

UNGRAMMATICAL EMBEDDING :
TOUGH TO BE EASY TO PLEASE

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In a footnote, Bresnan (1971, 266) (tentatively) formulates *Tough-Movement* (TM)¹ as follows:

- (1) [_S Δ Pred (PP) [_{VP} V* (P) NP]]
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in which V* represents an arbitrarily long string of verbs. This formulation, she continues, would allow the following sentences to occur, which may contain more than one depth of embedding (Ibid.):

- (2) a. John is easy for Bill to please.
b. John is hard for Bill to even try to please.
c. John is hard for Bill to even begin to try to please.

In reply to Bresnan, Berman and Szamosi (1972, 324) try to argue against Bresnan's formulation of TM by noting that it would generate ungrammatical sentences like the following (Cf. also, Berman 1973, 288):

- (3) a. *Max is tough to be easy to please.
b. *These lessons are impossible to be easy to learn.

In this paper, we will show that apparent counterexamples like those in (3) are ruled out without recourse to any ad hoc devices, and that, hence, they cease to constitute counterevidence to Bresnan's formulation of TM.²

When they cite such sentences as in (3), Berman and Szamosi note that their ungrammaticality cannot be attributed to "a restriction on embedding adjectival predicates, since the next sentence is grammatical" (324), in which the embedded predicate *be prepared for* is adjectival:

- (4) Such contingencies are difficult to be prepared for.

This much is correct. Berman and Szamosi, however, do not take notice of the difference in self-controllability between such predicates as *be prepared for* and such predicates as *be hard*; "normally" (or in many dialects), the former being [+self-controllable] and the latter, [-self-controllable].³

Consider the following paradigm in this respect:

- (5) a. Please John! (Cf. (2a))
b. Try to please John! (Cf. (2b))
c. Begin to try to please John! (Cf. (2c))

- d. Be prepared for such contingencies !
- (6) a. *Be easy to please ! (Cf. *(3a))
 b. *Be easy to learn ! (Cf. *(3b))
 c. *Rejoice over his success ! (Cf. *(7a))
 d. *Resemble his father ! (Cf. *(7b))
- (7) a. *His success is easy to rejoice over.
 b. *His father is difficult to resemble.

It appears to be said uncontroversially that those predicates that allow true imperatives, as in (5); are [+self-controllable], and those that do not, as in (6), [-self-controllable] (Cf. Kuno 1970, for example). The latter are exactly the ones that cannot appear as the (immediate) complement predicate of a *tough*-moved construction. In fact, *tough* predicates do not allow [-self-controllable] predicates as their complement irrespective of whether TM is involved or not:

- (8) a. *It is tough to be easy to please John.
 b. *To be easy to please John is tough.
 c. *It is impossible to be easy to learn these lessons.
 d. *To be easy to learn these lessons is impossible.
 e. *It is easy to rejoice over his success.
 f. *To rejoice over his success is easy.
 g. *It is difficult to resemble his father.
 h. *To resemble his father is difficult.

In short, the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (3) is due to a so-called selectional restriction of *tough* predicates i.e. the impossibility of [-self-controllable] predicates as the (immediate) complement predicates of *tough* constructions.⁴

In passing, let us note that Berĭman and Szamoĭsi also state that the ungrammaticality of such sentences as (3b) cannot be due to "a restriction on embedding *tough*-like predicates inside each other, citing the following as proof:

- (9) It is impossible for these lessons to be easy to learn.

As their term "*tough*-like" predicate may imply, however, *be impossible* in (4) is not a "*tough*" predicate. We will point out three pieces of evidence below, *inter alia*, to show this.

First, it is widely known that the *for*-phrase in a *tough* construction is a matrix pp, and can be preposed or postposed as seen below (Cf. e.g. Lasnik and Fiengo 1974):

- (10) a. For Bill, John is easy to please.
 b. John is easy to please, for Bill.
 c. For Bill, it is easy to please John.

d. It is easy to please John, for Bill.

The *for*-phrase in (9), however, does not have this property:⁵

(11) a. *For these lessons, it is impossible to be easy to learn.

b. *It is impossible to be easy to learn, for these lessons.

This suggests that the matrix predicate in (9) is not a *tough* predicate.

Second, although in a *tough* construction, the syntactic subject of the complement predicate is absent, the logical subject is corresponding to the object of the matrix *for*-phrase. A [+self-controllable] predicate, of course, requires as its subject an entity which can control the action denoted by that predicate. Thus, such a subject must be a volitional being, most typically, a human being. It follows from these facts that the object of the matrix *for*-phrase at issue must be a volitional being. Even if *be easy to learn* is [+self-controllable] (we will touch on this matter shortly), *these lessons* are not volitional beings. Hence, (9) must be ungrammatical as a *tough* construction i.e. it is not a *tough* construction.

Third, as discussed by Lasnik and Fiengo (Ibid, 562), (9) is acceptable only if it is interpreted as "the denial of a proposition" i.e. only if it means that there is good reason to believe that these lessons are difficult to learn. A sentence interpreted as the denial of a proposition does not manifest any properties of a *tough* construction. Thus, (9) is not a *tough* construction in this respect either.

These three pieces of evidence demonstrate that (9) is not a *tough* construction and irrelevant to the discussion unlike Berman and Szamosi's intention.

The above discussion has not reached the end of this paper yet. Namely, there appear to be speakers who accept (6a), repeated here as (12) (Cf. Lasnik and Fiengo, 547):

(12) Be easy to please!

This means that for such speakers, (12) is [+self-controllable]. If so, it may seem, *prima facie*, that (12) should be able to be embedded in a *tough* construction. Further scrutiny, however, reveals that this cannot be the case. Put it differently, a *tough* construction with such a predicate as (12) as its complement is logically contradictory. Hence, e.g. (3a), repeated as (13), is always ungrammatical:

(13) *Max is tough to be easy to please.

Whatever framework is adopted, the logical (or semantic) representation for (13) may, very roughly, look like the following:

(14) [_P Max be tough for A [_P for A to be easy for B

[_P for B to please C.]]

As Jackendoff (1972, 154) correctly observes, a *tough*-moved sentence with the subject coreferential with the object of the matrix *for*-phrase is ungrammatical:

(15) *Tony is tough for himself to shave.

Given this fact, in P₃, *Max* cannot be coreferential with *A* (nor, irrelevantly, *A*, with *B*).⁶ So, we get the relation (16):

(16) Max ≠ A

As has been mentioned above, the object of the matrix *for*-phrase in a *tough* construction must be a volitional being, typically, a human being. This excludes the possibility of *A* being a dummy *it*.

Next, *A* is superficially absent in (13). Provided that *A* is typically a human being, it must be an unspecified person. Notice also that the matrix subject and the missing object of a *tough*-moved construction refer to the same entity. Thus, in (2a), for instance, the missing object of *to please* is *John*. Applying the same mechanism to P₃, we get the relation (17):

(17) Max = C

When P₂ alone is considered as a *tough* construction, we get the next relation:

(18) A = C

From (17) and (18), we logically get (19):

(19) Max = A

It is evident that (16) and (19) are contradictory to each other. Because of this logical contradiction, even for speakers who regard (12) as [+self-controllable], such a type of "allegedly" *tough*-moved constructions as (13) is always ungrammatical.

In sum, the above discussion has established that such ungrammatical sentences as in (3) are logically precluded, independently of Bresnan's or any other formulations of TM, and that since those sentences are only *apparent* counterexamples, Berman and Szamosi fail to argue against Bresnan's formulation of TM.

Footnotes

*This paper is an expanded version of one section of my MA thesis submitted to the University of Tsukuba.

1. This transformation is called Object Shift by Bresnan, and Nonsubject Raising by Perlmutter and Soames (1979). The term "*Tough-Movement*" is due to Postal (1971).
2. This paper does not intend to make any commitment as to whether Bresnan's formulation of TM is correct or not.
3. See e.g. Berman (1970), and Inoue (1973) about self-controllability.
4. (6a) is also in violation of another selectional restriction. That is, the understood subject cannot be a human being, specifically "you", because *to learn*

does not take an animate object.

5. When *for*+NP is not a matrix pp, but COMP+Subject, the observed dislocatability cannot be obtained as seen below:

- (i) a. This problem is too abstract for Bill to solve it.
- b. *For Bill, this problem is too abstract to solve it.
- c. *This problem is too abstract to solve it, for Bill.

For more details, see Lasnik and Fiengo (Ibid., 538).

6. We will not discuss why (15) is ungrammatical nor how its ungrammaticality is predicted. Jackendoff (1972, 153-4) discusses this matter in depth in terms of his modified version of the Thematic Hierarchy Condition. He purports to exclude such sentences as the following by this condition:

- (i) ?I seem to myself to be clever.

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