

# **Unacceptably accented auxiliaries<sup>1</sup>**

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## *Abstract*

*Wells and Local (1983) intend to propose a thoroughly pragmatics-based explanation for the unacceptability of certain instances of accented infinitival to, have, and be in English, in reaction to Zwicky and Levin's (1980) arguments for a constraint couched in syntactic terms. A comparison of the two accounts serves as the vehicle for a discussion of several larger issues: choosing between theoretical frameworks on the basis of analyses formulated within them, metatheoretical considerations in deciding among competing analyses, the interplay between grammatical and functional accounts of phenomena, and the need for explicitness in analyses of all types.*

## **1. Introduction**

Wells and Local (1983; hereafter WL), confronting the data of Zwicky and Levin (1980; hereafter ZL) on the acceptability of accented infinitival *to, have, and be* in English, have proposed analyses involving principles of accent location which are sensitive to anaphora and the given/new distinction, in place of ZL's condition referring only to syntactic structure. I will be claiming that WL's reanalysis is no better than ZL's original, but my central purpose here is not to defend ZL (a squib of some vintage now) against critics. Instead I intend to use the exchange to air a number of general issues that arise (explicitly or implicitly) in WL: what the choice among analyses has to say about a choice between theoretical frameworks (section 2); whether there are metatheoretical considerations favoring one of these analyses (section 3); whether a grammatical or a functional account is to be preferred in this case (section 4); and the virtues of explicitness in proposed analyses (section 5).

The facts at issue are those like (1)-(3) below; italicization indicates accent.

- (1) I didn't see the exhibit last time. \*But this time I'm likely *to*.
- (2) I'm sure you didn't enjoy my first piano recital. \*You would've had to be extraordinary to *have*.
- (3) I wouldn't be upset not to be chosen. \*But on the other hand I wouldn't be upset to *be*.

According to ZL, the generalization that covers things like (1)–(3) is a condition that rules out accented nonfinite forms of auxiliaries when these are followed by an empty VP.<sup>2</sup> WL's alternative hinges instead on the generalization that “‘given’ items are deaccented” (703); on this analysis the italicized items in (1)–(3) offend because they are anaphoric and therefore given, but are nevertheless accented.

An adequate account of why (1)–(3) are unacceptable must nevertheless permit a number of similar constructions. Parallel to the unacceptable (3) there are the acceptable examples in (4), which is identical to (3) except for the location of the accent; in (5), which has a nonempty VP following *be*, rather than the empty VP following it in (3); in (6), which has a finite form of *be* preceding the empty VP, rather than the infinitive form preceding it in (3); and in (7), which has the infinitive *be* preceding a VP trace, rather than preceding an empty VP as in (3).<sup>3</sup>

- (4) I wouldn't be upset not to be chosen. But on the other hand I wouldn't be upset *to be*.
- (5) I wouldn't be upset not to be chosen. But on the other hand I wouldn't be upset to *be chosen*.
- (6) I wouldn't be upset not to be chosen. But on the other hand I wouldn't be upset if I *am*.
- (7) I'd love to be chosen. But chosen I could never *be*.

And an adequate account must distinguish the ‘zero anaphora’ of empty VPs, as in (8), from the explicit VP anaphors in (9) and (10), since only the former produce unacceptability.

- (8) I don't think you'll have anyone want to take early exams. \*For anyone to ask *to* is most unlikely.<sup>4</sup>
- (9) I don't think you'll have anyone want to take early exams. For anyone to ask *to do so/that* is most unlikely.
- (10) I don't think you'll have anyone want to take early exams. For anyone to ask to *do so/that* is most unlikely.

## 2. Choosing between theoretical frameworks

Both accounts refer to the location of accent. However, the crucial parts of ZL's condition are syntactic, while the crucial parts of WL's are

pragmatic: nonfinite forms of auxiliaries before empty VPs, on the one hand, versus final words of anaphoric, hence given, VP remainders, on the other. ZL are of course not maintaining that accent location and the choice of syntactic construction are without pragmatic consequences, nor are WL maintaining that syntactic structure is totally irrelevant to the location of accents. That is, both analyses are conceivable for both pairs of linguists; the dispute is over which account fits the facts better.

Nonetheless, WL talk as if ZL were ineluctably led to their analysis by their commitment to generative grammar<sup>5</sup> and as if their own proposal followed directly from their commitment to a Firthian framework. They castigate ZL for 'preferring ... to account for apparent peculiarities in the location of "contrastive stress" in purely syntactic terms' (702) and say of their own proposal that it

... derives from the principles of Firthian phonology.... We view phonological statements as being concerned with relating phonetic exponents to functional categories (whether or not they are mediated by lexical and/or syntactic systems). We have shown that such an approach provides a more adequate description of accentuation than is possible within the narrow generative model espoused by Zwicky and Levin (712f).

It might be true that generativists are more alert to the possibility of syntactic conditioning, and Firthians to possible effects of pragmatic function (although it is easy to think of many striking exceptions to this claim). But neither framework confines its adherents to only one of these domains. It follows that discovering whether the best account of phenomena like those illustrated in (1)–(10) is primarily syntactic or primarily pragmatic (or neither, or both) will reflect in no way on which is the better theoretical framework.

### 3. Metatheoretical considerations

The very reason for bringing up examples like (1)–(10) is to show that the accentuation in them is problematic from the point of view of simple principles of accent distribution, in particular the principle that new material is accented and given material deaccented. ZL assumed such wide agreement among linguists (including the generative linguists who constitute most of the readership of *Linguistic Inquiry*) that accent can signal newness and deaccentuation givenness that they did not bother to state it. Against the background of this assumption their proposal has considerable surprise value, and indeed the main feature of their 1980

formulation — a constraint on accent placement that refers to the output structures created by a particular transformational rule — is one that, far from being an inevitable result of the choice of theoretical framework, excludes statement in standard versions of that framework.

WL are then quite correct in asserting that metatheoretical considerations<sup>6</sup> would speak against the ZL proposal and in favor of their own. But it is also quite obvious that associating accent with newness and lack of accent with givenness will not by itself account for the pattern of data in (1)–(10). Further assumptions are needed to make the WL proposal work.

I now consider the cases in order, beginning with the (unacceptable) empty-VP cases in (1)–(3) and (8) and then continuing with cases that are in general acceptable: the leftward-accent cases like (4); the nonempty-VP cases like (5); the finite-V cases like (6); the VP-trace cases like (7); and the pro-V cases like (10). Note that all the ZL proposal does is mark the empty-VP examples as unacceptable; it makes no prediction about the other examples and so is consistent with instances of the other types being unacceptable for independent reasons.

### *Empty VP*

WL propose that these cases are unacceptable for the reasons below.

- (A) ‘The rightmost item of a VP deletion remainder functions ... as an anaphoric proform’ (711).
- (B) Anaphoric items cannot be accented.

Assumption (A) requires that these anaphoric proforms be properly distributed by syntactic rules, in particular that they lack following complement VPs; an analysis along these lines has been defended by Napoli (1985). What is important here is that there is a syntactic aspect in WL’s description of the empty-VP cases, just as in ZL’s, where the syntax must allow for empty VPs — in the terms of generalized phrase structure grammar (Gazdar et al. 1985), VPs with the feature [+NULL]. I do not intend to decide here between a syntactic analysis involving anaphoric auxiliaries and one involving empty VPs; both are compatible with a GPSG syntax.

Assumption (B), then, does the work of ZL’s quite specific constraint. But (B) is much too general, since it would rule out sentences like (11) and (12), not to mention (13), an example cited by WL themselves.

- (11) If you want help from Terry, you’ll have go see him; *he* won’t come to you.

- (12) Kim likes *herself* more than anyone else.
- (13) John kissed Frank and then Mary kissed *him*.

Actually, WL suggest a principle that is more specific than (B) and also works better:

- (B') Accent on an anaphoric proform ‘signals something like *look for a referent other than the conventional one for this proform*’ (708; italics in original).

Assumption (B') covers (13), but not (11) and (12), which, speaking intuitively, involve a different function of accent on anaphors, (implicit or explicit) contrast rather than frustration of conventional coreference. To be fully adequate, we need something like (B''):

- (B'') Accent on an anaphoric proform can signal that conventional coreference is frustrated (though it does not invariably do so).

But now we have lost our easy explanation for (1)–(3); no frustrated-coreference function can be assigned to the accented anaphoric proforms in them, as WL observe, but why can't they have a contrastive function, like the proforms in (11) and (12)?

The metatheoretical advantage of WL's proposal has disappeared. Whatever the right generalization is for WL, it appears to have to refer to the distinction between the anaphoric proforms in (1)–(3) and those in (11) and (12), just as ZL's constraint does. Indeed, the two proposals are no longer significantly different from one another.

#### *Leftward accent*

Examples like (4) require WL to formulate still another specific assumption about English accent placement. Accent in (4) has the function of contrasting the positive VP *to be* with the earlier negative VP *not to be chosen*. The accent cannot fall on *be*, by whatever the principle is that covers the empty-VP cases. (I accept here WL's implicit assumption that the accent in some sense ‘ought to’ fall at the right end of an accented constituent, thus on the anaphoric proform in the empty-VP cases.) ‘But the accent must go somewhere’ (708), WL assert, concluding from this that there is a principle shifting the accent leftward — sometimes, as in (4), onto a word that would not otherwise be eligible for accent itself.

WL's accent-shift principle must be quite specific, because in fact the accent DOESN'T have to go somewhere. English speakers could survive quite well if (4) were just as unacceptable as (3); the nonelliptical constructions in (5) and (14) would serve in its place. Also, the accent can

shift back only within a VP; in the gapping construction illustrated in (15) and (16) there is no place in the VP for the accent to shift to.

- (14) I wouldn't be upset not to be chosen. But on the other hand I wouldn't be upset to be *chosen*.
- (15) \*Robin told me not to talk, and Sandy, *to*.
- (16) \*Robin told me not to talk, and Sandy, *to*.

#### *Nonempty VP, finite V, VP trace, pro-V*

In most of the remaining cases, WL maintain that the material at issue is in fact 'the bearer of the new information content' (710) in its part of the utterance and so can be accented. Nonfinite auxiliary proforms, on the other hand, 'cannot, as auxiliaries, convey new information' (712). I find the sense in which WL's various examples can be said to convey or not convey new information extremely elusive. But nothing obliges WL to insist that conveying new information is the only function of accent (as I pointed out in the special case of accented anaphoric proforms above). Indeed, WL have no more obligation than ZL to provide a general characterization of the acceptable cases, so long as the unacceptable cases are distinguished from the rest.

#### 4. Grammatical and functional accounts

The ZL squib ends with a series of questions about *why* there should be a constraint specifically against accented nonfinite auxiliary proforms. At one level, I suggest, the answer to these particular questions is 'just because': a condition with this effect must be stipulated to be part of English grammar; nothing necessitates its existence. At another level, though, the question being asked is why it would make sense for the grammar of English to have a condition of this form, and an answer to this question might well follow along WL's lines: proforms are normally deaccented, because they normally convey given information; this tendency will be especially strong for auxiliaries as against main verbs, and for nonfinite forms as against finite ones, because in each case the former items have (*ceteris paribus*) less semantic content than the latter.

On this view, English has GRAMMATICIZED certain general tendencies in language, tendencies with a functional basis. Grammaticized tendencies are familiar enough; for instance, a tendency to avoid ambiguity can be grammaticized as language-peculiar constraints against certain instances

of ambiguity, and a tendency to avoid the repetition of identical syllables can be grammaticalized as language-particular constraints against certain instances of such repetition.

Note that I am not claiming that whenever we come across a constraint (whether it refers to accent and the distribution of new information, to ambiguity, to repetition, or whatever) we are observing a rule of grammar. Rather, grammaticalization has to be demonstrated, by showing that the pattern of data cannot be fully predicted from the relevant functional considerations. This is the sort of demonstration attempted implicitly by ZL, and more explicitly in my discussion above.<sup>7</sup>

Ungrammaticalized tendencies are in fact commonplace. For instance, WL refer to a 'lexical repetition constraint' (704–706, 710f), a tendency against an accented word repeating an earlier word, as in (17). Undoubtedly this dispreference contributes something to the unacceptability of empty-VP examples, but it can scarcely be the main effect, both because the dispreference is weak — (17) is a great deal better than (1)–(3) — and because most of the acceptable examples also have repeated words.

- (17) ?I don't have many clothes, but that suit I want to *have*.

### 5. The virtues of explicitness

It is actually not clear whether WL are proposing some sort of grammaticalized constraint or an extragrammatical principle. Their proposal is never made explicit; instead, they give a series of different formulations as they discuss different sets of examples.

At first they refer only to the given/new distinction, though without clarifying which of the many current senses of these terms they intend: 'the data ... can be explained in terms of more general principles of the semantics of given and new information' (703), and it 'can be subsumed under the general principle that "given" items are deaccented' (703).

But when they provide a formulation covering several sets of examples, they couch it in terms of anaphora rather than givenness: 'The crucial constraint on accent placement does not involve VP deletion: the relevant factors are (a) phonological repetition, (b) identity of sense, (c) sentence-final position' (706). The third factor — which I should point out is structural rather than pragmatic — comes into play in the discussion of some examples immediately preceding this formulation and has no role thereafter, and I will disregard it here. The first factor is the weak 'lexical repetition constraint' I mentioned in the previous section. The real work is done by the second factor, identity-of-sense anaphora. This is a special case of condition (B) in section 3, but the restriction to identity-of-sense

anaphors here is surely just a matter of exposition, since WL later frame another condition specifying that 'coreferential items receive accent [even — AMZ] less readily than items with identical sense' (712). That is, the relevant generalization is just condition (B).

Finally, the anaphora condition is altered in a small but significant way: 'An item cannot receive the accent if there is an antecedent that is coreferential with or identical in sense to it' (711). This formulation no longer covers personal pronouns whose referents are available only in the nonlinguistic context (*I can't stand him*, in a context where speaker and addressee are both looking at the referent of *him*) — though it should, since these are subject to deaccenting in the same way as pronouns with (linguistic) antecedents.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult indeed to tell what the predictions of WL's analysis are, since its terms are constantly shifting. I believe that when the details are filled in, their analysis is either inadequate or equivalent to ZL's. But it is hard to tell. Explicitness would be a great virtue here.

ZL's proposal, in contrast, is explicit, though three versions of it are now extant. In the original squib, it was formulated in transformational terms. At the beginning of this paper, I restated it so that it was compatible with a phrase structure syntax of the GPSG sort: the condition rules out accented nonfinite forms of auxiliaries when these are followed by an empty VP. Later I altered it to fit WL's and Napoli's analysis of VP deletion, while preserving compatibility with GPSG: the condition rules out accented nonfinite auxiliary proforms. Accent may be considered as distributed freely, subject to this condition and to others barring accent in specified configurations. The unacceptability or anomaly of accent patterns will otherwise follow from the meanings and pragmatic functions belonging to these accent patterns.

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#### Notes

1. This note was written at Stanford University in March, 1986. It draws on discussions I have had with Nancy Levin over the years, but the current formulation is mine alone. Correspondence address: Department of Linguistics, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, USA.
2. Under the heading of nonfinite forms fall, at least, infinitival *to*, infinitive *have*, infinitive *be*, present participle *being*, and past participle *been*; see ZL (635f) for further discussion. I follow Pullum (1982) in treating not only infinitive *have*, as in (2), and infinitive *be*, as in (3), as nonmodal auxiliaries, but also infinitival *to*, as in (1); in ZL the nonce term 'infinitoid' groups *to* along with the indubitable auxiliary verbs. In the transformational phrasing of ZL, an empty VP is 'a gap created by VPD[eletion]' (636).

3. In transformational terms (7) has a gap created by VP fronting rather than VP deletion. Examples of this sort are not discussed by ZL, who do cite gaps created by *wh* movement, topicalization, *though* inversion, and right node raising.
4. WL point out that examples like (8) are acceptable if the 'accent is a fall-rise with a large amount of pitch movement and if there is a second accent later in the sentence' (705). I agree with their judgments, but I do not believe that these data are relevant to the issue at hand. Surely English has several distinct accents, and an analysis appropriate for one will not necessarily carry over to another. WL themselves observe that one of the functions of the fall-rise accent involves 'projecting that more talk will follow' (705) (a fact that they use, correctly to my mind, to explain the unacceptability of this accent in sentence-final position); but the accents in (1)–(10) are not fall-rises and they do not have the discourse functions of fall-rises.
5. They also locate ZL's discussion within the history of generative attempts to predict stress patterns from syntactic structure, a tradition to which the ZL squib certainly does not belong.
6. But not Occam's razor, which is the one they cite (702). Occam's principle is one of ontological, not epistemological, parsimony. It exhorts us not to multiply entities beyond necessity but is silent on the question of how many assumptions we are allowed to make.
7. Admittedly, I take a special scholarly interest in grammaticalized phenomena and have investigated a number of them in moderate detail; for recent examples, see Zwicky (1982) on English, Zwicky and Pullum (1983) on Somali, and Zwicky (1985: sec. 3) on German. But I do not suppose that such cases constitute the entire linguistic universe.
8. Perhaps WL intended this version to apply only to anaphoric auxiliaries, since these do require a (linguistic) antecedent (though they are not the only anaphors that do). For discussion of the peculiar sort of identity required by these anaphors, see Hankamer and Sag (1976), Sag and Hankamer (1984), and the references therein.

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