

# “I’m done my homework.” – Case assignment in a stative passive

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## 1 Introduction

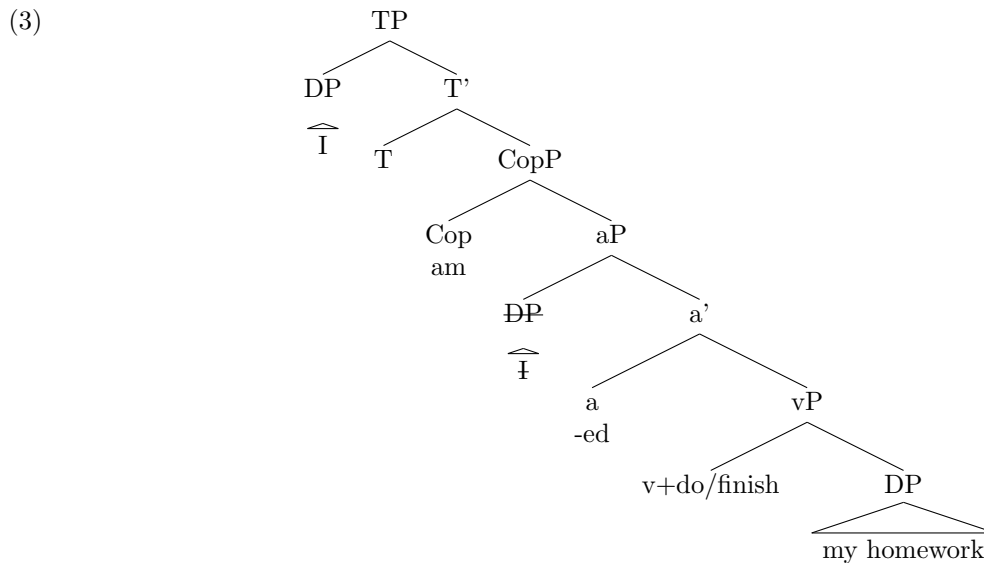
We present an analysis of an underdescribed construction common to Canadian and Philadelphian English dialects which appears to involve an instance of the copula/passive auxiliary *be*, a participial form of *finish* or *do*, and a DP complement receiving accusative Case (see Yerastov (2008) for a description and discussion of its geographical distribution). This construction, which is fully productive and non-idiomatic, is illustrated in (1).

- (1) I am done/finished my homework.

This construction raises a number of problems for the theory of Case-assignment and argument structure, including

- (2) a. What is the category of the phrase headed by the participle?
- b. Where is the external argument (*I* in example (1)) introduced?
- c. Where does the accusative Case of the internal argument (*my homework* in (1)) come from, given the apparently passive structure?
- d. Why is this construction lexically restricted to the participles of *do* and *finish*?

We will be arguing that the structure for (1) is given in (3).



The answers to questions (2a-2d) are then

- (4) a. The construction involves a resultative adjectival passive, rather than a full eventive passive or an active past participle (i.e. there is no Voice head)<sup>1</sup>
- b. The external argument is therefore introduced not in spec-VoiceP (which is absent) but in the subject position of the adjectival small clause (which we depict here as spec-aP).
- c. The accusative Case of the internal argument is assigned by a little-*a* head, perhaps similar to the little-*a* head which assigns accusative case to the objects of *worth*.
- d. The lexical specificity of this construction is due to the selectional properties of this little-*a* head.

## 1.1 Outline

### §2 *Done my homework* involves a resultative adjectival passive.

We will present arguments that *finished* and *done* are neither active participles, nor eventive passive participles.

### §3 Little-*a* is the case licenser.

We will rule out the possibility of other case licensers, including silent adpositions, verbal layers, and the copula. We also argue that the internal argument is interpreted via complement coercion, employing tests from Pylkkänen (2008).

### §4 Lexical Specificity

We address the issue of the lexical specificity of the construction, noting *finish* and *do* are uniquely selected to have external arguments in resultative adjectival passives in most dialects.

### §5 Remaining Puzzle

We'll briefly mention a remaining puzzle regarding the way *do* functions in this construction.

### §6 Conclusion

## 2 *Done my homework* involves a resultative adjectival passive participle.

### 2.1 It is not a perfect

Yerastov (2008) proposes that *be done DP* is a perfect with a non-standard auxiliary selection, dialectally related to Scots *be*-perfect, as illustrated in this example from Orkney Scottish English (p.c. Tamminga).

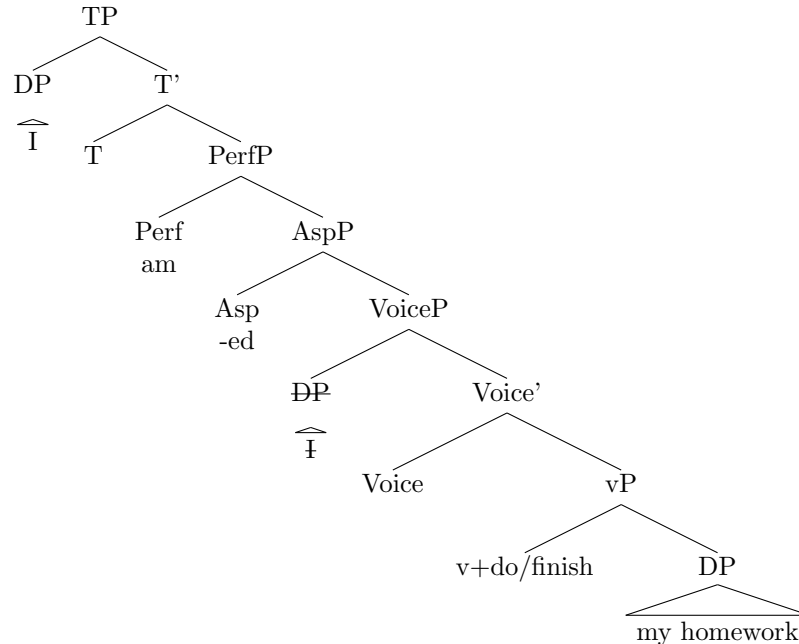
- (5) You'll no be been there afore  
 You'll not have been there before.

If this construction were a perfect, it would have a structure like that in (6), with the introduction of the external argument and the case marking on the internal argument both being done by Voice.

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<sup>1</sup>We follow Lundquist (2012) in taking participles to be adjectival in nature, and Embick (2004) in taking resultative participles to involve an event-introducing little-*v*, which we take to be distinct from Chomsky (2001) *v*\*/Kratzer's (1996) Voice.

(6)



However, this hypothesis can be dismissed on the basis of a few diagnostics.

### 2.1.1 Degree Modification

Yerastov (2008, p. 45) points out that *be done DP* is compatible with the degree modifier *all*, which is possible for adjectives, but not active participles.

- (7) a. I'm all ready for school.  
b. I'm all done my homework.  
c. \*I have all done my homework.

### 2.1.2 Embedding under a perfect

It's possible to embed *be done DP* under a perfect, while all other perfect "doubling" is impossible.

- (8) a. I have been done my homework for a while now.  
b. \*I have had done my homework for a while now.  
c. \*I is been done my homework for a while now.  
d. \*I is had done my homework for a while now.

### 2.1.3 Reduced relatives

It's possible for *be done DP* to appear in reduced relatives, but this is not possible for perfect participles.

- (9) a. Would all the students who have eaten their vegetables please stand up?  
b. \*Would all the students eaten their vegetables please stand up?
- (10) a. Would all the students who are finished their homework please stand up?  
b. Would all the students finished their homework please stand up?

#### 2.1.4 There is no Voice

Additionally, there are a number of diagnostics which indicate that there is no Voice head in the construction.

**It can't be passivized.** Unlike *have*-perfects, *be done DP* cannot be passivized

- (11) a. I have done my homework.  
b. My homework has been done.
- (12) a. I am done my homework.  
b. \*My homework is been done.

**No agent oriented modification.** While degree modification is possible, agent oriented modification is not.

- (13) a. I am completely/nearly/halfway done my homework.  
b. \*I am quickly/carefully/intentionally done my homework.

**The subject is not necessarily the agent.** In the following scenario, (14a) is possible, but (14b) is not.

Commissioner Gordon has just arrested the Joker. The Joker has been terrorizing Gotham City, but with the help of Batman, Gordon has apprehended the Joker before he could put his final act of terror into action. Gordon says to the Joker:

- (14) a. You're finished your reign of terror.  
b. #You finished your reign of terror.

↔ This construction is not a perfect.

### 2.2 It is not an eventive passive

True eventive passives cannot be embedded directly under *seem* or *look*.

- (15) \*The homework seems finished by John.

However, *be done DP* can.

- (16) John seems finished his homework.

*By*-phrases are also not licensed. Returning to the example of Commissioner Gordon arresting the Joker, the following is ungrammatical.

- (17) \*You're finished your reign of terror by me.

↔ This construction is not an eventive passive.

### 2.3 Conclusion: it is a resultative adjectival passive

Given this construction's incompatibility with diagnostics for active participles (e.g. appearance in reduced relatives, absence of Voice) and eventive passive participles (e.g. can directly embed under *seem*), and its compatibility with diagnostics for adjectivhood (e.g. degree modification), we conclude that this construction is a resultative adjectival passive.

Also, given the absence of any other location to introduce the external argument, it must be done at spec-*aP*.

## 3 Little-*a* is the case licenser.

We will begin first by considering other possible case licensers in this construction, and ultimately reject them.

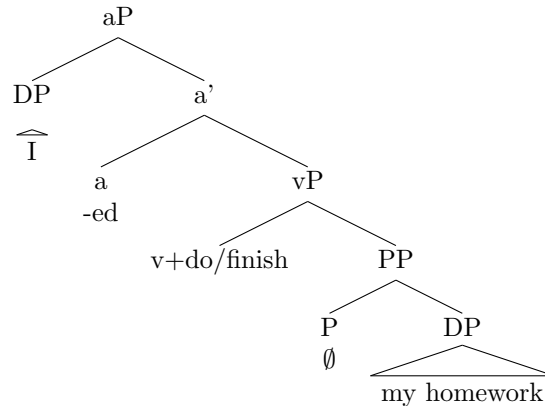
### 3.1 No null preposition

Here, we will consider and reject the hypothesis that a null preposition is the case licencer of the DP. Most speakers outside of dialects which allow (1) believe that it is related to (18) by eliding *with* or by using a null preposition (19-20).

(18) I am done/finished with my homework.

(19) I am done/finished ~~with~~/∅ my homework.

(20)



#### 3.1.1 Interpretive Differences

Philadelphian and Canadian dialects allow both (1) and (18), but they have different ranges of interpretations.

**Instrumental Readings** While (21) can allow instrumental readings (22) cannot.

(21) I am done with the computer.

- a. ✓using the computer
- b. ✓building the computer

(22) I am done the computer.

- a. \* using the computer
- b. ✓building the computer

**Result State** There are also differences in the understood result state of the complement DP between (1) and (18). Specifically, (1) has the same truth conditions regarding the state of the complement DP as a simple transitive. Note the contradiction in (23b).

- (23) a. I didn't finish my fries, but I'm done with them.
- b. #I didn't finish my fries, but I'm done them.

Moreover, when asking Philadelphians if there is a difference in meaning between (24a) and (24b), they remark that they serve different discourse functions.

- (24) a. Are you done with your fries?
- b. Are you done your fries?

They report that (24a) is a request to eat some of the necessarily remaining fries, while (24b) is simply information seeking.

Moreover, objects which cannot have a completed state, such as mass nouns and generic NPs, cannot be the object of (25b), but they can be the object of (25a).

- (25) a. John is finished with coffee. (He'll only drink tea for the rest of his life.)  
 b. \*John is finished coffee. (He'll only drink tea for the rest of his life.)
- (26) a. John is finished with books. (He'll only read magazines from now on.)  
 b. \*John is finished books. (He'll only read magazines from now on.)

### 3.1.2 Movement Tests

There is also at least one movement test involving PP stranding which differentiates the complement of *be done* DP from PP complements: *though*-movement. It is possible to move a transitive adjective past *though* and leave its PP complement behind.

- (27) a. Proud though John is [<sub>AdjP</sub> proud [<sub>PP</sub> of his daughter ] ]...  
 b. Angry though John is [<sub>AdjP</sub> angry [<sub>PP</sub> with his daughter ] ]...  
 c. Done though John is [<sub>AdjP</sub> done [<sub>PP</sub> with his computer ] ]...

This movement is not possible, however, if the complement to the adjective is a DP.

- (28) a. [<sub>AdjP</sub> Worth [<sub>DP</sub> the money]] though this may be ~~worth the money~~...  
 b. \*Worth though this may be [<sub>AdjP</sub> ~~worth~~ [<sub>DP</sub> the money]]...

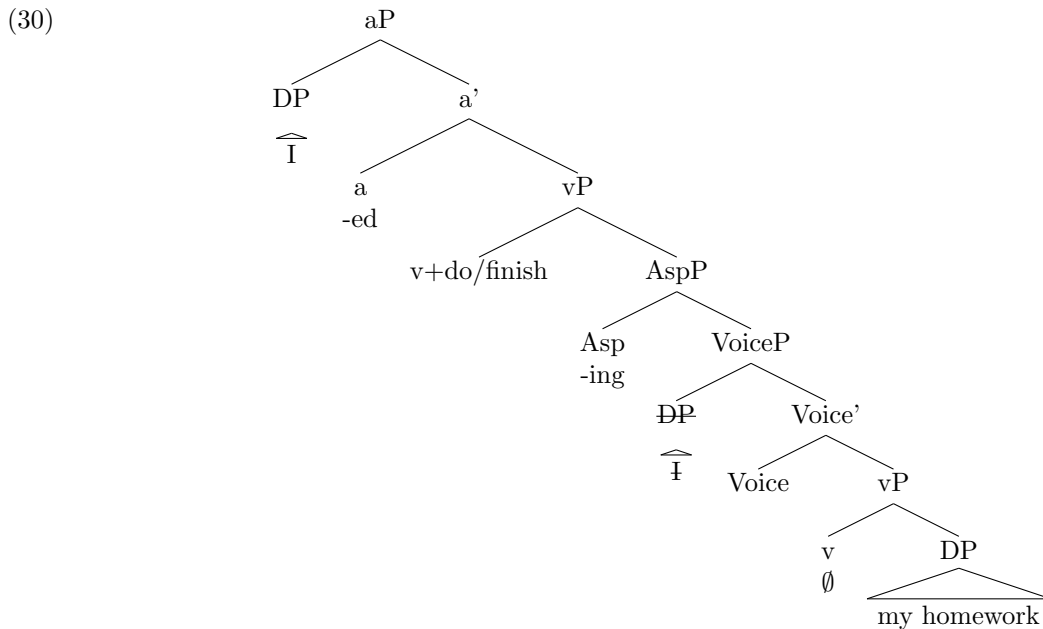
It is not possible to move *finished* or *done* past *though* and leave its complement behind, leading us to believe that this complement is a simple DP, not a PP.

- (29) a. [Finished/Done [his homework]] though John may be ~~finished/done his homework~~...  
 b. \*Finished/Done though John may be [~~finished/done~~ [his homework]]...

↔ There is no silent preposition in this construction.

### 3.2 No silent V

Here, we will consider and reject the hypothesis that there is a silent verb phrase below *do/finish*.



Our arguments against this structure are the same ones made by Pylkkänen (2008) against hidden VP analyses in favor of complement coercion in sentences like *John began the book*. As Pylkkänen (2008) showed, these diagnostics do not uniformly produce negative results for putative silent VP's (e.g., they yield positive evidence for the presence of such hidden structure in the complements of *want* and *need*), so we will take their negative results here to indicate an absence of a silent VP.

### 3.2.1 Restrictions on Modification

If there were a lower VP which assigned case to the internal argument, then it should be possible to modify that VP. However, this is not possible, as illustrated in (31b).

- (31) a. I am finished reading the book page by page. (I'll skim from now on.)  
b. \*I am finished the book page by page. (I'll skim from now on.)

### 3.2.2 Event anaphora

When there is a VP below *do/finish*, it can be referred to with an event anaphor *it*. This is not possible with *be done DP*.

- (32) a. John is sad to be done eating his fries, because it was enjoyable.  
b. #John is sad to be done his fries, because it was enjoyable.

↔ There is no silent verbal layer in this construction.

### 3.3 The copula is not the case licenser.

Given the arguments of Lohndal (2006) that copulas are responsible for Case assignment to predicate nominals in copular constructions, we consider the possibility that the copula is responsible for Case assignment in this construction. However, this can be ruled out by the fact that the small clause *done my homework* need not be embedded under a copula.

- (33) a. So, you did your chemistry exam this morning. That makes *you done your exams*, right?  
b. With *John at long last done his homework*, we can go out and have fun!

The possibility of a silent copula, at least in (33a), suggested to us by Kayne (p.c.), can be ruled out on semantic grounds. An overt copula in the complement of *make* results in an active *be* reading (see Partee (1977); Collins (2006)) which is not the meaning of (33a).

- (34) a. They made me be silly to amuse the children.  
b. ??They made me be done my homework to go out and party.

↔ The copula is not the case licenser.

### 3.4 Conclusion: *a* is the case licenser.

After eliminating candidates above *a* and below *do/finish*, we conclude that *a* must be the case licenser in the construction. This is not so strange in principle, because in most dialects at least the adjective *worth* takes DP complements, and presumably marks case on them.

- (35) a. This appliance is certainly worth the money.  
b. Reading this book is not worth my time.

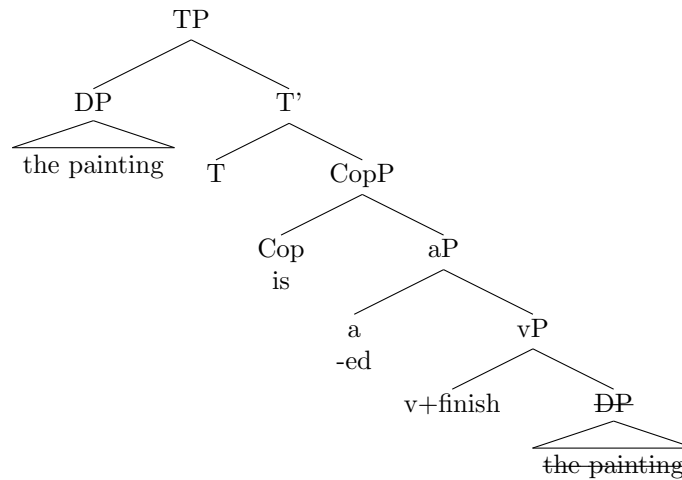
## 4 Lexical Specificity

While the case marking of internal arguments to stative passives by *a* is unique to Philadelphia and Canada, the lexically specified specialness of *finish* and *do* is actually common to almost all dialects. Specifically, it is only with *finished* and *do* that external arguments to a stative passive are possible. Compare the pattern in (36) to (37).

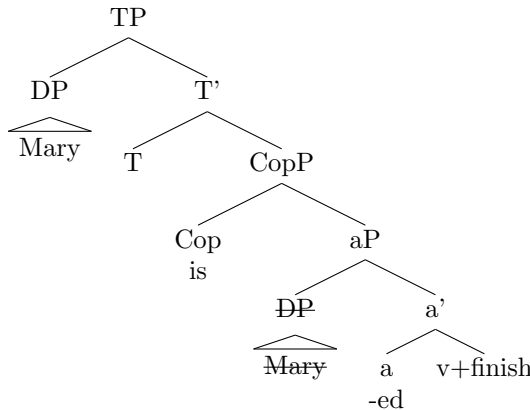
- (36) a. The painting is completed ~~the painting~~.  
 b. \*Mary is ~~Mary~~ completed.  
 c. \*Mary is ~~Mary~~ completed ~~Mary~~ painting her masterpiece.
- (37) a. The painting is finished ~~the painting~~.  
 b. Mary is ~~Mary~~ finished.  
 c. Mary is ~~Mary~~ finished ~~Mary~~ painting her masterpiece.

The structures for (46a) and (46b) are given in (38a) and (38b) respectively.

- (38) a.



- b.



It is our argument that (45b) is ungrammatical because the external argument introducing head *a*, which is present in (38b) does not select for *complete*.

There is some head *a* in most dialects of English which introduces an external argument to stative passives. In most dialects, it selects for only *finish* and *do*, while in others only *finish*, while in even others for *finish*, *do* and *start*. An independently varying property of this *a* head is whether or not it can assign case to an internal argument. We can tell that these are two properties of the same head, because in those dialects where it can assign case to an internal argument, it does so for all and only those stative passives which are selected to have an external argument.



	Montreal <sup>2</sup>	Philadelphia & Canada	Vermont <sup>3</sup>
I am finished.	✓	✓	✓
I am finished writing the assignment.	✓	✓	✓
I am finished my homework.	✓	✓	✓
(39) I am done.	*	✓	✓
I am done writing the assignment.	*	✓	✓
I am done my homework.	*	✓	✓
I am started.	*	*	✓
I am started writing the assignment.	*	*	✓
I am started my homework.	*	*	✓

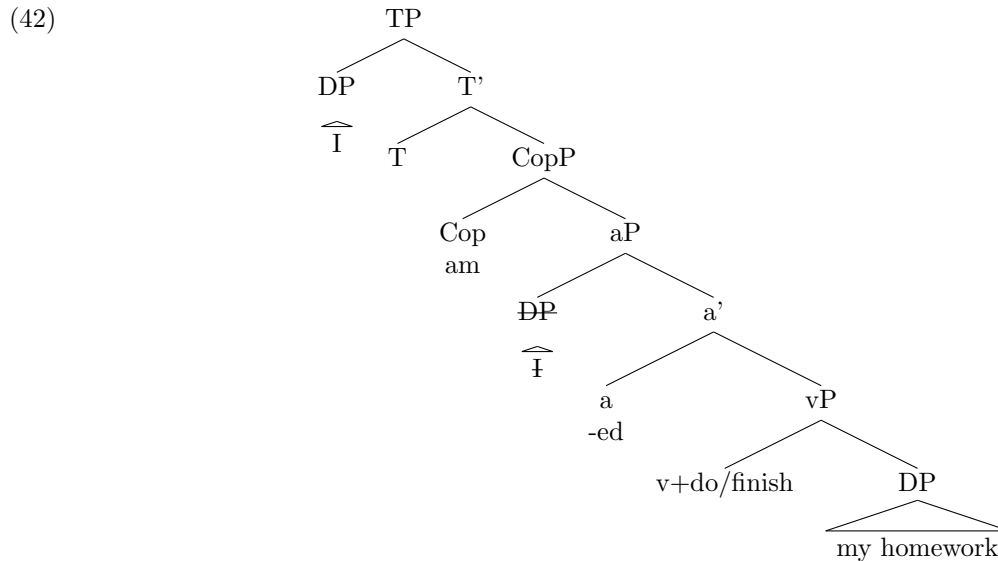
## 5 Remaining Puzzle

All *be finished DP* sentences have a corresponding grammatical *have finished DP* sentence with the same set of coerced meanings for the vP. This is not true for *be done DP*.

- (40) a. I am finished my beer. (consuming, brewing)  
 b. I have finished my beer. (consuming, brewing)
- (41) a. I am done my beer. (consuming, brewing)  
 b. ??I have done my beer. (\*consuming, brewing)

## 6 Conclusion

After considering a number of alternatives, we conclude that the structure in (42) is the correct one.



- (43) a. The construction involves a resultative adjectival passive, rather than a full eventive passive or an active past participle. (i.e. there is no Voice head)

<sup>2</sup>p.c. Sankoff

<sup>3</sup>p.c. Yerastov

- b. The external argument is therefore introduced not in spec-VoiceP (which is absent) but in the subject position of the adjectival small clause (which we depict here as spec-aP).
- c. The accusative Case of the internal argument is assigned by a little-*a* head, perhaps similar to the little-*a* head which assigns accusative case to the objects of *worth*.
- d. The lexical specificity of this construction is due to the selectional properties of this little-*a* head.

Our conclusions suggest at least three flavors of *a*.

(44) Distribution for most dialects:

	external argument	case marking	selects
<i>a</i> <sub>1</sub>	–	–	∅
<i>a</i> <sub>2</sub>	+	–	{ <i>finish</i> , <i>do</i> }
<i>a</i> <sub>3</sub>	+	+	{ <i>worth</i> }

It is necessary to posit these three distinct flavors to capture the fact that most dialects have the contrast between (45) and (46) (these are 36) and (37, partially repeated), have transitive *worth*, and don't allow *be done DP*.

- (45) a. The painting is completed ~~the painting~~.
- b. \*Mary is ~~Mary~~ completed.
- (46) a. The painting is finished ~~the painting~~.
- b. Mary is ~~Mary~~ finished.

These flavors of *a* are paralleled in the Voice domain.

(47) Flavors of Voice:

	external argument	case marking	selects
Voice <sub>1</sub>	–	–	unaccusatives
Voice <sub>2</sub>	+	–	unergatives
Voice <sub>3</sub>	+	+	transitives

In Philadelphia and Canada, it is actually not possible to distinguish between *a*<sub>2</sub> and *a*<sub>3</sub>, meaning these dialects may only utilize *a*<sub>1</sub> and *a*<sub>3</sub>.

## 6.1 Prediction

Based on the currently available dialect data, and our analysis, we might make the following prediction.

- (48) a. If for lexical item X in a dialect, it can appear in the *be Xed DP* construction, it can also appear in *be Xed Ving DP* and *I am Xed*.
  - *be Xed DP* → {*be Xed Ving DP*, *I am Xed*}
- b. Contrapositively, if for lexical item X in a dialect, it cannot appear in *I am Xed* nor *be Xed Ving DP*, it cannot appear in *be Xed DP*.
  - ¬ {*be Xed Ving DP*, *I am Xed*} → ¬ *be Xed DP*

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