Tough constructions in English

(Levine, 2000)

Course on "Locality of grammatical relations"
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Classical arguments that *for us* is a PP complement of *easy*

The following arguments are the principle bases for the claim that *tough* predicates select the control complement structure, along with a brief indication of why these arguments fail to establish the point.

Major Claims

- none of the classical arguments for treating *for Mary* in *John is easy for Mary to please* as a PP are borne out by the full set of relevant data;
- there is a set of arguments which point unequivocally to clausal status for *for Mary to please*;
- this analysis however requires that the CONTENT description of *tough* predicates have access to the index specifications of the clausal subject *Mary*. So information about the subject must be able to propagate extraclausally.

Argument 1

There are semantic/pragmatic restrictions on the post-*for* NP that can easily be imposed if this NP is an argument of the *tough* predicate, but not if it's the subject of a clausal complement.

Argument 2

Truly clausal infinitivals can be involved in extraposition relations with respect the VP that these infinitivals appear as subjects of:

(1) a. It is surprising for a woman to act that way.
     b. For a woman to act that way is surprising.

On the other hand, $tough$ infinitivals with *for* NP strings cannot:

(2) a. It would be tough for a woman to act that way.
     b. * For a woman to act that way would be tough.

Therefore such $tough$ infinitivals are not clausal.

Argument 3

The stress pattern of *Robin is easy (for us) to please* is exactly what would be predicted by the operation of the Nuclear Stress Rule from SPE if there were no cycle on the complement of *easy*, i. e., if *(for us) to please* were nonclausal. Thus phonological evidence is taken to provide independent confirmation of the syntactically supported PP VP analysis.

Argument 4

The $for + $ NP sequence following the $tough$ predicate can apparently undergo topicalization (Chomsky, 1973), e.g.:

(3) a. It is easy for us to learn Latin.
     b. For us, it is easy to learn Latin.

Lasnik and Fiengo (1974):

(4) a. John is easy for Bill to please.
     b. For Bill, John is easy to please.

Seemingly well-motivated conclusion: this displaceable sequence must be a constituent.

Why Argument 4 fails

The evidence is actually quite clear that these 'fronted' PPs not only need not be topicalized constituents, but $cannot$ be.

- $Worth$ shows the same pattern as in (3), (4) but does not tolerate 'in situ for NP;
- $Too/enough$ missing object constructions pattern parallel to (3), (4) but MUST have clausal complement structure;
- the French $difficile$ construction patterns parallel to (3), (4) but does not tolerate 'in situ' $pour$ NP;
- The distribution of 'displaced' for NP in English $tough$ parallels that in the $worth$ construction and adverbial PP distribution generally, but does not parallel the topicalization possibilities of uncontroversial PP[for].

What *worth* tells us

(5) a. John isn't worth talking to (*him).
    b. For John, Mary isn't worth talking to.
    c. Mary isn't worth talking to, for John.
    d. *Mary isn't worth for John talking to.

(6) a. Robin isn't worth (you) getting so upset about.
    b. Leslie isn't worth your spending so much time resenting.

(7) I can't get over ($\left\{\begin{array}{c} \text{you} \\ \text{your} \end{array}\right\}$) having driven so dangerously this morning.

(8) a. For you Robin isn't worth talking to.
    b. Robin, for you, isn't worth talking to.
    c. Robin isn't, for you, worth talking to.
   d. Robin isn't worth talking to you, for you.

What *too/enough* constructions tell us

(11) a. This park$_i$ is too small for us to have a proper picnic in (it$_i$).
    b. This box is small enough for us to hide (it$_i$) inside the piano.

(12) a. The park you describe sounds too small for there to have been a riot in.
    b. Like many politicians, Robin was too stupid for there to have been any point in arguing with.

• Neither control nor raising is possible; therefore clausal structure.

(13) a. For Bill$_j$, [this problem]$_i$ is too abstract [$_{\mathrm{VP[CONT|ARG1}\ j]}$ to solve t$_i$.]
    b. [This problem]$_i$ is too abstract [$_{\mathrm{VP[CONT|ARG1}\ j]}$ to solve t$_i$, for Bill$_j$].
    (data from Lasnik and Fiengo, 1974, p. 538)
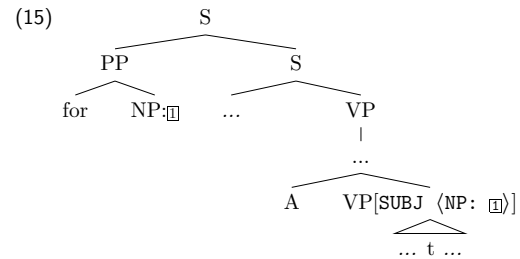
(9) a. Certainly, Robin is a spy.
    b. Robin certainly is a spy.
    c. Robin is certainly a spy.
    d. Robin is a spy, certainly.
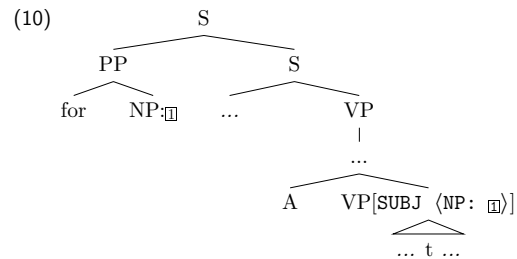
(10)

(14) a. *For there, the park you describe sounds too small to have been a riot in.
    b. *The park you describe sounds too small to have been a riot in, for there.

(15)

What *difficile* tells us

Major properties of *difficile*:

(i) There can be no post–adjective *pour* complement in this construction:

(16) * Ce livre est facile pour Jean–Jaques à lire.
      This book is easy for Jean–Jaques to read.

(ii) Yet it is possible to use the MO *difficile* construction to translate *This book is easy for Jean–Jaques to read*. Although no *pour* PP is possible as a complement to the adjectival head, both preposed and postposed PPs are possible:

(17) a. Pour Jean–Jaques, ce livre est facile à lire.
     b. Ce livre est facile à lire, pour Jean–Jaques.
     c. This book is easy for Jean–Jaques to read.'

<div align="right">13</div>

What *tough* constructions themselves tell us

(20) a.   For me, Robin is easy to please.
     b.   Robin, for me, is easy to please.
     c.   Robin is, for me, easy to please.
     d.   Robin is easy to please, for me.

(21) a.   I am worried about Robin.
     b.   About Robin, I am worried.
   c. *?? I about Robin am worried.
     d. *?? I am about Robin worried.

(22) a.   Leslie$_i$ is waiting for Sandy [$_{VP[SUBJ|INDEX\ i]}$ before leaving].
     b.   * Leslie, for Sandy, is waiting before leaving.
     c.   * Leslie is, for Sandy, waiting before leaving.
     d.   * Leslie is waiting before leaving, for Sandy.

where in the second through fourth examples, the assumed reading is nonbenefactive.

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(18) Il est difficile { pour / à / for } Marie de contenter Jean.
     It is easy   Marie to make happy Jean

'It is easy for Marie to make Jean happy.'

(19)
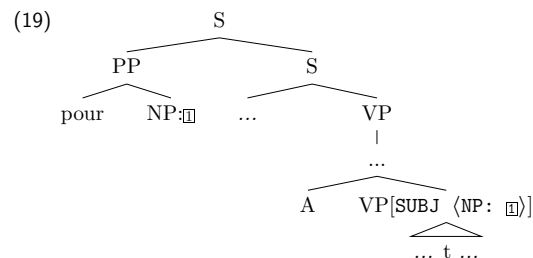
Why the clausal analysis is preferable to the control analysis

- An argument from the comparative construction
- An argument from extraposition
- An argument from discontinuous nominal dependencies
- An argument from parasitic gaps

Moral of the story: where it is possible to distinguish X PP[for] VP from X S[*inf*], *tough* complement structure parallels the latter, not the former.

<div align="right">16</div>

The argument from comparatives

(23) Robin would be easier for US to bribe ___with favors than for YOU to coerce ___with threats.

(24) a. Robin would good for you to hire.
   b. Robin$_i$ would be [$_{AP}$ [$_A$ good][$_{PP}$ for you] [$_{VP}$ to hire ___$_i$]] (i.e., it would be good for you if someone were to hire Robin
   c. Robin$_i$ would be [$_{AP}$ [$_A$ good][$_S$ for [$_S$ [you] [$_{VP}$ to hire ___$_i$]]]] (i.e., it would be good in general if you were to hire Robin)

(25) a. Robin would be better for you to hire immediately than for us to get into drawn-out negotiations with. (Sole reading: Robin is a person such that it would be better in general if you were to hire her immediately than it would be if we were to get into drawn-out negotiations with her.)
   b. Robin would be [$_{AP}$ [$_A$ better] [$_S$ for [$_S$ you to hire ___immediately] than [$_S$ for [$_S$ us to get into drawn-out negotiations with ___]]
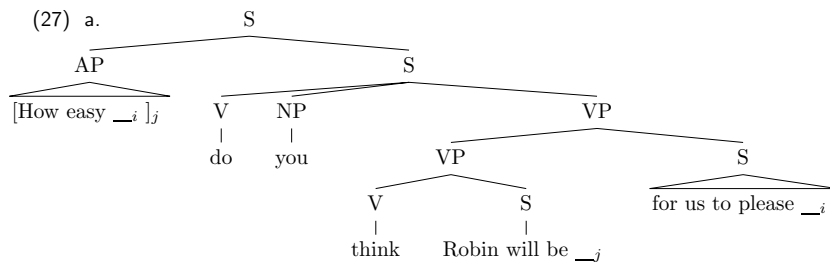
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b.
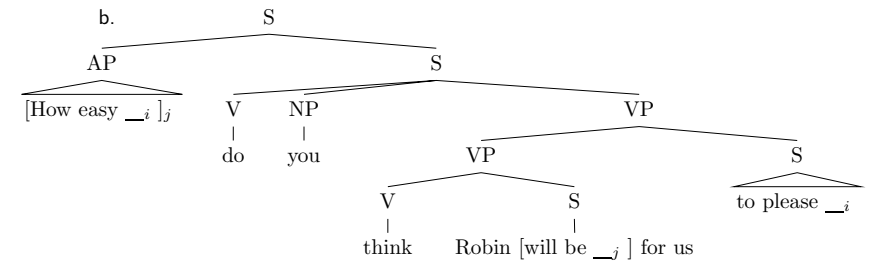
(28) a. Robin would be better for us to hire.
   b. How much better to hire would Robin be, for us?
   c. How much better would Robin be (,d'ya think,) for us to hire?

(29) How easy would Robin be(,d'ya think,) [for us to please]?

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The argument from extraposition

(26) How easy do you think Robin will be for us to please?

(27) a.

18

The argument from NP-internal selectional dependencies

(30) John would be a good person for you to hire.

(31) a.   John is a person such that your hiring John would be good.
   b. # John is a person such that someone hiring John would be good for you.

Conclusion: the structure here must be [A N [for [. . .]]].

Given:

(32) John is an easy person for us to please.

(33) John is a person such that we and us pleasing John are in the easy-relation.

20

The argument from parasitic gaps

(34) a. These books proved tough for critics of __to praise __sincerely.
    b. That hypothesis was easy for opponents of __to poke holes in __.
    c. Certainly it's the kind of policy that would be logical for opponents of __to pretend to like __.

(35) a. This policy had cost opponents a lot of effort to block __successfully.
    b. This cake will take chefs a lot of time to get the ingredients for __.

(36) a. * Such hypotheses$_i$ take critics of __$_i$ a long time to refute __$_i$.
    b. * This policy$_i$ cost [opponents of __$_i$] a lot of credibility to attack __$_i$ publically.

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(37)

Semantic interpretation in a clausal analysis
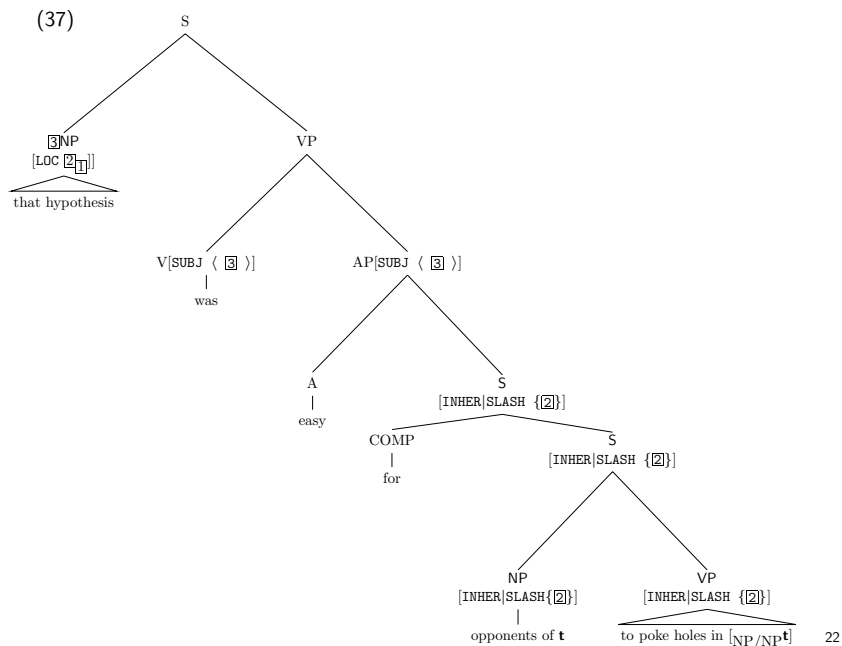
Guyanese Creole (Winford, 1993, p. 335 & pp. 340–341)

(38) I wuda gud fu mi fu i laas all i moni.
    'It would have been good for me for him to lose all his money.'

(39) I haad fu $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{am} \\ *\text{i} \end{array} \right\}$ fu laas all dat moni.
    'It's hard on him to lose all that money.'

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(40) a. Jan iizi fi pliiz.
      'Jan's easy to please.'

    b. Dem piiz-de haad fi shel.
      'Those peas are hard to shell.'

    c. Taiga na bin iizi fi kech.
      'Jaguars weren't easy to catch.'

(41) a. Savi haad fu $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{i} \\ *\text{am} \end{array} \right\}$ fuul. 'Savi$_i$'s hard for her/him$_j$ to fool.'

    b. Jan iizi fu $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Mieri} \\ \text{i} \\ *\text{am} \end{array} \right\}_j$ biit. 'John$_i$'s easy for $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Mary} \\ \text{him/her} \end{array} \right\}$ to beat.'
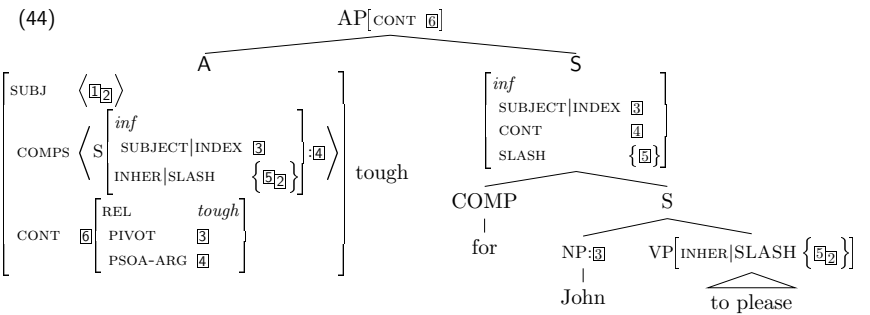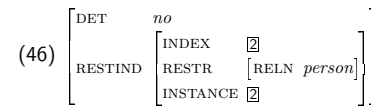
The semantics of English *tough*

- The syntactic evidence from GC and Standard English make it clear that the data strongly suggest the clausal analysis of *tough* rather than the control analysis is correct;
- but this analysis in turn entails that information about the subject of the embedded infinitival *tough* complement clause be available to a selecting head, and indeed GC provides an existence proof that such extraclausal propagation of information about 'buried' subjects exists, whatever the mechanism involved turns out to be;
- the most conservative approach to this mechanism might be the SUBJECT feature used by Kiss and Meurers in work already discussed, but this feature is not understood to contain index information. What is wanted in fact seems to be something more like the AGR feature argued for on completely independent morphosyntactic grounds in Kathol (1999), which explicitly included both case specification (like Meurer's SUBJECT feature needed for remote case assignment in certain German infinitival clauses) and a value for INDEX (required for *tough* on the analysis just presented).

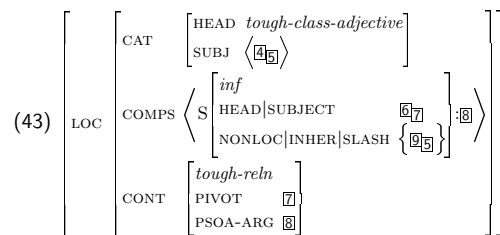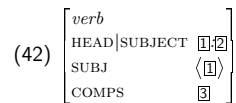I will in fact assume that these two features are the same feature, but will use the name

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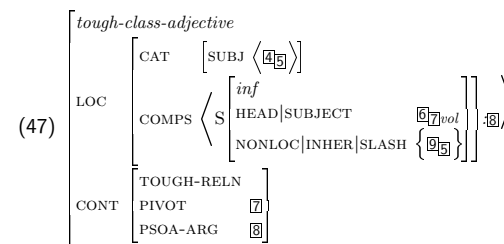
SUBJECT as a pointer to the clausal status of the *tough* complement that I've argued for in the preceding. The Meurer/Kathol feature is in fact the key to reconciling the clausal syntax of *tough* complementation with the semantic accessibility of the buried subject index.

(42)
$$\begin{bmatrix} verb \\ \text{HEAD|SUBJECT} & \boxed{1}{:}\boxed{2} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \langle \boxed{1} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} & \boxed{3} \end{bmatrix}$$

(43)
$$\text{LOC} \begin{bmatrix} \text{CAT} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & tough\text{-}class\text{-}adjective \\ \text{SUBJ} & \langle \boxed{4}\boxed{5} \rangle \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{COMPS} & \left\langle \text{S} \begin{bmatrix} inf \\ \text{HEAD|SUBJECT} & \boxed{6}\boxed{7} \\ \text{NONLOC|INHER|SLASH} & \{\boxed{9}\boxed{5}\} \end{bmatrix}{:}\boxed{8} \right\rangle \\ \text{CONT} & \begin{bmatrix} tough\text{-}reln \\ \text{PIVOT} & \boxed{7} \\ \text{PSOA-ARG} & \boxed{8} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

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(44)

(45) Robin is easy for NOBODY to please.

(46)
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{DET} & no \\ \text{RESTIND} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{INDEX} & \boxed{2} \\ \text{RESTR} & [\text{RELN } person] \\ \text{INSTANCE} & \boxed{2} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

A final wrinkle

(47)
$$\begin{bmatrix} tough\text{-}class\text{-}adjective \\ \text{LOC} \begin{bmatrix} \text{CAT} & [\text{SUBJ} \langle \boxed{4}\boxed{5} \rangle] \\ \text{COMPS} & \left\langle \text{S} \begin{bmatrix} inf \\ \text{HEAD|SUBJECT} & \boxed{6}\boxed{7}vol \\ \text{NONLOC|INHER|SLASH} & \{\boxed{9}\boxed{5}\} \end{bmatrix}{:}\boxed{8} \right\rangle \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{CONT} \begin{bmatrix} \text{TOUGH-RELN} \\ \text{PIVOT} & \boxed{7} \\ \text{PSOA-ARG} & \boxed{8} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

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