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On the Syntax of the *can't seem* construction in English

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Hilda Koopman

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1 Introduction

This paper focusses on the syntax of the intriguing *can't seem* construction in English, as ~~in~~ previously discussed in e.g.Langendoen (1970), Jacobson (2006), and Homer (2012). This construction shows a syntax semantics mismatch, raising the question how to resolve it. I will show, expanding on Koopman (2017b), that this problem calls for a syntactic solution: there is strong and unambiguous evidence that the linear order has to be derived in the syntax from a merge order where *seem* is merged higher than *not can V*, and the question is how the syntax can deliver this. The paper motivates the (independently motivated) steps in the bottom up derivation, with insights into the derivation coming from the syntax of the West Germanic OV languages. The properties of the construction and the restrictions reduce to structure building Merge (E- and I- merge), with I-merge driven by independently motivated properties of the syntactic atoms that enter into the derivation, in conjunction with general principles like Attract Closest, and the Extension condition.

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Remnant movements play a role in "smuggling" around interveners, pied-piping will be shown to be central ingredients in the derivation, a strong intervention effect of experiencers in the construction will be shown to reduce to Merge. Finally, I show how the proposed derivation for English provides insights into a syntactic solution of a well-known syntax phonology mismatch in German where, in certain contexts, the infinitival marker *zu* appears to appear on the "wrong" verb. It is precisely because this construction is so restricted, that it provides a valuable testing ground for the type of syntax we should pursue: The proposed analysis thus will be shown to provide valuable information on the architecture of UG, and the specifications of the syntactic component.

1.1 The problem

Sentences with *can't seem* show a number of intriguing properties, as shown in Langendoen (1970).

(1) I can't seem to get away from verbal complexes

a. *Paraphrasable as*: It seems that I can't get away from verbal complexes

b. *Not as*: # It can't seem that I get away from verbal complexes.

They appear to show a particular type of mismatch between the syntax and the semantics.

As the paraphrases of (1) show, *seem* appears to take scope over *can't* in (1), not under it. This is unexpected if the syntactic structure of (1) is as simple as it looks. Anyone with minimal syntax training will conclude that the syntactic hierarchy is *n't* > can > seem > <NP> to VP, with raising to subject from the infinitival complement of *seem*, and that's all there is to the syntax. This in fact turns out to be incorrect, as I will show below.

The *can't seem to* construction has a number of properties. It is restricted to the ('ability') modal *can*, and subject raising *seem*, but curiously is not possible with the near synonym *appear*. It is not restricted to *n't*, but in fact is found with a large number of downward entailing expressions (henceforth referred to DE). This is a diverse list. As shown in the following examples from Homer

(2012, ex.8), it includes a variety of subjects (negative indefinite subjects like *noone*; *few*, *at most N*, *only DP*; as well as adverbs like *not, never, rarely*).[1]

(2) a. noone can seem to forget about the vote

b. Few can seem to fathom how he could be so popular. (Jacobson, 2006, ex. 9)

c. At most five people can seem to understand this.

d. Only John can seem to stomach watching reruns of the 6th game of the 1986 Series. (Jacobson, 2006, ex. 10)

e. John can never seem to speak in full sentences. (Jacobson, 2006, ex. 7)

f. I just bought this lens, and I can rarely seem to get a clear picture.

It also possible with "verum" focus, i.e. in a context where you want to deny the truth of the assertion ((Langendoen, 1970, fnt 5)).

(3) *Context:...I think you can't seem to get work done on the bus..*

That's not true. I cán seem to get work done on the bus.

Following Homer (2012), I present this scope puzzle as follows, with DE referring to a downward entailment expression, and CAN to an abstract (ability) modal.

(4) a. Surface order (ignoring V-to-T movement):

DE . . . can . . . seem

b. Scopal relations: SEEM> DE > CAN

[1]But, as Jacobson (2006, ex.14, 15) shows, not the full set of DE environments licenses the construction.

(i) a. ?*Everyone who can/could seem to fix my closet is already busy with other jobs.
b. ?*If Joe can seem to fix my closet, I'll hire him.

The relation between the surface structure in (1) and its interpretation is an issue of the division of labor between the syntactic and interpretative component, and not surprisingly, all possible points of view are represented in the existing literature.

In early generative work, Langendoen (1970) argued for a syntactic transformation with abstract NEG + ABLE raising from below *seem* in subject raising environments. In this account, there is no scope reversal: the linear order in (1) is derived from an underlying syntactic merge structure (i.e. D-structure) that encodes the scope, as in (4b). While such a construction-specific rule is no longer available in current theories, there is strong empirical evidence (already presented in Langendoen (1970)), that this must be correct. My analysis in essence explores if and how exactly a syntactic derivation can be motivated from independently motivated assumptions within current syntactic frameworks.

Both Jacobson (2006) and Homer (2012) take it for granted that the linear order in (1) derives from a syntactic hierarchy of E_{DE} > CAN > SEEM, with the subject raising from the infinitival complement.[2]

(5) [John$_i$ [can$_k$ [N'T [<can>$_k$ [seem [to [<John>$_i$ run fast]]]]]]]

Given the syntactic structure in (5), it follows that the scope must be derived from this structure either by direct semantic composition (Jacobson, 2006), or by some other means (Homer, 2012).

Jacobson (2006) denies there is a scope mismatch. She takes the surface syntax to reflect a *not* > *can* > *seem* merge hierarchy (as in (5)), and sketches an account which bases the semantic composition on this surface syntactic structure. Her hypotheses are summarized in the following quote from her conclusion:

> "*Can* never means *be able* when it cooccurs with *seem*. Rather, it involves existential quantification over situations (in the actual world), and these can be restricted to those whose outcome is under the conscious control of the subject. And *seem* does not mean seem to me ; it does not invoke other possible worlds such as the speaker's belief worlds.

[2]Though reasonable, it should be questioned and treated with great suspicion because of the unexpected syntax semantics mismatch.

> Given the meanings of *can* and *seem*, there is no scope interaction, and the compositional semantics can put the two together in just the order suggested by the surface syntax. There is, however, an illusion here of scope reversal. This, I believe, is due in part simply to the fact that we happen to have a reasonably close paraphrase in which the item *able* is embedded under *seem* – and we have been misled by this paraphrase."

However, since her account fails to capture the properties discussed in section 2, I will not further address it here.

Homer (2012) focuses on the semantics of the *cannot seem to* construction, and also adopts (5) as the correct syntactic representation. He argues against two possible accounts, to wit, that the phenomenon is idiomatic and that it involves neg-raising. He proposes instead that *seem* is a PPI, which undergoes *covert* movement at the level of LF. This movement, he proposes, is forced by the need of the PPI to move out of the scope of the DE element that the syntax has created. In this analysis, there is indeed a syntax semantics mismatch, which is resolved at the level of LF by covert movement of the DE element.

The basic problem with this account is (again) that it stands or falls with (5) being the correct order of Merge in the first place. If indeed *seem* can be shown to c-commands DE and CAN at some stage of the derivation, there is no syntax semantics mismatch as in Langendoen (1970). Then we don't have to ask the difficult question why syntax would create a prison for the DE element in the first place, or where the PPI would even move to.

Much will thus depend on understanding the details of the syntactic derivation, and establishing the correct merge order. As I will show in section 2, there are two different arguments, independent of semantic considerations, that show that the surface syntax in the *cannot seem* construction must be derived from a structure where DE NEG CAN originate below *seem*, as in (6b). Thus, the paraphrase in (6b) *is* in fact informative, as the substructure will have to surface in the *seem* clause when raising is blocked.

(6) a. John can't seem to run fast

b. ...seems [that John can't run fast]

c. ...seem [to < John n't can > run fast] SEEM > DE > CAN

However, it is not just the subject that raises into the *seem* clause, but a bigger chunk of structure, indicated between < > in (6c).[3] This does not even look like a constituent. This shifts the problem squarely to the syntactic component, and strengthens the idea that (some) syntax semantics mismatches are but apparent, and follow from the way surface structures are built.

2 Establishing the syntactic hierarchy

There are two arguments that lead to the conclusion that the *cannot seem to* construction must be derived from the following sequence of merge: SEEM/TO > DE > CAN > V. These arguments are independent of the scope mismatch.

A syntactic derivation is therefore necessary, regardless of the syntax semantics mismatch problem.

2.1 The lexical VP is the complement of CAN, not of *seem*

There are two arguments that CAN merges with the lexical VP before *seem to* does. These arguments show that the surface order must be derived by movement (i.e.I(nternal)-Merge), as detailed in section 4.2.1. The evidence comes (i) from the type of existing "idiomatic" expressions (i.e. listed expressions), and (ii) the exceptional lifting of restrictions on the embedded aspect in the *can't seem to* construction. Both arguments show that the order of merge is SEEM > scde > CAN > V/v.

2.1.1 Idioms

The first piece of evidence comes from expressions that must be "listed". As shown in Langendoen (1970, ex. 2 and 3)), the sequences *can V* or DE *can V* can be idiomatic. Embedding under the raising verb *seem* leads to discontinuity:

[3] While the example contains *can't* it should be kept in mind that *n't* is not a necessary component: DE, a DE element like *noone, never, few, only* is.

(7) a. Abe can't (seem to) afford paying the rent

b. Tevye couldn't (seem to) tell the difference between right and left

c. Sam couldn't (seem to) stand the sound of jackhammers underneath his bedroom window

d. Harry can't (seem to) help falling asleep

The expression *can afford* in (7a) is an "idiom", with two fixed parts CAN and *afford*, excluding the complement of *afford* i.e. *pay(ing) rent*. Neither *"*I afford paying rent"* nor *"*I don't afford paying rent"* are well-formed, showing both parts must cooccur. *Can't stand* and *can't help* are idioms with three fixed parts: a *de* expression, *can* and *stand* or *help*. A DE is required in these expressions as shown by the ill-formedness of *"* Sam can stand this noise"*, and *"*I can help falling asleep"*. Furthermore, the DE must originate in the infinitival, as shown by the fact that it can license a clause-bound NPI.

(8) Harry can't (seem to) help worrying until his daughter is home.

The following idiomatic expressions appear to be attested, and the question is what this shows about the syntactic hierarchy.

(9) a. *can* V i.e. (can afford, can tell the difference, can take a joke, ...)

b. DE *can* V (i.e. can't stand, can't help, can't bear the sight..)

Sportiche (2005), building on Koopman & Sportiche (1991) argues that a possible idiom, an expression with fixed parts, must minimally consist of an uninterrupted sequence of heads. Specifiers, and complements can be open positions. Thus, an idiom like *to pull one's leg* is composed of the following uninterrupted sequence of heads ($v/V_{pull} > D\prime_s\ N_{leg}$), with [Spec, DP] as open position. If this is correct, idioms can be taken to be informative about a merge sequence of heads: *can afford* or DE *can help* have to form an uninterrupted sequence of heads, i.e. the hierarchy that underlies these idioms correspond to the following merge sequence:

(10) DE)>CAN>*V/v*

Given (10), it follows that *seem* cannot intervene between *can* and "V" , and therefore must merge outside of the sequence in (10). This fixes the syntactic hierarchy as (11), and this *independent of any scope considerations.*

(11) seem to > ... DE>*can*>*V/v*

This hierarchy shows up when *seem* takes a finite complement, which blocks raising:

(12) *seem that* .... >DE>CAN>*V*

This hierarchy corresponds to the scope order as well: there is therefore no syntax semantics mismatch, but a problem to solve in the syntax, how the DE and *can* can show up in the T region of the *seem* clause.

As the examples in (7) show, merging *seem to* with (12) leads to discontinuity of the idiom. This is a textbook diagnostic for syntactic raising. Parts of an idiom can only be discontinuous as a result of movement, i.e. what can intervene between discontinuous parts of an idiom is determined by the syntactic distance that can be created by particular syntactic operation(s).

Importantly though, it not just the subject that must raise in the *seem to* construction, but a much larger chunk of the structure, which also includes DE and *can*. This is an unusual process for English, which only seems possible in restricted environments. The question arises how this can be achieved, and why it is restricted in the way it is, it seems clear that this is a problem for the syntactic component, as a chunk of the embedded clause appears in the *seem* clause, only in cases where we postulate raising.

Summing up, idioms show that the syntactic hierarchy must be as follows:

(13) *seem to* > DE >*can*>*VP*

Can takes a bare "vP/VP" complement. Modals in related languages take a bare infinitive (English lacks infinitival morphology). A DE expression merges with *can VP*. *To* and *seem* in turn combine with the result (raising the question what their relative merge order is). This independently motivated syntactic hierarchy now corresponds to the right scopal relations, showing that this construction does not represent a mismatch between the syntactic structures and the semantic interpretation (in accordance with expectations in the antisymmetry framework, in particular Kayne (1998, 2000), and cartography (Cinque (1999), Rizzi & Cinque (2016))).

A further (syntactic) derivation is therefore independently necessary to derive the linear order with the raising verb *seem*, and the question is whether syntactic theory has made sufficient progress to deliver an independently motivated (and explanatory) account.

The search is on for a minimalist account, i.e. an account where the properties of the construction reduce to the mechanics of structure building Merge (E- and I- Merge), in conjunction with independently motivated properties of the syntactic atoms (whatever they may turn out to be) that enter into the derivation, and general principles like (Attract Closest) and possible constraints on movement. Together with cyclic interpretation and spell out, this should suffice to explain the properties we observe.

Motivating such an account is the focus of this paper. This construction, precisely because it is so restricted, and seemingly idiosyncratic, provides a perfect testing ground for minimalist grammars, and depending on the success of the analysis, it provides arguments for the type of Minimalist grammar the field should pursue. As I will show, it brings strong support for the Kaynean/cartographic enterprise.

2.1.2 Aspect

A second argument further confirms the relative order of merge of *seem to* and *can*, as *seem to* >DE>CAN > V. As pointed out in Homer (2012), the *cannot seem to* construction is exempt from an aspectual restriction that present tense *seems* otherwise imposes. The aspect on the main embedded

predicate must be stative (or receive a non-episodic reading), with the exception of the *can't seem to* construction[4]

(14) a. *They seem to sleep
b. They cannot seem to sleep

(15) a. *He seems to swim the butterfly
b. He cannot seem to swim the butterfly

However, if as argued above, *sleep* is the direct complement of CAN not of *to*, rather than exceptional, this turns out to be entirely expected. If stative aspect applies to the modal CAN, as indicated by the paraphrase of *"he cannot swim the butterfy"* as *"he is not able to swim the butterfly"*, then CAN, not *swim* satisfy the aspectual restrictions on the infinitival imposed by present tense *seem* - however this is ultimately accounted for -

(16) a. .. T_{pres} seem to <they not ASP can> sleep
b. .. T_{pres} seem to <he not ASP can> swim the butterfly

This therefore can be taken as further confirmation that *can* starts out below *seem to* and above V.

2.1.3 Idioms: Syntax or LF?

The arguments above are based on the completely standard assumption that idiomatic composition or the interpretation of parts of fixed expressions is based on the syntactic structure, i.e. requires strict locality of E-merge.

The question is if there are other options to save a basic *not* > *can* > *seem to* > *V* syntactic hierarchy that I am arguing against. Forming the idiom by structurally lowering *not can* below *seem* at LF is not allowed. "Lowering" (i.e reconstruction) is only possible if a structurally lower

[4]It might be the case that this actually may force language learners to postulate the sequence of merge where *Neg can* is in the to-complement. A few early productions of the *can't seem to* construction occur in CHILDES (age 2.5). Impressionistically speaking, children seem to produce examples like *I can't seem to do this* quite frequently, often with a characteristically whining tone, or frustrated flavor (see Homer (2012) on the actuality entailment that this construction has. I discussed this in a previous version, but won't address it in the current version for reasons of space). It is probably relevant that ability *can*, *success, (manage), frustrative* are in close structural proximity in the Cinque hierarchy (cf.Cinque (1999).

copy in a movement chain is interpreted, as in the syntactic account I am arguing for. Inserting *seem to* like a parenthetical cannot be assumed either, since *seem to* is integrated in the syntactic structure, and not offset by prosody typical for parentheticals. Whether there is some other way to lower *not can* at LF, using known well established semantic tools, is unclear. The only real option, as suggested to me by Clemens Mayr, would be some version of neg-lowering via a presupposition of *seem*. However, under such an approach , *not can* crucially will not take literal narrow scope with respect to *seem*, and will be unable to semantically combine with V at LF.

Homer (2012) takes *not* > *can* > *seem to* > *V* to represent the syntactic order of merge. As a consequence he must assume that idiom formation of *can* and *V* must take place at LF. As he suggests, *can* semantically composes with V once the PPI, *seem*, has covertly moved out of the downward entailment prison in which the syntax has put it: it is yet to be determined position where *seem* raises to exactly: what is important is that *seem* takes scope over DE and *can* (but this is, I just argued, what the syntax already does). The PPI *seem* or its copy structurally intervenes between DE *can* and *V* in his assumed syntactic representation, and therefore it is expected to be interpreted at the point before the DE is merged and it undergoes movement as a PPI. Homer's proposal, it seems to me, runs into the problems it does, because it starts out from the wrong syntactic hierarchy. This means that the question of why this particular type of raising is possible with only DE and *can* remains.

I therefore conclude that the idiom argument and the lifting of aspectual restrictions indicates the sequence of E-merge. How to derive the linear order in the *can't seem to* construction with subject raising *seem* and motivate it independently is a problem for the syntactic component, not an issue of covert syntax, nor an issue for non-local semantic composition.

3 Towards a syntactic derivation

So far, I established that the structure in (17b) underlies the linear order in (17c). I will now motivate the derivation.

(17) a. T...seem [that John can't run fast]

b. ...seem [to < John not can > run fast] SEEM > DE > ASP > CAN

c. [John [$_T$ can] not [seem [to < John not ASP can > run fast]]]

Since the material within the brackets < > shows up in the *seem* clause, an account must be motivated that will yield these results. This implies spelling out each step, and providing independent motivation for each step. The following section briefly lays out the problems the bottom up derivation encounters and foreshadows the solutions I adopt in the sections below. The construction is particularly interesting because it is so restricted, and hence rules out possible conceivable alternatives.

A first problem is that the material within < > is not a constituent, and hence it is not movable as a constituent. Moving each piece individually however is excluded, as they each have a role to play for the structure to converge. Furthermore, a head movement analysis where *can't* or *can* undergoes head movement to T past *to* and *seem* is a non-starter: the head would have to move past *seem* and *to*, and violate Minimality. It would also overgenerate, i.e. *can't* does not climb in general, but only with *seem*. Adjoining *can* to *seem* (somehow bypassing *to* is not an option either, as *can* (but not *seem*) ultimately combines with T. In cases where excorporation has been postulated (as in verb particle constructions for example, see Koopman (1995)), it is always the head of the complex head that excorporates, never the adjoined element.

Moving < > as a chunk of structure runs into the problem that it is not a constituent: *can* merges with vP/VP as its complement. But this problem can be solved, if < > is a remnant constituent. Here, I will adopt Kayne (2000, 2005), who argues convincingly that infinitival *to* (and functional Ps (like dative *to*)) do not get together with their complements via E-merge, as in phrase structure grammars, but are the result of I-merge. This means (infinitival) *to* is merged in the spine and attracts an (infinitival) vP/VP:

(18) ... to vp/VP inf [DP DE *can* <vP/VP>]

This derivation hides a locality problem. Attract Closest should attract the constituent headed by *can*, not vP/VP. Either we assume this is excluded because *to can cannot satisfies the selectional properties of *to*, hence allowing vP/VP to move, or we assume that the vP/VP is in fact closer to *to* (or equidistant). This is what I will argue for, using the ubiquitous complex verb formation visible in the Germanic OV languages: *can* is a verb that triggers so-called verb raising (a phrasal movement) which brings the vP/VP equidistant to *to*, and hence allows it to combine with *to*.

While this has created a remnant, the next problem is how the < > remnant moves into the *seem* clause. I will argue that this is achieved through complex verb formation (using insights from English close cousins, Dutch and German (Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000)) (see 4.2), where *seem* has to form a complex verb (attracts *can*, which pied-pipes DE). This step will yield the following output:

(19) [DP DE *can* t] seem... to vp/VP inf

Merging T with (19) raises a locality problem: why does T combine with *can* but not with *seem*? I will again pursue a configurational account: *can* combines with T because it is closest to T. This gives a role for the necessary presence of the DE element: it shifts the entire constituent out of the seem VP to the T region, because that's is where DE elements are (minimally) licensed: it is this step which brings *can* closest to T.

This purely derivational account relies on the sequence of E-merge (base generation), and I-merge (movements). It crucially employ "smuggling" (i.e. the movement of large chunks of structures followed by subextraction) to get around interveners (as in Collins (2005b,a)), or to get elements closest to their ultimate landing sites. The movements though are independently motivated and found in (closely related) languages: there is no smuggling motivation per se. In addition, the analysis also employs pied-piping parameters, which arguably play a crucial role in accounting for variability (Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) and Cinque (2005)). Finally, the derivations yield a novel account for hitherto unexplained properties of this construction (including intervention effects with experiencers, which will fall out from the derivation), and makes progress towards accounting

for its restrictions. In the following sections, I discuss the properties that must be accounted for, and spell out the derivations in greater detail.

3.1 Properties of the *can't seem to* construction

First, as previously mentioned, the construction is restricted to the finite ability modal *can/could*.[5] I will have nothing to say about this, other than the fact that only (a subset of) verbs that have no infinitival form **to can* seem to be able to escape from the complement of *seem*. This will turn out to be relevant.

Secondly, a DE element is required, i.e. scope reversal is impossible in other contexts (with neutral stress on *John* and *can*).

(20) #I can seem to get work done

We return to why this may be so in section 4.4.1.
Third, only subject raising *seem* occurs in the construction: its near synonym *appear* cannot.

(21) a. I can no longer seem to afford the mortgage
b. # I can no longer appear to afford the mortgage

Fourth, a to-experiencer may not intervene in this construction, as shown in (22):

(22) *John can't seem to me to run very fast (Langendoen, 1970, (9)b.).

Langendoen notes that the grammaticality of sentences like (22) is improved if the offending phrases are put at the end of such sentences, and improved even further if they are preposed:

(23) a. ?John can't seem to run very fast to me
b. To me, John can't seem to run very fast

[5] Homer reports that some speakers can get it with future *will*.

I will show in section 5.2 that there is nothing special to say about intervention. (22) falls out from the pure structure building analysis, with the timing of the relative orders of Merge of infinitival *to* and dative *to* restricted by complex verb formation. (22) simply cannot be derived from that order, but (23a) can.

In section 6, I will return to comparative syntax. Just as Dutch and German provided insights into the mechanics of the derivation of the *can't seem to* construction, I will show how the analysis of the English *can't seem* construction provides new insights into a possible syntactic treatment of a syntax phonology mismatch in German. The infinitival marker *zu* in certain verbal complexes in German shows up on the "wrong" verb ("*displaced zu*") given given the (underlying) syntactic hierarchy. Saltzmann (2016) argues that such cases should be treated in the postsyntactic treatment by local dislocation, a process which is insensitive to hierarchical structure, and only cares about linear order. Section 7 concludes.

4 A syntactic derivation

In this section, I motivate and spell out the steps of the syntactic derivation.

4.1 What the syntactic derivation must achieve

So far, I established that the structure in (24a) underlies the linear order in (24b), and that the material within the brackets $< >$ is a remnant (section 4.3 will discuss the role of *to* in creating the remnant structure).[6]

[6] Any element which can independently appear between *can* and the subject, for example adverbs, should be able to be carried into the *seem* clause as well. The following examples from (Homer, 2012, 14, 15) suggest this is the case, but further research is necessary.

(i) a. *Context:* Just looking at the hospital's visitors register, a doctor says. . .
People often seem to visit the patient of room 32. SEEM> OFTEN and OFTEN> SEEM
b. Some of you guys easily seem to forget that football is a team sport. SEEM> EASILY

The *only* option is surface scope when *seem* takes a tensed complement:

(ii) a. It often seems that people visit this patient. *SEEM > OFTEN OFTEN > SEEM

(24) a. ...seem [to run fast < John not ASP can > swim fast] SEEM > DE > ASP > CAN

b. [John [$_T$ can] n't [seem [to run fast < John not ASP can < swim the butterfly>]]]

How does the material in the remnant get to show up in the *seem* clause? This looks like a "restructuring process" achieved through leftward movement: a large chunk of an embedded complement ends up in a higher clause, and the elements it contains distribute individually, as if the structure were monoclausal. While such leftward shifting from infinitival complements is not a property of English syntax, it is in fact ubiquitous in the Germanic OV languages. The parallelism can be shown with the Dutch example in (25). Here, the infinitival verb (*voorstellen* "introduce") forms a verb cluster with the tensed verb (e.g. *wil* "want"). Its arguments (and adjuncts) distribute as separate constituents in the tensed clause headed by *want*. This is "restructuring" via leftward movement of a remnant, with the "verb" moved out of this constituent.

(25) ...dat [$_\alpha$ Marie Femke niet aan haar ouders $t_{voorstellen}$] wil voorstellen t_α
...that [Mary Femke not to her parents] want.PRS introduce
'...that Mary does not want to introduce Femke to her parents.'

Given this parallelism, I will use insights from this widely studied phenomena in the OV languages to motivate an analysis of the *can't seem to* construction (section 4.2.1), and argue that English reveals its fundamentally Germanic roots in this construction. Of the great many proposals for restructuring, I will simply adapt the proposals for the OV Germanic languages (as well as Hungarian) which involve complex verb formation and leftward movement, as in Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000), and Hinterhölzl (1999) or, since the leftward movement can be seen directly in English, with the difference that in English the vP/VP and its arguments follow *to*.

b. It easily seems that some of you guys forget that football is a team sport. *SEEM > EASILY ; EASILY > SEEM

4.2 Insights from Germanic OV languages

4.2.1 Complex predicate formation

Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) (henceforth K&S) motivate a uniform movement account for complex predicates, in Hungarian, Dutch, and German. Since *seem* and CAN typically form complex predicates in Dutch and German, and show restructuring effects crosslinguistically, I adapt our analysis to the English *can't seem to* construction and show how it derives the properties of the *can't seem to* construction (as well as its restrictions) in English.

Here are the central analytical ingredients:

(i) Complex predicate formation, is, we hypothesized, universally represented as a specific syntactic configuration in **??** (with V+ a dedicated projection in the verbal domain just above vP/VP). When α is a particle, a small clause PP, or AP, or a NP, it must form a complex predicate with a selecting verb.[7]

When v/V is an auxiliary or a member of a list of clustering verbs, (modals, aspectual verbs, control and raising verbs, including *seem* and *can*), it must form a complex predicate as a (universal) lexical property. These verbs attract a VP+ from their complement to the VP+ that dominates them (i.e. they have a +VP feature that is checked in this particular configuration). (26a), (26b),(26c), and **??** show how these participate in verb clusters in Dutch, German and English (or Germanic more broadly, as well as Hungarian):

(26) Dutch[8]

a. ... (*op*) kan (*op*) bellen
... (up) can (up) call.inf
... can call up

b. ... (*schoon*) kan (*schoon*) maken
... (*clean*) can (*clean*) make.inf
... can clean

c. ... (*piano*) kan (*piano*) spelen
... (piano) can (piano) play.inf
... can play piano

d. ... (*gaan*) kan (*gaan*)
... (go.inf) can go.inf
... can go

(27) German

a. ... an rufen kan
... up-call can

[7] Sometimes referred to as PredP, see Koster (1994), Zwart & Zwart (1997).

[8] The notation (..) signifies that either order is possible.

b. .. sauber machen kan
... clean make can
... can clean

c. ... Klavier spielen kan

... piano play.inf can

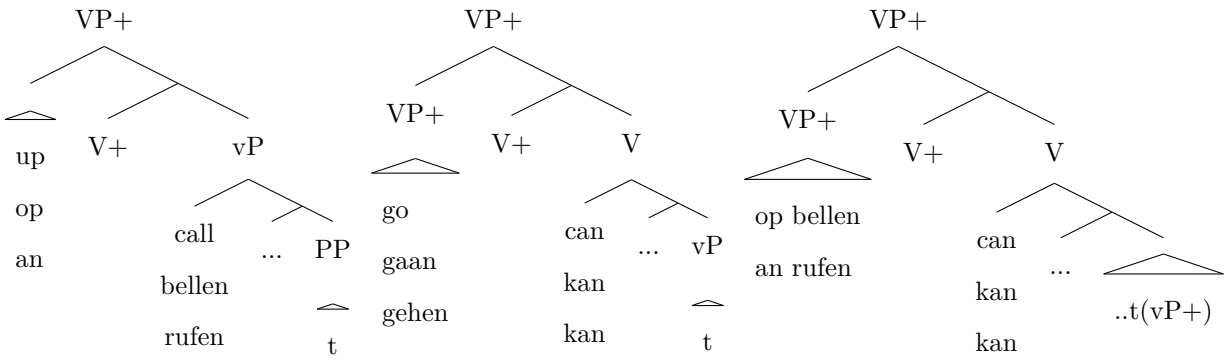
...

d. ... gehen kan

... go.inf can

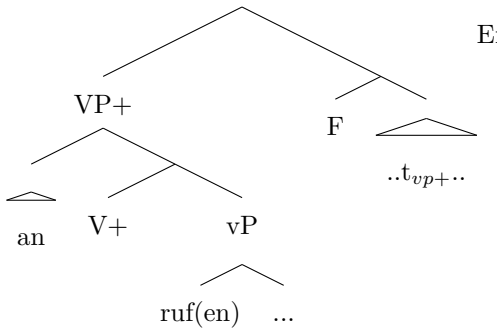
... can go

The trees below correspond to some of the examples above:

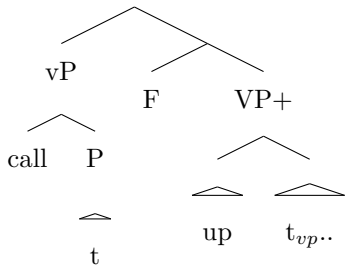


Since vP and VP+ are separate projections, the structures allow for the possibility that VP+ and vP act as a single constituent, or that they can be split into two independent constituents, (by vP moving out to a probe). Sometimes the same language allows either, yielding different surface realizations of complex predicates, without any differences in meaning. If VP+ and vp do not split, they will have the distributional properties of VP+, as well as of vP. If they do split, the vP has the distribution of vP, and the VP+ the distribution of VP+. In English, where the vp/VP always precedes VP+ (which contains the particles, or a small clause constituent) the vP moves out of the VP+ to a position preceding the particle that occurs in vP+. In German, vP pied pipes VP+ to F in the unmarked case

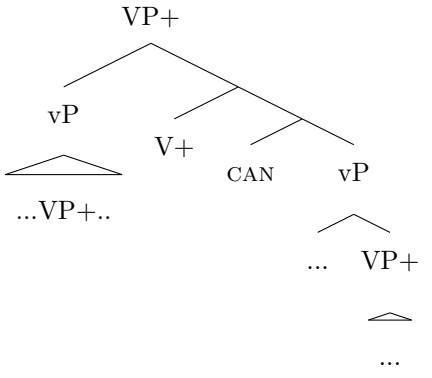
(28) German:

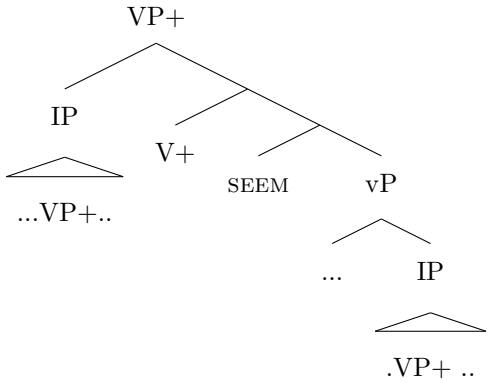


English:



(ii) Clustering verbs *can, seem, appear, want, try, make, ..* must form a complex predicate, and minimally attract a complex predicate, i.e. to the VP+that dominates them. (iii) The role of pied-piping: sometimes, VP+ can be embedded in a bigger constituent (even in the same language, see K&S for Hungarian, Dutch and German)), i.e. VP+ pied-pipes a larger constituent. This is the case in the English *can't seem to* as we will see below.





Finally, VP+ can pied-pipe a bigger constituent, CP for example. If it does, the constituent that contains VP+ will satisfy complex verb formation, but also show the external distribution of a CP; it will do double duty. These are (some of) the structural variables involved to account for the typology of verbal complexes in individual languages, or across languages.

These movements, as we have shown, are overt phrasal (remnant) movements, driven by the need to check features in strictly local configurations. The derivations proceed mechanically, and obey the extension condition.[9]

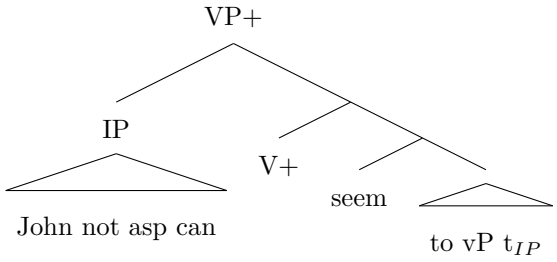
[9]I depart here from Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) in allowing subextraction from a remnant. It is an important issue for "smuggling" analyses when extraction from a moved constituent is allowed, and when it is not (i.e. when moved constituents are islands). See Boskovic (this volume) for discussion.

What is important for the *can't seem* construction is the fact that both *can* and *seem* must form complex predicates, i.e. (i) must attract a particular constituent which contains VP+ from their complement, and (ii) that this process can interact with pied-piping.

Given this background, we now return to (24b), repeated below and show how complex verb formation executes the shifting of the remnant constituent < > into the *seem* clause. (I don't show here how the remnant is actually formed. This is discussed in the 4.3).

(29) [John [$_T$ can] not [seem [to run fast < John not ASP [$_{VP+}$ can] > t$_{vp}$]]] =(17c)

a. *seem* has a VP+ feature: it must attract a complex predicate with the relevant VP+ feature, i.e. a constituent containing *can*, which pied-pipes IP yielding:



Can is in the (remnant VP+) that *seem* attracts: this step is responsible for the movement of the remnant constituent into the *seem* clause.

This analysis does not explain however why remnant movement of *can* by itself is not sufficient. Why is a DE expression required? As we saw in (28) in complex verbs in English, the verbal morphology invariably combines with the v in vp, and end up preceding the VP+. This is also the case with *seem* carrying the verbal morphology as in *John seems sad*, and not **John sadseems*.

But we also know that *can* can only surface in finite T. So, how is this achieved? Subject raising by itself is not sufficient. This is only possible if another step of movement brings *can* closer to T than *seem*. I will suggest below that a DE is instrumental in this movement, pied-piping the remnant constituent with *can*. As a result, *can* is brought closer to T than *seem*, so that *can* can ultimately appear in T.

4.3 How is the remnant created? The syntax of infinitival *to*

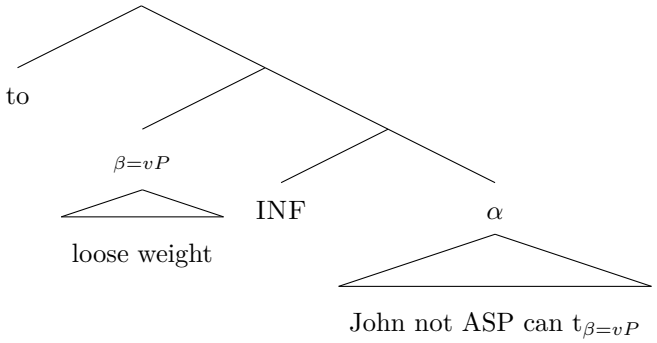
A constituent containing a subject, a downward entailing expression, stative aspect and CAN, but not the vP/VP complement of *can* ends up ultimately in the T region of the *seem* clause. Since only constituents can move, and *can* cannot escape from the infinitival by head movement (crossing over an intervening *to* and *seem*), the chunk of structure that ends up in the *seem* clause must move as a remnant constituent, without the vP. The missing vP is preceded by *to*. Thus, the vP complement of CAN combines with the infinitival *to* selected by *seem*, not *can*. Following Kayne (2000, Chapter 14)'s treatment of prepositional complementizers (see section 4.3 for justification and further discussion), I assume that infinitival *to* is always merged in the spine; it selects for a head INF (with a zero exponent in English) that probes for a vP complement that it attracts.

(30) a. (E)-Merge INF with [$_{\alpha}$ John can't [$_{vp}$ loose weight]

→ INF [$_{\alpha}$ John cannot [$_{vp}$ loose weight]

b. (I)-merge vp with INF, (E)merge *to*:

This yields the following structure:



An important conclusion of the derivation so far concerns the relative timing of merge of *to/inf* and complex predicate formation that brings the remnant into the *seem* clause.

(31) a. *to* plays a central role in the creation of the remnant constituent that moves up into the *seem* clause.

b. Since *to* creates the remnant that moves into the *seem* clause, the merger of *to* must precede complex predicate formation, responsible for the movement of the remnant into the *seem* clause.

This will play a role in a structural account for intervention in section 5.2.[10]

This analysis implies that *to* (and INF **must** be part of the syntactic derivation, and cannot be constructed/inserted post syntactically. This is generally true for the syntactic derivations of the antisymmetry type, with morphology and case interwoven in the syntactic derivations, often playing crucial roles in accounting for linear orders or variation in linear orders.

4.4 A stepwise derivation

In this subsection, I will present a stepwise derivation for the following sentence:

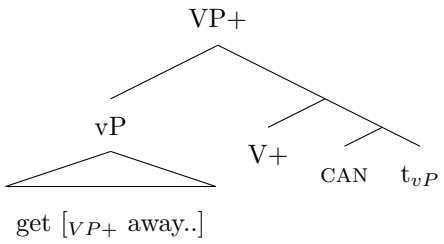
(32) She can no longer seem to get away from verbal complexes

We start the derivation at the point where CAN merges with a bare vP complement containing a complex predicate [$_{vP}$ get [$_{VP+}$ *away*] ~~*get*~~ ...]. Since CAN must form a complex predicate, it minimally attracts this VP+ constituent to its own VP+. VP+ pied-pipes the lexical projection vP, as shown in (33). In this configuration the VP+ feature of *can* is satisfied.

(33) a. CAN merges with vP

b. CAN attracts VP+ (away ~~get~~) to form a verbal complex

c. VP+ pied-pipes vP *get away..*



[10]This analysis could perhaps extend to other instances where *to* is obligatory for structural reasons. Passivization of causative or perception verbs require *to* (which is excluded in the active), which now looks related to smuggling of a VP shell (as in Collins (2005b)) past the vP shell (or the projection that introduces the external argument).

(i) a. I made Bill (*to) leave

b. Bill was made *(to) leave

In the next step of the derivation, a DE expression is merged (34a), as well as the subject DP, as in (34b) (either E or I merged : nothing hinges on this here). When the complement of *seem* includes an infinitive (as opposed to an adjectival small clause), *to* must appear in the structure. As in Dutch and German *to* (and inf) attract an "infinitival VP". Which VP in (33) is attracted? The vP in Spec, VP+, or, perhaps more expected, the VP headed by *can*? The output of the latter derivation is excluded:

can cannot combine with *to*, since *can* lacks an infinitival form * *to can*.[11] *To* will instead attract the local vP (get away from..). This is of course a licit case of movement of the full specifier movement, hence simply an option that UG allows. Here we have our first (apparent) mismatch: *to* seems to combine with the "wrong" verb, though this is does not combine with what looks like the closest vP, but with its complement. This step creates the desired remnant constituent, with only *can* remaining in the VP+. This is the constituent that *seem* minimally requires to form a complex predicate. In English, it will pied-pipe a big constituent.

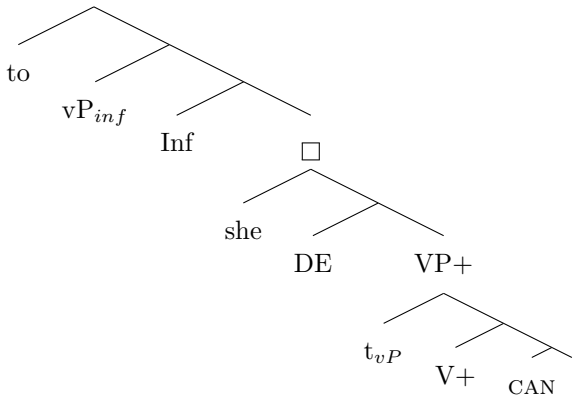
(34) a. Merge E_{DE} *no longer*

b. merge Subject *she*

c. Merge INF, attract vP (not *can*)

d. Merge *to*

□ *marks the node that VP+ will pied-pipe in the next step*



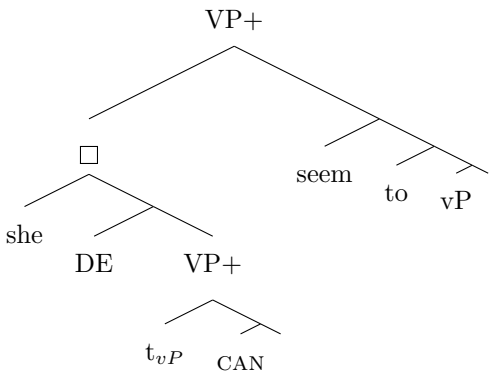
In the next step of the derivation *seem* merges, scoping over DE and *can*. *Seem* must form a complex predicate, it attracts VP+, now containing only CAN. VP+ pied-pipes the subject and the DE expression. (V+ heads omitted for convenience).

(35) a. Merge *seem*, attract VP+ containing CAN.

b. VP+ with CAN pied-pipes the DE *no longer* and the subject *I*.

[11] If abstract ability CAN moved to *to*, this derivation would have to result in *to be able to* with *be* required to satisfy the properties of *to*.

NB: This step "smuggles" CAN *past seem.*



As we observe, *seem* is not c-commanded by the DE expression. Note that this step *must* be the highest point at which scope is calculated: even though *can't* ends up marking the polarity of the clause as negative as the Klima tests show (Klima (1964)), *he can't seem to do this, can he?*, this marking does not appear to interact with the calculation of relative scope over *seem*.[12]

4.4.1 Why is a DE expression required?

In the next step in the derivation, POL is merged. POL attracts the DE (which, I assume marks POL as negative). But what is the role of the DE element? Why is it required?

Why is *can* unable to raise to T all by itself? And why isn't T merging with *seem* as it normally does in complex predicates, i.e. *she seems sad*? If we take Attract Closest seriously, we must conclude that *can* is closer to T than *seem*, when T is merged. The simplest answer then would be that *can* is indeed structurally closer. But this strongly suggest that there has to be an additional movement step in the derivation, that is not triggered by the needs of *can*, which brings the constituent containing it closer to *can*. I will now suggest that this movement is triggered by the DE element, which must move up into the *seem* clause, close to T, pied-piping *can*. Attract closest will then work in the mechanically blind way it should. This now raises the further question how likely is it that the various DE elements are indeed attracted into the T region (from which they can move even higher)?

[12] As Chris Collins points out, this seems to be a contradiction: the scope of the Klima tests is different from the scope of negation as indicated by the interpretation of scope orders between *seem*, DE and *can*. Thus, negation must be obligatorily interpreted under *seem* , while allowing polarity of the clause to be negative. I will leave for future research how to achieve this result.

As we can see from (2), repeated here as (36), a variety of DE elements that is found in this construction. These all end up in the seem clause, but start out under seem, as the paraphrases show.

(36) a. noone can seem to forget about the vote *paraphrasable as:* it seems that noone can forget about the vote.

b. Few can seem to fathom how he could be so popular. (Jacobson, 2006, ex. 9)

c. At most five people can seem to understand this.

d. John can never seem to speak in full sentences. (Jacobson, 2006, ex. 7)

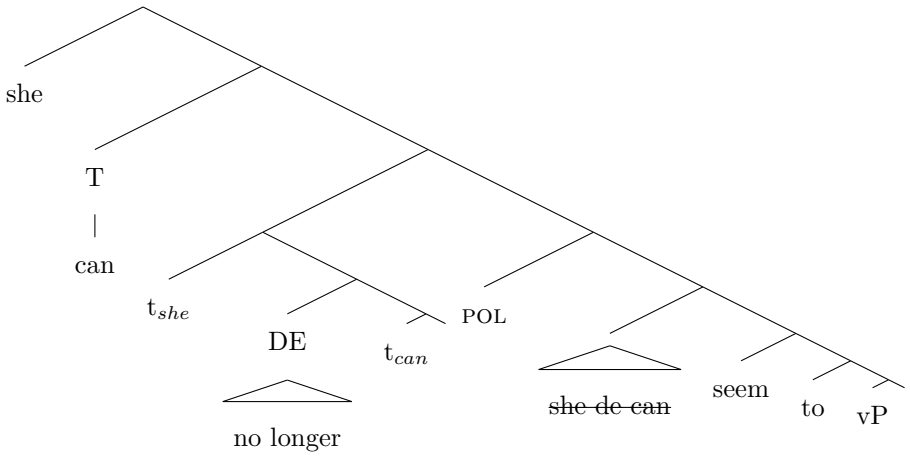
e. I just bought this lens, and I can rarely seem to get a clear picture.
paraphrasable as: it seems I can rarely get a clear picture
not as: # it rarely seems that I can get a clear picture

f. Only John can seem to stomach watching reruns of the 6th game of the 1986
paraphrasable as: It seems that only John can seem to stomach...

These are all interpreted under *seem*, and either end up in subject position (passing by the matrix NEG polarity), c-commanding the surface position of *can*, are in NegP of the matrix clause ('never', 'not'), or are related to only focus in (36f). *Rarely* (i.e. not frequently) is clearly outside the *seem* VP, but interpreted under *seem*, i.e. it diagnoses a surface position of the remnant.

If a DE must always raise into the T region to pick up negation or focus, prior to subject raising, and if, this time, the DE expression pied-pipes CAN, we can understand why a DE expression is a necessary ingredient in the construction. It brings *can* to a position higher than *seem*, and thus explains why *can*, but not *seem* ends up in T. When T merges, *can* is closest to T, and merges with T, as we know it must. Finally, the subject merges in Spec, TP, as shown below. This completes the derivation.

(37)



I thus suggest that there could be a structural reason for the fact that both DE and *can* are necessary in this construction. That is because they each have a role to play in pied-piping the constituent that contains them:[13] This construction requires a collaborative effort, with all actors playing a unique role.

This proposal also opens up a possible account of why Verum focus (3)) seems to license the construction (cf. (3), repeated as (38)).

(38) (but) I cán seem to get work done on the bus

"Verum" focus is a property of the T/Focus region. As long if there is verum focus on the polarity of the clause *can*, the pied-piping into the "T" region is independently required, and the construction can converge, i.e. all properties can be satisfied by overt movements.

Here is a summary of the important steps in the derivation. Infinitival to/in merges with the "DP DE [$_{VP+}$ vp [can t] " structure, and attracts the vP, creating a remnant constituent. *Seem* is a restructuring verb which must form a complex predicate. It attracts a remnant constituent containing *can* with the relevant vP+ property to its Spec, shifting the constituent into the seem clause. *Can* pied pipes the subject, DE (and ASP), carrying its passengers part of the way to their respective destinations. The DE expression takes over pied-piping responsibilities, and further caries

[13]This opens up a possible understanding of Jacobson's observation that not the full set of DE environments licenses the construction (Jacobson (2006, ex.14, 15)). Certain cases of non licensing could in fact receive a structural explanation.

the constituent into the T region, this time pied-piping *can*, and thus bringing the latter closer to T than *seem*. Finally, *can* subextracts and combines with T, and the subject moves to Spec, TP. All steps are required for convergence.

5 Accounting for further restrictions

While we now have an idea why DE is necessary, I have no particular insights to offer why only ability CAN enters in this particular derivation. [14] I leave this question open and refer the reader to Jacobson (2006) and Homer (2012) for further discussion.

5.1 Why *seem* but not *appear*?

It is striking that the near synonym *appear* (for many speakers at least) does not enter into this construction, a property which needs to be explained.

(39) a. I can't seem to loose weight

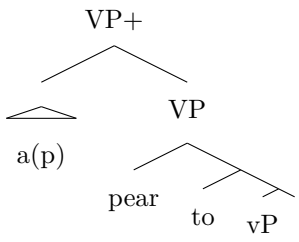
b. * I can't appear to loose weight

Appear has a different morphological make up than *seem*. It consists of a Romance P *a(d)-*, spelled out as *a-* in a local context with *-pear*. Is this fact even relevant for a synchronic analysis? Note that there are no theoretical barriers to a synchronic analysis: *-pear* is a fine morpheme (the possibility for a morpheme to be able to occur independently is not a theoretical criteria -pear is no different from *cran-, and -ceive* in this respect.) Note also that "conscious" access of a speaker to whether some word is decomposable or not cannot be a theoretical criterion: only distributional behavior can be. In this respect, it is well known that Romance P-V verbs are in complementary distribution with Germanic verb particle constructions, and (generally) do not occur in the Germanic double object construction. This makes sense if Germanic verb particle construction, and the Romance P-V verbs are reflections of the same underlying syntactic configuration, (e.g.Dikken (1992) and Punske (2013)), i.e. they are complex predicates. *Appear* has the same basic structure as a verb

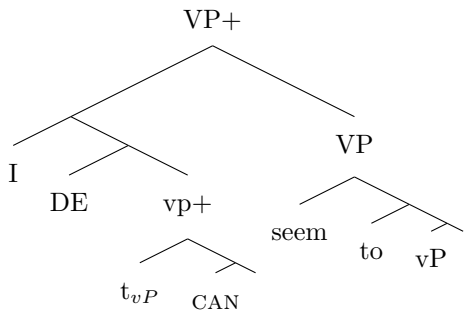
[14] Cinque (pers. comm) suggests further exploring the meanings of *can* (which can correspond to two modals in Romance, with 3 meanings, *savoir"know how"* and *pouvoir*.)

particle as in (40)). Thus the position through which *can* must escape, is occupied by *a(p)*, and is simply unavailable as an escape hatch.

(40)



(41)



Since complex predicate formation is a necessary ingredient in the derivation of (39a), and since the position for complex predicate formation is occupied in (39b), the string in (39b) is not derivable.

More broadly, since P-V verb, Part Verbs, and the restructuring construction with *can't seem* are in complementary distribution, this predicts correctly that verb particle constructions should never interact with scope reversal either:

(42) a. it turned out that John could not loose weight

b. *John couldn't turn out to loose weight

this cannot mean it turned out that John couldn't loose weight

c. John turned out to be unable to loose weight

More generally, particle verb should never interact with verb clusters that involve the VP+ site. This appears to be correct. There are no particle verbs in Dutch or Hungarian that form the strictest kind of verb clusters (those that use VP+ in our terms). Such clusters can be diagnosed in Dutch and German by the so-called IPP effect (see section 6), and in Hungarian by "VM" (i.e. particle climbing) in neutral clauses, i.e. clauses with no negation or focus (*be-menni* = "in-go")

(43) Be fogok akarni menni
in will.1sg want.inf go.inf
'I will want to go in'

Dutch particle verbs are compatible with a different kind of cluster, alternatively called the "the third construction" or "remnant extraposition". This construction does not show the IPP effect, and is generally compatible with small clauses in VP+. A similar remark holds for English as well: while *appear* does not allow clusters which must use VP+, *appear*is compatible with raising to subject (also a kind of restructuring effect).

5.2 A new account for Intervention

As already shown in Langendoen (1970), the *can't seem to* construction shows strong incompatibility with an intervening to-experiencer (44a). This contrasts with regular subject raising *seem* (44b):

(44) a. *John can't seem to me to loose weight
b. John seems to me to be unable to loose weight

This pattern is consistent with the following generalization that Cinque (2006, chapter1) establishes for restructuring predicates:

(45) Restructuring verbs that occur in environments that show overt effects of restructuring (like clitic climbing in Italian..) are incompatible with (internal) arguments.

This could follow, Cinque proposes, if such verbs are directly merged into one of the functional categories in the clause that correspond to their meaning (Cinque (1999)), and if argument structure can only be projected by lexical verbs, i.e. if the thematic domain is necessarily located below the functional sequence. (44) would be compatible with this generalization, if English had two verbs *seem*, one merging into a functional category, the other merging as a lexical category. This in turn is compatible with Jacobson (2006), who also proposes that there are two different verbs *seem*.

Seem in the *can't seem* construction cannot combine with an experiencer, as it is an "assertional hedge". It is different from the lexical verb *seem* which can combine with an overt experiencer *seem to me*.

As Langendoen (1970, (9)) shows however, examples like (44a) improve with a final experiencer, and are fine with clause initial experiencer (46d)).[15][16]

(46) a. John seems to me to be unable to run very fast

b. *John can't seem to me to run very fast

c. ?John can't seem to run very fast to me

d. To me, John can't seem to run very fast

In this section, I will remain agnostic about the question if *seem* can take an experiencer argument or not. I will instead assume that there is a single verb *seem*, which may or may not take an experiencer, as I take this as the default assumption. The question I want to raise is, whether, given the account developed in this paper, the order in (46b) could even arise. What would it take to derive the linear strings in (46b), i.e. what sequence of merge would we need to assume, and is that sequence compatible with the proposed analysis? As I show below, the analysis developed so far can account for the sharp ungrammaticality of (44a) quite straightforwardly. It follows from the timing of the sequence of operations that lead to the linear orders, with infinitival *to* and dative *to* playing a central role, in conjunction with hypotheses about where these can enter into the derivation.

To explore this question, it is crucial to determine what exactly the hierarchy of Merge is, and what linear orders can be derived from a given hierarchy.

I will try to derive the following:

[15] Jacobson suggests that the (46d) the PP is in fact not interpreted as a dative experiencer of *seem*, but more like *in my opinion*.

[16] There appears to be uniform speaker agreement on (46b), but the exact status of (46c) which is better than (46b), is more fuzzy.

(47) a. In the *can't seem* construction a to-experiencer cannot intervene between *seem* and the to-infinitival.

b. The experiencer can be initial (46d).

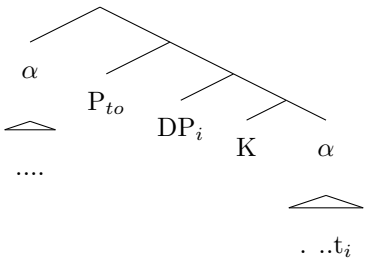
c. A to-experiencer can intervene only with subject raising *seem* (46a).
(But note that (46a) is difficult to acquire, and in fact excluded in many languages).

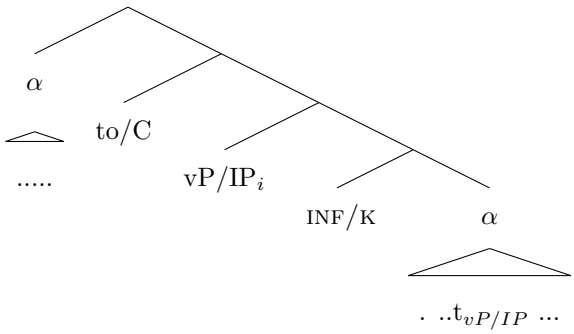
5.2.1 Background on experiencers

Let us assume the experiencer argument is introduced in a functional projection, labeled as APPL, above the position where the complex verb is formed, i.e. above the VP+ of *seem*.

(48) (Exp) > APPL > VP+ > seem

Let us also assume that the experiencer argument is not E-merged as a PP, but as a nominal argument. Furthermore, as Kayne has shown in a series of articles[17] functional PPs are never E-merged constituents, but are always the output result of (two) movement operations.[18] For experiencer *to* this means P ... K merge in the spine above (48); K(ase) attracts the experiencer, P merges with the result and always attracts the complement of K. This derivation is similar to infinitival *to* which as I showed is instrumental in forming the remnant in the *can't seem to* construction.





[17]See Kayne (2000, Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15) and Kayne (2005, Chapters 5, 7, 9).
[18]See Angelopoulos (2019) for Ps and Cs as Probes in Greek.

Given this proposal, what part of the spine P/K can merge with (i.e. α) can be determined by inspecting the left context of the P, i.e. what can (or cannot) precede the PP in the linear string, since this is the complement of K.

(49) $[_{\alpha}$ V .....] P DP K α

This in turn should be an important clue w.r.t. the learnability of the sequence of merge, and possible variability as to the height at which Ps can merge within a language or crosslinguistically. With the analytical ingredients we have so far, the linear order in (50) cannot arise.

(50) *John can't seem to me to run very fast =(46b)

This is because of the sequence of merge that leads to restructuring. As we have established, *to/inf* has to be merged prior to complex predicate formation: it is instrumental in creating the remnant constituent that shifts into the *seem* clause. Secondly, since to-experiencers must follow complex predicates, as (51) shows. From this, we can conclude that the dative *to* must be merged above the locus of complex predicate formation.

(51) a. John seems sad to me $to_{dat} > APPL > VP+ seem$

b. *John seems to me sad

The sequence of Merge necessary for convergence in the *can't seem to* construction must therefore be as follows:

(52) ... to(dat)> Exp> VP+ > to(inf) ...

But this order cannot yield the linear string in (50). i.e. the *to-inf* must be within the constituent α that merges to the left of the to-dative. This sequence of merge derives the order in (53) and

perhaps (53a): though not perfect, and judgments are somewhat fuzzy, (53) is clearly better than (50), which simply cannot be derived from this hierarchy.

(53) a. ?John can't seem to run very fast to me =(46c)

b. To me John can't seem to run very fast = (46d)

The impossibility of (50) therefore falls out from the syntactic derivation. Moreover, since this linear order cannot be derived, there should be no judgment variability w.r.t. (50). This seems correct, as far as I have been able to determine, speakers converge on the judgment (a fact which is remarkable in and of itself).

5.2.2 When is a to-DP intervener possible with *seem*

This now leaves us with the problem of understanding what derivation leads to a possible intervener, as in (54). Indeed, if (52) was the only merge order, such examples should be excluded.

(54) John seems to me to be unable to run very fast =(46a)

A different hierarchy of merge must therefore be available in English as well. The only merge order consistent with this linear string is one in which the *dat/to* merges prior to the infinitival *to/inf*, bleeding complex predicate formation which is required for the *can't seem to* construction.

(55) *to(inf) > to(dat)> Exp > VP+/seem*

[[$_\alpha$ John seems to me] to [$_{TP}$ be running very fast] inf t$_\alpha$]

This leads to the following conclusion:

(56) a. Infinitival *to* may merge at different heights: either below or above dative *to*.

b. Low merger is forced for complex verb formation (yielding a strong judgment on intervention).

If so, we may wonder about the timeline in acquisition. As is well known, intervening experiencers are difficult to acquire [19] which could be related to difficulty in figuring out the high option. Some languages (like French) completely disallow intervening experiencers. This could now be related to the fact that French *sembler "seem"* combines with a bare infinitival.

(57) a. Jean (me) semble être content
John (me) seems be happy

b. Jean semble être content à Marie
John seems be.INF happy to Mary

6 Insights from English into German displaced "zu": an (apparent) syntax-phonology mismatch

Comparative syntax (Dutch and German) yields important insights into the mechanics of the derivation of the *can't seem* construction in English. The English derivation in turn provides new insights in a possible syntactic treatment of the difficult problem of "displaced" *zu* in German: the curious placement of the infinitival marker *zu*, which shows up on the "wrong" infinitive in a subset of verbal complexes in German.

The *can't seem* construction does not show a syntax semantics mismatch (as was argued to follow from the fact that the basic assumption about the syntactic hierarchy turned out to be incorrect), the merge hierarchy I argued for now show two instances of apparent syntax morphology mismatches: the "wrong" verb phrase or verb combines with infinitival *to* in (58a) and with T in (58b). Naively in both cases, the highest verb should combine with *to* or T.

(58) a. [to + VP] ...CAN [VP]

b. [CAN + T] ... SEEM ....[CAN] ...

In the analysis I proposed, these turned out not to be mismatches either: a step of complex verb/ predicate formation around the intervening V effectively smuggled the element closer to the *to* in

[19] See Mateu and Hyams this volume.

(58a) or, for (58b), two steps of remnant movements smuggled *can* closer to *T*. Because of these movements, the highest VP or V at the relevant point in the derivation combine with the probes that attract them, as expected.

In so far as the abstract configurations are similar, I will now suggest that a similar syntactic solution should be pursued for "displaced" *zu* in German. Though I do not have a complete analysis to present here, I will sketch the outline of the argument, since this is an important point that bears on questions about the architecture of UG, in particular the question whether there is postyntactic movement. Indeed, Saltzmann (2016) argued that the placement of *zu* should be treated in the post-syntactic component by means of local dislocation (see Embick & Noyer (2001)). Local dislocation applies at a late stage in the post-syntactic morphological component that interfaces between the syntactic derivation and the phonology, after PF linearization of a 123 syntactic verbal complex according to Salzman. This would remove verb clusters and all correlated processes from the syntactic component.

The problem of displaced "zu" can be described as follows. German verbal complexes generally occur in a strict V3 V2 V1 order, corresponding to the hierarchical order, where V1 c-commands V2, etc, and V1 and V2 must form verb clusters/complex predicates.

(59) ... lesen müssen kan
... read.inf must.inf can.PRS
... can have to read ...$V3_{inf}$ $V2_{inf}$ $V1_T$

Some three member verb clusters, however, show a different linear order. This is the case for example when V1 is the perfect auxiliary. The perfect auxiliary, as in English, requires a participle form on V2, but when V2 itself forms a cluster with an infinitive V3, V2 carries infinitival morphology instead. This is the so-called IPP-effect (*Infinitive Pro Participle*). Furthermore, in standard German varieties, there is an obligatory switch in linear orders, i.e. and the order must be either V3 V1 V2, or V1 V3 V2, depending on the region, but the "normal" V3 V2 V1 order is not allowed. This is shown in the examples below, where the infinitive-hiding-a-participle is glossed a V_{ipp}

(60) T>Have> Mod >V

a. ... lesen hat können — $V3_{inf}$ $V1_{T}$ $V2_{ipp}$
... read.inf had.3s be.able.IPP
... had been able to read.

b. .... hat lesen können — $V1_{T}$ $V3_{inf}$ $V2_{ipp}$
.... had read.inf be.able.IPP

This construction raises the following questions: why does the V2 shows up with the infinitive instead of the participle, and why do the clusters show up in a different order (see Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) for a proposal).

Next we show what happens when clusters are embedded in infinitival complements which require the infinitival marker *zu*, like *ohne ... zu* 'without to'?

With a regular 321 cluster, as shown in (61), *zu* precedes the highest verb in the cluster, as expected. *zu* attracts the highest verb in the complex, and the remnant verbal complex appears in VP+ (if there is one), yielding a [32 [zu [1] output:

(61) Hierarchy of Merge: ohne ..... zu > V1 > V2 >V3

... ohne das buch lesen müssen zu können
... without the book read.inf must.inf to can.inf
... without being able to have to read the book — $V3_{inf}$ V_{inf} zu $V1_{inf}$

In IPP clusters, however, "zu" cannot precede the auxiliary *have* - the form that would be finite in tensed clauses - It precedes the verb with the IPP infinitive instead.

(62) hierarchy of Merge: zu>have1> can2 >3V

a. ... lesen haben zu können — $V3_{inf}$ $V1_{inf}$ zu V2.IPP
... read.inf have.inf to be.able.IPP

b. ... haben lezen zu können — $V1_{inf}$ $V3_{inf}$ zu V2.IPP
... have.inf read.inf to be.able.IPP

c. *... lesen zu haben können — * $V3_{inf}$ zu $V1_{inf}$ V2.IPP

d. *... zu haben lesen können — *zu $V1_{inf}$ $V3_{inf}$ V2.IPP

e. *... zu lezen haben können

Putting the insights from English together with German, this now suggests a path towards a possible syntactic analysis:

(63) The IPP-infinitive *können* must be closest to *zu* at the point where infinitival *zu* is merged.

And clearly, this has be related to a syntactic derivation that yields the change in linear order, which must be related to the missing participial morphology that *have* demands.

That (63) is to be related to the IPP effect finds further support from Dutch. The Dutch infinitival marker *te* precedes the highest infinitive in the 123 cluster in the same contexts as in German, and is well behaved in this respect. What is surprising, however, is that the order where *te* immediately precedes the infinitive-hiding-a-participle is also quite acceptable to me and others, contrary to expectations:

(64) a. zonder dat boek te hebben kunnen lezen
without that book to have.inf can.IPP read.inf
Without having been able to read that book — .. te $V1_{inf}$−V2.IPP - $V3_{inf}$

b. zonder dat boek te kunnen hebben lezen
without that book to can.IPP have.inf read.inf
Without having been able to — .. te V2IPP - $V1_{inf}$ - $V3_{inf}$

Moreover, such orders are quite degraded for me in regular clusters.

(65) a. zonder dat boek te zullen kunnen lezen
without that book to will.inf can.inf read.inf

b. *?zonder dat boek te kunnen zullen lezen
without that book to can.inf will.inf read.inf

.. te V2IPP- $V1_{inf}$ - $V3_{inf}$

Note that the acceptability of the order in (64b) must be based on a syntactic derivation where *können* is the highest at the point where we merge *zu*, ultimately related to the problem how V2 (the modal) "escapes" the requirement of building a participle. I therefore conclude that (64b) is significantly similar to the structure that underlies German *zu* placement in IPP clusters. This suggests there should be a unified approach for these cases, and a postsyntactic treatment of such cases is completely unwarranted, and avoids probing the difficult syntax of these constructions. At the very least then, the English account provides a possible lead for a new syntactic account for the German mismatch, with the apparent mismatch a consequence of a more complex syntactic derivation. Besides serious problems with local dislocation, which I have argued, cannot be a UG mechanism (see e.g. Koopman (2017a))), the problem with this proposal is that we don't understand why the IPP effect in standard German correlates with a 132 or 312 order, how it is possible for the participial morphology to hide out as an infinitive, what exactly the correlating syntactic properties of each of the orders are, etc. More generally, it disallows pursuing unified analyses of different cluster formations within the same language, or cross linguistically, as we pursued in Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000). It is difficult to see in what way these facts are similar to the English puzzles discussed in this paper, or extend beyond German, or more generally what role comparative syntax has to play.

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7 Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper, I explored the syntactic derivation of the *can't seem to* construction in English, which at first blush seems to cause problems for the syntax semantics interface. The syntax turns out not to be as simple as it seems. Probing the properties of the construction, brought to light clear evidence from idioms/fixed expressions and the lack of expected aspectual restrictions, that the

can't seem to construction does not derive from the hierarchy in (66a), but from the hierarchy in (66b) with subject raising *seem*. Since this is also the scopal hierarchy, there is no scope mismatch between the syntactic structure and the interpretation in this construction, (as expected under antisymmetry in particular Kayne (1998)).

(66) John can't seem to swim

a. DE > CAN > seem to ASP vP/VP

b. → SEEM TO > DE > ASP > CAN > Vp.

Precisely because this construction is so restricted, it provides a valuable testing ground for the type of minimalist syntax we should pursue. I explored a minimalist account, i.e. an account by which the properties of the construction and the restrictions reduce to structure building Merge (E and I merge), together with independently motivated properties of the syntactic atoms that enter into the derivation, in conjunction with general principles like Attract Closest, and the Extension condition. Since restrictions cannot be construction specific but must fall out from independent principles, the proposed analysis has direct bearings on the architecture of UG, as well as on a number of issues of technical implementations, i.e. specific implementations we should or should not pursue in the research. The paper motivated the (independently supported) steps in the bottom up derivation that ultimately leads to the linear order, and explored if the severe restrictions of this construction can be made to fall out from that derivation.

A large part of the paper was devoted to spelling out the independently motivated ingredients that enter into the syntactic derivation, and to spell out the steps in the derivation. The derivations involves a sequence of heads, and motivating the steps of I-merge. All cases of I-merge were cases of overt movements.

I argued (66) is essentially a restructuring construction, with a large part of the embedded complement [DP DE ASP > CAN raising into the *seem* clause, eventually distributing as individual constituents in the *seem* clause.

Complex predicate formation, central in the Germanic OV languages, was shown to play an important role in the derivation of the surface order in this particular English construction. It is instrumental in raising a remnant constituent leftward (DPDE > ASP > CAN) into the *seem* clause, i.e. in smuggling a clausal chunk past *seem*, followed by dispersion of its content into the *seem* clause.

The infinitival marker *to* is instrumental in forming the remnant constituent that is attracted into the *seem* clause. Contrary to the traditional idea that *to* forms an underlying constituent with the vP/VP complement, perhaps inherited from phrase structure rules, the *to vP* constituent is the result of I-merge: *to* and the vP start out in different parts of the spine, and "get together" by I merge, an idea pioneered and explored by Kayne, with far reaching consequences. Since the English derivation involves leftward remnant movement past *seem*, and appears to yield restructuring effects as a by product of this movement and subsequent extractions, it is likely that restructuring in Dutch and German also should involve similar movement processes (as in K&S and Hinterhölzl (1999)), rather than a number of alternative analyses on the market, i.e. transparency being due to the selection of the size of complements, OV as the basic structure, with rightward head movement etc... The infinitival marker in English can be merged at different heights in the spine, yielding different linear orders, and explaining when a dative experiencer can intervene. A novel account for intervention effects in the cannot seem

I adapted the assumptions, derivations and parameters argued for in Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000), with pied-piping parameters (and who pied-pipes who in different combinations) providing a possible explanation of why a DE) expression and *can* are both necessary in the *can't seem to* construction for the derivation to converge (see also Cinque (2005) on the role of pied-piping parameters).

The overall analysis points to the following conclusions:

- Linear order must be informative of the underlying syntactic hierarchy, as expressed by the LCA (Kayne, 1994) . Concretely this implies that the linguist (in fact the learner) needs to figure out how a particular linear order maps onto a hierarchical order of Merge, with E merge and I merge interspersed. The analytical task in working out the steps in the derivation

is not unlike figuring out rule ordering. There cannot be postsyntactic linearization, nor postsyntactic ordering adjustments.

- The analysis requires there to be a single syntactic component, with functional prepositions, case, complementizers, morphology playing crucial roles in the derivations. It is incompatible with a model that has narrow syntax and post- narrow syntax syntax, with narrow syntax only consisting of meaningful elements.

- Phrases like *to VP* and PPs like *to DP* are the result output of the syntactic derivation. They don't start out as constituents (as in earlier phrase structure rule rules), or start out fully inflected, but end up together in a local configuration. This is an effect of the point where the probes are E- merged, and what they can attract via Attract closest. Similarly, inflected forms are the output of the derivation, but not the input (as seen by the syntax morphology mismatches).

- The derivations provide new insights in the analysis of intervention effects, which I suggested can be reduced to the I and E Merge, given an independently motivated order of merge. Some elements (like *to*) may merge in more than one position.

- The derivations involve sequences of E-merge and I-merge only. All movements are overt. They can be directly translated into Stabler type Minimalist Grammars, in the same way as Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) was)

- Phrasal remnant movement from which constituents are subsequently extracted play a central role in the derivations and seem to be the primary syntactic means for the grammar to get around interveners: i.e. (*can* gets around *seem* through complex verb formation, i.e. phrasal movement. Smuggling is not a motivation, but a consequence of the way surface constituents are built up from scattered pieces of structure.

- Comparative syntax has an important role to play. Insights into the derivations for English came from the closely related sister languages Dutch and German. In turn, English provided insight into a possible account for a syntax phonology mismatch in German, which led to

investigate the same configurations in Dutch, showing similar effects on a more abstract level, and providing new insights into the variables that are involved in the conditions that underly potential mismatches: constructions with unexpected morphology, like missing participial forms, surprising infinitives, unexpected word order changes, or defective verbs, like missing infinitivals (like English *can*).

- The analysis gives rise to new research questions for example the question whether we can formally measure syntactic relatedness between closely related languages. Dutch and English are more alike from the perspective of antisymmetry, than from earlier perspective of X-bar structure or headedness parameters (see also Koopman (2010)). Complex verb formation of the Germanic type may be much more pervasive in English than the rather opaque surface syntax leads one to believe.

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