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Alemannic verb doubling is the overt realization of a head movement chain

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1. Introduction

I argue for a new analysis of constructions in Alemannic German, a variety spoken in and around Switzerland, in which some verbs must co-occur with a truncated second instance, which henceforth I refer to as a “doublet” (dbl), as illustrated in example (1a) for a doubled finite verb, and in (1b) for a doubled non-finite verb.

- (1) a. I gang *(ga) tanza
I go.1sg go.dbl dance
“I go dancing.”
- b. I wett *(ga) tanza (goo)
I want.1sg go.dbl dance (go.inf)
“I want to go dancing.”

Due to these form similarities, many authors use the term *verb doubling* to refer to constructions involving such a doublet (Hodler 1969, Lötscher 1993, Schönenberger & Penner 1995b, Salzmann 2013).

Other similar phenomena in various languages have been termed verb doubling (Barbiers et al. (2008), for Standard German see also Fleischer (2008)), where usually the doubling is dependent on a topicalization operation. Alemannic verb doubling is different from the rest, though: Here, no topicalization is involved; rather, some verbs more generally co-occur with a truncated second instance of themselves. These verbs are “go”, “come”, “begin” and “let”, as demonstrated in (2)-(5) below.

- (2) i gang *(ga) tanza
I go.1sg go.dbl dance
“I go dancing.”
- (3) i chum cho schaffe
I come.1sg come.dbl work
“I come (to) work.”
- (4) s fot afo räge
it begins.3sg begin.dbl rain
“It starts to rain.”
- (5) la lo si!
let.imp let.dbl be
“Let it be!”

As noticeable in the above examples, doublets systematically resemble other forms of the verb. Depending on the specific (sub)dialect of Alemannic, doublets are identical or similar in form to inflected forms (e.g., first person singular as in “I go”), and/or to infinitives (as in “to go”). I will come back to the morphology of doublets in section 4.

In what follows I present an analysis of such verb doubling as the spell-out of multiple copies (or in traditional terms, traces) of the main verb. Being based on syntactic identity of several positions, this approach is in contrast to the existing analyses in the literature, which explicitly reject such an account and instead treat the truncated element as a distinct element that does not stem from a shared derivational history with the V head (van Riemsdijk (2002: fn.22); Salzmann (2013: 86p)). The analysis presented here accounts also for data that has previously been seen as problematic for a doubling-style analysis. It

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has a benefit over previous ones in that it correctly predicts the distribution of the phenomenon, following naturally from independently motivated verb movement.

The analysis has some consequences: It is, as argued in the main section, evidence for the head-initiality of the verbal domain in Alemannic. Furthermore, the current analysis substantiates a typological prediction of the copy theory of movement (Chomsky 1993), namely the overt realisation of more than one copy created by head-movement. This would be in contrast to copies created by *phrasal* movement (on which see Barbiers et al. (2008)).

2. Analysis

This section develops an analysis of Alemannic verb doubling that is based on the realization of more than one position in a head movement chain of the verb. Salzmann (2013: 6) and van Riemsdijk (2002: 160 fn. 22) are critical of this idea and raise the following counterarguments: The first one is based on the assumption that verbs in Verb-final configuration (that is, in all subordinate clauses) do not move away from V and without movement there can be no doubling. The second one is the empirical problem of morphological mismatches between full verbs and truncated forms, leading to the conclusion that syntactic identity would be stipulative. The remainder of this section shows that with movement to little v, the first problem can be solved. Section 3 then addresses mismatch doubling and, I argue, plausibly accounts for the problematic data.

2.1. Doubling verbs take vP complements

In a verb doubling construction like (1), the higher verb “gang” is inflected to carry finiteness and agreement morphology. The other verb, “tanza”, in contrast, lacks either of these and is thus usually called an *infinitive*. This term, however, covers a rather broad range of structures, and it is desirable to narrow down this description. One typologic criterion is the size of the complement (of, in our case, a doubling verb), that is, whether it consists of a CP, TP, or merely a VP, or something in between. CP is ruled out by the ungrammaticality of a complementizer and the possibility of scrambling, and TP is ruled out by the ungrammaticality of independent tense (tested with a temporal adverb, “tomorrow”) as well as the ungrammaticality of a subject remnant (the quantifier “all”), as shown in (6) below.

- (6) Mer gond [a deam Projekt]_{SCR} ga *dass *alli *morn t_{SCR} schaffa
 We go.infl on that project go that all tomorrow work
 “We’ll go work on that project.”

The contrasting interpretations of the “go” and “let” doubling verbs in Alemannic shows that the lower verb’s logical subject is controlled. The embedded verb “play” below has its logical subject subject-controlled (7) or object-controlled (8), depending on the selecting doubling verb “go” vs. “let”. Accordingly, the object in (8a) cannot have scrambled up from the domain of the lower verb as in (7b/7a), but is base-generated in the higher verb’s domain, demonstrated with the ungrammaticality of (8b).

- (7) a. er_i got s neui Spil_j ga PRO_{i/*j} spila
 he goes the new game_j go.db1 PRO play
 “He goes play the new game.”
 b. er_i got ga PRO_{i/*j} s neui Spil_j spila
 he goes go the new game play
 “He goes play the new game.”

- (8) a. er_i lat d chind_j la PRO_{*i/j} spila
 he lets the kids let play
 “He lets the kids play.”
- b. *er_i lat la PRO_j d chind_j spila
 he lets let the kids play
 “He lets the kids play.”

I therefore suggest that doubling verbs take vP complements that have a PRO subject, as shown in (9a) for a matrix clause, corresponding to (7a). The same sentence, but as an embedded clause, is shown in (9b). Only the main clause (a) exhibits *Verb-second* (for an overview see Holmberg (2015)), a process found in several Germanic languages, where the verb must move to C in main clauses, but doesn't in embedded clauses, where the complementizer blocks this movement.

- (9) a. [CP er_i got_k [TP t_i t_k s neu_i Spil_j [V' [V ga_k] [vP PRO_i t_j [v spila]]]]]]
 b. [CP dass [TP er_i got_k s neu_i Spil_j [V' [V ga_k] [vP PRO_i t_j [v spila]]]]]]

2.2. Verb doubling is head doubling

Another verb that obligatorily doubles in the sense shown for “ga” above is “afo” (“begin”, cf. Standard German “anfangen”), as previewed in (4). It is a particle verb, “a+fo”, which I assume to be an idiomaticized V' (10a) (following Wurmbrand (2000)) consisting of a verb in V and a particle in its complement position. In anticipation of an argument about the headedness of VPs in Alemannic, I revise this in (10b) and analyze it as a VP, with the particle in the specifier.

- (10) a. [_{VP} [_{V'} [_{XP} a] [_V fo]]] head-initial view
 b. [_{VP} [_{XP} a] [_{V'} [_V fo]]] head-final view

An example for this verb is given below, where in (11a) it is in its base-generated order and in (11b) it is in “reversed” order due to *Verb-second*, corresponding to the structure in (12) (ignoring for now intermediate landing sites).

(11) Split verb constituent order in Alemannic

- a. as söt afo
 it should ptcl=start
 “It should start.”
- b. as fot a
 it starts ptcl
 “It starts.”

- (12) [_{C'} as [_C fot] ... [_{VP} a [_V fə]]]
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When involved in verb doubling, the split verb “afo” doubles the part “fo”, as shown in (13), which according to the analysis in (10b) is V (to the exclusion of its complement and specifier). This fact is strong evidence that Alemannic verb doubling is based on head-movement (not phrasal movement of any sort) and thus head-doubling of the verb, as suggested in (14).

- (13) as fot a (*a)fo schneje
 it starts ptcl (*ptcl)start snow
 “It starts to snow.”

(14) $[_{TP} \text{ as } [_{T} \text{ fot }] [_{vP} [_{v} \text{ f\ddot{o}}] [_{VP} \text{ a } [_{V} \text{ fo }] \text{ schneje }]]]$

The particle always precedes the doublet (*fo a), which follows from the analysis in (14), but is inconceivable if the doublet is assumed to be in any higher position, such as Fin, Mod, or Asp, as suggested in previous literature.

2.3. Doublets as V traces in a head-initial VP

Across all the constructions that involve verb doubling, there is a common pattern: Doublets strictly precede their complement. As established in the previous section, I assume doublets to be heads, which allows for the conclusion that the phrase including the doublet is head-initial.

(15) The doublet can under no circumstances follow its complement.

- a. $[_{XP} \text{ ga } [\text{schaffa}]]$
- b. *schaffa ga

In the current analysis, *XP* in (15) is of course *VP*. In contrast to Salzmann (2013), who also identifies doublet phrases as a *VP*, it is the *only* *VP* for me, blocking (in the *V* position) any other (e.g. full) form of the verb. In contrast, Salzmann analyzes it as an additional *VP* that exists next to the conventional *VP* that hosts the full verb, which, I argue, is not necessary.

The analysis I suggest thus involves a deviation from what is commonly assumed for German dialects: I assume that Alemannic is underlyingly head-initial, and not head-final (as it usually assumed in the literature). However, a fact that is not always acknowledged for Alemannic is its freedom of surface headedness in the verbal domain: Verbal (and clausal) complements can usually both precede and follow their head (see also van Riemsdijk (2002: fn.29)), as shown in (16a-b) for a verbal complement of a modal, and in (16c-d) for a verbal complement of another verb.

(16) Surface headedness variation in Alemannic

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. dass i wett losa.
that I want listen
“that I want to listen” b. dass i losa wett.
that I listen want
“that I want to listen” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. dass i gang ga losa.
that I go.infl go listen
“that I go listening” d. dass i ga losa gang.
that I go listen go.infl.
“that I go listening” |
|--|---|

Sheehan et al. (2017) argue that universally, head-initial phrases cannot stand under head-final phrases of the same domain, calling it the Final-over-Final-condition (FOFC). This is a further motivation to assume *TP* in Alemannic being head-initial (like its daughter *VP*), since a head-final *TP* would constitute a FOFC violation. Thus I will opt for a head-initial *TP*. The obvious question then is how to derive linearly final *T* if we assume *TP* is head-initial, which I will come back to shortly.

The analysis I'd like to put forward is thus set in a head-initial structure. It is shown in (17) below, where there is verb movement of the *V* head to either *v* (in embedded clauses) or –via *v* and *T*– to *C* for a Verb-second configuration (in matrix clauses). The original site, *V*, has its content spelled out, giving rise to “doubling”.

(17) a. $[_{CP} \text{ dass } [_{TP} \text{ I } [_{v} \text{ gang}_i] [_{V} \text{ t}_i=\text{ga}] [_{vP2} \text{ ... schaffa ... }]]]$

b. $[_{CP} \text{ I } \text{ gang}_i [_{TP} \text{ ... } [_{v} \text{ t}_i] [_{V} \text{ t}_i=\text{ga}] [_{vP2} \text{ ... schaffa ... }]]]$

In linearly *T*-final forms, such as in (16b), the matrix *VP* is moved to a specifier of the matrix *vP*, as shown in (18) below.

- a. Sie will hin (gehen).
 she wants there.dir
 “She wants to go there.”
- b. Sie ist hin (gegangen).
 she is there.dir (gone).
 “She went there.”

The silenced “go” thus is the original element, of which doublets are traces/copies. Strong evidence for this view comes from the fact that the forms of “go” in (22) *can* be realized. Similarly, the Alemannic data in (21a)-(21b) *can* have their full forms of “go” realized, as demonstrated in (23)-(24).

- (23) I wett ga tanza goo
 I want go.db1 dance go
 “I want to go dancing.”
- (24) Zitt zum ga tanza goo
 time to go dance go
 “time to go dancing”

While van Riemsdijk (2002) phrases this optionality of realization of “go” in terms of a “empty GO”, I diagram this optionality below with the possibility of ellipsis, indicated by ϵ . The structure for (21a)/(23) and (21b)/(24) is given in (25) and (26) below.

- (25) [_{TP} I [_T wett] [_{vP} [_v ϵ_{goo}] [_{VP} [_V ga] tanza]]]

- (26) [_{NP} Zitt [_{PP} zum [_{vP} [_v ϵ_{goo}] [_{VP} [_V ga] tanza]]]

In the third problematic type, (21c), a form of “go” is also missing. Under an auxiliary, such a form is expected to be a participle (“gone”) rather than an infinitive (“go”). Like with the optional infinitives just seen, the participle here, too, is optional, as demonstrated in (27) (cf. (22b)) below:

- (27) I bia ga tanza (gganga)
 I am.aux go.db1 dance (gone)
 “I went dancing.”

I suggest here the same mechanism as in (25)/(26), but preceded (or accompanied) by what is called Infinitivus-pro-participio (IPP, “infinitive for a participle”, also called *Ersatzinfinitiv*). IPP as a phenomenon is independently attested in Standard German (among other languages), as shown in (28). Here, “can” has infinitive morphology when it takes a verbal complement (28b), even though it is expected to have participle morphology (as in (28a)), since it stands under an auxiliary.

- (28) a. ich habe es gekonnt/*können
 I have.aux it can.participle/*can.inf
 “I could do it.”
- b. ich habe gehen können/*gekonnt
 I have.aux go.inf can.inf/*can.participle
 “I could go.”

In (27), then, the participle “gganga” is substituted by (or born in the first place as) what is morphologically an infinitive (“goo”). From there on, the mechanism is identical to the one in (25)/(26) above and shown in (29): Deletion of the motion verb yields a string including only a doublet, but not its original full verb.

- (29) [_{TP} I [_T bia] [_{vP} [_v $\epsilon_{goo,IPP}$] [_{VP} [_V ga] tanza]]]

3.2. Semantic lack of a doubler: The realization of subcomponents

Turning to the second of two types of mismatch doubling, we now look at cases in which there is a semantic (and morphological) mismatch between a doublet and the doubling verb. Some semantically richer motion verbs than “go” (e.g. “run”), for example, also require the “go” doublet, shown in (30):

- (30) a. Alls ischt ... gsecklet gi si anderscht aalegge [Weibel & Peter (2020)]
 all is.aux ran go.db1 itself differently dress
 “Everyone ran to change clothes.”
- b. Ich chan ... nöd go aperöle cho [Stark et al. (2009-2014: 447)]
 i can not go.db1 aperöle come
 “I can’t come to have aperitif.”

The doublet is plausibly a semantically impoverished form of what it doubles, as is true for many doubling phenomena (Barbiers et al. 2008). In a study of German Verb-second, Bayer & Freitag 2020 argue (on the basis of Negative Polarity Item licencing, among other things) that while inflection is interpreted in the high position (C), the lexical part of a verb is interpreted in its original position (V). I take such observations as evidence that syntax operates not on finished words, but rather on abstract features that get replaced by actual words at a later point. One implementation of such an architecture is Distributed Morphology (DM) (Halle & Marantz 1993).

A DM account of verb doubling can allow cases of lexical mismatch such as in (30): Assuming that a verb like “run”, as in (30a), is semantically composed of at least the meaning of “motion” and the meaning of manner (“fast”), the doublet (“go”, bearing only “motion” but not the manner meaning) would fit as an *underspecified* vocabulary item, and similarly for the verb “come” in (30b).

4. Determining which copies are spelled-out

Consider again the doubling constructions in (31), where in (a) a finite verb is doubled, and in (b) a non-finite verb is doubled, exemplified specifically for the Alemannic (sub)dialect of Dornbirn/Austria.

- (31) a. ar ga:t ga schaffa b. ar wett ga schaffa (ga:)
 he goes go.db1 work he wants go.db1 work (go.inf)
 “He goes (to) work.” “He wants to go (to) work.”

I implement the current analysis using Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), which posits that syntactic nodes are filled with their morpho-phonological content only after the syntactic processes. The insertion goes according to language-specific rules, called Vocabulary Insertion (VI) rules.

The VI rules in (32) describe the forms of the verb (including the doublet), as given in (31). This is a first suggestion, and I leave it to future work to further specify the doublet rule in (b) to apply only in the syntactic contexts verb doubling actually occurs (that is: iff adjacent to a vP).

- (32) VI rules for verbs and doublets in Alemannic:
- a. [+Verb, -fin] ↔ -V
 b. [+Verb] ↔ ∅
 c. [+Verb, +fin, 3sg] ↔ -Vt

In a copy-and-delete approach to movement (Chomsky 1993), syntactic elements that are to be moved are actually merged again at a higher position (“copy”). This concept of movement thus leaves full copies in lower positions, rather than traces. Under this view, it is not surprising that lower copies can be spelled-out, thus giving rise to *doubling*. It is the language-specific variation, implemented above in terms of VI rules, that makes a language double its verbs or not.

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