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Movement and Silence in the English have yet to Construction

Neil Myler

New York University, sah4@nyu.edu

Stephanie Harves

New York University, njm277@nyu.edu

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Movement and Silence in the English *have yet to* Construction

Abstract

This paper discusses the syntax of the *have yet to* construction in English, as in *John has yet to eat dinner*. As pointed out by Kelly (2008), this construction raises a number of questions. How is the NPI *yet* licensed? Why is *have* interpreted as a perfect auxiliary verb, in spite of the fact that it appears to take an infinitival complement, rather than a perfect participle? We argue that *have* in the *have yet to* construction is, for many speakers, perfect *have*, which selects for a silent raising predicate that has negative implicative semantics. This predicate, which we identify as a silent counterpart of *fail*, is responsible for licensing the NPI *yet*. We propose that FAILED is made silent as a result of *yet* moving into its specifier (invoking Koopman's (1996) Generalized Doubly-filled COMP filter). This same movement accounts for *yet*'s unusual word-order behavior in the *have yet to* construction.

Movement and Silence in the English *have yet to* Construction

Neil Myler and Stephanie Harves*

1 Introduction: The Puzzles¹

Kelly (2008) points out several syntactic and semantic puzzles in regard to the construction in (1), compared with its paraphrase in (2).

- (1) John has yet to eat dinner.
- (2) John hasn't eaten dinner yet.

The first puzzle regards the presence of *yet* in (1). How is *yet*, a Negative Polarity Item (NPI), licensed? The paraphrase in (2) contains negation, so could it be that (1) contains an instance of silent sentential negation? Second, we appear to have a clash between the syntax and the semantic interpretation of *have* here. That is, why do we see *have to* plus an infinitival complement in (1) as opposed to *have* plus a perfect participle as in (2)? *Have to* appears in English when the interpretation of *have* is modal, rather than the aspectual perfect, as in (3). Could it be that the *have* in this construction is, in fact, modal *have*?

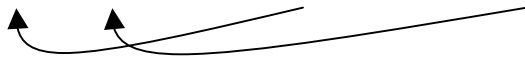
- (3) John has to leave by 5:00.

Third, in light of the grammaticality of (1), and its interpretation in (2), why is the sentence in (4) ungrammatical?

- (4) *John has yet eaten dinner.

Kelly (2008) suggests that *yet* conveys negative perfective aspect in the construction in (1) (henceforth the *have yet to* construction) although it is not clear how exactly it comes to take on this meaning on its own. We will argue that *yet* does not, in fact, convey negative perfective aspect on its own. Rather, we will adhere to the standard assumption that *yet* is an NPI and argue that this NPI is licensed by a silent perfect participle FAILED, which has negative implicative semantics. Specifically, we will argue that the sentence in (1) has the derivation shown in (5).

- (5) John has yet FAILED [_{TP} <John> to eat dinner <yet>].



The linear placement of *yet* (which is atypical, as we will show) arises via movement. We suggest that *yet* raises into the specifier of its licensor, FAILED, which is in turn rendered silent by the presence of the NPI *yet* in its specifier. Our proposal is thus that the *have yet to* construction arises from a process that, while highly restricted in English, is robustly attested in other languages. In particular, this relationship between the movement of an NPI and the silence of its licensor is a well-known feature of Ibero-Romance languages, as we discuss extensively below. Further, the proposal has the following consequences: (i) the *have yet to* construction is biclausal and involves raising; (ii) the construction is both downward-entailing and anti-additive, licensing the NPI *yet* in the embedded clause; (iii) there is no sentential negation present in the syntactic derivation of this construction. Below we present empirical arguments in favor of each of these consequences.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the negative force of the *have yet to* construction and how this interacts with the licensing of *yet* as an NPI. In

*Many thanks to the audiences at PLC and the NYU Syntax/Semantics Brown Bag Forum for comments and suggestions on the work presented here.

¹The talk we presented at the 37th Penn Linguistics Colloquium also discussed the *be yet to* construction. For reasons of space, we do not include that discussion here, but see Harves and Myler (submitted).

Section 3, we consider the hypothesis that sentences with *have yet to* contain an occurrence of silent sentential negation, in light of the paraphrase in (2) above. In Section 4 we move on to the specifics of the syntax of *have yet to*. We conclude in Section 5.

2 The Negative Force of *Have Yet to* and the Licensing of *Yet*

Since the influential work of Ladusaw (1979), it has been argued that NPIs are licensed only in the scope of a Downward Entailing (DE) operator. However, not all NPIs are licensed in the same downward entailing environments. As discussed by Zwarts (1998) and van der Wouden (1997), strong NPIs additionally require anti-additivity as a strong licensing requirement.² Zwarts (1998:222) provides the following definition for anti-additivity.

- (6) Let B and B^* be two Boolean algebras. A function f from B to B^* is said to be **anti-additive** iff for each two elements X and Y of the algebra B :
- $$f(X \cup Y) = f(X) \cap f(Y).$$

It appears that the *have yet to* construction creates an anti-additive context in the sense of (6). This is shown by the validity of the following entailments.

- (7) a. John has yet to visit Paris or Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has yet to visit Paris and John has yet to visit Berlin.
- (8) a. John has yet to visit Paris and John has yet to visit Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has yet to visit Paris or Berlin.

It is therefore expected that *have yet to* will license NPIs identified as strong in Zwarts' (1998) typology, such as *lift a finger* or *utter a sound*. This expectation is correct, as shown in (9).

- (9) a. John has yet to *lift a finger* around here.
 b. John has yet to *utter a sound*.

Any analysis of the *have yet to* construction must explain where this anti-additivity comes from. Uncovering the source of this anti-additivity will not only explain the data in (7–9), but also immediately account for the licensing of *yet* in the construction. While the set of environments that license *yet* is too complex to discuss in detail here (see Levinson 2008 for a comprehensive list), it suffices to note that *yet* is licensed both in anti-additive (10a&b) and in merely downward entailing contexts (10c).

- (10) a. John hasn't visited Paris *yet*.
 b. No student has visited Paris *yet*.
 c. Not everyone has visited Paris *yet*.

It follows that whatever accounts for (7–9) will also account for the fact that *yet* is licensed in (1) but not in (4). Perhaps the most obvious way of accounting for the anti-additivity of this construction is to postulate that it contains a silent instance of sentential negation. We examine this hypothesis in the next section.

3 Testing for Silent Negation

Recall the examples we started with in (1) and (2), repeated here as (11) and (12).

² See Giannakidou (1997) for arguments that nonveridicality is the key to NPI-licensing. See Gajewski (2005, 2011) for arguments that the presuppositions of strong NPI licensors must also be taken into account. Since *yet* passes diagnostics for weak NPIs, rather than strong NPIs, we will not throw our hat into the ring around the debate concerning strong NPI-licensing here.

- (11) John has yet to eat dinner.
 (12) John hasn't eaten dinner yet.

Since the paraphrase in (12) naturally contains sentential negation, it is appealing to consider the hypothesis that silent sentential negation is indeed responsible for licensing *yet* in (11). We will argue, however, that adopting this hypothesis would be a mistake.

A number of diagnostics have been used since Klima (1964) for determining the presence or absence of sentential negation in a clause.

- (13) Klima (1964) Tests
 Sentential negation exists in a clause if:
 a. It takes a positive rather than a negative tag question.
 b. It can be continued with a phrase headed by *neither* rather than *so*.
 c. It can be continued with a phrase that begins with *not even*.

A simple illustration of how these tests are used in negated versus non-negated sentences is given in (14) and (15).

- (14) a. John didn't attend Mary's lecture last week, *did he/*didn't he?*
 b. John didn't attend Mary's lecture last week, and *neither did Bill/*so did Bill*.
 c. John didn't attend Mary's lecture last week, *not even for a minute*.
 (15) a. John attended Mary's lecture last week, **did he/didn't he?*
 b. John attended Mary's lecture last week, and **neither did Bill/so did Bill*.
 c. John attended Mary's lecture last week, **not even for a minute*.

As (14) shows, sentences with sentential negation pass all three of the Klima-tests, while the sentences in (15) show that sentences which lack sentential negation fail all three tests. With this in mind, let us now return to the construction under consideration here and apply these diagnostics to sentences with *have yet to*.

- (16) a. *John has yet to eat dinner, *has he?*³
 b. John has yet to eat dinner, *hasn't he/doesn't he?*
 c. *John has yet to eat dinner, and *neither has Mary*.
 d. John has yet to eat dinner, and *so has/does Mary*.
 e. *John has yet to eat dinner, *not even once*.

Application of the Klima tests in (13) suggests that there is no sentential negation present in the *have yet to* construction.⁴ Hence, the source of the anti-additivity of this construction must be sought elsewhere. In order to set up the background for our own proposal, we turn in the next section to a more detailed discussion of the syntax of *have yet to*.

4 The Syntax of *Have Yet to*

One of the first questions that arises in examining the *have yet to* construction is, what kind of *have* are we dealing with here? Is this Perfect auxiliary *have*? Modal *have*? Possessive or light verb *have*?

4.1 Syntactic Diagnostics: The NICE Properties of *Have Yet to*

³ Note that this sentence is grammatical under a particular interpretation in some dialects of English, but with a reading that is different from a standard tag question interpretation. It means something like, "Aha! John has yet to eat dinner. Intriguing!" It does not have the interpretation, "John has yet to eat dinner, right?"

⁴ One might wonder whether Klima's tests apply only to overt instances of sentential negation, rather than SILENT instances of it (we thank Salvador Mascarenhas, personal communication, for bringing this issue to our attention). In Harves and Myler (submitted) we show that uncontroversial instances of silent negation in French and Spanish do indeed pass Klima tests in those languages.

One way of probing the syntax of *have* here is to consider its so-called NICE properties (Huddleston 1976).⁵

As is by now well known, Perfect AUX *have* differs from both modal *have* and possessive *have* with respect to Negation, Inversion, Contraction, and Ellipsis. The sentences in (17–19) show the following: (i) only AUX *have* precedes negation and rejects *do*-support (a-b examples);⁶ (ii) only AUX *have* undergoes Inversion in questions (c-d examples); (iii) only AUX *have* Contracts with subjects (e examples); and (iv) only AUX *have* allows for Ellipsis of all lexical material following *have*, i.e., VP-ellipsis (f examples).

- (17) a. I haven't eaten lunch. (AUX *have*)
 b. *I don't have eaten lunch.
 c. Have I eaten lunch?
 d. *Do I have eaten lunch?
 e. I've eaten lunch.
 f. I have eaten lunch, and Mary has/*does, too.
- (18) a. *I haven't to eat lunch. (Modal *have*)
 b. I don't have to eat lunch.
 c. *Have I to eat lunch?
 d. Do I have to eat lunch?
 e. *I've to eat lunch.
 f. I have to eat lunch, and Mary *has/does, too.
- (19) a. *I haven't a new car. (Poss *have*)
 b. I don't have a new car
 c. *Have I a new car?
 d. Do I have a new car?
 e. *I've a new car.
 f. I have a new car, and Mary *has/does, too.

Having laid out a number of syntactic diagnostics for distinguishing between three variants of *have*, we now return to the *have yet to* construction. As the data in (20) show, the facts are not crystal clear. A survey of 11 native speakers of English yields the following results (we return presently to what is meant by the notation “%/*” next to the negation cases).

- (20) NICE Properties with *have yet to*
- a. %/* John hasn't yet to win the hearts of his classmates. (Negation)
 b. %/* John doesn't have yet to win the hearts of his classmates.
 c. % Has John yet to win the hearts of his classmates? (Inversion)
 d. % Does John have yet to win the hearts of his classmates?
 e. I've yet to win the hearts of my classmates. (Contraction)
 f. % John has yet to win the hearts of his classmates, and Bill has, too. (Ellipsis)
 g. % John has yet to win the hearts of his classmates, and Bill does, too.

The % sign here conceals the nature of the variation in play, which is worth breaking down in more detail. Broadly speaking, there are four types of speaker. For one group, *have* in this construction patterns consistently with auxiliary *have*. For another group, *have* consistently patterns with lexical *have* (with the exception of allowing contraction, which is available for everyone).⁷ A

⁵ We note that the original NICE properties were defined as “Negation, Inversion, Code, and Emphatic Affirmation.” Instead, we use the properties “Negation, Inversion, Contraction, and Ellipsis.” “Code” for Huddleston (1976) is equivalent to what we today call VP-ellipsis.

⁶ The judgments given in (18) and (19) reflect those of our American informants. We set aside here those (mainly British) dialects in which main verb *have* retains some auxiliary-like properties.

⁷ The fact that contraction is the “easiest” auxiliary-like property for this *have* to have has intriguing implications, since it suggests that a more fine-grained approach to the nature of the NICE properties than the traditional distinction between auxiliary and lexical verb is necessary. In the same connection, it is interesting to note that Thoms (2012), looking at British dialects in which possessive *have* has auxiliary-like properties,

- (24) a. John has yet to visit France. \Rightarrow
 b. John has yet to visit Paris.

Furthermore, recall the discussion of anti-additivity above. We showed in (7) and (8) that sentences with *have yet to* are anti-additive (repeated here as (25) and (26)).

- (25) a. John has yet to visit Paris or Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has yet to visit Paris and John has yet to visit Berlin.
 (26) a. John has yet to visit Paris and John has yet to visit Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has yet to visit Paris or Berlin.

We would therefore expect that sentences with overt *fail* should yield anti-additive contexts as well. Indeed, as shown in (27) and (28), this prediction is borne out.

- (27) a. John has failed to visit Paris or Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has failed to visit Paris and John has failed to visit Berlin.
 (28) a. John has failed to visit Paris and John has failed to visit Berlin. \Rightarrow
 b. John has failed to visit Paris or Berlin.

An additional prediction made by our proposal is that sentences with *have yet to* will pass diagnostics for raising predicates, since *fail* behaves as a raising predicate. The sentences below show that *fail* allows for idiomatic readings with discontinuous idioms (29a) and also allows for expletive subjects (29b&c), two properties shared by raising predicates but not control predicates.

- (29) a. The shit has failed to hit the fan.
 b. There has failed to be a comprehensive discussion of this topic in the literature.
 c. It has failed to snow all weekend.

As the examples in (30) show, sentences with *have yet to* pass these same diagnostic tests, which suggests that the silent predicate is indeed a raising verb, not a control verb.

- (30) a. The shit has yet to hit the fan.
 b. There has yet to be a comprehensive discussion of this topic in the literature.
 c. It has yet to snow all weekend.

Another piece of independent evidence in favor of a silent predicate *FAILED* in the *have yet to* construction, as opposed to silent sentential negation or some other NPI licenser, comes from *quite*-modification of *yet*.⁸ Certain NPI-licensing environments allow for the existence of either *yet* or *quite yet*. Several of these contexts are shown in (31).

- (31) a. John hasn't arrived (*quite*) *yet*.
 b. He is too young to understand this (*quite*) *yet*.
 c. I doubt the lamp is fixed (*quite*) *yet*.
 d. Mary has crossed the border without realizing it (*quite*) *yet*.

However, not all contexts that license *yet* license *quite yet*. While yes-no questions such as (32a) and superlatives as in (32b) license *yet*, *quite yet* is disallowed. And as (33) shows, *quite yet* is disallowed from occurring in the *have yet to* construction.

- (32) a. Has John arrived (**quite*) *yet*?
 b. This is the best film that has been shown (**quite*) *yet*.

⁸ We thank Chris Collins for bringing *quite*-modification to our attention.

- (33) a. John has (**quite*) *yet* to eat his dinner.
 b. John has (**quite*) *yet* to visit Paris.

If one of the NPI licensors in (31) were the silent element responsible for licensing *yet* in (32), then the ungrammaticality of *quite yet* would be mysterious. As the examples in (34) show, *quite yet* is not licensed in the presence of overt *fail*. Hence, we do not expect it to be licensed when *FAIL* is silent, as in (33).

- (34) a. John has failed to visit Paris (**quite*) *yet*.
 b. Mary has failed to write her grandmother (**quite*) *yet*.

Before moving on to the syntactic derivation of sentences with *have yet to*, let us briefly summarize the results of this subsection. We have argued that *yet* in the *have yet to* construction is licensed by the silent negative implicative verb *FAIL*. We saw a number of arguments in favor of such an analysis, based on the shared behavior of sentences with overt *fail* vs. silent *FAIL* (i.e., *have yet to*). We summarize the shared properties of these constructions in (35).

- (35) Shared properties of sentences with *have yet to* and sentences with overt *fail*
 a. Both constructions are downward entailing and anti-additive.
 b. Both constructions pass diagnostics for raising predicates.
 c. Neither construction allows *yet* to be modified by *quite*.

One issue that we have yet to address in full is the position of *yet* in sentences with *have yet to* compared to sentences where *fail* is overt. We turn to this issue now and use the differences in placement/pronunciation of *yet* as the key to understanding the licensing of silent *FAIL*.⁹

4.3 The Syntactic Derivation of *Have Yet to*

Thus far, we have only briefly alluded to the position of *yet* in the sentences under investigation here. Since we are arguing that sentences with *have yet to* vs. those with overt *fail* share an underlying structure, it is perhaps surprising that *yet* is pronounced in two different places, depending on the pronunciation or silence of *fail*. Consider the position of *yet* in the examples in (36).

- (36) a. John has *yet* to eat dinner.
 b. John has *yet* to visit Paris.
 c. John has failed to eat dinner *yet*.
 d. John has failed to visit Paris *yet*.

When *failed* is overt, *yet* is obligatorily pronounced sentence-finally. That is, *yet* cannot be pronounced adjacent to *have* when *failed* is overt, as shown in (37).

- (37) a. *John has *yet* failed to eat dinner.
 b. *John has *yet* failed to visit Paris.

⁹ For those speakers who allow a version of *have yet to* involving lexical/possessive *have*, we might suggest that the silent predicate involved is the derived nominal form of a negative implicative verb, with *have* acting in its light verb use. The overt counterpart of the relevant derived nominal might, in fact, be *failure*, since some speakers accept overt *failure* in a light verb construction along the lines of (i).

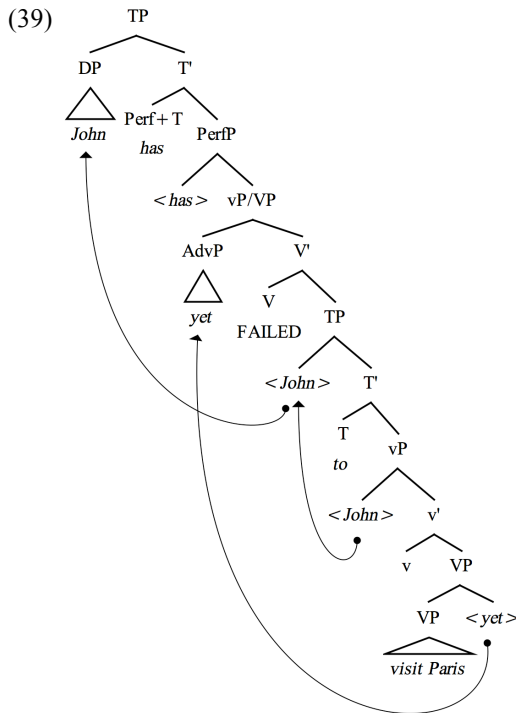
- (i) %John has had a failure to do his homework yet this year.

More investigation is needed to discover to what extent the availability of (i) in a given I-language correlates with the availability of the lexical/possessive *have* version of *have yet to*. If the correlation does not go through for all speakers, we will have to conclude a different derived nominal than *failure* is involved. All that our thesis requires is that the derived nominal in question be negative implicative in nature.

One crucial fact about *fail* as an NPI licensor is that this predicate only licenses NPIs within its infinitival complement. It does not license NPIs in its own clause.

- (38) a. *John has *ever* failed to visit France.
 b. John has failed to *ever* visit France.
 c. *John has failed *any* exam.
 d. John hasn't failed *any* exam.
 e. John has failed to pass *any* exam.

In (38a&b) we see that *fail* cannot license the NPI *ever* in the matrix clause, although it can license it within its infinitival complement. Similarly, if *fail* occurs in its transitive guise, as in (38c), it cannot license an NPI in the direct object position unless sentential negation occurs as well (38d). That *fail* is incapable of licensing NPIs within its own clause suggests that *yet* in the *have yet to* construction Externally Merges in the infinitival clause and then Moves to / Internally Merges in the matrix clause. We propose that *yet* raises to the Specifier of *FAIL* in the *have yet to* construction, and that this raising is precisely what accounts for the silence of *FAIL*. The derivation we propose is given in (39).



If *yet* raises to the Specifier of *FAILED*, then *yet* is pronounced in the Specifier position, and the head *FAILED* is silent. If *yet* remains in situ, then *failed* is pronounced in the matrix clause. This dependency between movement into a Specifier position and the silence of the head associated with that specifier is reminiscent of other “generalized doubly-filled COMP” effects, including analyses proposed for constructions involving *n*-word movement and Neg-deletion in Ibero-Romance. In both Spanish and Catalan, when an NPI/*n*-word raises past sentential negation, the Neg-head is silent, obligatorily so in Spanish and optionally in Catalan.

- (40) Spanish (Zagona 2002: 197-200)
 a. *(No) vino **nadie**.
 NEG came nobody
 ‘Nobody came.’

- b. **Nadie** vino.
Nobody came
'Nobody came.'
- c. ***Nadie no** vino.
Nobody NEG came
'Nobody came.'
- (41) Catalan (Espinal 2000: 559)
- a. *(**No**) ha vist **ningú**.
NEG has seen nobody
'S/he has not seen anybody.'
- b. **Ningú (no)** ha vist res.
nobody (NEG) has seen anything
'Nobody has seen anything.'
- c. **A NINGÚ (no)** ha vist.
P nobody (NEG) has seen
'S/he has seen nobody.'

One can argue, following Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) and Zagana (2002), that satisfaction of something akin to the Neg-Criterion results in silence of the Neg head.

- (42) *The Neg Criterion* (Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991: 244)
- a. Each Neg X^0 must be in a Spec-Head relation with a Negative operator;
b. Each Negative operator must be in a Spec-Head relation with a Neg X^0 .

The silence of the Neg-head could be argued to derive from Koopman's (1996) Generalized Doubly-Filled Comp Filter, defined in Koopman & Szabolcsi (2000) as follows.

- (43) Generalized Doubly-Filled Comp Filter (Koopman & Szabolcsi 2000: 4)
No projection has both an overt head and an overt specifier at the end of the derivation.

We argue here that the silence of *FAILED* in the *have yet to* construction is due to the same principle governing the silence of negation with fronted *n*-words in Spanish and Catalan. It is unlikely to be a mere coincidence that in both cases we are dealing with the silence or pronunciation of an NPI licensing head.

To conclude this section, we return to a puzzle raised at the outset of this paper, namely, why is the sentence in (44a) ungrammatical, given the paraphrases of sentences with *have yet to*?

- (44) a. *John has *yet* eaten dinner.
b. John has *yet* to eat dinner.
c. John hasn't eaten dinner *yet*.

At this point our answer should be clear. The sentence in (44a) is ungrammatical because there is no silent negative implicative verb *FAILED* available in this sentence. The perfect participle *eaten* is filling the verbal head where *FAILED* would occur. Moreover, there is no silent sentential negation here.¹⁰

¹⁰ Beatrice Santorini has proposed to us (personal communication) a very interesting counteranalysis of this construction which at first sight also seems able to capture the data here. She points out that *yet*'s status as an NPI emerged over time, and that historically *yet* had non-NPI uses. Furthermore, some such non-NPI uses remain in modern English in a restricted way, often (but not always) with an archaic flavor (cf. *he might yet arrive*). Santorini's suggestion is thus that the *have yet to* construction involves two sorts of archaized syntax. First, she proposes that this version of *yet* is representative of the older, pre-NPI stage; second, the unusual word-order arises because *have* (which she proposes is the modal *have* of *John has to leave*) undergoes V-to-T movement, just as it did in earlier English (and still does in some British varieties). The existence of speakers who reject instances of the construction in interrogatives, VP ellipsis cases etc. can then be explained as a case of their not having full control over this archaic syntax.

5 Conclusion

We began this paper by pointing out some seemingly idiosyncratic properties of the *have yet to* construction: the irregular replacement and NPI behavior of *yet*, and the apparent mismatch of the construction's surface infinitival syntax with its semantic interpretation. Our proposal that the construction involves a negative implicative predicate which is rendered silent by the raising of *yet* into its specifier (with *yet* in turn licensed as an NPI by the negative implicative predicate) yields an instant solution to these puzzles, and moreover one that is motivated by the existence of dependencies between movement and silence in other languages. Hence, what seemed like a bizarre and idiosyncratic property of English turns out to be nothing more than a highly restricted reflection of a well-attested phenomenon permitted by UG.

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Department of Linguistics, NYU
 10 Washington Place
 New York, NY
 sah4@nyu.edu
 njm277@nyu.edu

There are two reasons why we do not adopt this analysis. The first is that there are speakers who robustly allow *do*-support in this construction in interrogatives, under negation, and in VP-ellipsis. This is totally unexpected if the word order with *have* preceding *yet* is produced by V-to-T movement, for then we would expect *do*-support to be ruled out entirely. The second is that cases involving modals like *he might yet arrive* do not pattern with *have yet to* as regards negation. While it is possible to negate *have yet to* with an explicit denial interpretation, it seems to us that this is not possible at all in cases like *he might yet arrive*.

- (i) *Wait a minute, he {mightn't / couldn't} yet arrive! (We already know he can't make it.)