

Licensing NPIs and Licensing Silence: *Have/Be Yet To* in English

Stephanie Harves (NYU) and Neil Myler (NYU)

The Puzzle: In this talk, we discuss the *have yet to* and *be yet to* constructions in English, exemplified in (1). As pointed out by Kelly (2008), these constructions pose a number of puzzles relative to their paraphrases in (2). These puzzles can be summarized as follows. (i) How is the NPI *yet* licensed in such structures? (ii) Why is (1a) interpreted like a *have* + *past participle* construction as in (2a), given that it contains an infinitive? (iii) In light of (ii), why is **John has yet eaten dinner* ungrammatical? (iv) What accounts for the apparent free alternation between *have* and *be* in (1)? Puzzle (iv) is striking against the background of proposals that *have* and *be* are derivationally related to each other (Freeze 1992, Kayne 1993, among others), which, given the obligatoriness of syntactic operations, would predict such free alternation to be impossible.

The Proposal: We propose that the constructions in (1) each involve a silent raising predicate which takes an infinitival clause as its complement. This silent predicate has negative implicative semantics. The NPI *yet* is merged inside this embedded clause, where it is licensed by the negative implicative predicate, and then raises into the specifier of the negative implicative predicate, rendering it silent. This dependency between the raising of an NPI and the silence of a negative element is reminiscent of the behavior of NPIs in Spanish and Catalan (Espinal 2000; Zagana 2002), as illustrated for Spanish in (3). We show that English speakers appear to vary as to whether the *have* in the *have yet to* construction acts as an auxiliary or a main verb (as diagnosed by the NICE tests for auxiliaries in (4)), and also that the silent predicate in *be yet to* sentences must be of a different category than that found in *have yet to* sentences, as shown by the availability of *though* movement (5). Our account for this is that the silent negative implicative predicate is of a different category in each case. In (4a), it is the past participle of *fail*, in (4b) the derived nominal form *failure*, and in *be yet to* sentences the adjectival passive participle of a negative implicative predicate which has no overt counterpart in English. The analysis for (1a) is illustrated in (6) (for a speaker who has auxiliary *have* in this construction).

Conclusions and Consequences: This analysis yields solutions to each of the puzzles enumerated above. The NPI *yet* is licensed straightforwardly by the negative implicative matrix predicate. Example (1a) is interpreted like the perfect construction because it is an instance of that construction with a silent past participle. The apparent free alternation between *have* and *be* turns out to be illusory: the category of the silent predicate can be shown to be different in each case in a way that is to be expected given independent c-selectional properties of *have* and *be* in English. A further consequence of this analysis is that there is no sentential negation in (1), as opposed to the paraphrases in (2). This is a desirable conclusion, as can be shown with reference to various tests for the presence of sentential negation standard since Klima (1964) (see 7). These constructions behave like affirmative rather than negative sentences in accepting negative rather than positive tag-questions (7a-b), in rejecting a continuation with *neither* as opposed to one with *so* (7c-d), and in rejecting continuations beginning with *not even* (7e). Our analysis thus additionally accounts for the ungrammaticality of **John has yet eaten dinner* (puzzle iii above) since we show that there is no silent negation present in the *have/be yet to* construction, and that the past participle *eaten* competes for the position of our silent participle *FAILED*.

- (1) a. John has yet to eat dinner.
b. John is yet to eat dinner.
- (2) a. John hasn't eaten dinner yet.
b. John didn't eat dinner yet.
- (3) a. ***(No)** vino **nadie**. (Spanish)
NEG came nobody
'Nobody came.'
- b. **Nadie** vino.
Nobody came
'Nobody came.'
- c. ***Nadie no** vino.
Nobody NEG came
'Nobody came.'
- (4) a. % Has John yet to eat dinner? (% indicates speaker variation)
b. % Does John have yet to eat dinner?
c. */?? John hasn't yet to eat dinner.
d. % John doesn't have yet to eat dinner.
e. % John has yet to eat dinner, and Bill has, too.
f. % John has yet to eat dinner, and Bill does, too.
g. John's yet to win the hearts of his classmates. (Ambiguous for *have/be yet to*)
h. I've yet to win the hearts of my classmates. (Unambiguous for *have/be yet to*)
- (5) Yet to score though he is/*has, Messi is still Barcelona's best player.
- (6) John has yet_i FAILED to eat dinner t_i.
- (7) a. *John has yet to eat dinner, *has he?*¹
b. John has yet to eat dinner, *hasn't he/doesn't he?*
c. ??/*John has yet to eat dinner, and *neither has Mary*.
d. John has yet to eat dinner, and *so has/does Mary*.
e. ??John has yet to eat dinner, *not even once*.

References

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¹ Note that this sentence is grammatical under a particular interpretation in some dialects of English, but with a reading that is different from a standard tag question interpretation. It means something like, "Aha! John has yet to eat dinner. Intriguing!" It does not have the interpretation, "John has yet to eat dinner, right?"