Ling 566
Dec 6, 2016

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
- Reading questions
- Course evals

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	*Chris is at home*
We angry with you	*We're angry with you*
You a genius	*You are a genius*
They askin for help	*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?*
**It ain't a flower show, Ø 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*]:

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

2. Write a special grammar rule for verbless clauses:

$$\begin{bmatrix} phrase \\ \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} verb \\ \text{FORM} & \text{fin} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{VAL} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} & \langle\,\rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{SEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{MODE} & \text{prop} \\ \text{INDEX} & \boxed{2} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{matrix} \boxed{1}\text{NP} \\ \begin{bmatrix} \text{CASE} & \text{nom} \\ \text{AGR} & non\text{-}1sing \end{bmatrix} \end{matrix} \begin{bmatrix} \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & + \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{VAL} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} & \langle\,\boxed{1}\,\rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{SEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{INDEX} & \boxed{2} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

A Counterexample to Both:

How old you think his baby ∅

- 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

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

- This is a highly specialized lexeme-to-word rule (i-rule)

Some Questions About This Rule

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

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

QUESTION	ANSWER
Which lexemes does it apply to?	Those spelled *be*
Why is the output [FORM fin]?	**You got to ∅ good*
Why is the output AGR *non-1sing*?	**I ∅ hungry.*
Why is the output [INV –]?	**It ain't a flower show, ∅ it?*

How does this account for LDDs?

Silent *be* Lexical Rule

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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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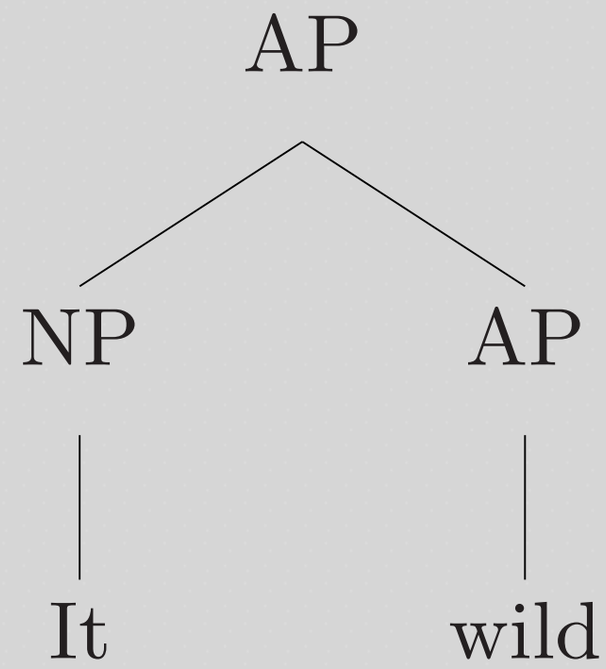
Reading Questions

- Just curious, how did copula absence AAVE occur? Is there some historical linguistic facts about it?
- How would be go about dealing with newer features of AAE? For example, ‘Habitual be’ (e.g. 'He be late'.) or use of pluperfect for simple past (e.g. 'he had walked'='he walked')

Reading Questions

- I don't understand the top of pg 460, where it says that expressions like those in (13) (e.g. *It wild*.) are permissible. Can you show a tree for one of them?
- So can we analyze examples of be-omission in SAE (15) p. 460 the same way we do for the AAVE? (e.g. *With the cat away, the mice will play*.)

Reading Questions



Reading Questions

- In (26) *Ain't Lew Alcindor Mohammed Ali?* the book says *Mohammed Ali* is not PRED +. What determines whether a phrase is PRED +? Only verbs are explicitly PRED -, and I couldn't find any entries in the lexicon that were specified for PRED on e way or the other.

Reading Questions

- What becomes the head for the Initial Symbol and Phrase Structure Rule Analyses on pages 459 and 461, respectively?
- Also, what is the reasoning for the complement of be becoming the head in the case of the Silent Be Lexical Rule (AAVE) on page 461?

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Reading Questions

- How do we handle *Where he going* if silent *be* is [INV -]?
- Our rule accounting for zero copula is an *i-rule*, meaning its input will not have tense information in its SEM component. Since copula be would normally contribute tense information to a sentence, how does a zero copula sentence get information about tense into its semantics?

Reading Questions

- All of our attempts to account for AAVE's copula-less sentences have been through introducing very small changes to a grammar of SAE. Has anyone ever tried to develop a grammar from scratch for AAVE, rather than modifying a grammar of SAE? I wonder if by doing so we could come up with a satisfactory account of the missing copulas without needing to refer to silent words.

- How would our description of null copulas differ if we were to formulate a grammar of Russian, Latin, or Hungarian from the ground up?

Reading Questions

- How do we typically differentiate between different lexical entries for the same lexeme? Is it simply that their lexical entries are different and an analysis of its purpose in the sentence helps us pick the right lexical entry for the situation? "have", for example, I assume would have varying predications, whereas "to" is semantically empty in all of our cases.

- How are the semantics in (4) and (5) in p455 different with the "possess" have with AUX +? Even if there is semantic difference among these lexical entries of have, for me its semantics in (4) and (5) actually depend on the context, and without previous context there could be ambiguity.

Reading Questions

(1) a. They had a fit.

b.*They had not a fit.

c.*Had they a fit?

d.*They hadn't a fit.

e.*I said they would have a fit, and they had.

(2) a. Every day at lunch, Lou had a martini.

b.*Every day at lunch, Lou had not a martini.

c.*Every day at lunch, had Lou a martini?

d.*Every day at lunch, if Fran had a martini, Lou had, too.

Reading Questions

- In general, does it make more sense to develop a grammar for the "standard" dialect of a language and then modify it for other dialects, as we've been doing, or to develop separate grammars for various dialects (or would you decide on a case-by-case basis, depending on how different the dialect is from the language)? Would translating between (very different) dialects be made easier or more difficult if their grammars were distinct (or maybe this question makes no sense--I don't know)? It seems like modifying a grammar too much could run the risk of breaking things or generating unwanted things for a specific dialect or domain...

Reading Questions

- So, are the changes for AAVE now part of our English grammar or are we constructing a grammar for a dialect using our grammar through Ch 14 as a foundation? I'm wondering about the realistic scope of our grammar or any practical grammar for that matter. Do we always take dialects into account when constructing a grammar for a language?

- Do we have any work that leverages the missing be rules for AAVE to some recent-like lingo e.g. “You there?”

Reading Questions

- Are there any known dialects or language variations that can't be analyzed with HPSG? If so, what makes them hard? (What about colloquial speech on the internet, e.g.?)

Reading Questions

- Is there any evidence for silent words, or does it just sort of work conveniently as a possibility in this chapter?
- Could you further explain "operations that destructively modify feature structures."? (Apropos of Labov's account.)
- Do null things present challenges for Parsing? Are there Russian HPSG parsers, and do they put null copulas in places where you don't want them?

Reading Questions

- Now that we've given in and implemented silent words, are there areas we've previously implemented in the grammar that would be better represented by silent words than by what we did before? A decent number of our analyses have been motivated by wanting to avoid certain types of analysis, and I'm wondering if any of the options that we previously dismissed quickly now make more sense.

- I'm not sure I caught how our silent copula analysis differs from Labov's analysis. Is it just that Labov's analysis only predicts silent copulas in environments where the contraction rule can apply? Are there other differences?

Reading Questions

- Another thing about British English (and some others, I think) is that the auxiliary "do" shows up during ellipsis, e.g. "A: Did you buy a gaming console?" "B: No, but I could do." or "I didn't write my essay, but I should have done." Would that just be a quick edit to the Ellipsis Lexical Rule adding a form of 'do' to the ARG-ST?

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