

THE EXTERNAL OBJECT HYPOTHESIS AND THE CASE OF OBJECT EXPLETIVES¹

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others, are exemplified in (3) (Postal & Pullum 1988: 643).

3. They never mentioned *it* to the candidate that the job was poorly paid
 We can take *it* for granted that there will be an appeal
 I have *it* on good authority that the CIA was never informed
 We demand *it* of our employees that they wear a tie
 Don't bruit *it* about that their marriage is on the rocks
 Don't spread *it* around that I'm giving you this assignment
 I blame *it* on you that we can't go
 They brought *it* to his attention that his daughter was sick

Postal & Pullum argue for (4), which essentially states that there are object expletives in English:

4. "An NP with the form *it* must be postulated that...
 (a) is not assigned a \bar{e} -role,
 (b) meets all of our syntactic criteria for expletives, and
 (c) is in a subcategorized position." (Postal & Pullum: 653)

Postal & Pullum provide examples like (5) and (6) to counter a "small clause" analysis, which would place *it* as the subject of a small clause, rather than as an object (Postal & Pullum: 644-5):

5. (a) They mentioned *it* immediately to the candidate that the job was poorly paid
 (b) *They mentioned immediately *it* to the candidate that the job was poorly paid
6. (a) I take *it* then that you won't be joining us
 (b) *I take then *it* that you won't be joining us

Both (5) and (6) show that main clause material can, and in fact must, follow the expletive pronoun, suggesting that the expletive is not a lower clause subject but is actually part of the main clause. Postal & Pullum conclude that the standard assumption in (2) must be abandoned.

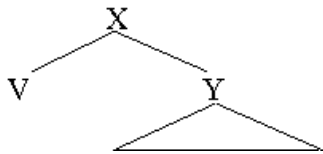
Rothstein (1995) has a different take on the data in (1) and (3). She claims that these pronouns are thematic objects (not expletives) and are associated with the clausal constituents by predication and/or dislocation. Her view is consistent with the data in (5) and (6) since the pronouns are objects. Rothstein, then, argues that there are no object expletives, which means that (2) can be maintained.

My take on the controversial data in (1) and (3) is that it does not actually matter if these object pronouns are expletive or not because my account will be consistent with either outcome. However, I will turn now to further data that I believe involve objects which are uncontroversially expletive.

Rothstein does discuss another class of pronouns which she argues are expletive, but are not objects; these are in (7):

7. (a) I consider it (to be) obvious that you should have done that
(b)

11.



There are several arguments for this. First, coordination examples like those in (12) involve conjuncts like [the book on the table], which is a VP-like constituent lacking a verb:

- 12. (a) Gary put [the book on the table] and [the lamp on the sofa]
- (b) Chris ate [the meat slowly] but [the vegetables quickly]
- (c) Sam talked [to Mittie yesterday] and [to Betsy the day before]

[Larson 1988]

The relevant coordinated conjunct is, e.g., [the book on the table], which looks like a constituent containing the complements of V without the verb itself. I take this as initial evidence for overt V raising to a position external to VP.

Second, Right-Node Raising (whatever its appropriate analysis) seems to target a VP-like constituent lacking a verb, as (13) shows:

- 13. (a) Smith loaned, and his widow later donated, [a valuable collection of manuscripts to the library]
- (b) I borrowed, and my sister stole, [large sums of money from Chase Manhattan Bank]
- (c) Leslie played, and Mary sang, [some Country & Western songs at George's party]
- (d) Mary baked, and George frosted, [twenty cakes in less than an hour]

[Abbott 1976]

The right node constituent, e.g. [a valuable collection of manuscripts to the library], again appears to be a constituent containing the complements of V without the verb itself. I take this as further evidence that V raises to a position external to VP.

Third, Rochemont & Culicover (1990) argue that stylistic inversion examples like the one in (14) involve a fronted VP, lacking a verb:

- 14. They said John would walk into the room nude, and into the room nude John walked/walked
John

[Rochemont & Culicover 1990]

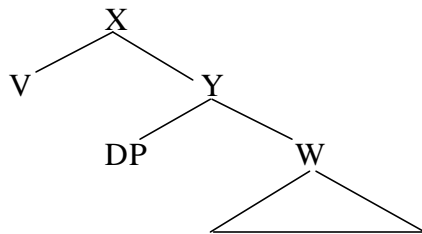
Once again, the fronted constituent, [into the room nude], contains the complements of V without the verb itself. Following Rochemont & Culicover I will take this as more evidence that V raises to a position outside of VP.

My first conclusion, then, is that V moves overtly out of a constituent containing the complements of V and other VP-related material. This is what the schema in (11) represents.

2.2 V and O external to VP-type constituent

There is also reason to believe that the object as well appears external to a VP-type constituent. (15) illustrates a more articulated version of (11):

15.



Coordination examples like those in (16) again point to a VP-like constituent this time lacking both verb and object:

16. (a) Marcia told the story [to Alice before breakfast] and [to Sam after dinner]
 (b) I showed the office [to the prospective students during their interviews] and [to the faculty after cleaning it up]
 (c) Ginger saw Mary Ann [in the park after dinner] and [at the dock around sunset]
 [Runner 1998]

The coordinated conjunct, e.g. [to Alice before breakfast], looks like a constituent containing other VP material, without either the verb or the direct object NP. I take this as initial evidence that not only V, but also the direct object NP raises overtly out of VP to a VP-external position.

Right-Node Raising examples like (17) point in the same direction:

17. (a) Marcia told the story, and Alice explained the problem, [to Sam after dinner]
 (b) I showed the office, and Mary showed the computer lab, [to the prospective students during their interviews]
 (c) Ginger saw Mary Ann, and Thurston saw Lovey, [in the park after dinner]
 [Runner 1998]

The right node constituent, e.g. [to Sam after dinner], again looks like a VP without the verb or the direct object NP. I take this as further evidence that both V and its direct object NP raise overtly out of VP to a VP-external position.

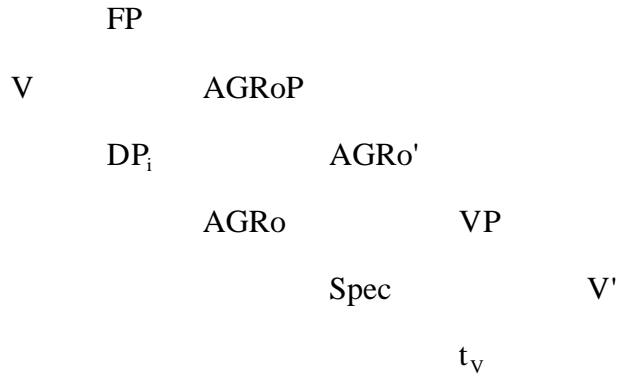
Third, recent work by Lasnik (1996, 1999) has also converged on the claim that objects move overtly for Case in English. He has exploited this claim in an analysis of pseudogapping (Lasnik 1996) and in an analysis of the binding possibilities in ECM constructions.

My second conclusion, then, is that both the main verb and direct object appear external to a VP-type constituent, as (15) schematizes. I now turn to my actual proposal, which fills in the details in (15).

2.3 The Proposal

The tree in (18), which incorporates the External Object Hypothesis will form the basis for my explanation of the facts in Sections 2.1 and 2.2:

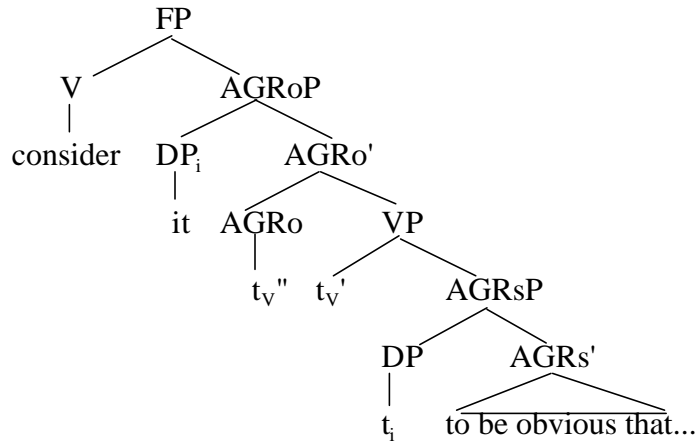
18.



25. (a) I consider it to be obvious that you should have done that

[Rothstein, 525]

(b)



I propose a sort of "raising to object" account, extending the account of ECM constructions provided in Runner (1998). The expletive is generated as the subject of *to be obvious that you should have done that* in the lower clause. It raises overtly to the main clause surface object position: Spec,AGRoP.

This proposal allows both Postal & Pullum and Rothstein to be right: these expletives are (surface) objects, Postal & Pullum's claim, while still being (underlying, "predicational") subjects, which is Rothstein's claim.

The other examples from (9) and (10), above, can be treated in the same way:

26. (a) I *figured it out* to be more than 3000 miles from here to Tulsa
 (b) ...[_{FP} figure [_{AGRoP} it [_{VP}...out [_{AGRsP} *t_{it}* to be 3000 miles from here to Tulsa]]]]
27. (a) I can *prove it to your satisfaction* to be impossible to construct all the parse trees in polynomial time
 (b) ...[_{FP} prove [_{AGRoP} it [_{VP}...to your satisfaction [_{AGRsP} *t_{it}* to be impossible to

Either analysis is straightforwardly available, given the EOH. Thus, the EOH, independently supported by the arguments in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 above, finds further support since it allows for an analysis of the otherwise problematic examples from Section 1. The next section outlines an argument for why it is correct to link the exceptions to (2), above, to the EOH and not to some other unrelated characteristic of English.

4 Why a Case position?

The EOH claims that objects in English move to a VP-external functional specifier to get Case. The account of object expletives provided in Section 3 exploits this non-thematic position as the position hosting the object expletives illustrated in Section 1. This account was motivated in part by the desire to maintain (2), the claim that expletives never appear in subcategorized (thematic) positions. One question that arises is what the status of (2) is. The generalization (2) embodies is part of a larger one which excludes the presence of any sort of phrase in a subcategorized position that is not thematically related to the head associated with that position. That is, besides ruling out expletives in thematic positions, we want to rule out movement into thematic or subcategorized positions. Descriptively, we just don't find cases where expletives or non-thematic phrases appear as complements to lexical heads, so such cases need to be ruled out in principle. So, we want something like (2) to hold.

One might ask why this descriptive generalization seems to be so. In fact, the only apparent counterexamples to this claim are the case of "raising to object" and the case of object expletives. But given the EOH, these are not counterexamples since their analysis does not involve placing a non-thematic NP as a complement to a lexical head. In other words the EOH, then, seems to provide a potential escape hatch to the generalization expressed in (2). That is, if a head does have associated with it a non-thematic Case position then an apparent exception to (2) is available. Therefore we want to be cautious about providing such a position since the fact is violations to (2) are rare.

I believe that the EOH, combined with standard assumptions about Case-assignment, is sufficiently constrained to pave the way towards an account of this descriptive generalization. The fact is that only verbs, and specifically, a subset of verbs, allow apparent violations to (2). No noun, preposition, or adjective allows such apparent violations. That is, there are no, e.g., noun object expletives. Thus, the escape hatch provided for (2) must be constrained enough to explain why only certain verbs, and no other lexical category, allow for the apparent violation of (2).

The heart of the analysis of object expletives provided above is the EOH. The EOH is simply the claim that direct objects appear in a special Case position for Case-licensing. That is, the escape hatch that the EOH provides is part of Case theory. Only V, and only a subset of V, provides a Case feature to be checked against a noun phrase for Case-licensing via Spec-head agreement with AGR (or some other functional head, see footnote 1). It is standardly assumed that P assigns Case differently from V and that N and A do not directly assign Case at all. If V is the only lexical head that assigns Case via something like the EOH then we have an explanation for why only with V do

apparent exceptions to (2) appear. Crucially, this explanation rests on the EOH.

5 Conclusion

The External Object Hypothesis, which claims that direct objects in English are parallel to subjects in having a VP-internal thematic position and a VP-external Case position which they appear in overtly, provides a straightforward account of the otherwise problematic object expletive construction discussed in Rosenbaum (1967), Pullum & Postal (1989) and Rothstein (1995). It also paves the way towards a new analysis of the fact that verbs and only certain verbs allow for such object expletives.

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