Variation in the English Auxiliary System
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 \textit{be} in AAVE

• Some AAVE sentences:
  
  \textit{Chris at home}
  \textit{We angry with you}
  \textit{You a genius}
  \textit{They askin for help}

• Like SAE sentences with a form of \textit{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 ∅ good, Rednall!

  Be nice to your mother!
  *∅ 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 $[\text{HEAD} \ [\text{PRED} +]]$, not $[\text{HEAD} \ \text{verb}]$:

   $\begin{align*}
   \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} pos \\ \text{PRED} + \end{bmatrix} \\
   \text{VAL} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \langle \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \langle \rangle \end{bmatrix}
   \end{align*}$

2. Write a special grammar rule for verbless clauses:

   $\begin{align*}
   \text{phrase} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{verb} \\ \text{FORM} \text{ fin} \end{bmatrix} \\
   \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEA} \\ \text{D} \\ \text{VAL} \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \langle \rangle \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{MODE} \begin{bmatrix} \text{prop} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{INDEX} \begin{bmatrix} 2 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\
   \rightarrow & \begin{bmatrix} 1 \text{NP} \\ \text{CASE} \begin{bmatrix} \text{nom} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{AGR} \begin{bmatrix} \text{non-1sing} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\
   \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEA} \\ \text{D} \\ \text{VAL} \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \langle 1 \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\
   \text{SEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{INDEX} \begin{bmatrix} 2 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}
   \end{align*}$
A Counterexample to Both:

*How old you think his baby Ø*

- 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

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

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

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

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

<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><em>You got to ∅ good</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the output AGR <em>non-1sing</em>?</td>
<td><em>I ∅ hungry.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the output [INV −]?</td>
<td><em>It ain’t a flower show, ∅ it?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does this account for LDDs?

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

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

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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Complicated example

#5

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

did you not

all laughed
You all laughed didn't you
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