Aspects of English historical syntax

David Denison
Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo
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Grammar is grammar

- In structuralist and generative grammar
- strings are grammatical or ungrammatical
- analysis of unambiguous sentences is unique
- speaker’s grammar is consistent and coherent
- Are we sure?

Plan of talk: five case studies

- Unreal conditionals
- *That*-clause complements
- Prepositional passive
- Analysing *run over*
- Gradual word class change

Unreal conditionals

Innovation and retention

Double marking of unreality

- Extra *have/ve/of* in protasis, often parallel to apodosis.

  *If I'd've put your real age <pause> you'd've said* (1985-93 BNC, spoken)

  *If I'd've jumped sooner maybe I'd've been picked up sooner.* (1943 COHA)

  *If I'd of been there I'd of flogged that a long while ago and got rid of it* (1992 BNC, spoken)

  *if you'd of been with her like you usually was, like you should of been, that bear never would of took the both of you* (2002 COCA)
Two ‘national treasures’

Indirect quotation

IN THIS third collection of excerpts from his diaries [...] Alan Bennett complains that people see him as “cosy and essentially harmless”. Even if he stabbed Dame Judi Dench with a pitchfork he would, he hazards, still be reckoned a teddy bear.

(Sunday Times, 16 Oct 2016)

‘Direct quotation’

“I am in the pigeonhole marked ‘no threat’ and were I to stab Judi Dench with a pitchfork I should still be a teddy bear,” he writes at the end of 2005. He worries that his work – that he – is considered cosy.

(Miranda Sawyer, The Guardian, 2 Oct 2016)

Original

(Book of the Week, BBC Radio 4, 27 Oct 2016)

I shall still be thought to be kindly, cosy and essentially harmless. I am in the pigeon-hole marked “no threat” and did I stab Judi Dench with a pitchfork I should still be a teddy bear.

(2016 Alan Bennett, Keeping on Keeping On, entry for 20 Dec 2007)
**Original**

**History of inverted protases**

**18th century, court of George III**

- Example from 'Image to Text' project:

  Ah how you would feel for me did you know what I have gone through on her account (1781 Charlotte Gunning)

**Inverted vs if-protases in ARCHER 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Had (perf. aux.)</th>
<th>Were</th>
<th>Should</th>
<th>Could</th>
<th>Did</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inverted</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>Inverted</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>Inverted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1650-99</td>
<td>28 (57%)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11 (41%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-49</td>
<td>21 (50%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750-99</td>
<td>13 (39%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6 (19%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-49</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7 (27%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-99</td>
<td>11 (33%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-49</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Denison (1998: 300, Table 3.10)**

**Inversion protases in PPCMBE**

- **had** ×72 (full range of dates in corpus)
- modal ×38
  - should ×26, could ×9
  - would ×2 (latest 1745), can[1] ×1 (1808)
- past be ×37
  - were ×22, was ×5 (1745-1808)
- **did** ×4 (1785, 1830 ×2, 1876)
  - We should not be doing justice to our subject did we not place on record the very decided opinions [... ] (POORE-1876, 163.54)
  - past tense non-auxiliary V ×0

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Denison, ‘Aspects’ (AGU, Tokyo)
Unreal if-protases in PPCMBE

- ×4.49 approx.
  - past tense V, be, have ×318
  - did ×21
  and if they did not cut them all to pieces he would be damned (RYDER-1716,74.394)
  - past tense modal ×110
- In PPCMBE (1700-1914), past tense if protases outnumber inverted protases 3:1
  - (both totals may include a few real conditionals)

Inversion protases in PDE

- Overall frequency has declined through ModE period
- Fewer verbs now invert there: had, were, should, ...
- What about did?
  - Biber et al. (1999: 89-3, 909): No
  - Quirk et al. (1985: 1084): not mentioned, implicit No
  - journalist or subeditor on The Guardian: ?No
  - Visser (1969-73: 767): ‘nowadays only in literary style’

Is did I protasis grammatical?

- Depends not just on speaker but on register. ‘Passive’ grammaticality not same as ability to use.
- Almost as if Alan Bennett is wilfully retaining or reviving a dying usage. Does same for could:
  Could I slip into the seat behind, I would put a hand on my young shoulder and say, ‘It’s going to be all right’. (ibid. 2014)
- Would he use these in everyday conversation?
- Grammaticality not either-or

That-clause complements

V + that-clause in student work

1. Hundt’s study (2009), which advocates that the subjunctive is in fact replacing the periphrastic [...] ✓
2. this highlights once more that [...] ✓?
3. with Poussa criticising that the French influence was sporadic ✓
4. Sweet defines that “grammar may be regarded either from a theoretical or practical point of view. [...]” ✓
5. This study has displayed that older participants have more stable and confident results than [...] ✓
6. Follet (1966) [...] poses that the informality of try and leads to [...] ✓
7. Steven Pinker, (1994) puts forward that chimps often just imitate the messages of the trainer ✓
8. which can be reinforced by Milroy et al, who utters that “In other locations [...]” ✓

V + that-clause or V + N-that?

You have to accept that this could happen again. (2015, COCA)
If you just accept the fact that there’s no self [...] (2007, COCA)

“The aforementioned authors espouse that students from the age of four to eight are aware of racial difference (2011, COCA)
Poland also espoused the idea that the COMECON Members should [...] (1990, COCA)
Factual and suasive verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accept, acknowledge, add, assert, assume, believe (claim), concede, confirm, consider, convey, deduce, determine, demonstrate, deny, disclose, discover, disturb, emphasise, establish, explain, find, forget, guarantee, hold, imagine, indicate, infer, judge, maintain, mention, observe, (point out), (predict), (presume), (pronounce), propose, prove, recognise, report, repeat, see, (show), state, stipulate, stress, submit, suggest, (suppose), (suspect), understand</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- advance, articulate, back up, challenge, communicate, contradict, convey, define, discuss, dispute, encourage, endorse, entangle upon, express, oppose, promote, put across, put forward, question, rule, support, sustain, underline, underscore, utter | ✓ | ✗ |

- advocate, analyse, bring to the surface, cite, clarify, contest, criticise, deem (OK?), deliberate, depict, describe, display, exemplify, explicate, highlight, identify, illustrate, inform, instigate, interpret, moat, portray, pose, posit (OK?), propound, publicise, quote, reflect, refute, reinforce, reiterate, respect, rule out, solidify, stand, summarise, take into account, uncover, update, view, welcome, yield | ✓ | ✗ | ✗ |

Such verbs are needed to avoid risk of plagiarism.

- Word processor thesaurus for ‘elegant variation’?
- Students in question tend to be relatively unskilled writers, insecure about written expression.
- Asking them about grammaticality not helpful.
- Once written down, usage can get entrenched.

Error vs. innovation

- Distinction crucial to Kachru’s concentric circles model.
- In historical linguistics, some errors turn out (with hindsight) to be innovations.
- The sporadic occurrence of ‘new’ V-that patterns has affinities with learner English and with new Englishes.
- These are native speakers using (misusing?) words and patterns in writing that would be rare or non-existent in their everyday conversation.

Systematic research in corpora

- Tagged and lemmatised corpus distinguishes e.g.
  - advance, display V – advance, display N
  - that CONJ – that D
- Search COHA for [display].[v*] that.[cst]
- Accuracy 5/41 = 12% (display = N ×18, that = D ×18)
- Perhaps tagger trained on data without marginal examples
- And then only 1/5 somewhat relevant!
  but all this accomplished was to display that the poor creature’s teeth have been yanked out (1990 COHA)

Reanalysis in the active?

Vulcanus...found thee lying by his wyf alas.
Vulcan ... found you ‘lying by’ his wife alas (c1385, MED)

- V [PP P NP] > [V, V + P] NP
- [intransitive verb] [transitive] [group-verb]

Pis maiden...feled al so bi her pi bat sche was yleyn bi.
this maiden ... felt also by her thigh that she had-been ‘lain by’

(c1330 (193000), MED)
Or analogy in the passive?
- Structure of new prepositional passive is vague, related to
  active equivalent
  other kinds of stranding pattern
  other kinds of passive
- Many features not really new:
  passive participles
  stranded prepositions (e.g. in relative and infinitive clauses)
  do, let, send, set, tell, (?) tend – lexical verbs with early
  prepositional passives – already had conventional passives
- Cf. ‘serial relationship’ and recent work on micro-changes

Analysing run over

Prepositional verb in OBC
- Many examples in Old Bailey Corpus where horse or carriage runs out of control:
  it [= a Hansom cab] was going very fast – it knocked the
  men down and ran over them (1878)
  the man was run over on the legs (1864)
- Preposition over describes trajectory of moving vehicle
  across and above obstacle or victim
- Prepositional verb run over

Unclear examples in OBC
- a young woman with a child in her arms endeavour’d to
  stop the horses; I called to her to let them go, as I saw she
  would be run over else (1770)
  the prisoner came up and told me I was not to go too fast,
  for if I did I should get run over (1869)
- Meaning of over uncertain from PDE point of view:
  trajectory of moving vehicle?
  trajectory of victim out of upright position? preposition
  resultative
  adv particle

Clear phrasal verb only later
- If adverbial particle, have transitive phrasal verb run
  over ‘injure with a vehicle’, cf. knock down
  a. She […] got on her bike and roared off. My father tried
     to stop her by standing in her way, so she ran him over
     and broke his leg quite badly (BNC)
  b. Someone’s going to run a little child over soon because
     the lollipop lady is busy asking drivers to move on. (BNC)
- Clear corpus examples (e.g. COHA) and metalinguistic
  discussion only from mid-20th century
- (But OED now 1860-)

Unclear examples in OBC
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  stop the horses; I called to her to let them go, as I saw she
  would be run over else (1770)
  the prisoner came up and told me I was not to go too fast,
  for if I did I should get run over (1869)
- Meaning of over ambiguous.
- Meaning of group-verb run over perhaps clear:
  is [run over], ‘NP Patient is struck, falls and is injured’
  Patient role crucial for prep. passive, appropriate also
  for passive of phrasal verb. Vague as to whether victim
  falls under horse or carriage.
Reanalysis or micro-steps?
- Structure also vague, especially at first.
- Apparently reanalysed structures, or something closely similar, had prior existence with other exponents or in other contexts.
  - Prepositional passive in ME and run over in 20th c.
  - Innovation 'sneaks in' where least salient.
  - Structural change (or changes, if analysed in terms of micro-steps) arise from vagueness rather than ambiguity.

Gradual word class change

Decategorialisation
Word class of long in certain idiosyncratic uses:
The chair will ensure that I don’t take long.
- Has been argued to be
  - N (because ‘object’ of normally transitive verb)
  - Adj (because meaning ≈ ‘a long time’)
  - Adv (because adjunct of time)
- Closest to Adv, but has affinities with N and Adj.
- Better to look at VP take long than at each word.

Category space

Examples from ‘Image to Text’
- Mental state passive participles become adjectives.
- Intensifier (very) much implies still a verb:
  I am very much flattered by what you tell me of her Majesty’s honouring me with her obliging inquiries (1777-82)
  I have been very much shocked and am extremely distressed by the Death of Col’ Cathcart (1794)
- Intensifiers very or too imply adjectival:
  My head is too confused to dwell longer upon this painful subject. (1810)

Intensifier with mental state V
Unclear examples
- Where both Adj and V readings are available, many examples have no intensifier or other clue as to word class.
- If there is little discernible difference of meaning, example is vague rather than ambiguous.
- Arbitrary for linguist to insist that the word must be either V or Adj.

Word class not always clear-cut

Word classes are theoretical constructs devised to capture syntactic and other analogies. It is no more than a convenient fiction to assume that speakers and hearers operate with precisely those analogies and no others.

Conclusion

Grammar is grammar?
- Is it really the case that
  - strings are grammatical or ungrammatical?
  - Not always
  - analysis of unambiguous sentences is unique?
  - Not always
  - speaker's grammar is consistent and coherent?
  - No
- Grammar is messy.
- But simplifying assumptions often work well enough.

JSPS Fellowship
- I gratefully acknowledge funding from the JSPS Invitation Fellowship Programme for Research in Japan (short term) which has made this lecture possible
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Last slide!
- Presentation can be downloaded from http://tinyurl.com/DD-download
- Comments welcome!

Domo arigato gozaimashita
References


Denison, David. 2016. Underspecified categories, supercategories, or no categories? Paper presented at University of Stockholm, Uppsala University, ISLE4 Poznan


OED = Oxford English Dictionary online <www.oed.com>


Corpora cited:


OBC = Huber, Magnus, Magnus Nissel, Patrick Maiwald & Bianca Widlitzki. 2012. The Old Bailey Corpus. Spoken English in the 18th and 19th centuries.