

English Auxiliary Verbs

The italicized words in the examples in (1) are called ‘auxiliary verbs’ or ‘auxiliaries’.

- (1)
- a. Sheila *might* reconsider.
 - b. Your coffee grinder *will* last longer if you follow these simple instructions.
 - c. David *has* hit another home run.
 - d. Somebody *is* sleeping in my bed.
 - e. No intelligent person *could have* made such an outrageous statement.
 - f. His behavior over the past year *has been* puzzling me.

Consider the following hypothesis about the syntactic analysis of auxiliaries:

- (2) Auxiliaries are special types of Vs (heads of category V) that select for VPs (complements of category V).

Taking the assumptions about phrase structure and selection made in class as your starting point, use the three sets of data below (plus any additional facts you want to bring to bear) to develop an argument in favor of this hypothesis. Argue clearly and explicitly, identify any additional assumptions you make, and illustrate important points with lexical entries, phrase structure trees and example sentences.

Note: You may focus just on the subparts of these sentences that are crucial to the assignment. That is, you do not need to worry about the position of the subject, the internal syntax of phrases like *these simple instructions*, etc.; you can concentrate on the relations between the auxiliaries, each other, and the other verbs/verb phrases.

Set 1 The following sentences show that there are constraints on the linear ordering of auxiliaries in English; your analysis should account for these facts.

- (3)
- a. *Nigel may should play the zither.
 - b. Nigel may have played the zither.
 - c. Nigel may be playing the zither.
 - d. *Nigel has may(en) play the zither.
 - e. Nigel has been playing the zither.
 - f. *Nigel is may(ing) play the zither.
 - g. *Nigel is having played the zither.

Set 2 In addition to the word order constraints illustrated in (3), each auxiliary in English requires the immediately following auxiliary or main verb to occur in a particular form. The information below is included to remind you of these requirements (which do not bear directly on the data in (3)). As the examples in (4) indicate, most English verbs have six forms: three finite (tensed) forms (present singular, present plural, and past), and three nonfinite (tenseless) forms (the ‘bare’ form, the ‘-ing’ form, and the ‘-en’ form).

(4) *English verb forms*

PRES SG	PRES PL	PAST	BARE	-ING	-EN
gives	give	gave	give	giving	given
sings	sing	sang	sing	singing	sung
walks	walk	walked	walk	walking	walked
smiles	smile	smiled	smile	smiling	smiled
runs	run	ran	run	running	run
buys	buy	bought	buy	buying	bought
has	have	had	have	having	had
is/am	are	was/were	be	being	been

Your analysis should explain which form (PRES, PAST, -ING, -EN, BARE) is required by which auxiliaries — *be*, *have*, and the modals (*might*, *could*, *will*, *can*, *should*, etc.).

Set 3 The following semantically equivalent pairs of sentences are related by an operation usually referred to as VP-deletion (VPD), whereby a redundant verb phrase (here indicated by \emptyset) appears to be omitted from the surface form.

- (5) a. Lee hasn't talked to Sam, but I may talk to Sam.
b. Lee hasn't talked to Sam, but I may \emptyset .
- (6) a. Felix is reading *The Idiot* because Felicia is reading *The Idiot*.
b. Felix is reading *The Idiot* because Felicia is \emptyset .
- (7) a. Although Stefanie hasn't arrived yet, she will arrive.
b. Although Stefanie hasn't arrived yet, she will \emptyset .

Assume that VPD constructions like (5b)-(7b) are derived by a rule that allows a VP to be deleted if it is identical to another (overt) VP in some local segment of discourse. Of particular relevance is the fact that all of (8a-c) are acceptable. (These should be read with a pause in the position indicated by the comma, and stress on *shouldn't*.)

- (8) a. He shouldn't have been playing with matches, he really shouldn't have been \emptyset .
b. He shouldn't have been playing with matches, he really shouldn't have \emptyset .
c. He shouldn't have been playing with matches, he really shouldn't \emptyset .

VPD is not unrestricted, however: the examples in (9) are ungrammatical. What does this suggest about the operation of VP-deletion, and how does it relate to your analysis of auxiliary verbs?

- (9) a. *Lee hasn't talked to Sam, but I \emptyset .
b. *We donated some money to Nader's campaign, and Max says he \emptyset , too.
c. *Felix is reading *The Brothers Karamazov* because Felicia \emptyset .
d. *Although Stefanie hasn't arrived yet, she \emptyset .
e. *He really shouldn't have been playing with matches, he \emptyset .