

# snippets

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## 5.

### Bradley Larson – University of Maryland *An argument against null prepositions in certain stative passives*

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Fruehwald and Myler (2013) contend that certain stative passive sentences (found in certain English dialects) like in (1) do not involve null prepositions as sketched in (2).

- (1) I'm done my homework.  
(2) I'm done [<sub>PP</sub> Ø my homework]

They note that the putative null preposition in (2) does not have the same meaning as overt prepositions. For example, the overt preposition *with* allows instrumental readings as well as what they deem 'result state' readings as seen in (3). This ambiguity is not found in stative passives like (4), only the result state reading is possible. Therefore, according to them, there is no null preposition.

- (3) a. I'm done with the computer  
b. *Instrumental reading:* Done using it  
c. *Result state reading:* Done building it  
(4) a. I'm done the computer  
b. *Instrumental reading:* \*Done using it  
c. *Result state reading:* Done building it

This sort of reasoning, based on interpretive distinction, is not persuasive. There is no reason to require that different lexical items have the same interpretation. The null preposition need not have the same range of meanings as the overt preposition *with*. Unfortunately this is the only sort of argument that Fruehwald and Myler offer against the null preposition analysis.

There is however a clearer means to argue against the null preposition analysis: the Law of Coordination of Likes (Williams 1981). In dialects that allow this sort of stative passive, it is possible to coordinate two objects (5). It is also possible to coordinate prepositional phrases when both conjuncts have the result state reading (6).

- (5) I'm done (both) my homework and my chores.  
(6) I'm done (both) with my homework and with my chores.

Note also that it is possible to coordinate null-headed phrases with overtly headed ones:

- (7) Jill saw cats and some dogs at the pound.

It is however *not* possible to coordinate one of these stative passive objects with a result state prepositional phrase. This seems to be due to a violation of the Law of Coordination of Likes in that the unacceptability persists even when different coordinators are used (cf. Schachter 1977):

- (8) a. \*I'm done (both) my homework and with doing my chores.  
b. \*Jill is either done her homework or with doing her chores.  
c. \*I'm done my homework but not with doing my chores.

This is a better argument against the null prepositional account of these stative passives. It is possible to coordinate result state arguments either with prepositions or without, but not with a mix. This is unexpected under a null preposition analysis.

### References

- Fruehwald, J. and N. Myler. (2013) "I'm done my homework. Case assignment in a stative passive." Talk presented at the Penn Linguistics Colloquium.
- Schachter, P. (1977) "Constraints on coordination." *Language* 53, 86-103.
- Williams, E. (1981) "Transformationless grammar." *Linguistic Inquiry* 16, 247-289.