



PREPOSITION STRANDING IN ENGLISH: A PROBLEM AND A MYSTERY

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English has the option of stranding prepositions (Ps) when unbounded rules apply, or pied piping them along with a moved constituent. There are mysterious and hitherto undescribed constraints on the stranding option, as we shall show. The possibility of extraction is not at issue in our discussion, since as readers may verify for themselves, in every case of ungrammaticality we mention, pied piping in the same structure would yield well-formed results.

We note first that Ps cannot be extracted immediately before certain phrasal categories. In (1) the bracketed string that follows the stranded P would generally be analyzed as a VP.

- (1)a. *These chairs, which two of ___ [are broken], are too old.
- b. *I saw the box which Amy said out of ___ [came a toad].

In (2) an adjective phrase (AP) is involved.

- (2)a. *Who does the chair feel to ___ [very hard]?

(Cf. Who does the chair feel [very hard] to ___?)

Finally, in (3) the P is stranded immediately before an NP.

- (3)a. *Which room is there in ___ [a strange beast]?

(Cf. Which room is there [a strange beast] in ___?)

- b. *Pam, we received from ___ [several long letters].

(Cf. Pam, we received [several long letters] from ___.)

- c. *Who did you mention to ___ [that it was too late]?

- d. *Who were you shown by ___ [that the door was stuck]?

On the other hand, it is permissible for Ps to be stranded before two other phrasal categories: PPs, as illustrated in (4), and instances of S that are not direct-object NPs, e.g. extra-posed Ss and complements that are not direct objects, as shown in (5).

- (4)a. Who did you talk to ___ [about Dot]?

- b. Who did you talk about ___ [about Dot]?

- c. Who was the money kept by ___ [in a vault]?

- d. What was the money kept in ___ [by Jack]?

- e. Jim, I'm proud of ___ [for speaking up].

- (5)a. Who did you mention it to ___ [that it was too late]?

- b. Who does it suggest nothing to ___ [that Max vanished]?

- c. Who isn't it apparent to ___ [that this example is fine]?

- d. Who were you persuaded by ___ [that I was wrong]? (cf. 3d)

We could provide a description of these facts, though hardly an explanation for them, by formulating each unbounded rule in question so as not to leave Ps behind in the environments ___VP, ___AP, and ___NP. The problem is to find some way of expressing the generalization that this restriction holds for each unbounded rule of English grammar; in this respect it is like the problem of providing a unified account of island phenomena.

We turn now to a consideration of other facts for which we have scarcely an inkling of a solution. There are a number of quite unexpected contrasts between cases in which Ps can be stranded before complement clauses and cases in which they cannot.

One class of unstrandable Ps comprises those in the environment it..._S, where the S cannot grammatically replace the it; that is, clefts as in (6) and Extraposition cases with seem-type verbs as in (7).

(6) *Who was it to ___ [that you spoke]?

(7) *Who does it appear to ___ [that this sentence is fine]?

The rest are cases in which either Raising or Equi is involved, so that the complement clause is lacking an NP (subject or object) linked to the subject of the higher clause. Examples are given in (8).

(8)a. *Who does this sentence appear to ___ [to be fine]?

b. *Who is the library difficult for ___ [to get to]?

c. *Who did you promise to ___ [to be quiet]?

d. *Who did you admit to ___ [to [being unhappy]]?

The mystery, then, is why there should be contrasts of the sort we show paired in the following examples, where presumed movement sites are indicated as indexed dashes, and presumed Equi deletion sites are shown as indexed zeroes.

(9)a. Who_i is it apparent to ____i [that you're a spy]?

b. *Who_i does it appear to ____i [that you're a spy]?

(10)a. Who_i is it hard for ____i [Ø_i even to be polite to us]?

b. *Who_i are we_j hard for ____i [Ø_i even to be polite to ____j]?

(11)a. Who_i are you_j considered by ____i [____j to be a spy]?

b. *Who_i do you_j seem to ____i [____j to be a spy]?

(12)a. Who_i did you_j appeal to ____i [Ø_i to be gentle]?

b. *Who_i did you_j appear to ____i [____j to be gentle]?

(13)a. Who_i did you_j yell to ____i [Ø_i to keep quiet]?

b. *Who_i did you_j promise to ____i [Ø_j to keep quiet]?

(14)a. Who_i did you_j laugh at ____i [for [Ø_i being mad]?

b. *Who_i did you_j admit to ____i [to [Ø_j being mad]?

We stress again that it is stranding, not extraction, that is at issue. What are the constraints on P stranding that are at work here?