

English *How Come* Construction: A Double Life*

Jong-Bok Kim and Okgi Kim

Abstract

The expression *how come* is a lot similar to *why* in its usage as well as in the meaning, but displays quite unpredictable properties. There have been several attempts to deal with the construction involving *how come*, but they all seem to be not satisfactory enough when considering its wider variations we find in actual uses. In this paper, we try to look into its grammatical properties together with detailed corpus search and then provide a construction-based approach that can deal with its idiosyncrasies as well as regularities.

Key words: *how come*, *why*, factivity, grammaticalization, SAI, construction-specific

1 Introduction

The expressions *how come* and *why* are nearly synonymous and interchangeable in many contexts:

- (1) a. When they do poorly, their teachers get the blame. **How come/Why?**
- b. After it was quiet for a minute, I almost asked him **how come/why**.
- c. I am ashamed, because I do not know **how come/why** I am spared.

However, as noted in the literature (cf. Zwicky and Zwicky 1971, Quirk et al. 1985, Collins 1991, Fitzpatrick 2005), these two behave quite differently in many grammatical respects. One obvious difference is that the former does not trigger SAI (Subject-Aux Inversion) as seen from the following contrast:

- (2) a. **Why** did you leave?
- b. ***Why** you left?

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- (3) a. **How come** you left?
 b. ***How come** did you leave?

There have been several attempts to deal with the grammatical properties of the construction involving *how come*, but they all seem to be not satisfactory enough when considering its wider variations we find in actual uses. In this paper, we look into the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the construction based on the literature as well as corpus search. We then briefly review the previous approaches that try to capture these and provide a construction-based approach that can deal with its idiosyncrasies as well as regularities.

2 Distributional Properties

2.1 With a Non-inverted Finite Clause

The expression *how come* displays much wider distributional possibilities. The expression canonically combines with a non-inverted finite S, as attested by the following corpus examples:¹

- (4) a. How come [I don't have a retirement fund]? (COCA)
 b. How come [I've never had my own show for more than a blink]? (COCA)
 c. How come [you're not getting pregnant with your own child]? (COCA)

As shown in (4), *how come* seems to combine with a finite S, asking the cause of the proposition denoted by the sentence. Note that a subordinate or even a much more complex sentence can intervene between *how come* and the main clause whose proposition it questions:

- (5) a. How come [when I asked you], you didn't stop? (COCA)
 b. How come [whenever you cook and use onions], they make you cry? (COCA)
 c. How come [if you and I and others can figure this out], so many other health professionals can't? (COCA)
 d. How come [every time I try to pin you down], I find myself talking to your taillights? (COCA)

¹The corpora we have used in this study include 410 million words COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), 400 million words COHA (Corpus of Historical American English), and 100 million words BNC (British National Corpus). All these are available online.

In the examples here, the intervening subordinate clause modifies an indicative main clause, and *how come* questions the proposition of this main clause, not that of the subordinate clause.

Note that *how come* can combine even with the so-called comparative correlative or an inverted complex sentence, as seen from the following attested examples from COCA:

- (6) a. How come [the more often I work out], [the hungrier I am]?
- b. But I want to ask Dr. Gish, how come [not only are the hemoglobins of chimpanzees and humans identical, but we share even pseudogenes].

Such distributional flexibility indicates that *how come* can question a variety of statement types realized in syntax.²

One puzzling distribution is that *how come* combines with a finite CP too:

- (7) a. How come [that you say that you are an existential threat]? (COCA)
- b. How come [that 67 doesn't become 66]? (COCA)
- c. How come [that you have such good English]? (COCA)

As noted by Zwicky and Zwicky (1971) and Collins (1991), such examples could be dialectal uses, but it seems to us that such distributional possibilities are quite common in standard English.

In terms of external syntax, the *how come* construction can occur wherever an interrogative construction can appear. For example, just like *why*, the construction can be the sentential complement of interrogative verbs like *ask*, *wonder* as in (8), or can serve as the complement of the copula in the wh-cleft or inverted wh-cleft construction as given in (9), or can even occur as the complement of a preposition or adjective as given in (10):

- (8) a. Now kids **ask** how come that's not happening in the real world. (COCA)
- b. Now **explain** how come you knew three thugs were going to jump me. (COCA)
- c. I never **wondered** how come there were no brothers in Westerns. (COCA)

²In a similar fashion, *why* can also have an intervening subordinate clause:

- (i) a. That's why [when they remade the movie], they set it in San Francisco, except that this was supposed to be a good thing. An organic thing.
- b. I was going to ask you why [if he's always so mean], you're always so nice?

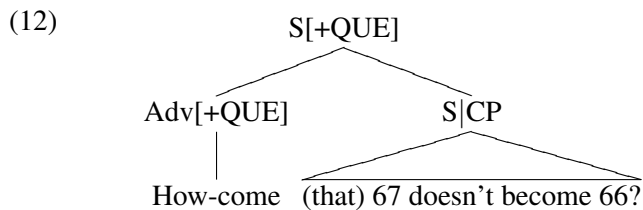
Though few examples have been found where a subordinate clause intervenes in direct questions, indirect examples as in (i) are found frequently. Such noninverted ordering is possible in the main clause in particular for children. See Thornton (2004) for detailed discussion.

- (9) a. That's how come I'm so superstitious, I figure. (COCA)
 b. What I want to know **is** how come I never heard of it? (COCA)
- (10) a. We were talking **about** how come we didn't have anything. (COCA)
 b. I'm not **sure** how come I followed you. (COCA)

In all these examples, we can naturally replace *how come* by *why*:

- (11) a. Kids ask why that's not happening in the real world.
 b. That is why I am so superstitious, I figure.
 c. We are talking about why we didn't have anything.

The distributional possibilities we have seen so far can be best captured by assuming that *how come* functions as a sentential or CP adverbial element, introducing an interrogative force as roughly represented in the following (cf. Zwicky and Zwicky 1971):



As given here, the expression *how come* is taken to be a complex word which has no variant form like **how came* in such a context (see section 5 for detailed analysis). In addition, no element can intervene between *how* and *come* and they need to be always together even in sluicing:

- (13) a. You're always grinning about something. How **(come)*?
 b. My grandma always paid for the meal. I remember asking my parents how **(come)*.

If these two expressions *how* and *come* are independent words, there would be no reason for us not to sluice *come* here. Moreover, the following attested coordination examples also show us that *how come* functions as a unit, introducing an interrogative force:

- (14) a. The tournament is finished. I don't know [when] and [how come].
 b. I wonder [why] and [how come] you are the most important person in my life.
 c. I wonder [how come] and [when] is the password resetting.

2.2 With a Nonfinite Clause

Even though *how come* in general combines with a finite S or CP, our corpus search gives us many instances where it combines with a non-finite small-clause S. In such a case, the type of predicative expression is quite flexible as seen from the following:

- (15) a. How come [your hair] [_{AP} so thick]? (COHA)
- b. How come [you guys] [_{PP} up here out of uniform]? (COHA)
- c. How come [we] [_{VP} going to the bakery]? (COCA)

What we can observe here is that the full range of possible predicative expressions such as AP, PP, or VP can also appear in this context. This kind of flexibility is not the unique property of *how come* since *why* also licenses similar examples:³

- (16) a. Why [your hair] [so sick]?
- b. Why [students] [in the room]?
- c. Why [you] [being so nice to me]?

In such a non-finite context, two intriguing points we note are the case marking on the subject and the VP's form value. As noted in Collins (1991), unlike *why*, *how come* does not license a base VP as its immediate dependent:⁴

- (17) a. Why/*How come [_{VP}_[bse] waste class time and money]?
- b. Why/*How come [_{VP}_[bse] travel if it caused such anxiety]?

When *how come* occurs with a subject, the predicative VP can be nonfinite:

- (18) a. Now, tell me the truth, how come [you] [singing songs for me]? (COCA)
- b. How come [they] [done that to me]? (COCA)
- c. How come [you] [been staying awake]? (COHA)

As seen here, nonfinite VPs can appear following the subject immediately. One intriguing property emerges from the subject in the infinitival VP. As seen in the following, the case value of the subject is accusative with *how come*, but nominative with *why*:⁵

³See Hendreick (1982) for more discussion of such reduced wh-questions.

⁴English VFORM values can be first divided into *finite* and *nonfinite*. The former has as its subtypes *pres(ent)*, *past*, and *plain* whereas the latter has *base*, *-en*, *-ing*, and *inf(initive)*. See Kim and Sells (2008) and the references therein.

⁵Some of the native speakers we consulted do not accept such examples with an infinitival VP.

- (19) a. How come [you] [to do that]? (COCA)
 b. How come [her] [to sing] or how come [her] [to close her eyes] when she sings? (COCA)
 c. How come [him] [to do that]. (COCA)
- (20) a. That's why [she] [to say to you that she's on your side]. (BNC)
 b. That's why [he] [to get golf clubs]. (BNC)

Given these observations, it seems to us that *how come* in the nonfinite clause cannot be treated as a sentential adverb, but another instance as an auxiliary-type element occurring in the auxiliary position. We will further discuss this assumption in what follows.

3 Semantic and Pragmatic Properties

In terms of meaning, *why* and *how come* both question a 'causal' relation that the main clause evokes. As seen from the following, each wh-question has a different semantic relation (cf. Fitzpatrick 2005, Tsai 2008):

- (21) A: Why did John leave?
 B: He was boring. (reason)
 B: He went to school. (purpose)
- (22) A: How did John leave?
 B: Quietly/On foot/Quite successfully. (manner/instrumental/resultative)
- (23) A: How come John left?
 B: He had to catch the flight. (causal)

As observed here, the conspicuous reading for *how come*, different from *why* or *how*, is a causal relation.

In addition to this kind of semantic difference, unlike *why*, *how come* is peculiar in that it does not allow a long distance construal (cf. Zwicky and Zwicky 1971, Collins 1991, Culicover 1999, Fitzpatrick 2006). For example, *why* in (24) can be linked to either the main clause or the embedded clause, but *how come* in (25) is associated only with the higher clause:

- (24) a. Why do some people think [they are above others]?
 b. Why do people say [it is racist to question the holocaust]?

- (25) a. How come some people think [they are above others]?
- b. How come people say [it is racist to question the holocaust]?

The local construal can be easily captured by the base-generation analysis in which *how come* is base-generated as an adverbial or an auxiliary element: it has no ability to look into a deeper structure, violating the locality condition.

As Collins (1991) and Conroy (2006) point out, *how come* is different from *why* in rhetorical questions which are negatively biased, too:

- (26) a. Why would John leave?
- b. *How come John would leave?

As seen here, unlike *why*, *how come* cannot introduce the negatively biased question since it conflicts with the presupposed truth of the complement. The presupposed factivity of the sentence can be also observed in the following:

- (27) a. *How come you will go out tonight?
- b. *How come if you had studied more, you would pass the exam?

As given here, *how come* cannot question a future event or subjunctive one. In a similar vein, we observe that unlike *why*, *how come* cannot be used as a suggestion:

- (28) a. Why don't we sing together? (suggestion)
- b. *How come we don't sing together?

This in turn means that *how come* cannot combine with an open question, basically barring multiple wh-questions like the following (cf. Collins 1991, Fitzpatrick 2005, 2006):

- (29) a. Why did John eat what?
- b. *How come John ate what?

It appears that the factivity requirement disallows multiple questions for *how come*.

The locality and factivity constraints also seem to lead to differences in pragmatic information. Both *why* P? and *how come* P? presuppose the existential closure of P, that is, presupposing the truth of the complement P.⁶ But, the speaker of

⁶As a reviewer points out, unlike *why*, *how come* cannot also combine with the expression *the hell*:

- (i) a. Why the hell did he drop out of the school?
- b. *How come the hell he dropped out of the school?

This implies that *how come* does not have a true interrogative force, as seen from the factivity constraint on its complement.

the latter also presupposes something caused P and P shouldn't happen and evokes the speech act such that the speaker wants to know what caused P.⁷ Observe the following contrast (cf. Tsai 2008):

- (30) How come you didn't leave when you had the chance?
- Presupposition: You didn't leave, and something caused you not to leave → You should have left.
- Speech Act: The speaker wants to know what caused you not to leave.
- (31) Why didn't you leave when you had the chance?
- Presupposition: You didn't leave.
- Speech Act: The speaker wants to know the reason you didn't leave.

The local construal constraint and the factivity constraint also seem to influence the scope possibility of *how*: *How come* doesn't scopally interact with a quantifier phrase (QP) (Zwicky and Zwicky 1971, Collins 1991).

- (32) a. Why does everyone hate John? (Why > every, every > Why)
- b. How come everyone hates John? (How come > every, *every > How come)

The sentence (32a) can have two readings: *why* can scope over the quantifier *everyone* or be scoped over by the quantifier. This ambiguity does not arise in (32b). The only possible reading here is the one where *how come* has a wider scope reading than the quantifier.

Another peculiar property can be found from NPI licensing: unlike *why*, *how come* does not license an NPI as seen from the contrast *Why did Joe say anything?* vs. **How come Joe ever said anything?*. Fitzpatrick (2005) and others point out that *how come* and *why* are different with respect to licensing NPIs. Wh-questions in general license an NPI:

- (33) a. Who said **anything** at the seminar?
- b. Why did John say **anything** at the seminar?
- c. How did John say **anything** at the seminar?
- d. *How come John ever said **anything**?

Note that the NPI constraint is similar in the complement clause of factive verbs:

⁷This kind of strong presuppositions seems to require the complement to denote a closed proposition, thus not allowing multiple *wh*-questions, as seen from the contrast *Why did John eat what?* vs. **How come John ate what?*

- (34) a. *John didn't find out that Bill ate anything.
 b. *John didn't find out that anyone left.

The nature of NPI licensing in the *how come* construction thus seems to have to do with the factivity constraint too. Note that a similar construction does not have such a constraint as noted in Fitzpatrick (2005):

- (35) a. How did it come about that John ever left?
 b. How did it come about that you would go on tour with anyone?

In terms of meaning, *how did it come about* is similar to *how come*, but does license an NPI like other wh-questions. In this sense, the NPI constraint is construction-specific.

4 Previous Approaches

4.1 Reduction Analyses

Considering the meaning of the *how come* construction, Zwicky and Zwicky (1971) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) independently suggest that the construction may be derived from *How did it come about that* or *How does it come to be that*, as illustrated in the following:

- (36) a. How come the fridge is switched off.
 b. How ~~did it~~ come ~~about that~~ the fridge is switched off.
 c. How ~~does it~~ come ~~to be that~~ the fridge is switched off.

This kind of analysis can immediately explain its combination possibilities with a finite S or a CP with the complementizer *that*, the local construal of the construction, and so forth.

However, it is not sure what kind of explicit syntactic rules can delete only *did it* and *about that* when considering quite flexible distributions of the construction we can see from its authentic uses (e.g. (15)). In addition, as pointed out by Collins (1991) and others, such a reduction approach would run into problems when the *how come* construction behaves differently from the presumed source sentence. For example, *how come* is semantically similar not to *how* but to *why*:

- (37) a. How come you turned the light off?
 b. Why did you turn the light off?
 c. How did you turn the light off?

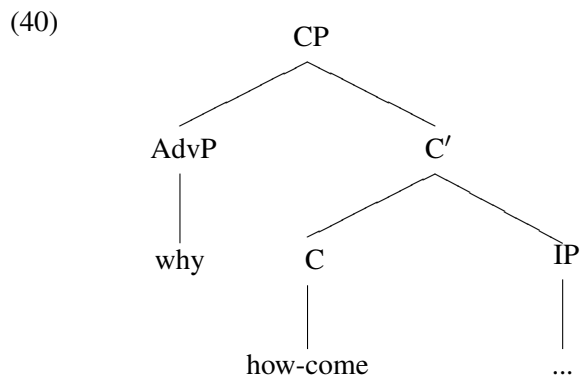
In addition, there are differences between *how come* and *how did it come about that* with respect to extraction as well as collocation with *else* (cf. Collins 1991):

- (38) a. How did you say that __ it came about that John left?
 b. *How did you say __ come that John left?
- (39) a. How else could it come about that John left?
 b. *How else come did John leave?

These examples of course show us that *how* in *how come* cannot be separated and no element can be intervened.

4.2 Comp Analyses

Observing the problems that a reduction-style analysis encounters, Collins (1991) proposes that *how come* is base-generated in the head of CP while *why* is moved to the Spec of CP:



First of all, this simple analysis can account for several facts including the distributional possibilities of *how come*. For example, its combination with a non-inverted S follows naturally. However, this COMP analysis, as Collins himself recognizes, runs into a problem for dealing with examples with the complementizer *that*:

- (41) a. How come [that others are selling our land]?
 b. How come [that no one could make a virus to attack linux OS]?

The supposition of an additional mechanism or relegating such examples to dialectal variance may save this COMP analysis, but issues still remain for coordination examples we have seen earlier:

- (42) a. I wonder [why and how come] he doesn't have many friends.

- b. [How come and why] can't I use this?

These coordination examples indicate that *how come* and *why* need to be in the same syntactic position.

It is true that the Comp analysis is simple and attractive in capturing a number of the construction's distributional possibilities. However, it is not enough to capture the idiosyncratic behavior of its syntactic and semantic properties.

5 An Analysis: a Double Life within an Construction-based Perspective

The general as well as peculiar properties of the *how come* construction lead us to conclude the following generalizations:

- (43) a. *How come* functions as an adverbial expression modifying a finite S or CP.
b. *How come* can be used as an inverted auxiliary.

With this generalization, we assume that the invariable form *how come* invokes the lexeme-type construction in (44), but this lexeme has two different word-level types: one as an adverbial and the other as an inverted auxiliary element.⁸ That is, we assume that English has a special *come* lexeme as represented in the following:

- (44)
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{come-factive-lexeme} \\ \text{FORM } \langle \text{come} \rangle \\ \text{SYNTAX } | \text{ SPR } \langle [\text{how}] \rangle \\ \text{SEMANTICS } \text{why}(\text{factive-P}) \\ \text{CONTEXT } \left[\begin{array}{l} P \text{ is presupposed} \\ P \text{ shouldn't happen} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

This lexeme tells us that *come* combines with *how* as its specifier and has a special pragmatic effect coming from the factivity condition.⁹ We assume that this lexeme can serve as the immediate daughter of two word-level constructions that inherit the core properties of the lexeme but are minimally different with respect to syntactic features:

⁸A construction is a set of formal conditions on morphosyntax, semantic interpretation, pragmatic function that jointly characterize or license certain classes of linguistic objects. The grammatical constructions in a language for a network are connected by links of inheritance. See Fillmore (1999) and Michaelis (2011) for detailed discussion.

⁹As a reviewer points out, this auxiliary *come* is special in that it requires *how* as its specifier or subject. As suggested in the below, grammaticalization processes seem to change this property too.

(45)

a. As an adverb

b. As an Auxiliary

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{adv-come-word-cx} \\ \text{FORM } \langle \text{how-come} \rangle \\ \text{CAT adv} \\ \text{SPR } \langle \quad \rangle \\ \text{MOD } \langle \text{S/CP[INV -]} \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

|

$$\left[\text{come-factive-lexeme} \right]$$
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{aux-come-word-cx} \\ \text{FORM } \langle \text{come} \rangle \\ \text{CAT verb} \\ \text{COMPS } \langle \text{NP, XP} \rangle \\ \text{AUX +} \\ \text{INV +} \end{array} \right]$$

|

$$\left[\text{come-factive-lexeme} \right]$$

What this means is that *come* can be realized into two different options at the word level construction with the *come-factive-lexeme* as their syntactic daughter: one as an adverbial element in which *come* forms a complex lexical element with *how*, and the other as an auxiliary expression selecting *how* as its specifier (whose property is inherited from the lexeme type). This in turn means that in English there are two word-level constructions that take the lexeme as its input and produce the word level output inheriting most of the lexeme's properties.¹⁰

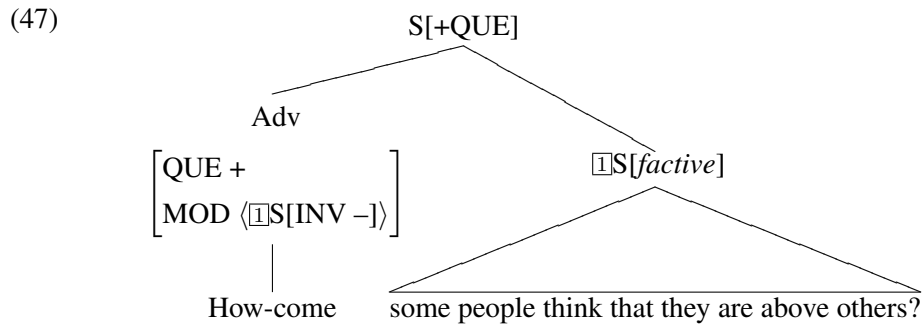
Why do we have such a peculiar, double life? Our conjecture is it may have to do with grammaticalization. There is crosslinguistic evidence that deictic verbs like *come* and *go* are most prone to be grammaticalized into a tense or aspect maker, exhibiting a wide range of morphosyntactic variation. Hopper and Traugott (1993) note that the development of such deictic verbs into tense and aspect markers typically has several characteristics including the following:

- (46) a. Constructions undergo grammaticalization rather than lexemes *per se*.
b. Grammaticalization involves morpho-syntactic reanalysis. In particular, there is an increase in c-command scope.
c. Various stages of grammaticalization may co-exist; That is, the process exhibits structural and phonological allomorphy.

We conjecture that the *how come* construction reflects these grammaticalization properties. First, *how come* is reanalyzed as an adverbial element with the highest scope or *come* becomes an auxiliary verb. As noted, the lack of any inflection on *come*, which is a canonical property of an auxiliary verb as for the semi-auxiliary *need*, implies that that *come* here is not a regular main verb. As we have seen earlier, there is enough evidence showing that *how* and *come* are reanalyzed as a

¹⁰See Sag (2011) for similar processes in English.

lexical element: the two have no variant forms and form a tight unit. The adverbial function of *how come*, together with an interrogative force, has been observed in many places. This adverbial realization explains why *how come*, unlike other canonical wh-words, licenses the local construal only:



As represented in the structure, *how come* requires a finite, noninverted S as its dependent from the beginning. There is then no way to link this to the embedded clause only. In addition, since the dependent S is required to be factive, the grammar would not generate an open question, disallowing a wh-expression within the dependent.

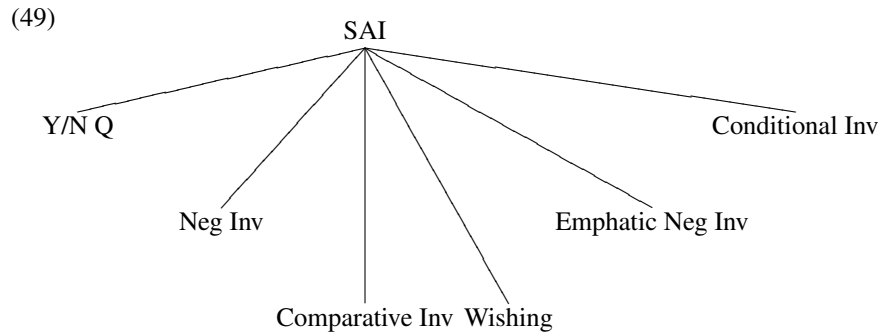
What is interesting is that there is a variation with respect to inversion property. Our corpus gives some examples where *how come* combines with an inverted S:

- (48) a. But perhaps someone will ask in the language of the day, how come does iodine get into the human system of dwellers along the coasts from sea water? (COCA)
- b. Stepan is attempting to carve the chicken. STEPAN Anna, how come is it that your boyfriend isn't here to carve? (COCA)
- c. When I represent the Iranian government how come is it that I am unaware of what you are telling me and that you should be aware of it. (COCA)
- d. Brandon, now nine years old – Brandon now nine years old. Now, how come did you give those baby-sitters such a hard time? (COCA)
- e. How come, if he's the Devil Incarnate, does he spend half the book down there in that poxy little room? (BNC)

Within the present system, for such a variation for speakers, the only thing we need to do is to loosen up the [INV –] requirements.¹¹ That is, if we assume that the composite adverbial expression *how come* combines with an inverted sentence, we would generate examples like (48).

¹¹Negative adverbs like *never* can modify an inverted S as in *Never [did I pass the test]*.

Second, *come* has another life as an auxiliary. English employs many different SAI (Subject-Aux Inversion) constructions as given in (49) (cf. Green 1976, Fillmore 1999, Kim and Sells 2008):



These constructions have one shared formal property such that the auxiliary is inverted in the sentence initial position as have been accepted by traditional grammar and others. However, each of these constructions has its own constraints which cannot fully be predicted from other constructions:

- (50) a. Wish: May she live forever!
 b. Matrix Polar Interrogative: Was I that stupid?
 c. Negative Imperative: Don't you even touch that!
 d. Subjunctive: Had they been here now, we wouldn't have this problem.
 e. Exclamative: Boy, am I tired!

For example, in 'wish' constructions, only the modal auxiliary *may* is possible. In negative imperatives, only *don't* allows the subject to follow. These idiosyncratic properties support a non-movement approach, in which auxiliaries can be specified to have particular uses or meanings when inserted into particular positions in the syntax.¹²

As Fillmore (1999) and Goldberg (2006) have suggested, the set of SAI constructions, linked or derived from the prototypical sentences, is different from prototypical sentences in many respects. For example, the SAI constructions cannot stand alone, are dependent upon the main clause, and represent non-positive and non-assertive denotations. These common attributes on the SAI can be represented as constructional constraints in Figure 1.

¹²See Fillmore (1999) and Goldberg (2006) for the discussion of grammatical properties of the SAI construction.

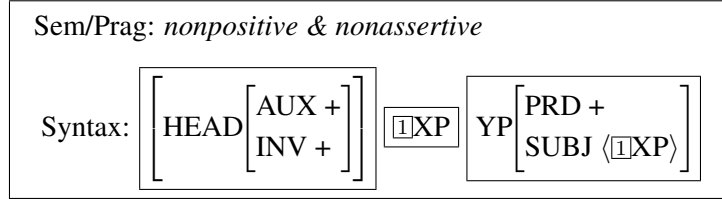


Figure 1: SAI in English

The constructional constraints in Figure 1 specify that in terms of semantics and pragmatics, SAI constructions have non-positive and non-assertive illocutionary force. In terms of syntax, SAI constructions are inverted and have three sisters consisting of an inverted auxiliary, subject XP, and the predicate.

We assume that the auxiliary *come* also invokes a subtype of such SAI constructions, but has its own constructional constraints as given in the following:

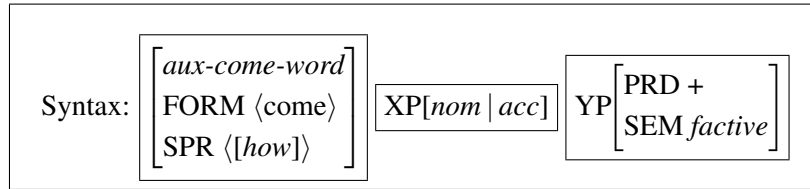
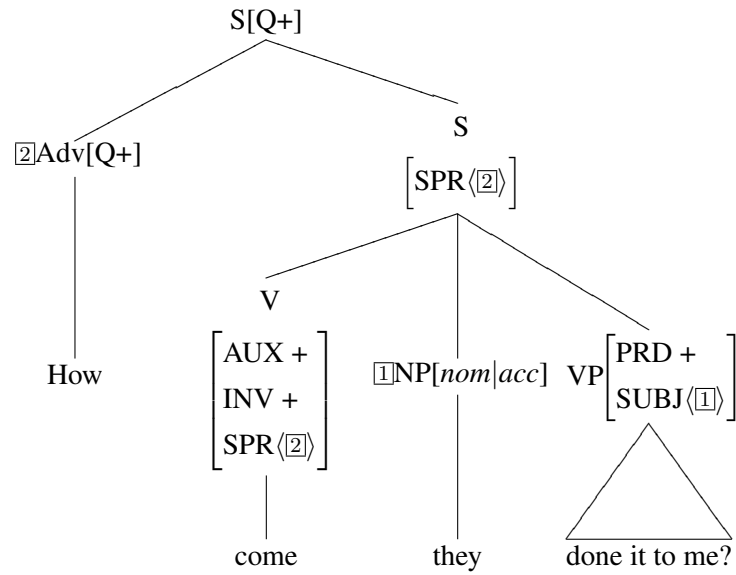


Figure 2: come-SAI in English

This construction, basically being projected from the *aux-come-word*, inherits the properties of its supertype SAI construction in Figure 1, but specifies that its second argument can be marked either with nominative or accusative. In addition, the construction is peculiar in that it requires *how* as its specifier expression which triggers an interrogative force. The construction eventually gives us structures like the following:

(51)



As shown in the structure, the expression *come* is taken to be an inverted auxiliary, requiring a subject and a predicative element.

Within the present system, the auxiliary *come* in a sense selects the subject and its predicate as a type of complement. This may then explain why the subject can appear as accusative also:¹³

- (52) a. How come [they] [done that to me]? (COCA)
 b. How come [you] [been staying awake]? (COCA)
 c. How come [her] [to sing]? (COCA)

The nonfinite VFORM value of the predicate here is also intriguing. One interesting set of data we have encountered from the COCA corpus is examples like the following where the main verb's VFORM value is base:

- (53) a. How come he [**say** you don't respect him]? (COCA)
 b. How come this nigger so cool, how come it [**freeze** up whenever they on the scene]? (COCA)
 c. So how come Bedlington [**let** you ride Lang on this horse]? (COCA)
 d. How come she [**take** on a skinny little runt like you if she so pretty]? (COHA)

¹³As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, this case assignment is peculiar in that nominative is canonically assigned by a finite verb while accusative gets its case by a nonfinite expression. Our conjecture is that the finite auxiliary *come* assigns nominative while the nonfinite predicate assigns accusative.

These appear to be counterexamples to the assumption that *how come* combines with a finite sentence. However, in the present analysis, such examples can be expected since the nonfinite base VP can be the predicative complement of the auxiliary *come*.¹⁴

6 Conclusion

In the paper, we have seen that *how come* is semantically similar to *why*, but it displays quite different syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. We have seen that the flexible, distributional possibilities of *how come*, together with carrying sui generis properties, lead us to the double-life analysis we sketched here. In particular, we suggest that *how come* can be a composite adverbial element modifying a finite, noninverted S or CP, or can be a special auxiliary selecting *how* as its specifier. We conjecture that this double life has to do with the grammaticalization process of *come*.

The idiosyncratic properties of the *how come* construction are unpredictable from general principles, but some are surely inherited from more general constructions. This mechanism, together with our double-life approach, further gives us ways to account for variations in the uses of *how come*. We believe that English grammar must license such variations too.

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¹⁴Another unexpected support for the present analysis also seems to come from variations in the use of *how come*. In particular, as seen from the following attested examples, we observe *how comes* is used in two different ways:

- (i) a. How comes [it] [that there are gardens here at all]?
- b. How comes [it] [that all this was unfortunately the case]?
- (ii) a. How comes [is it that there are gardens here at all]?
- b. How comes [is it that all this was unfortunately the case]?

As seen from the above, the expression *how comes* might be taken to be an auxiliary element as or used as a simple adverbial expression as given here. As a reviewer points out, the auxiliary verb is canonically not inflected. However, as in British English examples like *Has the student enough money?*, the inflected verb can have an inverted auxiliary property.

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