Parasitic participles in the syntax of verbal rather

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the syntax of parasitic participles in (varieties of) colloquial English, which can be found when rather is used as a verb. The syntax of verbal rather has not, to my knowledge, been studied before, and turns out to be of substantial interest, for two reasons. First, it presents a syntactic configuration that is not found elsewhere in the language, with the result that one perfect auxiliary can license two perfect participles. While rare in English, this phenomenon has been studied in a number of other Germanic languages, and has been argued to be diagnostic of restructuring. Second, its syntactic and argument structural properties in ECM contexts suggest that it may license a null variant of ECM HAVE, providing a perhaps unique angle for studying the syntax of verbal elements dependent on the availability of various uses of ‘have’.

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1. Introduction

The sentences in (1) exhibit a phenomenon common in the colloquial speech of some, but not all, speakers of (American) English.¹ There, the word rather takes verbal participial morphology (-ed), and co-occurs with another verb which also takes participial morphology.

(1) a. I wouldn’t tell him, but I would have rathered slept in a bed because, in all honesty, his lap was not very comfortable.²

b. But all in all, a strip club is where I would have rathered him gone³

(1b) shows that rather in this use is (or may be) a verb, since it licenses the embedded subject him; without rathered, (1b) is ungrammatical for all speakers of English (as far as I know), as illustrated in (2).⁴

(2) *But all in all, a strip club is where I would’ve him gone!

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¹ I have not investigated this phenomenon in varieties of English spoken outside of North America.
³ http://www.weddingwire.com/wedding-forums/kwr-ooops-update/f897699a59b8f8d6e.html?page=2
⁴ In this paper, I generally use ‘ve instead of have for constructed examples in order to avoid ambiguity with lexical have, which may not, for most speakers of American English, be expressed as ‘ve; in some cases, a parse with lexical have would lead to a grammatical sentence with an irrelevant meaning. Most examples of perfect have in this paper are more naturally pronounced [əv] or [ə]; see Kayne (1997) for the possible syntactic relevance of this, which introduces issues that go beyond the scope of the present study (see also Kayne, 1993).
The verbal use of *rather* means something very close to ‘prefer’.

The occurrence of two perfect participles with only one perfect auxiliary (*have*) is widespread across Germanic languages (see Wurmbrand, 2010, 2011 for a detailed overview; see also Bošković, 1995, 1999 on double participles in Serbo-Croatian). Den Dikken and Hoekstra (1997) discuss instances of what they call “parasitic participles” in Frisian.

(3) *hy soe it* **dien** **wollen** **ha**
    *he would it done.PRF wanted.PRF have.INF*
    ‘He would have liked to do it.’  

(Frisian)

In (3), one auxiliary *ha* ‘have’ seems to be licensing two perfect participles; the infinitive *dwaan* ‘do’, normally selected by *wolle* ‘want’, is also possible. The participial form on *dien* ‘done’ is parasitic on the participial form of *wollen* ‘want’; that is, *dien* is only possible with ‘*want*’ if ‘*want*’ is itself in the participial form.

Parasitic participles are found in the Scandinavian languages as well, including at least Norwegian, Swedish and Faroese (and possibly some varieties of Danish) (Wiklund, 2001:211; Wiklund, 2007:190). The following is a Swedish example from Wiklund (2001:211).

(4) *Han har velat åkt* till Spanien.
    *he has wanted.PRF gone.PRF to Spain*
    ‘He has wanted to go to Spain.’  

(Swedish)

(4) looks quite similar to *I would have rathered gone to Spain*, a sentence which is parallel to (1a) and grammatical for me. Certain “Exceptional Case Marking” (ECM) verbs can also license parasitic participles, as illustrated again for Swedish in (5) (example from Wiklund, 2007:69).

(5) *Vi hade låtit henne skrivit ett bref.*
    *we had let.PRF her written.PRF a letter*
    ‘We had let her write a letter.’  

(Swedish)

(5) looks quite similar to *We would have rathered her written a letter*, a sentence which is parallel to (1b) and grammatical for me. (See section 2 below for discussion of ECM verbs.)

Faroese, to judge by the discussion in Thráinsson et al. (2004), has parasitic participles very robustly. The examples in (6) show parasitic participles with a bare infinitive (6a), an *at* ‘to’-marked infinitive (6b), an adjective (6c) and an object control or ECM verb (6d).

(6) a. *Han hevði viljað lisið bókina.*
    *he had wanted.PRF read.PRF book.the*
    ‘He would have wanted to read the book.’  

(Faroese)

b. *Teir hava roynt at dripið grind.*
    *they have tried.PRF to killed.PRF pilot.whale*
    ‘They have tried to kill pilot whales.’  

(Faroese)

c. *Tað hevði verið stuttligt at sloppið at hildið rõðu.*
    *it had been.PRF interesting to gotten.PRF to held.PRF speech*
    ‘It would have been interesting to get to give a speech.’  

(Faroese)

d. *Teir kundu noktað mær at komið i bátin.*
    *they could denied.PRF me to come.PRF to boat.the*
    ‘They could have prevented me from getting on the boat.’  

(Faroese)

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5 I do not know whether (6d) is an instance of ECM or object control. (6a) comes from Wiklund (2007:191), and (6b–d) come from Thráinsson et al. (2004:235–236). The choice of perfect participial morphology with modals, such as in (6d), may have semantic effects, in addition to licensing a lower participle in place of an infinitive.
In Icelandic, such examples are impossible for many speakers (cf. Wiklund, 2001:202; Thráinsson et al., 2004:236), though they are possible for others (cf. Wiklund, 2007:192). The following is an attested example from E.F. Sigurðsson (2012:83).

(7) 

Ég hefði viljað getað sagt
I had. SBJV wanted. PRF been.able. PRF said. PRF
að við ættum að vera hér á fundi á Alþingi á mánuðaginn kemur.
that we ought to be here in meeting at Althing on Monday comes

‘I would have wanted to be able to say that we ought to be here meeting at Althing this Monday.’ (Icelandic)

In (7), as in the standard language, the verb hafa ‘have’ selects the perfect participle form of vilja ‘want’, and geta ‘be able to’ selects perfect participle form of segja ‘say’. However, while vilja ‘want’ standardly selects the infinitival form of the following verb, in (7) it selects the perfect participle form. Although examples of vilja ‘want’ selecting a perfect participle on its own are not unattested, E.F. Sigurðsson (2012:83) writes that for him, it is “much better […] if vilja ‘want’ is itself in the participial form.” This seems, then, to be another instance of a parasitic participle. Web searches reveal further Icelandic examples, such as the particularly striking example in (8), where the coordinate structure replicates the second participle on each conjunct.

(8) 

Ég hefði viljað farið í langt heitt bað, pantð pítsu, náð í dvd og sofnáð yfir henni.
I have. SBJV wanted. PRF gone. PRF in long hot bath ordered. PRF pizza gotten. PRF in dvd and fallen.asleep. PRF over it

‘I’d have wanted to take a long hot bath, order a pizza, get a DVD and fall asleep to it.’ (Icelandic)

While these examples are likely to be unacceptable to many speakers of Icelandic, something about the syntactic system seems be set up to allow certain instances of parasitic participles through, for some speakers, with the kinds of verbs that allow them more robustly in other languages.

The same can be said of the English sentences in (1). Many speakers would reject such examples, while others, including myself, find them completely natural. The emergence of this phenomenon seems to stem initially from the acquisition of rather as a verb, in addition to its use as an adverb. The sentence in (9a) thus has a parse like (9b), where it is an adverb modifying some projection of the verb, or like (9c), where it is a verb taking a VP complement.

(9) 

a. I would rather leave now.
b. [I would [VP1 [AdvP rather] [VP1 leave now]]]
c. [I would [VP2 [V2 rather] [VP1 leave now]]]

In the parse in (9c), rather is a verb that means something like ‘prefer’, and its VP complement is a bare infinitive; that is, it lacks the infinitive marker to found in sentences like I would prefer *(to) leave now. Something about the structural configuration in (9c) seems to lead a subset of speakers to allow two participles. However, as we will see below, the “verbal” parse of rather, for a given speaker, does not guarantee the availability of sentences like (1) for that speaker.

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6 Richard Kayne (p.c.) asks whether the relative reluctance of Icelandic to accept parasitic participles, as compared to Faroese, is related to any other difference between the two languages, such as Icelandic having more verb-raising than Faroese. One possibility is that Icelandic infinitives tend to project a larger structure, which both allows verb movement and interferes with the dependency of the embedded verb on the matrix clause. Note, however, that infinitive complements vilja ‘want’ seem to lack such verb movement (Thráinsson, 1984:254); nevertheless, vilja ‘want’ evidently allows partial control, as in Hvæmir vilja hittast? ‘When do you want to meet’, which might suggest a larger structure (Landau, 2004). In evaluating (7), the somewhat unusual behavior of geta ‘can’ discussed by Thráinsson (2007:422–423) may also be relevant.

7 Original: “en þó þykir mér mun edilegara að nota getað ef sagnbót (eða lýsingarháttur þáltar) vilja fer á undan, sbr. viljað getað í [(7)].” Einar Freyr Sigurðsson (p.c.) informs me that (8) is not acceptable to him, although it seems that it is unlikely to be a production error.


9 Or a projection of a verb, as proposed below.
In this paper, I describe and analyze three dialects (idioms) with respect to verbal *rather* (and briefly discuss a fourth dialect). Two of these dialects will be argued to exhibit parasitic participles; that is, the participle morphology on the lower verb is only possible when there is participle morphology on a higher verb. The third dialect (Dialect C) exhibits parasitic participles transparently. I argue that the second dialect (Dialect B) does so as well, although the higher participle can be silent. The first dialect (Dialect A), however, seems to disallow all instances of parasitic participles (at least in the empirical domain under consideration).

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I give a brief overview of verbal *rather*. In section 3, I provide some background on parasitic participles and present the analysis of them adopted here. In section 4, I provide a description and analysis of three dialects with respect to verbal *rather*. Section 5 outlines some remaining points of variation and issues that remain to be understood.

2. Verbal *rather*

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the use of *rather* as a verb, since it is not recognized as such in Standard English, and indeed, in many dialects, does not behave as a verb. According to Klippenstein (2012), the adverb *rather* has become “lexicalized” as a verb fairly recently. From a historical perspective, Klippenstein (2012) is interested in the development of a modal adverb into verb which seems to follow principles of grammaticalization despite being a development from a lexical item into another lexical item (rather than into a functional item). Although the earliest attestations of verbal *rather* come from 1576 or earlier, verbal morphology does not appear on *rather* until the late 1890s. The first attested example occurs in Sinclair’s (1899) edited version of a text from 1614, where (10a) is rewritten as (10b).

(10) a. I *rather* I had bene buried heir.
    b. I should have *rathered* I had been buried here.

Klippenstein (2012) observes:

Sinclair cleans up spelling, morphology, word choice, and style towards norms of his time. In the process, he adapts [(10)a] (without morphology) to [(10)b] (with morphology); this indicates that he in fact perceived should have *rathered* as relatively standard.

That *rather* is a verb in (10) is suggested by the fact that there is no other overt element that could be considered the verb introducing the embedded clause.

In present day English, sentences like (10a) are ungrammatical for many speakers—all speakers who I have asked, in fact. This is because verbal *rather* is only possible in the presence of a modal element, as indicated in 11. In section 5.3, I discuss further which modals are possible with verbal *rather*. Verbal *rather* also cannot occur on its own in perfect or progressive contexts, as shown in (12).

(11) I *(would) rather* that I had been buried here.

(12) a. *I had rathered him leave.
    b. *I have rathered him leave for a while now.
    c. *I was rathering him leave.

Even in the presence of *would, rather* resists certain verbal suffixes, such as *-ing*. While (13a) might be ungrammatical because verbs meaning ‘prefer’ are often odd or unacceptable in the progressive (see (14a)), this explanation does not obviously extend to the unacceptability of (13b).

(13) a. *At that point, I would have been rathering leave before them.
    b. *He would then really rely on me rathering them (to) leave early.

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10 I will use the term ‘dialect’ in this paper, although it is not known whether the dialects have a socially-interesting distribution, such as being constrained by geography, gender, or the like. This would be good to know, but for present purposes I am interested solely in the morphosyntax of the relevant dialects (cf. Kayne (2013:133) on % We prefer those kind of horses). Informally, I have not, so far, been able to discern any social coherence among the dialects, such as in terms of geography or age; but I have not yet conducted the sort of research that would be likely to reveal such coherence. I myself am a speaker of Dialect C, and I am from New Hampshire.

11 In the framework adopted below, an element is “lexicalized” as a verb when it is embeddable in verbal structure.
(14)  
a. *At that point, I would have been preferring to leave before them.
b. He would then really rely on me preferring them to leave early.

However, I wish to point out immediately that to judge by web searches, there appear to be many speakers for whom this restriction does not hold; some examples are provided in (15). The diacritic %D indicates that these examples are only possible for speakers of dialects other than Dialects A, B, and C discussed in section 4.

(15)  
a. %D Wow can’t believe at one point I actually had rathered carried around a “fanny pack” full of cds as opposed to owning an ipod!
b. %D Dougie had rathered felt anything than what he was feeling daily; numb, ever since the accident.
c. %D Once it rained and I rathered to walk without shoes before making my cat’s boots wet.
d. %D I’ve always rathered to be the listener than to speak of myself.
e. %D She much ratheres to sniff around and not run too much these days.

Examples can be found of rather taking the -ing suffix as well. The examples in (16) are cited in the wiktitionary entry for rather. (16a) comes from Bruce Brooks’s (1984) The Moves Make the Man, and (16b) comes from Elizabeth Bowen’s (1949:269) The Heat of the Day (also cited in Klippenstein, 2012).

(16)  
a. %D The ones who knew said nothing, rathering to die than let on they had been hustled by two negative dudes.
b. %D I had understood us all to be friendly --- apart, that is, from his rathering me not there.

It may be that for (some) speakers of Dialect D, rather is a lexical verb that is of no more interest than other verbs with a similar meaning (which is not to say it is of no interest at all). But the attested data termed here “Dialect D”, including the participle doubling examples in (15a–b), are hard to evaluate, since I do not know of any speakers who accept these examples. There may be considerable microvariation among Dialect D speakers (assuming there are such speakers), and since for present purposes I am specifically interested in microvariation, I have to set this data aside. The takeaway point for now is that for the dialects discussed in this paper, verbal rather requires a modal context, and resists -ing morphology. I return to the former point in section section 5.3.

Verbal rather for the dialects at hand, then, is quite restricted in its distribution. The motivation for thinking it is a verb at all in these dialects comes primarily from examples like the attested sentences in (17), which are acceptable to speakers of the dialects discussed in this paper (A/B/C).

(17)  
a. I would rather him call me by my first name than be called Mom.
b. I would rather him learn from an early age how to use a weapon for a few reasons.
c. Would you rather break up with someone… or have them break up with you? […] I would rather him break up with me.

As mentioned in the previous section, these examples illustrate the use of rather as an “Exceptional Case Marking” (ECM) verb. An ECM verb is so called because the verb is “exceptional” in that it appears to case-mark a DP to which it does not
assign a theta-role (namely, the embedded subject). Thus, the embedded subject may be an expletive (which is generally thought not to get any theta-role at all).

(18) a. I work outside so I’d rather it rain on my days off.22
    b. Am I the only one that would rather there be one syntax?23

As an ECM verb, notice that rather is among the verbs that may take an infinitive complement without the infinitive marker to.24 Other ECM verbs that lack to include “causative” verbs like make, let, and have; perception verbs like see, hear, and feel; and the verb help (though see Johnson, 2013 for an intriguingly different empirical picture of Appalachian English).25

(19) a. I made him call me.
    b. I let him call me.
    c. I had him call me.

(20) a. I saw him walk upstairs.
    b. I heard him walk upstairs.
    c. I felt him brush past me.
    d. I helped him walk upstairs.

In the ECM uses of rather, it seems like rather must be the “lexical” verb, because leaving it out would be ungrammatical:

(21) a. *I would him call me by my first name.
    b. *I would him learn from an early age how to use a weapon.
    c. *I would him break up with me.

In contrast, non-ECM uses of apparently verbal rather are often grammatical without the latter, leading to the possibility that is still adverbial in those uses.26

(22) a. I would (rather) leave now.
    b. I would have (rathered) left earlier.

While the use of rather in (22) is potentially ambiguous (despite verbal morphology on (22b)), the ECM use in (17) would seem to force the conclusion that rather is the verb, if any overt element is. It is this fact that motivates my use of the term “verbal rather.”27 When rathered is pronounced in sentences like (22b), we seem to have one perfect auxiliary (have) licensing two perfect participles, just like the parasitic participle constructions discussed in the previous section.

In this section, I have discussed some of the basic properties of verbal rather. That it is a verb is suggested most strongly by the ECM structures where its omission leads to ungrammaticality; the embedded subject is only licensed in the presence of rather. While verbal rather is attested with various kinds of verbal morphology, for the speakers discussed in this paper (non-“Dialect D” speakers), verbal rather generally requires the presence of a modal. Some speakers allow the perfect participle form rathered (as long as a modal is also present, as in would’ve rathered), and such speakers also allow instances of two participles, which strongly resembles the cross-Germanic phenomenon of parasitic participles. In the next section, I provide some background on parasitic participles, before detailing the dialect variation in section 4. I return to the modal requirement, among other issues, in section 5.

3. Parasitic participles

Parasitic participles have been observed in descriptive studies of Germanic languages (Mikkelsen, 1911; Ljunggren, 1934; Thráinsson et al., 2004), and have received attention in theoretical work such as Den Dikken and Hoekstra (1997), Wiklund (2001, 2007), and Wurmbrand (2010, 2011, 2012b). It has been observed that parasitic participles are

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22 http://www.facebook.com/pages/I-work-outside-so-I’d-rather-it-rain-on-my-days-off/127098013976682
23 https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=5067084
24 In fact, to is unacceptable to the speakers of the present dialects (A/B/C).
25 As we will see below, “causative” have is not always really causative.
26 As noted below, rathered is only acceptable in Dialect B and Dialect C. (22a) holds for everyone.
27 I will argue below that null verbal elements are doing a lot of the verbal work in the structure.
characteristic of so-called “restructuring” verbs cross-linguistically (Wiklund, 2007; see Wurmbrand, 1998, 2004; Cinque, 2006). Restructuring verbs are generally analyzed as verbs which take complements that are structurally reduced or smaller as compared to non-restructuring verbs, or are the realization of functional heads in the extended projection of a lexical verb.

For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt the analysis of parasitic participles according to which a restructuring verb may or may not select for an infinitive complement. One way of operationalizing this is to assume that when a verb selects an infinitive complement, it selects for extra structure, such as an infinitival T head. However, while parasitic participles are characteristic of restructuring verbs, they are not an obligatory consequence of a smaller, restructuring structure; restructuring effects can be found in the absence of parasitic participles. For example, one kind of restructuring phenomenon is known as a "long passive" (Wurmbrand, 1998, 2004). In long passives, a verb taking an infinitive complement is passivized, and the object of the embedded infinitive is promoted to subject (as in *This was tried to fix = ‘someone tried to fix this’, which is not acceptable in English). However, long passives embedded under a perfect auxiliary are possible without necessarily forcing parasitic participles, as shown by the (non-standard) Norwegian example provided by Helge Lødrup (p.c.).

(23) lovligheten bak det firmaet er blitt forsøkt å gjøre noe med legality.DEF behind that company.DEF is been.PRF tried.PASS to do something with ‘One has tried to do something about the legality of that company.’ (Norwegian)

If restructuring under perfect auxiliaries forced parasitic participles, the embedded infinitive verb would be expected to be a participle rather than an infinitive. I will thus assume that while a restructuring configuration is required for parasitic participles, it does not guarantee them, and there is no need to say that a parasitic participle structure is necessarily smaller than an infinitival one. Instead, a restructuring verb may assign infinitive feature to an under-specified verbal head—here called Asp(ect)—in the extended projection of the verb. For example, suppose that the verb write projects an Asp head, and the verb let assigns the feature [INF] to that head. This gives the basic structure in (24). As noted in Wurmbrand (2010, 2011), who develops an analysis of parasitic participles suggested by Wiklund (2007), feature valuation here is top-down, which is more like Case valuation, but unlike \(\phi\)-feature valuation, in the Agree relation proposed by Chomsky (2001); see Sigurðsson (in press) on top-down agreement, and Sigurðsson (2006) on the distinction between Agree and agreement, a distinction that is not made here.

(24) 

I assume that in perfect constructions, a perfect auxiliary have assigns participial morphology to any Asp head in its local domain, as long as the verb is capable of bearing participial morphology (see Wurmbrand, 2010, 2011); the Asp head is
the locus of participial morphology (see Bjorkman, 2011; see also Embick, 2003, 2004). The structure of John would have gone is thus as in (25).

(25) 

Following Abels (2003) and Wurmbrand (2012a), I assume a "last resort" condition on merging functional heads; that is, a functional head may only merge if it leads to the immediate satisfaction of a previously unsatisfiable feature. Asp merges because verbs have a feature requiring them to project an Asp head, so Asp may merge to satisfy this feature. (For present purposes, we may assume that this is simply a verbal feature—the feature of "being a verb"; see also Roberts (2010).) This Asp head needs to have an aspectual feature assigned to it, so Perf may merge to satisfy that feature. I assume that similar verbal features continue the selectional relations all the way up the extended projection of the verb.

The sentence in (26a) is ungrammatical because even though make receives participial morphology, it still assigns infinitival morphology to its complement.

(26) a. * John would’ve made her written a letter.
   b.  John would’ve made her write a letter.

The relevant portion of the structure of (26b) is provided in (27).

(27) 

However, sentences like (26a) do exist, such as the Swedish example in (5), repeated here in (28).

(28) Vi hade låtit henne skrivit ett bref.
   We had let her written a letter
   'We had let her write a letter.' (Swedish)
Following the analysis in Wurmbrand (2011, 2012b), when restructuring verbs allow parasitic participles, they have the property that they do not assign any feature on the lower Asp head. Instead, both the matrix and the lower verb are dependent on higher verbal structure.\(^{33}\) (28) is thus derived as in (29).

\[ (29) \]

The reason that English generally lacks parasitic participles, then, is that it has no restructuring verbs of the relevant sort: it has no verbs with small-sized complements to which it does not assign verbal features. The verbal rather facts, such as the sentences in (1), however, suggest that the structure of English is very close to allowing the sorts of configurations that yield parasitic participles. In what follows I will propose that, for Dialects B and C, there are two verbs with the parasitic property: a null variant of ECM have, which is thus very much like the Swedish låta ‘let’, and a volitional modal head activated by rather, which is very much like the volitional verbs in Frisian (3) and Swedish (4).

4. Dialect variation in verbal rather

In this section I discuss dialect variation in structures with verbal rather, and the analysis of those structures. In each subsection, I present the judgments of a given dialect, and discuss the analysis of that dialect. In section 4.4, I present a full summary of the relevant data and the points of analysis; the interested reader may skip to (49) and (50) if s/he wishes to see all of the data together, rather than one dialect at a time.

There are two interacting domains of analysis that play a role in what follows. First, there is the question of how to analyze parasitic participles. Second, there is a question of how rather becomes a verb, which requires some notion of what it means to “be a verb.” So what the analysis has to cover is how rather becomes a verb, as well as how it becomes a verb that allows parasitic participles.

For the first question, I have outlined an analysis in the previous section. The basic idea is that Asp heads are projected by verbs, but have no inherent feature value. They must acquire a value from a higher head. In non-parasitic constructions, the next highest verbal head typically assigns the feature value, such as [INF] in (27). In parasitic constructions, the next highest verbal head does not assign the feature value, and moreover, it projects its own Asp head in need of a value. In such circumstances, a higher head (such as Perf) assigns the feature value to both Asp heads simultaneously. This was illustrated in (29). The domain of variation here, then, is whether or not a verb values the Asp

\(^{33}\) One difference is that Wurmbrand (2011, 2012b) treats infinitival morphology as a feature of the verb, rather than as a feature of a projection of the verb. I assume with standard work in Distributed Morphology (e.g. Embick, 2003, 2004) that the separate participle inflection on the verb corresponds to a separate syntactic head. For Wurmbrand (2011, 2012b), the crucial difference between verbs that have the “parasitic” property and verbs that do not, however, boils down to the former verbs not valuing the verbal features of the lower verb, and allowing the higher verb to value the features of both the matrix verb and the lower verb; this is adopted here. In addition, the embedded structure must be small enough for it to be in the same agreement domain (or “phase”) as the higher Perf head (cf. footnote 43).
head in its complement. A verb that does so will not result in a parasitic construction. A verb that does not do so will result in a parasitic construction.

For the second question, we should ask first what it means to “be a verb,” and then ask how and when this notion applies to rather. Traditionally, being a verb has been understood as a lexical notion; it is a property of a word or affix that is listed in a mental dictionary with that word or affix. A competing view, however, is that syntactic elements become verbs on the basis of their syntactic distribution; that is, something is a verb if it occurs with some sort of verbal functional structure. Kayne (2008) argues that all verbs are syntactically complex, consisting of a functional verbal element along with some other element (such as a noun) which has incorporated into it. In Distributed Morphology, verbs consist of a category-neutral root (or a previously categorized root) adjoined to a verbal head (Embick and Marantz, 2008). In Borer (2005a,b), a word is a verb if it occurs in the context of verbal functional heads such as Asp(ect) or T(ense).

To say that rather can “be a verb,” then, is to say that rather is able to occur with verbal syntactic structure. It might be, for example, that a root √rather is able to adjoin to a little v head, forming the complex [v √rather v]. This does not easily capture the restricted distribution of verbal rather, however, and says nothing about the fact that even in verbal rather dialects, rather retains all the basic adverbial properties. The latter fact probably should not be cause for choosing between theories, but the former will lead me to propose that rather in fact becomes a verb by merging with a higher functional head, Modvolition. Modvolition is a modal volitional head that may host volitional adverbs it its specifier, or it may be verbal in many languages, hosting modal verbs meaning ‘want’ (and the like). The latter use is widely found cross-linguistically, but not generally found in modern English. I propose here that Modvolition is verbal when it projects an Asp head of its own. It is this Asp-projecting Modvolition to which rather will adjoin to “become a verb.”

I will discuss all of this in more detail in the sections to follow, but for now, we may note the parameters of variation to be invoked in (30).

(30)  
   a. An element is a verb if it projects Asp.  
   b. A verb with an AspP in its complement may value Asp, or not.  
   c. Modvolition may be a verb, and project Asp, or not.  
   d. Rather may adjoin to Modvolition.  

(30a) provides a sufficient (though not necessarily necessary) condition on being a verb. (30b) determines whether a verb allows the Asp value of its complement to be parasitic on its own Asp value. (30c--d) together determine whether verbal rather is available.

As for the dialect variation, I will propose that in Dialect A, there are no parasitic participles. Rather is basically an adverb, and when it appears to have verbal properties, those properties actually derive from the presence of a null version of ECM have (and/or other null elements). In terms of the properties in (30), Modvolition does not project Asp, and all verbs with an Asp in their complement value that Asp. In Dialect B, rather may take on verbal properties by adjoining to a Modvolition that optionally projects Asp. In addition, both verbal Modvolition and null have may optionally have the parasitic property: they may select an embedded AspP but not value the Asp head of that AspP. Dialect C is exactly like Dialect B, except that Modvolition obligatorily projects Asp when rather is in its specifier. Thus, Dialects B and C have parasitic participles, while Dialect A does not.

4.1. Dialect A

In Dialect A, rather may not take any verbal morphology; the participial form rathered is always judged unacceptable. Rather may appear between have’ve and the lower verb, but it may not take the -ed affix, and in non-ECM contexts, the lower verb must be a perfect participle.

(31)  
   a. I would’ve rather gone to a small school.  
   b. *I would’ve rathered gone to a small school.  
   c. *I would’ve rathered go to a small school.  
   d. *I would’ve rather go to a small school.

While (31a) is grammatical for Dialect A speakers, many say that they would prefer to put rather between would and have’ve.

For some speakers, rather may not follow perfect have in (31a); the dialect variation in this section will be restricted to speakers who do allow rather in this position.

---

34 I will propose below that this adunction happens post-syntactically through m-merger.

35 In Dialect A, it is immaterial whether rather adjoins to Modvolition or not, so I will assume that it does not.

36 In this and the following two subsections, the judgments given apply specifically to the dialect of that subsection. In this subsection, for example, the judgments refer specifically to Dialect A. A summary of the overall dataset is given in (49) and (50) below.

37 For some speakers, rather may not follow perfect have in (31a); the dialect variation in this section will be restricted to speakers who do allow rather in this position.
I would rather've gone to a small school.

For Dialect A speakers, the only sign that rather has become a verb at all comes from ECM structures such as (33a). The embedded ECM subject is impossible without rather.

(33) a. I would rather them go to a small school.
    b. *I would them go to a small school.

Interestingly, Dialect A speakers allow sentences in the perfect without any perfect participle at all. In fact, with rather following perfect 've, no verb may bear perfect participle morphology.

(34) a. I would've rather them go to a small school.
    b. *I would've rather them gone to a small school.
    c. *I would've them go to a small school.
    d. *I would've them gone to a small school.

I propose that for Dialect A speakers, rather may license a silent verb HAVE. It is this verb, and not rather, that is responsible for licensing the embedded ECM subjects and bearing perfect feature assigned by the auxiliary have (explaining why we do not find any perfect participle in (34a)). This analysis captures the semantics of ECM rather well; while (35a) has a causative meaning, where I intentionally cause him to go to a small school, sentences expressing volition or preference, like (35b–c), more naturally allow a reading where I simply experience (or am the beneficiary of) his going to a small school. It is this second reading, known in the literature as “experiencer have” (Harley, 1995; Ritter and Rosen, 1997; Myler, in press), that is found in (35d). Sentences like (34a) are therefore like (35e), which makes their analysis completely parallel to (35c) and (31a) (except that the “lexical” verb is null).

(35) a. I would have him go to a small school.
    b. I would prefer to have him go to a small school.
    c. I would rather have him go to a small school.
    d. I would rather have him go to a small school.
    e. I would've rather have him go to a small school.

A null HAVE/HAD could not be present in non-ECM contexts like (31), since have normally cannot occur in such contexts.

(36) a. *I would've had go to a small school.
    b. *I would've had gone to a small school.

Invoking null HAVE/HAD thus predicts, correctly, that only ECM cases allow the absence of participial morphology in the perfect.

(37) a. I would've rather him go to a small school.
    b. *I would've rather go to a small school.

In (37a), but not (37b), null HAD is available to silently bear participial morphology. This analysis seems to pave the way for saying that rather is not really a verb at all for Dialect A speakers, but is still just an adverb—one that may license a null verb.

To introduce a more precise analysis, given the volitional meaning of rather in the relevant contexts, the fact that volitional verbs are very often “restructuring” verbs cross-linguistically (see Wurmbrand, 1998; Cinque, 2006 and further below), and that adverbs have been proposed to occur in the specifiers of dedicated functional heads (Cinque, 1999), I propose that rather occupies the specifier of a volitional modal head Modvolition. For speakers of Dialect A, however, Modvolition cannot project an Asp head; only the “lexical” verb projects an Asp head. For present purposes, we will assume that projecting an Asp head is part of what it means to be a “verb” categorially. Modvolition cannot project Asp in Dialect A, so it is in this dialect a purely adverbial head, rather than a verbal head. The structure of John would have rather gone is thus as in (38).

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38 I discuss this distinction further in section 5.2; there it is proposed that the stative nature of volitional expressions may be responsible for biasing the interpretation of have toward the experiencer reading, rather than the causative reading.
In this structure, there is only one verb, *gone*; there is no silent **have** or any other silent verb that projects an Asp head.\(^{39}\)

When the verb below **Mod**\(^{\text{volition}}\) is **have**, however, it projects Asp, and it may move further to **Mod**\(^{\text{volition}}\). When it does, it is silent, due, I assume, to whatever is responsible for “Generalized Doubly Filled Comp” (GDFC) filter effects, that is, the generalization that very often, a head and its specifier may not both be overt at the same time (Koopman and Szabolcsi, 2000).\(^{40,41}\) Thus, Perf is able to assign its [**PERF**] feature to an Asp head, but that head may wind up in a structural position where it will be silent. The structure of *John would’ve rather him go (to a small school)* is as in (39).

\(^{39}\) A reviewer asks, given the analysis in (38), what the structure of (32) would be. If it has the same base structure, with *rather* moving to SpecPerfP, this would create a GDFC effect (on which see immediately below). Thus, either *rather* moves higher (to the specifier of some head between Perf and Mod), or else (32) involves a structure where **Mod**\(^{\text{volition}}\) is externally merged higher than PerfP. I do not choose between these options here.

\(^{40}\) Harves and Myler (in press) propose that constructions with perfect **have** are able to license a silent participle **failed** in sentences (i), when *yet* moves to the specifier of **failed**, yielding a GDFC filter effect.

(i) He has yet **failed** to take out the trash (**yet**).

\(^{41}\) Koopman and Szabolcsi (2000) take the GDFC filter to be a principle of spellout/linearization. I will differ from Koopman and Szabolcsi (2000) in that I will allow an overt head to adjoin to an overt head.
To sum up this section, in Dialect A, rather may occupy the specifier of adverbal Mod\textsubscript{volition}. Mod\textsubscript{volition} is not verbal, and thus may not project an AspP. For Dialect A speakers, then, rather is not a verb at all. The cases where it would seem to have to be a verb are the ECM cases. However, for ECM cases, I have argued that the verbal work, including argument structure and (case-)licensing of the embedded verb, is provided by a null verb HAVE which moves to Mod\textsubscript{volition}. In Dialect A, null HAVE does not have the parasitic property: it always assigns [INF] to the lower Asp head. This rules out sentences like (34b) in this dialect.\textsuperscript{42} We will now examine which aspects of this analysis may vary in the other dialects. In Dialects B and C, null HAVE may or may not assign an [INF] feature to a lower Asp, and Mod\textsubscript{volition} may or may not project an Asp head. In Dialect C, Mod\textsubscript{volition} must project an Asp head.

4.2. Dialect B

Dialect B differs from Dialect A in two ways. First, it allows rather to take the form of a perfect participle.

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
\item I would’ve rather gone to a small school.
\item I would’ve rathered gone to a small school.
\item I would’ve rathered go to a small school.
\item *I would’ve rather go to a small school.
\end{enumerate}

Second, it allows the embedded verb in an ECM structure to take the form of a perfect participle.

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
\item I would’ve rather them go to a small school.
\item I would’ve rathered them gone to a small school.
\item I would’ve rathered them go to a small school.
\item I would’ve rathered them gone to a small school.
\end{enumerate}

Dialect B is the most liberal (see (49) and (50) below), in terms of the range of sentences that are acceptable, and shares properties with both Dialect A and Dialect C, though differs in important ways from both.

Dialect B shares with Dialect A the contrast between (40d) and (41a): perfect participle morphology may be omitted only in the ECM structure, not in the non-ECM infinitive structure. This fact suggests that in Dialect B, too, rather may license a null HAVE/HAD. However, Dialect B differs from Dialect A in that it allows (41b), with participial morphology on the embedded verb in ECM contexts. Within the current proposal, this is derived if Dialect B allows null HAVE to not assign [INF] to the embedded Asp. Because of this, both the lower and the higher Asp are dependent on the same, higher Perf head. This is shown in (42) (compare with (39)).\textsuperscript{43}

\begin{table}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{42} We will see below that (34b) is ungrammatical in Dialect C, but for a different reason.

\textsuperscript{43} A reviewer points out that the analysis in (42) runs into a technical problem when confronted with phase theory (Chomsky, 2001, 2007, 2008; Marantz, 2007). If Agree relations are blocked by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), then the Perf head should not be able to Agree with the lower Asp\textsubscript{go} head in (42). This is because the null matrix verb will have its own argument structure; there will be a phase head between Asp\textsubscript{have} and V\textsubscript{have}. Assuming this phase head spells out its complement before Perf is merged, Asp\textsubscript{go} will be squarely within that complement, and unable to Agree with Perf. I will not work out a full solution here, but I will outline two possibilities. First, we might assume with Wurmbrand (2010) that the relevant phase head introducing the subject is actually higher than PerfP, putting Perf and Asp\textsubscript{go} in the same spellout domain. Another solution would be to adopt a dynamic view of phases, such that the phase heads are not inherently phasal, but acquire or lose their phasal status depending on operations and features within the syntax (Den Dikken, 2006b, 2007a,b; Wurmbrand, 2010; Bobaljik and Wurmbrand, 2013). For example, we might assume that spellout is delayed until all features in a phase domain are valued (including verbal features; cf. Wurmbrand (2010), who makes a proposal like this for \(\phi\)-features). Since the features of Asp\textsubscript{go} are not valued by have, spellout will not occur until Perf is merged, valuing the higher and lower Asp at the same time. This would only work on a truncated clause structure, because if the clause projected any higher, Perf (or some other appropriate head) would merge to value the Asp head. Notice also the similarity between this analysis and the Multiple Select relation of Hiraiwa (2005).
The other difference between Dialects A and B is that Dialect B allows the participial form *rathered*. As mentioned in the previous section, this means that Mod\textsubscript{volition} may itself project an Asp head. It is only when Mod\textsubscript{volition} projects an Asp head that it itself is able to value the lower Asp head as \([\text{INF}]\). I assume that these properties go together: this is what it means for Mod\textsubscript{volition} to become verbal, rather than being a host for volitional adverbs in its specifier. If Mod\textsubscript{volition} could assign \([\text{INF}]\) on its own, we might expect (31d)—which is ungrammatical for all dialects—to be acceptable.\(^{44}\)

While the structural properties of (43) are fairly clear, it is not clear how the participial morphology ends up on *rather*. We might assume that *rather* is itself able to raise and adjoin to Asp; but there would be something strange about that: Asp is

\(^{44}\) An explanation for why this holds is that Perf may only merge in the first place if there is an unvalued Asp head for it to value. If Mod\textsubscript{volition} valued Asp, Perf would not be able to merge in the first place—unless Mod\textsubscript{volition} itself projected Asp, in which case Perf would value that as \([\text{PERF}]\). Mod\textsubscript{volition}, then, may only assign \([\text{INF}]\) to Asp in Dialects B/C, where *rathered* is possible.
projected by, and belongs properly to, Mod\textsubscript{volition}, not the element in its specifier. It should be Mod\textsubscript{volition} that adjoins to Asp, not its specifier. Nor would we want to say that \textit{rather} raises to, or is base generated in, SpecAspP. This would be fine from a semantic point of view, but recall that our explanation of the lack of participial morphology on \textit{rather} in Dialect A depended on the principle that a head and its specifier cannot both be overt at the same time. If \textit{rather} is in SpecAspP and Mod\textsubscript{volition} raises to Asp, then we would expect the participial morphology to be null, just as in Dialect A. What we want is for \textit{rather} to form a complex head with Mod\textsubscript{volition}, which will then raise to Asp. This can be achieved with an operation known as “m(orphological)-merger,” which rebrackets a head and its specifier into a complex head, as schematized in (44) (Matushansky, 2006).

$$\text{(44)} \quad \text{XP} \rightarrow m\text{-merger} \rightarrow \text{XP}$$

Applying m-merger in (43) adjoins \textit{rather} to Mod\textsubscript{volition}; this complex may then raise to Asp and form the structure in (45), which derives the sentence in (40c).45,46

$$\text{(45)} \quad \text{ModP} \quad \text{John} \quad \text{Mod} \quad \text{would} \quad \text{PerfP} \quad \text{Perf} \quad \text{have} \quad \text{AspP} \quad \text{Asp} \quad \text{Mod} \quad \text{Modvolition} \quad \text{rather} \quad \text{Modvolition} \quad \langle \text{Modvolition} \rangle \quad \text{AspP} \quad \text{Aspgo} \quad \text{VP} \quad \text{go} \quad \langle \text{go} \rangle$$

Since Asp has no specifier, there is no barrier to spelling out \textit{rather} and the participial morphology at the same time (see footnote 41).

Sentences with two participles, such as (40b), are derived when Mod\textsubscript{volition} projects an Asp head, but does not assign infinitival morphology to the lower Asp head. In such cases, Perf may assign [PERF] to both Asp heads, as illustrated in (46), which is the structure of (40b).

\textit{45} If \textit{rather} is itself phrasal, m-merger may need to apply iteratively to form the appropriate input configuration. An alternative would be for Asp to lower and adjoin to the \textit{rather} + Mod\textsubscript{volition} complex (see Embick, 2007; Embick and Marantz, 2008); there are other conceivable alternatives. For present purposes, what is relevant is that Asp, Mod\textsubscript{volition}, and \textit{rather} (possible along with HAVE/HAD) combine into a complex head.

\textit{46} Note that modifiers like very much in I would have very much rathered go(ne) to a small school, do not diagnose the phrasal status of rather, given that very much may modify prefer in I would very much prefer to leave now.
It should now be clear how the remaining sentences in (41) (repeated here) are derived. (41c) is like (41a) in that null have assigns [INF], and (41d) is like (41b) in that null have does not assign [INF]. (41c–d) differ from (41a–b) only in that rather projects Asp morphology (something that is not possible in Dialect A).

(41) a. I would’ve rather them go to a small school.
   b. I would’ve rathered them gone to a small school.
   c. I would’ve rathered them go to a small school.
   d. I would’ve rathered them gone to a small school.

In sum, I have proposed that to form the participle rathered, Modvolition projects Asp, and that in order for this to work out morphologically, m-merger combines rather and Modvolition. The intuition here should be clear: the modal head is becoming “more verbal” by projecting aspect, and rather is becoming “more verbal” by attaching directly to a verbal head. One could try to do this in a more direct way, by assuming that rather may merge directly in the head of Modvolition (or project such a head, and, for that matter, the Asp head). This would be no less stipulative than the present approach, and in a theory where verbs are built in the syntax, rather than the lexicon, it is not clear that there would be any meaningful difference.

The advantage to the present approach is this: rather still distributes like an adverb for all speakers, and it does not always take Asp morphology.\(^{47}\) Even as a verb, its distribution is restricted. Deriving its restricted verbal properties in the syntax is necessary for any analysis, but deriving them from the syntax allows for a clearer understanding of what it means for rather to “be a verb”: it is basically an adverb, but it may occur in configurations with verbal heads and interact with those heads. The two differences between Dialect A and Dialect B are (i) in Dialect B, null have may or may not assign [INF] to the embedded Asp, whereas in Dialect A it must assign [INF] to the embedded Asp, and (ii) in Dialect B Modvolition\(^+\) rather may or may not project Asp, whereas in Dialect A, it must not.

---

\(^{47}\) The claim that rather is an adverb at some stage of the syntactic derivation even when it eventually becomes rathered might, at first glance, seem to be supported by the fact that it can still license a bare than-phrase, as in (i), whereas prefer tends to take rather than, as in (ii):

(i) I would’ve rathered walk to the store than drive to the mall.
(ii) I would’ve preferred to walk to the store rather than drive to the mall.

However, Huddleston (2002:1129) points out that prefer can, in fact, sometimes be found with a bare than-phrase; his example (and judgment) is given in (iii).

(iii) He’d prefer to put David over the cliff than let him have the land for building.

Huddleston (2002:1129) writes that (iii) “is rare (and generally condemned by prescriptivists, in spite of the clear analogy with would rather),” (iii) is quite bad for me. However, if than-phrases can be generally licensed by verbs meaning ‘prefer’, then (i) might not form the strongest argument in favor of saying that verbal rathered is an adverb at some stage of the structure building. The contrast between rathered and preferred seems strong, though (at least for some speakers), and is certainly compatible with the present view. See section 5.4 for more discussion of the role of the than-phrase.
4.3. Dialect C

Dialect C (my own dialect) differs from Dialects A and B in that not only may rather take a participial form under perfect have, it must. This holds for both non-ECM and ECM contexts.48

(47) a. *I would've rather gone to a small school.
   b. I would've rathered gone to a small school.
   c. I would've rathered go to a small school.
   d. *I would've rather go to a small school.

(48) a. *I would've rather them go to a small school.
   b. *I would've rather them gone to a small school.
   c. I would've rathered them go to a small school.
   d. I would've rathered them gone to a small school.

This leads to a shared judgment between Dialects A and C in (48b), but for different reasons. For Dialect A, (48b) is ungrammatical because gone cannot be a participle; for Dialect C, (48b) is ungrammatical because rather must be a participle. Given the analysis in the previous subsection, it seems fairly clear what needs to be said to account for this difference between Dialect B and Dialect C: in Dialect C, Modv must project Asp; in Dialect B, it may, but need not. Dialect C shares with Dialect B the property that null HAVE may, but need not, project Asp.

4.4. Summary

The data from the dialects are summarized in (49) and (50).

(49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I would've rather gone to a small school.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I would've rathered gone to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I would've rathered go to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I would've rather go to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I would've rather them go to a small school.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I would've rather them gone to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I would've rathered them go to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I would've rathered them gone to a small school.</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis hinges on several microparameters, associated the properties of particular syntactic heads. These properties are summarized in (51), which lists particular heads along with properties that those heads might have, along with an indication as to which dialect possesses each head-property pair.49

(51)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. HAVE</td>
<td>+ values Asp features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. HAVE</td>
<td>- values Asp features</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Modv</td>
<td>+ projects Asp with rather in spec</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Modv</td>
<td>- projects Asp with rather in spec</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Modv</td>
<td>+ values Asp features</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Modv</td>
<td>- values Asp features</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All varieties have the HAVE that values Asp features, and all varieties have the Modv that fails to value Asp features. (For Dialect A, for which Modv never projects Asp, this is an adverb-hosting head, but it is nevertheless a Modv.)

48 For speakers such as myself (Dialect C), (47a) is a possible sentence, but has a meaning distinct from the verbal rather meaning—something closer to ‘instead’ than to ‘prefer’.

49 It is not necessarily the case that all of these properties may vary independently. For example, I propose that Modv may only value Asp features if it itself projects Asp.
that fails to value Asp features.) Dialect A is distinguished by lacking the HAVE that fails to value Asp features as well as lacking the Mod\text{volition}, that is able to project Asp, and Dialect C is characterized by lacking the Mod\text{volition} head that fails to project Asp when rather is in its specifier. Dialect B possesses all of these heads.

Since the functional heads available in Dialect B is the union of those available in Dialects A and C, it may seem at first glance as though Dialect B speakers are simply “speaking both dialects.” Notice, however, that this is not really surface true; Dialect B speakers do not generate the union of sentences generated by Dialect A and C speakers. Because Dialect B has the HAVE that fails to value Asp features, but also the Mod\text{volition} that fails to project Asp when rather is in its specifier, Dialect B can generate a sentence that is not generable in either Dialect A or Dialect C, namely (50b): *I would've rather them gone to a small school.* That is, the formal implementation of speaking both dialects, in this case, produces a sentence that is otherwise not generable in either.

Importantly, in the present analysis, rather does become a “verb” in a sense: by forcing it to adjoin to Asp-projecting Mod\text{volition}—a verbal projection—it becomes part of a complex head that heads a verbal projection. This is, basically, what it means to be a verb in syntactic theories of lexical category formation (Borer, 2005a,b; Embick and Marantz, 2008; Kayne, 2008; see above). The somewhat unusual behavior of verbal rather supports the notion that the “being a verb” isn’t a lexical property that predicts a certain syntax (or syntactic distribution); instead, “being a verb” is a configurational property: a certain syntax is needed to make something a verb, not the other way around.

Even more importantly, we see in dialects of English that a particular configuration feeds a kind of phenomenon that is widely attested across Germanic in similar configurations: parasitic participles. It seems unlikely that this has somehow been borrowed from other Germanic languages. What is more likely is that the distribution of the adverb rather led to an ambiguous parse for learners, as in (9), repeated here in (52).

\begin{enumerate}
\item I would rather leave now.
\item [I would [VP1 [AdvP rather] [VP1 leave now]]]
\item [I would [VP2 [V2 rather] [VP1 leave now]]]
\end{enumerate}

In the verbal parse in (52c), rather expresses volition and takes a bare infinitive complement (with no infinitive marker). It is well known that parasitic participles are characteristic of so-called “restructuring” verbs (Wiklund, 2007; Wurmbrand, 2010, 2011). Verbs of volition are very frequently restructuring verbs. When the child acquiring English decides on the parse in (52c), s/he acquires a verb with volitional meaning and a truncated complement structure. Parasitic participles arise because for the child acquiring English, the most natural analysis of this state of affairs will treat the syntax of verbal rather as restructuring, e.g. involving the Mod\text{volition} head; this paves the way for (but still doesn’t guarantee) parasitic participles. The availability of distinct parses, however, leads to distinct decisions; some children will settle only on the parse in (52b).

5. Outstanding issues

5.1. Correlations in dialect variation

Recall that there are two differences between Dialect A and Dialect B. First, in Dialect B, null HAVE may or may not assign [INF] to the embedded Asp, whereas in Dialect A it must assign [INF] to the embedded Asp. This is illustrated in (53).

\begin{enumerate}
\item Perf rather had them gone (*A/B)
\item Perf rather had them go (A/B)
\end{enumerate}

Second, in Dialect B Mod\text{volition}^{+} rather may or may not project Asp, whereas in Dialect A, it must not.

One might wonder whether these two differences are related. After all, as noted in footnote 44, the ability of Mod\text{volition} to project Asp is directly related to its ability to assign [INF] to a lower Asp. Since assigning [INF] to a lower Asp is one of the

\footnote{In the spirit of Adger (2006), this analysis could be fitted to make predictions about the frequency of each of these forms, if social and performance factors could be factored out. The corpus required to gather enough data to study Labovian-style variation would probably have to be quite large.}
functions of null HAVE, it would seem that the ability of Mod\text{volition} to project Asp allows it to “take over” that function of null HAVE. Given the system proposed so far, there are now three ways, in principle, to derive John would’ve rathered them go (to a small school), and one way to generate John would’ve rathered them gone (to a small school). These are illustrated in the paradigm in (54).

(54) Dialects B and C

\begin{itemize}
  \item a. Perf . . . rathered . . . HAD . . . them . . . gone
  \item b. Perf . . . rathered . . . HAD . . . them . . . go
  \item c. Perf . . . rathered . . . HAVE . . . them . . . go
  \item d. Perf . . . rathered . . . HAVE . . . them . . . go
\end{itemize}

The configuration in (54c) shows rather taking over the [INF]-assigning function of null HAVE. We know that rathered is able to assign infinitive morphology based on non-ECM sentences like John would’ve rathered go. We know that null HAVE/HAD must have the “parasitic” property based on the acceptability of sentences corresponding to the configuration in (54a) (as well as (53a), in Dialect B). Since rather can assign [INF], and since null HAVE/HAD can have the parasitic property, it would seem to follow (if nothing else is said) that configurations like (54c) should be possible.

Still, it does not follow directly from the present proposal that both differences should be tied to one difference. Whether a direct relationship is even desirable will depend on whether there are speakers who allow (41a–b) but not rathered; if there are such speakers, then it is probably correct to leave the two differences between Dialect A and Dialect B as distinct differences. It would show that null HAVE can have the parasitic property even when rather does not project Asp or assign [INF].51 Such speakers would be analyzed as allowing null HAVE to not assign [INF], but not allowing Mod\text{volition} to project Asp. Similarly, if there are speakers who allow (41a) and (41c) but neither (41b) nor (41d), then such speakers would be analyzed as allowing Mod\text{volition} to project Asp, but forcing null HAVE to assign [INF]. There are several other possible manipulations of these microparameters, and since there is at present no theoretical necessity to tie together the properties of Mod\text{volition} and the properties of null HAVE, I set that possibility aside.52

5.2. Silent HAVE

The analysis presented in the previous section relied on the presence of a silent verb HAVE and a modal head Mod\text{volition}. One might rightly ask why and whether such silent verbal elements should be necessary. There are two kinds of answers to this. First, the silent material does real work in the analysis and second, it integrates verbal rather into a larger context of work on verbal argument structure. For the first kind of answer, the alternative response would be to say that rather has lexical verb properties that mimic the work that the syntax is doing here; within the larger context of a syntactic approach to argument structure, however, this option ends up looking nearly identical, at best, to the present analysis; at worst, it adds a redundancy between the work done in the lexicon and the work done in the syntax.

Turning first to the work that silent HAVE does in the present analysis, it provides an immediate account for the structure and meaning of ECM uses. As mentioned in section 2, the number and nature of ECM verbs taking bare infinitive complements is somewhat limited. The class of such verbs include verbs of perception, causatives, help and have. Among these, have is the closest in meaning and argument structure, especially in the sorts of modal contexts that characterize verbal rather; ECM verbs of volition have to, or a passive complement; have also allows passive complements. But only have shares the same meanings and argument structures with verbal rather.53

51 See Kayne (2005:279ff.) on the independence of certain microparameters, such as the word order associated with English enough (big enough vs. *enough big), versus other degree elements (*big too/so/how vs. too/so/how big).
52 That is, if there were some theoretical or analytical reason to tie the two properties together, then we would want to do so and make the prediction the hypothetical speakers in the main text do not exist; in the absence of such a reason, we should allow ourselves the conclusion that they might exist, and that if they do not, then we do not yet know why.
53 The judgments reported in this section are my own.
(55)  
   a. *Would you prefer him leave?  
   b. Would you prefer him killed?  

(56)  
   a. *Would you want him leave?  
   b. Would you want him killed?  

(57)  
   a. Would you have him kill them rather than arrest them?  
   b. Would you have him killed rather than banished?  

(58)  
   a. Would you rather him kill them?  
   b. %Would you rather him killed?  

The affinity between *rather and have* can be seen clearly in (17c), repeated in (59):  

(59)  
   Would you rather break up with someone...or have them break up with you? [...]  
   I would rather him break up with me.  

The meaning and syntax of overt *have* would not be so different if this had said *I would rather have him break up with me.* Invoking *have*, then, automatically captures the syntactic and thematic affinity between sentences with overt *have* and sentences with *rather*, an affinity which is missing elsewhere in the language.  

A reviewer provides a number of attested examples which, according to him/her, make silent *have* unlikely. These are the (a) examples in the following pairs:  

(60)  
   a. I'd rather him be for me than for someone else.  
   b. I'd rather have him be for me than for someone else.  

(61)  
   a. You said you'd rather him be there, rather than being next to a right-wing nut like me.  
   b. You said you'd rather have him be there, rather than being next to a right-wing nut like me.  

(62)  
   a. But I'd rather him still beat me for youngest winner outright.  
   b. But I'd rather have him still beat me for youngest winner outright.  

(63)  
   a. I'd rather him admit it than try to make something up.  
   b. I'd rather have him admit it than try to make something up.  

(64)  
   a. I'd rather him hit me than dump me.  
   b. I'd rather have him hit me than dump me.  

For me, all of the readings available in the (a) examples have corresponding readings in the (b) examples. It is true that the (b) examples may have a causative reading; (63b), for example, can have the meaning that I am in charge of him and I force him to admit it. This reading is not clearly available in (63a). However, both the (a) examples and the (b) examples have the reading which *Ritter and Rosen (1997)* call “experiencer *have*” (on which see also *Harley, 1995*).  

According to *Ritter and Rosen (1997)*, experiencer *have* is stative, not eventive, whereas causative *have* is eventive. In my judgment, all sentences with ECM *rather* that I have encountered so far are nearly equivalent or even identical in meaning to experiencer *have*. Note, however, that this might not be surprising, since *Ritter and Rosen (1997)* argue that have has no  

54 Richard Kayne and Larry Horn have pointed out to me that they find (58b) ungrammatical. I find no difference between (58a) and (58b), but I do have the same contrast with ECM uses of sooner, which I will return to briefly in section 5.4. I do not have an explanation for this difference, and have yet to investigate speaker variation related to it.  

55 http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100721222936AAy3szb  

56 The sentence in (59) nicely exemplifies the non-felicity of the causative reading of have. When the author of that sentence writes, “have them break up with you,” he or she is clearly not talking about causing, ordering or commanding the person to break up; this would be non-sensical, since telling someone to break up with you is in practice the same a breaking up with him/her. What the author means to ask is, if a relationship is going to end, would you rather be the one to end it or would you rather that the other person ends it? Which is harder: to break up with someone, or to have the experience of someone breaking up with you?
lexical content of its own, but rather derives its lexical content from surrounding elements. Since expressions of volition are generally stative, it is unsurprising that it is the stative, experiencer  

have reading that corresponds to the reading available for ECM rather.

The second thing that  

have does is provide the verbal substructure needed to license the embedded ECM subject; it does this at the same time as it captures the syntactic and semantic similarities mentioned in the previous paragraph. The third thing that  

have does is provide a way to account for the lack of any participial morphology at all in sentences like (34a) for Dialect A and B speakers. According to the theory of Agree in Wurmbrand (2012a), the Perf head should not even merge into the structure in the first place unless it is assigning its [PERF] feature, which would lead us to expect a participle. The present analysis explains why we do not see one: the [PERF] feature is assigned to a silent verb.

Within the larger context of argument structure, however, it may be somewhat misleading to put so much emphasis on  

have qua silent  

have. A long tradition, which encompasses many subtraditions, rejects the idea that a verb like  

have is a primitive lexical item in the first place. Studies of alternations between structures with be and structures  

have, both cross-linguistically and within individual languages, have led many to conclude that  

have is really a form of be, specifically be with some extra syntactic material (such as a preposition, determiner, or applicative head) incorporated into it.

To provide just one early example, Freeze (1992) observed that many languages lack a “word” for ‘have’ and instead express possession with a locative expression, often consisting of a ‘be’ plus a PP or oblique DP.

(65)  

a.  

U menja budet novaja kniga.  

at me.GEN will.be new book.NOM  

‘I will have a new book.’ (Harves and Kayne, 2012:121)  

(Russian)

b.  

Man ir velosipēds  

me.DAT is bicycle.NOM  

‘I have a bicycle.’ (Harves and Kayne, 2012:122)  

(Latvian)

Freeze (1992) proposed that languages with a lexical ‘have’ are like this too, but that the preposition or oblique case-marker incorporates into the copula, and spells out as a unit—which we call ‘have’.

(66)

This view was further developed (and modified) by Kayne (1993) (who extended the idea to perfect/auxiliary  

have; see also footnote 4), and many others since (see Levinson, 2011; Brillman, 2012; Marantz, 2013; D’Alessandro, submitted for publication and Myler, in press for recent approaches and critical discussion). For present purposes, I want to emphasize the independence of this particular analysis from the general idea that ‘have’ is the spellout of a particular configuration of functional heads.

Building further on this, Harves and Kayne (2012) observe that all languages with a transitive verb  

need also have a transitive verb  

have. They propose that this follows if the only way to build a transitive verb ‘need’ is to incorporate a nominal ‘need’ into a verb ‘have’:

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67 Wurmbrand (2012a) adopts the Last Resort condition from Abels (2003:92), which says: “A constituent α may only be merged, i.e. base-merged or re-merged, if that leads to the immediate satisfaction of a previously unsatisfiable feature.”
Combining this analysis with the analysis (or family of analyses) of have presented above, what ‘need’ is incorporating into is itself a complex structure. This incorporation leads to the silence of HAVE.

The claim that verbal rather inherits the argument structure of have by combining syntactically with a silent variant have thus amounts to the claim the syntactic formatives that are present in sentences with ECM have are also present in sentences with ECM rather. The lexical alternative would say that rather acquires a lexical entry that shares many properties with the lexical entry for have, and projects those properties into the syntax—with, of course, some additional restrictions, such as the restriction to modal contexts. This alternative will replicate the same similarities between ECM rather and ECM have that are proposed here, only it will do this in the lexicon; it will then force ECM have and ECM rather to project similar syntactic functional structure—again in agreement with the present proposal. Moreover, it will do this in a way that establishes no connection to general observations about how the argument structure of ‘have’-verbs relates to the argument structure of other verbs. The present analysis says that this stems from the fact that the syntax can be built in ways that lead to the non-pronunciation of the functional structure that is ordinarily spelled out as ‘have’. Thus, the silence of HAVE is tied directly to the presence of rather in the same portion of clause structure.

Note that not all sentences with have in English correspond to the same syntactic structure. We saw in (55–58) that the ECM uses of have and rather are shared with both infinitive and embedded passives (for some speakers, at least). Beyond ECM cases, some uses of have seem to be allowed to correspond to verbal rather, while others do not. DP possession, for example, is well attested. While slightly unnatural for me, it is certainly not ungrammatical. The oddness seems to be similar to the oddness of possessive have in the appropriate contexts.58

(67) 

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{VP} \\
\text{have} \\
\text{need} \\
\text{a book} \\
\text{NP} \\
\end{array} \quad \rightarrow \quad 
\begin{array}{c}
\text{VP} \\
\text{a book} \\
\text{NP} \\
\end{array}
\]

(68) a. ?I would rather a puppy than a kitten (if it were up to me).
b. ?I would have a puppy rather than a kitten (if it were up to me).
c. I would rather have a puppy than a kitten.

Neil Myler (p.c.) points out that light verb uses of have, such as have a conversation, reveal an appreciably stronger contrast.

(69) a. ??I would rather a conversation than a fight (if it were up to me).
b. I would have a conversation rather than a fight (if it were up to me).
c. I would rather have a conversation than a fight.

Attested examples of rathered can be found with the possessive meaning. In my judgment, the acceptability is the same for rathered as for (68a) and (69a).

(70) a. ?I would’ve rathered a puppy.
b. ??I would’ve rathered a conversation.

Other uses of have correspond differently, and with some speaker variation, to uses of verbal rather. One use of have that cannot correspond to verbal rather is the ‘modal’ use of have.

(71) a. I would have to leave rather than stay.
b. *I would rather to leave than stay.
c. I would rather have to leave (than have to stay).

58 The sentences in (68b), (69b) and (71a) should be judged on the ‘if it were up to me’ reading. As a reviewer points out, these sentences also have a reading along the lines of “in this hypothetical situation, I would probably happen to have a puppy instead of having a kitten.” I focus on this reading because this is the reading that is forced in (68a) and (69a).
I do not have a full explanation for why this is the case. What it suggests is that the structure of obligation have is distinct from the structures of both ECM have and possession have. For example, Kayne (2011) and Brillman (2012) suggest that there is a silent element NEED in the modal use of have. Combining this idea with the analysis of modal ‘be’ in Kayne (in press), where a silent SUPPOSED moves to the left of the auxiliary, the structure of modal ‘have’ would involve NEED moving to the left of have.

\[(72) \]

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
    \item You NEED have (need) to leave right now!
    \item You SUPPOSED are (supposed) to leave right now!
\end{enumerate}

It may be, then, that the licensing of silent NEED by have interferes with the licensing HAVE by rather. The derivations proposed by Kayne (in press) for modal ‘be’ are more intricate than this sketch indicates, and a number of differences between ‘have’ modals and ‘be’ modals would need an account.\(^{59}\) Still, the idea that modal ‘have’ is structurally distinct from possessive ‘have’ seems plausible, and may be able to derive the impossibility of \((71b)\) for most speakers.\(^{60}\) \((71b)\), then, should not stand in the way of an analysis of ECM rather in terms of silent have.

Before closing this section, I would like to emphasize that the choice of have as the avatar of the null verb is strictly independent of the analytical claim that ECM rather involves a null verb. van Riemsdijk (2002), for example, provides a convincing argument in favor of a null verb in Swiss German syntax (and OV Germanic in general) in certain modal environments. However, he also argues that this light verb, which he refers to as \(\textgo}\), cannot strictly be identified with any particular overt verb, though it comes closest to ‘go’. In fact, factoring out independent theoretical differences between that proposal and this one makes the two very similar. The lexical conditions he places on null \(\textgo\), for example, would be treated here by having different contextual conditions determining the spellout of a partially overlapping set of functional heads as either ‘have’ or as null. What is crucially important for the analysis is that there is a null ECM verb at work in ECM rather sentences. The claim is then that this null verb has quite a lot of overlap with the verb(al complex spelled out as) have in English, in terms of argument structure and semantic interpretation.

5.3. The Modal Element

What is worth emphasizing at this point is that while I am drawing on and supporting the view that ‘have’ can be silent,\(^{61}\) silent have is not always present with verbal rather; in many cases, the real verbal work is being done by the modal head that I have (following Cinque, 1999, 2006) called Modvolition. This head—absent have—underlies the non-ECM bare infinitive complements as well as finite CP complements; have presumably cannot be responsible for such cases.\(^{62}\)

\[(73) \]

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
    \item I would rather that he left.
    \item I would rather that he leave.
\end{enumerate}

These sentences raise the question of whether rather can be truly adverbal for Dialect A speakers. If so, we would seem to have to say rather, as an adverb, has the kinds of properties that allow Modvolition to take a CP complement. Possibly, such sentences are related to sentences of archaic English like (74). Speakers I have asked have varying degrees of comfort or familiarity with such sentences.

\[(74) \]

Archaeic English

\begin{enumerate}[a.]
    \item Would that I could! ‘If only I could’
    \item Would that it were. ‘If only it were’
\end{enumerate}

\(^{59}\) For example, ‘be’ modals, unlike ‘have’ modals, are restricted to finite uses of ‘be’; \("You would be to leave right now! is unacceptable, unlike You would have to leave right now!\).\(^{60}\) As mentioned earlier, some speakers appear to allow rather to, but most examples I have found of this do not suggest that the meaning is anything like \((71c)\). It is possible that the sentence in \((94a)\) below has that meaning, however.\(^{61}\) Or, more precisely, the functional material that leads to the pronunciation of ‘have’ in some syntactic contexts will not be spelled out as such in other syntactic contexts.\(^{62}\) There are some possibly relevant uses such as Legend has it that she helped him steal the young Black Sabbath from their original manager. (Spin, Aug. 2000, pp. 111.) This use comes close to the meaning of finite CP complements with verbal rather in sentences like the following, taken from the web: If my words are to affect you so deeply, I would have it that these words spoken now affect you, not the ones from many long minutes ago. (http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5789364/1/Hopeless-yet-not/) As Neil Myler (p.c.) points out, the complementizer that can be deleted in the former sentence much more easily that the latter, which may be relevant since that may also be deleted in \((73)\).
Whether or not there is a direct syntactic connection between (73) and (74), they do both seem to involve a modal like would licensing volitional meaning.

As mentioned briefly in section 2, for speakers of the dialects discussed in this paper, rather cannot occur on its own in finite contexts. This holds of non-ECM contexts, as illustrated in (75), as well as ECM contexts, as illustrated in (76).

(75)  a. I would rather leave now.
     b. *I rather leave now.

(76)  a. I would rather him leave now.
     b. *I rather him leave now.

What the modal like would does, I propose, is select for or activate the Modvolition head; specifically, it selects for a variant of Modvolition that requires a filled specifier; rather satisfies this latter requirement. (See below for a suggestion as to how/why it is rather that is able to do this.) If verbal have is around, it may incorporate into Modvolition, as outlined above, but it need not.

In fact, it is not just any modal that licenses verbal rather; it is primarily would. Other modals are less acceptable, to varying degrees.

(77)  a. He would rather leave.
     b. (?)He might rather leave. (You should ask him.)
     c. ?He could rather leave, for all we know.
     d. ??He must rather leave. (There’s no other explanation.)
     e. *He should rather leave.

In general, deontic or “root” modals are quite unacceptable with rather, and it is the epistemic (uses of) modals that flirt with acceptability. This makes sense, if the volitional modal has a direct relationship with a higher modal head, which would then have to be local and epistemic, given that epistemic modals are higher in the structure than root modals (Thránesson and Vikner, 1995; Cinque, 1999; van Gelderen, 2003; Hacquard, 2010; Hasty, in press).

Counter-factual clauses also seem to license verbal rather, as shown by the examples in (78) (with my judgments; thanks to Einar Freyr Sigurðsson for raising this question).

(78)  a. ?If I had rathered that they stayed, I would’ve said so.
     b. ?If only I had rathered that they stayed!

The dialogue in (79), which illustrates this possibility, was found on an online discussion forum:

(79)  A: I take it that you would rather not answer her question.
     B: Of course I would rather not. If I had rathered, I would have.

I assume that such cases involve, structurally, a modal element on par with the functional structure associated with would. Note that some dialects of American English allow for an apparently pleonastic would in such constructions (Trudgill and Hannah, 1991:60).

(80)  a. %If I would have seen one, I would have bought it for you. (Trudgill and Hannah, 1991:60)
     b. If I had seen one, I would have bought it for you.

That (80a) seems to mean the same thing as (80b) suggests that the modal head realized by would in (80a) is active in counterfactuals like (80b), as well as (78) and (79B).

Before closing this section, I would like to point out that a number of analyses of parasitic participles in Norwegian dialects, along with other, in some cases very similar constructions, propose that the lower participle is a subjunctive or

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63 This is, however, acceptable to speakers who use should as a conditional akin to would in my dialect, as in I should hope so; thanks to Neil Myler for confirming this.

counterfactual marker, which happens to be homophonous with a participle (see Sandoy, 1991, 2001, 2003; Julien, 2003; Eide, 2011 for discussion). Eide (2011) provides independent historical support for this claim on the basis of a subjunctive/participle collapse in the morphology in certain dialects of Norwegian. Julien (2003:148) points out that the “unexpected participle” in Norwegian, for some speakers, requires a counterfactual context.65

\[(81)\]

a. Dei har planlagt å gjera det.
   they have planned to do it
   ‘They have planned to do it.’

b. *Dei har planlagt å gjort det.
   they have planned to done it
   INTENDED: ‘They have planned to do it.’

(82) a. Dei kunne (ha) planlagt å gjera det.
   they could have planned to do it
   ‘They could’ve planned to do it.’

b. Dei kunne (ha) planlagt å gjort det.
   they could have planned to done it
   ‘They could’ve planned to do it.’

However, Eide (2011) also notes that “supine attraction [≈parasitic participles] subsumes a range of constructions, some of which have no counterfactual or hypothetical reading” (Eide, 2011:3). For verbal rather it is hard to tell if counterfactuality plays a role in the licensing of the participle, since such environments are needed to license verbal rather in the first place, regardless of whether there are parasitic participles or not. Thus, it seems that parasitic participles are independent of counterfactuality. (This is also supported by the examples (15a) and perhaps (15b) seen earlier.) Also, if it were only counterfactuality at issue in the present case, then we would need some explanation for why this is only possible for rather.

\[(83)\]

a. I would have made him go sooner.

b. *I would have made him gone sooner.

(84) a. I would have preferred to go sooner.

b. *I would have preferred to gone sooner.

There seems to be no getting around the fact that some verbs allow parasitic participles, while others do not. Still, it is intriguing that they happen to show up in English in just the same environments where they are most common—even claimed to be crucial—in other Germanic languages. Hopefully, future research will uncover whether there is any principled reason for this. For now, I conclude that the analysis of parasitic participles is in principle independent of counterfactuality.

5.4. Why rather?

One final question is why rather is special. Why, for example, do other adverbs, such as instead, fail to show this behavior?

\[(85)\]

a. I would go to a small school (rather than a large one).

b. I would rather go to a small school (than a large one).

c. I would rather him go to a small school.

\[(86)\]

a. I would go to a small school instead (of a large one).

b. I would instead go to a small school (*of a large one).

c. *I would instead him go to a small school.

The answer to this question is not obvious, and some aspects of it might be an uninteresting by-product of historical accident. However, it is almost certain that syntactic properties of rather that set it apart from other adverbs, in other

65 I thank Marit Julien (p.c.) for drawing my attention to these examples.
dialects and in previous stages of the English, have fed its development in ways that are non-accidental and very syntactically interesting.

I would like to speculate that what makes rather special, in addition to the fact that it ended up in the “right places in the right sentences” to be analyzed as (activating) a volitional modal, stems from an independent property of its use. It has syntactic functions similar to elements like whether, either and neither, where it relates to a disjunction. Consider the following question-answer pairs.

(87) A: Would you rather eat a ham or a steak?
    B: #Yes / a ham.

(88) A: Would you rather eat a ham or a steak than a vegetable?
    B: Yes / *a ham.
    A': Would you eat a ham or a steak rather than a vegetable?
    B': Yes / *a ham.

(89) A: Would you rather eat either a ham or a steak?
    B: Yes / *a ham.

In (87), rather has a direct relationship to the disjunction, which specifies the possible answers of what otherwise looks like a yes-no question. The answer yes is odd out of the blue; it is only appropriate if there is an implicit than clause that rather can be understood as relating to. In (88), a than-clause is overt; this forces rather to be related to the than clause instead of the disjunction. The consequence of this is that it is only understood as a yes-no question. The other way to prevent rather from being related to the disjunction is to use either, as in (89). This forces a reading with an implicit than-clause.

Den Dikken (2006a) proposes a syntax of either where it may adjoin to the first XP of a disjunction (among other places in the XP’s “θ-path”). The distribution of rather is apparently more restricted, but the facts above suggest that it may attach to (or relate to the θ-path) of the first conjunct of a than-conjunction, selecting that conjunct and licensing the than-phrase. Thus, in (88), rather selects the whole XP a ham or a steak, so those are not understood as possible answers to the question. In the absence of a than-clause, as in (87), rather may attach to (or relate to the θ-path) of the first disjunct, a ham, leaving the disjunction open. In (89), either does this and prevents rather from doing so, forcing rather to be understood as relating to the first conjunct of an implicit than-conjunction (i.e. either a ham or a steak).

This function of rather—i.e., of selecting from a possible disjunction—is plausibly related to why it makes a good candidate to license the activation of Modvolition. Volitional modality is about choosing from among a set of possible worlds (those that are compatible with someone’s volition). Rather comes to mean ‘prefer’ because preference is thought of as choosing between a restricted set of possibilities, and as a conjunctive element, rather does just that. It selects the alternative to the left over the alternative (or set of disjoined alternatives) to the right of than.

(90) If it were up to him, he would eat beans rather than rice (or apples (or pears (or snails))).

Instead, on the other hand, does not exhibit this kind of asymmetry. Yes is a perfectly natural answer to (91A), whereas a ham is only possible with strongly salient context such that B has rejected some other food, and it is known that B will choose something else and ham and steak are the only options.

(91) A: Would you instead eat a ham or a steak?
    B: Yes / *a ham.

(92) A: Would you eat a ham or a steak instead of a vegetable?
    B: Yes / *a ham.

(93) A: Would you instead eat either a ham or a steak?
    B: Yes / *a ham.

The connection between rather and disjunction is seen even more explicitly earlier stages of English, as seen in the following examples from the Oxford English Dictionary.66

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66 Thanks to Nicole Palffy-Muhoray for pointing me to these examples.
Moreover, Neil Myler points out to me that sooner is much like rather for many speakers: it behaves just like rather in contexts like (87–89) (as in Would you sooner eat a ham or a steak?). In fact, sooner can occur in ECM contexts as well.

(95)  
  a. I’d sooner them police the Apps better than make it a free for all.70
  b. Nothing will compensate me for losing this house. I’d sooner them keep the money. It’s my house.71

Just like the ECM uses of verbal rather, the interpretation is as though there is a silent HAVE in the structure.72 The facts with sooner strengthen the claim that the function of rather with disjunctions is related to its ability to activate Modvolition and, ultimately, license silent ECM HAVE.73

My speculation, then, is that two aspects of the syntax of rather led to its becoming a volitional modal: its function of selecting an alternative from a disjunction, and its frequent presence in the portion of clause structure where Modvolition is known to reside. In this second respect it overlaps with eitherneither.

(96)  
  a. John would either read the book or skim the conclusion.
  b. John would neither read the book nor skim the conclusion.
  c. John would rather read the book than skim it.

(97)  
  a. Would John either read the book or skim the conclusion?
  b. Would John rather read the book or skim the conclusion?

Both either and rather may appear in the portion of the clause where Modvolition occurs and relate to a disjunction, but only rather chooses from among the disjuncts. The combination of those two properties makes its adoption as a volitional modal sensible. Whether this speculation is on the right track goes beyond the scope of the present paper, however.

6. Conclusion

The distribution of verbal rather across dialects of colloquial English suggests that English has all the structural pieces in place to derive parasitic participles; all it needs is the ability to embed restructuring modals in the perfect; verbal rather, apparently, qualifies. I have proposed that the syntactic properties of verbal rather are a consequence of various interacting factors, including its relationship with a null volitional modal head and its ability to license a silent ECM verb HAVE. Dialects vary as to whether rather may bear participial morphology (analyzed as Modvolition projecting Asp), and whether null HAVE has the parasitic property (analyzed as the ability of a verb to select and AspP without checking its features, making the latter dependent on higher verbal structure). The analysis that I have developed shows that fine-grained microvariation across speakers can be analyzed solely in terms of variation in the properties of functional heads; it leaves open the possibility that there are more dialects than those discussed here, and lays out clear microparameters for

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67 1527 R. Wakefield Let. in Kotser Codicis (?1533) sig. Pivv.
68 1591 R. Bruce Serm. (1843) 259.
71 http://streetfightersproject.wordpress.com/multimedia/photofilms/a-kick-in-the-bricks/
72 These sentences are basically acceptable to me, though I suspect that I myself do not produce sooner as frequently as I produce rather in circumstances where either is appropriate. Echoing footnote 54, I find a sharp contrast between actives and passive, such that I would sooner them criticize someone else is acceptable, but *I would sooner them criticized in public* is not. As far as I know, there are no relevant attestations of participial *soonered*, unlike the widely attested rathered.
73 Stephanie Harves (p.c.) asks whether rather might attract HAVE to Modvolition (leading to its silence) in a way that is similar to how neither in SpecCP attracts T-to-C, as in neither am I. Of course, the latter does not lead to silence of am; one possibility is that HAVE is null, not due to the GDFC filter, but due to incorporation into Modvolition bleeding the context for the spellout rule leading to [hav], similar to 1st singular aren’t I? in Why aren’t I? (where are is the “elsewhere” form of present tense finite be (Nevin and Parrott, 2010; see also Embick and Marantz, 2008)). The parallelism might be even closer if rather and sooner move from a lower position (associated with the disjunction or than-clause); as pointed out by Richard Kayne (p.c.), the syntax of sentences such as He as much as confessed could shed light on the details of this derivation. Also relevant might be I would more readily eat snails.
analyzing such dialects. Since this is the first study of the syntax of verbal rather, as far as I know, I take this to be a good thing, since it should provide a useful framework for future research, and at the same time shows that syntactic theory is capable of shedding light on, analyzing and allowing us to learn from fine-grained differences across speakers.

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