



snippets

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3.

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Evidence for covert syntax in complement coercion

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Complement coercion, in which a verb that semantically selects for an event predicate can occur with an individual-denoting object, as in Modern Hebrew (MH) (1), is generally assumed not to involve a null syntactic head (Pylkkänen & McElree 2006).

- (1) ha-yeled hitxil et ha-sefer.
the-boy began ACC the-book
'The boy began the book.'

The MH example in (1) is identical to its English counterpart, except for the occurrence of accusative case marking through the object marker *et*. Although it is not entirely clear what assigns accusative in such an example, given that an aspectual verb like *hitxil* 'begin' bears no thematic relation to the object, and accusative is not a default case in MH (unlike English; see Schütze 2001), it is not convincing evidence for a null V, since accusative case marking seems to be the norm crosslinguistically in this sort of example.

However, there is another configuration in MH which arguably provides support for the existence of a null V in complement coercion contexts. Consider (2): the unaccusative verb *niš'ar* 'remain' takes an optional dative argument and a DP subject, which has remained in its base-generated position and with which the verb agrees.

- (2) niš'aru li štei ha-calaxot še-kanita li.
remain.3PL to.me two the-plates that-bought.2MSG for.me
'I still have the two plates that you bought me.'

Alongside (2), MH also has (3), where *niš'ar* lacks subject agreement and *et* precedes the lower argument. Pace Danon (2006), who claims that (2) and (3) are interchangeable, with agreement and *et*, respectively, constituting different mechanisms for checking Case on the DP subject, the underlying structure of the two examples is fundamentally different. Specifically, (3) involves an implicit infinitival complement to *niš'ar*, as shown in parentheses below.

- (3) niš'ar li (lenakot) et štei ha-calaxot še-kanita li.
remain.3SG to.me (to.clean) ACC two the-plates that-bought.2MSG for.me
'I still have (to clean) the two plates that you bought me.'

Evidence for the covert infinitival structure of the complement in (3) comes from its semantics: the latter is infelicitous in a context like (4), and only appropriate if B has something left to do with or to the plates.

(4) Context: There was a fire which destroyed most of B's house.

A: nisraf lexa ha-kol?

burnt to.you the-all?

'Did everything of yours burn?'

B: # lo, niš'ar li et štei ha-calaxot še-kanita li.

no remain.3SG to.me ACC two the-plates that-bought.2MSG for.me

'No, I still have the two plates that you bought me.'

The fact that two distinct structures underlie these examples explains the difference in agreement: in (2) the DP is the subject, and hence agreement is expected, while in (3) it is not. Crucially, the appearance of *et* in (3) is a problem for the assumption that complement coercion never involves a null V head: where is accusative case coming from if not from the implicit verb? If indeed it is licensed in the example under discussion by a silent V, the question arises why similar examples have not been reported in the literature on other languages, and why other types of evidence for this V produce mixed results at best (Pylkkänen & McElree 2006). One possibility is that next to true semantic coercion, there exist cases of syntactic ellipsis which produce comparable results.

References

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