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
• Final exam preview
• 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*  \quad *Chris is at home*

*We angry with you*  \quad *We’re angry with you*

*You a genius*  \quad *You are a genius*

*They askin for help*  \quad *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, ’s it?
  *It ain’t a flower show, ∅ 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’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 \([\text{HEAD} \text{verb}]\):

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

2. Write a special grammar rule for verbless clauses:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{phrase} & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{HEAD} \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{verb} \\
\text{FORM } \text{fin}
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{SPR} \langle \rangle
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{MODE} \quad \text{prop} \\
\text{INDEX} \quad 2
\end{bmatrix} \\
\rightarrow & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
1\text{NP} \\
\text{CASE} \quad \text{nom} \\
\text{AGR} \quad \text{non-1sing}
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{SYN} & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{HEAD} \quad [\text{PRED } +]
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{VAL} & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{SPR} \langle 1 \rangle
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{SEM} & \quad \begin{bmatrix}
\text{INDEX} \quad 2
\end{bmatrix}
\end{align*}
\]
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

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

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

#### Silent *be* Lexical Rule

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

<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><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

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

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 #4

You all laughed, did you not?

*You all laughed, did not you?

You all laugheded, didn’t you?
you all laughed

V NP ADV...
did you not
You all laughed didn't you
Complicated example #6

*Kim continues to be likely to be easy to talk to.

*Kim continue to be likely to be easy to talk to.

*Kim continues to be likely to is easy to talk to.

*Kim continues to Kim be likely to be easy to talk to.
Kim continues to be likely to be easy to talk to.
Complicated example #7

That cake, Kim thought would be easy to eat.

*That cake, Kim thought would be easy to eat pie.

*That cake, Kim thought would be easy to eaten.

*Cupcake, Kim thought would be easy to eat.

*That cake, Kim thought that would be easy to eat.
That cake Kim thought would be easy to eat.
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