Overview

- AAVE copula absence
- Why it’s not phonological deletion
- Alternative syntactic analyses
- The winner: An empty element (!)
- Reflection on syntactic argumentation
- Questions about HW 8
- More “untangle this”
Linguistic Argumentation

• The available data usually underdetermines the analysis (cf to)

• Sometimes appeals to naturalness can help

• Further constraints come into play when we try to make interacting analyses consistent

• Still, just about everything could be done differently if we’re willing to change assumptions

• Data underdetermines the theory; difficult to argue that something must be analyzed a certain way
An Unusual Case

- The verbless sentences in Chapter 15 provide a rare example where the data seem to force a particular kind of analysis.
- Specifically: an empty element.
- And we tried very hard to avoid it.
Notes on African American Vernacular English

• aka Ebonics, Black English, and various other things
• All natural languages are systematic
• This is just as true of stigmatized varieties as of prestige dialects
• The claim that AAVE has “no discernible rules” (columnist William Raspberry) is blatantly false
• This is not to deny the social and economic value of using a prestige dialect
• But prestige is not correlated with systematicity
Missing *be* in AAVE

• Some AAVE sentences:
  
  *Chris at home*
  *We angry with you*
  *You a genius*
  *They askin for help*

• Like SAE sentences with a form of *be* missing

• Analogous sentences occur in many languages
AAVE Also Allows Sentences With *be*

Chris at home

We angry with you

You a genius

They askin for help

Chris is at home

We’re angry with you

You are a genius

They’re askin for help
Labov’s Deletion Account

• Copula absence comes about when contracted auxiliaries (’s and it ’re) are deleted altogether

• Predicts that copula absence is only possible where contraction is: (strong claim)
  
  *You got to be good, Rednall!
  *You got to Ø good, Rednall!

  Be nice to your mother!
  *Ø Nice to your mother!

  It ain’t a flower show, is it?
  *It ain’t a flower show, ’s it?
Counterexamples to Labov’s Account

How old you think his baby is
*How old you think his baby ’s
How old you think his baby ∅

Tha’s the man they say is in love
*Tha’s the man they say ’s in love
Tha’s the man they say ∅ in love

• The relevant examples here are with fully contracted ’s

• These examples show that copula absence can’t depend on copula contraction
Our Challenge

• Provide a precise analysis of AAVE copula absence within our theory

• Account for all of the facts covered by the deletion account

• Deal with the counterexamples to the deletion account
Two Possible Analyses

1. Add another initial symbol which is [HEAD [PRED +]], not [HEAD verb]:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{HEAD} & \quad \text{pos} \\
\text{PRED} & \quad + \\
\text{VAL} & \quad \text{SPR} \langle \rangle \\
\text{COMPS} & \quad \langle \rangle \\
\end{align*}
\]

2. Write a special grammar rule for verbless clauses:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{phrase} & \quad \text{verb} \\
\text{FORM} & \quad \text{fin} \\
\text{VAL} & \quad \text{SPR} \langle \rangle \\
\text{SEM} & \quad \text{prop} \\
\text{INDEX} & \quad 2
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{1NP} & \quad \text{CASE} \quad \text{nom} \\
\text{AGR} & \quad \text{non-1sing}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{HEAD} & \quad \text{PRED} + \\
\text{VAL} & \quad \text{SPR} \langle \text{1} \rangle \\
\text{SEM} & \quad \text{INDEX} \quad 2
\end{align*}
\]
A Counterexample to Both:

*How old you think his baby* $\emptyset$

- LDDs require that a non-empty GAP list be licensed by a lexical head that is missing an argument

- Neither the initial symbol analysis nor the grammar rule analysis posits a lexical head corresponding to *is* that would license the gap

- If we posit a silent variant of finite forms of *be*, we solve this problem
The Silent *be* Analysis

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{i-rule} \\
\text{INPUT} & \langle \text{be} , X \rangle \\
\text{OUTPUT} & \langle \phi , [\text{HEAD} [\text{AGR} \ non-1\text{sing}] [\text{FORM} \ fin] [\text{INV} \ -] ] ] \rangle
\end{align*}
\]

- This is a highly specialized lexeme-to-word rule (i-rule)
Some Questions About This Rule

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{i-rule} \\
\text{INPUT} & \quad \langle \text{be}, \ X \rangle \\
\text{OUTPUT} & \quad \langle \phi, \ [\text{HEAD} \ \left[ \text{AGR} \begin{array}{c}
\text{non-1sing}
\end{array} \\
\text{FORM} \begin{array}{c}
\text{fin}
\end{array} \\
\text{INV} \begin{array}{c}
-
\end{array}\right]\rangle \\
\end{align*}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>ANSWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which lexemes does it apply to?</td>
<td>Those spelled <em>be</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the output [FORM fin]?</td>
<td>*You got to ∅ good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the output AGR non-1sing?</td>
<td>*I ∅ hungry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the output [INV −]?</td>
<td>*It ain’t a flower show, ∅ it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does this account for LDDs?

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
i\text{-rule} \\
\text{INPUT} & \langle \text{be} , X \rangle \\
\text{OUTPUT} & \langle \phi , \left[ \text{HEAD} \left[ \text{AGR} \; \text{non-1sing} \right] \right] \left[ \text{FORM} \; \text{fin} \right] \left[ \text{INV} \; - \right] \rangle \end{bmatrix}
\]

Answer: The usual way. That is, the output of this rule (silent *be*) can have a non-empty GAP list. The fact that the verb is not pronounced doesn’t matter.
A Possible Objection

• Earlier, we touted the WYSIWYG character of our theory: everything justified by something observable.

• Doesn’t positing an inaudible verb undermine that claim?

• Response

  • A word with no phonology is just the shortest possible word

  • Positing one such word, with restricted distribution is qualitatively different from allowing multiple “empty categories” that can appear in many places
Conclusions

• Studying a variety of languages and dialects is important to discovering what formal devices are necessary to account for natural language.

• Formulating a precise theory of grammar allows us to investigate in detail the differences between dialects and between languages.

• We were able to make the argument for a silent verb because our analyses were precise, and the consequences could be worked through.
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I expect Kim to continue to be surprised that Sandy laughed.
Cf. Kim seemed surprised that...
Complicated example

#5

That Sandy could laugh so hard, Kim did not realize.
That Sandy could laugh Kim did not realize
Complicated example

#6

Kim continues to be likely to be easy to talk to.
Kim continues to be likely to be easy to talk to.
Complicated example

#4

You all laughed, did you not?
you all laughed did you not
You all laughed didn't you
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