*), but in type (3) *how come* appears to have lexicalized as a synonym of 'why.' Montgomery and Hall (2004:141) do include a clear example of *come* in the sense of 'become':

> (16) He come ninety-four last month.

Sentences (6) – (15) do share some functionality with the sentences of types (1) – (3), but they are not quite the same. To uncover deeper connections requires a historically longer perspective.

2.1. Historical Roots of *how come*

There were in fact *two* factive verbs in Anglo-Saxon denoting a change of state, *weorðan* and *bicuman*. They could have several syntactic functions. *Weorðan* with its basic meaning of 'come into a condition / into existence' could be a copula (*þa wearð micel hunʒor* 'then there was great hunger'); it was the ideal auxiliary for passives, of course, because of its resultative aspect; and it could be the main verb, of interest for this analysis. Of particular relevance are sentences where the verb expresses how something comes about or how someone is affected by an experience, internal or external.

CHANGE OF INNER STATE / CHANGE OF FORTUNE:

(17) **990-1002** – <u>Hu wearð þe</u> þæt cuþ? Ualerianus 7wyrde
Godes enȝel me tæhte (Ælfred *Lives of the Saints* XXXIV *De Scā cæcilia* 122-23)
'How came knowledge of this [to] you$_{DAT}$? Valerianus answered: God's angel showed me.'
cf. German *Wie wurde dir das bekannt?*

(18) c. **1075** – þa cwæð dauid to þam cnihte, <u>hu becom þe</u> swa mycel swyȝe
'Then David said to the servant, how befell you$_{DAT}$ such great speechlessness?' (= 'how did such a great silence come over you?'; *Story of the Holy Rood-Tree*, fol. 15, in Napier 1944:8)

(19) C. **888** – ...swa hit hwilum ȝewyrþ þæt <u>þæm ȝodum becymþ</u> anfeald yfel. (Boethius, *De Consol. Philos.,* transl. Ælfred, xxxix §9, in Fox 1864:225)[3]
'...as it sometimes happens that flat-out ['one-fold'] evil befalls ['comes to'] the good.'

Sentences (17) – (19) take the EXPERIENCER as indirect object, assigning Dative case. They also have a subject, the thing that causes the experience. In (17) it is *þæt* (the matter revealed to Valerianus), in (18) it is the complete absence of speech (*mycel swyȝe*) that struck David's overwhelmed servant, and in (19) it is the simple evil (*anfeald yfel*) that can happen to good people.

If sentences of types (2) and (3) were to be derived in modern syntax, they would be strange hybrids indeed. Simultaneously, *how come* would have a subject (*her to be in Matewan, us in thair*) and appear to assign object case into that subject (*her, us*). One would also expect agreement morphology on *come* if it takes a subject, or preferably *do*-support (*how does it come*). Those incongruencies indicate that *how come* in (2) and (3) must be a lexicalized construction; it could simply not be generated by modern core syntax. A lexicalized approach will be developed below.

No Dative case was assigned at all when those two verbs denoted something that begins or comes into existence:

COME INTO BEING (WHY):

(20) c. **9th c.** – <u>Hu is þæt ȝeworden</u> on þysse werþeode
þæt ȝe swa moniȝfeald on ȝemynd witon?
'How has that come [to be], that, among these people, you know such a range of history?'
(Cynewulf, *Elene* ll. 643/44, in Kent 1902:42))

(21) **1481** – I axed hym <u>how cometh that</u> by[4]
he wold not speke a worde more but flewe his waye
'I asked him: How does that come about? He would not say a word, but flew away.'
('How reynart the foxe excused hym bifore the kynge,' *Reynard the Fox* transl. William Caxton)

Sentence (19) can be cited here again, too, because it also contains *hit hwilum ȝewyrþ* ('it sometimes happens'). The thing being affected by change (coming into being) is here the subject, assigned Nominative case (*þæt, hit*). In Michael's data, type (1) has *it* as the subject of *how come* (*how come it was this*) and likewise does not assign object case.

2.2. The Loss of *weorðan*

German and Dutch still use the cognate of *weorðan* today:

> (22) Mij <u>wordt</u> onrecht aangedaan. (Engbers 2013)
> 'I am being wronged' (in the sense of 'injustice is being done me').
> (23) Mir <u>wird</u> schlecht.
> 'I am getting sick' (in the sense of 'I experience sickness beginning to affect me')

English, on the other hand, does not. How come? English replaced *weorðan* with (*be*)*come* (and *weaxan* 'wax,' *ʒrowen*' grow, *biwenden* 'turn,' *ʒelimpan* 'happen,' and *turnen* 'turn,' but mainly *become*), and the culprit appears to have been a shift in usage. The past tense forms receded first. Peter Petré noticed a change in narrative style (which uses the narrative past), and he thinks it might have occurred in the wake of Old Norse (2011:2).[5] The Anglo-Saxon narrative preference was to string together factive episodes, each with a bounded time unit of its own. That style of narration gradually morphed into a new style where all events are located in a comprehensive origo, letting the narration unfold within that projected here-and-now flashback. In cinematographic terms, that would amount to a shift from first-person point of view to a bird's-eye perspective (Petré 2010:466). Old English syntax was fine-tuned to that kind of 'bounded-episode' narrating, introducing each chunk with a marker like *þa* 'then,' which 'chops up a narrative into temporal segments' (ibid.). This is perfectly illustrated in the Prodigal Son story, from which a few representative sentences are cited in (24). *Þa* consistently triggers verb-second word order and, often, an appearance of *wearð* if there was a 'change of state' event:

> (24) 14 … þa <u>wearð</u> micel hunʒor on þam rice and he wearð wædla.
> 15 **Þa** <u>ferde he</u> and folʒode anum burhsittendum men þæs rices; **ða** <u>sende he</u> hine to his tune þæt he heolde his swin.
> 'Then came about great hunger in that kingdom and he became a pauper. Then he traveled and followed a townsman of the realm; then he sent him to his town that he may keep his swine.' (Luke 15)

In the 14th century, that kind of construction (adverbial + V-2 + *wearð*) gave way to using the progressive aspect in narratives (with SVO). Petré notes that in the new style of narration, 'the events that are conceptualized are anchored to a single point in time which is maintained throughout the event,' which renders a 'structurally required slot for defining topic time' unnecessary (2010:466). At that point, we see the rise of *be* + V + *-ing* in English (and notably we do *not* see the same development in German or Dutch, which do not inflect the verb for progressive aspect). The demise of *þa* + V-2 dragged *weorðan* down with it, and (*be*)*come* took on its functions (Petré 2011:1).

Of the two possible ancestors *hu wearð* and *hu becom*, only the latter survived, and in two realizations: heading a clause with subject *it* (type 1) and as a phrasal modifier, either of just a lexical phrase (type 3) or of a non-finite VP (type 2). German and Dutch, on the other hand, retained both verbs. Besides (22) and (23), we also have the following:

> (25) Peter looked at him, and asked him, in Dutch, "Hoe wiet zij wie ik ben, en <u>hoe komt</u> zij mij te kennen?"
> 'How do you know who I am, and how come you to know me?' (Barrow 1839:119)
> (26) Sicinius. '<u>Wie kommt's</u>, daß ihr / ihm halft, sich fort zu machen?' (Dorothea Tieck's translation of (9)).

3. Clausal *how come*: Type 1 (Reanalyzed)

The obvious questions to ask about type (1) are these: Why *how come it* and not *how does it come*?, and what's up with the missing agreement inflection – why is it *how come it* and not *how comes it* as it used to be in (6), (8), and (9)? And why never in the past tense, as in (7)? I suggest that those questions have a single answer: *how come it* is reanalyzed as strongly inflected.

We tend to think of reanalysis as exceptional, with surprising examples like the passivization of an object of a prepositional phrase (*this was not properly looked at*), where the preposition might be reanalyzed as a particle of a transitive phrasal verb *look at* (cf. Chomsky 1982:123). I think that reanalysis is quite common. If someone were exposed to a particular *how come* construction for the first time and decided to adopt it, the first step would not be to consult the *Southern Journal of Linguistics* to see how that might be accomplished. The listener must co-create the expression, and may not necessarily do it in the same way the speaker did it. Consequently, there are regional variations, as Michael's data illustrate – or the construction may also be completely absent in someone's lexical inventory.[6]

3.1. Strong Agreement

Strong agreement draws the *main* verb up from its head position of VP to I, the head of the inflection phrase (from where it may rise again to the complementizer position C – see Figure 4 below). The sole remaining verb to still follow that pattern today is *be*, though on occasion even *be* stays *in situ* and remains the V head of VP. We can see this in formulaic *why don't you* exhortations, where (historically, or still productively) a dummy *do* rose from I to C (as in the lines from one of the success hits by the Supremes, 'You Keep me Hanging On': 'Why <u>don't</u> you <u>be</u> a man about it / And set me free.'). Since *be* still productively follows strong agreement, that setting must still be operable. Shakespeare, for instance, alternated weak and strong agreement with verbs as a stylistic device, raising main verbs for lines of special import or to indicate a high level of status or formality, as in (27) from *Romeo and Juliet*:

(27) Why call you for a sword? (I.i.76)

Juliet's plain-spoken nurse, in contrast, uses the modern weak inflection and *do*-support (Thiede 2009). Older grammatical forms and features can indeed be carried over for register. They also linger on in songs and sayings, or in memorized lines from scripture.

Just as Shakespeare switched between Middle and Early Modern English grammar for register, so, for example, did Mary Davis Brown in her diaries (1854-1901), transcribed faithfully and published by her descendants (Talley et al., 2010).[7] Mary Brown went to church on Sundays without fail and was thus able to produce many Bible quotes from memory (not always verbatim, meaning she was able to recreate them in her mind); she also wrote invocations to a new year, prayers, and elegies for lost family members. When she switched to a liturgical register for such special entries, she successfully aligned her grammar with that of the King James Bible, in sharp contrast to her everyday vernacular. That liturgical register includes strong agreement, as in (28):

(28) … be shure that you deceive not youre self. (Jun. 4, 1858, p. 60)

Atavistic and modern morphological features (like strong and weak AGR) can thus coexist and even be used by the same speaker. That includes *come* as a strongly inflected verb.

Recognizing *come*, without agreement or past tense, as nonetheless strongly inflected requires another look back in history. Note, for example, how the Lord's Prayer has *Thy Kingdom <u>come</u>* (not *comes,* not *cometh*, nor *may come*, and certainly not *has come*), as it did in Anglo-Saxon:

> (29) to <u>becume</u> þin rice (Wessex Gospels – West Saxon)
> (30) to-<u>cymeð</u> ric ðin (Aldred's gloss to the Lindisfarne Gospels – Northumbrian)

The full subjunctive/optative inflection *-eð*, still present in the Northumbrian example (30) above, is reduced in West Saxon to *-e* in (29) (cf. Cole 2011). Later, of course, that *-e* is devoiced ('silent *-e*'). We still have it in sayings like 'come what may' (still pronounced in the German equivalent *komm<u>e</u>, was da woll<u>e</u>*). I assume that it is the acoustic *absence* (devoicing) of a mood ending that encouraged reanalysis of *come* in formulaic *how come* as strongly inflected. Backformations to archaic morphology are not unprecedented in English: Steven Pinker pointed out that the past tense *sneaked* was reanalyzed as irregular *snuck*; the past tense of *spin*, which was *span*, was reanalyzed as *spun*; and in some regions *climbed* is now *clumb* (1999:76-78). One might add *knelt*, replacing *kneeled*.

One could speculate that the cause for this reanalysis was also a choice of polite register. After all, the construction is not used as a challenge but as a request for someone to explain a *fait accompli* (see (5) above), and the indirectness afforded by the subjunctive mood (the gesture being 'how do you think it might have come about' rather than 'tell me what happened') leaves an escape hatch if the addressee might not know (or might prefer not to disclose) the reason. Those who do not feel comfortable with strong verbs other than *be* have the option of using *get* instead of *come*, and rephrase (13) as *how <u>did</u> her eyes <u>get</u> so bright* or (14) as *how <u>did</u> Falstaff's sword <u>get</u> so hacked*. I do not believe that *come* has perfective aspect without the auxiliary ([~~has~~] *come*), because of a lack of examples with an auxiliary in place.

One might object that modern *how come it* is modeled on (6) – (10) but lost its inflection under pressure from lexicalized *how come*. That seems ad hoc and would be the only such case in English. Subjunctive/optative expressions without *-s*, *truth be told*, survive elsewhere, as in *God bless you* or *God save the Queen*, with *come* (*your/to kingdom come*, *come Monday / hell or high water / rain or shine / what may*), in mandative sentences with *that* (*I recommend that she consult a lawyer*), or after *lest* (see also Vlasova 2010).

3.2. Verb-second Word Order

Strong agreement on the verb *come* also explains the verb-second word order (*how come it*), because the main verb has to rise above the subject to achieve it. Modern German uses V-2 ordering quite regularly, syntactically raising the content of I to the complementizer position C and long-distance raising (or projecting) the fronted element directly to the specifier of CP. Type-(1) sentences likewise raise I to C, but it sounds marked and old-fashioned. In some instances, English V-2 sounds quite natural, however, such as in (31) from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

> (31) …tied around the neck of the bottle <u>was a paper</u> with the words "DRINK ME" beautifully printed in large letters. (Carrol 30-31)

And (31) is indeed a different construction. Note that I-to-C raising entails that V-2 is impossible with an overt complementizer (because C, being filled, cannot serve as a landing site for I-to-C raising). In German, filled C and V-2 are mutually exclusive. English, however, *does* accomplish it. For example, it

would be grammatical and quite unmarked to make (31) the complement of a complementizer (*Alice noticed that* [(31)]). One must therefore conclude that modern English not only retained V-2 by raising I to C but also can *emulate* V-2 by topicalization (left-appending to IP). That is somewhat contrived, because it likely involves leaving the subject *in situ* in [SPEC,VP] prior to phonetic SPELL-OUT. The option to achieve V-2 by means of topicalization must have been available as early as the 15th century, when John Lydgate completed his *Fall of Princes* between 1431 and 1438. In (32), we see V-2 after filled C, meaning the word order must now have been achieved by appending the fronted element to IP. Here, the specifier of CP is filled with *whan* and C with *that*.[8] The subordinate clause has the topicalized constituent *in Roome toun*:

> (32) This thing was doon whan that in Roome toun
> The striff was grettest tween Cesar & Pompeie (*Lydgate*'s *Fall of Princes* pt. III book vi 3214-15, in Bergen 1923:761)

A classical V-2 grammar (I-to-C raising) could not have generated such a sentence.

3.3 Syntactic Functions

In (1) *how come it was this*, the underlying syntactic relations are as in (33):

> (33)   [$_{IP}$ this was [$_{CP}$ α come how]]

There is an implied clause in α (e.g. *that I don't talk to him anymore*), or a place holder for it, i.e. the expletive *it* (German *wie kommt's* as in (26) can similarly omit the *that*-clause and substitute the expletive *es*, here contracted to an enclitic). In sentence (1) as quoted, some clefting has occurred. In the actual sentence *How come it was this,* the pronoun *this* looks extraposed, i.e. projected to the right periphery, and *how come it* is topicalized, i.e. left-adjoined to IP. Extraposition and topicalization are direct (non-movement) projections (Culicover & Rochemont 1990), but the associated canonic positions of subject and subject complement should still be filled with a phonetically empty marker, preventing those positions from being filled with something else. In the figures below, I mark the canonic positions of remapped constituents with a trace – not a trace of movement, but a variable, an associated (co-indexed) position that can be reconstrued. I am aligning my analysis with Ur Shlonksy and Gabriela Soare's analysis of *why*; they assumed that *why* is an operator associated with a 'trace/copy that is interpreted as a semantic variable' (652).[9]

4. Fossilized *how come*: Types (2) and (3)

Since, as pointed out above, *come* cannot be expected to simultaneously have a subject (IP in (2) and PP in (3)) and assign Object case into it, it can not be productively generated in modern syntax. Lexicalized *how come* has no need for IP, hence remains uninflected (there is no subject to agree with). That said, the remaining question is where the apparent object case comes from (*her* to be in Matewan, *us* in there).

4.1. No Case Assigned in Fossilized *how come*

We can rule out the usual ways in which object case is assigned:

- Structurally: Exceptional case marking, where a verb assigns object case to the subject of an infinitive, lacks the syntactic structure to do so here. Right-appended inside a modifier (see figures 2 and 3 below), *come* cannot c-command the target.
- Inherently: No Dative is assigned by *come* to the pronouns in (2) and (3) because they are not the affected EXPERIENCER as in (17) – (19).
- Quirkily: In sentences like (23) *mir wird schlecht*, the subject position appears to be filled by a pronoun marked for Dative case. However, in the sentences that fall under types (2) and (3), there is no verb that could assign such a case. At any rate, (23) has a phonetically unrealized subject expletive (cf. Johnson 181) that could optionally be realized as *es* in *Es wird mir schlecht* or, with V-2-word order, *mir wird es schlecht*. I do not believe in quirky case.

The remaining option is that no case is assigned at all if there is no mechanism and no structure to do so. I suggest we think of *me, him, her,* etc. as the *unmarked* forms of pronouns, because it requires syntactic structure and effort (MOVE) to assign Subject case to them. And indeed we see those forms in non-case-marked positions elsewhere, as in resumptive subjects or for emphasis:

(34)   Me, I am just fine.
(35)   This is me talking.
(36)   It's me!

As Andrew Radford pointed out, that is also a preferred option for children who have not yet developed the Case system (1990:178):

(37)   Me show mummy.
(38)   Me like coffee.

Thus, rather than claiming that the pronouns in (2) and (3) have object case, I conclude that they are not case marked at all.

4.2 Syntactic Functions

In (2) *how come her to be in Matewan*, *how come* is not a main clause but has lexicalized as a modifier, which makes it quite different from type (1). Here, a verb phrase with adverbial function of 'reason or cause' (Quirk et al. 752, similarly Zwicky & Zwicky) points to the reason for being in Matewan:

(39)   [IP to [VP her be in Matewan [wh- how come]]]

Actually, (39) is already a derivation, because *her* is originally the subject of a small-clause [PP *her in Matewan*]:

(40)   [IP to [VP be [PP her in Matewan] [wh- how come]]]

In (3) *how come us in there*, the *how-come* constituent is again an adverbial modifier pointing to the reason for why *us-in-there* should be the case. It originates inside a prepositional phrase, the preposition *in* taking a proform *there*, referring to some prepositional phrase of location, as its complement:

(41)   [[PP us in there] [wh- how come]]

Any syntactic analysis must, to be worth its salt, identify the canonic positions where fronted or extraposed constituents have their place of origin so that their historical syntactic functions can be reconstrued. That is where I part company with previous approaches.

5. Syntactic Structures

Using all the assumptions laid out above, there are three different ways of articulating *how come*. I will parse them from most to least lexicalized.

5.1. Type (3) – Small-clause *how come* Appended to Lexical Phrase (Lexicalized Template)

The structurally simplest approach is to take *come how* as a verb phrase with a fronted *wh-* element as diagrammed in Figure 1.
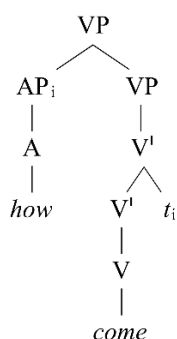

Fig. 1: Small-clause *how come.* The *wh-* element is functionally a postverbal adverb, fronted by left-appending it to VP. That functional position is marked as *t* and co-indexed with AP, but here and below, *t* is not understood as a trace of movement so much as a variable, or functionally associated node.

This stacked VP acts as a single *wh*-modifier within a lexical phrase (NP, VP, AP, PP).

Figure 1 must not necessarily be a VP for all speakers. Some speakers may have decided that *how come* in Type (3) is really just a phrasal adjective – a single 'compound interrogative word' (Huddleston & Pullum 909) with a merged function comparable to *wanna* and *stirfry*. Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms* notes that *how come* is 'rapidly pronounced huc-cum' in Virginia (1848:182), suggesting that at least some speakers might have used the expression contracted to a single word. Either way – as a single word or as a lexical phrase – *how come* would be treated as a *wh*-element, hence fronted.

In sentence (3) *how come us in there*, the *wh*-element *how come* is logically an adjectival modifier within the prepositional small clause *us in there* but actually left-appended to PP because it is a *wh*-element, as in Figure 2.
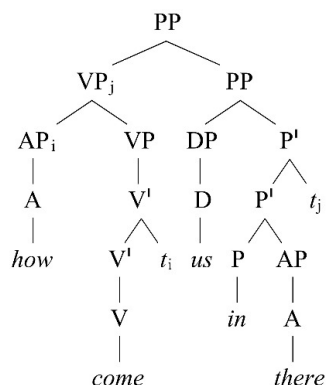
```
                          PP
                  ┌───────┴───────┐
                VPⱼ               PP
             ┌───┴───┐        ┌────┴────┐
           APᵢ       VP      DP         P'
            │        │        │        ╱ ╲
            A        V'       D       P'   tⱼ
            │       ╱ ╲       │       ╱ ╲
          how      V'   tᵢ   us   P     AP
                   │             │     │
                   V            in     A
                   │                   │
                 come               there
```

Fig. 2: Small-clause *how come* appended to small-clause *us in there*, with an associated variable *t*ⱼ in the modifier position at P'.

The entire structure in Figure 2 is the complement of the linking verb *be* in (3), *and that's <u>how come us in there</u>*.

Small clauses are straightforward, but template (3) cannot generate sentences of types (1) and (2).

5.2. Type (2) – Small-clause *how come* Appended to Non-finite IP (Lexicalized Template)

In this scenario, *how come* is appended not to a lexical phrase but to non-finite IP (a.k.a. infinitive), with an associated modifier node inside IP. That is likewise a template, a lexically stored pattern rather than a structure produced by syntactic movement, but the presence of IP does require some syntactic raising, so it is not *entirely* lexical. In sentence (2) *How come her to be in Matewan*, with underlying syntactic functions as in (40), *how come* modifies (queries the reason for) *be* [PP *her in Matewan*]. The *wh*-phrase is left-appended to IP as in Figure 3.

```
                    IP
             ┌──────┴──────┐
           VPᵢ             IP
         ┌──┴──┐       ┌────┴────┐
       APⱼ     VP     DPₖ        I'
        │      │      │      ┌────┴────┐
        A      V'     D      I         VP
        │     ╱ ╲     │      │      ┌───┴───┐
      how    V'  tⱼ  her    to    tₖ      V'
             │                          ╱ ╲
             V                         V'   tᵢ
             │                        ╱ ╲
           come                      V'   PP
                                     │   ╱ ╲
                                     V  tₖ   P'
                                     │      ╱ ╲
                                    be     P   DP
                                           │  ╱ ╲
                                          in D   NP
                                           │     │
                                           ∅     N
                                                 │
                                              Matewan
```
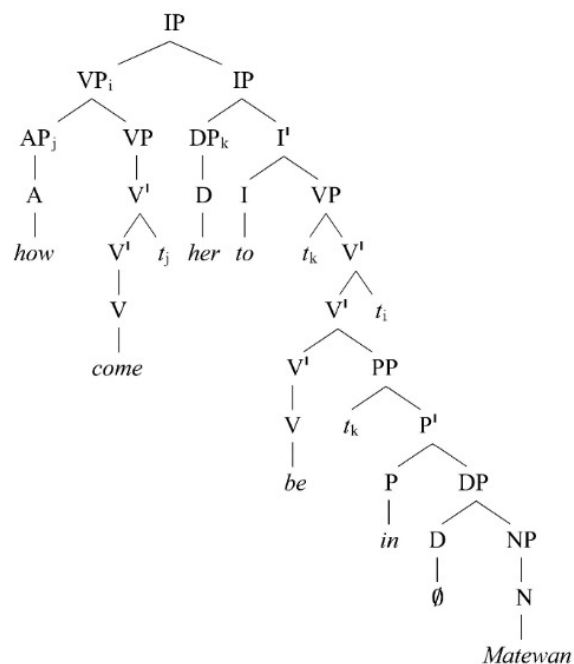
Fig. 3: Small-clause *how come* is left-appended to non-finite IP. It functions relationally as a modifier in the verb phrase. *Her* is the subject of PP, is inherited by VP, and rises to IP.

5.3. Type (1) – Full-clause [$_{CP}$ *how come it* + (CP)] or [$_{CP}$ *how come* + CP] (Productive)

In this, the most syntactic of *how come* sentences, *how come* projects a CP with *come* as the main verb, taking a subject. In a sentence like *they come to be so calme* [*how*], *come* as a main verb takes *they* as subject (marked for subject Case). That position may be filled with an expletive *it* if there is an associated (real or implied) *that*-clause as in (7) *how came it that I sleeping here was found* / (1) *how come it was this*. Whether it is *how comes it*, *how came it*, or *how come it*, the verb is strongly inflected (for agreement, tense, or subjunctive mood) and available for raising from I to C (classic V-2 ordering). This version of the structure is rather more intricate than the simple VP version above, as Figure 4 shows.

[Tree diagram:
CP$_i$
— AP — A — *how*$_j$
— C' — C — *come*$_k$
— C' — IP — XPL — *it*$_m$
— IP — I' — I — t_k
— I' — VP — VP — t_m, V' — V' — V — t_k, and t_j
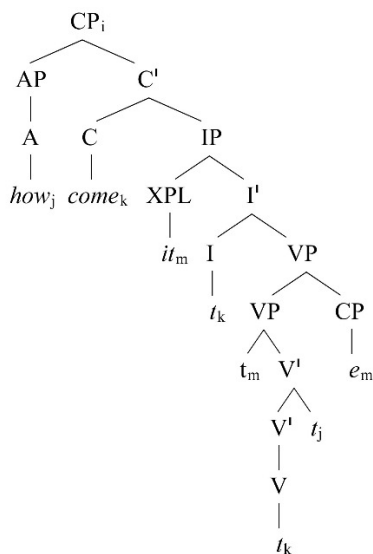— VP — CP — e_m]

Fig. 4: The full-clause version of *how come/came/comes it*. The expletive *it* is here co-indexed with an elided *that*-clause, an empty CP, as in (1). The lower VP could also be filled, as in (6) or (7).

Sentence (1), with the functional logic of (33), contains the structure of Figure 4 as the fronted α-complement of *this was* α, as in Figure 5.

[Tree diagram:
CP
— CP$_i$ — AP — A — *how*$_j$; C' — C — *come*$_k$; IP — XPL — *it*$_m$; I' — VP ...; VP — CP — e_m; V' — t_j; V — t_k
— C' — C — *was*$_n$; IP — DP$_p$ — D — *this*, I — t_n; I' — I — t_p, VP — V' — V — t_n, t_i]
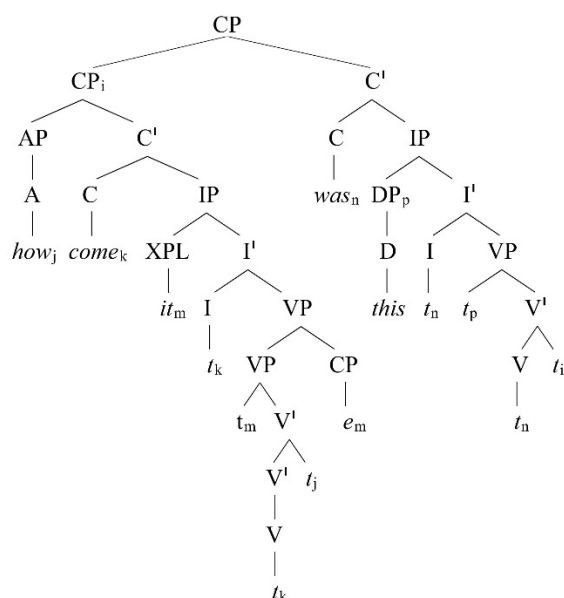
Fig. 5: *How come it was this*, with Fig. 4 in [SPEC,CP] and verb-second word order. Alternatively, V-2 order could be imitated with *was* in I and *this* extraposed (right-appended to IP).

Following Eric Haeberli's understanding of V-2 clauses (2002), Gregory Johnson assumes that in full *how-come* clauses without overt *it*, there must be a null expletive (2014:181). This would appear to be parallel to realizing (23) alternatively with or without *es*. How a null expletive would be discovered by a child acquiring English is a different matter.

Since this is main-verb *come* with a CP complement (Figure 4) and *not* a template, we see creative variations. For example, the C head of the CP complement of *come* need not be filled with the main verb for V-2 word ordering. It could instead attract an auxiliary or modal in I for presenting the lower sentence as a question. Such data are reported in Radford (2018), who scoured the web for examples:

(42) a. How come does iodine get into the human system of dwellers along the coasts from sea water? (Radford 2018:217)
b. I mean, how come would I be crying? … You know I don't cry (Daugharty, cited by Radford 2018:186)

Arguably, users of (42) might also use *how come* as a single-word synonym of *why*; this is most likely the case in (43):

(43) How come is it that even ugly women my age can get a boyfriend but I am still single? (Radford 2018:217)

Whether *how come* is used as a phrasal (compound) adverb or as a lexical phrase, the clause structure is as in Figure 4, with I-to-C raising for question formation and the *wh*-element in [SPEC,CP]. Indications that *come* can head a productive finite clause even today come from examples that Radford collected on the web where *come* is (strongly) inflected for agreement or tense (Radford 2018:218):

(44) a. How comes that you have so many singing parts in this new record?
b. How came you never watched Sailor Moon?

A further indication that full-clause *how come* (with subject Case) is productive and not formulaic may be the existence of elaborations such as *how the hell come*, *how exactly come*, and even *why come*, for which DARE has a few examples such as in (45):

(45) a. Dammit, Frog. Why come you do that? ... Always low-rating my stories. (Fox 1962:44)
b. why come i gotta leave frostburg to have that much fun? (DARE File, 2006)

The full-clause type of *how come* with *come* as a strongly inflected verb is still robustly productive today. None of those uses found by Radford appear in Michael's corpus, however. Also, to be fair, Radford has no way of knowing whether any of his data were generated by ESL or EFL speakers.

6. Conclusion

Gregory Johnson was right: We need to distinguish between non-finite and finite *how come*. That is because some *how come* constructions have become lexical templates, whereas others are still produced in syntax today. In fact, I am arguing for *two* non-finite templates in which *how come* has adverbial function: in a lexical phrase, or in an infinitive. Neither template requires a complementizer phrase CP to accommodate *how come*, which I suggest is a bare VP with a fronted *wh-*, or else a compound adverb for some speakers. Instead, the phrase can simply be left-appended to the top of the lexical phrase (or the infinitive, IP). Such fronting is by direct mapping, not by syntactic movement: a template is simply a lexically stored lattice with slots to fill.

In full-clause *how come*, the main verb is *come* and it takes a subject. That finite construction is not formulaic, but robustly productive in the sense that it can produce creative variations (though they may not always be equally acceptable to all speakers of English).

I hypothesize that both finite and non-finite *how come* (but especially the non-finite templates) retain grammatical features that were productive when it started becoming formulaic in the 16th century: strong agreement for *come*, and verb-second syntax. I conclude that there is no single, unified account of all instances of *how come*. Instead, we see the kind of reanalysis that necessarily needs to occur when expressions or forms are retained from an older grammar (or returned to it by reanalysis) that is no longer productive today.

Whether this analysis would have convinced Michael, I do not know. But it does something that none of the previous approaches have done systematically: identify the canonic positions and functions of all constituents before they were scrambled, and allow for a mixed-grammar approach (historical and modern) that can retain and/or reanalyze atavistic parts of our ever-changing language.

NOTES

[1] Most of these articles are also capably reviewed by Gregory Johnson II (2014), in chapter 5 of his dissertation.

[2] Alternatively, though that seems an anachronistic reading, (10) might be using *come* as an auxiliary (*they come forsake that refined state*), cf. 'You can't come coming in here knocking over everything and acting a damn fool' (Spears 1982:861). I ruled out construing *forsake* as a bare infinitive (*how come they that refined state* [to] *forsake*) because an infinitive would imply volition and purpose. However, the sufferers here *experience* their loss without agency.

[3] Alfred's use of *becuman* perfectly captures the Latin *contingere*. The original (lib. iv prosa 6) is *bonis tum adversa tum prospera, malis etiam tum optata tum odiosa contingant.*

[4] Caxton's *how cometh that by* may look like *becomen* with a separable prefix, but it is indeed a full preposition *by*. It is Caxton's translation of Middle Dutch *ic… vraechde, hoe datted dear toe cwam?* (*van den vos Reinaerde* by 'Willem," l. 6432).

[5] That time frame strikes me as late, though. I wonder if the prevalence of Anglo-Norman texts and their use of the narrative *imparfait* rubbed off on Middle English instead.

[6] Mary Davis Brown of York County, South Carolina, for comparison, did not use *how come* a single time in her near-fifty years of journaling. In a passage where she might have had an opportunity to do so, she uses *why it is*: 'I have a verry heavey heart within this bosom of mine this new year night. Why it is, I cant tell' (p. 211, first entry of 1873 and an invocation to the new year in the liturgical register).

[7] Special thanks to the diary's co-editor, former student Catherine Brown Michael, a great-great granddaughter of Mary Davis Brown, who was kind enough to share an electronic copy of the book with me for linguistic analysis.

[8] *Whan that* is not the only possible content filling [SPEC,CP] and C in Middle English. Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale' has *how that* in the lines 'Hym thoughte how that the wynged god Mercurie / Biforn hym stood and bad hym to be murie' (*CT* 'The Knight's Tale' second part ll. 1385-86).

[9] Masao Ochi (2004) argues that in contrast to *why*, *how come* does not bind trace. If that means trace of movement, I agree. However, Ochi's evidence seems contrived, resting on the supposed ungrammaticality of **How come John ate what?* compared to *Why did John eat what?* (similarly Collins 1991). The *how come* question here sounds perfectly acceptable in a context where B asks A to explain how come John ate kimchi. A has never heard of kimchi before and asks: 'How come John ate *what*?' Both are echo questions, and in both the *wh*-element is associated with a modifier position; the object of *ate* is a distractor.

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