

“Need and Light Verbs”

Richard S. Kayne
New York University

Università di Siena
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1. English *need*.

Isačenko (1974) suggested that Russian lacks a verbal *need* with a nominative argumental subject, as in:

(1) He needs a sister.

because Russian lacks a verb *have* in sentences like:

(2) He has a sister.

(That is, Russian has no direct counterpart of either of these.) More specifically, Isačenko takes English *need* to ‘piggyback’ on English *have*, much in the (later, more general, theoretically grounded) spirit of Hale and Keyser (1993; 2002), which amounts to saying that (1) should be analyzed as:

(3) ...HAVE need...

with *need* incorporating to the silent light verb HAVE, in some sense of the term ‘incorporation’.

(1) is not sensitive to finiteness, in the sense that (1) readily has non-finite counterparts:

(4) There will need to be more work done.

(5) He has always needed a sister.

(6) Despite needing a sister,...

(7) They don’t need to stay.

(8) They haven’t needed to talk to us.

(9) They couldn’t possibly have needed to do that.

(10) Despite not needing to leave, they left.

On the other hand, finiteness matters (unsurprisingly, at first glance, given general properties of English modals that are notable especially in the case of root modals) for what we call modal-like *need* in English (which is followed by an infinitive without *to* and which has polarity properties):

(11) They needn’t stay.

(12) *They haven’t needed talk to us.

(13) *They couldn’t possibly have needed do that.

(14) *Despite not needing leave, they left.

A question that arises is why English should have this (at first glance lexical) property of allowing *need* to act either like an ordinary verb or like a modal.

The proposal I would like to make is that the modal-like behavior of *need* (which is not complete, as we shall see) is parasitic on the auxiliary-like behavior of certain instances of English *have*, more precisely:

(15) Modal *need* is derived via incorporation of nominal *need* to auxiliary-like possessive *have*.

In other words, the existence of (11) in English is dependent on the existence in English of sentences like:

- (16) They haven't any money.
- (17) I haven't the slightest idea.

where the pre-*n't* position of *have* indicates auxiliary status:

That is, (11) is to be thought of as containing, at some stage of the derivation, with HAVE having raised past *n't*:

- (18) ...HAVE n't need...

It may be that the incorporation of *need* to HAVE takes place at a lower stage, with HAVE and *need* then moving together past *n't*. In either case, we are starting from:

- (19) ...n't HAVE need...

which provides (the basis of) an account of the fact that in (11) *need* necessarily scopes under *n't* (although the polarity property of modal-like *need* dilutes this point).

Note that from this perspective the limitation of modal-like *need* to (mostly) finite contexts cannot be a primitive fact about modal-like *need* (which is now not a primitive element at all, differently from (extensions to English of) Cinque (1999; 2006)). Rather we would expect this limitation to reduce at least in part to a property of auxiliary-like possessive *have*.

Properties of auxiliary-like possessive *have* are not always easy to individuate, given the existence of non-auxiliary-like possessive *have*, and even when they are, are not always clearly relevant. For example (16) has no non-finite counterpart:

- (20) *They may well haven't any money.

but this might be explicable entirely in terms of properties of *n't* (which is arguably strictly limited to contexts of finite verbs in general, perhaps accounting for **He'sn't very smart*, if 's is an agreement morpheme).

Useful, then, is possessive *have got*, in which *have* is auxiliary-like in being able to precede *n't*:

- (21) They haven't got any money at all.

Huddleston (2002, 112) points out that in British English the past tense version of this is less usual:

- (22) ?They hadn't got any money at all.

In my English, this property is sharper (cf. Quinn (2006) on New Zealand English), with (22) a full *, in a way that clearly distinguishes *have got* from *have* + past participle. (Quinn suggests that the deviance of (22) is to be understood in terms of a Pred head to which *have* raises that is found primarily in the present tense, a la Delfitto (2004).)

(For me, this present vs. past distinction holds, too, (although less sharply) for auxiliary-like possessive *have* even in the absence of *got*:

- (23) He hasn't the slightest/faintest idea what to say to people.
- (24) ?Back then, he hadn't the slightest/faintest idea what to say to people.)

Huddleston notes in addition that there is no past participle counterpart of this *have*:

- (25) *They haven't had got any money.

and no gerund counterpart, for example:

- (26) *Despite not having got any money, John...

(possible in British English, but only with *got* = *gotten*) again contrasting with *have* + past participle.

In contrast, Huddleston notes the (bare) infinitival counterpart to be only “very marginal”:

(27) ?She may have got plenty of money but that doesn’t mean she can push us around.

Put another way, the *have* of *have got* is, as a bare infinitive, more possible than as a past participle, as in (25), or as a gerund, as in (26).

That the overall limitation of modal-like *need* to finite contexts (as well as its ability to invert in questions and to precede *n’t* and to license VP-deletion) is derivative from properties of auxiliary-like possessive *have* is strikingly supported by the fact that (for me) the examples of (12)-(14) are more deviant than the corresponding bare infinitive, arguably mimicking the *have got* facts that Huddleston mentions:

(28) ?You won’t need stay any longer than necessary.

(29) ?Nobody will need stay any longer than necessary.

(I don’t have such a distinction with other modals - i.e. **He won’t must/can stay...*, etc.)

Somewhat similarly, the present tense vs. past tense contrast of (21)/(22) with *have got* arguably has a counterpart with modal *need*, in that (11) contrasts sharply for me with:

(30) *They neededn’t stay.

The same holds with *not*:

(31) They need not stay.

(32) *They needed not stay.

(though past tense examples with modal-like *need* are bad even for some speakers who accept (22); on the other hand, a Google search suggests that some speakers may allow past tense modal-like *need*). Similarly for me:

(33) Nobody need stay any longer than necessary.

(34) *Nobody needed stay any longer than necessary.

as well as with VP-deletion:

(35) Need he really?

(36) *Needed he really?

Why the past tense prohibition with modal *need* holds even for some who allow *hadn’t got* remains to be understood (as does *He hasn’t got much money* vs. **He needsn’t stay/*Nobody needs stay*).

2. *Need* in contemporary Indo-European languages (taken from joint work with Stephanie Harves - Harves and Kayne 2008)

In his discussion of counterparts of *have* and *be* within Slavic, Isačenko (1974: 75) asks, “Could it be sheer coincidence that those Slavic languages which have become H(ave)-languages...have some modal verbs which are unknown to Russian, a B(e)-language?” In the spirit of Hale and Keyser (1993, 2002) and Noonan (1993), this would seem to be no coincidence, at least for the modal verb *need*.

Let an H-language be a language that has a close overt counterpart of English *have*, in the sense of having an overt verb expressing ordinary possession (as in *Mary*

has two brothers, Mary has a new car), such that the possessor has nominative Case and the possessee is a direct object (with accusative Case and no preposition). A B-language will then be taken to mean a language that lacks a close counterpart of *have* and expresses ordinary possession using some counterpart of *be*.

An expanded generalization, as compared with the earlier discussion of English is as follows:

(37) All contemporary Indo-European languages that have a transitive verb corresponding to *need* are H-languages.

Put another way, B-languages never have transitive *need*. By transitive here is meant (as above for *have*) a verb matching *need* and taking a nominative subject and an accusative direct object (with no preposition).

Many contemporary Indo-European languages are like English in having transitive *need* (as in *They need that book*). Examples are German, Spanish, Swedish, Czech, Slovenian, Polish, Burgenland Croatian, as well as Slovak, Bosnian, standard Croatian, and some dialects of Serbian. In contrast, Latvian, Irish, and Hindi (also Bengali, Bhojpuri, Sindhi, Punjabi, Gujarati, and Marathi) are B-languages that, in accordance with (37), lack transitive *need*.

It is to be noted that (37) is not a biconditional. Transitive *need* implies the presence in the language of transitive *have*, but the converse does not hold. The presence of *have* in a language is not enough to guarantee the existence of transitive *need*. Bulgarian, French and Lithuanian are examples of H-languages that lack transitive *need*.

(37) suggests that the analysis of verbal *need* must crucially invoke the presence of *have* in a given language, which in turn suggests a Hale and Keyser (1993, 2002) style incorporation-approach to verbal *need*, whereby nominal *need* raises and incorporates into unpronounced verbal HAVE. Incorporation of nominal *need* into verbal HAVE results in the appearance of a transitive verb *need* inheriting the accusative Case licensing properties of HAVE. Strictly speaking, though, *need* is never a verb, i.e., it is never exhaustively dominated by the node V.

As far as Case is concerned, we can say that in the absence of incorporation, *need* itself requires Case from *have* or from a P:

(38) ?They have need of a new car.

(39) They are in need of a new car.

On the other hand, when *need* has incorporated to HAVE, we can follow Baker (1988) and say that incorporated *need* does not need Case, so that HAVE is available to assign Case to *a new car*, obviating the need for *of*, as in:

(40) They need a new car.

Incorporation (in some sense of the term) to silent HAVE underlies the derivation of transitive *need* in languages such as English, German, Swedish, Icelandic, Czech, Spanish, etc. The lack of transitive *need* in contemporary IE B-languages (e.g. Latvian, Hindi, Celtic languages) follows straightforwardly from an analysis that posits HAVE as a necessary component in the derivation of transitive verbal *need*. (Why H-languages like French nonetheless lack transitive *need* remains to be understood.)

This proposal recalls the proposal made by Noonan (1993), who took the absence of stative transitive verbs in Irish such as *know*, *respect*, *fear*, and *love* to be traceable back to the absence in Irish of transitive *have*. She argued for an incorporation approach to these predicates (à la Hale and Keyser) whereby an underlying noun incorporates into verbal HAVE. The present proposal for transitive *need* is simultaneously narrower and broader than her proposal for Irish. It is narrower in that it says nothing about any (derived) verb other than *need* (she does not discuss *need* explicitly). It is broader in that her proposal was limited to Irish.

One may ask whether a Hale & Keyser type analysis of *need* can be extended to other language families, or even be taken to hold universally. It is logically possible that the generalization noted here is solely an Indo-European phenomenon, and that other non-IE B-languages have a different strategy that would allow them to have transitive *need* despite lacking *have*. A very brief look at a handful of B-languages outside of IE suggests that this is, however, not likely to be the case. Within Altaic, for example, Turkish fits the generalization discussed here, and within Finno-Ugric, Hungarian also falls into place (both are B-languages, and neither has transitive *need*).

On the other hand, Finnish (cf. Pykkänen 1998) does not clearly fit in. It appears to be a B-language insofar as it does not express possession via sentences in which the possessor is nominative (though the object does sometimes look accusative). Yet, it seems to have transitive *need*.

Pykkänen (1998) argues that Finnish is nonetheless a H-language. If her analysis turns out to be correct, then Finnish would not provide a counterexample to a generalized version of (37). (Hebrew transitive adjectival *need* represents another challenge.)

3. *besoin* vs. *bisogno*

French and Italian are similar in having:

- (41) Jean a besoin de chanter. ('J has need to sing')
- (42) Gianni ha bisogno di cantare.

Both allow nominal *besoin/bisogno* to act as the object of 'have'. Yet only Italian allows *bisogno* to incorporate into a verbal structure yielding the impersonal sentence:

- (43) Bisogna cantare. ('needs to-sing' = 'it's necessary to sing')

French has no:

- (44) *Il beso(i)gne chanter.

I have put a subject clitic *il* in this example to respect the non-pro-drop character of French. French does, however, have, with an interpretation close to that of (43):

- (45) Il faut chanter. ('it needs to-sing' = 'it's necessary to sing')

Although similar in interpretation, (43) and (45) differ when it comes to replacing the infinitive by an object clitic pronoun *lo/le*:

- (46) *Lo bisogna. ('it needs')
- (47) Il le faut. ('it it needs' = 'it's necessary')

A possible account of (46) vs. (47) is that the infinitive in (43) in Italian is actually (an obligatorily postverbal) subject of the matrix verb (and so cannot give rise to an object clitic), whereas the infinitive in (45) is not subject-like, but object-like, with this difference in turn related to the pro-drop character of Italian vs. French. Put another

way, French (45) already has a subject apart from the infinitive, namely the subject clitic *il*. Italian (43) arguably does not. (This should extend to French allowing impersonal *Il le semble* and Italian not.)

On the reasonable assumption that clitic climbing is (sometimes) possible out of object infinitives, but never possible out of subject infinitives, we have an account of:

(48) Bisogna parlarne. ('needs to-speak of-them')

(49) *Ne bisogna parlare. ('of-them needs to-speak')

in terms of the subject status of the infinitive that accompanies *bisogna*. Conversely, we expect clitic climbing to be possible out of the object-like infinitive that accompanies *il faut*. This expectation cannot be tested in contemporary colloquial French, which disallows clitic climbing in general (apart from causatives, or out of past participle phrases). But in a more literary French, where clitic climbing is allowed with the clitics *y* and *en*, we do have:

(50) Il en faut parler. ('it of-it needs to-speak' = 'it's necessary to speak of it')

Assume now that impersonal (43) in Italian has a derivation of the sort suggested in Hale and Keyser (1993; 2002), in which nominal *bisogn-* is 'incorporated' into a light verb (such as existential 'be'), and furthermore (thinking also of Baker (1988)) that *bisogn-* must be (part of) the non-subject argument of that light verb.

In (43), this is possible since we can take the infinitive (which may originate within the same phrase as *bisogn-*, excluding 'be') to be licensed as the (postverbal) subject of the light verb 'be', i.e. we have, at an early stage of the derivation:

(51) ...BE [*bisogn-* cantare]

Subsequently, either *bisogn-* incorporates directly, or else *cantare* scrambles out (and gets licensed as a subject/nominative) and the remnant '[*bisogn-* t]' 'incorporates'.

By the same reasoning, there is a problem with a parallel derivation for French (44), insofar as the infinitive there cannot be licensed as the subject/nominative, given the presence of *il*:

(52) il BE [*besoin chanter*]

Nor can the infinitive be licensed as the object, since the phrase containing it plus *besoin* is. Consequently, (44) is excluded, as desired. (This will need to be extended to finite counterparts of *chanter*.) If so, what appeared to be differential behavior of the same morpheme(s) (*besoin/bisogn-*) in French vs. Italian has turned out to be a side effect of an independent difference between those two languages concerning the filling of subject position, in a way that shows that comparative syntax can be fruitfully applied to questions that might appear to be lexical.

Left open is the question why the infinitive in (44)/(52) cannot be licensed via *de*:

(53) *Il beso(i)gne de chanter.

(Perhaps *de* would block the scrambling of the infinitive.)

In addition we will need to say something about cases (from Pollock (1981)) like:

(54) Il a pris forme dans ce pays un grand nombre de... ('it has taken form in this country a large number of...')

It may be that bare infinitives are excluded from being licensed parallel to the postverbal subject-like DP in (54), much as in 'stylistic inversion':

(55) la fille à qui plaît (beaucoup) ce garçon/*chanter

(56) la fille que fait pleurer ce garçon/*écouter Mozart

Cf. also the difference between:

- (57) ?Ho bisogno quel libro. (possible in some Italian - v. work by Andrea Cattaneo)
 (58) *Ho bisogno dormire.

Given the sharp contrast between (44) and (45), it must be the case that (45) (with *falloir*) does not involve incorporation of exactly the sort found in (43). (This correlates with the fact that *faut* (infinitive: *falloir*) has no corresponding morphologically related noun or nominal root like *besoin*.) This in turn suggests that the gloss and translation in (45), (47) and (50) is (non-innocuously) incorrect; instead of 'need' for *faut*, a better gloss would be 'must':

- (59) Il faut chanter. ('it must to-sing' = 'one must sing')

It is possible here to add a dative clitic:

- (60) Il me faut chanter. ('it me must to-sing' = 'I must sing')

with an interpretation very close to that of:

- (61) Je dois chanter. ('I must to-sing')

In effect (60) has a dative (clitic) subject comparable to the nominative subject of (61).

Of additional comparative interest is the fact that Italian has no sentence that is a good match for (60) at all. This might seem to follow from the fact that Italian lacks any overt counterpart of French *il*, combined with the proposal that Italian lacks any silent counterpart of this *il*, but Catalan leads to complications that I will not pursue.

Alongside (60), French also has, with a DP object instead of an infinitival one (and with no agreement between object and verb):

- (62) Il me faut ces livres. ('it me must those books' = 'I must have those books')

in which the postverbal DP can be replaced by an object clitic:

- (63) Il me les faut. ('it me them must' = 'I must have them')

(Again, Italian has no good match to these.) If (63) contains a silent HAVE (as has often been proposed), then (63) is an instance of clitic climbing licensed by the silence of the embedded verb (perhaps because that embedded verb moves up in a special way).

Examples (62) and (63) contrast with:

- (64) *Je dois ces livres.

- (65) *Je les dois.

which are impossible in the relevant sense of *devoir* (as in English), for reasons that need to be elucidated. (Cinque's (2006, chap. 1) proposal for (the Italian counterparts of) these facts would appear not to allow for (62) or (63), given (50).) Nor is there an immediate account for the contrast within French between these and:

- (66) J'ai besoin de ces livres.

- (67) J'en ai besoin.

and similarly for English:

- (68) We need/*must those books.

4. *need* vs. *want*

Italian, as opposed to French, has *volerci* ('to-want-there'), with an 'expletive' *ci*, in a sense close to that of 'need':

- (69) Ci vorrebbe un linguista.

- (70) *Il y voudrait un linguiste.

Also:

- (71) Mi ci vorrebbe un libro di linguistica.
- (72) *Il m'y voudrait un livre de linguistique.

In these Italian examples, the postverbal DP is subject-like in that the verb agrees with it:

- (73) Mi ci vorrebbero parecchi libri di linguistica.

and in that an accusative object clitic cannot replace that postverbal DP (whether the verb agrees with it or not):

- (74) *Mi ce li vorrebbe(ro).

(Arguably, some North Italian dialects have *volerci* with a silent counterpart of *ci*.)

Although the impossibility of an accusative clitic in (74) might seem to be directly related to the (obligatory) agreement of (73), I think it is more directly related to comparable facts with French *il y a*, which lacks such agreement:

- (75) Il y a/*ont des livres sur la table.

Yet an accusative clitic is sharply out:

- (76) *Il les y a sur la table.

in a way almost certainly related to the 'definiteness effect' well-known from existentials.

More specifically, let me take the definiteness effect to follow, as in Kayne (2008a), from a blocking effect (involving 'expletive' *there*) enforced by the definite article, in simple cases like:

- (77) Which table is there a/*the book on?

From that perspective, *les* in (76) is incompatible with *y*. In:

- (78) Il en/*les arrivera.

there must be a silent counterpart of *y*, as supported by Burzio's (1986) discussion of Piedmontese, which shows an overt one.

Returning to (74), we can now say that an accusative clitic would be incompatible there with 'expletive' *ci* (assuming *ci* there to necessarily originate within the non-dative argument). The contrast between (74) and (63) can therefore be tied to the absence in (63) of any *y* or of any silent counterpart of it.

The next question is why *volerci* should require *ci*, while *falloir* does not require (or allow) an expletive *y*. Part of the answer may be that *volerci* sentences in Italian are comparable to English ones like:

- (79) There is a/no need for a linguist.
- (80) There is a/no need for you to have a linguistics book.

i.e. *volerci* involves existential structure, with *ci* very much like *there* and *volere* involving noun-incorporation in essentially the sense in which verbal *need* does (despite impersonal *bisogna* not having *ci*). (I return to this shortly.) *Falloir*, on the other hand, is akin to *must/devoir*, as suggested above, and does not involve incorporation of that sort.

A further question is why French does not allow (70) or (72), i.e. why French has no direct counterpart of *volerci*, either with *y* or, as in the following, with a silent counterpart of it:

- (81) *Il voudrait un linguiste. (* in the impersonal reading)
- (82) *Il me voudrait un livre de linguistique.

Thinking of the proposal in (51) to the effect that Italian impersonal *bisogna* involves incorporation into silent 'be' and that French does not allow such incorporation, it may be that *volerci* necessarily involves incorporation into silent 'be', too (despite *volerci* not being limited to finite forms, as opposed to *bisogna*), and again that French does not allow it, perhaps (in part) related to the fact that French has 'have', but not 'be', in existentials:

(83) Il y a/*est un livre sur la table.

(Relevant here is whether or not the literary *Il est des gens qui...* contains a silent y or not.)

The link between *volere* and *need* just discussed recalls the fact that in English *want* and *need* are very close in certain cases (across dialects of English):

(84) Your car needs washing.

(85) Your car wants washing.

On the other hand, their cross-linguistic distribution within contemporary Indo-European languages is not the same. Although transitive *need*, as discussed earlier, is found only in languages with a verb like *have*, that is not true of transitive *want*, which is found even in Kashmiri and Latvian (with counterparts of *wish/would like*), both of which lack *have*. (It may be that (85) itself is not found in any of them, though, since (85) arguably does not contain the FEEL of (87) below.)

(37) can obviously not be extended mechanically to *want*. On the other hand, Noonan's 1993 paper explicitly had the idea that the absence of transitive *want* in Irish is keyed to the absence in Irish of *have*.

A possible way of resolving this paradox would be to say that an (apparently) ordinary sentence like:

(86) They want a new car.

is to be analyzed as:

(87) ...FEEL want...

where the (nominal) morpheme *want* is interpreted essentially as *need* and is incorporated to a silent FEEL. This FEEL would in some B-languages (Kashmiri and Latvian, but not Irish) be able to license a nominative subject (originating as a possessor, a la Szabolcsi) in a way at least partially akin to the way in which *have* does. (Why Irish is recalcitrant here remains to be understood.)

This kind of analysis would express the intuition that (86) is close to:

(88) They feel the need for a new car.

The general presence of FEEL in *want*-sentences, as opposed to *need*-sentences, may also underlie the difference between *need* and *want* in English seen in:

(89) They needn't leave yet.

(90) *They wantn't leave yet.

and similarly:

(91) Need/*Want they leave?

Modal-like *need* is dependent on incorporation to (silent) auxiliary-like possessive *have*; *want* can arguably not mimic *need* in this way (in English) because *feel* cannot mimic *have*. (Why restructuring behavior groups Romance *want* with Romance *can*, *must* needs to be explicated.)

If this suggestion is on the right track, incorporation to a light verb may be relevant not only to *need* (as argued earlier) but also to the wider class of stative verbs for which Noonan in effect proposed an incorporation approach.

5. Conclusion.

Various considerations having to do with the two types of *need* in English, with the cross-linguistic distribution of transitive *need*, with *besoin* vs. *bisogna*, and with *need* vs. *want* appear to converge on (some generalization of) (37).

A question that arises is why (37) (or some generalization of it) holds in the first place. Put in acquisition terms, why do learners of languages like English associate with transitive *need* a Hale & Keyser type analysis. Why could *need* not be taken to be a simple transitive verb?

The same question arises for a Hale & Keyser approach to *laugh*. Why could languages like English (as opposed to Basque) not simply take *laugh* to be unergative, with no object and no light verb?

An answer that comes to mind is that the language faculty rigidly associates elements like *laugh* with the category noun, thereby forcing sentences like:

(92) John laughed.

to contain a light verb, whether silent (as in English) or overt (as in Basque).

If (37) is valid universally, it suggests in a similar way that the language faculty rigidly associates *need* with the category noun, thereby imposing the presence of a light verb in:

(93) John needed that book.

As in Kayne (2008b), pursuing this consistently leads to:

(94) All verbs are light verbs.

i.e. to the idea that the class of verbs is closed and rather small and limited (at a first approximation) to what have been called light verbs, e.g.:

(95) *do, have, be, take* (a shower), *put* (the blame on), *give* (a scolding), *go*...

keeping in mind that some of these may be analyzable in terms of some of the others, i.e. not all light verbs are necessarily primitives.

(37) then suggests:

(96) Modals are not among the class of light verbs (and are therefore not verbs at all).

a conclusion that is not readily compatible with (part of) Cinque's (1999) hierarchy.

If pairs like:

(97) They took a shower yesterday morning.

(98) They showered yesterday morning.

indicate that *take* can be a light verb, then the expectation is that there can be no such pairs with a modal in place of *take*. (Left open is the question how to concisely characterize the class of light verbs.)