Alemannic Verb Doubling Is the Overt Realization of a Head Movement Chain

David Diem

1. Introduction

I argue for a new analysis of constructions in Alemannic[1], in which some verbs must co-occur with a truncated second instance (henceforth *doublet* (DBL)) when they have a verbal complement (1a-b).

(1) a. I gang *(ga) tanza
I go.1SG go.DBL dance
"I go dancing."

b. I wett *(ga) tanza (goo)
I want.1SG go.DBL dance (go.INF)
"I want to go dancing."

Due to these form simliarities, many authors use the term *verb doubling* to refer to constructions involving such a doublet (Hodler 1969, Lötscher 1993, Schönenberger & Penner 1995b, Salzmann 2013). Other similar phenomena in various languages have been termed verb doubling (Barbiers et al. (2008), for Standard German see also Fleischer (2008)), where usually the doubling is dependent on a topicalization operation. Alemannic verb doubling is different from the rest, though: Here, no topicalization is involved; rather, some verbs more generally co-occur with a truncated second instance of themselves. These verbs are "go", "come", "begin" and "let", as demonstrated in (2)-(5) below.

(2) i gang *(ga) tanza
I go.1SG go.DBL dance
"I go dancing."

(3) i chum *(cho) schaffe
I come.1SG come.DBL work
"I come (to) work."

(4) s fot a *(fo) rägne
it begins.3SG PTCL begin.DBL rain
"It starts to rain."

(5) la *(lo) si!
let.imp let.DBL be
"Let it be!"

As noticeable in the above examples, doublets systematically resemble other forms of the verb. Depending on the specific (sub)dialect of Alemannic, doublets are identical or similar in form to inflected and/or to infinitival forms (see (33)). In what follows I present an analysis of such verb doubling as the spell-out of multiple copies (traditionally: traces) of the main verb. Being based on syntactic identity of several positions, this approach is in contrast to the existing analyses in the literature, which explicitly reject such an account and instead treat the truncated element as a distinct element that does not stem from a shared derivational history with the V head (van Riemsdijk (2002: fn.22); Salzmann (2013: 86p)). The analysis presented here accounts also for data that has previously been seen as problematic for a doubling-style analysis. It has a benefit over previous ones in that it correctly predicts the distribution of the phenomenon, following naturally from independently motivated verb movement.

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[1] Often referred to as "Swiss German", which is a large subtype of Alemannic.

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The analysis has some consequences: First, it strongly suggests the head-initiality of the Alemannic verbal domain. Also, it substantiates a typological prediction of the copy theory of movement (Chomsky 1993), namely the overt realisation of more than one copy created by head-movement. This would be in contrast to copies created by *phrasal* movement (on which see Barbiers et al. (2008)).

2. Analysis

This section develops an analysis of Alemannic verb doubling that is based on the realization of more than one position in a head movement chain of the verb. Salzmann (2013: 6) and van Riemsdijk (2002: 160 fn. 22) are critical of this idea and raise the following counterarguments: The first one is based on the assumption that verbs in Verb-final configuration (that is, in all subordinate clauses) do not move away from V, and without movement there can be no doubling. The second one is the empirical problem of morphological mismatches between full verbs and truncated forms (my doublets), leading to the conclusion that syntactic identity would be stipulative. The remainder of this section shows that with movement to little v, the first problem can be solved. Section 3 then addresses mismatch doubling and, I argue, plausibly accounts for the problematic data.

2.1. Doubling verbs take vP complements

In a verb doubling construction like (1), the higher verb *gang* "go" doubles. It is inflected to carry finiteness and agreement morphology. The lower verb, *tanza* "dance", lacks this morphology, and is therefore usually called an *infinitive*. This term, however, covers a number of syntactic structures, which we need to narrow down: One structural diagnostic is its structural size, that is, whether the doubling verb's infinitival complement is a CP, TP, or merely a VP, or something in between. CP is ruled out by the ungrammaticality of a complementizer and the possibility of scrambling, and TP is ruled out by the ungrammaticality of independent tense (tested with a temporal adverb, "tomorrow") as well as the ungrammaticality of a subject remannt (the quantifier "all"), as shown in (6) below.

(6) Mer gond [a deam Projekt]$_{SCR}$ ga *dass *alli *morn t_{SCR} schaffa
We go.infl on that project go that all tomorrow work
"We'll go work on that project."

Objects of the lower verb may precede the doublet or follow it (7) (see also (19)). In both variants, contrasting interpretations of the implied subjects under "go" vs. "let" show that the lower verb's logical subject is controlled. Depending on the selecting doubling verb, it is subject-controlled (7) or object-controlled (8). Thus, the object in (8a) cannot have scrambled up from the domain of the lower verb as in (7b/7a), but is base-generated in the higher verb's domain, shown with the ungrammaticality of (8b).

(7) a. er$_i$ goot s neui Spil$_j$ ga PRO$_{i/*j}$ spila
he goes the new game$_j$ go.DBL PRO play
"He goes play the new game."

b. er$_i$ goot ga PRO$_{i/*j}$ s neui Spil$_j$ spila
he goes go { } the new game play
"He goes play the new game."

(8) a. er$_i$ lat d chind$_j$ la PRO$_{*i/j}$ spila
he lets the kids let { } play
"He lets the kids play."

b. *er$_i$ lat la PRO$_{i/j}$ d chind$_j$ spila
he lets let { } the kids play
"He lets the kids play."

I therefore suggest that doubling verbs take vP complements that have a PRO subject, as shown in (9a) for a matrix clause, corresponding to (7a). The embedded clause version is shown in (9b). [2]

(9) a. [CP er$_i$ goot$_k$ [TP t$_i$ t$_k$ s neui Spil$_j$ [V' [V ga$_k$] [vP PRO$_i$ t_j [v spila]]]]]]]

b. [CP dass [TP er$_i$ goot$_k$ s neui Spil$_j$ [V' [V ga$_k$] [vP PRO$_i$ t_j [v spila]]]]]]

2.2. Verb doubling is head doubling

One of the doubling verbs from (4) is *afo* "begin". It is a particle verb, "a+fo", which Wurmbrand (2000) analyzes as an idiomatic V' with the particle in the complement of V (10a). In anticipation of a headedness argument below, I analyze the particle as a specifier instead (10b).

(10) a. $[_{VP}\ [_{V'}\ [_{XP}$ a] $[_{V}$ fo]]] head-final view

b. $[_{VP}\ [_{XP}$ a] $[_{V'}\ [_{V}$ fo]] head-initial view

Independently of doubling, particle verbs separate in Verb-second configuration (11b)/(12), but are contiguous when in base-generated order (11a).

(11) a. as söt a=fo
it should on.PTCL=catch
"It should start."

b. as fot a
it catches on.PTCL
"It starts."

(12) $[_{CP}$ as $[_{C}$ fot] ... $[_{VP}$ a $[_{V}$ ~~fo~~]]]]

When involved in verb doubling, the split verb *afo* doubles the part *fo*, as shown in (13), which according to the analysis in (10b) is V (to the exclusion of its complement and specifier). This fact is strong evidence that Alemannic verb doubling is based on head-movement (not phrasal movement of any sort) and thus head-doubling of the verb, as suggested in (14).

(13) as fot a (*a=)fo schneje
it starts ptcl (*ptcl=)start snow
"It starts to snow."

(14) $[_{CP}$ as $[_{C}$ fot] ... $[_{vP}$ $[_{v}$ ~~fo~~] $[_{VP}$ a $[_{V}$ fo] schneje]]]

The particle always precedes the doublet (*fo a). This follows from the analysis in (14), but not from previous proposals in which the doublet is analyzed in higher positions such as FIN, MOD, or ASP.

2.3. Doublets as V copies in a head-initial VP

Across all the constructions that involve verb doubling, there is a common pattern: Doublets strictly precede their complement. As established in the previous section, I assume doublets to be heads, which allows for the conclusion that the phrase including the doublet is head-initial.

(15) The doublet can under no circumstances follow its complement.

a. [$_{XP}$ ga [schaffa]]

b. *schaffa ga

[2] The main clause is *Verb-second*, for which see Holmberg (2015).

In the current analysis, *XP* in (15) is of course *VP*. In contrast to Salzmann (2013), who also identifies doublet phrases as a VP, it is the *only* VP for me, blocking (in the V position) any other (e.g. full) form of the verb. In contrast, Salzmann analyzes it as an additional VP that exists next to the conventional VP that hosts the full verb, which, I argue, is not necessary. The analysis I suggest thus involves a deviation from what is commonly assumed for German dialects: I assume that Alemannic is underylingly head-initial, and not head-final. A fact that I argue needs to be better acknowledged regarding this controversy is the freedom of surface headedness in the Alemannic verbal domain: Verbal (and clausal) complements can usually both precede and follow their head, as shown in (16a-b) for a verbal complement of a modal, and in (16c-d) for a verbal complement of another verb.

(16) Surface headedness variation in Alemannic

a. dass i wett losa
that I want listen
"that I want to listen"

b. dass i losa wett
that I listen want
"that I want to listen"

c. dass i gang ga losa
that I go.infl go listen
"that I go listening"

d. dass i ga losa gang
that I go listen go.infl.
"that I go listening"

Sheehan et al. (2017) argue that universally, head-initial phrases cannot stand under head-final phrases of the same domain, calling it the Final-over-Final-condition (FOFC). This suggests that also TP is head-inital, since a head-final TP over a head-initial VP would constitute a FOFC violation. I show empirical support for this assumption in section (4.1). The proposed structure is shown in (17), where V moves either to v (in embedded clauses) or –via v and T– to C in Verb-second orders (i.e. matrix clauses). The original site, V, has its content spelled out, giving rise to doubling.

(17) a. $[_{CP}$ dass $[_{TP}$ I $[_{v}$ gang$_i$] $[_{V}$ t$_i$=ga] $[_{vP2}$ ... schaffa ...]]]

b. $[_{CP}$ I gang$_i$ $[_{TP}$ ... $[_{v}$ t$_i$] $[_{V}$ t$_i$=ga] $[_{vP2}$ ... schaffa ...]]]

The obvious question with a head-initial analysis of Alemannic is how linearly final T orders such as (16b,d) are derived. I suggest that in these, the matrix VP moves to a specifier of matrix vP (18).

(18) $[_{CP}$ dass $[_{TP}$ I $[_{vP}$ $[_{VP}$ $[_{V}$ t$_i$=ga] $[_{vP2}$ ... losa ...]] $[_{v}$ gang$_i$] [t$_{VP}$]]]]

(7a) and (7b) showed an ordering alternation of the embedded verb's object relative to the doublet. I argue that the doublet's position is fixed, and that it is the object that moves (19). Such free DP movement is usually termed *scrambling*.

(19) I$_j$ gang$_i$ $[_{TP}$ t$_j$ $[_{TP}$ s neui Spil$_k$ $_T$t$_i$ $[_{vP}$ t$_j$ $_v$t$_i$ $_V$t$_i$=ga $[_{vP2}$ t$_k$ $[_{v'2}$ spila t$_k$...]...]

Scrambling Case

3. Doubling without a realized doubling verb

Salzmann (2013: 86) mentions another problem that in his view makes a "spell-out analysis […] unattractive", referring to an analysis like the one put forward here, in which doublets are the result of spelled-out low copies (or traces). He argues that lexical mismatches between a doublet and its corresponding full verb cannot be explained without stipulation. There are, as I will show, two types of such doubling where there is no matching (i.e., morphologically related) full verb form, which I address in

turn: Section 3.1 demonstrates a potential solution for the type in which there is no full verb at all, but rather a modal, an auxiliary, or even a noun. Section 3.2 then shows a possible way to account for the other type of mismatch doubling, in which a doublet co-occurs with a morphologically distinct full verb.

3.1. Syntactic lack of a doubler: Infinitives and ellipsis

In the cases so far we have seen doublets co-occurring with full verb forms, and the analysis put foward here crucially relies on this. However, doublets may also occur with a modal (20), an auxiliary (22), or in a complement of a noun (21).

(20) I wett ga tanza
I want go dance
"I want to go dancing."

(21) Zitt zum ga tanza
time to go dance
"time to go dancing"

(22) I bia ga tanza
I AUX go dance
"I went dancing."

These constructions can be straightforwardly accommodated in the current analysis if we assume deletion of "go", which is independently possible in Alemannic and other German varieties, an observation attributed to Hoekstra (1997) in van Riemsdijk (2002: 159).

(23) a. Sie will hin (gehen).
she wants there.DIR
"She wants to go there."

b. Sie ist hin (gegangen).
she is there.DIR (gone).
"She went there."

The silenced "go" thus is the original element, of which doublets are traces/copies. Strong evidence for this view comes from the fact that the forms of "go" in (23) *can* be realized. Similarly, the Alemannic data in (20)-(21) *can* have their full forms of "go" realized, as demonstrated in (24)-(25).

(24) I wett ga tanza goo
I want go.DBL dance go
"I want to go dancing."

(25) Zitt zum ga tanza goo
time to go dance go
"time to go dancing"

While van Riemsdijk (2002) phrases this optionality of realiztion of "go" in terms of a "empty GO", I diagram this optionality below with the possibility of ellipsis, indicated by ε. The structures for (20)/(24) and (21)/(25) are given in (26) and (27) below.

(26) $[_{TP}$ I $[_{T}$ wett] $[_{vP}$ $[_{v}$ ε *goo*] $[_{VP}$ $[_{V}$ ga] tanza]]]

(27) $[_{NP}$ Ziit $[_{PP}$ zum $[_{vP}$ $[_{v}$ ε *goo*] $[_{VP}$ $[_{V}$ ga] tanza]]]

In the third problematic type, (22), a form of "go" is also missing. Under an auxiliary, such a form is expected to be a participle ("gone") rather than an infinitive ("go"). Like with the optional infinitives just seen, the participle here, too, is optional, as demonstrated in (28) (cf. (23b)) below:

(28) I bia ga tanza (ggange)
I am.AUX go.DBL dance (gone)
"I went dancing."

I suggest here the same mechanism as in (26)/(27), but preceded (or accompanied) by what is called Infinitivus-pro-participio (IPP, "infinitive for a participle", also called *Ersatzinfinitiv*). IPP as a phenomenon is independently attested in Standard German (among other languages), as shown in (29). Here, "can" has infinitive morphology when it takes a verbal complement, even though it is, standing under a auxiliary, expected to have participle morphology.

(29) ich habe [es gekonnt/*können] / [gehen können/*gekonnt]
I have.AUX [it can.PTCP/*can.INF] / [go.INF can.INF/*can.PTCP]
"I could do it." / "I could go."

In (28), then, the participle "ggange" is substituted by (or born as) what is morphologically an infinitive ("goo"). From there on, the mechanism is identical to the one in (26)/(27) above and shown in (30): Deletion of the motion verb yields a string including only a doublet, but not its original full verb.

(30) $[_{TP}$ I $[_{T}$ bia] $[_{vP}$ $[_{v}$ $\epsilon_{goo.IPP}$] $[_{VP}$ $[_{V}$ ga] tanza]]]

3.2. Semantic lack of a doubler: The realization of subcomponents

Turning to the second of two types of mismatch doubling, we now look at cases in which there is a semantic (and morphological) mismatch between a doublet and the doubling verb. Some semantically richer motion verbs than "go" (e.g. "run"), for example, also require the "go" doublet, shown in (31):

(31) a. Alls ischt … gsecklet gi si anderscht aalegge *[Brändle et al. (2023)]*
all is.AUX ran go.DBL itself differently dress
"Everyone ran to change clothes."

b. Ich chan … nöd go aperöle cho *[Stark et al. (2009-2014: 447)]*
I can not go.DBL have-apero come
"I can't come to have aperitif."

The doublet is plausibly a semantically impoverished form of what it doubles, as with many doubling phenomena (Barbiers et al. 2008). In a study of German Verb-second, Bayer & Freitag (2020) argue (on the basis of Negative Polarity Item licencing, among other things) that while inflection is interpreted in the high position (C), the lexical part of a verb is interpreted in its original position (V). I take such observations as evidence that syntax operates not on finished words, but rather on abstract features that get replaced by actual words at a later point. One implementation of such an architecture is Distributed Morphology (DM) (Halle & Marantz 1993). A DM account of verb doubling can allow cases of lexical mismatch such as in (31): Assuming that a verb like "run", as in (31a), is semantically composed of at least the meaning of "motion" and the meaning of manner ("fast"), the doublet ("go", bearing only "motion" but not the manner meaning) would fit as an *underspecified* vocabulary item, and similarly for the verb "come" in (31b).

4. Determining which copies are spelled-out

Consider again the doubling constructions in (32), where in (a) a finite verb is doubled, and in (b) a non-finite verb is doubled, exemplified specifically for the Alemannic (sub)dialect of Dornbirn/Austria.

(32) a. ar gɑːt ga schaffa
he goes go.DBL work
"He goes (to) work."

b. ar wett ga schaffa (gɑː)
he wants go.DBL work (go.INF)
"He wants to go (to) work."

I implement the current analysis using Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993), which posits that syntactic nodes are filled with their morpho-phonological content only after the syntactic processes. The insertion goes according to language-specific rules, called Vocabulary Insertion (VI) rules.

The VI rules in (33) describe the forms of the verb (including the doublet), as given in (32). This is a first suggestion, and I leave it to future work to further specify the doublet rule in (b) to apply only in the syntactic contexts verb doubling actually occurs (that is: iff adjacent to a vP).

(33) VI rules for verbs and doublets in Alemannic:

a. [+Verb, −fin] ↔ -V

b. [+Verb] ↔ ø

c. [+Verb, +fin, 3sg] ↔ -Vt

In a copy-and-delete approach to movement (Chomsky 1993), syntactic elements that are to be moved are actually merged again at a higher position ("copy"). This concept of movement thus leaves full copies in lower positions, rather than traces. Under this view, it is not surprising that lower copies can be spelled-out, thus giving rise to *doubling*. It is the language-specific variation, implemented above in terms of VI rules, that makes a language double its verbs or not.

4.1. Tripling as deviant doubling

In constructions such as (34a) (cf. Stark et al. (2009-2014: 4030)) there is more than one doublet. Assuming that the full verb, a participle, is elided in the sense of (30), I call these *verb tripling*. Two doublets cannot be linearly adjacent (34b). A possible explanation for this is that doublets are clitics, and, following a cross-linguistic tendency, can therefore not stand in direct adjacency.

(34) a. ?i gang ga [de vattr]$_i$ ga t_i bsuacha
I go.1SG go.DBL the dad go.DBL see
"I go see dad."

b. *i gang {de vattr} ga ga {de vattr} bsuacha

One group of Alemannic (sub)dialects in Switzerland is the exception, as (35) shows. Here, it seems that two doublets can grammatically stand next to each other. In fact, two clitics seem to form one word, usually with a schwa in the second syllable, which can be understood as the result of further weakening a doublet's phonology upon incorporation with another doublet.

(35) mer gönd ebe vilicht goge tschüütele *[Stark et al. (2009-2014: 3043)]*
we go so maybe go.DBL=go.DBL play-soccer
"We will maybe go to play soccer."

Tripling of the type shown in (34a) is predicted to be possible in all dialects. Its acceptability is degraded, as reflected by the very low number of such constructions in the available datasets (Brändle et al. 2023, Stark et al. 2009-2014). Two sorts of explanation for data such as (34a) are conceivable: One view is that it is in principle possible for intermediate copies to be spelled-out. Given this is possible for the lowest copy *and* the highest copy in the present account, arguably also intermediate copies can be realized under the right circumstances. Therefore, if V goes all the way to C, there are enough positions for *three* realized doublets (verb quadrupling), namely in V, v, and T. The other explanation is that *verb tripling* is a performance error.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that head movement of V in Alemannic can result in "doublets", since these elements are realizations of copies formed by the verb's head movement. Existing research has unanimously rejected a productive doubling analysis, while some assume doubling to have been productive at earlier stages (Hodler 1969, Lötscher 1993, Schönenberger & Penner 1995, van Riemsdijk 2002, Brandner 2006, Salzmann & Brandner 2011, Salzmann 2013). The suggested analysis, although breaking with the orthodox view of all German dialects being head-final, I argue, is a good pricipled explanation of the phenomenon. Theoretically, verb doubling as analyzed here is one of the predictions the copy theory of movement makes: That head-movement, under some circumstances, can lead to the occurrence of several heads in a sentence.

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