


(Fodor, Smith)

*Department of Linguistics*

*U-145*

*University of Connecticut*

*Storrs, Connecticut 06268*

---

*Linguistic Inquiry Volume 9 Number 1 (Winter, 1978) 66-74.*

**On the Nontransformational Derivation of Some Null VP Anaphors**

**Jorge Hankamer**

0. Hankamer and Sag (1976) argued that in general the rule of “VP Deletion”\(^1\) (or whatever rule produces the anaphoric clauses in the examples below) requires a syntactically present linguistic antecedent in surrounding discourse:

1. Bill won’t eat bananas, but John will.
2. Speaker A: Eat this banana.
   Speaker B: I won’t.
   Speaker B: I don’t want to.

We argued that in a case in which no linguistic antecedent is present in surrounding

\(^1\) I use the term “VP” as a convenient label for the material to the right of the first auxiliary verb in a clause in normal order (there are, of course, complications that I am ignoring here). I know of no very good reason to assume that this material forms a constituent. Sag (1976) offers some arguments to the effect that it does in fact not.
discourse, this particular type of null VP anaphora is generally ill-formed:

(3) Situation: at a cocktail party, bananas have been offered around in place of the salty things one usually gets, and every guest has silently declined (with a shake of the head, or simply by turning away).

Guest G, to hostess: *John will.

However, if the hostess had just complained that nobody would eat her bananas, the guest’s comment would be perfectly in place. We concluded that “VP Deletion” anaphors must receive their interpretation from a linguistic antecedent, and cannot in general receive it from nonlinguistic context.

This is in contrast to certain other anaphoric expressions, which may receive their interpretation from a linguistic antecedent, as in (4), or from the nonlinguistic context, as in (5):

(4) Guest F to Guest G, at the same party: I never thought I would eat a banana with a gin and tonic, but John did it, so I guess I can do it, too.

(5) Guest F to Guest G, seeing John peel and eat a banana with his gin and tonic: Well, John did it, so I guess I can do it too.

Schachter (1977) questions the correctness of the claimed generalization (i.e. that VP Deletion requires a linguistic antecedent), citing the following examples:

(6) (Miss Clairol advertisement:)
Does she or doesn’t she?—Only her hairdresser knows for sure.

(7) a. (John tries to kiss Mary. She says:)
John, you mustn’t.
b. (John pours another martini for Mary. She says:)
I really shouldn’t.
c. (The band starts playing, and several couples head for the dance floor. Pulling back his chair and half-rising, John says to Mary:)
Shall we?
d. (John hands Mary the expensive present he has bought for her. She says:)
Oh, John, you shouldn’t have.
e. (John comes to the table where Mary is sitting, makes as if to take one of the spare chairs there, and says:)
May I?
(Mary replies:)
Please do.

Schachter proposes a nontransformational analysis of null VP anaphora.2 His

2 Unless one accepts the claim of Hankamer and Sag (1976), that transformationally derived anaphors always require a linguistic antecedent, it is not clear how examples (6)–(7) could constitute an argument against the transformational derivation of null VP anaphors. No such argument is offered in Schachter (1977). Schachter refers to an earlier paper (Schachter (ms)) as providing such arguments, but does not cite the arguments.
proposal is that the anaphoric clauses in examples (1)–(7) are base-generated as is, by allowing auxiliaries to fail to take complements. Under this proposal there is never, at any stage, a structure of any kind to the right of the Aux in such anaphoric clauses.³

The claim is, then, that there is no syntactic difference between deep and surface anaphora, and that all anaphors are in principle equally open to pragmatic control. To account for the general difficulty, observed by Hankamer and Sag (1976), in finding null VP anaphors with pragmatic control (as opposed to the relative freedom with which ordinary pronouns, for example, accept pragmatic control), Schachter proposes that it is simply more difficult in general to find situations in which a VP anaphor is sufficiently recoverable, given only nonlinguistic context, to assure that an interpretation can be unambiguously assigned. When the situation is restricted enough, Schachter suggests, pragmatic control is possible even for null VP anaphors; examples (6) and (7) are offered as evidence of this.

1. Schachter’s examples are of two quite different kinds, and I will deal with them separately. In this section I will discuss example (6).

Schachter admits that this example might be “advertisingese”; and in so admitting, tacitly grants that there might be special rules for advertisingese, or rather that normal rules and constraints might be ignored or stretched or broken in advertisingese. I think it is quite clear that this is true, and that advertising language must be regarded as a kind of poetry: the ad-man is straining for special effects, and one way to get them is to play around with the language. Other examples of this are easy to collect; for instance, the ad-men’s invention of the word uncola for 7-Up. This violates the general rule that the prefix un- occurs only as a negator for adjectives, adverbs, and verbs; by ignoring this rule it draws attention to itself and becomes hard to forget, and this suits the ad-men’s purpose.

But it is clear that there is more to say about (6) than that it is “advertisingese”. The interesting part of (6) (Does she or doesn’t she?) illustrates another ad-man’s trick: turning a common expression, with a common meaning, into an advertising slogan with a quite different meaning, capitalizing on the currency of the common expression to help make the slogan stick in the victims’ minds. The common meaning of the expression in question, of course, is “Does she or doesn’t she screw?”⁴,⁵

So the problem of accounting for example (6) does not reduce to the problem of accounting for the vagaries of advertisingese (at least not that alone); it reduces to the general problem of accounting for elliptical forms of taboo expressions. There is some mysterious but widespread (not only in English but in other languages as well)

³ In particular, there are no “empty” structures in that position, as in interpretive analyses proposed by Jackendoff (1972) and Wasow (1972).
⁴ Schachter claims (personal communication) not to have been aware that this expression was in common use with this meaning.
⁵ This expression, to be sure, is obsolete nowadays—but the advertisement from which Schachter draws his example is several years old too.
convention that allows obscene or otherwise taboo expressions to be replaced by anaphoric expressions, without benefit of an overt antecedent.  

This is of course an interesting phenomenon, all the more interesting in that (6) (or rather the common expression on which (6) is based) shows that it can happen (though it usually doesn't) with surface anaphoric processes like VP Deletion, which generally require a linguistic antecedent.

But (6) is clearly not an example of what Schachter says it is an example of—namely, a freely occurring straightforward use of an anaphor legitimized by the high recoverability potential in the context of a hair-dye ad. If that were the case, we would have to expect the semantically equivalent (8) to serve just as well, but it does not.

(8) *(Hair-dye ad:)
    Does she?

The reason is obvious: *Does she?* does not exist independently as a common expression with a common (taboo) meaning, and consequently is not available for the play on words that yielded the occurring slogan.

2. Examples (7a–e) are more interesting. Sag and I were aware of (and acknowledged; cf. Hankamer and Sag (1976, 409, fn. 19)) the existence of such uses. Here are a few more examples:

(9) (Hankamer advances on Sag, brandishing cleaver:)
    Sag: Don’t! My God, please don’t!
    (From Hankamer and Sag (1976))

(10) (Mary has just discovered that John has used one of her best lace antimacas-sars to polish his electric train with:)
    John, how could you?

(11) (Hero, John Wayne or somebody, clamping grip on bad guy just about to commit some misdeed:)
    Oh no you don’t, fellas.

Sag and I noted that this class of cases, where null VP anaphors appear controlled by pragmatic context rather than some linguistic antecedent, are characterized in every case by some kind of marked illocutionary force. Note that none of Schachter’s examples ((6) having been set aside) has purely the force of a declarative statement. It is not clear what name to give the special quality of some of the examples, such as (7c,d), but it is clear that in none of these examples, nor in the additional ones I have provided, is the force of the sentence declarative.

In Hankamer and Sag (1976), we were careful to admit that our claim regarding the requirement of syntactic control for null VP anaphors could be established only for

---

6 Some of these have received some attention in the underground (and semiunderground) literature. Cf., for example, Peenemunde (ms).
declarative cases. We had no idea what to say about examples like (7) and (9)-(11), except that instances of null VP anaphora with pragmatic control appear to be limited to illocutionarily charged utterances. In fact it seems that we were more cautious than necessary, for not only is pragmatic control of null VP anaphors prohibited in statements, it is (so far as I have been able to determine) prohibited in normal questions too; that is, in questions the actual purpose of which is to elicit information. Pragmatic control appears to be possible only in modes other than those that are concerned in a straightforward way with the transmission of information. Thus we find it in exhortations, commands, pleas, warnings, exclamations of various kinds, and polite formulas. We do not find it in statements or in direct requests for information.

Schachter's claim is that there is no general restriction against pragmatic control of null VP anaphors, and that in situations such as those exhibited in (7), the high recoverability of the meaning of the anaphor is all that is required to legitimize its use. That this cannot be correct is easily shown, simply by replacing the anaphoric clause in each case with one that would have the same interpretation as in Schachter's example, but is a simple statement or information question rather than an illocutionarily charged expression. If it is simply the high recoverability of the meaning of the anaphor in the stated circumstance that makes pragmatic control possible in examples (7) and (9)-(11), then it should likewise be possible in the substitute examples. However, it is not, as can readily be observed:

(7) a'. (Situation as described in (7a):)
*John, you're the first man who ever has.

If the situation itself makes John's trying to kiss Mary sufficiently recoverable in (7a) to legitimize the use of the anaphoric expression, why is it not likewise sufficient in (7a')?

(7) b'. (Situation as described in (7b), i.e. have a second drink is supposedly highly recoverable:)
*John, are you aware that no one else has?

c'. (Situation as in (7c), where dance is highly recoverable:)
John, instead of asking Mary to dance, says:
*I certainly admire the way Sue does.

d'. (As in (7d):)
John, that's very nice. *My other boyfriends never do.

e'. (As in (7e):)
John: *Do you mind if I do?

It is clearly not the case that, as Schachter suggests, the only condition required for pragmatic control of a null VP anaphor is a sufficiently constrained situation for recoverability to be reasonably assured. With the situation held constant, it appears that pragmatic control is allowed with certain expressions whose force has not to do with the transmission of information in the usual, objective, sense, but rather constitutes some more marked illocutionary act.
REMARKS AND REPLIES

In fact, there seems to be a rather limited inventory of such expressions, and furthermore it appears that each one has some limitations on the range of interpretations it can receive. For example, consider Mary’s protestation in example (7d):

(7) d. John, you shouldn’t have.

I believe it is the case that this expression can be felicitously used without benefit of linguistic antecedent only in the stereotyped situation where John has just surprised Mary with some extravagant gift or performed some special service uncalled for by the normal rules of their interaction. If, for example, John has borrowed Mary’s hairbrush and used it to stir paint, (7d) would not be said. Instead, Mary would probably say something like (12):

(12) You shouldn’t have done that.

Similarly, the I really shouldn’t of example (7b) is used only in situations where the speaker is faced with the choice of performing or not performing an act that is at the same time pleasant and somehow (at least potentially) detrimental to some greater or more long-term good. If these conditions are not met, even though the situation may render the meaning just as recoverable as in example (7b), the use of the expression is strange:

(13) (John is about to absent-mindedly light the wrong end of a filter cigarette, and catches himself just in time. He might say:)  
a. I really shouldn’t do this.  
But he would not say:  
b. *I really shouldn’t.  

This restriction to particular kinds of semantic interpretation is not normal behavior for null VP anaphora, and suggests that these expressions require special treatment. I will advance a specific proposal in section 4.

3. In the previous section we have seen that Schachter’s proposal regarding recoverability is inadequate to account for the pragmatically controlled uses of null VP anaphors. Neither can the other half of his proposal, that VP anaphors are generally not found with pragmatic control just because most situations do not provide a sufficiently determining context, be correct.

One point that was painstakingly established in Hankamer and Sag (1976) was that there are differences in pragmatic controllability between VP Deletion (null VP) anaphora and do it anaphora. Such contrasts are illustrated in examples (3)–(4), (6a–b) of that article, and can readily be reproduced.  

7 If, however, John is fond of smoking his filter cigarettes backwards, because he likes the taste, but is aware that the fumes of burned filter are not good for his lungs, and he’s already had a pack and a half that day, he might well say (13b).

8 We also gave examples ((66a–b), (67a–b)) showing that VP Deletion resists pragmatic control in situations in which the anaphoric process that we call Null Complement Anaphora does not. The reader can easily verify that these are also counterexamples to Schachter’s thesis.
REMARKS AND REPLIES

(14) (Harry Houdini, before an audience of thousands, is attempting to escape from a locked safe dangling under a blimp. One spectator says to another:)
   a. Do you think he'll be able to do it?
      But not:
   b. *Do you think he'll be able to?

(15) (Houdini manages to effect his escape:)
   Spectator A to spectator B:
   a. He did it.
      But not:
   b. *He did.

In these examples, the two anaphoric processes clearly contrast in ability to take pragmatic control. But the situation is constant, and the interpretation that must be assigned to the anaphor is constant. How can it be claimed that the unacceptability of the (b) examples is due to insufficient situational recoverability, when the (a) examples are perfect under exactly the same circumstances?

Schachter attributes the existence of contrasts like those exhibited in (15) to the fact that do it requires an agentive subject, and is hence "more determinate" than the VP Deletion anaphor, which does not have this restriction. He suggests that it is no surprise that the less narrowly restricted VP Deletion anaphor would more often require syntactic aid in effecting recoverability.

I find this suggestion difficult to accept. In (15) it is hard to see how the extra bit of information provided by the agentiveness requirement could make a difference to the hearer's ability to figure out what is being referred to. And in (14) the subject of the VP Deletion anaphor is also necessarily agentive, by virtue of a requirement imposed by be able; yet the contrast remains.

Similarly, Schachter's proposal regarding the contrast observed in examples like (15) would lead us to expect no contrast among the following three sentences with regard to pragmatic controllability:

(16) a. He's trying to do it.
    b. He's trying to.
    c. He's trying.

Yet whereas both (16a) and (16c) are pragmatically controllable (e.g. in a context such as the one described in (14)), (16b) is not. Surely the subject of trying to is just as necessarily agentive, in any context, as that of try to do it.

It seems to be clear that a restriction to agentive subject is not sufficient to account for pragmatic controllability. On the other hand, it is clearly not necessary either, for there are many instances of pragmatically controlled sentential it without benefit of the agentive do. Examples of this were cited in Hankamer and Sag (1976), and can readily be reproduced:
(17) (Same context as (15):)
Spectator: I see it, but I don’t believe it.

Here the anaphor is less restricted than the null VP anaphor in (15b), yet pragmatic control is perfectly acceptable.

4. I believe it is clear that the requirement of syntactic control observed in Hankamer and Sag (1976) holds in general for null VP anaphora. The problem is to account for the special status of the uses illustrated in examples (7) and (9)–(11). Given the acceptability of these examples with pragmatic control, it is clear that either (a) the requirement of syntactic control is suspended for (certain) illocutionarily charged utterances, as suggested in Hankamer and Sag (1976); or (b) these sentences are not derived by a surface syntactic process. Schachter assumes the latter, and concludes that null VP anaphors in general can be regarded as deep anaphors.

This step can be rejected without further ado, as Schachter offers no counter to the well-known arguments (cf. Ross (1969), Grinder and Postal (1971), Hankamer and Sag (1976)) for a deletion analysis of null VP anaphors, which have been accepted universally, even by interpretivists such as Wasow (1972), as establishing that null VP anaphors cannot simply be derived by allowing the base to generate complementless auxiliaries.

Therefore, it seems to me that we are faced with a situation where there are good and inescapable reasons to believe that VP Deletion is a process of surface anaphora; where there is quite substantial evidence in favor of the theory that surface anaphors in general require syntactic control; but where a subset of the null VP anaphors can, in restricted situations and with restricted possibilities of interpretation, be used without syntactic control. The question is simply whether to regard these as cases of surface anaphora, like the rest of the null VP anaphors, and try to explain why the syntactic control requirement is suspended, or to regard them as cases of deep anaphora.

I propose to do the latter. In fact, for the pragmatically controllable cases (examples (7), (9)–(11), and similar ones), I suggest that Schachter’s proposal is exactly right: namely, they are derived basically, with no transformational history of any interest; and they are assigned interpretations according to the principles appropriate to deep anaphors. But I accept this analysis only for a limited number of fixed expressions: don’t, do, you wouldn’t, may I, shall we, you shouldn’t have, oh no you don’t, I shouldn’t, you mustn’t, and no doubt a few more. Furthermore, I propose that these expressions are not only base-derived, but also listed in the lexicon, together with some specification as to restrictions on their occurrence and interpretation. I believe the evidence heavily indicates that they are formulas, like How do you do?, and I propose to treat them as such. Incidentally, the expression Does she or doesn’t she? obviously has to be treated the same way.

The fact that these expressions look exactly like VP-Deletion outputs, of course, is no accident; a language that lacked VP Deletion would presumably lack such formulaic
expressions as well. This, however, is the general problem of idiomatic and formulaic expressions, which have forms that could be generated by the regular rules but must be listed anyway. Such forms have always been an embarrassment to any generative description; but they are certainly no more embarrassing in this particular case than in any other.

What I am suggesting, in effect, is that the expressions of (7) and (9)–(11) belong to a particular subclass of natural language processes, which is beyond the domain of normal operations like VP Deletion. If we recognize the devices of natural language as falling into two distinct domains, (a) the informational devices that effect the transmission of information, including declarative statements, information questions, instructions, and most commands; and (b) the expressive devices that are more or less direct signs of an internal state of the speaker, or else serve as conversational lubricators, signals of comprehension, sympathy, agreement, deference, etc.—then we can say that the null VP expressions that admit pragmatic control all fall into the latter class. I suggest that there are no productive devices in class (b), and that all such expressions must be lexically listed, with some account of their expressive force and appropriate circumstances of use. In the domain of informational expressions, there are such productive operations as VP Deletion, and in that domain it is subject to the general restriction on surface anaphoric processes, that it must have a linguistic antecedent.

References

Department of Linguistics
Science Center 223
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138