

THE AUXILIARY DO IN ENGLISH

John Hewson
Memorial University of Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

The DO auxiliary of English has either been dismissed as a meaningless 'dummy', whose purpose is purely positional, or, if treated as meaningful, it has been given special lexical meanings such as OCCURRENCE QUESTIONED (Penhallurick 1985) for which there is no lexical justification whatever. Starting from minimal pairs, it will be shown that the DO auxiliary is necessarily meaningful, and that when used contrastively it provides a dynamic reading for the verb phrase. Given that DO has such a generalized meaning that almost all other verbs may be considered its hyponyms, and given that all auxiliaries undergo 'esoteric subduction' (Guillaume 1938, 1964:75) or semantic bleaching, it will be proposed that DO, with its full verbal morphology, represents the occurrence of an event, and that its dependent infinitive clarifies, with its lexical precision, the nature of the event. It will also be argued that representing these two elements of the verb phrase separately is an elegant solution to cognitive problems confronted in the construction of interrogatives and negatives. The question of affirmative DO will also be addressed, and also the reason why this auxiliary is not normally used in the formation of the interrogative and the negative of the verb TO BE.

1. Introduction

It is well known that the simple forms of the English verb, which in Shakespeare's day could form their interrogatives by simple inversion:

(1) 'Lives he, good uncle?' (Henry V, 4:VI:4)

and their negative by the use of not:

(2) 'Your Majesty came not like yourself...' (Henry V, 4:VIII:49)

now regularly use auxiliary DO in both interrogative and negative, except for to be:

- (3) Is that right?
 *Does that be right?
 That is not right.
 *That does not be right.

The use of DO with to be is not unknown in Irish English, however:

- (4) What time does the mass be out there?

and certainly occurs with imperatives, both negative and affirmative:

- (5) Don't be so stupid! Do be careful!

For many speakers of British English simple inversion is also used with the verb to have when the sense of possession is intended:

- (6) Have you a piece of paper handy?
 No, sorry, I haven't

and the auxiliary when the verb represents activity:

- (7) What time do you have breakfast?
 I didn't have breakfast this morning.
 *What time have you breakfast?
 *I had not breakfast this morning.

Although the DO auxiliary was not systematically used for interrogatives and negatives in Shakespeare's day, it was nevertheless much in use, but the exploitation, the use, the norm, was quite different. In Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, for example, when the clown brings the asp to Cleopatra, we have a moment of magic that stems from the tension between the impending suicide and the silly chatter of the simpleton, who warns her to treat the snake carefully

- (8) ... for his biting is immortal; those that do die of it do seldom or never recover.

showing a usage of DO that would be quite strange today, a usage that apparently disappeared from the standard language after the introduction of the progressive in the seventeenth century, but may

still be heard in the dialects of the English West Country, according to Rogers (1979:39).

Before the introduction of the progressive, these DO forms seem to have represented the frequentative and habitual as in (7) above; this at any rate is the usage reported by Rogers as still surviving in the West of England. In short, do die at this time had an habitual sense, so that simple die, by contrast, would normally have a punctual sense. The distinction between habitual and punctual is now largely covered by the simple/progressive contrast: He talks/is talking too much. The Early Modern English usage, however, needs further research: a thesis might well emerge from this topic, starting from the diachronic data of Ellegard 1953 and the synchronic data of regional English from Nevalainen and Rissanen 1986.

The DO auxiliary in its modern usage has frequently been considered a meaningless syntactic counter, a 'dummy' which was not needed in earlier forms of English and did not develop until the middle of the eighteenth century. It has in fact commonly been suggested that the purpose of the auxiliary do is to maintain the subject in front of the verb as it is in the affirmative, in short, to maintain the SVO order (e.g. Kroch 1989). Why this should be necessary, or even profitable, has never been made clear. As Kroch points out, an argument can be made for keeping Verb and Direct Object together, but it must be admitted that speakers of British English have no problems whatever in processing sentences such as Has John any children?, and putting too much faith in syntactic word order justifications has occasionally been rightly questioned, as in Ard 1982. What is the purpose of DO in the negative, for example, where inversion of subject and verb is not in question:

- (9) I know what you mean
I don't know what you mean

We must also ask what is the relationship to the use of the DO auxiliary in the affirmative: if this auxiliary is associated with negatives and questions, why does it make an affirmation even stronger?

2. The Meaning of the DO Auxiliary

First of all however, we must establish that the DO auxiliary is no meaningless dummy. Bolinger (1977), insisting that all grammar is meaningful, showed that the DO auxiliary is no exception. Since, in fact, the purpose of language usage is the conveying of meaning, we may wonder at the suggestion that there are elements in language that serve no signifying function, and indeed the auxiliary DO is shown to be meaningful by the existence of minimal pairs (a and b examples from Hirtle 1965:31):

- (10) a. Why aren't you a doctor?
 b. Why don't you be a doctor?
 c. Why weren't you more careful?
 d. Why didn't you be more careful?

Here we may observe that the use of the infinitive, necessary when the auxiliary DO is used, gives a prospective sense of potentiality, typical of infinitive usage, so that (10)d suggests that a better strategy could have been planned, whereas (10)c simply indicates that the subject was careless.

In fact we can go even further, and note that there is a contrast between a static and a dynamic reading, just as there is with the verb to have in the British examples in (6) and (7), so that (10)b reads Why don't you become a doctor? and (10)d reads Why didn't you take more care? Clearly, therefore, DO is something more than a meaningless dummy which serves only for the syntactic ordering of words.

One can see however why DO has been treated in this way as a mechanical marker of the interrogative and negative of the simple forms of the verb. Its function is, of course, largely automatic, and as an auxiliary it certainly does not carry its full lexical meaning of carry out, as in do the washing up or do the right thing. The dematerialization of the auxiliaries do, be and have from their full lexical sense of carry out, exist and possess, exemplifies what Traugott calls (1989:49) 'the general claim that grammaticalization involves loss of meaning (desemanticization, bleaching, etc.)'.

If the term bleaching is the one currently in use today, it is interesting to note that Gustave Guillaume used the French term subduction over fifty years ago (1938) to indicate this process of dematerialization. In fact he went even further and noted that verbs like do, be, and have notionally underlie all other verbs in

the lexicon, so that move, go, come, walk, eat, etc, all presuppose be, and are all hyponyms of do. Consequently do, be, and have stand in a relation of subduction to these other verbs, since there is semantic bleaching from the higher levels of the lexicon to the lowest underlying levels, where the most general and most abstract meanings are to be found. This is exoteric or external subduction, because it is loss of meaning from one word to another. In short to eat, to breathe, to move, is to do something, where we can see the lexical content of the intransitives eat/breathe/move being transferred to the indefinite goal of transitive do: do something.

(11) eat/breathe/move = do something

Here it is the element something that represents the particularities of eating, breathing, moving, whereas do represents what they all have in common.

For our purposes, however, it is more important to follow Guillaume's argument that these most fundamental underlying verbs can themselves be eroded from the inside, where the subduction is esoteric or internal. The purpose of this erosion or bleaching is to establish between the two parts of what the Firthians call the verbal piece, in this case auxiliary plus verbal, the kind of balance between lexis and grammar that exists in single words; in short to make the verbal piece into a single unit where the auxiliary carries the grammar, with a mere quantum of lexical content, and the verbal carries the lexical meaning with a minimum of grammaticalization, with no agreement for tense or person, for example.

Guillaume in his 1938 article proposes that any true auxiliary, because of the esoteric subduction it undergoes, becomes somewhat less than a full word. If we represent a full word as M + F (i.e. Matter plus Form, lexical content plus grammatical form), then an auxiliary may be represented as M-q + F, where q represents the quantum of lexical meaning that has been bleached in order to form the auxiliary (1938, 1964:78). In terms of Form the auxiliary is not reduced, since it has all the normal attributes of a full finite verb. The dependent infinitive is also a full word, M + F, whose grammatical form allows it to be predicated of the auxiliary, and whose lexical meaning, already partially identical to that of the auxiliary, joins with that of the auxiliary to replace the missing quantum and weld the two parts of the verbal piece into a single lexical unity. Guillaume proposes that the only role of the infinitive is to replace the lexical quantum bleached from the

infinitive, which is quite a remarkable insight by itself, but this ignores the fact that the infinitive is itself a full word (M + F). There is also the fact that in the case of DO the amalgam of the two lexical elements is even more radical because the M element of the infinitive, as a hyponym of DO, already contains the M-q element of the auxiliary, so that there is an identity between the two lexical elements as well as a replacement of q.

The result of this amalgamation is that the event represented by the auxiliary, with its mood, person and tense, is identified with the event named by the infinitive. In the verbal piece so composed the auxiliary carries the necessary grammar for the verb, and the infinitive the necessary lexical element. Since the M element of the auxiliary is contained in the M element of the infinitive, and the F element of the infinitive is predicated of the auxiliary, the whole combination is, in a sense, a new combination of M + F, which is no doubt what has led to the auxiliary DO being treated as a meaningless grammatical counter.

Since the lexical meaning of the DO auxiliary is only reduced or bleached by this process, we are entitled to ask what is the meaning that is left, that prevents DO from becoming a meaningless grammatical counter (in which case one would expect it to be incorporated into the verb as an inflection, in much the same way that the Latin/Romance auxiliary habēre became the inflections of the new future tense of Early Western Romance, so that Late Latin amāre habēō became French aimerai).

The question of the meaning of the DO auxiliary has been discussed by Hirtle (1965:31-35), Joly (1975:§4.2.1), Guimier (1981:138), and most recently by Duffley (1990). The earlier consensus was that the idea of activity expressed by the full verb is reduced to that of 'a mere potential for the realization of the event' (Joly 1975, qu. Duffley 1990:2) in the auxiliary. Duffley, however, has taken this analysis further, and his conclusion is worth quoting in full (1990:9-10):

'The conclusion to be drawn, consequently, from both the meaning of auxiliary DO and the comparison of its behaviour with that of auxiliary NEED, is that subducting DO does not result in a withdrawal into the domain of the potential. As an auxiliary, DO continues to denote something actual; the actualization of the incidence of the accompanying infinitive's event to its support throughout the stretch of universe time required to fully

actualize this event (which explains the relation between DO auxiliary and the simple form of the verb). As such, DO is no different from BE and HAVE, whose auxiliary senses also evoke forms of actuality, proof that subduction does not always result in potentiality'.

In this view the auxiliary DO represents the subject as involved with the time required for carrying out the event: the subject's activity during that time is represented as being of a kind that can also accommodate the more precise activity represented by the verbal (see (11) above) when this verbal is itself predicated of the auxiliary DO.

3. Cognitive Function of the DO Auxiliary

In asserting that the DO auxiliary is meaningful we are taking the position that all auxiliaries have a cognitive function, in the sense of Langacker (1985) and Lakoff (1987), in the combination auxiliary + verbal, in much the same way that all determiners have a cognitive function in the combination determiner + noun. Langacker declares (1985:15) '...most (if not all) grammatical morphemes are meaningful...' and is critical of 'dummies' and the DO-Support Rule (1985:25, 30-31). Lakoff, for his part, in his criticisms of 'objectivism' shows that what is represented in language is not the world of experience, but our perceptions of the world of experience, which necessitates an interpretation or representation (in its etymological sense of re-presentation) of the world of experience; hence linguistic categories are arbitrary, in the Saussurean sense. He shows that zebra is, in a sense, a concept just like metre, an arbitrary human judgment (1987:185ff), and he calls for 'a theory of syntax in which syntactic categories are semantically motivated and grammatical constructions come with meaning' (1985:256-7), a point of view that ties in directly with that of European structuralists such as Jakobson, Hjelmslev, and Guillaume, who always insisted that grammatical paradigms are nothing more than the morphological markers of meaningful content systems.

In certain of the Indo-European families such as Germanic and Romance, a typological revolution has taken place over the last two to three thousand years whereby these phrasal combinations have replaced single words (Hewson 1972:14-15, 1989, 1990). Subject and object nouns, for example, have been replaced by Determiner + Noun:

in French for example, all the grammar of the NP is carried by the article, the noun, in speech at least, presenting only the lexical content. Nouns in oblique cases have been replaced by prepositional phrases, where it is the preposition that controls the grammatical function of the whole phrase.

Since, in fact, the auxiliary DO carries the mark of tense, whereas the verbal carries the lexical content, the cognitive result of this combination is the following division of labour:

- A. the auxiliary DO, with its categories of tense, mood, etc., represents the temporal occurrence of the event or state; it represents indefinite activity in a parcel of universe time, whereas
- B. the accompanying infinitive actualizes this activity as being of a specific kind (i.e. eating, breathing, moving - see (11) above),

the two items together carrying out the full function of a normal verb.

Consequently it is cognitively profitable, in the negative and interrogative forms of the verb, to separate the representation of the occurrence of the event from the representation of the nature of the event, as is achieved by the use of the DO auxiliary. There are, in short, certain problems of representation that have to be confronted when one forms negatives and interrogatives. In Early Modern English, for example, the negative was formed by representing the event as occurring, and then denying the occurrence, as in (2) above: Your Majesty came ... not. The problem is that one must have something to deny: even zero is a negation of something. Or, as the Greek Stoic philosophers put it: ouk éstin oudén, there is no such thing as nothing; nothing is necessarily the denial of something; it must be positive first before it can be negative.

It is of course necessarily wasteful and contradictory to represent an event or state as occurring, and then to deny its occurrence. The use of the DO auxiliary is an elegant solution to this problem of representation since it enables the speaker to deny the occurrence of the event or state at the level of the auxiliary, making it possible to name the event or state and deny its occurrence within the same verbal phrase without being obliged at any time to represent the event or state as actually occurring. There is in short a division of labour, whereby the verbal names the

event or the state, without representing its occurrence, and the auxiliary, with its past and non-past tenses, is used in the negative to represent its non-occurrence.

The same strategy is of course useful for the formation of the interrogative, where similar problems of representation occur, since one must represent the event that one wishes to query, and yet query it at the same time. Some languages confront these problems by using question particles, often as clitics in second position in the clause. Where word order is configurational, subject and verb may be inverted. The result of inversion represents the event first without its locus, as unsupported, thereby putting it into doubt or question. But the normal question concerns only the occurrence of the event, and does not query the nature of the event. The use of the DO auxiliary allows the question to focus on the occurrence of the event or state.

4. Negation Without DO

If the use of the DO auxiliary is to be considered an elegant solution to the problem of creating negatives and interrogatives, we are entitled to wonder why there are such common phrases as I hope not and I think not, and why the auxiliary is not normally used when the simple forms of the verb occur with never, as in I never saw such a sight in my whole life. In the case of I hope not it is quite clear that the verb is not negated, but is in fact an affirmative hope that something will not happen: the negative is subordinate to the main clause I hope, and this is equally true of I think not, which would be translated into French as Je crois que non.

In the case of never, it has to be realized that this word is the negative form of the adverb ever, which means that the negation is applied to ever first, and only secondarily, through ever, to the verb. The normal role of ever is to create a state of possibility, of potentiality, as in whoever, whatever, whenever. The verb modified by ever is therefore necessarily represented as potential, not as actual, making the use of the actualizer DO redundant in the negative, just as it is in the negative of the subjunctive: I propose that we not move too quickly. Such details serve to emphasize the subconscious nature of linguistic programming, and the subtleties that may be revealed by careful analysis.

5. DO with Affirmations

Since the use of the DO auxiliary allows us to represent an event as doubtful or not occurring, we may well wonder why it has the opposite effect in the affirmative and strengthens the affirmation. What happens is that by separating the representation of the nature of the event from the representation of its occurrence, the event is represented twice: it is both named (lexically) and affirmed as occurring, this affirmation being all the stronger because it is itself a distinct and separate element of the sentence (auxiliary DO); each representation is in this way a confirmation of the other. It is from this that we have the impression of a confirmed or strengthened affirmation.

That the auxiliary is a representation of the occurrence of the event or state is confirmed by its occasional use, in the affirmative, to emphasize a contrast between past and non-past tense. Zandvoort (1957:81) quotes the following

- (12) An even more doubtful story attempts to explain the figure of a wailing woman which haunts, or did haunt, the banks of the River Goyt near Marple Hall.

In the first case we have the verb haunts in the non-past tense, and in the second case the author wishes merely to change the tense. To show that only the tense is to be changed and not the nature of the event, the change of tense is presented in the auxiliary.

It is perhaps not surprising that the use of the DO auxiliary with interrogatives and negatives was only adopted into English at about the time that the progressive became a fully functional element, thereby producing within the verbal system an aspectual contrast between the verb with open perspective (progressive) and the verb with closed perspective (simple).

- (13) He walks to work (closed perspective)
 He's walking to work (perspective open to change)

The great range of stylistic effects produced by this simple binary contrast between simple and progressive has been extensively demonstrated by Hirtle (1967).

At this point in the development of English there were two grammatical auxiliaries, be and have, and some half dozen modal auxiliaries, so that verb forms with auxiliaries would have a high frequency, and, necessarily, most questions and negatives would already be made through the medium of an auxiliary, so that the simple forms would be following a well established pattern, as the following tabulation shows:

	Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative
Progressive	she is going	she is not going	is she going?
Perfect	he has gone	he has not gone	has he gone?
Simple	she goes	she does not go	does she go?

Consequently the usefulness of auxiliaries in the creation of interrogatives and negatives would be readily apparent. In short the separative function of the auxiliary in interrogatives and negatives would have long been readily apparent from the patterning of the Perfect and the Progressive. It is a small step to begin to use the DO auxiliary for the interrogative and negative of the simple forms of the verb, except where the representation is considered unsuitable, as with the verb to be and, in some British usage, with some senses of the verb to have.

6. Epilogue: BE and HAVE

The verb to be, since it is the most fundamental of all verbs, to be presupposed of all events that are represented as taking place in the world of experience, poses all kinds of representational problems. It is not really surprising that minimal pairs with the auxiliary DO only occur in the interrogative negative, as in (10) above, for example.

The basic problem with be is that here you have a lexical element that is so fundamental that it is virtually impossible to represent it as something separate or separable from its subject. If the subject is not (or should I say does not be?), then there is no subject. The auxiliary DO is consequently only found with alloemes of be such as become, as we can demonstrate by paraphrasing (10)b,d above:

- (14) Why don't you become a doctor?
 Why didn't you take more care?

Here we note that become is the inceptive alloseme of be, so that becoming a doctor results in being a doctor, and take care is a dynamic way of expressing be careful. Even the Irish English example of (4) could best be paraphrased as

(15) What time does the mass take place out there?

where be is replaced by a verb of dynamic activity.

Consequently it is not surprising that we find conflicting usage (see exx. 6,7) with have, which is at one remove from the universality of be. It is also not surprising that the conflicting usage affects only certain allosemes of have, namely those that indicate possession, without a dynamic reading. Where the dynamic reading is required, the use of the DO auxiliary is universal, as it is with the dynamic uses of BE in (10)b,d above.

7. Conclusion

Many attempts to deal with the DO auxiliary of English have concentrated on trying to define a suitable lexical meaning for this auxiliary, such as OCCURRENCE QUESTIONED (Penhallurick 1985:315). In this paper we have proposed that the function of DO as an auxiliary stems first from its position of exoteric subduction in the lexicon, and that it can be used as an auxiliary for other verbs because notionally they are hyponyms of DO; and secondly from the fact that the lexical meaning of DO has undergone esoteric or internal subduction (i.e. bleaching). Its principal role is consequently as a grammatical complement to the lexical content of its dependent infinitive, its own lexical meaning being developed only to the point where it retains its hyponymic relationship with all other verbs except the existential senses of the verb to be.

REFERENCES

- ARD, Josh. 1982. 'Auxiliary do: Support or emphasis?'. Linguistics 20:445-466.
- BOLINGER, Dwight. 1977. Meaning and Form. London: Longman.
- DUFFLEY, Patrick. 1990. 'A look at auxiliary DO in the light of NEED auxiliary.' Paper given at 4e Colloque de psychomécanique du langage, Université Laval, Québec, 15-16 May 1990.
- ELLEGARD, Alvar. 1953. The Auxiliary DO: The establishment and regulation of its use in English. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- GUILLAUME, Gustave. 1938. 'Théorie des auxiliaires et examen des faits connexes.' Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris. (Reprinted in Guillaume 1964).
- . 1964. Langage et science du langage. Paris: Klincksieck; Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- GUIMIER, Claude. 1981. 'Sur la substitution verbale en anglais.' Modèles linguistiques 3.1:135-161.
- HEWSON, John. 1972. Article and Noun in English. The Hague: Mouton.
- . 1989. 'Noun Phrase and Phrasal Noun.' In Ruth M. Brend & David G. Lockwood (eds.), The Fifteenth LACUS Forum 1988, 205-210. Lake Bluff, Illinois: LACUS.
- . 1990. 'The Indo-European evolution from word structure to phrase structure.' Paper presented at 15th International LAUD Symposium, Duisburg, West Germany, March 1990.
- HIRTLE, Walter. 1965. 'Auxiliaries and Voice in English.' Les langues modernes 59,4:433-450.
- . 1967. The Simple and Progressive Forms. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- JOLY, André. 1975. La négation verbale en anglais moderne. Thèse de Doctorat d'Etat, Université de Paris III.

- KROCH, Anthony. 1989. 'Function and Grammar in the History of English: Periphrastic do.' In Ralph W. Fasold and Deborah Schiffrin (eds.), Language Change and Variation, 133-172. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- LAKOFF, George. 1987. Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- LANGACKER, Ronald. 1985. An Overview of Cognitive Grammar. University of California at San Diego: mimeo.
- NEVALAINEN, Terttu and Matti Rissanen. 1986. 'So You Support the Do Support? Emphatic and non-emphatic do in affirmative statements in present-day spoken English.' In Sven Jacobson (ed.), Papers from the Third Scandinavian Symposium on Syntactic Variation, Stockholm, December 11-12, 1985, 35-50. Stockholm: Ahlqvist and Wiksell.
- PENHALLURICK, John. 1985. 'The Semantics of Auxiliary DO', Studies in Linguistics 9:311-333.
- ROGERS, Norman. 1979. Wessex Dialect. Bradford-on Avon: Moonbeam Press.
- TRUGOTT, Elizabeth Closs. 1989. 'On the rise of epistemic meanings in English: An example of subjectification in semantic change', Language 65:31-55.
- ZANDVOORT, R.W. 1957. A Handbook of English Grammar. London: Longmans.