Forms, constructions, and total syncretism: The case of \textit{useta}
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Syntax, morphology

A rule of thumb says not to distinguish inflectional categories unless there is some
distinction in their phonological realizations. This rule tells us to treat the “present subjunctive”
of English (\textit{I insist they be expelled}) as just another use of Fo:U (“base form”) verbs, though in a
Finite:+ syntactic construction.

We distinguish strictly between (syntactic) properties of constructions (Finite:+), and
morphological properties of individual words (Fo:U, the “nonfinite form” property Fi:A, the
“finite form” Fi:B). These properties are often intimately related – Finite:+ clauses usually have
Fi:B heads – but they can diverge.

A rule of thumb, however, is just that. If the grammar of a language needs to distinguish
two fully homophonous sets of word occurrences, then so be it. We argue that a grammar of
English should distinguish Fo:U from a totally syncretic Fo:X. There are at least three relevant
phenomena; here we discuss one, the distribution of the defective verb \textit{used} (hereafter
\textit{useta}) and of supportive \textit{do} (\textit{do}s), relying on well-known facts.

\textit{Useta} looks like a Fi:B-only item, like the modals; it apparently has no Fi:A occurrences,
in particular, none in Fo:U (used with modals and infinitival \textit{to}), but occurs only in the Fi:B
“past tense”. Yet, paradoxically, it occurs with \textit{do}s, which is customarily described as requiring
a Fo:U complement: \textit{Did you useta live in L.A.? I didn’t useta like sushi}. So the inflectional
form \textit{useta} seems to have both Fi:B and Fi:A properties.

We propose that A (non-B) and B (non-A) don’t exhaust the finiteness types, and posit a
third type: AB, both Fi:A and Fi:B, and embracing a new inflectional form Fo:X.

\textit{Useta} is then intrinsically Fo:X (type AB) (while the modals are intrinsically Fi:B only);
normal verbs have both Fo:U (type A) and Fo:X (type AB) versions, but they’re identical (since
except by stipulation, all forms are phonologically identical to Fo:U). Modals and infinitival \textit{to}
require Fo:U complements, so \textit{useta} is out there. And \textit{do}s requires Fo:X (type AB), so that
Fo:U-only verbs, like \textit{beware}, cannot occur in its complements (\textit{Must/*Do I beware of the
flying pigs? No!}), while \textit{useta} is allowed there.

Next, since normal Finite:+ clauses have Fi:B head verbs, \textit{useta} (both Fi:A and Fi:B)
can occur there too.

Then, if we say that \textit{do} requires Fo:X, and that \textit{be} (unlike most verbs) has no type AB
form, only type A and type B forms, we get an account of the well-known failure of \textit{be} to occur
in complements of \textit{do} (*\textit{Do I be nasty to the kids}?). (This is stipulative, but no more so than
other accounts.)
To summarize: Most verbs have forms of all three types, with Fo:X identical to Fo:U. Finite:+ clauses normally have Fi:B heads; modals and infinitival to govern Fo:U; but DO₃ governs Fo:X. The rest of the story follows entirely from the morphological defectivity of particular verbs: USETA has only a Fo:X, Tense:Pst form; modals have only type B forms; and BE has no type AB form.