

PROGRESS REPORT NO. 4

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FURTHER ON COPULA SENTENCES

The following sentences have very similar superficial structures, but considerably different underlying ones:

- (1) The chasm is a mile across
- (2) The chasm is a mile away
- (3) The chasm is a mile deep

One may note immediately that corresponding to (1) there are the sentences:

- (4) There is a mile across the chasm
- (5) It is a mile across the chasm

but there are no such sentences corresponding to (2) and (3):

- (6) \*There is a mile away the chasm
- (7) \*It is a mile away the chasm
- (8) \*There is a mile deep the chasm
- (9) \*It is a mile deep the chasm

And, while all the predicates a mile across, a mile away and a mile deep may be used as post-nominal modifiers, as in a chasm (which is) a mile across, etc., ~~the~~ only a mile deep can occur pre-nominally, forming the first part of a sort of nominal compound: a mile-deep chasm (similarly, a two-mile deep chasm, a thousand-foot deep chasm, etc.).

The existence of sentences (1) and (5) would suggest an analysis which derives (1) from (5) by means of the rule T (cf. Prog. Rep. 2, p. 2). In this example, NP in VP the noun phrase the chasm replaces initial it in (5).

Sentence (5), in turn, has as its underlying structure:

(10) [[ it [ a mile [for to] <sup>AUX</sup> be across the chasm] ]  
<sub>S NP</sub>

AUX [be] ]  
<sub>VP S</sub>

and is derived from (10) directly by T<sup>si</sup> and deletion  
<sub>comp sep</sub>  
of for and to be. Despite the deletion of for, however,  
the subject noun phrase of the embedded sentence, a mile,  
does not replace the initial it.

If we now consider the pair of sentences:

(11) It is a long way from Chicago to New York

(12) New York is a long way from Chicago

we see that it is possible to postulate an underlying  
structure for them similar to (10), from which (11) may  
be derived by complement separation, and (12) by T<sup>NP in VP</sup>  
together with the deletion of the preposition to. The  
sentence which is the complement to it in (11) corresponds  
to the simple sentence:

(13) There is a long way from Chicago to New York

An immediate difficulty, however, arises when we consider  
such sentences as:

(14) It is far from Chicago to New York

(15) New York is far from Chicago

where there is no corresponding simple sentence:

(16) \*There is far from Chicago to New York

One way out of this difficulty is to say that the far in

sentences (14) and (15) is a degenerate noun phrase, of something like a great distance; alternatively, one might wish to argue that sentences with far as subject are obligatorily subordinate. A third alternative is to say that the embedded sentence is:

(17) From Chicago to New York for to be far  
and similarly the embedded sentence in (10) is:

(18) Across the chasm for to be a mile

Adopting this solution, however, would require us to introduce a special transformation to get the correct order of constituents in sentences like (11) and (12), and we would still be unable to account directly for the sentences:

(19) It is just down the street to the ballpark

(20) The ballpark is just down the street

We shall not concern ourselves further with this problem here.

Looking again at the triples of sentences (1), (4), (5) and (11) - (13), we observe that they all have a characteristic in common: the predicate of the embedded sentence (or of the simple sentence in the case of (4) and (13)) embodies a measure of distance from one point to another, and consequently must be expressed in terms of coordinate preposition phrases/having prepositions from ... to, down ... to (as in (19)), or in terms of a simple preposition phrase having a preposition like across or around, which themselves embody a measurement of distance from one point to another. Other prepositions which may be used in these constructions coordinate with to are across, ahead, below.

off (of), out of and up, but not at, in, near, or on. In addition, the particle out may be so used, as in the sentences:

(21) There are six miles out to the boat

(22) It is six miles out to the boat

(23) The boat is six miles out

These preposition phrases may also be used with noun phrases of time, as in the sentences:

(24) There is a long time from now to the show

(25) It is a long time from now to the show

(26) The show is a long time from now-

It should be noted that the following two sentences (unlike (1) and (4)) are unrelated:

(27) There are two feet under the boat

(28) The boat is two feet under

In sentence (28), two feet under is a postposition phrase of the same type as a mile away in (2), whereas in (27), under the boat is a preposition phrase, but unlike across the chasm, does not involve a measure of distance from one point to another. (27) may not be used as an embedded sentence in the structure (10); thus we do not get:

(29) \*It is two feet under the boat

where the initial it is not a referential pronoun.

Finally, we remark that the phrase a mile deep is a special kind of adjective phrase involving an adjective modified by a noun phrase (perhaps to be viewed as a degenerate adverbial phrase of distance). The following is an exhaustive list of adjectives in English which can be modified by phrases of distance in this way: deep, high, long, square, tall, thick, wide. Also old may be modified by a time phrase as in six years old.