

Abstract: Go look at the modern language to test hypotheses about the past
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The modern English Quasi-Serial Verb construction (QSV: *Go get some wine*; see Pullum 1990, citing much earlier literature) shows a cluster of properties that seem quite extraordinary, taken together: (1) the Inflection Condition, which requires that both verbs be in a form identical to the base form (either the base form itself, or the present non-3rd-sg form, as in *I go get some wine whenever I can*, vs. **She goes get(s) some wine...*); (2) the Intervention Condition, which disallows a dependent of the first verb between the two verbs (**Go out get some wine*); (3) a strong preference for face-to-face conversation (so that searching the standard corpora nets very few examples); and (4) a newly discovered statistical asymmetry (observed by searching a database of film scripts), involving a very strong preference (when QSV examples are compared to all relevant occurrences of *go* and *come*) for base forms over unmarked presents and, within the base forms, for the imperative over all other uses (with modals, with infinitival *to*, and in all other contexts).

Though it's usually supposed that QSV is derived (historically, if not synchronically) from the GO AND GET construction (*Go and get some wine*) by reduction, this hendiadys construction is not subject to either the Inflection Condition or the Intervention Condition (*I went out and got some wine*), and preliminary analysis suggests that it shows neither of the contextual preferences to anything like the same degree as QSV. Given this historical story, the present state of the language is mysterious.

We propose an alternative story, in which (sentence-initial) hortatory *go* and *come* with imperatives (*Go, get some wine! Come, see how it's grown!*) were reanalyzed as forming prosodic, syntactic, and semantic units with them; the resulting construction was then extended from the imperative to other uses of the base form, and then to homophonous finite forms (thus yielding the Inflection Condition). The preference for face-to-face conversation follows directly from the pragmatics of hortatory *go/come*. The Intervention Constraint follows from the fact that these hortatory elements, like other specialized introductory verbal elements (*look, listen, see, say*), are single words.

Finally, the modern statistical asymmetries mirror the historical development, though this stretched over hundreds of years. Insofar as the statistical distribution of a construction across its contexts tends to be maintained from generation to generation, the mirroring of diachronic sequence in synchronic frequencies is just what we should expect.

There are numerous puzzles and difficulties in tracing the history of QSV and GO AND GET from the textual evidence. But plausible inferences can still be made, entirely on the basis of oddities in modern English.