

It is often taken for granted in the literature that the semantic and pragmatic properties of English main verb *do* are well understood. *Do* is frequently claimed to require an agent as subject, to only combine with non-stative verbs, and to receive its interpretation in a straightforward manner from an event-denoting complement (Dowty 1979; Lakoff & Ross 1966; Ross 1972). I show that none of these claims can be maintained given the full range of the data.

The claim that the subject of *do* must be an agent cannot accommodate examples such as (1), where the subject is a location, or (2), where the subjects are inanimate body parts (perhaps an instruments), without relaxing the definition of agenthood. Examples (1) and (2) are also problematic for the claim that *do* must combine with a non-stative verb, unless we are willing to define stativity more strictly. Finally, the nominal complement in (3) is not event-denoting, and intransitive *do* in (4) has no complement at all, yet both successfully receive an interpretation.

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| (1) <u>No place</u> does romance like <u>Italy</u> does romance. | [do = be conducive to] |
| (2) <u>Our ears</u> do the hearing, and <u>our brain</u> does the listening. | [do the hearing = hear] |
| (3) We also do dogs. | [do = groom/walk/train/etc.] |
| (4) Mary is doing well. | [do = perform/feel/recover/etc.] |

I propose that the interpretation of *do* derives from an event representation made salient by context and world knowledge. In the most straightforward cases, this will be from event-denoting complements (*do a dance*), but may be from an eventuality made salient by a non-event denoting complement (*do a commercial*), or from an eventuality drawn from a combination of the context and world knowledge. For example, the interpretation of (3) varies depending on who we refers to, the sorts of things the hearer believes the subject to be likely to do to dogs, as well as the topic of conversation (e.g., a pet sitter may pet sit dogs; a vet may treat or spay dogs). Context may even override more default interpretations, as in (5), where *do* is interpreted as 'film.'

- (5) [Context: Filmmakers who are documenting high school life discuss who will film what.]
A: I can do a dance.

Further, the only constraint that *do* places on the verbs with which it combines is that the verb in question must denote a process, or be able to be coerced into a process, an operation which is itself highly dependent on both contextual and world knowledge (Moens & Steedman 1988). If coercion is successful, then any entity which may have served as the subject of the underlying event will be able to serve as the subject of *do*, regardless of its thematic role. In (1), if *do* is interpreted as 'is conducive to,' which can naturally take a location as a subject, then nothing stands in the way of *do* also taking a location as a subject.

My analysis accounts for the full range of the data without resorting to a redefinition of agenthood or stativity, since incompatibility arises from factors external to *do*, i.e., coercion failure or clashes with world knowledge. This analysis can inform our understanding of verbal anaphora (*do it/that*), as well as the processes through which we construct event representations more generally, while also suggesting new avenues for investigating processes of coercion.

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