The Unbearable Lightness of GOing
Phonetically Empty Light Motion Verbs in Continental West Germanic

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The Problem. It is a well-known fact that most of the Germanic languages can use modal verbs with non-verbal complements. In the present paper I will focus on modal with directional PPs such as the German *ich muss nach hause* (I must *go* home). Essentially, there are two ways to analyze such constructions. Either we say that the modal can (also) be used as a main verb, in which case it can have a complete theta-structure, a full-blown subcategorization frame (e.g. Barbiers (1995)). Alternatively, we may say that among the verbal complements the modal verb can combine with there is a super-light motion verb [e] which is either deleted at PF (Vanden Wyngaert (1995)) or phonetically empty in the lexicon. In the latter case we may call it GO (= [ cat: [+V, +DIR], phon: [e] ]). Is it possible to choose among these alternatives, or are both alternatives available?

Barbiers' arguments against PF-deletion. Barbiers (1995) presents a number of arguments (based on Dutch) against a PF-deletion approach. In particular, he argues that in many cases the putative source does not exist, that it has a different meaning than the verbless variant, that there would have to be many different deletion rules and that deletion would have to be blocked in many cases. He concludes that modals with directional PPs must be main-verb-like. I will argue that an analysis in terms of a super-light motion verb GO avoids Barbiers' arguments in that distributional and selectional properties can be attributed to the lexical entry for GO that are different from those of the various phonetically realized counterparts.

Evidence for GO from Swiss German. Swiss German presents us with two incontrovertible arguments to the effect that there has to be an empty GO. The first, suggested first in J. Hoekstra (1997), is based on examples like (1).

(1) ...wil si nöd hät döörfe i d schuel
...because she not has may *particip* in the school
'...because she was not allowed to go to school'

It can be shown that the PP cannot be extraposed, and hence that it must be inside the Verb Projection Raising Cluster, and hence that it has to precede its governing/selecting verb. Since there is no visible verb to its right, GO must be assumed to follow it.

A second argument comes from Verb Doubling (cf. i.a. Schmidt (2000)). There are four verbs in Swiss German that take infinitival complements that are neither bare nor introduced by the regular infinitive marker *z* ([ts]) but instead by a phonetically reduced copy of themselves. There is one apparent exception to this. Modals may take infinitival complements with the very same phonetically reduced elements, though they are not copies of anything visible:

(2) ...wil si het söle {a) *gaa/ (b) gaa go/ (c) go} poschte
...because she had should *inf* { go / go go / go } *shop inf*
'...because she should have gone shopping'

Since the phonetically reduced copy cannot occur without the full motion verb, (2) argues that GO is present in (2c): ...wil si het söle GO go poschte.
**Micro-variation: Dutch and West Flemish.** Since Dutch does not have Verb Doubling, what about the first argument. In order to construct it, two ingredients are needed: the Dutch/English order of verbs in the verb cluster, and Verb Projection Raising (cf. Haegeman & Van Riemsdijk (1986)). While Standard Dutch has no VPR, examples of VPR with intransitive prepositions are nevertheless marginally possible. And these show the telltale contrast:

(3)  
a. ...als we terug mogen (gaan) ...when we back may (go)  
b. ?...als we mogen terug gaan (VPR)  
c. *...als we mogen terug (cf. (1))

This suggests that Dutch does not have GO. Alternatively there may be an independent reason why GO is not licensed in this context, at least in Dutch. The latter option, intricately linked also to the IPP-effect, pursues a line of enquiry the was first suggested in the classical analysis of auxiliary deletion in Scandinavian by Den Besten (1977). So there are two options, but how can we choose?

West Flemish (Haegeman (1990, p.c.)) confronts us with an apparently even worse situation: WF has both VPR and Verb Doubling of the Swiss German type. And paradoxically, WF patterns with Dutch in the argument based on patterns like (1) and (3), while it is identical to Swiss German with respect to Verb Doubling as in (2). Does WF use main verb modals alongside GO? Let us hope not!

I will propose that the only way in which the paradox can be resolved is to assume that all varieties (I have relevant additional data from Afrikaans, Alsatian, German, Frisian, and Lettenburgish), of Continental West Germanic have the phonetically empty super-light motion verb GO, but that the variation is due to slight differences in its licensing conditions.

**References.**


Schmidt, Christa (2000) 'Verb Doubling in Zurich German,' Talk presented at the Workshop on Syntactic Microvariation, Meertens Institute, Amsterdam