"Say"-ing without a Voice

Travis Major   Richard Stockwell
University of California, Los Angeles   Christ Church, University of Oxford

Overview. This paper analyzes the light verb SAY as it relates to argument and event structure based on novel data. Recent work (Grimshaw 2015, 2017; Kratzer 2006, 2016) has argued that *say* is one realization of a silent light verb SAY, a universal semantic primitive akin to BE and HAVE (e.g. Hale & Keyser 1993). Continuing the tradition of analyzing these silent elements based on the properties of their overt counterparts, we offer a new syntactic formalization of SAY by introducing discussion of the locative use of *say* in (1):

(1)   a. The sign says {"slow down"/to slow down/three things} on it.
        b. It says {"slow down"/to slow down/three things} on the sign.

We argue that SAY does not inherently require an agent or VoiceP projection; rather, the only argument SAY introduces across all its uses is the 'linguistic material' (LM; direct/indirect quotation, DPs referring to LM). The VP-internal structure of SAY-constructions is consistent, with VP-external structure responsible for differences related to event structure and agentivity.

Data. *Activity vs. State.* A prototypical use of *say*, as in (2), involves an agent, a speech event, and LM. Here, *say* describes an activity: the event can be modified by a volitional adverb, a location and a duration, and can anaphorically referred to (e.g., *this*) in a follow-up sentence:

(2)   John (deliberately) said {to be a good person / "Be a good person!" / some bland words} (in the yard) (for five minutes). (This happened yesterday.)

With an inanimate subject, however, event modification is possible only marginally, to the extent that *the sign* in (3) can be metaphorically elevated to animacy, or stand metonymically for its designer, etc. – an Agentive Repository of Information (Anand et al. 2017):

(3)   The sign (?#deliberately) said {to be a good person / "Be a good person!" / some bland words} (?#in the yard) (?#for five minutes). (?#This happened yesterday.)

With the locative use of *say* including PP, however, event modification is out of the question (4):

(4)   {The sign / It} (#deliberately) said {to be a good person / "Be a good person!" / some bland words} {on the sign / on it} (#in the yard) (#for five minutes). (#This happened yesterday.)

A process interpretation arising from progressive aspect is possible only without the locative PP:

(5)   {The sign / It} was saying to slow down (*{on it / on the sign}), but John didn't obey.

Agentivity. An agent is required for SAY to introduce an addressee (6) (same riders re *the sign*):

(6)   {John / ?#the sign} said to us to slow down (*on it).

An agent is likewise required for an instrument (*with* + DP), not manner (*in* +DP) (7):

(7)   a. John said "Slow down!" {with a megaphone / in a loud voice}.
       b. The sign said "Slow down!" {?#with / ✓in} big red letters.

Expletive subject. The *it* subject in the locative use of *say* in (1b) is expletive; (8) exhausts all referential possibilities. *It* does not track the linguistic material or the DP complement of P in number (a); doing so with *they* results in ungrammaticality, attributable to a Condition C effect. There is also no plausible discourse referent for *it*, since attempts to substitute a full DP or the unambiguously referential demonstrative pronoun *that* fail in (b):

(8)   a. {It$_{expl/*i/*j}$ says / *They$_{i/j}$ say} our names$_i$ on the signs$_j$.
       b. *{The message/advert/writing/sign / that}$_k$ says "Slow down!$_i$" on the sign$_j$.

Overall, locative *say* is non-eventive, non-agentive, and can have an expletive subject.

Analysis of SAY. These data support an analysis whereby the VP-internal structure of SAY remains consistent, with higher functional/aspectual structure further specifying the meaning (Borer 1994, Travis 2000, Kratzer 1996, a.o). We follow Grimshaw (2015) in supposing that SAY is a member of the set of universal predicates, but propose two modifications. For cases like (1b/8a), SAY involves an expletive subject and introduces both LM and a locative PP (9). (It may be that *It says to slow down* can realize only the minimal VP-internal structure of SAY, i.e. V + LM; but without the DP complement to P to provide for Condition C and number matching, this is inconclusive.)

(9)   [[it] [VP [VP say [*LM*]] [PP on the signs]]]

The prospects for a direct derivational relationship between the locative use of *say* in (1a) and the expletive version in (1b) are grim; if the subject raised from PP in (1a) we would expect a trace rather than *it* in PP, since English does not have resumptive pronouns. Instead, *v* merges into the structure and introduces a non-agentive external argument (cf. Alexiadou et al. 2015, Wood 2015). PP is optional, deriving either (1a) or the non-metaphorical version of (3), as in (10):

(10)   [[*v*P [the sign] [*v*0 [VP [VP say [*LM*]] ([PP on it])]]]]

Agentive external arguments, on the other hand, are introduced by Voice (11) (we refrain from commitments about Voice bundling (Pylkkanen 2008) and *v*-cause versus Voice):

(11)   [VoiceP [John][Voice0 [*v*P [*v*0 [VP say [*LM*]]]]]]

SAY predicates. Building on Grimshaw (2015), this structural distinction regarding presence/absence of Voice offers new insights into the categorization of SAY predicates. For Grimshaw, SAY has two argument schemas, introducing either: (i) an agent, LM, and an optional addressee; or (ii) a location, and LM. Grimshaw further posits a division between (a) 'discourse role' verbs (e.g. *ask, tell, assert*) and (b) 'mode' verbs, subdivided into 'say-with-attitude' (e.g. *gripe*, *bitch*) and 'say-by-means' (e.g. *mutter*, *grunt*, *scream*, *sigh*). Based on the above data, our proposal appropriately draws a distinction between 'discourse role' and 'say-with-attitude', to the

exclusion of 'say-by-means'. The former require Voice, introduce an Agent, and hence are eventive (2) and can introduce addressees (6), instruments and manners (7a); cf. (12):

(12)   {John / ?#The sign} (deliberately) {griped to / told} Mary to slow down
        {with a megaphone / in a loud voice} (*on it). (This happened yesterday.)

Say-by-means, however, is compatible with non-agentive, non-eventive locative *say* (13), just as manner modification was in (7b):

(13)   {The sign / It} {screamed/*griped/*told} (*us) to slow down {on it / on the sign}.

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