

# Adjective Complement and Adjective Adjunct Asymmetries

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**Dwijatmoko, Benedict B. 2001. Adjective Complement and Adjective Adjunct Asymmetries.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal* 9(2), 49-63. As a complement is s-selected and adjunct is not, an adjective complement and an adjective adjunct have different syntactic behaviors. An adjective may take a preposition phrase, a *to*-infinitive verb, and a clause both as its complement and as its adjunct. A preposition phrase, a *to*-infinitive verb, and a clause which function as a complement may undergo some syntactic processes which a preposition phrase, a *to*-infinitive verb, and a clause which function as an adjunct cannot. The different syntactic behavior can explain why certain sentences with certain predicative adjective constructions are not acceptable. (Sanata Dharma University)

## 1. Introduction

The concepts of complement, adjunct, and attribute as the elements of a phrase have been widely discussed (see Chomsky 1981 and Haegeman 1991). While the difference between an adjunct and an attribute lies in their position, the difference between a complement and an adjunct lies in their generation. A complement is semantically selected (s-selected) by the head and is, therefore, base-generated while an adjunct is generally not s-selected by the head and is not base-generated.

Semantically, a complement and an adjunct also show different functions. In an adjective phrase (AP), a complement shows the person or thing to which a state is directed, like in (1) and (2).

- (1) John is angry with his sister.
- (2) The answer is not relevant to the question.

The PPs *with his sister* in (1) and *to the question* in (2) are the complements of *angry* and *relevant* respectively. *With his sister* shows the person to whom the anger is directed, and *to the question* shows the thing to which the answer is related. Different from a complement, an adjunct only gives information such as on the place and time of a state, like in (3) and (4).

- (3) John was angry in the meeting.
- (4) The film is good at the beginning.

The PPs *in the meeting* in (3) and *at the beginning* in (4) are adjuncts of *angry* and *good* respectively. *In the meeting* shows the place where John was angry, and *at the beginning* shows the place of the good part of the film.

Categorically, an AP may take a preposition phrase (PP), to-infinitive verb, and clause both as a complement and an adjunct. As a complement and an adjunct are different in their generation and semantic function, a PP, to-infinitive verb, and clause which function as a complement show a syntactic behavior which is different from those which function as an adjunct. A PP, to-infinitive verb, and clause which function a complement may undergo some syntactic processes which a PP, to-infinitive verb, and clause which function as an adjunct cannot undergo. Similarly, a PP, to-infinitive verb, and clause which function as an adjunct may undergo some syntactic processes which a PP, to-infinitive verb, and clause which function as a complement cannot undergo.

The asymmetries of an adjective complement and adjective adjunct has an important consequence in the development of a theory on the generation and structure of a phrase. As a complement and adjunct

syntactically behave differently, a phrase theory which does not distinguish the two elements cannot capture the nature of a phrase, and, hence, does not have a strong ground.

## 2. Preposition Phrase

An adjective may take a PP as its complement and adjunct. The complements of the adjectives *angry* in (1) and *relevant* in (2), which are rewritten as (5) and (6) respectively below, are the PPs *with his sister* and *to the question* respectively.

- (5) John is angry with his sister.
- (6) The answer is not relevant to the question.

In (3) and (4), which are rewritten as (7) and (8) below, the adjunct of the adjective *angry* is the PP *in the meeting*, and the adjunct of the adjective *good* is the PP *at the beginning*.

- (7) John was angry in the meeting.
- (8) The film is good at the beginning.

When an adjective takes a PP as its complement, the preposition which becomes the head of the PP is fixed. A certain adjective may only take a PP headed by a certain preposition as its complement. The expressions *afraid of*, *ambitious for*, *angry with/at*, *anxious about*, *bored with*, *different from*, *fond of*, *good in*, *relevant to* and *worried about* are combinations of adjectives and the prepositions which head the PPs which function as complements.

An adjective does not specify the preposition which becomes the head of its adjunct. The choice of the preposition depends on the types of information which the adjunct conveys.

- (9) The TV programs are good in the morning/on Saturdays.
- (10) John was only quiet in the meeting/during the trip.

*In the morning* and *on Saturdays* are the adjuncts of *good*, and *in the meeting* and *during the meeting* are the adjuncts of *quiet*. The choice of *in* or *on* in (9) and *in* or *during* in (10) depends on the types of information the NPs which come after them convey.

A PP adjective complement shows a specific syntactic behavior. The NP which becomes the complement of the preposition can be replaced with *what* or *who* to make a question.

- (11) a. John is angry with his sister.  
b. Who is John angry with?  
(12) a. Mary is fond of candies.  
b. What is Mary fond of?

*His sister* in (11) is substituted with *who*, and in (12) *candies* is substituted with *what*. *Who* and *what* are then moved to the specifier of C to form a question. (See Chomsky 1981, Haegeman 1991, and Lasnik and Saito 1992 for a detailed discussion of a *wh*-phrase movement.)

An NP in a PP adjective adjunct, on the contrary, cannot be substituted with *what* or *who*.

- (13) a. John was angry in the meeting.  
b. \*What was John angry in?  
(14) a. The new employer was good in his early weeks.  
b. \*What was the new employer good in?

The substitution of *the meeting* in (13) and *his early weeks* in (14) with *what* and the movement of *what* to the specifier of C produce unacceptable sentences.

A PP adjective adjunct gives circumstantial information in a sentence. In a question, such a PP is substituted with a *wh*-phrase like *where* and *when*.

- (15) a. John was angry in the meeting.  
 b. Where was John angry?  
 (16) a. The new employer was good in his early weeks.  
 b. When was the new employer good?

*Where* in (15) is a substitute of *in the meeting*, and *when* in (16) is a substitute of *in his early weeks*

The unacceptability of (13b) and (14b) is due to government. *In the meeting* in (13a) and *in his early weeks* in (14a) are not lexically marked and, hence, are blocking categories for the NPs *the meeting* and *his early weeks*. The PPs are barriers for the NPs. The traces of *what* in the PPs are not antecedent-governed by *what* which moves to the specifier position of C. The movement of *what* in (13b) and (14b) is different from the movement of *who* in (11) and *what* in (12). The PPs *with his sister/who* and *of candies/what* are lexically marked and are, therefore, not blocking categories for the wh-phrases.

The same reason can be used to explain the acceptability of (17) and (18) and the unacceptability of (19a) and (20a). An NP which occurs in a PP adjective complement can occur in a cleft sentence like in (17) and (18) whereas an NP which occurs in a PP adjective adjunct cannot do so.

- (17) It was his sister<sub>i</sub> that John was angry with (his sister<sub>i</sub>).  
 (18) It is candies<sub>i</sub> that Mary is fond of (candies<sub>i</sub>).  
 (19) a. \*It is the meeting that John was angry in (the meeting).  
 b. It is in the meeting that John was angry.  
 (20) a. \*It was the beginning that the story of the film was good at (the beginning).  
 b. It was at the beginning that the story of the film was good.

*His sister* as the complement of *with* in (17) and *candies* as the complement of *of* in (18) can be focused in the a cleft sentence. *His sister* in *with his sister* in (17) and *candies* in *of candies* in (18) can be

deleted under the Equi-NP deletion rule. They are recoverable because they are governed by *his sister* and *candies* in the matrix clause and can be co-indexed with them. On the contrary, *the meeting* as the complement of *in* in (19a) and *the beginning* as the complement of *at* in (20a) cannot be focused. *In the meeting* and *at the beginning* are adjective adjuncts, and they can be focused as in (19a) and (20b).

The NP of a PP adjective complement can also be focused in a pseudo-cleft sentence. Sentences (11a) and (12a) can be paraphrased into (21) and (22).

- (21) Who John was angry with was his sister.  
 (22) What Mary is fond of is candies.

The NP of a PP adjective adjunct, on the contrary, cannot be focused in a pseudo-cleft sentence. Sentences (13a) and (14a) cannot be paraphrased into (23a) and (24a) but into (23b) and (24b)

- (23) a. \*What John was angry in was the meeting.  
       b. Where John was angry was in the meeting  
 (24) a. \*What the film is good at at the beginning.  
       b. Where the film is good is at the beginning.

Sentences (23a) and (24a) are not acceptable. Sentences (13a) and (14a) can only be paraphrased with *where* like in (23b) and (24b).

### 3. *To*-Infinitive

An adjective can also take a *to*-infinitive verb as its complement and adjunct.

- (25) John is ready to do the work.  
 (26) Mary is eager to study abroad.  
 (27) The book is easy to understand.

(28) The dress is expensive to buy.

*To do the work* in (25) and *to study abroad* in (26) are the complements of the adjectives *ready* and *eager* respectively, and *to understand* in (27) and *to buy* in (28) are the adjuncts of the adjectives *easy* and *expensive* respectively.

A *to*-infinitive verb which functions as an adjective complement is different from that which functions as an adjective adjunct in some respects. A *to*-infinitive adjective complement can be substituted with *what* to form a question.

(29) What is John ready (to do)?

(30) What is Mary eager (to do)?

A *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct, on the contrary, cannot be substituted with *what* in a question.

(31) a. \*What is the book easy to do?

b. How is the book easy?

(32) a. \*What is the dress expensive to do?

b. How is the dress expensive?

As seen in (31a) and (32a), the substitution of the *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct with *what* results in unacceptability. A *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct cannot be questioned with *what*. The question word *how* is used to ask about a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct like in (31b) and (32b).

A *to*-infinitive adjective complement is different from a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct in a cleft sentence. A sentence with an adjective complement can be paraphrased into a cleft sentence with the *to*-infinitive as the focus.

(33) It is to do the work that John is ready.

(34) It is to study abroad that Mary is eager.

A sentence with a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct cannot be paraphrased into a cleft sentence in the same way as is a sentence with a *to*-infinitive adjective complement.

- (35) \*It is to read that the book is easy.  
(36) \*It is to buy that the dress is expensive.

Sentences (35) and (36) as paraphrases of (27) and (28) respectively are not acceptable. A sentence with a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct can only be paraphrased into a cleft sentence in the following way.

- (37) It is to read the book that is easy  
(38) It is to buy the dress that is expensive.

*The book* in (37) and *the dress* in (38) are not the subjects in the *that*-clauses but the objects of the verbs *read* and *buy* respectively.

A *to*-infinitive adjective complement is also different from a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct in a pseudo-cleft sentence. A *to*-infinitive adjective complement can appear in a pseudo-cleft sentence.

- (39) What John is ready is to do the work.  
(40) What Mary is eager is to study abroad.

A *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct, on the contrary, cannot occur in a pseudo-cleft sentence in the same way as a *to*-infinitive adjective complement.

- (41) \*What the book is easy is to read.  
(42) \*What the dress is expensive is to buy.

Similar to (37) and (38), a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct can only appear in a pseudo-cleft sentence when the NP becomes the (syntactic)

object of the verb like in (43) and (44).

(43) What is easy is to read the book.

(44) What is expensive is to buy the dress.

*The book* and *the dress* are the objects of the verbs *read* and *buy* respectively, and the *to*-infinitive is the subject complement of the verb *be*.

Another difference between a *to*-infinitive adjective complement and a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct is the equivalence of a *to*-infinitive to a *to*-infinitive subject. A *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct is equivalent to a *to*-infinitive subject.

(45) a. The book is easy to read.

b. To read the book is easy.

(46) a. The dress is expensive to buy.

b. To buy the dress is expensive.

In (45a) *to read* is an adjunct of the adjective *easy* while in (45b) *to read the book* is the subject of the sentence where *easy* occurs predicatively. In (46a), *to buy* is an adjunct of the adjective *expensive* while in (46b) *to buy the dress* is the subject of the sentence where *expensive* occurs predicatively.

A *to*-infinitive adjective complement, on the contrary, cannot become the subject of a sentence.

(47) a. John is ready to do the work.

b. \*To do the work is ready

(48) a. Mary is eager to study abroad.

b. \*To study abroad is eager.

The use of *to do the work* in (48b) and *to study abroad* in (48b) in the subject position as a paraphrase of (47b) and (48b) respectively results

in ungrammaticality.<sup>1)</sup>

A *to*-infinitive adjective complement is also different from a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct in the meaning. A *to*-infinitive adjective complement generally has an active meaning while a *to*-infinitive adjective may have either an active or passive meaning or both an active and passive meaning. The difference in meaning can be seen in (25) - (28), which are rewritten below as (49) - (52).

- (49) John is ready to do the work.
- (50) Mary is eager to study abroad.
- (51) The book is easy to understand.
- (52) The dress is expensive to buy.

Sentence (49) and (50) have an active meaning, and (51) and (52) have a passive meaning.<sup>2)</sup>

The verbs *do* and *study* have *John* and *Mary* respectively as the specifiers, and the verbs *understand* and *buy* have other NPs instead of *the book* and *the dress* as their specifiers.

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1) The ungrammaticality of (47b) and (48b) is due to a semantic agreement. An adjective which s-selects a *to*-infinitive verb as its complement also s-selects its specifier. In line with Speas (1990), the adjectives *ready* in (47a) and *eager* in (48a) s-select *John* and *Mary* as their specifiers respectively. The adjectives require a specifier which has a [+human] feature, and *John* and *Mary* have the feature. Sentences (47b) and (48b) are not grammatical because the *to*-infinitive verbs, which become the specifiers of *ready* and *eager*, do not have the [+human] feature.

2) In relation to the meaning, a *to*-infinitive verb is said to have an ambiguous meaning (Fromkin and Rodman 1990). The *to*-infinitive verbs in (i) and (ii) may have an active or passive meaning.

- (i) The horse is ready to ride.
- (ii) Mary is easy to please.

Sentence (i) means either the horse is ready for someone to ride or the horse is ready to ride on the track, and sentence (ii) means either it is easy to please Mary or Mary has no problem in pleasing somebody. *To ride* in (i) is a complement of *ready*, and *to please* in (ii) is an adjunct of *easy*.

#### 4 Clause

The last kind of adjective complement and adjunct is a clause. The complements of the adjective *sure* in (53) and *afraid* in (54) are *that*-clauses.

(53) I am sure that John will complete the work on time.

(54) The children are afraid that the man may come again.

*That John will complete the work on time* and *that the man may come again* function as adjective complements. A *that*-clause which functions as an adjective complement is different from a *that*-clause which functions as an adjective adjunct like in (54) and (56).

(55) It is good that you came on time.

(56) It is wise that John cancelled the trip.

*That you came on time* and *that John cancelled the trip* are adjective adjuncts. A *that*-clause adjective adjunct is different from a *that*-clause adjective complement in that a *that*-clause adjective adjunct can become the subject in a paraphrase whereas a *that*-clause adjective complement cannot. Sentences (55) and (56) can be paraphrased into (57) and (58).

(57) That you came on time is good.

(58) That John cancelled the trip is wise.

Sentences (53) and (54), on the contrary, cannot be paraphrased with a *that*-clause as the subject.

(59) \*That John will complete the work on time is sure.

(60) \*That the man may come again the children are afraid.

Sentences (59) and (60) are not acceptable as paraphrases of (53) and (54).

It should be noted here that a *that*-clause can only become an adjective adjunct when the sentence subject is the introductory *it* like in (55) and (56). When the subject has a semantic reference like in (61a) and (62a), a *that*-clause as an adjective adjunct does not occur.

- (61) a. \*John is good that he never comes late.  
b. John is good in that he never comes late.  
(62) a. \*The test was easy that all the students passed it.  
b. The test was easy in that all the students passed it.

The clause should use *in that* like in (61b) and (62b) to function as an adjective adjunct.

A *that*-clause adjective complement is also different from a *that*-clause adjective adjunct in a cleft sentence. A *that*-clause adjective complement can be focused in a cleft sentence like in (63) and (64).

- (63) It is that John will complete the work on time that I am sure.  
(64) It is that the man may come again that the children are afraid.

A *that*-clause adjective adjunct, on the contrary, cannot be focused in a cleft sentence in the same way as a *that*-clause adjective complement.

- (65) a. \*It is that you came on time that it is good.  
b. It is that you came on time that is good.  
(66) a. \*It is that John cancelled the trip that it is wise.  
b. It is that John cancelled the trip that is wise.

In the cleft sentences, as seen in (65a) and (66a), the introductory *it* cannot be retained. The cleft sentences are only acceptable if the introductory *it* is dropped like in (65b) and (66b).

A *that*-clause adjective complement and a *that*-clause adjective adjunct are also different in that a *that*-clause adjective complement can

be questioned with *what* whereas a *that*-clause adjective adjunct cannot be questioned.

- (67) a. I am sure that John will complete the work on time.  
 b. What are you sure of?  
 (68) a. The children are afraid that the man may come again.  
 b. What are the children afraid of?  
 (69) a. It is good that you came on time.  
 b. \*What is it good?  
 (70) a. It is wise that John cancelled the trip.  
 b. \*What is it wise?

That John will complete his work on time in (67a) and that the man may come again in (68a) are the answers to (67b) and (68b) respectively. The questions are acceptable because they ask about an element which the adjectives *sure* and *afraid* s-select. Unlike a *that*-clause adjective complement, a *that*-clause adjective adjunct like in (69a) and (70a) cannot be questioned in any way.<sup>3)</sup> Sentences (69b) and (70b) are unacceptable.

A *that*-clause adjective complement is also different from a *that*-clause adjective adjunct in a pseudo-cleft sentence.

- (71) a. I am afraid that you drop the course.  
 b. What I am afraid is that you drop the course.  
 (72) a. It is bad that Mary sold her car.  
 b. \*What it is bad is that Mary sold her car.  
 c. What is bad is that Mary sold her car.

*That you drop the course* in (71a) is the complement of *afraid*, and the sentence can be paraphrased into (71b). *That Mary sold her car* in

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3) Questions (i) and (ii) are common questions, but the answers to the questions are not like (69a) and (70a) but like in (ib) and (iib).

- (i) a. What is good?  
 b. That you came on time is good.  
 (ii) a. What is wise?  
 b. That John cancelled the trip is wise.

(72a) is an adjunct. The paraphrase of (72a) is not (72b) but (72c). The subject of the matrix clause of (72a), *it*, should be dropped.

An adjective can also take an *if*-clause or *whether*-clause as its complement.

- (73) a. John is not sure if/whether he can finish his work on time  
or not.  
b. \*John is not sure that he can finish his work on time.

As *not sure* s-selects a clause with *if/whether*, the clause is certainly a complement of the adjective. As a complement, an *if/whether* clause can undergo the same syntactic processes as a *that*-clause.

- (74) \*If/Whether he can finish his work on time or not is not sure.  
(75) What is John not sure?

As can be seen in (74) and (75) the *if/whether*-clause cannot become the subject of a sentence, but it can be substituted with *what* to form a question.

An adjective cannot occur with an *if/whether* clause as its adjunct, but it may occur with a *so-that* clause as an adjunct. Sentences in (76) and (77) contain a *so-that* adjective adjunct.

- (76) John was so tired that he could not sleep well.  
(77) The test was so difficult that only a few students passed it.

*So* and *that* function as a compound conjunction and are written separately when they do not occur with an adjective or an adverb.

- (78) John did not come to the meeting so that he did not know the decision.  
(79) Mary has bought a computer so that she need not work in the computer lab anymore.

In (78) and (79) *so-that* forms clauses of result.

## 5. Conclusion

An adjective may take a PP, *to*-infinitive verb, and clause both as its complement and adjunct. The difference between a complement and adjunct is important because a PP, *to*-infinitive verb, and clause which function as a complement show syntactic behaviors which are different from those which function as an adjunct. The NP in a PP which functions as the complement can be substituted with *who* or *what* to form a question and can become the focus in a cleft sentence while the NP in a PP which functions as an adjunct cannot. A *to*-infinitive adjective complement can be substituted with *what* to form a question while a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct cannot. Furthermore, a *to*-infinitive adjective complement can appear in a cleft and pseudo-cleft sentence while a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct can only occur in a pseudo-cleft sentence when *what* also functions as the subject in a sentence where the adjective is the subject complement. In contrast, a *to*-infinitive adjective adjunct can become the subject of a sentence while a *to*-infinitive adjective complement cannot. A clause which functions as an adjunct can also become the subject in a sentence where the adjective is used predicatively while a clause which functions as a complement cannot. Finally, a clause which functions as a complement can be substituted with *what* to form a question but a clause which functions as an adjunct cannot.

In conclusion, as an adjective complement and adjective adjunct show different syntactic behaviors, a thorough discussion of adjective phrases should differentiate the two grammatical concepts. Only with the differentiation of the two concepts can the grammaticality and ungrammaticality of adjective phrases be explained.

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