

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE RULE OF  
EQUI-NP DELETION IN ENGLISH SYNTAX

by

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## Preface

It has been suggested by some that an abstract S may fail to explain various inconsistencies in syntax and that certain rules hitherto thought acceptable in the system, may in fact have serious flaws. Michael Brame, in Conjectures and Refutations in Syntax and Semantics, attacks the notion of the abstract S through the rule of Equi-NP Deletion which he finds so often riddled with ad hoc devices in its application that it is, for him, not a rule of syntax.

In this paper I will present some of Brame's arguments against Equi-NP Deletion (henceforth, Equi) and comment on or question these arguments. The format of this paper will be straightforward: I will present an argument, explain it as Brame sees it, and then offer my own comments or criticisms. I would like it understood that it is my belief that the Equi question remains open. Before proceeding with Brame's arguments against Equi, however, it might be to our advantage to briefly investigate the foundation from which Brame argues.

## I Introduction

### 1.1 Abstract S

First, what is an abstract S? It is an S in underlying representation which, due to structural change through various rule applications, is not an S in surface structure. An example of the abstract S is seen in an S like 'John wants to go' whose surface structure is derived from [John want it] S<sub>1</sub> [John go] S<sub>2</sub> in the following simplified manner:

1. Complementizer Placement applies and 'for-to' is chosen.  
[John want] [it]<sub>S<sub>2</sub></sub> for John to go]S<sub>2</sub>
2. Equi applies and the subject NP of the complement, which is co-referential to the subject NP of the matrix S, is deleted.  
[John want] [it]<sub>S<sub>2</sub></sub> for-to go]S<sub>2</sub>
3. It-Deletion applies on S<sub>1</sub>.  
[John want]<sub>S<sub>2</sub></sub> [for-to go]S<sub>2</sub>
4. Complementizer Deletion applies on the S<sub>2</sub> cycle.  
[John want]<sub>S<sub>2</sub></sub> [to go]S<sub>2</sub>

As I mentioned above, the abstract S is thought by some to be inadequate in its explanation of syntax. A proposed remedy for this inadequacy is the VP complement which, posited in place of an abstract S, might allow for the derivation of a variety of surface structures without need for several ad hoc devices.

### 1.2 Joan Bresnan's VP hypothesis

Joan Bresnan, in "Sentence Stress and Syntactic Transformations" (Bresnan; 1971) presents a formulation and exploration of the VP complement. She tells us that

It has been proposed...that certain infinitival complements should be derived from deep structure

VP's rather than Ss. Suppose this proposal is applied to the analysis of certain adjectives plus complement constructions. The question is whether in a construction like 'It is tough for students to solve this problem', there is an underlying S= [for students to solve this problem] or an underlying PP+VP= [for students] [to solve this problem]. (Bresnan, 1971: 263)

Assuming the existence of both VP and S as underlying complements, Bresnan suggests that the "full range of possible subcategorizations for Adjectives would be expressed as VP ... (PP)( $\begin{smallmatrix} VP \\ S \end{smallmatrix}$ ). (Bresnan, 1971: 263, footnote #4).

### 1.3 Bresnan's arguments against the sentential analysis

Bresnan presents several arguments against the sentential analysis of complements to adjectives like 'tough'. First, if 'tough' takes S complements, There-insertion, which is a sentence-cyclic transformation, should be applicable on the inner cycle. However, while we can have (1a), we can not have (1b)

- (1) a. It will be tough for at least some students to be in class on time.  
 b. \*It will be tough for there to be at least some students in class on time.

Second, "for-to complementizer of a true sentential complement allows many types of objects which the preposition 'for' after 'tough' does not". (Bresnan, 1971: 264)

- (2) a. Emmy was eager for that theorem on modules to become known.  
 b. \*It was tough for that theorem on modules to become known.

Third, complements to predicates such as 'hard' do not act as sentential constituents (they can not be shifted). While we can derive (3b) from (3a), we can not derive (4b) from (4a).