

### Short-form "Doubling Verbs" in Schwyzerdütsch

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Certain verbs in Schwyzerdütsch appear twice in a sentence without a corresponding repetition of meaning (Nübling 1995:173). This paper explores some possible explanations of this "doubling verb" phenomenon, using the current literature on the subject and interviews with native speakers.<sup>1</sup>

The first appearance of the "doubled" verb in a sentence is an inflected form of the verb, and the second appearance is a short form CV stem. The sentences below illustrate this phenomenon; the short forms are in bold. In the first example "go" is the short form and "gang" is the inflected 1st person form of the verb "goo" (*gehen* in Modern High German) 'go.' There are four verbs in Schwyzerdütsch which can be "doubled" in this way, with each "doubled" verb showing different patterns of usage and frequency of use; there are also historical differences and differences in use among the different regional dialects of the country. e.g.:

1. i gang     **go**     schwimme     'I'm going swimming'  
I go(1st sg) go(stem) swim(Inf)
2. es kunnt     **ko**     räagne     'it's about to rain'  
it come(3rd sg) come(stem) rain(Inf)
3. si foot a     **fo**     schaffe     'she's beginning to work'

<sup>1</sup> Native-speaking experts: Jakob Christ, age 70; Rike Christ-Kutter, age 63; Max Reif, age 45; Christa Baltzer, age 35; Daniel Sachs, age 27; Rosina Christ, age 20.

she begin(3rd sg) begin(stem) work(Inf)

4. er loot      lo      grüesse      'he sends greetings'  
 he let(3rd sg) let(stem) greet(Inf)

The histories of the "doubled" verbs are diverse: while the doubled use of "go" is found already in Middle High German literature and is used in modern times all over German-speaking Switzerland, as well as in parts of Southern Germany, the doubled use of "afo" and "lo" is found only in certain Swiss dialects. The doubled use of "ko" is harder to trace, as in several dialects it is homophonous with "go."

All four of these "doubling" verbs undergo the same phonological reduction in the unstressed position before the infinitive main verb, losing length and individual word accent. In this process the meaning is also reduced, necessitating another token of the same verb to produce the desired meaning. Thus, it is the first, inflected form of the verb which is the repeated or "doubled" form, not the second, short stem form. Even so this is not really a productive operation with predictable results, and the grammatical result of each "doubled" form is different.

In Schwyzerdütsch as in Modern High German there are weak (regular) verbs, strong (irregular) verbs, and modals. The short form verbs represent another class of verbs in Schwyzerdütsch. In Modern High German the weak and strong verbs are conjugated differently, but in Schwyzerdütsch the weak and strong verbs are conjugated similarly; the real differences in the conjugations are between the set of strong and weak verbs and the set of modals and the short-form verbs. The indicative is formed in the weak and strong verbs by adding the personal endings to the verb stem; in the short form and modal verbs it is formed with a vowel change in the plural in addition to the personal endings. The conditional is formed in the weak and strong verbs with the addition of [t] and the conditional person endings to the verb stem; in the short form and modal verbs the stem also undergoes vowel change, see following charts adapted from Suter 1976:108.

**weak verb 'to seek'**

*infinitive:* sueche *imperative:* such!  
*past participle:* gsuecht

<u>present indicative</u>	<u>conditional</u>
i suech	i suechti
de suechs	de suechtisch
er suecht	er suechti
mer sueche	mer suechte
er sueche	er suechte
si, Si sueche	si, Sie suechte

**short form verb 'to go'**

**strong verb 'to sing'**

*infinitive:* singe *imperative:* sing!  
*past participle:* gsunge

<u>present indicative</u>	<u>conditional</u>
i sing	i singti
de singsch	de singtisch
er singt	er singti
mer singe	mer singte
er singe	er singte
si, Si singe	si, Si singte

**modal verb 'to want'**

*infinitive:* goo *imperative:* gang!  
*past participle:* gange

*infinitive:* welle  
*past participle:* welle

<u>present indicative</u>	<u>conditional</u>	<u>present indicative</u>	<u>conditional</u>
i gang	i giengti	i wott	i wetti
de goosch	de giengtisch	de wootsch	de wettisch
er goot	er giengti	er wott	er wetti
mer geen	mer giengte	mer wään	mer wette
er geen	er gientet	er wään	er wettet
si, Si geen	si, Si giengte	si, Si wään	si, Si wette

There are some other syntactic differences between Modern High German and Schwyzerdütsch; one of them is the order in which adjacent verbs appear in a sentence, here shown with parallel modal constructions in the two languages. Whereas in Modern High German the modal appears after the complement verb in a dependent clause, in Schwyzerdütsch the modal (in bold) verb appears after the meaning-bearing verb.e.g.:

5. "I haa nit **kenne** schlooffe" (Ich habe nicht schlafen **können**) 'I couldn't sleep' (1976:191)<sup>2</sup>
6. "Mer hänn **deerfe** zueluege" (Wir haben zuschauen **dürfen**) 'We were allowed to watch' (Suter 1976:105)

Also similar to the modals, in some adjacent verb pairs in Schwyzerdütsch, no "zu" is needed for the verbal complement, though in the Modern High German sentences the "zu" may be obligatory. e.g.:

7. "S foot aa räagne" (es fängt an zu regnen) 'it's starting to rain' (Suter 1976:149)
8. "Heer uff dumm schwätze!" (hör auf, dumm zu schwatzen!) 'stop talking dumb!' (pg. 149)

Schwyzerdütsch also does not use the German um...zu construction for purpose clauses. The short-form "go" can be used instead of "zu" when the explicit meaning 'go' is not available, though there seems to be some persistence of meaning even with this usage; there is an implied "going" in the verb 'to visit' in the following sentence:

9. S isch uns koo go bsueche (sie ist uns besuchen gekommen) 'she has come to visit us'

Some specific form of the verb 'to go' has acquired a grammatical meaning in many languages. In Swiss-German the verbal particle "go" indicates immediate future, similar to *gonna* in English and to forms of "aller" in the *futur proche* in French. This is the verb found "doubled" not only in Swiss-German but also in Southern German dialects. When it is used thus as a grammatical element it does not require the use of the inflected form of the same verb, but can also be used with other verbs. e.g.:

<sup>2</sup> The orthography of Schwyzerdütsch and the sentences in quotes are from Suter's 1976 Baseldeutsch-Grammatik. Modern High German translations are in parentheses, English glosses are in single quotes.

10. "Si isch uff Floränz graist go di naischte Modäll bschaue" (sie ist nach Florenz gereist, um die neuste Modell zu beschauen) 'she has traveled to Florence to look at the latest fashions' (184)

It seems that this "doubling" structure may be spreading from "go" to other verbs within the language; at the same time these short verb-stem forms are acquiring grammatical meaning. Nübling notes that short forms of "goo" are among the first attested forms of this type. (Nübling pg.167) The verb "go" has been used with doubled forms at least since the 16th century in German. e.g.:

11. (Lötscher 1993: 183) "Ich gan weder gan bredigen noch gan taufen" 'I go neither to preach nor to baptize' (literally 'I go, neither to go preach nor to go baptize')

The process of change from an inflected "regular" use of these verbs can be observed in their varied usage; while the use of the short form "go" requires the inflected form of the same verb to get the actual meaning 'go' in a sentence, the rules regarding the other three verbs in this set are not as clear. As the verb 'go' is used as an immediate future or *futur proche*, "ko" is used to mark inchoative aspect. The verb "afo" is developing an inceptive aspectual meaning, and "lo" is used to mark a change in voice, from active to passive.

The "ko" form is not used in as many dialects and its use has not been attested for as long a period of time as "go." When it is "doubled" it must be used with the inflected form of the same verb, "koo." The doubled use of this verb is not obligatory except in cases of impending weather. e.g.:

12. si kunnt uns ko bsueche ~ si kunnt uns bsueche 'she's coming to visit us'

13. es kunnt ko räägne \*Es kunnt räägne 'it's about to rain'

The doubled use of "anfangen" is not obligatory in either direction: both the inflected form and the short form may be used without the other in a sentence.

14. si foot aa schaffe ~ si foot afo schaffe (sie fängt an zu schaffen) 'she is beginning to work'

15. "Er wott afo studiere" (Er will zu studieren anfangen) 'He wants to begin to study' (150)

There has been a reanalysis of verbs used together with "lassen," to mean "get VERBed." e.g.: "loreinige" 'get X cleaned'; "loflicke" 'get X repaired.' The "thing" denoted by X may not appear between the prefixed "lo" short form and the verb. These verbs do not require "lassen" as the inflected verb in the sentence, and the inflected forms of "lassen" and the short form "lo" are not immediately perceived to be parts of the same verb paradigm. In the Schwyzerdütsch spoken in Basel when "lassen" denotes 'leave X to be...(cleaned, fixed, etc.)' sentences with only the inflected form of the verb "lassen"

are ungrammatical. In the Schwyzerdütsch spoken in Zürich as in Modern High German these sentences are grammatical and have the same meaning as the present tense sentences with the doubled use of the verb. e.g.:

16. er loot di schue flicke ~ er loot di schue lo flicke 'he leaves the shoes to be fixed'

In Basel and other parts of Switzerland the doubled form is required in the present tense; to get the desired meaning there must be some inflected verb and the short form element "lo." e.g.:

17. \*si loot di hosen reinige \*'she lets the pants clean'

18. \*er loot di schue flicke \*'he lets the shoes fix'

19. a. er hat di hosen lo reinige 'he has left the pants to be cleaned'  
 b. er wird di hosen lo reinige 'he will leave the pants to be cleaned'  
 c. er duet di hosen lo reinige 'he is leaving the pants to be cleaned'

20. a. si hat di hosen lo flicke 'she has left the pants to be fixed'  
 b. si wird di hosen lo flicke 'she will leave the pants to be fixed'  
 c. si duet di hosen lo flicke 'she is leaving the pants to be fixed'

When greetings are "left" the analysis is ambiguous; it is not clear if the doubling is not obligatory, or if in one case the substantive 'greetings' are meant and in the other case the verb 'greet' is being used, as the verb and noun in this case are homophonous.

21. er loot grüesse ~ er loot lo grüesse (er lässt grüssen) 'he leaves (sends) greetings'<sup>3</sup>

The historical facts about the language offer an explanation for these constructions. In Middle High German there were two competing forms of many verbs, a long form and a contracted form, e.g.: la:zen ~ la:n 'let'; haben ~ ha:n 'have'; slahen ~ sla:n 'hit' (Nübling 1995:169). The present-day conjugations of these verbs in Swiss-German are formed on the pattern of the short forms, and the Modern High German conjugations are patterned after the long form conjugations. The infinitives and past participles of the short-form verbs in Swiss-German are monosyllabic and end with a long vowel.

In the time of Middle High German there is evidence of some variation in word order within the sentence; modals and auxiliaries could appear before or after the main complement verb in a dependent clause. Swiss-German now uses the pattern modal-main

<sup>3</sup> Changing the word order to try to find a final -n in the infinitive does not provide a solution, as it would in Modern High German, as in Schwyzerdütsch there is an epenthetic -n between vowels regardless of the part of speech, e.g.:

i. I due glette (Ich tue/mache glätten) 'I am ironing'  
 ii. Das duen I nit (Das mache ich nicht) 'That I don't do'

verb in this environment, and Modern High German uses the pattern main verb-modal. e.g.:

22. a. (from the *Nibelungenlied*) "Ir sult wol lazzen schouen..." 'you should show...'  
(modal-verb)  
b. (Paul 1953:147 MHD) "...sünde hat begangen" '..had committed sins'  
(aux-verb)  
c. (Paul 1953:147 MHD) "...er uns hat geschaffen" '..he has made us'  
(aux-verb)  
d. (Paul 1953:143 MHD) "...er hat sich leben lazzen" '..he let himself live'  
(verb-modal)

The main meaning-bearing verbs are those following the modals and auxiliaries in Swiss-German; for that reason they receive a heavier accent. In contrast to the main verbs, the modals and auxiliaries are unaccented and reduced. Because of their position in the sentence the short-form verbs lose length and individual word accent, changing from the syllable structure CV: to CV. In this process the meaning is also reduced, and another token of the same verb may be required to produce the desired meaning. Thus it is the first, inflected form of the verb which is actually "doubled" or repeated, not the second, reduced verb form. It is not the case that "doubling" has become some sort of productive process in Swiss-German, rather the phenomenon has been called "doubling" because linguists can still recognize the relationship between the regular inflected forms of the verbs and the particles that were once part of those verb paradigms. Grammaticalization of certain forms of these verbs has taken place; the resulting reduced forms no longer carry the same meanings as the inflected forms. The preverbal verb forms "go," "ko," and "fo" yield aspectual differences in the verbs, and the prefixed "lo" element changes the valence, or the relationship of the argument to the verb.

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