CHAPTER 2

AUXILIARY VERBS IN \( \bar{X} \)-THEORY

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will examine basic constructions involving perfective have and progressive be, such as those in (1)–(2), with respect to the phrase structure of the verbal predicate(s) of IP:

(1) John has read that book.
(2) John is reading that book.

Instances of have and be followed by participial forms of V may be distinguished from main verbs in that they lack independent argument structure. In (1) for example, the verb read subcategorizes for the object NP that book, and VP assigns an external role to the subject John. Aspectual have and be neither subcategorize independent objects nor affect the thematic role of the subject of the clause.

Given the dependence of these verbs on the argument structure of the main verb, the question arises as to whether aspectual have and be should be treated as independent predicate phrases (i.e., contained in independent VPs) at all. The alternative would be a structure like (3), where have is a specifier of the following verb:

(3) \([vP \: \text{have} \: [v \: \text{read} \: \text{that book}]\]

This question reflects a long-standing controversy as to the internal structure of English VP. Within the framework adopted in this study, the analysis is restricted by \( \bar{X} \)-Theory to either a structure such as (3) or that in (4), in which the relation between the auxiliary and the following verb is a head-complement relation:

(4) \([vP \: \ldots \text{have} \: \ldots [vP \: \ldots \text{read} \: \ldots]]\]

It will be argued that the structure for sequences of auxiliary + verb is as in (4). In Section 2, I will summarize major points of the analysis of Akmajian, Steele and Wasow (1979), which is perhaps the most detailed generative analysis of the English auxiliary system. They analyze auxiliary verbs as specifiers of the main verb, arguing that the structure of VP includes intermediate levels of structure which dominate auxiliaries. In Section 3 I argue that auxiliaries must be contained in independent phrases, based on the distribution and interpretation of certain adverbials in clauses containing sequences of auxiliaries. In Section 4, I show that the

K. Zagona, Verb Phrase Syntax
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layered VP analysis cannot naturally represent the structural relationships between auxiliaries and these adverbial elements. In Section 5, I present evidence that auxiliaries are restricted to occurring in clauses with appropriate tense specifications. I will show that this generalization provides evidence for the structure in (4), and undermines one of the major arguments for the layered VP.

2. ARGUMENTS FOR VP WITH AUXILIARIES AS SPECIFIERS

Akmajian, Steele and Wasow (1979) (henceforth ASW) argue for VP which is structured as in (5):

\[
(5) \quad y_3 \sim (\text{have-en}) y_2 \sim (\text{be-ing}) y_1 \sim (\text{be-en}) V
\]

ASW give three major kinds of evidence for the structure in (5). These are based on: (a) the internal ordering of auxiliaries, (b) the fact that rules of grammar appear to make reference to distinct levels, and (c) that subcategorization frames in the lexicon make reference to distinct levels.

The argument concerning the internal ordering of auxiliaries involves contrasts such as the following:

(6) a. John has been sleeping for a long time.

b. *John is having slept for a long time.

Their claim is that in order for the grammar to generate only the correct sequences of auxiliaries, the lexicon must specify that perfective have may be inserted only under \(V^3\), and progressive be only under \(V^2\). Earlier analyses of VP structure, such as Chomsky (1957) and Jackendoff (1977), derived this order by permitting phrase structure rules to specify certain grammatical formatives as terminal symbols, with order of the formatives stipulated by the rules themselves. Jackendoff (1977) generates both have and be as formatives at the \(\overline{V}\) level:

\[
(7) \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{\overline{V}} \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{V}
\]

\[
\overline{V} \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{V} \quad \overline{V}
\]