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A NOTE ON THE STRUCTURE OF
PREDICATE PHRASE + *BE* +
THAT-CP

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1 Kuno's (1973) Observation

Kuno (1973) observes that the English construction in (1), in which a preposed predicate phrase (PredP) is followed by a form of *be* and a non-*wh* CP such as *that*-CP, is ungrammatical.

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments. I am deeply grateful to one of the reviewers, in particular, for detailed comments on and convincing counterarguments to my original draft, in which I had erroneously claimed that the construction in question is a kind of pseudocleft with PRO instead of *what*. All remaining errors are of course my own.

- (1) a. *Clear to everyone was that the candidate did not have the slightest chance of winning the election. (Kuno 1973:371)
- b. *Agreed upon by everyone was that we must work harder. (ibid.)

The aim of this squib is to show that this observation is descriptively wrong.

2 Counterexamples to Kuno's Observation: The CP- and DP-Types

The following are counterexamples to Kuno's observation:

- (2) The tempo of Malaysian politics has picked up. Some see these developments as the beginning of the end of Mahathir bin Mohamad's 20-year dominance. There have been suggestions that he is preparing his exit. More likely is that he has taken the initiative to confuse allies and enemies alike, aiming to rekindle his popularity and obstruct the emergence of a successor. (*The International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 2001)
- (3) Even more important is for the outside guarantors to preempt divisions among themselves by making sure the parties fulfill their commitments to arrest and extradite suspects, supply requested evidence and permit unhindered access to crime scenes. (*The Washington Post*, 23 January 1996)
- (4) Best of all would be to get a job in Wellingham. (Biber et al. 1999:914)
- (5) Central to the commonality between QR and *wh*-movement, when viewed from the perspective of LF, is that both give rise to structures in which a phrase in an \bar{A} -position . . . binds an empty category in an A-position, which can be formally defined . . . (Robert May, *Logical Form* (1985), 31)
- (6) Sentences (1) and (2) have been long-standing puzzles in discussions of natural language quantifier scope. . . . Of particular interest here is that they have been used as strong motivation for semantical approaches to meaning in natural language. (Norbert Hornstein, *Logic as Grammar* (1984), 78)
- (7) Among Mr. Arafat's reasons was that a goal of the Palestinian movement has always been a universal right of return for the Palestinian refugees. (*The International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 2001)
- (8) Among the many things that America learned this year about its new president is that Mr. Bush sometimes responds uncertainly when he is taken by surprise, as he did in the hastily

arranged appearance he made on Sept. 11. (*The New York Times*, 31 December 2001)

- (9) Underlying our view of elliptical structure is that in order for it to count as *projected* structure, it must be reconstructed, that is, satisfy structural identity conditions. (Robert Fiengo and Robert May, *Indices and Identity* (1994), 258)

The syntactic categories of preposed PredPs are an AP headed by a comparative or superlative adjective in (2), (3), and (4); an AP in (5); a predicative PP in (6); a PP headed by the preposition *among* in (7) and (8); and a VP headed by a participle in (9).¹ As for the syntactic categories of postcopular CPs, *for*-CP in (3) and *to*-infinitive CP (or IP) in (4) are also possible besides *that*-CP.

The above examples seem to be of the same type as (10), where a preposed PredP is followed by a form of *be* and a sentence-final DP. Henceforth, the construction with an S-final DP is called the *DP-type*, and the one with an S-final CP is called the *CP-type*.

- (10) More important has been the establishment of legal services. (Murata 1982:235)

3 Similarities between the CP- and DP-Types

Biber et al. (1999:902ff.) observe concerning the DP-type that preposed PredPs in sentences like (10) generally contain ‘‘anaphoric links with the preceding context’’ in the form of definite NPs, pronouns, comparatives, superlatives, or modifiers such as *particular* and *also*. They also observe that the postcopular DP is a focus position, where new information appears. The same is true of the preposed PredP and the S-final CP with the CP-type examples (2)–(9).

Furthermore, Murata (1982:237) and Biber et al. (1999:907–908) point out concerning the DP-type that the preposed PredP can be a VP headed by the present participle of a stative verb.

- (11) a. Requiring further investigation, however, is the difference between the use of (43) and (44) in discourse. (Murata 1982:237)
 b. The difference between the use of (43) and (44) in discourse requires/*is requiring further investigation.
- (12) a. Corresponding to these choices of focus are the following natural responses. (Murata 1982:237)
 b. The following natural responses correspond/*are corresponding to these choices of focus.

¹ Examples (7) and (8) might be better analyzed as instances of locative inversion whose focus phrase is a *that*-CP. If so, Levin and Rappaport Hovav’s (1995:269) observation that locative inversion is impossible with *that*-CP is descriptively wrong.

Again, the same point holds of the CP-type. The preposed PredP in (9) is headed by the stative verb *underlie*.

4 Inversion

The inversion found in the CP-type and DP-type is not that of subject and tensed auxiliary, in which the tensed auxiliary moves from I to C. Rather, the *be*-verb in these examples occupies the same position as in uninverted clauses; namely, a finite *be*-verb is under I and a nonfinite one is under a V-node. This point is evident in (4) and (10). It is also confirmed by the fact that (7), for example, can be changed into (13), where the expression *seems to have been* is inserted in place of the tensed *be*-verb.

- (13) Among Mr. Arafat's reasons seems to have been that a goal of the Palestinian movement has always been a universal right of return for the Palestinian refugees.

And it is further confirmed by comparing (14a) and (14b).

- (14) a. *How likely is that John will show up? (James D. McCawley, *The Syntactic Phenomena of English* (1998), 328)
(cf. How likely is it that John will show up?)
b. More likely is that he has taken the initiative to confuse allies and enemies alike, aiming to rekindle his popularity and obstruct the emergence of a successor. (= (2))
(cf. *More likely is it that he has taken the initiative to confuse allies . . .)

Note that (14a) involves interrogative inversion, where the tensed *be*-verb is moved from I to C.

5 Factors Influencing the Acceptability of the CP-Type

The determining factor for the acceptability of the CP-type construction seems to be that either the preceding context or the preposed PredP must be likely to raise the hearer's expectation that a proposition (in the form of *that*-CP) will show up in the postcopular focus position. In other words, the more readily one can imagine that a proposition will come at the end, the more acceptable the construction sounds.

Examples (2) and (6) above and (15) and (16) below are cases where the expectation that a proposition will occur in the focus position depends on the preceding context. In (2), the sentence prior to the CP-type construction mentions *suggestions*, thereby allowing us to expect that what is at issue is a proposition. In (6), the preceding sentence mentions *discussions*. In (15), the word *reasons* is contained in the preceding sentence and the pronoun in the preposed PredP refers to it. In (16), the *that*-CP in the preceding sentence makes it clear that what is being talked about is a difference between factives and nonfatives.

- (15) The criterion I have given for distinguishing factives from nonfactives is primarily a semantic one; there are, however, many syntactic reasons for distinguishing factives from nonfactives. Among them is that in 2.198 *it* can be replaced by *the fact*: [example 2.206 omitted] whereas in 2.200 *it* cannot: [example 2.207 omitted] (Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *A History of English Syntax* (1972), 60)
- (16) Yet another difference is that most nonfactives allow what some linguists have called “subject-raising,” while no factives do. . . . Of particular interest is that if a factive is embedded to a proposition with past tense, then the factive complement can be past or nonpast: [example 2.216 omitted] But if a nonfactive is embedded to a higher sentence with past, then the complement must be past too: [example 2.217 omitted] (Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *A History of English Syntax* (1972), 61)

Examples (5), (7), (8), and (9) are cases where the expectation depends on the preposed PredP. In (5), the DP *the commonality between QR and wh-movement* creates the impression that a proposition-type expression will come at the focus position. The noun *reasons* in (7), the DP *the many things that America learned this year about its new president* in (8), and the noun *view* in (9) perform the same function.

A discourse-linking marker on the preposed PredP also helps raise the expectation in question. Examples (1a) and (1b) can be improved by means of discourse-linking devices such as comparatives, pronouns, and adverbs like *also*.

- (17) a. Even clearer to them was that the candidate did not have the slightest chance of winning the election.
 b. Also agreed upon by these people was that they must work harder than ever.

Note also that Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995:267) give (18a) to “show that sentential complements cannot undergo locative inversion.” Here again, acceptability increases if the whole PredP is preposed and discourse linking is clearly marked.²

² An anonymous reviewer points out example (i), which is much more acceptable than (18a). I do not discuss it here simply because syntactically, it is not an instance of the construction under discussion.

- (i) OK/?In this very room was also discovered that cancer was caused by eating too many potatoes.

The reviewer also points out (ii), which is considerably better than the unacceptable (1a).

- (ii) OK/?Clearer to everyone was that the candidate did not have the slightest chance of winning the election.

Note that *everyone* in the unacceptable (1a) and the acceptable (ii) is discourse-linked in that it refers to the set of people under discussion. The only difference

- (18) a. *In this very room was discovered that cancer was caused by eating too many potatoes.
 b. Also discovered in this very room was that cancer was caused by eating too many potatoes.

6 Concluding Remarks

In this squib, I have presented counterexamples to Kuno's (1973) observation, pointed out some similarities between the PredP + *be* + *that*-CP construction (the CP-type) and the PredP + *be* + *that*-DP construction (the DP-type), shown that the inversion in the relevant construction is not the type with a finite auxiliary found in interrogative or negative clauses, and proposed and illustrated a condition that influences the acceptability of the CP-type construction. As for how to derive the DP-type and the CP-type, I cannot think of any non-ad hoc way. However, regardless of what derivation (and condition on acceptability) is proposed for these constructions, it is certain that they should be examined in comparison with the other two focus-final constructions, namely, pseudocleft and locative inversion, with which the DP-type and CP-type share much in terms of syntax and semantics.

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between (1a) and (ii) is that the PredP of (ii) contains a comparative. Use of the comparative presupposes that “another thing clear to everyone” has been mentioned in the preceding context. It looks as if the fact that a *that*-CP occupies the focus position of (ii) creates an impression that the presupposed “another thing clear to everyone” must be a proposition, which in turn raises the expectation that a proposition will show up in the focus position.