

HAVE-omission in Swedish: Towards a theory of auxiliary omission

Summary: There are at least two influential approaches to auxiliaries: (i) A purely syntactic theory which treats them as merged lexical items (e.g. Pollock 1989, Cinque 1999, Pietraszko 2023), and (ii) a morphosyntactic theory which assumes they realize features (e.g. Déchaine 1993, Cowper 2010, Bjorkman 2011). A well-known argument for the morphosyntactic approach comes from the *overflow pattern* where auxiliaries only occur in combinations of inflectional categories, e.g. in the Latin perfect passive, but neither in the simple perfect or passive. This talk presents another argument for the morphosyntactic approach drawn from Swedish which allows perfect *ha* ‘have’ to be omitted, but no other auxiliaries. We will ascribe this to the featurally marked nature of the perfect (Kayne 1993; Bjorkman 2011). Specifically, Swedish does not allow a marked, perfect-specific feature to co-occur with tense on Perf°. This triggers one of two dissimilation rules (cf. Arregi and Nevins 2012): (i) deletion of tense on Perf°, or (ii) obliteration of Perf°, i.e. *have*-omission. That auxiliary omission seems to be a response to a marked feature combination can be understood straightforwardly under a morphosyntactic approach to auxiliaries.

Swedish auxiliary omission: Swedish is a V2 language which forms the perfect with the auxiliary *ha* ‘have’ and a perfect participle called the supine (SUP). However, finite *ha* ‘have’ can be omitted (1). Interestingly, this is only possible if *ha* ‘have’ does not move to C (Platzack 1986), as shown in (2).

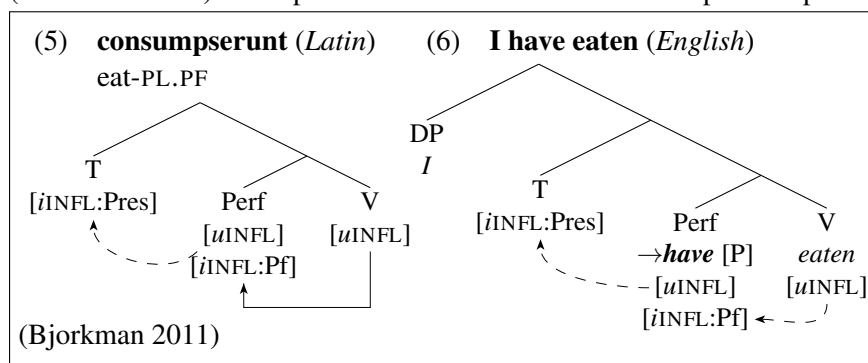
- (1) Där *kanske* han inte **har** varit idag. (2) Där ***(har)** han inte varit idag.
 there maybe he not (has) been.SUP today there has he not been.SUP today
 ‘He maybe hasn’t been there today.’ ‘He hasn’t been there today.’ (Heinat 2012:89)

Only the perfect *ha* ‘have’ auxiliary allows omission, not e.g. passive *vara* ‘be’ or possessive *ha* ‘have’.

- (3) ... att hon ***(har)** brevet. (4) ... att brevet ***(är)** skrivet.
 that she has.POSS letter.the that letter.the is.PASS written.PTCP
 ‘... that she has the letter.’ ‘... that the letter has been written.’

Note that Swedish is the only Scandinavian language with finite *have*-omission. Functionally, this may be because it is the only language with a dedicated perfect participle form, i.e. the supine (Wegner 2019).

Auxiliaries as morphological repair: An argument for a morphosyntactic approach to auxiliaries is the *overflow pattern*. Unlike the ADDITIVE pattern, where certain inflectional categories separately require auxiliaries, in the OVERFLOW pattern, auxiliaries only occur in *certain combinations of inflectional categories*. Bjorkman (2011) proposes (building on Adger 2003) that lexical verbs have one agreement slot for inflectional features. Combination with further features requires head movement. If head movement is unavailable, leaving an inflectional feature stranded, the morphology saves it by inserting an auxiliary (the default is *be*) in the position of the lowest feature. Compare the perfect in English and Latin (5–6).



The Latin present perfect is expressed with verbal inflection. This is because the verb can check [P(er)f] by head-moving to Perf°, and in turn Perf° can agree with [Pres] on T°, see (5). Thus, no auxiliary is inserted. (Dotted lines = agreement; **bold lines = movement**).

Unlike Latin, the English perfect requires an auxiliary. This is because the verb does not undergo head movement in English and so it can only agree with Perf°, and Perf° then must agree with T°. This leaves an inflectional feature stranded on Perf° which requires insertion of an auxiliary.

Importantly, the English perfect auxiliary is *have* – not *be*. Based on e.g. Benveniste (1968) and Kayne (1993), Bjorkman (2011) proposes that *have* is *be* plus a perfect-specific prepositional [P]-feature on Perf°. In a present perfect clause, T has an [INFL:Pres]-feature, and Perf° an [INFL:P(er)f]-feature. This triggers auxiliary insertion – of *have* because of [P] – in a *have*-language like English (6).

Perfect deletion: We argue that the marked status of *have* is precisely why it can be omitted: The marked perfect-prepositional feature [P] leads to a lack of exponence. A long tradition of work within Distributed

Morphology shows that marked features can lead to deletion rules (Noyer 1992 et seq.). Independent evidence for deletion comes from Swedish dialects where infinitival *ha* occurs in finite contexts (7–8).

- (7) Jag **har/ha** *diskat*. (8) Dä **hade/ha** *kanske vari värre ...*
 I have.PRS/.INF dish.washed.SUP it had.PST/.INF maybe be.SUP worse

‘I have washed the dishes.’ (Larsson 2009:375) ‘It might have been worse...’ (Larsson 2014:288) Arregi and Nevins (2012) argue that marked feature combinations can lead to deletion of features (*impoverishment*) or deletion of nodes (*obliteration*). They demonstrate that the Biscayan varieties of Basque have different responses to the same configuration of multiple participant clitics which can be understood by variation in how much is deleted (Arregi and Nevins 2012:Ch. 4). The difference between (7–8) and full omission (1) in Swedish can be understood in exactly the same terms: either as deletion of a tense feature on the auxiliary ([±Past]) or as obliteration of the entire node, i.e. *have*-omission (9).

- (9) **Perfect deletion:** For a single auxiliary on Perf^o specified as both [±Past] and [P]:
 (a) Delete [±Past] on the auxiliary, or (b) Delete the auxiliary.

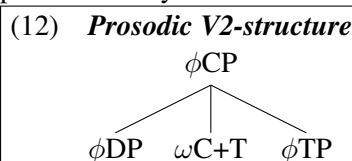
Deriving HAVE-omission: We propose that in Swedish non-V2 perfect clauses (10), just as in English (6), the verb Agrees with [INFL:Pres] on T^o and [INFL:Pf] on Perf^o, triggering *have*-insertion (due to [P]).

- (10) ... där *kanske* han inte **har** varit idag.
 ... there maybe he not has been today
 ‘... he maybe hasn’t been there today.’
 (11) ... [_T *han* [_{Neg} *inte* [_{Perf} **har** [_{PERF,PRES}] [_V *varit*]] ...

However, now [±Past, P] occur on Perf^o and so, following (9b), Perf (and *ha*) is obliterated (10–11). Thus, omission arises from the (featureally) marked nature of the perfect.

An alternative “null auxiliary” analysis overlooks the marked nature of perfect *have*, and the fact that the homophonous possessive *have* cannot be similarly omitted (3). Our analysis does not predict omission of possessive *have* as it does not involve [P]. The link between markedness and deletion can be naturally understood in a morphosyntactic approach to auxiliaries (e.g. Bjorkman 2011). However, exactly why deletion of inflectional features would lead to omission is not obvious in a purely syntactic approach. In Pietraszko’s (2023) theory, for example, where auxiliaries arise due to a selectional requirement of particular heads, it is not obvious why feature deletion would make such requirements go away.

Prosodic V2-requirement: Recall that perfect *ha* ‘have’ cannot be omitted in V2-clauses (2). (Early Modern German, which also allowed auxiliary omission had a similar restriction (Breitbarth 2005)). This is unexpected under an account where the feature set of the auxiliary, not its position, gives rise to omission. We argue that this is independent of *have*-omission, as crucially, V2-clauses always require a verb in second position. In fact, the V2-constraint only prevents full omission, not partial impoverishment, cf. (8–9). Any work which assumes a phonological component to V2 can in principle account for this (e.g. Rice & Svenonius 1998, Platzack 2013). For the sake of concreteness, Richards (2016) provides a way of understanding it. Richards assumes that in V2-languages like Swedish, main clauses



have an affixal C that requires a specifier for metrical support (a prosodic EPP). C and T must also occur in one prosodic phrase (ϕ) where T is adjacent to the left edge of the lower ϕ (12). If a non-subject DP moves to Spec,CP, the subject in spec,TP intervenes between C and T. Therefore, T must move to C, forming one prosodic

word (ω). Subject-initial V2 is due to a Germanic requirement for a non-degenerate trochaic foot in CP, i.e. ϕ followed by ω . A null auxiliary cannot provide the necessary metrical support for affixal C and thus, overt HAVE is needed. Non-V2 clauses (e.g. embedded clauses) lack affixal C and so the verb does not move. **Conclusions:** We analyze omission of the perfect auxiliary in Swedish with a dissimilation rule triggered by the marked perfect feature [P]. This analysis supports a morphosyntactic approach to auxiliaries (e.g. Bjorkman 2011) and provides a novel, theoretical handle on auxiliary omission.

Selected references: Benviste, E. 1968. *Mutations of linguistic categories*. University of Texas Press, Bjorkman, B. 2011. PhD thesis, MIT, Breitbarth, A. 2005. PhD thesis, University of Ghent, Kayne, R. 1993. *Studia Linguistica* 47(1):3–31, Arregi, K. and A. Nevins. 2012. *Morphotactics*. Springer, Platzack, C. 1986. COMP, INFL and Germanic word order. *Topics in Scandinavian Syntax*, Pietraszko, A. 2023. Cyclic selection. *LI* 54(2):350–377, Richards, N. 2016. *Contiguity theory*. MIT Press.