The Crosslinguistic Defaultness of BE
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1. Introduction/Background

- There is a long-standing intuition in linguistic analysis that auxiliaries such as be are in some sense default verbs.
- Here I present a formalization of this intuition: auxiliary be is not present in syntax but is instead a morphological default inserted to realize "stranded" inflectional material.
- This provides a unified analysis of previously-undiscussed variation in the distribution of auxiliary constructions.

2. Variation in Auxiliary Use

A familiar pattern:
Some inflectional categories require auxiliaries. Combinations of such categories require two auxiliaries:

(1) a. Progressive: The children were eating the cake.
b. Passive: The cake was eaten.
c. Progressive passive: The cake was being eaten.

A different pattern: Bantu, Latin

Individual inflectional categories do not require auxiliaries, but some combinations do:

- Kinande: past tense and aspect (progressive, imperfective, or incomplete) require an auxiliary only in combination:
  a. Progressive: tu-nêmu-húma, 'We are hitting'
  b. Past: tw-á-húma, 'We hit (recently, not today)'
  c. Past Progressive: tw-á-byà i-tu-nêmu-húma, ‘We were (recently, not today) hitting.’

- Latin: passive and perfect categories require an auxiliary only in combination (Embick, 2000)

- Perfect: amavi, 'I loved, I have loved.'
- Passive: amor, 'I am loved.'
- Perfect Passive: amatus sum, 'I was loved, I have been loved.'

Evidence for Default Auxiliaries:

Latin and Kinande would require complex licensing for be in an AuxP, projected only in the presence of two other categories, never by either individually.

- *[AuxP [XP]]
- *[AuxP [YP]]
- √ [AuxP [XP [YP]]]

An alternative: no AuxP; complex structures give rise to auxiliaries in the morphology (cf. Schütze, 2003; Cowper, 2010)

3. A Simple Theory of Inflection

4. Illustration

1. ENGLISH

Head movement: *T attracts VoP and AspP

Default (non-visible): Non-progressive AspP; active VoP

Progressive: were eating
- AspP and VoP Agree for [Prog]
- T Agree with AspP for [Past]
- HM
- [Past] is stranded → auxiliary was
- Passive: was eaten
- VoP and AspP Agree for [Passive]
- T and VoP Agree for [Past]
- HM
- [Past] is stranded → auxiliary was
- was being eaten
- VoP and AspP Agree for [Passive]
- T and VoP Agree for [Pass]
- HM
- [Prog] is stranded → auxiliary was

2. KINANDE

Head movement: none

Default (non-visible): Present T and perfective AspP

Progressive: tu-nêmu-húma
- ‘we are hitting’
- AspP and VoP Agree for [Prog]
- No stranded features
- Past: twá-húma
- ‘we hit (recently)’
- T and VoP Agree for [Past]
- No stranded features
- Progressive Passive: tw-á-byà i-tu-nêmu-húma
- ‘we were (recently) hitting’
- AspP and VoP Agree for [Past]
- T and VoP Agree for [Past]
- [Past] is stranded → auxiliary twá-byà

3. LATIN

Head movement: VoP and AspP attract VoP

Default (non-visible): Imperfective AspP; active VoP

Perfect: amavi ‘I have loved.’
- AspP and VoP Agree for [Prog]
- HM
- T and AspP, VoP Agree
- No stranded features
- Passive: amor ‘I am loved’
- AspP and VoP Agree for [Pass]
- HM
- T and VoP, AspP Agree
- No stranded features
- Perfect Passive: amatus sum ‘I was, have been loved’
- VoP and AspP Agree for [Pass]
- HM
- AspP and VoP, VoP Agree for [Pass]
- T and AspP, VoP Agree for [Perf]
- HM
- T and AspP, VoP Agree for [Past]
- [Past] is stranded → auxiliary sum

5. Implications: Reduced Relatives

Reduced relative forms exist only for participles that take be (so-called Whiz-deletion in English; extended further by Iatridou et al., 2003)

(4) a. The cake eaten by the children
b. The children eating the cake
c. *The children eating the cake

This is exactly an environment in which we would expect an auxiliary not to occur, assuming that reduced relatives lack higher inflectional structure and so never have stranded inflection.

The restriction to follow is if other auxiliaries (i.e. have) arise in structures with additional features (Freeze, 1992; Kayne, 1993), requiring verbal realization.

If be occupied AuxP, why would relevant inflectional categories fail to select be in reduced relative environments? -> support for the default be analysis.

Please see the handout for full references.
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