Scope and dummy verbs in Carrier

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In Carrier, an Athabaskan language of the Central Interior of British Columbia, the negative particle \( ?aw \) as well as some adverbs has rightward scope. As a result, material within the scope of negation other than the verb must follow \( ?aw \), though topicalized constituents fall within scope even though they precede \( ?aw \). Other scope-bearing elements, including \( \text{ca} \) “also” and \( \text{za} \) “only”, have leftward scope. These particles underlie the constructions \( S \text{ ca } V_{\text{neg}} \) “to keep on S-ing” and \( S \text{ ca } V_{\text{neg}} \) “to S also”, in which the choice of dummy verb \( V_{\text{neg}} \) is determined by the event type, valence, and aspect of the main clause. It is suggested that the use of the dummy verb results from the interaction of leftward scope with the requirement that the clause be verb final.

1 Scope-Bearing Elements

In Carrier\(^1\), an Athabaskan language of the Central Interior of British Columbia, there are both elements that have scope over the material that follows them and elements that have scope over the material that precedes them.

1.1 Rightward Scope

An example of an element with rightward scope is the negative particle \( ?aw \) “not”. Carrier verbs are inflected for negation, so when the scope of negation is restricted to the verb, \( ?aw \) is unnecessary and is used only for emphasis. In (1) negation is marked on the verb, which is also marked for the unspecified object. (“to smoke” is strictly transitive in Carrier.) The negative particle \( ?aw \) is therefore optional.

(1) \( (?aw) \) leʔzast’at
   (not) I-do-not-smoke-unspecific-object
   I do not smoke.

However, if material other than the verb is to fall within the scope of negation, \( ?aw \) must be used and must precede whatever is within the scope of negation. In (2), the assertion is not that the speaker does not smoke, which indeed is explicitly contradicted, but that he or she does not smoke kinkikinik. The particle \( ?aw \) is therefore obligatory, as seen in (3), and must precede \( dəniht’ən \) “kinikkinik”, as seen in (4).

(2) Dek’a ast’at: \( ?aw \) dəniht’ən hazast’at.
   Tobacco I-smoke not kinkikinik I-do-not-smoke
   I smoke tobacco; I don’t smoke kinkikinik.

\(^1\) Carrier exhibits considerable dialectal diversity. The dialect described here is the Nak’alban/Dzin’alban (Stuart/Trembleur Lake) dialect.
(3) *Dek’ā əst’āt; daniht’an lazast’at.
Tobacco I-smoke kinnikinik I-do-not-smoke
I smoke tobacco; I don’t smoke kinnikinik.

(4) *Dek’ā əst’āt; daniht’an ?aw lazast’at.
Tobacco I-smoke kinnikinik not I-do-not-smoke
I smoke tobacco; I don’t smoke kinnikinik.

The item following ?aw need not be a direct object. In (5) it is a comitative PP.²

that man he-is-mean so not with-him we-work cannot
That man is so mean we cannot work with him.

It is possible for multiple phrases to be within the scope of negation. In (6) the numeral ?ilo huloh
“nine”, the noun ?at’en-i “tasks”, and the adverb ?algoh “together” are all within the scope of
negation and all follow ?aw.

not nine tasks together we-do cannot
We cannot do nine things at once.

The rule that anything within the scope of negation must follow ?aw does not hold of topicalized
material. In (7) daniht’an “kinnikinik” is topicalized and precedes ?aw; nonetheless, it is within
the scope of negation.³

(7) Dek’ā əst’āt; daniht’an ?i ?aw lazast’at.
Tobacco I-smoke kinnikinik it not I-do-not-smoke
I smoke tobacco; I don’t smoke kinnikinik.

Similarly, adverbs precede whatever they modify. If they modify more than the verb, what they
modify follows them.

(8) ?ək’anadədí? ?et hawa su nedo k’ayəłdək gələ?.
he-imitates because well white-person he-speaks-like he-became
She learned to speak good English by imitating others.

(9) ?ada? dəkə̃ne xana-i hat’i xʷe long-ago Indians animals they-have while
su də̃xana? ʔəhinli inleʔ?.
well their-animals they-care-for used-to
Long ago when Indians had cattle they took good care of their beasts.

(10) Čił təbe su saldən ʔənlī.
young-man very well soldier he-is
The young man is a good soldier.

² Notice that here the main verb is not negative; the negation results from the use of the particle ait’oh “cannot”,
which follows an inflected non-negative verb in the optative mode.

³ Topicalization in Carrier is accomplished by resuming the full noun phrase by the appropriate independent pronoun.
Here the NP daniht’an is resumed by the non-human pronoun ʔi.
1.2 Leftward Scope

Particles with leftward scope include za “only” and ča “also”. In (11), za “only” has scope over the pronoun iti “it” to its left.

    washing-machine it only he-wants
    The only thing she wants is a washing machine.

In (12), ča “also” has scope over sasče “large bear” to its left.

    uncle he-brings-in-kill while big-bear too he-killed
    While my uncle was bringing in the meat he killed a large bear too.

Such particles may follow ȴ as well as NPs and PPs. (14) follows (13) in a story about an owl that kidnaps a little boy. In (14), ča “also” follows the ȴ Ta?usda te “when he was thirsty”, making a semantic contribution equivalent to that of English sentence-initial “and”.

(13) Goh idzhì te Ḍa?asqì Ḍi yafa?al
    rabbit he-caught when meat it he-eats-it
    and its-kidneys two them for-him he-brought-back
    When he caught a rabbit he would eat the meat and bring back the two kidneys for him.

(14) Ta?usda te ča datsan?ks?oh be
    he-is-thirsty when also leaf by
    water he-brought-up-to-him he-drinks-it
    And when he was thirsty he drank water
    that he brought up to him in a leaf.

2 The Keep-on-V-ing Construction

Carrier has a construction meaning “to keep on V-ing” in which the particle za “only” plays a crucial role. The construction may be schematized as in (15).

(15)  S za Vaux

The most interesting and complex aspect of this construction is the choice of auxiliary verb.

2.1 States

If the main clause describes a state, a form of the verb “to be” is used, as in (16)-(18).

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4 These two sentences contain two words too nice to pass over in silence. The word mek in (13) does not mean “kidney” in general; it refers specifically to rabbit kidneys. The gloss “leaf” does not do justice to the word datsan?ks?oh in (14). Literally meaning “crown moosehair”, it refers to leaves of the Trembling Aspen Populus tremuloides that curl up to form a bowl.
(16) Ĕalts'āl ąstį za ?ant'oh.
    baby  sleeps only he-is
    The baby kept on sleeping.

(17) Ğyįn ąza ?ant'oh.
    he-stands only he-is
    He keeps on standing.

(18) Ģgo ąza anili.
    he-cries only he-is
    He keeps on crying.

2.2 Sounds

If the main clause describes a sound, a form of the verb “to make a noise, to say” is used, as in (19).

(19) Ąjan ąza ?atni.
    he-sings only he-says
    He just keeps on singing.

The auxiliary verb may take on other tenses, as in (20), and it may take various subject forms, as in (21)-(23).

(20) Tiįn ąza ?adxatini.
    he-will-sing only he-will-say
    He is going to keep on singing.

(21) Yadląk ąza ?atni
    he-talks only he-says
    He keeps on talking.

(22) Yaħadląk ąza ?ahatni.
    they-talk only they-say
    They keep on talking.

(23) Yasdąk ąza ?adəsni.
    I-talk only I-say
    I keep on talking.

All manner of sounds fall into this category. It includes not only singing (20) and speaking (21)-(23), but hollering (24), telling stories (25), crying (26), barking (27), sirens blowing (28) and even involuntary sounds such as burping (29), farting (30), and coughing (31).

(24) Nyum dān andigəd'a?-an dāl'į za ?atni.
    that man who-got-hurt hollers only he-says
    The man who was hurt keeps on hollering.

(25) Nax'ahląk ąza ?atni.
    he-tells-stories only he says
    He just keeps on telling stories.
(26) Ts’udan atso za ?atni.
    child he-cries only he-says
    The child keeps crying.

(27) Li s’ła yatše za ?atni.
    dog at-me he-barks only he-says
    The dog keeps on barking at me.

(28) ɬu n zu ?atni.
    it-blows only he-says
    The siren keeps on blowing.

    he-burps only he-says
    He keeps on burping.

(30) ɬit’et zu ?atni.
    he-farts only he-says
    He keeps on farting.

(31) ?Az nągaya xʷats’án dalkʷɑʃ za ?atni
    outside he-went since he-coughs only he-says
    He has been coughing ever since he went outside.

2.3 Events Other Than Sounds

If an event other than a sound is involved, the auxiliary verb is derived from the root -ʔen “do”. In most cases, this root is preceded by the valence prefix d. Examples (32)-(35) illustrate the range of events that fall into this category.

    he-works only he-does
    He just keeps on working.

(33) Nálgahn zu ?At’en.
    he-runs only he-does
    He keeps on running.

(34) Yo dildás za ?At’en.
    down he-falls only he-does
    He keeps on falling.

    he-is-sick while he-shivers only he-does
    He keeps on shivering from his sickness.

In certain cases, in addition to the valence prefix d, the absolutive classifier prefix xʷ is present. This is one of several prefixes (sometimes called “gender” prefixes) that agree with the absolutive argument of the verb. For example, in (36) the verb nálat has no classifier prefix and is therefore

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5 The d valence prefix combines with the initial glottal stop of the stem to form a glottalized t’.
generic. In (37) the verb includes the $d$ classifier prefix, usually associated with stick-like things. In (38), the verb includes the $n$ classifier prefix associated with round things. In (39) the verb includes the $x^c$ classifier prefix associated with saliently areal or spatial things. In these cases, the verb is intransitive and the classifier prefix agrees with the subject.

(36) T'et nəlat  
young-woman  it-is-floating around  
A young woman is floating around.

(37) Dačan nəlat  
log  it-$d$-class-is-floating-around  
A log is floating around.

(38) Labrot nəlat  
ball  it-$n$-class-is-floating-around  
A ball is floating around.

(39) Yoh naxʷəlat  
house  it-$x^c$-class-is-floating-around  
A house is floating around.

When the verb is transitive, the classifier prefix agrees with the object. In (40), there is no classifier prefix and the verb is therefore generic. However, in (41) the $x^c$ classifier prefix is present, in agreement with the object yoh “house”, which is saliently areal.

(40) Cankel ?əle.  
box  he-is-making  
He is making a box.

(41) Yoh ?xʷəle.  
house  he-is-making-$x^c$-class  
He is building a house.

The sentences in which the $x^c$ classifier prefix is present are those in which the subject is areal or spatial. The main verb may itself contain the $x^c$ classifier prefix, as in (42), but it need not, as in (43).

(42) Naxʷəltih za ?xʷət’en.  
it-rains only it-wh-does  
It just keeps on raining.

(43) Najaʔ za ?xʷət’en.  
it-snows only it-wh-does  
It just keeps on snowing.

Indeed, as (44) and (45) show, it is possible to get nearly synonymous pairs of verbs, one with $x^c$, the other without it, both taking the auxiliary verb with $x^c$.

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6 Although there is no difference in the English translations, these sentences are not synonymous. (44) refers to relatively dense hail, (45) to relatively sparse hail. The verb naxʷəltih in (44) is the verb “to rain”. The verb naxələt in (45) is the distributive form of “plural objects fall to the ground”. 
(44) ?Indulutsan nax°altih za ?ax°at’en.
   hail  rains  only  it-wh-does
   It just keeps on hailing.

(45) ?Indulutsan nanakat za ?ax°at’en.
   hail  falls  only  it-wh-does
   It just keeps on hailing.

The x° prefix is not restricted to weather constructions. In (46) the main verb x°adîg’k’an takes it in agreement with the subject yoh “house”. The auxiliary therefore takes it to. Contrast (46) with (47) in which the subject is not areal. Here neither the main verb nor the auxiliary take the x° classifier.

(46) Yoh x°adîg’k’an za ?ax°at’en.
   house  burns  only  it-wh-does
   The house keeps on burning.

(47) X°anin’ai dîg’k’an za ?at’en.
   pole  burns  only  it-does
   The pole keeps on burning.

The x° classifier prefix is found on the auxiliary exclusively when the main clause is intransitive, never when it is transitive.

In certain cases, the valence prefix is l rather than d. Here are some examples:

(48) Ts’ilma yult’ah ?et hunts’i
   bee  it-stings-him  although
   he-carries-it-around  only  he-does-it-to-him
   nayale  za  yal?en.
   Even though the bee is stinging him he keeps on carrying it around.

(49) Danî naîgel  za  yal?en.
   moose  he-packs-it-back  only  he-makes-it
   He keeps on packing the moose back.

   it-spills  although  tea  he-pours-it  only  he-makes-it
   Although the tea is spilling he keeps on pouring it.

(51) ?Aw lisk°as  ?et hunts’i yanilt’î  za  yal?en.
   not  it-does-not-move  although  he-pushes-it  only  he-makes-it
   Although it (vehicle) does not move he keeps on pushing it.

As l valence is usually associated with transitive verbs, it is not surprising that all of the examples with l involve transitive main clauses. However, not all transitive main clauses induce an auxiliary with l valence, as exemplified by (52)-(55), which have d.

(52) ?adâlnat  za  ?at’en
   he-splits-wood  only  he-does
   He keeps on splitting wood
(53) ?A?al (he-eats) za ?a?en. (he-only eats)
    He keeps on eating.

(54) Yulc'is (he-punches) za ?a?en. (him-only does)
    He keeps on punching him.

    Mother keeps on kneading dough.

Intransitive main clauses always take $d$, but only some transitive clauses take $t$. The criterion seems to have to do with aspect. In the examples in which $t$ is used, the underlying situation type is durative. One keeps on pushing, for example, by not ceasing to push. On the other hand, in the transitive examples in which $d$ is used, the underlying situation type is punctual. For example, punching someone is semelfactive; continuing to punch someone involves repetition, not merely not ceasing to punch.

3 The V-too Construction

A second construction based on a particle with leftward scope also makes use of a dummy verb. This is the V-too construction, which may be schematized as in (56).

(56) S ča V aux

The choice of auxiliary verb is governed by the same principles as in the Keep-on-V-ing construction. Thus, in (57) (said by an elder describing her grand-daughter's new boyfriend to another elder) the main clause denotes a state and the auxiliary is a form of “to be”. In (58), the main clause denotes a sound event, and the auxiliary is a form of “make a noise”. As (59) and (60) illustrate, events other than sounds use an auxiliary based on the root $?en "do".

(57) Danezu? (he-is-handsome) ča ?a?en'oh. (also he-is-nice)
    He is handsome and he is nice too.

(58) Šonald'en x'enin nadjay. ?ajan ča ?a?en. (movies for he-dances)
    She dances in the movies. She sings too.

(59) U-x'a?anju? k'et datlat ča ?a?en. (so he-shakes)
    He was so scared he was shaking.

    He builds houses too.
4 Particle Scope and Dummy Verbs

The syntax of elements having leftward scope is more complex than that of those with rightward scope since Carrier is verb-final. An element with rightward scope can precede anything and so can have anything within its scope; a problem arises in bringing the verb within the scope of a particle with leftward scope since in order to have scope over the verb the particle must follow it, which is forbidden, since the clause would then not be verb final. I suggest that it is this conundrum that motivates the dummy verb constructions in Carrier. Adding the dummy verb after the particle satisfies the requirement that the verb be clause-final.

Post-verbal particles such as the interrogative particle *eh*, exemplified in (61), and the emphatic particle *si*, exemplified in (62), are only apparent counterexamples to this analysis. These particles are not clause-final; they are sentence-final. As such, they do not belong to any clause.

(61) ḳaʔningan eh?
    tea you-(1)-want INT
    Do you want tea?

(62) Nanyust’en si!
    I-see-you (1)-optative-affirmative EMPH
    I’ll see you again!

A question raised by this analysis is why the dummy verb should reflect the semantic type and valence of the main clause. Several other approaches would seem to meet the constraints: (a) using a fixed verb (e.g. “do”) or (b) copying the main verb. One possibility is that all three cases are instantiated in different languages and that the Carrier case reflects an arbitrary choice. An alternative would be that there is a principled explanation. However, the complexity and nature of the rules governing the choice of the dummy verb suggest that it will be difficult to find one.7

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7 To the complexity of the rules in the dialect described here we may add the fact that it appears that in the Hôtel de la [Stoney Creek] dialect they are slightly different, with aspect playing no role.