



# snippets

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## Contents

1. Jason Kandybowicz and Harold Torrence, *How why is different: wh-in-situ in Krachi.*
2. Hideki Kishimoto, *Empty verb support as a morphological adjustment rule.*
3. Timothy Leffel, *English proximal/distal non-deictic demonstratives align with hearer-new/hearer-old information status.*
4. Joan Mascaró, *The realization of features in asymmetric agreement in DPs.*
5. Philippe Schlenker, *Singular pronouns with split antecedents.*
6. Daniel Siddiqi, *The English intensifier ass.*
7. Christos Vlachos, *Sluicing and relatives.*



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***Empty verb support as a morphological adjustment rule***

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According to Chomsky (1991), *do*-insertion is a language specific rule, and it applies to save a syntactic representation which would otherwise result in an illegitimate output. In English, the empty verb *do* is inserted when tense is separated from a main verb by *not*; when it is not, *do*-insertion does not take place.

(1) John {did not/\*did} read the book.

Even though *do*-insertion by itself is a language specific rule, the same sort of operation (i.e. ‘empty verb support’) is implemented in many other languages. In Japanese, the empty verb *suru* ‘do’ is inserted when a verbal bound morpheme is separated from its host verb by an adverbial particle like *mo* ‘also’. In (2), *suru* may be inserted in two different places because both passive and tense morphemes are bound elements that need to be hosted by a verb. The empty verb cannot be inserted when particles are not present, as indicated by the unacceptability of \**home-rare si-ta* (praise-PASS do-PAST) and \**home s-are-ta* (praise do-PASS-PAST). This suggests that Japanese *suru*-insertion, just like English *do*-insertion, is used to save a representation that would not yield a legitimate output otherwise.

(2) John-ga Mary-ni {home-rare-ta, home-rare-**mo si-ta**, home-**mo s-are-ta**}.

John-NOM Mary-by praise-PASS-PAST praise-PRT do-PAST praise-PRT do-PASS-PAST  
 ‘John was (also) admired by Mary.’

One notable fact regarding Japanese *suru*-insertion is that it is not compatible with ‘subject honorification’, which is syntactically conditioned:

(3) Sensei-ga hon-o {yomi-mo **si-ta**, \*yomi-mo **nasat-ta**}  
 teacher-NOM book-ACC read-PRT do-PAST read-PRT do.HON-PAS  
 ‘The teacher read the book.’

In Japanese, verbs are changed to honorific forms under subject honorification, and this process is triggered if the clause contains a subject judged worthy of deference (Harada 1976). Note that in (4), *suru* can be changed to the honorific form *nasaru*, even if the verb does not carry any significant meaning. In (4), *suru* is a light verb used to create a predicate in combination with a verbal noun. The presence of *suru* is required syntactically in (4), and the subject can trigger subject honorification. By contrast, subject honorification fails in (3), where the empty verb *suru* is inserted on the grounds that a bound morpheme is stranded from the main verb.

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- (4) Sensei-ga Mary-to {aiseki-**si**-ta, aiseki-**nasat**-ta}.  
teacher-NOM Mary-with seat-do-PAST seat-do.HON-PAST  
'The teacher sat with Mary.'

There are two different views on empty verb support. One view is that an empty verb is inserted in the syntactic component (Chomsky 1991), and another is that its insertion takes place at PF for the purpose of a morphological adjustment (Bobaljik 1994, Halle and Marantz 1993); i.e. when there is no way of deriving a well-formed morphological sequence after syntax, an empty verb is inserted. Syntactically conditioned subject honorification should be possible if an empty verb is inserted in the syntax; therefore, the failure of honorific verb replacement in (3) suggests that empty verb support should be implemented at PF just for maintaining morphological well-formedness.

### References

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