ON THE NATURE OF THE MEANING DIFFERENCE

BETWEEN THE ENGLISH *TOUGH*-CONSTRUCTION AND ITS *IT*-ANALOG CONSTRUCTION

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The (English) *TOUGH*-CONSTRUCTION (TC) is a syntactic pattern which was often considered to involve so-called *TOUGH*-MOVEMENT (i.e., a transformational rule which moves an NP out of the predicate of a complement clause in early generative transformational grammar), as is illustrated in (1):

(1) (a) Tom$_i$ is tough to please __$_i$.

 (b) That old man$_i$ is difficult to argue against __$_i$.

In the above examples, the syntactic subject of a *tough*-adjective such as *easy, hard,* and *difficult* is interpreted as semantically (and sometimes syntactically as well) being responsible for a gap in the infinitival complement phrase.

Ever since the TC in English began to attract the attention of early transformational grammarians,[1] one of the most controversial issues about the construction has been whether the *tough*-subject position is thematic or not. This semantic issue concerns whether the *tough*-adjective (along with the following infinitival phrase) in a *tough*-sentence assigns a semantic role to its syntactic subject. Although the position that the *tough*-subject is thematic has widely been assumed in both derivational and non-derivational syntactic frameworks since Lasnik and Fiengo (1974), it is still highly controversial whether or not this widely-held assumption is a truly well-motivated position which correctly reflects the nature of the meaning of the English TC.

Furthermore, there are some important questions that still need to be more fully resolved about the meanings of the TC and its *IT*-ANALOG CONSTRUCTION (IC). In particular, although there have been occasional claims for a meaning difference between the TC and the IC and a few suggestions about how the difference can be defined, virtually no previous

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[1] Lees (1960) is probably the earliest paper on the English TC. The TC has been a focus of discussion ever since Chomsky's (1964: 61−5) discussion of pairs of sentences such as *John is eager to please* and *John is easy to please*, in which the NP *John* in the first sentence is the subject of *eager* whereas it is the understood object of *please* in the second sentence.

studies have been fully successful in identifying its substance and demonstrating its presence and role in the actual use of language.

This study explores the meaning and use of the English TC and IC with a dual goal: first, to argue for the additional meaning of 'responsibility' assignable to the *tough*-subject by demonstrating its role as a factor determining the language user's choice between the two alternative constructions, and second, to argue against the widely-held assumption about the thematicity of the *tough*-subject by clarifying the nature of the additional meaning, which often results in a meaning difference between the two constructions. Discussion on the former will be based mainly on the analysis of the corpus data from the British Component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-GB), while discussion for the latter will be done with the balance between the corpus-based and intuition-based approach in mind.

In the presentation, after briefly reviewing the current understanding of the TC and raises issues to address, I will first propose to explain the meaning difference between the TC and the IC by using the concept of 'assignment of responsibility' and show how positing this meaning difference as a factor determining the language user's choice between the two alternative constructions can illuminate the use of the TC and the IC. Then, I will look more closely into the nature of the additional meaning, which is evidenced to be often assignable to the *tough*-subject, to determine whether the *tough*-subject can be considered truly thematic. In short, the results of this study will show that despite the possible difference in meaning between the two constructions, the *tough*-subject cannot be considered thematic because the presence *and* absence of the additional meaning that can occasionally be assigned to the *tough*-subject is not inherent to the TC and can be pragmatically explained.

References

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