

DUTCH AUXILIARIES WITH A NULL VP PROFORM COMPLEMENT

LOBKE AELBRECHT
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS/CRISSP

INTRODUCTION

The verbal complement of Dutch auxiliaries can be left unpronounced if it has a contextually salient antecedent, as is shown in (1):

- (1) A: Wie wil er meerijden naar het strand morgen?
 who wants there with.drive to the beach tomorrow
 B: Ik kan niet.
 I can not

“Who wants to drive along to the beach tomorrow” – “I can’t.”

This is reminiscent of English VP ellipsis (VPE), which has been claimed to involve PF deletion of a fully specified VP (recently by among others Merchant 2001, Johnson 2001). I argue, however, that the modal auxiliary in (1)B selects a phonologically null VP proform, thereby contributing to the long-standing discussion about whether ellipsis involves deletion of syntactic structure or a base-generated empty complement.

BASIC DATA

Although Dutch has since long been considered a language disallowing VPE, some auxiliaries allow for an empty VP complement. This is not the case for all modals. In particular, the temporal modal *zullen* ‘will’ cannot occur without its VP complement, whereas *willen* ‘want’, *moeten* ‘must’, *kunnen* ‘can’, *mogen* ‘may’ and *hoeven* ‘must/need’ can, as is shown in (2).

- (2) A: Komt Thomas ook naar je lezing?
 comes Thomas also to your talk
 B: Hij{ wil/ moet/mag/ kan/ hoeft/ *zal} niet.
 he wants/ must/may/ can/ need/ will not

Moreover, the verbal complement can only remain absent when the modal receives a deontic reading, not an epistemic one, as in (3).

- (3) A: Wie kan de afwas doen morgen?
 who can the dishes do tomorrow
 B: Klaas moet^{*epist/deont} wel/ maar.
 Klaas must PRT/ PRT

“Who can do the dishes tomorrow?” – “Klaas has to.”

Note that, in a context like (3), *moet* ‘must’ is compatible with an epistemic interpretation when there is a verbal complement present:

- (4) A: Wie kan de afwas doen morgen?
 who can the dishes do tomorrow
 B: Klaas moet_{epist} wel tijd hebben, (geloof ik).
 Klaas must PRT time have believe I

“Who can do the dishes tomorrow?” – “Klaas must have time, I believe.”

ANALYSIS: No VP ellipsis, but a null VP proform

Merchant (2001) and Johnson (2001) analyze English VP ellipsis as PF deletion of a full syntactic structure, and provide four main arguments in favor of this claim. In VPE arguments may survive the ellipsis (i.e. Pseudo-gapping: see (5)), and wh-phrases may extract out of an elided VP (cf. (6)). Furthermore, an elided VP can have a *there*-expletive as its subject, the associate being contained in the ellipsis site, cf. (7). Finally, (8) shows that VPE allows antecedent-contained deletion (ACD).

- (5) Mina lit a cigar and Peter did a cigarette.

- (6) Mina ate a banana, but I don’t know what Peter did.

(7) Mina thought there to be an elephant in the garden, but there seemed not to.

(8) Mina reads each book that Peter does.

Applying these tests to Dutch auxiliaries without a complement, on the other hand, yields different results: they do not allow for pseudo-gapping (cf. (9)) or object wh-extraction, as is shown in (10). Their subject cannot be a *there*-expletive (cf. (11)) and antecedent-contained deletion (ACD) is ungrammatical (cf. (12)).

(9) A: Wie doet morgen de afwas?
who does tomorrow the dishes

B:*Ik kan niet, maar ik wil wel de was.
I can not but I want PRT the laundry

(10) A: Aan wie moet Katrien een cadeautje geven?
to who must Katrien a present give

B:*Dat weet ik niet. Aan wie moet Bert?
that know I not to who must Bert

(11) A: Moeten er veel mensen naar de vergadering komen?
must there a.lot.of people to the meeting come

B:*Nee, er moeten niet.
no there must not

(12) *Joris leest elk boek dat Monika niet wil.
Joris reads each book that Monika not wants

Consequently, I claim that the VP complement of the auxiliaries in Dutch has not been deleted as in English VPE; there was just never a full VP structure present. The modal selects a VP proform which interpreted as the VP in the antecedent. This proform replaces a whole VP, include the arguments (as shown by (9) above), but only optionally includes the adjuncts. This is illustrated by (13):

(13) A: Wie doet vanavond de afwas?
who does tonight the dishes

B: Ik wil wel, maar niet vanavond.
I want PRT but not tonight

B': Ik wil wel.
I want PRT

A TYPOLOGY OF ELLIPSIS

Van Craenenbroeck (2004) has argued that ellipsis of TP may either involve deletion of a full syntactic structure, or the presence of a proform. I shall argue that the same is true for VP. In particular, I shall show that while English uses the VP-deletion strategy, Dutch data support the conclusion that a VP proform is involved. I therefore suggest that both ellipsis strategies for empty VP complements are instantiated in language. To conclude, I shall discuss the parameters responsible for the cross-linguistic differences observed.

REFERENCES

- Craenenbroeck, J. van (2004). *Ellipsis in Dutch dialects*. LOT Dissertation Series 96. Utrecht: LOT.
- Johnson, K. (2001). "What VP-Ellipsis can do, and what it can't, but not why". In: Mark Baltin & C. Collins (eds.) *The Handbook of Syntactic Theory*, 439-279, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Merchant, J. (2001). *The syntax of silence. Sluicing, islands and the theory of ellipsis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.