

Go Get, Come See: the Syntax of a Double Verb Construction in North American English

In a little-studied construction of North American English, the motion verbs *come* and *go* can be immediately followed by a second verb, as seen in (1).

One notable property of this construction is that it is possible only in environments that license a form of the verb identical to the bare stem (Zwicky 1969, Shopen 1971, Carden & Pesetsky 1977). Thus, while the imperative, infinitive, and simple present examples shown above are acceptable, the parallel sentences in (2) with overtly inflected verb forms are out. Furthermore, unacceptable sentences improve when *Do*-support leaves behind a bare verb, as in (3). The contrast between the *Do*-support sentences and their inflected counterparts is striking, considered together with the contrast between unacceptable (2c) with 3rd-singular agreement and acceptable (1c) with default present \emptyset agreement; this indicates an apparently *surface dependent* morphological restriction, sensitive to the phonological form of a verb but *not* to its underlying feature composition. My analysis of this morphological restriction relies on what appears to be a close connection between the *go*-verb construction and the imperative; there is statistical evidence that the *go*-verb construction is used more often in the imperative than in any other verb form (Zwicky 2003), and moreover, there are languages which have a construction extremely like the *go*-verb construction, but where it is possible only in imperatives (Greek, Hebrew).

The purpose of this paper is to present a syntactic analysis of the *go*-verb construction. The first question addressed is whether the motion verb (*go* or *come*) is a main verb located in VP, or is a functional verb located somewhere higher within the structure of the clause. Several previous analyses have adopted the functional-item analysis (Shopen 1971, Jaeggli & Hyams 1993, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2005). I argue, however, that the motion verb of the *go*-verb construction should be analyzed as a main lexical verb, as it does not display any of the syntactic behaviour characteristic of English auxiliaries: i.e. it does not precede negation or floated quantifiers (4a-b), or participate in Subject-Aux inversion (4c). Furthermore, it affects the theta-marking of the surface subject by requiring that it be agentive (compare (5a), with an animate subject, to ungrammatical (5b), with an inanimate subject incapable of being agentive).

The second question addressed is what the nature of the complement of the motion verb is. I propose that the motion verbs *go* and *come* take a small clause complement in the *go*-verb construction, a small clause that takes the place of the semi-obligatory locative argument within the argument structure of the locative verb. The subject of this small clause is PRO, controlled by the subject of the higher verb. I argue that this small clause is a vP: unlike causative *make*, which also takes a small clause complement, the *go*-verb construction can take the passive-be auxiliary as its second verb (6). This implies that the complement of *go* or *come* must be a structure at least large enough to contain a passivizing head; I assume that the head responsible for passivization is little-v. The complement of *go* or *come* cannot be any larger than vP, however, as the examples in (7) show that all auxiliary verbs that occur higher in clause structure than passive be are impossible as complements in the *go*-verb construction. Thus, the complement of *go* or *come* in the *go*-verb construction must be exactly vP, rather than any larger phrase structure. This small-clause complement analysis runs contra Pullum (1990), who proposes that the complement of the motion verb in the *go*-verb construction is even smaller than a VP; he argues that the motion verb and the second verb are co-heads of a single VP, analagous to a Serial Verb Construction (SVC, Baker 1989). This analysis is imperiled by the passive-*be* examples in (6), however; functional auxiliaries are not able to participate in SVCs, standardly understood, as they lack argument structure to share with their co-head verb.

The final subject discussed in the paper is the behaviour of the *go*-verb construction in ellipsis, as it bears on the licensing conditions for ellipsis gaps. As shown in (6), passive *be* can occur in the *go*-verb construction, but there it loses its normal ability to license the ellipsis of its own complement (8). This argues that the licensing conditions on the ellipsis gap cannot be simply that it be c-commanded by an auxiliary verb (as proposed, for example, by Gazdar, Pullum, and Sag 1982 or Kim 1995). Instead, the site of ellipsis must not have any non-functional verb intervening between it and a c-commanding overt Infl (Potsdam 1997).

- (1) a. Go jump in a lake!
b. I asked her to come see us next week.
c. Every morning I go get a coffee.
- (2) a. *I went jumped in the lake.
b. *She's coming seeing us next week.
c. *Every morning he goes gets a coffee
- (3) a. I didn't go jump in the lake.
b. Does he go get a coffee every morning?
- (4) a. *They come not visit often.
b. *They go all swimming every Thursday.
c. *Go you get coffee every morning?
- (5) a. The soldiers will come destroy the city.
b. *The bomb will come destroy the city.
- (6) a. John will go be arrested.
b. *I'll make John be arrested
- (7) a. *Go have read that book!
b. *She must come be singing at the party.
- (8) a. Was Alma arrested? Well, she tried to be ~~arrested~~.
b. Should Alma go be arrested? *No, but she will go be ~~arrested~~ anyway

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