

snippets

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More unbearably light elements? Silent verbs demanding overt complementizers in Afrikaans

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Van Riemsdijk (2002) observes structures in certain West Germanic/WGmc varieties, including Afrikaans, which permit temporal and modal auxiliaries without an accompanying lexical verb:

- (1) Hy **is/moet** biblioteek toe [Afrikaans]
he is/must library to
'He has gone/has to go to the library'

As the translation indicates, the “missing” verb is related to motion-verb *go*. Van Riemsdijk accordingly postulates a “super-light” verb $e_{[GO]}$ for (1)-type structures. Crucially, $e_{[GO]}$ is not identical to the overt motion-verb, exhibiting several distinctive properties (cf. Kayne 2005 on the more general non-identity of overt and “silent” elements). One difference is $e_{[GO]}$'s unavailability in finite form:

- (2) *Hy $e_{[GAAN]}$ biblioteek toe
he GO library to

For Afrikaans specifically, we note that hypothetical $e_{[GAAN]}$ appears to select for the *be*-auxiliary, despite Afrikaans, unlike its WGmc counterparts, systematically employing *have* in perfect-tense structures featuring overt lexical verbs:

- (3) Hy ***is/ het** biblioteek toe gegaan
he is/ has library to gone
'He has gone to the library'

Also not previously registered and, to the best of our knowledge, unique to Afrikaans is a further “silent verb”-containing structure:

- (4) Ek **sal/moet/wil/gaan/het**, etc. dat Wanda die boeke bestel
I shall/must/want/go/have, etc. that Wanda the books order
'I will/must/have organize(d)/ensure(d)/propose(d)/ask(ed) that Wanda orders the books'

As before, we observe a lexical verb omissible in the presence of modals and a temporal auxiliary – here, *have* and not *be* as in (1)-type structures. Identifying a single silent verb is less straightforward than in the latter case, however: as (4)'s (non-

exhaustive) translation shows, a range of lexical verbs may be “implied”. Nevertheless, there are clear restrictions, verbs like *hope*, *wish* and *think* not being possible, with feasible verbs having broadly “organizational” meanings (cf. Levin 1993). The possibility of identifying a “super-light” verb, potentially something like $e_{[MAKE]}$ (Afrikaans $e_{[MAAK]}$), therefore remains.

Importantly, $e_{[MAKE]}$, like $e_{[GO]}$, would differ from overt counterparts in a range of ways, most strikingly in obligatorily requiring an overt complementizer:

(5) *Ek **het** Wanda bestel die boeke
I have Wanda order(ed) the books

(6) Ek het gereël...
I have organised

dat Wanda die boeke bestel
that Wanda the books order

Wanda bestel die boeke
Wanda order the books

‘I organised that Wanda orders the books’

As (6) shows, complementizer omission is possible where *het* selects an overt “organisation”-verb, but not where this verb is “silent” ((5)). Further, hypothetical $e_{[MAKE]}$ requires finite declarative *dat*, being incompatible with finite interrogative *of* even where an *ask*-type meaning is implied. This follows directly if specifically “organisational” *ask-that*, rather than interrogative *ask-if*, is at stake, and can also be understood in relation to $e_{[MAAK]}$: “organisational” $e_{[MAAK]}$ corresponds in relevant respects to overt *maak dat* (“make that”) and not *maak of* (“make (as) if”). Like $e_{[GO]}$, $e_{[MAKE]}$ ’s presence is dependent on a main-clause auxiliary, finite forms being unavailable (**Ek e_{[MAAK]} dat Wanda die boeke bestel*). Embedded auxiliaries are, however, severely restricted, present-tense verbs being the norm in $e_{[MAKE]}$ -complements.

These newly-observed overt-“silent” asymmetries seem to us to merit more detailed investigation, both for their own sake and in developing our understanding of “silent syntax” more generally.

References

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