

On *Likely* and *Eager* Adjectives

Iwao OTSUKA

1 *Likely* Adjectives

1.1 The three adjectives *likely*, *unlikely* and *certain* are quite unique in their syntactic behavior. We call them *likely* adjectives.

- (1) a. He is (*un*) *likely* to succeed.
 b. He is *certain* to succeed.

This type of adjective can take the structure of *it be* adj *that*-clause, as in (2).

- (2) a. It is (*un*) *likely* that he will succeed.
 b. It is *certain* that he will succeed.

Adjectives such as *sure*, *safe* (=sure), *apt* (=likely), *liable* (=likely), *etc.*, all of which refer to future possibility like (*un*)*likely* and *certain*, are not to be included in this class, since they can never have the structure of *it be* adj *that*-clause, as shown in (3). As for *sure*, some native speakers judge the negative sentence *It is not sure that he will come* or the interrogative sentence *Is it sure that he will come?* as acceptable.

- (3) a. He is *sure* to come.
 b. *It is *sure* that he will come.
- a. The President is *safe* to be reelected.
 b. *It is *safe* that the President will be reelected.
- a. He is *apt* to win an Oscar this time.
 b. *It is *apt* that he will win an Oscar this time.
- a. It is *liable* to rain.

- b. *It is *liable* that it will rain.

Meanwhile, adjectives such as *(im)probable*, *(im)possible*, etc. have the structure of *it be adj that*-clause, but they cannot be followed by the *to*-infinitive phrase, as shown in (4):

- (4) a. *He is *probable* to succeed.
 b. It is *probable* that he will succeed.
- a. *He is *possible* to be late.
 b. It is *possible* that he will be late.

The unique syntactic characteristic of *likely*, *unlikely* and *certain* is that they can occur both in the structure of *be Adj to*-infinitive and the structure of *it be Adj that*-clause, as was shown in (1) and (2).

In passing, I would like to add that *uncertain*, which is derived from *certain*, differs from *certain* in that it can occur neither in the structure of *be Adj to*-infinitive nor in the structure of *it be Adj that*-clause, as in (5):

- (5) a. *He is *uncertain* to succeed.
 b. *It is *uncertain* that he will succeed.

As to the impossibility of the word *uncertain*, Bolinger (1977: 110 & 122) discusses it and give two unacceptable examples with an asterisk attached:

- (6) a. There was *certain* (**uncertain*) to be brought to light all the rancor that had built up.
 b. Whereas **There is uncertain to be more* is clearly unacceptable, I find *There is unlikely to be more* acceptable. ...

1.2 Although *It is likely (unlikely, certain)* can be followed by the *that*-clause, it cannot be followed by the *for*-phrase plus the *to*-infinitive, as shown in (7 c) below. In transformational terms, when the adjective of this class takes a *for-to* complementizer instead of a *that*- complementizer, both the extraposition and the subject-to-subject raising transformations must successively apply to get (7 d). If they are not applied, unacceptable sentences (7 b & c) will be generated.

- (7) a. [[it] [he succeed]] is *likely*
 b. *For him to succeed is *likely*.

Extraposition

c. * It is *likely* for him to come.

Subject-to-Subject Raising

d. He is *likely* to succeed.

This reminds us of the existence of the five verbs *happen*, *chance*, *turn out*, *seem*, and *appear*, which are subject to the same restriction as *likely* adjectives, namely, the obligatory application of the extraposition and subject-to-subject raising transformations.

(8) a. [[it] [he come]] *happened*

b. *For him to come *happened*.

Extraposition

c. * It *happened* for him to come.

Subject-to-Subject Raising

d. He *happened* to come.

I should like to point out two more things here which *likely* adjectives and *happen* verbs have in common.

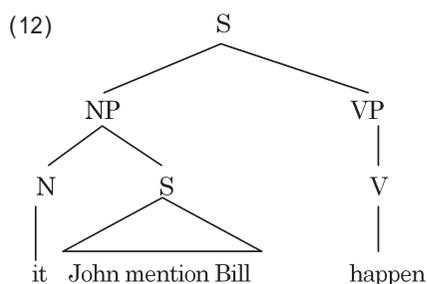
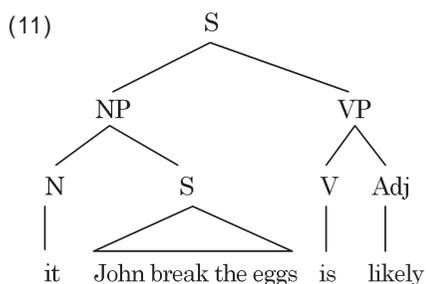
(9) a. John is *likely* to break the eggs.

b. The eggs are *likely* to be broken by John.

(10) a. John *happened* to mention Bill.

b. Bill *happened* to be mentioned by John.

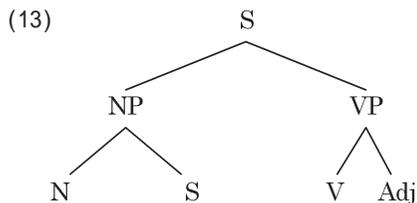
When we think logically of (9 a), we find that what is likely is not so much *John* as *John's breaking of the eggs*. And in (10 a) what happened is *John's mentioning of Bill* rather than *John*. Therefore, we may say that (*is*) *likely* and *happened* are both concerned with the remaining part of the whole sentence. This logical consideration leads us to assume the underlying structure of (9 a) and (10 a) to be (11) and (12), respectively:



These configurations of the underlying structure are quite similar to that of *easy* adjectives. In view of this, *likely* adjectives may be said to be 'abstract' adjectives just like *easy* adjectives.

Next, note the synonymy of the two sentences (a) and (b) of (9) and (10). If we assume the underlying structure of the two sentences (a) and (b) of (9) to be (11), then the synonymy of the two sentences will be explained automatically, since the two sentences differ only in the non-application or application of the passivization transformation to the common underlying structure. The same is true of the sentences of (10). Conversely, this may be said to serve as a motivation to set up (11) or (12) as the underlying structure.

1.4 A transformational approach would be helpful to show explicitly how a *likely* adjective, an *easy* adjective and a *necessary* adjective differ from each other. (The class of *necessary* adjectives includes such adjectives as *necessary*, *important*, *proper*, *essential*, *etc.*, but they are not going to be properly dealt with in the present study.) So, let's compare the derivation (14) of the sentence containing *likely*, which I cite here again for ease of reference, with the derivation (15) of the sentence containing *easy* and the derivation (16) of the sentence containing *necessary*. The three derivations are similar in having a configuration of (13) as their deep structure. Note here that in the illustration below and elsewhere as well, it must be understood that in technically strict terms, (c), (d) and (e) of each derivation result from the application of a transformation to the structure underlying (b), (c) and (e), respectively. In the present study, however, I do not intend to be so highly technical.



(14)=(7)

- a. [[it] [he succeed]] is *likely*
- b. *For him to succeed is *likely*.
Extraposition (Obligatory)
- c. *It is *likely* for him to come.
Subject-to-Subject Raising (Obligatory)
- d. He is *likely* to succeed.

(15) a. [[it] [he heat the room]] is *easy*

- b. For him to heat the room is *easy*.

Extraposition (Optional)

c. It is *easy* for him to heat the room.

||| Subject-to-Subject Raising (Not to be applied.)

d. *He is *easy* to heat the room.

||| Object-to-Subject Raising (Optional)

e. The room is *easy* for him to heat.

(16) a. [[it] [he read the book]] is *necessary*

b. For him to read the book is *necessary*.

Extraposition (Optional)

c. It is *necessary* for him to read the book.

||| Subject-to-Subject Raising (Not to be applied.)

d. *He is *necessary* to read the book.

||| Object-to-Subject Raising (Not to be applied.)

e. *The book is *necessary* for him to read.

The comparison of the above derivations reveals that (14) differs from (15) in that in the former, Extraposition and Subject-to-Subject Raising are both obligatory, while in the latter, Subject-to-Subject Raising must not be applied, and Extraposition and Object-to-Subject Raising are optional. In (16), Extraposition is optional just as in (15), but neither Subject-to-Subject Raising nor Object-to-Subject are to be applied. The structural variation of the *necessary* sentence is very limited.

Marginally, the sentences in (16 d & e) may be judged to be grammatical when the infinitives are construed as functioning as ‘purpose adverbials.’ But, if so, we have to admit that the subject-to-subject raising and object-to-subject raising transformations have changed the meaning that the sentence (16 c) has had before the two transformations have been applied. This clearly contradicts the fundamental constraint imposed upon ‘transformation’ that it should not change cognitive or logical meaning. Thus, it will be justified to give an asterisk to (16 d & e).

2 *Eager* Adjectives

2.1 The following adjectives express volitional meaning and belong to the class of *eager* adjectives:

(17) (i) ambitious, anxious, eager, impatient, keen, solicitous, willing.

(ii) hesitant, loath, reluctant, unwilling.

(18) a. He is *eager* to come.

b. He is *anxious* to meet his parents.

- c. He was *impatient* to leave.
- d. He is *reluctant* to go there alone.
- e. He is *unwilling* to accept our offer.

The subclasses (i) and (ii) are distinguished in that the former expresses positive volition, that is, the notion of ‘welcoming’ or ‘reaching out for’, whereas the latter negative volition, that is, the notion of ‘rejecting’ or ‘holding back from.’

2.2.1 Adjectives of this class show a uniform pattern of syntactic behavior. First, they can have a *for*-phrase between the adjective and the *to*-infinitive:

- (19) a. He is *eager for you* to come.
- b. He is *anxious for her* to meet his parents.
- c. He was *impatient for his plane* to take off.
- d. He is *reluctant for his daughter* to go there alone.
- e. He is *unwilling for his son* to accept our offer.

Transformationally, the subject of the embedded sentence and the subject of the main sentence can be either the same or different, that is, they need not necessarily be identical. This reminds us that such verbs as *want, like, love, hate, long, prefer, etc.* behave the same way:

- (20) a. I want to go at once.
I want *you* to go at once.
- b. He longed to return home.
He longed *for his son* to return home.
- c. I prefer to sing.
I prefer (*for*) *her* to sing.

On the other hand, adjective constructions comprising such adjectives as *ready* (=willing), *hungry* (=eager), *curious* (=eager), *thirsty* (=eager), *greedy* (=eager), and *desperate* (=eager), all of which express the notion of ‘reaching out for,’ can never have a *for*-phrase after them. For this very reason, I did not include them in the list of (17 i) at the beginning of section 2.1. These adjectives’ inability to be followed by a *for*-phrase leads us to assume that they are not so high in the degree of verbalness as the adjectives in (17), which can be followed by a *for* phrase.

- (21) a. He was always *ready* to help people in trouble.
 *He was always *ready* (=willing) *for her* to help people in trouble.
- b. John is *hungry* to get on in the company.
 *John is *hungry* for his son to get on in the company.
- c. He is very *curious* to know if it is true.
 *He is very *curious* for his students to know if it is true.
- d. He is *desperate* to get a job.
 *He is *desperate* for his son to get a job.

In these sentences, the embedded subject must be the same as that of the main sentence. This again reminds us of the existence of such verbs as *begin*, *cease*, *condescend*, *continue*, *etc.*

- (22) a. I began to read the book
 *I began *him* to read the book.
- b. The king condescended to eat with the minstrels.
 *The king condescended *the queen* to eat with the minstrels.
- c. She continued to keep a diary till she died.
 *She continued *him* to keep a diary till she died.

2.2.2 Secondly, *eager* adjectives can freely have derived nominal forms, as in (21), which contrasts sharply with the impossibility of the nominal forms derived from *easy* and *likely* adjectives, as is shown in (22) and (23):

- (21)
- | | | | | | | |
|---------|--|----------|--|--------|--|----------|
| John is | $\left. \begin{array}{l} \textit{eager} \\ \textit{willing} \\ \dots \\ \textit{reluctant} \\ \textit{hesitant} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$ | to agree | | John's | $\left. \begin{array}{l} \textit{eagerness} \\ \textit{willingness} \\ \dots \\ \textit{reluctance} \\ \textit{hesitance} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$ | to agree |
|---------|--|----------|--|--------|--|----------|

(22) John is $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{easy} \\ \textit{difficult} \\ \textit{impossible} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$ to please *John's $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{easiness} \\ \textit{difficulty} \\ \textit{impossibility} \end{array} \right\}$ to please

(23) John is $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{(un)likely} \\ \textit{certain} \end{array} \right\}$ to succeed *John's $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{(un)likelihood} \\ \textit{certainty} \end{array} \right\}$ to succeed

2.2.3 Thirdly, I should like to point out that all of the *eager* adjectives can be followed by a *that*-clause, in which the putative modal *should* or the present subjunctive verb is indispensable.

- (26) a. John is *eager* that his son (should) enter college.
 b. Bill is *solicitous* that Mary (should) write a letter to him.
 c. Are you *willing* that she (should) be permitted to resign?
 d. Jane is *hesitant* that her son (should) act like that.
 e. She is *loath* that her daughter (should) go alone to such a place.

2.3 It would be interesting to notice that *eager* adjectives require a certain preposition at the end of the *what*-clause of a pseudo-cleft sentence, just as such verbs as *hope*, *decide*, *etc.* do.

- (27) a. I am *eager* for you to see my etchings.
 What I am *eager* for is for you to see my etchings.
 b. I am *solicitous* for him to come here.
 What I am *solicitous* for is for him to come here.
 c. She is *apprehensive* for her daughter to go alone to such a place.
 What she is *apprehensive* of is for her daughter to go alone to such a place.
 d. He is *hesitant* to accept our offer.
 What he is *hesitant* about is to accept our offer.

- (28) a. I *hope* for you to come on time.
 What I *hope* for is for you to come on time.
 b. I *decided* for John to represent us.
 What I *decided* on is for John to represent us.

It might be that the occurrence of a preposition at the end of the *what*-clause is necessary in order for the *what*-clause in itself to make sense.

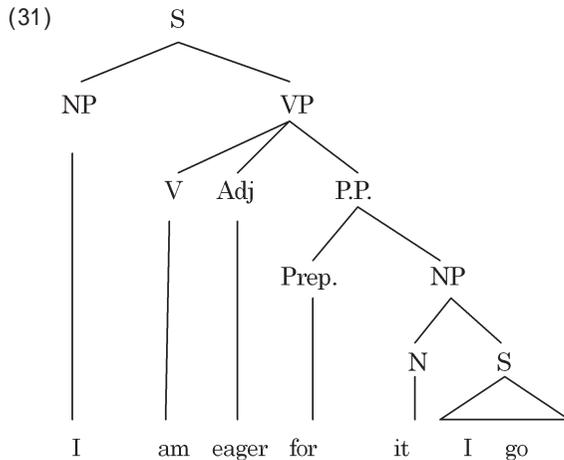
With the three adjectives of *willing*, *unwilling*, and *loath*, there will usually never occur a prepositional phrase after them, as in (29 a). However, in the pseudo-cleft *what*-clause comprising one of these adjectives and a *for-to* phrase, there must occur a preposition after the adjective concerned, as in (29 c).

- (29) a. *I am (*un*) *willing* for your kindness.
 b. I am (*un*) *willing* for you to see my etchings.
 c. What I am (*un*) *willing* for is for you to see my etchings.
- a. *She is *loath* for your kindness.
 b. She is *loath* for her daughter to go there alone.
 c. What she is *loath* for is for her daughter to go there alone.

In this case as well, it might seem that a preposition appears in the pseudo-cleft *what*-clause to make the *what*-clause itself a syntactically and semantically complete unity.

2.4 By way of summary, I should like to show the parallelism between *be eager to* and *hope to* by placing them in the same position of the corresponding sentences. We will find that the two are closely parallel to each other. Therefore, we may suppose the underlying structure of *I am eager to go* to be, roughly, the one shown in diagram (31), by analogy with *I hope for you to go*.

- (30) a. I am *eager to go*.
 I *hope to go*.
- b. I am *eager for you to go*.
 I *hope for you to go*.
- c. I am *eager that you should go*.
 I *hope that you will go*.
- d. What I am *eager for* is for you to go.
 What I *hope for* is for you to go.
- e. What I am *eager for* is that you should go.
 What I *hope for* is that you will go.



REFERENCES

- Bolinger, Dwight L. 1977. *Meaning and Form*. London: Longman.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1967. "Remarks on nominalization," *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*, eds. by Roderick A. Jacobs and Peter S. Rosenbaum, 184-221. Waltham, Mass.: Ginn.
- Emonds, Joseph E. *A Transformational Approach to English Syntax: Root, Structure-Preserving and Local Transformations*. New York: Academic Press.
- Huddleston, Rodney. 2005. *A Student's Guide to English Grammar*. Cambridge, the United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lees, Robert B. 1960. "A multiply ambiguous adjectival constructions in English," *Language*, 36, 207-221.
- _____. 1960. *The Grammar of English Nominalizations*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Rosenbaum, Peter S. 1967. *The Grammar of English Predicate Complement Constructions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Ross, John Robert. 1967. *Constraints in Variables in Syntax*. Doctoral Dissertation at MIT.
- Yasui, Minoru, Satoshi Akiyama, and Masaru Nakamura. 1976. *Adjectives*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha.
- _____. 1996. *Sanseido's Concise Dictionary of English Grammar*. Tokyo: Sanseido.