

An Optimality Theoretic Approach to
Subject-AUX Inversion and its
Cross-linguistic Variation

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The aim of this paper is to provide a straightforward and unified account for Subject-AUX inversion (SAI) in interrogatives and its cross-linguistic variation by making use of Optimality Theoretic constraints. The constraints include the restriction on clause type, *wh*-operator, economy of representation, feature specification, head, and traces. The proposed hypothesis is that in Standard English, the constraints are stratified in the order enumerated. Thus the optimal representation of an interrogative in Standard English, whether it be a yes-no question or a *wh*-question, is the one that best satisfies the stratified constraints. Demonstrating that systematic failure of SAI in embedded questions of Standard English is also explained as a consequence of the interactions of the constraints, this paper argues that sporadic or systematic occurrence of SAI in embedded contexts of varieties of English immediately follows from the difference of the same set of constraints.