The issue

Extraposition of clausal/propositional arguments such as in (1) and (2) has been subject to extensive research during the last decades.

(1) a. It really [seems/happens/appears] that the Giants lost the World Series.
   b. That the Giants lost the World Series really [seems/happens/appears].

(Altenberg, 2005, 176)

Such examples have raised a number of questions, most prominently: Is extraposition of propositional arguments a uniform phenomenon within a language/cross-linguistically? If not, which (sub)types have to be distinguished? While this question has been considered in more detail with respect to verbs, the same configuration with adjectives has been considered with less details.

Contribution of the work here: Here, I provide some considerations for extraposed clauses with adjectival predicates in English and report on three different experimental studies, and relate them to current approaches to extraposition.

Theoretical Approaches

Three different types of analyses are to be distinguished: The Adjunct Analyses (AA) is the selected subject and extraposed clause is an adjunct (see e.g. Koster 1978, Bennis 1986, Vink 1995). The Complement Analyses (CA) is a clause as a selected argument while as an expletive (see for egative adjectives Bennis 2000 for a recent study in English). The Complex Constituent Analyses (CCA) are CP-extraced nominal constituent from which the clause is necessarily extraposed (see Roenneberg 1967, Sonnergren 1992, partly Büng & Hartmann 1997, Müller 1996).

Experimental Studies: Expectation

Relevance of wh-extrapolation: The different analyses make different predictions with respect to wh-extraction (also depending on the class of predicate).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Prediction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) adjunct analysis</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) complement analysis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) complex constituent analysis</td>
<td>✓</td>
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Experimental Studies: Design

Two different studies with the conditions in (7), (8):

1. Adjectives: Adjectives with a finite clause, which usually do not occur with an additional PP argument (see Herr et al. 2008) due to ECA data, in which modal adjectives (possible, impossible, certain, probable, likely), adjectives of frequency (common, customary, rare, unusual), evaluative predicates (illegal, right, wrong, correct, true).

(7) a. Extraposition: It is possible that Peter sold his school books.
   b. Extraction: Which books is it possible that . . . ?
   c. In-situ subject: That Peter sold his school books is possible.


(8) a. Extraposition: It is clear to the parliament that the will vote against.
   b. Extraction: Which proposal was it clear to the public that the parliament will vote against?
   c. In-situ subject: That the parliament will vote against the proposal.

Experimental Studies: Results

The results show across all configurations (see the figures below) (i) that that-clauses are overall not tolerated in subject position (with the exception of a few selected adjectival predicates) and (ii) that wh-extraction is not possible out of that-clause with all investigated adjectival predicates. Post hoc tests reveal that with a small set of unergative predicates (dissimulating that-extraction, occurrence in as is-constructions and DP+INF, see Czepka 1989, Bennis 2000, 2004) wh-extraction is rated significantly worse than clausal subjects, while wh-extraction and occurrence in subject position are rated equally bad with ergative adjectives.

Fig. 2: Adjective 1 (n=50)

Fig. 3: Adjective 2 (n=50)

Discussion

Based on this study, wh-extraction is generally not possible out of extraposed clauses, both with unergative and ergative adjectives. This result is not expected under the Complement Analyses but it under the Adjunct Analyses Complex Constituent Analyses. Considering the availability of the clause in subject position being dependent on the nature of the predicate as unergative or ergative suggests that the that-clause without it can be selected subject. Taking this together extraposed clauses are either adjoined with it as set of a kind of cataphoric pronoun in subject position (both with unergative and ergative adjectives) or they are base-generated in complement position with the correlate extracted to subject position (ergative adjectives) or they are base-generated as that-clauses in subject position (unergative adjectives).

Outlook

There is an issue whether or not the unergative vs. ergative distinction is also relevant with these adjectives. The adjectives used in the two studies can be grouped in these classes based on (i) Comp-dop (ii) Availability in AS ADJ contexts (iii) Raising available for adjectival infinitive complement. Even though it was not obvious how to group some of the adjectives, posthoc-analysis suggests that (un)ergativity indeed should be explored more.

References