

Lexical Sharing in LFG meets Usage-based Linguistics: on English tensed auxiliary contraction

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At first sight, formal theories of grammar like LFG and usage-based grammar appear completely opposed in their fundamental assumptions (Diessel 2007). If grammatical structures emerge from language use and are constantly changing through psychological processing, as usage-based grammar claims, how can they be formalized as a closed and stable system like LFG, independent of use? As one step toward answering this question, I will argue that Wescoat's (2002, 2005) theory of lexical sharing provides insights into how we might combine major findings from formal and usage-based lines of research on tensed auxiliary contraction in English^{1,2} to explain their puzzling properties:

1. tensed auxiliary contraction is bidirectionally prosodified, showing segmental phonological dependence on its host in the left context, like an enclitic, and metrical dependence on its adjacent syntactic phrase in the right context, like a proclitic;

¹Formal research on English auxiliary contraction includes syntactic, morphological and phonological analyses by Labov 1969, 1972; King 1970; Lakov 1970; Zwicky 1970; Baker 1971; Bresnan 1978[1971]; Kaisse 1979, 1983, 1985; Zwicky & Pullum 1983; Selkirk 1984, 1996; Klavens 1985; Inkelas 1989; Inkelas & Zec 1993; Wilder 1997; Sadler 1997; Barron 1998; Bender & Sag 2001; Close 2004; Wescoat 2005; Anderson 2008; MacKenzie 2012; Anttila 2013, 2014).

²Usage-based research on English auxiliary contraction includes corpus studies of the frequencies of actual uses of contraction by groups of speakers and employs quantitative methods such as statistical modeling of corpus and interview data (e.g. Labov 1969, 1972; McElhinny 1993, Bybee & Thompson 1997; Bybee & Sheibmann 1999; Bybee 2001; Krug 1998; Barth 2011; Frank & Jaeger 2008; MacKenzie 2012; Bresnan & Spencer 2013; Spencer 2015; Barth & Kapatsinski 2015).

2. 'restricted' auxiliary contraction, which shows irregular morphophonology supporting a lexical analysis fusing the host and auxiliary, shares both grammatical and information-theoretic properties of 'unrestricted' (syntactically productive, not to say promiscuous) auxiliary contraction;
3. the boundary between restricted and unrestricted auxiliary contraction is eroded.