

EPENTHESIS OR DELETION — I COULD DO

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This paper presents some initial steps toward a minimal three way contrast between British English, American English, and Polish. The purpose of the contrast is to discover whether information emerges which might contribute to the current debate in linguistic semantics. The central issue of the paper, or at least the data on which the investigation is based is a feature of British English reduced sentences not occurring in American English or in Polish. A brief example of this feature can be illustrated by an exchange I recently had with a British friend. We were discussing a toy she had gotten for Christmas. "It is covered with fur", she said. I asked, "Does it vibrate?" Her reply was, "It might do". The response in AmE would never include the *do*. The operation of *do support* would not appear. It is just this additional *do* element occurring in some BrE reduced replies which interests me, and for a number of reasons. First I have found it difficult to even describe the surface and deep structure constraints on the item's occurrence. Second, it is interesting to compare from the point of view of regular common English tag questions such as the one following the juncture in this utterance: John went to the store, didn't he. Here *do* occurs in both British and American English. Third, it has features of anaphoric reference which put it in the main stream of a class of issues which are important to the central theoretical approaches to linguistic semantics.

I will begin by giving some examples of the structure I am interested in. The first set of sentences have been agreed to by three native speakers of British English.

1. Will the sun shine more in January? It could do.
2. Will we all have to attend? We should do.
3. Will they go away if you don't come? They might do.
4. open
5. Do you expect her to get married soon? She should do.

6. Do you intend to go to Warsaw tomorrow? I might do.
7. open
8. open
9. Would you do it if I asked you to? I might do.

All the responses to this minimally controlled elicitation contained either *could*, *should*, or *might*. I will not vouch for the selection of informants since the population is so small. Nor can I defend my handling of the cross-dialectal eliciting. At least one of my informants said after an elicitation session, "I accepted it because it was an Americanism".

As you will notice, there are three holes in the pattern a *could* response to a *do* question, 4; a *could* response to a *would* question, 7; and a *should* response to a *would* question, 8. It is not clear whether these are actually unacceptable sentences or if they are due to incomplete elicitation. Since this paper will deal with *how* *do*-sentences mean rather than *what* *do*-sentences mean, I will spend little time discussing the signification. Let me say only that each of the *do* responses has a conditional feeling about it to the speakers. They would easily accept a following if-clause.

The following sentences were not agreed upon by all three speakers, being accepted by one or two but rejected outright by the remainder, or yielding to a preferred alternative.

10. Have you ever visited that country?

*Yes, I have done.

11. Will we have a Christmas holiday?

We should do. We should have.

12. Will we know when the break will be?

We should do. We ought to.

13. Do you have to do it by Friday?

*I should do.

14. Would you have shoes made here?

*I might do.

15. Are we going to have staff meeting this Friday?

We might do. We might be.

16. Should you clean your teeth once a day

*You should do.

Among these, 11 and 12 match the *will/should* pattern of 2, 13 matches the *do/should* pattern of 5, and 14 matches the *would/might* pattern of 9. Further elicitation will reveal whether these contradictions are inconsistencies or areas of further interest.

Only one response was universally rejected by this small universe of three informants.

17. Are you thinking about getting another car?

*I should do.

I have no explanation for this as yet.

I can make a few generalizations about this type of elliptical structure in BrE. There are no negatives in it. That is, there are none of the form.

18. Will you (or won't you) go home? *I might not do.

The structure does not appear as a question.

19. I heard she was going to Arkansas with Groucho Marx.

Is it true that she might do?

20. *I should do, shouldn't I?

The pattern appears to be excluded from the second person singular and plural. It appears to be limited to *could*, *might*, and *should* among the models and seldom used have +ed as Quirk suggests. Finally, there is always contrastive stress on the modal.

21. I should do. rather than

22. *I should do. or

23. *I should do.

Now let us look at *do support* structures in general and then at the most widely accepted formulation of normal tag questions as represented by that of Marina Burt (1971) and others. Then let us look at some approximation of the constraints on the *do* reply in BrE. And finally let us see if the anaphoric nature of this construction lends any support to either side of the semantics debate.

First what is *do support* in common English? Most verbs in English require the use of *do* in negation and in interrogation when there is no auxiliary support. Others require only the basic verb form. For example,

24. I like tripe.

25. Do you like tripe?

26. I don't (do not) like tripe.

With Auxiliary support, the *do* is not possible.

27. I am eating tripe.

28. Are you eating tripe?

29. I'm (I am) not eating tripe.

It appears to be true that in those cases where an Aux is a necessary vehicle for tense, number, person, negation, or question, and where no such Aux exists, *do* appears to serve the function. The exception, of course, is the verb *to be*. There is, for example,

where NP₁, VP₁, and ADV₁ are coreferent with the subject NP, the Main Clause VP, and the Main Clause ADV respectively. Derivations based on extraposition or other operations are rejected as inelegant. A Burt-like derivation does not seem possible because of the difference between the bound and free nature of these structures, though this may be open to objection.

In tags, the *do* has no more anaphoric reference than the *may*, *will*, *have* or *be* of such tags since *do* is simply an empty morpheme serving only as support for an affix. It is not a proform in that same sense that *do so* is in

38. I wanted to eat and I did so.

Notice that in

39. I didn't want to eat so I didn't do so.

a *do* emerges to carry the tense and negative in the regular fashion.

Ignoring for the time being the interesting constraints on these antecedents, the *do* in the BrE elliptical construction is thus a result of deletion, though epenthetic, and has an anaphoric character, unlike the *do* tag. My investigation of *do so* structures is as yet incomplete, but initially shows that there is interesting support from them.

Now let us look at linguistic semantics and see how the anaphoric character of this structure might contribute to the debate in this field.

The study of semantics usually deals with the formalization of meaning in language. Meaning has been so important to linguistics for such a long time that much of the linguistic research of the west has attempted to ignore meaning. Of course it has not really been ignored. Meaning has always been acknowledged as the purpose and the source of all communication. But as Bloomfield (1933:75) writes, "The study of language can be conducted without special assumptions only so long as we pay no attention to the meaning of what is spoken". This statement by no means contrasts with the context from which it is taken. Language, even in the most traditional model, is a device which, in a very complicated fashion, relates some kind of signification to sound. (A nod to behaviourists who would not accept this idea of meaning). The earliest structural models emphasized the issues that came from the surface sound rather than meaning. For example, in Trager and Smith's (1966) *Outline of English structure*, 80% of the book was devoted to phonology, 19% to something like morphology and word formation, and a scant 1% to syntax. Nothing whatsoever was devoted to meaning.

But meaning has always been an important issue in linguistics. Bloomfield's school, perhaps to Bloomfield's dismay, tended to overplay his deemphasis of meaning. They did everything that they could to keep meaning out of language. Of course, it entered although it was not really easily acknowledged by the neo-Bloomfieldians as Chomsky (1957:94) points out in *Syntactic structures*. And it entered at a number of quite critical points. One of these

points is in the heart of structural linguistics, phonology. Only when two utterances differ in meaning can they be shown to be phonemically distinct.

For Saussure, the linguistic sign united a concept and an acoustic image, meaning and sound. It was the image, that he was most successful in describing.

Even though Chomsky (1957:93) devoted considerable interest in *Syntactic structures* to the issue of meaning, I feel that the emphasis there was clearly illustrated by the following quotation. "It is important to recognize that by attempting to deal with grammar and semantics and their points of connection we need not alter the purely formal character of the theory of grammatical structure itself". That is to say, Chomsky saw the goal of linguistics at that time as the formalization of the study of syntax rather than the integration of semantics into the total structure. He appears to have doubted any systematic connection between syntax and semantics (Partee 1971:6). So meaning, up to the early mid 1960's, was a secondary field of interest to linguists.

It was not until Katz and Postal's (1963) early formulation of a syntactically motivated challenge to a semantics free grammar, and a more complete formulation a year later by Katz and Fodor's (1964) that issues of meaning and semantics were emphasized. Quite simply, Katz and Postal claimed that if a base component is to be the only source of input for a semantic component, then the base component must have all that is necessary for semantic interpretation. Parenthetically, at some point in the history of semantic theory this presentation changed from an empirical hypothesis to a criterion for judging the formulation of transformations and lost much of its empirical content. In their formulation, then, nothing must change between the point at which semantic interpretation is carried out and the phonological output. Transformation, if the concept of an autonomous syntax is to be maintained, must not change meaning.

Let me briefly sketch the models that I am referring to. Initially in the *Syntactic structures* model there was a base component consisting of a set of phrase structure rules and lexical insertion. The final operations of this component produced the familiar kernel sentences. Another component within certain constraints, combined kernels, made sentences negative or interrogative, and generally patted them into shape for the phonological component. The semantic component, such as it was, interpreted roughly the base component.

So the history of the development of formulations of linguistic semantics is interesting, beginning with the formulation by Chomsky that meaning was based on an interpretation of information contained in deep structure. As it was initially formulated, the deep structure was a fairly nebulous term and evolved as the concepts of optional and obligatory transformations evolved. The concept was made more explicit by stating that it was at this point that

semantic interpretation took place. It is clearly circular to maintain that semantic interpretation takes place at the point of deep structure and in turn that deep structure is where semantic interpretation takes place. However this seems to have featured in some of the debates and has been pointed out by McCawley (1967). The concept evolved, however, and has eventually presented itself as a clearer target for debate. Chomsky, (1970) in his article "Deep Structures, Surface Structures, and Semantics", has written that lexical insertion takes place before any of the transformations. This precyclical, pretransformational point in the evolution of an utterance has been taken as the limit of deep structure.

But the challenges were forthcoming long before such a clear target presented itself and the Katz — Postal hypothesis had reached the status of a necessary condition for transformations by the time such challenges began to surface. One of the first challenges was that by Kuroda (1971). It was based on the fact that certain words, for example, *even*, *also*, and *only*, seem to be limited to one occurrence per sentence but could also occur in a number of positions within the sentence with different meanings. The next elegant, the simplest way of handling these words appeared to be by introducing them from a separate node and then placing them in their surface structure position within the sentence. This interpretation, which was syntactically motivated, contradicted the claim that transformations were meaning preserving. The force of a portion of this argument was weakened by evidence that more than one such item can occur in the sentence. But the explanation of the semantic scope of these words is still a goal. Other challenges were arising elsewhere. Kuroda's argument had set the style for a certain type, the variety that assaulted the Katz-Postal hypothesis.

It is generally acknowledged that the one that succeeded deals with the behavior of quantifiers. Roughly, the argument goes like this. For obligatory rules, the question of meaning preservingness is vacuous. These rules operate on abstract structures between which we cannot judge synonymy. The question of whether the obligatory *do support* rules, for example, changes meaning presupposes that we can assign meaning to an abstract P marker which fits the structural description for *do support*, but which has not undergone it. So it is only optional rules which are of interest. If, then, an operation does not appear to change meaning, and an independently motivated abstract structure can be added to the deep structure, the rule can be freed from the requirement of meaning preservingness. Katz and Postal did just this with NEG and based their arguments on those of Klima (1964). What they overlooked was an important violation of their argument. For Klima, the application of the *some-any* suppletion rule was optional in most of its environments. So in the following examples, 40 is related to 41 by an optional transformation, and 42 to 43.

- 40. I didn't have any of the bread.
- 41. I didn't have some of the bread.
- 42. Some of the ideas were not mine.
- 43. None of the ideas were mine.

Thus Klima's formulation would allow an optional rule that changed meaning in violation of the Katz-Postal model. There has been a lively commentary on the attempts to formulate a *some-any* rule. There has been no satisfactory solution yet.

These are the sorts of arguments that led to the demise of the Katz-Postal hypothesis. One could either retain the idea that transformations do preserve meaning and modify the concept of deep structure (largely the position of generative semantics), or one could abandon the disputed hypothesis and retain the concept of deep structure (the interpretive semantics position).

Another type of argument to separate these two positions is that based simply on economy. As it is formulated, the extended standard theory of Chomsky, interpretative semantics, maintains that there must be two interpretative components. One of these interprets syntactically the primitives of the base component. This is of course the transformational component. The other is the one which interprets meaning, the semantic component. In this formulation, then, there are two components interpreting the same structure. One assault on the extended standard theory faults the lack of economy of a system which requires two different, two distinctive, two equally unwieldy interpretative components. The issue here is the autonomy of syntax. McCawley argues that if there is no principled boundary that can be drawn between deep and surface structure then there is no need for deep structure interpretation. The following are the characteristics that McCawley (1971) outlines for his rival grammar. In his model semantic features have the same formal nature as syntactic structures. They are labelled trees whose non-terminal node labels are the same set of labels that appear at the surface. He no longer maintains notions of a set of structures which separates syntax from semantics, what Chomsky and his followers called deep structure. Neither does he support the distinction between transformations and the semantic interpretive rules. These are given up in favor of a unified model which relates meaning and sound by intervening stages that are just as semantic as they are syntactic. He bases this conception partially on the claim that rules needed to decide what a grammatical sentence may mean are necessary to decide what is grammatical in the first place. Grammar then is taken to generate a set of surface structures somehow distinct from a set of deep structures by a set of derivations. These consist of a set of derivational constraints on what combinations may occur at the surface of language and how the different stages of the derivation may differ from one another.

Another type of argument, which is perhaps a subset of the preceding one, focuses on Chomsky's claim that the boundary of the deep structure is the operations of lexical insertion which occur in a block. If it is possible to find transformations which must apply before the lexical insertion, then it is possible to deny the existence of a principled boundary between deep and surface structures. Without this boundary it is impossible to specify the domain of the semantic interpretive rules. The unspecifiability shows the weakness of this formulation, the necessity of abandoning it.

Pronominalization and anaphoric reference have features in these argument. It is this area that is interesting to the investigation of the *do* structure of this paper and the anaphoric reference of this item in the elliptical replies of BrE. My next steps in this investigation, steps which I have not taken yet, will be to find if the anaphoric nature of this proform fits any of the now classical assaults on the interpretive semantics position. For example, Postal (1969) has argued that there are certain lexical items resulting from lexical transformations that are immune to inbound and outbound anaphoric reference. These he calls anaphoric islands. Constraints on pronoun reference are illustrated in the following two sentences:

44. John's parents are dead and mine are living.
45. John is an orphan and mine are living.

Such islands appear to exist for the proforms under investigation.

46. I couldn't fasten the boards together with glue, but I could do with tape.
47. I couldn't glue the boards together, but I could do with tape.

Backwards pronominalization, perhaps proformization, (a feature of the Bach-Peters (1970) paradox) may follow some of the same constraints with this *do* form. For examples see the following sentences:

48. The gorilla₁ indicated that he₁ was leaving.
49. He₁ indicated that the gorilla₁ was leaving.
50. After he₁ smiled, the gorilla₁ left.

On the other hand, perhaps because of the verbal nature of this proform, comparable examples with *do* are difficult to find. The following are comparable to some extent:

51. If one must sit down, I would do.
52. I would do if one must sit down.
53. If one must do, I would sit down.

But notice that these last two meet the requirements of command for backward pronominalization.

Bach and Peters, on the basis of these features of anaphoric reference discovered sentences that violated at least one of three syntactically motivated

constraints on transformations. The following is an example of a Bach-Peters sentence:

54. (the child who was eating it₂)₁ liked (the lody she₁ had)₂.

In such a sentence, the anaphoric reference crosses and the usual analysis would be infinitely recursive, violating the premise that derivations must be finite in length. I have been unable to find the essential endocentric crossing with the *do* structure. The following examples, which at first appear to have it, do not. Nor am I certain that they would be accepted by BrE of the *do* structure.

55. When I asked him₁ (to dance)₂, John₁ said he₁ might do₂.
56. When I asked if (he₁ would be hit by the tree)₂ (John, who thought it might do₂)₁ left.

Other features remain to be investigated as well. How do these structures relate to gapping? On the model of some researchers' analysis, where do the operations involved in such a structure occur in relation to lexical insertion? I hope that further study will allow me to answer these questions.

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