

The *That*-Trace Effect Is Not About Extraction

Every account of the “*that*-trace effect” or *anticomplementizer constraint* (as I will call it here), illustrated in (1), assumes that it is about extraction. However, data from Postal (2004) show that this is not so; the constraint is instead about unpronounced subjects. I will argue that the correct descriptive generalization is the following:

Generalization: There must be overt material between an overt complementizer and a subject position with no phonetic exponence.

The data from Postal (2004) involve *as*-parentheticals (and comparatives, which I will not discuss here). With adjectival and passive predicates, *as*-parentheticals can appear without any obvious subject (2). Postal argues that, in these parentheticals, *as* corresponds to an extraposed *that* clause, and a null expletive corresponding to *it* is the subject. That is, the parentheticals in (2) have something like the form in (3) underlyingly. *As* corresponds to the embedded clause, and undergoes extraction; just when it does, the *it* in subject position can be unpronounced.

The evidence for this, and against the alternative, where the *as* corresponds to an extracted sentential subject, comes from a class of verbs that permit extraposed clauses but do not permit sentential subjects (when passivized), illustrated in (4). These verbs permit *as*-parentheticals with missing subjects (5), indicating that *as* in this case does not correspond to a sentential subject. Instead, *as* must correspond with an extraposed clause, as it demonstrably can in a sentence like (6), and the missing subject in (5) must be a null expletive.

Furthermore, there is a class of verbs that do not permit their subjects to be extraposed (7), and these do not permit *as*-parentheticals (8). What this shows is that *as* in these parentheticals may *only* correspond to an extraposed clause, and may never correspond to a sentential subject.

All of this has established that *as* parentheticals do not involve subject extraction. Instead, the subject is a null expletive. Now, given that the extracted *as* is not the subject, it is extremely curious given existing accounts of the anticomplementizer constraint that it arises in *as*-parentheticals with missing subjects, as shown in (9). This holds even with the class of verbs that do not permit sentential subjects (10). Furthermore, just as in standard cases of subject extraction, adverbs alleviate the effect (Culicover 1992), as shown in (11–12), indicating that we are dealing with the same constraint, and not a different one.

The importance of Postal’s observations for the proper characterization of the anticomplementizer constraint cannot be overemphasized. All existing theories of the constraint are built on the assumption that it is a constraint on extracted subjects. But *as*-parentheticals show that this is not so. The extracted *as* is *not* a subject.

Departing from Postal, I contend that the actual descriptive generalization is that given above: there must be pronounced material between an overt complementizer and an unpronounced subject, whether that subject is unpronounced (in that position) because it has been extracted, or because it is null (as in *as*-parentheticals). I suggest that this generalization follows from prosodic mapping. The complementizer in a simple embedded clause is prosodified with the embedded subject, while the VP forms a separate prosodic group, as in (13); that *that* prosodifies with the subject is evidenced by the possibility of palatalization (virtually obligatory for many speakers) between *that* and the subject in (13). If the subject is not pronounced, the complementizer would be the sole member of its prosodic group (14), a situation that I suggest is ruled out for such a prosodically weak function word (absent special focus or contrast). An adverbial phrase after the complementizer permits it to be incorporated into a prosodic group with other material: with the adverb, or with the preceding verb. Speakers vary in how they prosodify in these cases (Sobin 2002), and many speakers actually accept anticomplementizer constraint violations (Sobin 2002). I suggest that those speakers who accept them permit *that* to incorporate into preceding or following prosodic groups in (14), unlike those speakers who reject (14).

- (1) How many gorillas did Tom claim (*that) *t* walked into the room?
- (2) (Postal 2004, 32, (51))
- a. Lasers can, as is obvious, cut through stone walls.
 - b. Lasers can, as was proved by Mike, cut through stone walls.
- (3)
- a. It is obvious that lasers can cut through stone walls.
 - b. It was proved by Mike that lasers can cut through stone walls.
- (4) (Postal 2004, 33, (56))
- a. Everyone intelligent feels/holds/says/supposes/thinks that gold is rare.
 - b. * That gold is rare is felt/held/said/supposed/thought by everyone intelligent.
 - c. It is felt/held/said/supposed/thought by everyone intelligent that gold is rare.
- (5) Gold is not, as is deeply felt/widely held/sometimes said/usually supposed/generally thought, extremely rare. (Postal 2004, 33, (57))
- (6) Lasers cannot, as it had previously seemed to everyone, cut through stone walls. (Postal 2004, 32, (53b))
- (7) (Postal 2004, 34, (60))
- a. * It is captured/expressed/reflected by this theory that languages have verbs.
 - b. That languages have verbs is captured/expressed/reflected by this theory.
- (8) * Languages do (not) have, as is captured/expressed/reflected by this theory, the sort of verb in question. (Postal 2004, 34, (61b))
- (9) (Postal 2004, 36, (69))
- a. Ted was cheated, as I assumed (*that) was obvious.
 - b. Ted was cheated, as I thought (*that) had been proved by Michelle.
- (10) Diamonds are not actually rare, as I thought (*that) was usually supposed.
- (11) (Culicover 1992)
- a. * Robin met the man who Leslie said that *t* was the mayor of the city.
 - b. Robin met the man who Leslie said that for all intents and purposes *t* was the mayor of the city.
- (12) Diamonds are not actually rare, as I had thought that, for all intents and purposes, was usually supposed.
- (13) He said (that y[č]ou're) (feeling fine).
- (14) * Who did he claim (that) (was feeling fine)?

References

- Culicover, Peter W. (1992), "The Adverb Effect: Evidence against ECP Accounts of the *That-t* Effect." In Amy J. Schafer, ed., *Proceedings of the North East Linguistic Society (NELS) 23*, Amherst, MA: GLSA, pp. 97–111.
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