

## Rapport de mission de Christopher DESURMONT

**Colloque International : « Les Déconnexions Forme / Sens et la syntaxe dite mensongère » ; sous l'égide du LERMA (EA 853), 31 mars et 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2011, Université de Provence, Aix-en-Provence.**

**Communication :**

**“Unclear predication in the <evaluative adjective + infinitive> construction.”**

**Résumé à la suite du programme.**

### Programme

**Jeudi 31 mars 2011, salle des Professeurs**

**10h Accueil des participants**

**10h15 Ouverture du colloque** en présence du Vice-Président du Secteur Lettres et Sciences Humaines, M. Xavier Lafon et/ou du Vice-Président du Conseil Scientifique, M. Denis Bertin, et du Directeur du LERMA, M. Gérard Hugues.

**Présidents de séance : Paul Larreya** (Université de Paris 13) & **Monique De Mattia-Viviès** (Aix-Marseille Université)

10h30-11h30 **Conférence plénière : Pierre Cotte** (Paris 4), *Hiérarchies.*

11h30-12h15 **Catherine Delesse** (Nancy 2), *Quel(s) sens pour les formes du type 'he was reported to V' ?*

12h30-14h **Déjeuner** (Buffet au Département d'anglais)

**Présidente de séance : Geneviève Girard-Gillet** (Université de Paris 3)

14h15-15h **Grégoire Lacaze** (Aix-Marseille 1), *Ce que la syntaxe tisse , la sémantique tend à l'effilocheur : étude de phénomènes de déconnexion forme-sens dans des énoncés de discours rapporté*

15h-15h45 **Paul Larreya** (Paris 13), *Le débordement du sens : quelques métonymies syntaxiques de l'anglais*

**Pause-café**

**Présidente de séance : Catherine Delesse** (Université de Nancy 2)

16h-16h45 **Christopher Desurmont** (Lille 3), *Unclear predication in the <evaluative adjective + infinitive> construction*

16h45-17h30 **Jean Albrespit** (Bordeaux 3), *Quand un pluriel cache un singulier : le cas de they*

**19h30 Dîner en ville**

## Vendredi 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2011, salle des Professeurs

**Président de séance : Pierre Cotte** (Université de Paris 4 - Sorbonne)

9h15-10h **Geneviève Girard-Gillet** (Paris 3), *Linéarité et hiérarchie : deux modes de construction du sens*

10h-10h45 **Bénédicte Guillaume** (Nice – Sophia Antipolis), *From ambiguity to deceptiveness : the case of hybrid subordinates in English*

**Pause-café**

**Présidente de séance : Sandrine Sorlin** (Université de Montpellier 3)

11h-11h45 **Ruth Menzies** (Aix-Marseille 1), *Imaginary languages*

11h45-12h30 **Sara Greaves** (Aix-Marseille 1), *Dissociating Form and Meaning in Bilingual Creative Writing and Creative Translation Workshops*

12h45-14h **Déjeuner** (Buffet au Département d'anglais)

**Président de séance : Jean Albrespit** (Université de Bordeaux 3)

14h15-15h **Christelle Lacassain-Lagoïn** (Pau), *It's not what it looks to be! Déconnexion entre forme et sens dans les énoncés avec verbe de perception à emploi dit "copule"*

15h-15h45 **Bertrand Richet** (Paris 3), *Or else, or so or what? A few Examples of the Staging of the Implicit in English*

**16h – Fin du colloque**

### Unclear predication in the <evaluative adjective + infinitive> construction.

1. This paper examines Evaluative Adjectives (EAs) like *brave*, *clever*, *crazy*, *foolish*, *silly*, *smart*, *stupid*, *wise* when followed by a to-infinitive clause (examples from the BNC) :

- (1) C8T 2147 I suppose I<sub>i</sub>'m silly PRO<sub>i</sub> to worry about that.'
- (2) Presupposition : I worry about that.
- (3) EU 1623 You<sub>i</sub>'d be crazy PRO<sub>i</sub> to sell today.
- (4) Presupposition : You have not yet sold today.
- (5) Implicature : You may be thinking of selling today

The main issue here is the nature of the predication, which means partaking in the ongoing discussion on “the entailment puzzle”, whereby, for example, *Jane is silly to worry* apparently does not entail that “*Jane is silly*”.

I adopt L.Kertz's (2006) “adjunct control analysis” of the “EA + toV” construction, who argues against a “relativized reading” of the adjectival predication, and assumes the infinitive clause to be AP-adjoined (T.Stowell, 1991), so neither an internal argument (or clausal complement) nor a VP adjunct. Kertz (2006) convincingly demonstrates (versus Stowell's 1991 “coercion analysis”) that predication in this construction is Individual-level (*prédicat d'individu*), not Stage-level (*prédicat épisodique*)<sup>1</sup>; a demonstration based on classic S-level tests<sup>2</sup>.

2. In order to try and capture the nature of the predication in this construction, this paper hinges on the question of presupposition (C.Barker, 2002) and preconstruction (D.Oshima, 2008), and on the syntactic link between the infinitive clause and the adjective.

I plead in favour of a stratified representation of the overall meaning of this <AP toV> construction, and assume that the impersonal <it be AP toV> cxn has more or less the same meaning; i.e. that both are essentially property-denoting, not eventive<sup>3</sup> :

(6) ALK 27 However, I believe it would be foolish PRO [for anyone / for you ] to allow such an assertion to remain unchallenged.

(7) Presupposition (if PRO is situationally controlled) : You have not (yet) allowed such an assertion to remain unchallenged

(8) Implicature: You may be tempted to allow such an assertion to remain unchallenged.

(9) Preconstruction : ANY X who allows such an assertion to remain unchallenged is foolish.

However, I claim that the nature of the predication remains “unclear” in spite of its I-level nature, and that this has the possible advantage of enabling the speaker to pronounce a judgment without committing themselves as they would with a basic EA.

3. The propositional content of the infinitive clause (p) in the EA + toV construction is usually said to have presupposition status (Wilkinson, 1970)<sup>4</sup>; which implies that the main clause predicate is factive. However, it seems that not all EA + to V sentences presuppose p or non p.

If the main verb is in the indicative mood as in (1), p is presupposed to be true. If the main verb is in the conditional mood as in (3), it is non-p that is presupposed to be true, and the same observation

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<sup>1</sup> For Barker (2002), Feynman is stupid to dance like that (2b) does not entail that Feynman is stupid (2a). For Landau (2006), *It was clever of John to leave the party* (13b), signifies a property that is temporally bound.

<sup>2</sup> Carlson (1977), Milsark (1974, 1977), Grimshaw (1990), Kratzer (1995).

<sup>3</sup> This is how K.Yagi (2006) analyses the impersonal cxn *It is silly of him to believe her* (10b) : ‘The preposition *of* as in (10b) is used to specify who is *silly*, in other words, (10b) is a statement about *him*, not the event as a whole’.

<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson (1970) remarks that *Feynman was stupid to dance on the table* (18a) and its negative counterpart *Feynman wasn't stupid to dance on the table* (18b) both entail that *Feynman danced*.

seems to apply whether the empty PRO subject is syntactically controlled as in (1) or not as in (6) where PRO is either arbitrarily or situationally controlled (*for anyone to / for you to*). In (14), the content of the infinitive clause does not seem to a presupposition status.

One may wonder whether the nature of the adjectival predication is the same when p is presupposed (10), when what is presupposed is non-p (12), or when there is no presupposition (because the predicate is non-factive) as in (14) :

(10) K8V 3545 Silly PRO to be jealous, everyone knew Rose was no chaste angel.

(11) Presupposition : Someone is jealous.

(12) CCE 653 We<sub>i</sub> would be foolish PRO<sub>i</sub> to believe that nothing good could come out of modernity.

(13) Presupposition (in the infinitive) : We do not (yet/really) believe that nothing good could come out of modernity.

(14) CJA 2150 You<sub>i</sub>'re way too smart PRO<sub>i</sub> to be driving a truck. non factive

(15) Presupposition (in the infinitival) : none

Although the subject (you) may well be driving a truck (p), this is not part of the “conceptual meaning” of the sentence, because the possible truth of p is not part of the truth condition of the sentence as a whole, as can be seen through a coordination test :

(16) You<sub>i</sub>'re way too smart PRO<sub>i</sub> to be driving a truck, so don't take the job.

4. The to-V clause right of a disposition adjective (DA) like *eager, ready, willing* – eg. *They are eager to come* – has been shown to be the DA's internal argument (i.e., a clausal complement), and the “DA + toV” construction is eventive (it passes all the classic S-level tests); while the EA's infinitival is AP-adjoined and the predication is I-level (*prédicat d'individu*)<sup>5</sup>.

The aspectual marker <be + -ing> can be incompatible even with an S-level predicate; for example, it is incompatible with disposition adjectives (DAs) : *They are being eager to come*. However, the following contrast implying EAs may still be significant :

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| (17) Jane is silly.                            | Basic EA   |
| (18) Jane is being silly                       | be + -ing  |
| (19) Jane is silly to behave like that.        | Derived EA |
| (20) *Jane is being silly to behave like that. | * be -ing  |

Basic EAs are compatible with *be -ing*, while derived EAs are not (20). Now in as much as <be -ing> has dynamic and thematic implications, non grammaticality in (20) would suggest that the controlling NP-subject cannot be assigned the agent role in the event described by the infinitival (no intentionality); which in turn suggests that the derived EA construction is not fundamentally eventive, but property-denoting.

5. Barker (2002) distinguishes three subtypes of “stupid adjectives” (lucky, stupid, smart) on the basis of the following criteria : sentience (the subject must be capable of volition), discretion (it is within the power of the subject to choose to bring about the situation described by the infinitive), intentionality (the subject intends for the situation described by the infinitive to come about). He claims that of these three adjectives, only *smart* implies intentionality, the other two being “neutral” in this respect. Now assuming these distinctions to be correct, one notices that the “intentionality” feature still does not allow <be -ing> to be associated with *be* as main verbal predicate, but it does allow association of <be -ing> with another main verbal predicate such as *look* in (21) :

(21) FM7 403 Right I'll just see who's looking smart to start.

6. Kertz (2006) compares (22) and (23) and claims that while the EA's infinitival is (indeed) AP-adjoined (Stowell, 1991), the PP with gerund modifier (*in + V-ing*) is a case of VP-adjunction :

<sup>5</sup> ‘Evaluative adjectives like *smart* form a coherent semantic and syntactic class, distinct from ‘normal’ control adjectives like *eager*. Evaluative adjectives are one-place property-denoting predicates, which retain their individual-level reading when combined with an infinitival clause.’ (Kertz, 2006).

(22) The government was [<sub>AP</sub> smart] [<sub>CP</sub> to bring the trial to Houston] AP modifier

(23) The government [<sub>VP</sub> was smart] [<sub>PP</sub> in bringing the trial to Houston] VP modifier

Regardless of the level at which adjunction occurs, wh-movement in question formation is not felicitous (24, 25), suggesting an adjunct-island effect<sup>6</sup>. Wh-movement in question formation is only fully acceptable in the “DA + toV” construction (26) :

(24) ? Where was the government smart in bringing the trial? EA

(25) ? Where was the government smart to bring the trial?

(26) Where was the government eager to bring the trial? DA

The “DA + toV” cxn is not affected by this restriction as it is a clausal complement, not an adjunct. As for preposing of the complete adjunct, it is allowed for the gerund modifier (27), but not for the *toV* modifier (28), and Kertz (2006) sees this as a possible indication of a difference in adjunction sites (VP-adjoined vs. AP-adjoined) :

(27) In bringing the trial to Houston, the government was smart.

(28) \*To bring the trial to Houston, the government was smart.

This grammatical contrast seems to suggest a looser semantic link between the VP adjunct and the adjective than between the AP adjunct and the adjective; and if this is so, then the nature of the adjectival predication may not be exactly the same.

7. Analysing the <EA + toV> construction, D.Oshima (2008) calls upon an “expectation operator” from “expectation modal logic”. Thus, a sentence like (29) would be paraphrased as in (30) :

(29) CS0 223 It is silly PRO to exaggerate differences when the similarities are also significant.

(30) In view of the normal course of events, ANY X who exaggerates differences when the similarities are also significant is silly.

It seems to me that this sort of interpretation has several advantages:

1° Predication with a derived EA is thus shown to be based on preconstruction.

2° It fits in nicely with the unclear nature of the empty PRO subject in impersonal constructions like (29), where there is either arbitrary control (for anyone to), or situational control (for you to).

3° It implies individual-level interpretation, but applied indirectly “to any X who has the property of *exaggerating differences when the similarities are also significant*” (and who therefore identifies with the empty PRO subject).

8. The infinitival content sets the temporal frame within which the predication applies without modifying the meaning of the adjective, implying an intersective use of the adjective. The evaluative adjective denotes the way the subject is judged by the speaker for their real or possible participation in the event. Within the eventive and therefore temporal framework set up by the infinitive clause, a judgment is being pronounced. It appears to me that temporal boundedness does not entail a “relativized reading”. Through participation in the event, the subject’s behaviour or attitude reveals a property that is identified with a preconstructed adjectival notion (*cleverness, boldness, craziness, foolishness, silliness, wisdom* or whatever), and a judgment is thus rendered possible. This leads me to conclude that there is no incompatibility (and therefore no contradiction) between temporal boundedness and individual-level predication; i.e., that temporal boundedness does not entail a “relativized” (subjective) reading of the adjectival predication.

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<sup>6</sup> ISLAND CONDITION (on Movement Rules)

Subjects and Adjuncts are islands; Complements are not.

The “Island Condition” implies that ‘constituents can be extracted out of Complement Phrases, but not out of Subject/adjunct phrases’ (Radford 1988 : 487).

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