Linguistics 322

Interrogative Mood

There are two kinds of interrogative sentences. The first type are affirmation questions wherein the speaker is trying to get the addressee to assert whether or not a proposition underlying the interrogative sentence is true or false. The addressee may respond with a declarative sentence, a negative declarative sentence (he is asserting that the proposition is false), or he may respond with the answer that he does not know the truth value of the proposition. The second type are questions in which the speaker is seeking information about a given proposition. The addressee may respond with the information, refuse to give the information, or claim that the does not know the information., or he does not wish to divulge the information.

The normal or unmarked interrogative constructions in English in traditional terms is formed by fronting the auxiliary verb to a position before the subject or by inserting the dummy preposition DO and then fronting it:
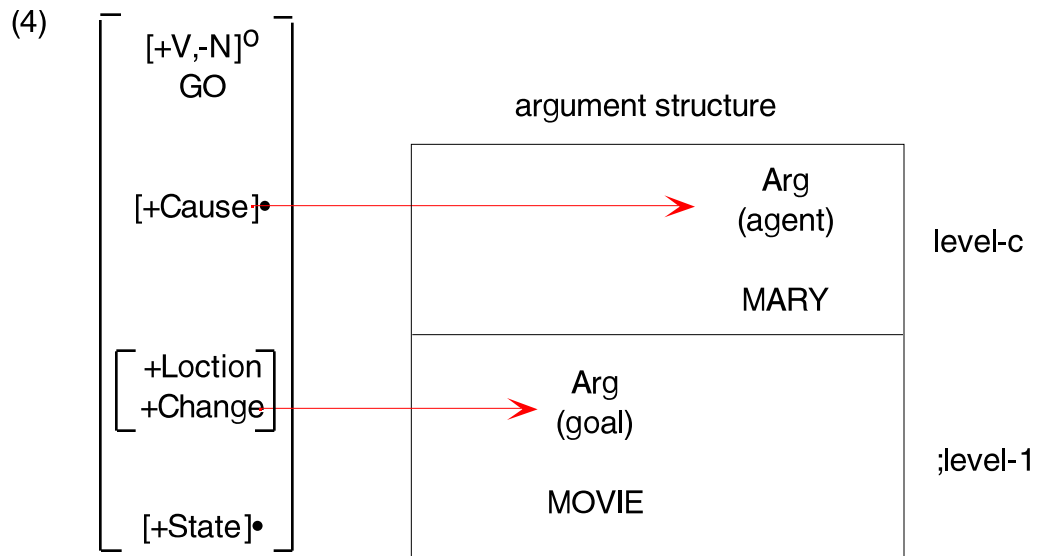
(1) a. Mary went to the movies.

  b. Did Mary go to the movies?

(2) a. Mary may go to the movies.

  b. May Mary go to the movies?

However, there is no explanatory value in such a statement. What prompts the movement? What is the landing site of the movement? Why is there a dummy verb inserted here? It is the aim of this course to provide some answers to these questions.

First, we claim that the interrogative is a mood. Interrogatives are not indicative as no realis statement is being made. The attempt to is determine whether the addressee views the underlying clause as being realis. That is, In (2b) The speaker is trying determine whether the clause *Mary went to the movies* is realis. If realis, the answer is (1b). If not the speaker would answer with a negative, or it he doesn't know, he states that:

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(3) a.   No, Mary didn't go to the movies.

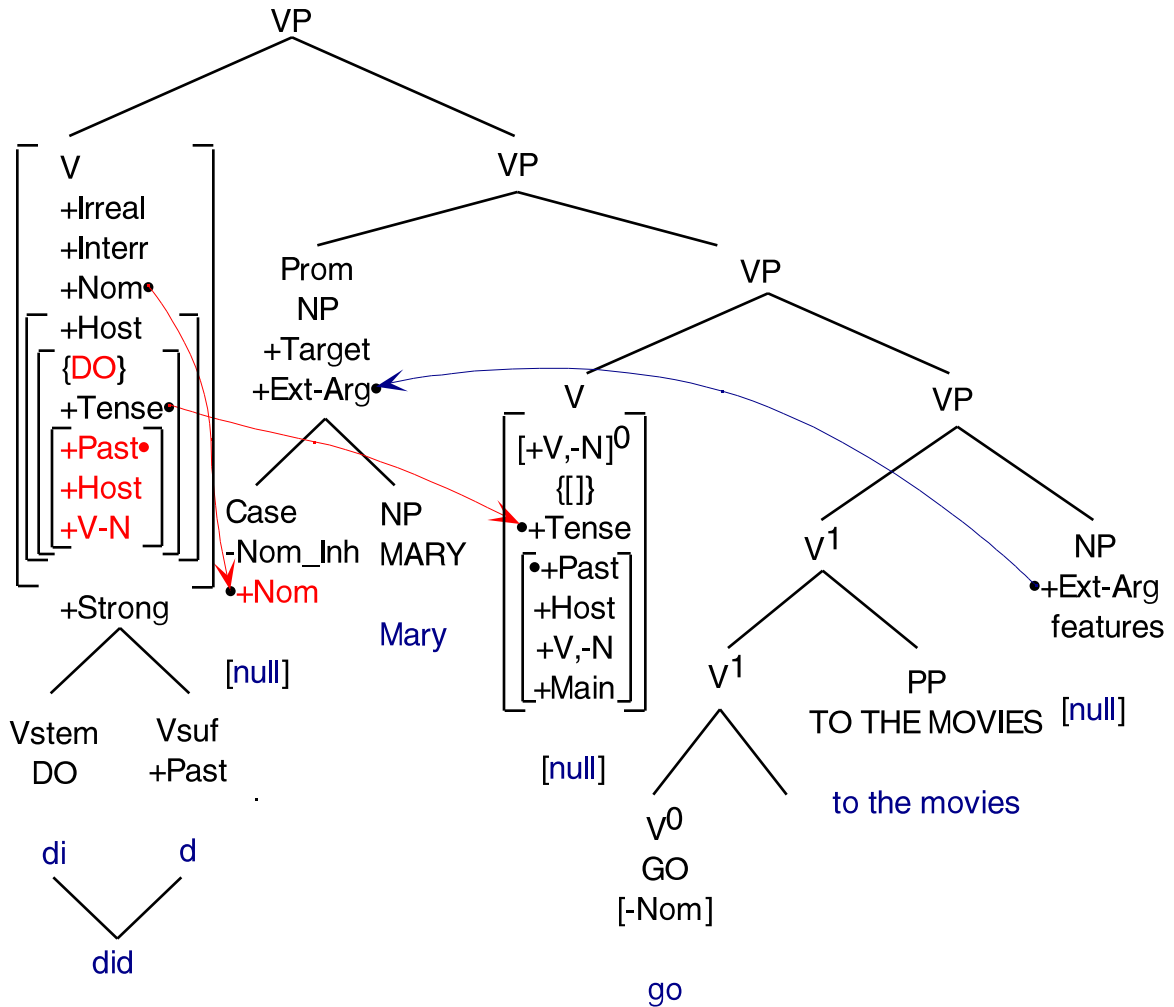   b.   I don't know whether she went to the movies or not.

The argument structure of the verb GO in (3a) is the following:

(4)

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
[+V,-N]^0 \\
\text{GO} \\
\\
[+Cause]\bullet \\
\\
\begin{bmatrix} +Loction \\ +Change \end{bmatrix} \\
\\
[+State]\bullet
\end{bmatrix}
$$

argument structure

Arg (agent) MARY	level-c
Arg (goal) MOVIE	;level-1

The theme associated with [+State] is incorporated into the verb; it is not shown here.

Argument structure (4) is projected up to the following structure for (1b); the irrelevant operators are omitted for the sake of brevity:

(5)

VP
├── V
│   +Irreal
│   +Interr
│   +Nom•
│   +Host
│   [{DO}
│   +Tense•
│   [+Past•
│   +Host
│   +V-N]]
│   +Strong
│   ├── Vstem
│   │   DO
│   │   di
│   └── Vsuf
│   +Past
│   d
│   did
└── VP
    ├── Prom
    │   NP
    │   +Target
    │   +Ext-Arg•
    │   ├── Case
    │   │   -Nom_Inh
    │   │   •+Nom
    │   │   [null]
    │   └── NP
    │   MARY
    │   Mary
    └── VP
        ├── V
        │   [+V,-N]⁰
        │   {[]}
        │   •+Tense
        │   [•+Past]
        │   +Host
        │   +V,-N
        │   +Main
        │   [null]
        └── VP
            ├── V¹
            │   ├── V¹
            │   │   └── V⁰
            │   │   GO
            │   │   [-Nom]
            │   │   go
            │   └── PP
            │   TO THE MOVIES
            │   to the movies
            └── NP
                •+Ext-Arg
                features
                [null]

The key feature is [+Strong]. It means that whichever end of the link that is so marked is where the link is spelled out. First, a link must be made to [+Tense], which in turn contains [±Past]. But [+Tense [+Past]] cannot be spelled out at the head, but must be spelled out at the tail. For [+Tense] to be spelled out at the head o the link, the features contained by [+Tense] must also be copied back. Copying the features back to the tail is tantamount to a h-link. This is not shown above to reduce clutter.
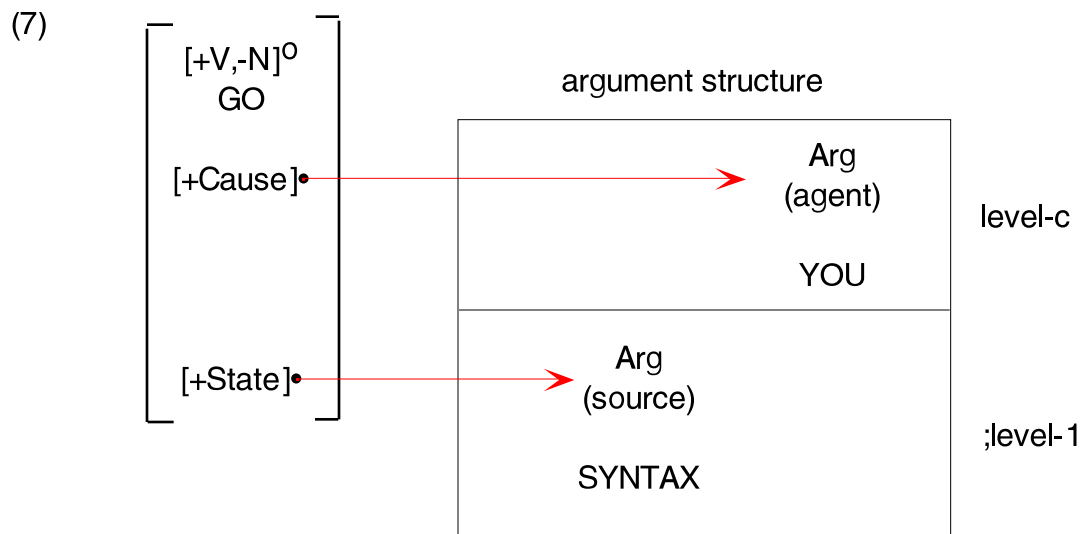
Tense needs a verbal form to be licensed. Note that [+Tense] governs [+Tense], not any of the other operators that determine either BE or HAVE. When [+Tense] is goverened, the dummy verb DO is selected and inserted. Note also that when [+Tense] is h-governed

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by a form containing [+Strong], the chain cannot be spelled out at the main verb, but at [+Strong], Hence, {DO} is inserted. In spell-out, DO+[+Past] is spelled out as "di - d", which by orthographic convention is merged into one written word: *did*.

Now let us consider an example with an auxiliary verb in the mood position:
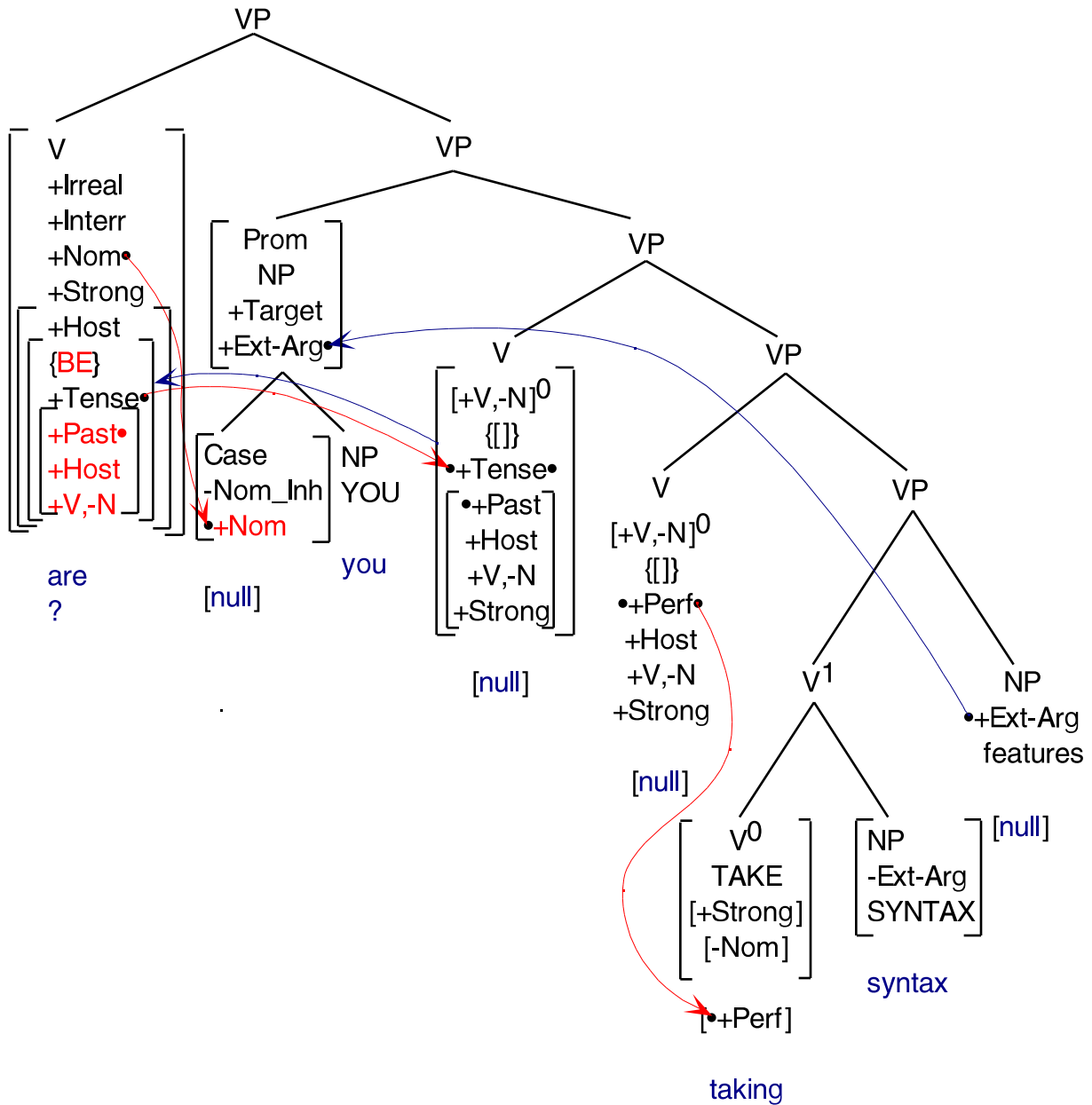
(6) Are you taking syntax?

The argument structure for (6) is the following:

(7)

$[+V,-N]^O$
GO

argument structure

[+Cause]•————————————————→ Arg
                                                     (agent)   level-c

                                                        YOU

[+State]•———————————→ Arg
                                            (source)   ;level-1

                                           SYNTAX

The structure in (7) is projected up to the following structure:

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(8)

Here, [+Tense] needs a host. Since it can't be adjoined to the main verb, marked now as [+Strong]. the dummy verb BE is inserted. And because [+Irreal] is marked to take a tense host, it is linked to [+Tense]. And since [+Interr] is marked [+Strong], it must be spelled out at the end of the tail, the strong end.; It is insufficient to say that the tense alone is spelled out at the strong tail. In order to spell out tense, the entire head containing [+Tense] must be copied to [+Tense] in the tail; the results are shown in red above under [+Tense]. Tense

still needs a verbal host. Since it cannot be adjoined to the main verb, a dummy verb must be inserted. [+Tense] in the tail govern the same in the head.

The third dummy verb BE is copied from the tense head of the link to the tail of the link when the tail [+Strong]. All the other features in the head of link are also copied to the tail of the link. This because the auxiliary verb BE needs those features in order to be properly spelled out. The person and number features adjoined to tense through agreement are also copied to the tail. BE+[-Past]+[+Pers]+[-1st] is spelled out as *are* according to the rules of the lexicon.

When [+Interr] occurs in an embedded clause, [+interr] is [-Host]; it does not require a host and it is spelled out either as *if* or *whether*:

(9)   a.   John asked Bill if he understands the Last Resort Principle.

          b.   John asked Bill whether he understands the Last Resort Principle.

Summary: DO-insertion is associated with [+Tense], either through government or through containment. If [+Interr] occurs in a matrix clause, it strong and needs a tensed host, If it i embedded is does not need a host, and it is spelled out as *if* or *whether*.

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