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**Really strange, that construction**

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## Really strange, that construction

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### 1. Introduction

- what is the structure of the following apparently sub-sentential examples? (Shopen 1972; Culicover and Jackendoff 2005)

- (1)
- a. Smart woman, your mom.
  - b. Always praising her kids, Mary.
  - c. Really bright, those students over there.
  - d. Always on time, that guy.

- are these sentences? (syntactically, semantically)
- is this a construction?

### 2. General characteristics

- first XP is a predicate phrase (NP/DP, VP, AP, PP)
- second XP is always a DP that corresponds to the subject of the predicate
- DP can't be the object:

- (2) \*Sandy sure likes, your mom.

- in semantic terms, the first XP is of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , the second is either  $\langle e \rangle$  or  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$

#### 2.1 Distributional restrictions

##### 2.1.1 The predicate

- although all categories are possible predicates, the predicate must be stative (or individual-level?)

- (3)
- a. \* Praising her kids, Mary.
  - b. \* In the next room, that guy.

- as noted by Shopen, in the following the missing verb is 'is' not 'is being'

- (4) An ass, that guy at the next table.

- moreover the missing verb is usually some form of 'be', but 'have' is sometimes possible

(5) Big nose, that politician.

- in certain cases, there is no missing verb at all

(6) Might be a good linguist, your sister.

- sentential adverbs are ok

(7) Definitely/probably a smart woman, your mom.

### 2.1.2 *The subject*

- cannot be a nonspecific indefinite

(8) a. \* Loves his mother, a good boy.  
b. \* Always digging up my yard, a dog.  
c. \* Great cook, some mom.

- quantificational DPs are also often bad

(9) a. \* Really bright, every math student.  
b. \* Always talking, most students.

- if we modify these DPs, however, the result is grammatical.<sup>1</sup>

(10) a. Really bright, every math student over there.  
b. Always talking, most of my students.

- the subject must be salient in the discourse (see section X.X)

### 2.1.3 *Binding*

- the subject appears to c-command elements in the predicate phrase for the purposes of binding theory

(11) a. Always praising herself<sub>i</sub>, your sister<sub>i</sub>.  
b. \* Very proud of him<sub>i</sub>, John<sub>i</sub>.

- looks like connectivity, but...

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<sup>1</sup> Certain quantifiers, e.g. *each*, seem to be impossible, however.

#### 2.1.4 *Anti-connectivity*

- a negative subject does not license an NPI in the predicate phrase.
- (12) a. \* Ever on time, no one in my class.  
b. \* Reads anything anymore, nobody.
- an idiom chunk cannot be broken up between the predicate phrase and the subject (this might be because the subject has to be referential)
- (13) a. \* About to hit the fan, the shit.  
b. \* Out of the bag, the cat.
- idioms are perfectly grammatical inside the predicate phrase itself
- (14) a. Almost let the cat out of the bag, that guy.  
b. About to kick the bucket, my cat.

#### 2.1.4 *Other*

- the predicate and the subject must appear in that order

(15) \*Your mom, smart woman.

- can't be embedded

(16) \*I think [smart woman, your mom].

#### 2.3 *Intonation*

- as noted by Shopen (1972), the predicate must receive the most prominent stress (“tag intonation”)

(17) a. A good TALKER, your friend Bill.  
b. \* A good talker, your friend BILL.

#### 2.4 *Information structure*

- the predicate phrase is new information (focus)
- the subject is old information (topic) and must be salient – this explains why indefinite nonspecific DPs are impossible
- the improving effect of adding a demonstrative or deictic is related to saliency – need to link the subject to context

## 2.5 *Force/type*

- note the similarity to exclamatives (Zanuttini and Portner 2003; Portner and Zanuttini to appear?)

- (18) a. A good talker, your friend Bill.  
b. What a good talker, your friend Bill!

- similar use but different internal distribution: wh-exclamatives require a scale

- (19) a. The best coffee in the world, that Maxwell House.  
b. \* What the best coffee in the world, that Maxwell House!

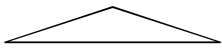
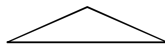
- NB: we exclude examples such as (2): different intonation, different semantics (question-answer)

- (20) Your best friend? Any dog.

## 3. Possible analyses

### 3.1 *Two independent phrases*

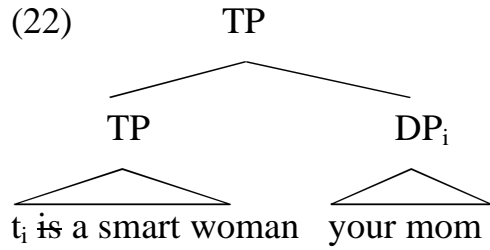
- speakers routinely produce sub-sentential utterances
- Stainton (forthcoming): sub-sentential utterances are in fact just that: phrases of categories other than TP
- PredNP utterances are two syntactically disconnected XPs

- (21)
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| DP  | DP  |
|  |  |
| a smart woman   | your mom  |

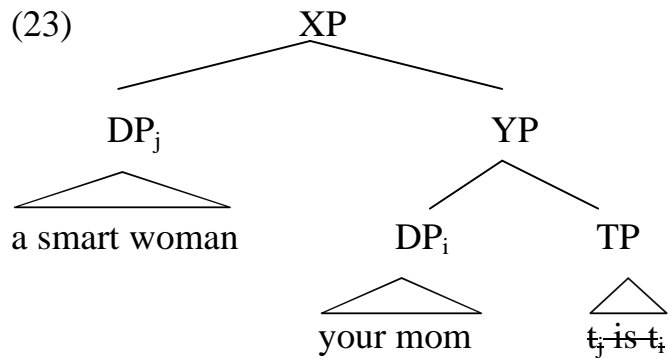
⇒ maximally simple structure

### 3.2 *Movement plus deletion*

- point of departure: Merchant's (2004) analysis of fragments as involving fronting of the apparent fragment followed by deletion (ellipsis)
- in PredNP cases, the subject is right-adjoined to the TP (via topicalization) and the verb is deleted



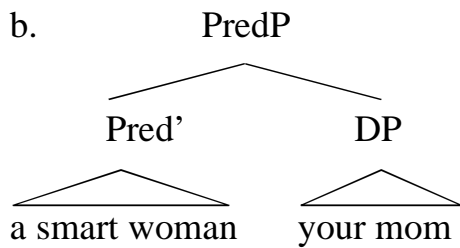
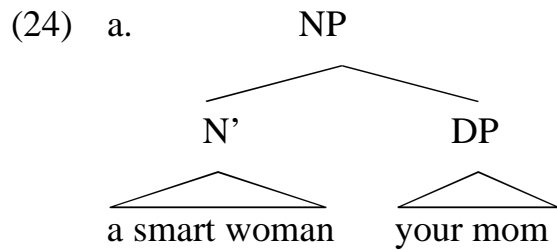
- or maybe both constituents have been fronted, followed by (TP) ellipsis



⇒ maximally complex structure

### 3.3 *Small clause*

- the predicate and the subject form a syntactic constituent: a small clause with a rightward subject



⇒ mid-level structural complexity

### 3.4 *How do they rank?*

- can these analyses account for the properties outlined in section 2?
  - 1. sentential adverbs – can appear, but only on predicate
    - i. two phrases: we expect sentential adverbs to be ok on both
- (25) Definitely your mom.
- ii. movement + deletion: the presence of sentential adverbs is expected, but their position is unexpected under the double-fronting approach
  - iii. small clause: presence of sentential adverbs is not expected
- (26) \*I consider definitely her a good friend.
2. binding – subject appears to c-command predicate
  - i. two phrases: at first unexpected (no c-command), but the standard binding conditions are notoriously violated everywhere in English, including in sub-sentential speech
- (27) Always looking at himself in the mirror.
- ii. movement + deletion: binding effects are expected
  - iii. small clause: binding effects are expected
3. anti-connectivity– no NPI licensing
  - i. two phrases: we don't expect NPI licensing (NPIs really do require c-command)
  - ii. movement + deletion: at first, we expect NPI licensing, but if the movement is topicalization, we can rule it out – nonreferential DPs can't be topicalized
- (28) ex
- iii. small clause: we expect NPI licensing

(29)

	two phrases	movement + deletion	small clause
stativity restriction	✗	✗	✗
sentential adverbs	✗	✓	✗
restrictions on subject	✗	✓	✗
binding	✓	✓	✓
anti-connectivity	✓	✓	✗
irreversibility	✗	✗/✓	✗
no embedding	✓	✗	✗
intonation	✗	✓	✗

- other points to consider:
- movement + deletion: strange deletion

(30) Smart woman, your mom.

- not only the verb, but the determiner appear to be deleted

### 3.5 *Divide and conquer*

- a fourth logical option is that all three analyses are available in UG – some examples involve two phrases, some ellipsis, yet others a small clause

## 4. Conclusion

- none of the proposed analyses are satisfactory – suggestions?
- what is the correct characterization of the restriction on the predicate? stativity? individual-level? something else?
- can we answer our initial questions?

(31)

	two phrases	movement + deletion	small clause
syntactic sentence?	no	yes	no
semantic sentence?	no	yes	yes
construction?	no <sup>2</sup>	yes	?

## References

- Culicover, P. and R. Jackendoff. 2005. *Simpler syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merchant, J. 2004. Fragments and ellipsis. *Linguistics and Philosophy*.

<sup>2</sup> But this could be a “discourse construction”.



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