

# A Syntactic Study of "It's+A+P+NP+ToV"

*Richard W.S.Huang\**

## ABSTRACT

This short paper attempts to investigate whether or not the two patterns which are formed by the adjectives "kind" and "difficult" respectively are different in their deep structures even though they share the same surface structure. The pattern which are formed with the "difficult"-group adjectives is termed as Type A; the "kind"-group, Type B. The paper also aims to demonstrate the assumptions that I propose to be acceptable, and to illustrate some interesting points. Certainly, there are some minor details neglected intentionally. I would like to leave these minor questions open.

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In English, there are particular sentence constructions which initiate sentences with expletives, introductory words, such as, "it" and "there". I am especially concerned with the former. "It" can introduce sentences like below :

- (1) It was difficult for me to find the house.
- (2) It was silly of you to make such a mistake.

I assume that both sentences derive from different deep structures. For the sake of simplicity, I classify sentence (1) "it is + ADJ + for-to" as type A and (2) "it is + ADJ + of-to" as type B. I will discuss the following aspects comparatively:

- (a) underlying structure of both sentence types.
- (b) the characteristics of abjectives in both types.

If I replace sentences (1) and (2) with the following sentences, it would make the contrastive sentences more similar.

- (3) It is difficult for you to help Bill.
- (4) It is kind of you to help Bill.

In the light of phrase structure rules, the sentences seem to be identical.

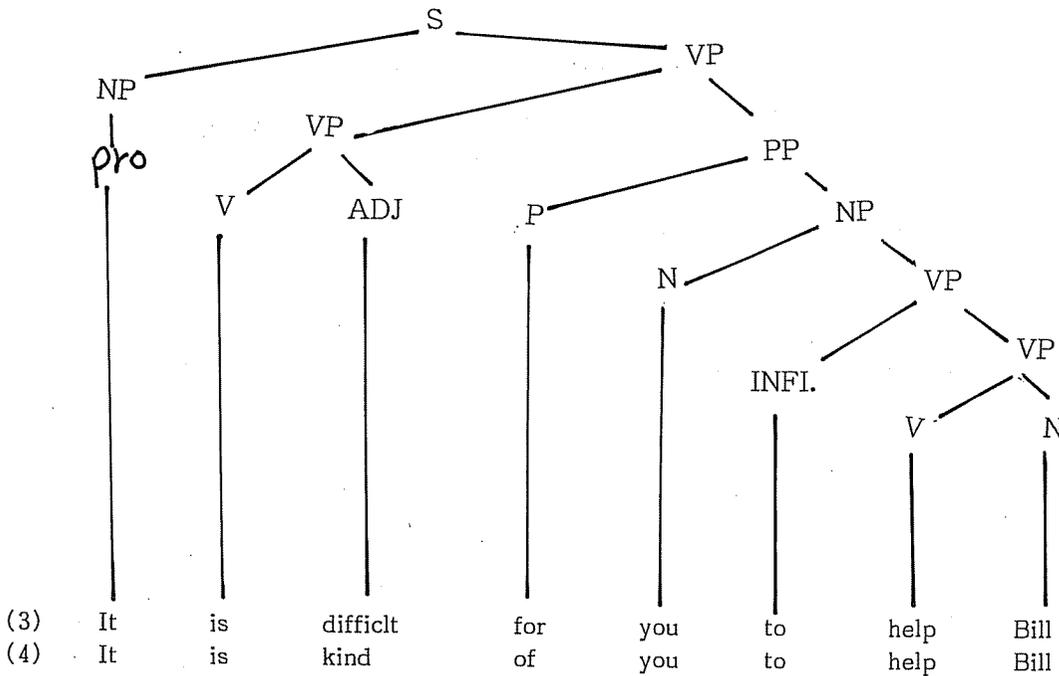


DIAGRAM 1.

Diagram 1 illustrates only surface structure, since that expletive "it" does not exist in surface structure<sup>2</sup>. Recently many a linguist has considered for-to construction a complement construction. Therefore, the phrase structure rules cannot explain the difference between type A and type B.

As Paul Roberts indicates, the underlying structure of sentence (3) should be (5)

(5) For you to help Bill is difficult. He points out that "The it transformation that puts it at the beginning of the sentence and a subordinate clause subject at the end is now familiar. This transformation operates also for the for-to construction:

For us to be there by eight is impossible.

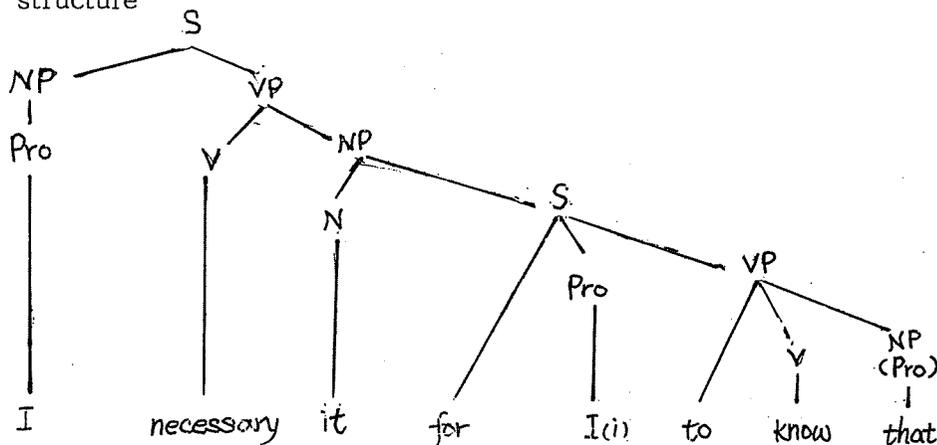
It is impossible for us to be there by eight.

The transformation is not obligatory. Both of the sentences in the example are grammatical. But its transform is clearly the more common, the more natural."<sup>3</sup>

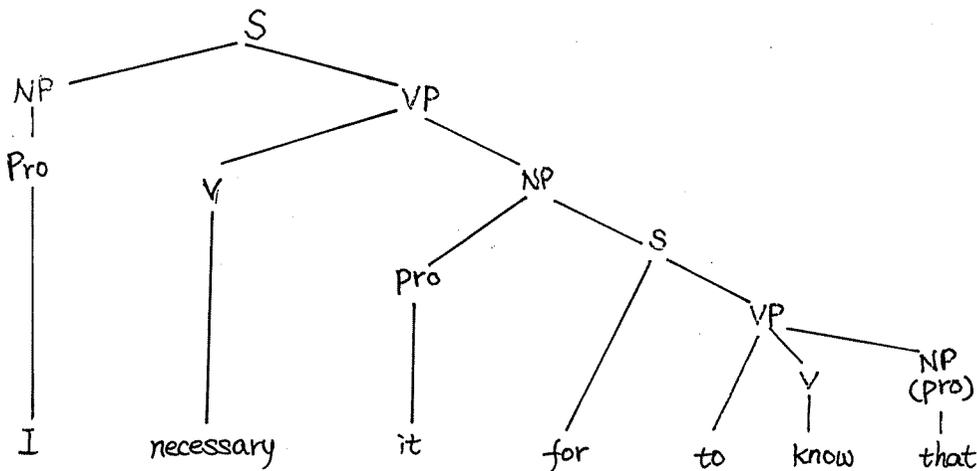
Lakoff treats the construction with a different and complicated way, although he also considers "for" as a complementizer. The following is his illustration:<sup>4</sup>

(6) It is necessary for me to know that.

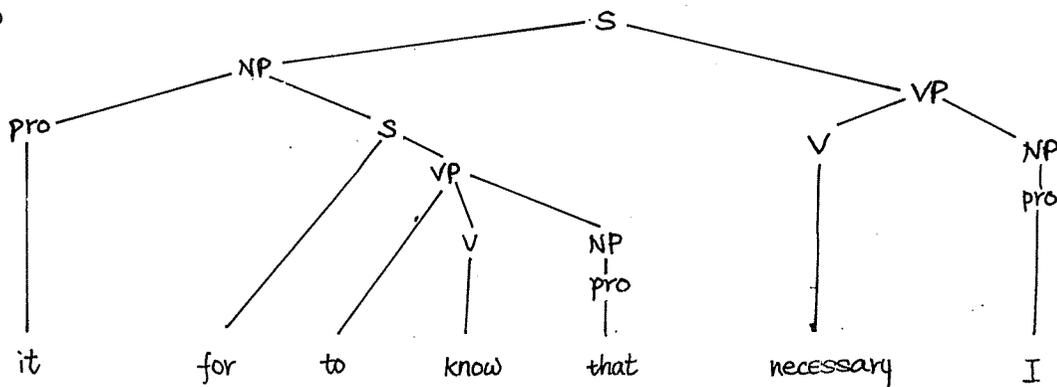
(i) underlying structure



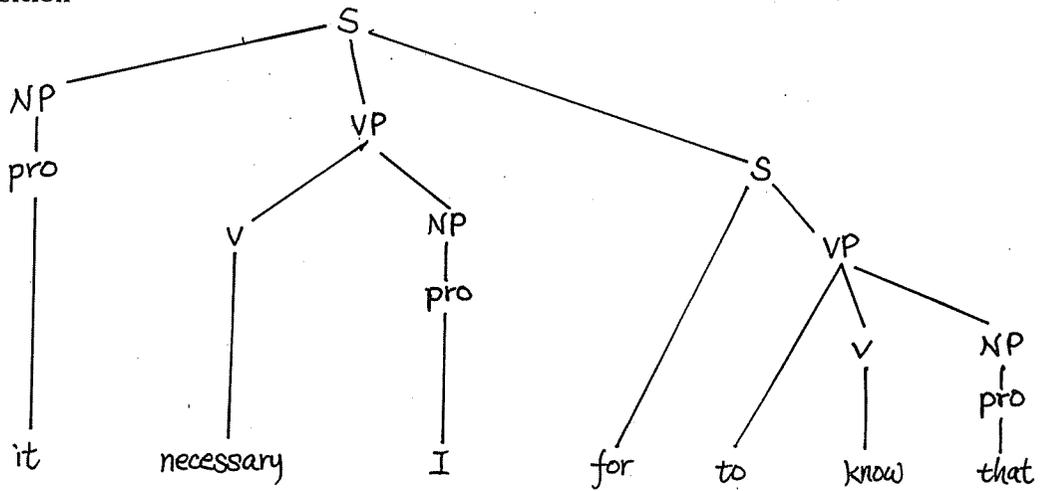
(ii) identical NP deletion



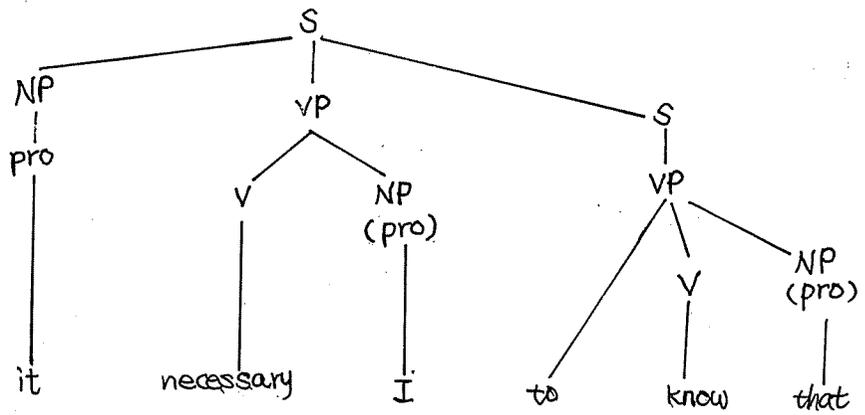
(iii) flip



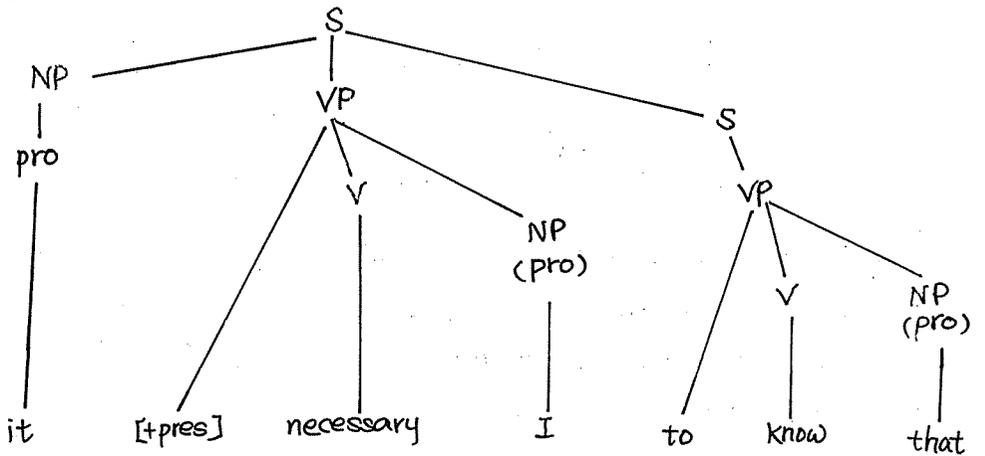
(iv) Extraposition



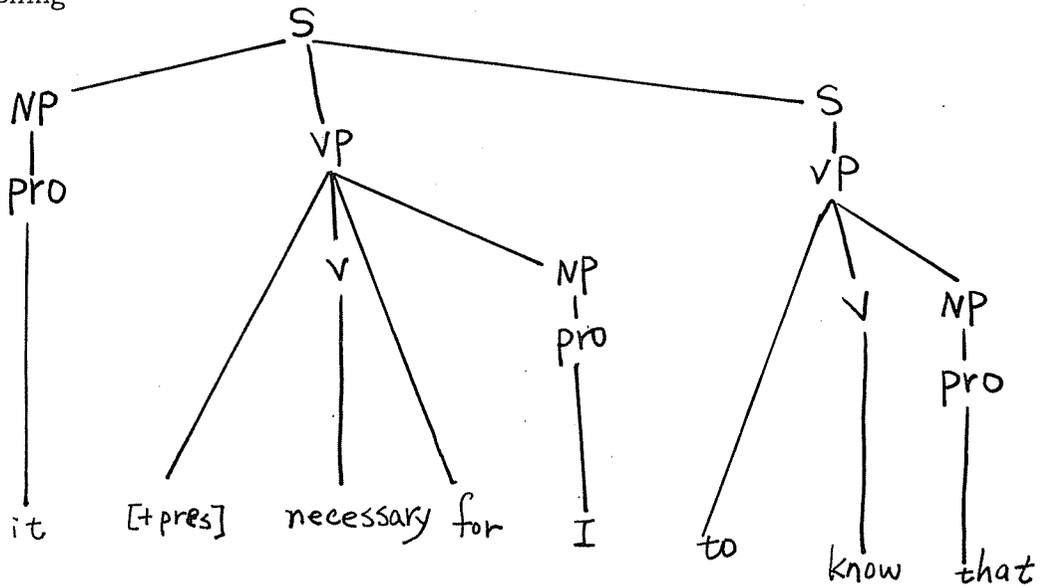
(v) for-deletion



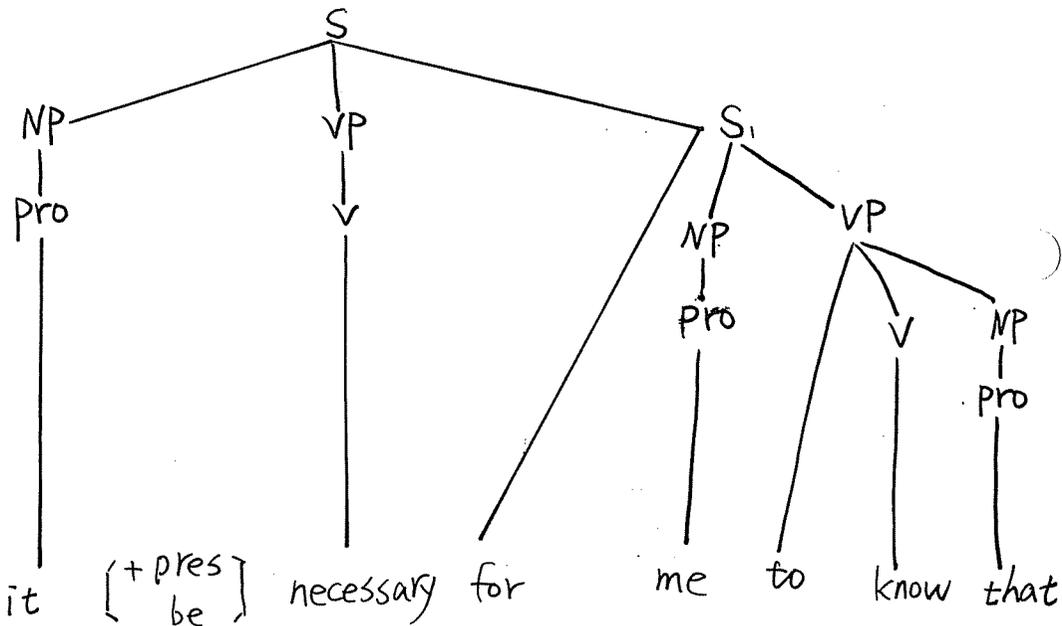
(vi) tenes-spelling



(vii) prep-spelling



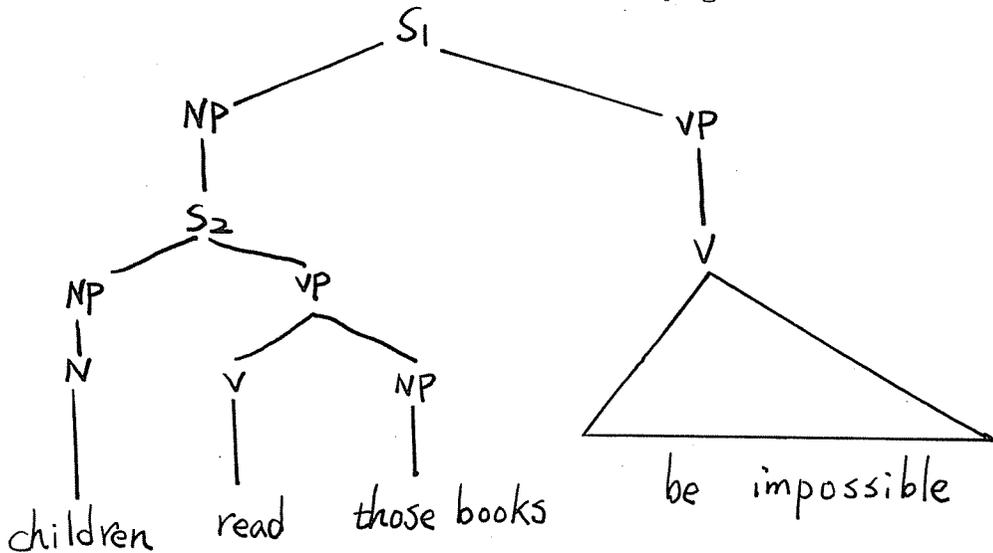
(viii) be-deletion



Lakoff's analysis is not only complicated but also unplausible. In (i) "it" occurs in underlying structure, although he regards it as comp. He applies for-deletion first and then applies for-insertion again. It does not conform to the rule of simplicity. Soames assumes the simpler assumption which is similar to Paul Roberts'.

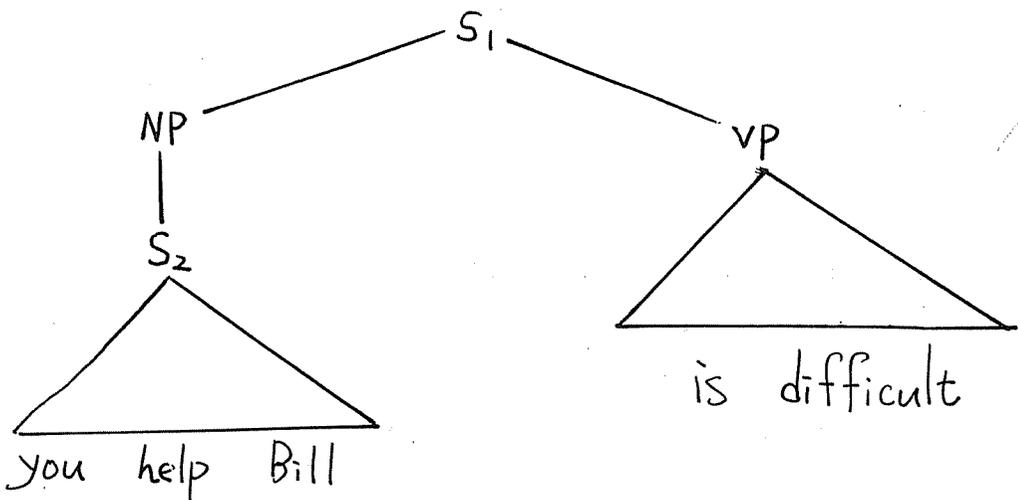
In order to interpret the sentence,

(7) Those books are impossible for children to read. Soames and Permuter refer to the movement hypothesis. The structure underlying (7) is:<sup>5</sup>

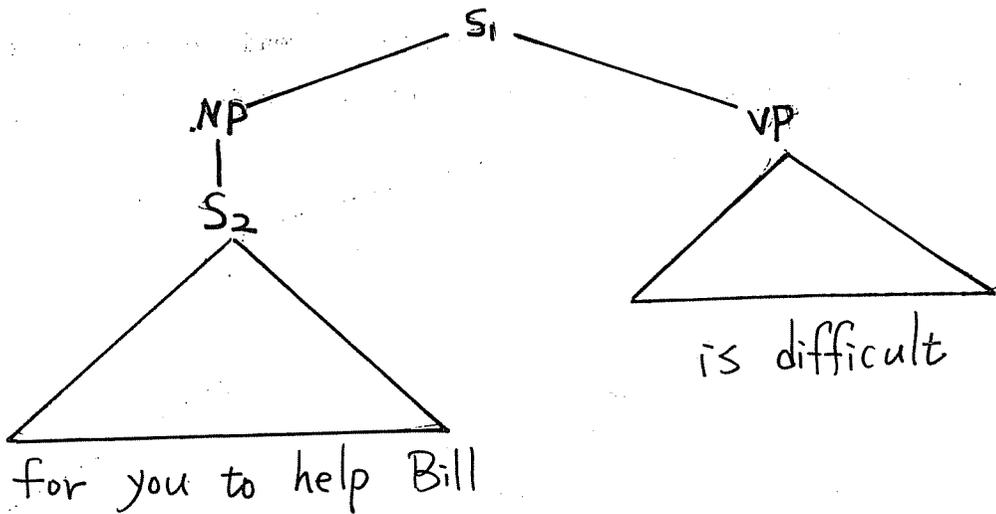


Therefore, I assume that sentence (3) takes a sentential subject in its underlying structure. The following illustrations are my assumptions which demonstrate the deep structure and transformational rules of Type (A):

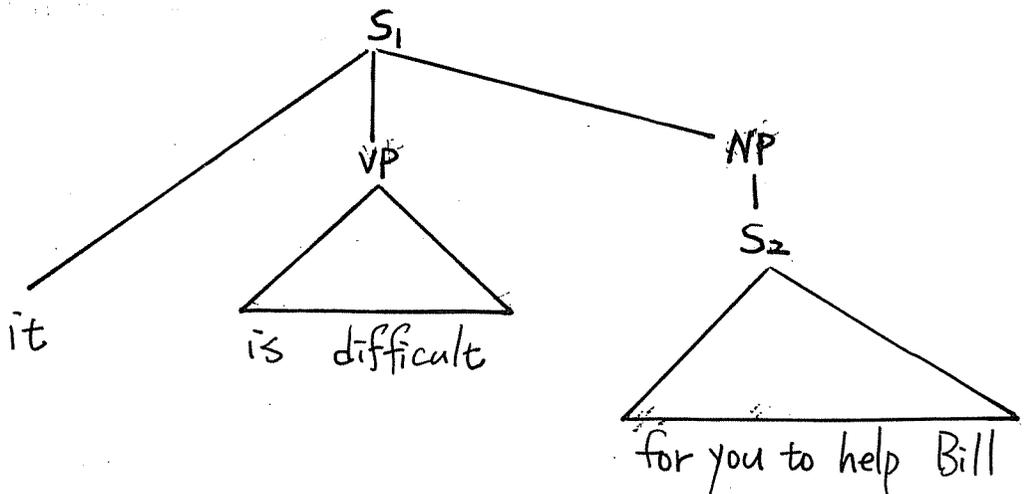
(i) deep structure



(ii) for-to insertion



(iii) flip and It-insertion



assumption 1 : for-to is a unit constituent.

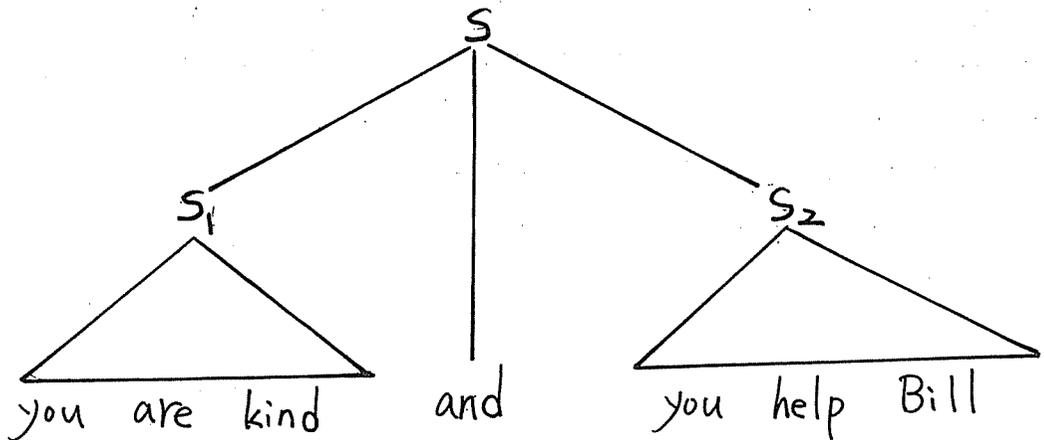
assumption 2 : "For" is a prepositionalized complementizer which should take an objective case noun.

assumption 3 : After for-to insertion applies, the N immediately after "for" should change nominative case into objective case; if the N is null, "for" ought to be obligatorily deleted.

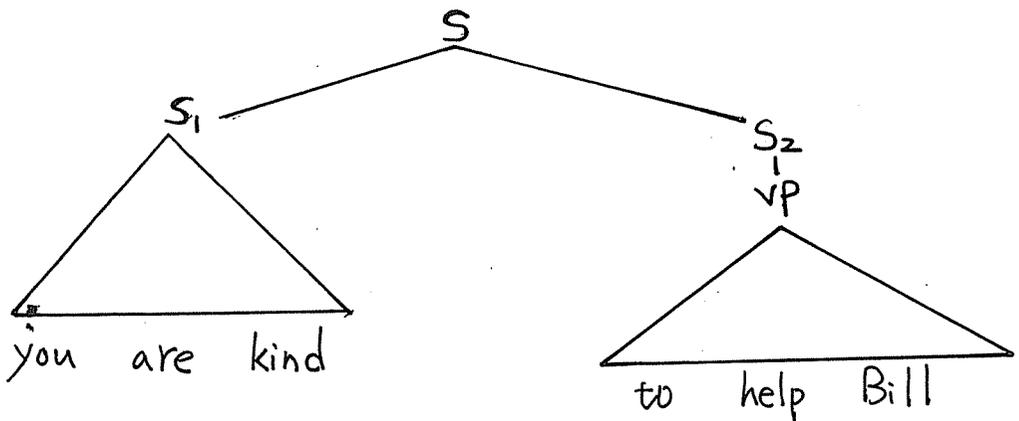
assumption 4 : "To" should not be deleted obligatorily.

On the contrary, linguists seem to deal comparatively less with Type B. I assume that the underlying structure of Type B can be a combination of two clauses conjoined by a conjunction "and". The sentence (4) underlying is:

(i) deep structure



(ii) equi-NP deletion



This step is very important in order to generate its surface structure. There should be an "antecedent" relation between S1 and S2. If equi-NP is deleted in S1, it would violate the nature of equi-NP deletion rules. And the construction:

$$\frac{\text{of}}{\text{prep.}} + \frac{(\text{you to help Bill})}{S2}$$

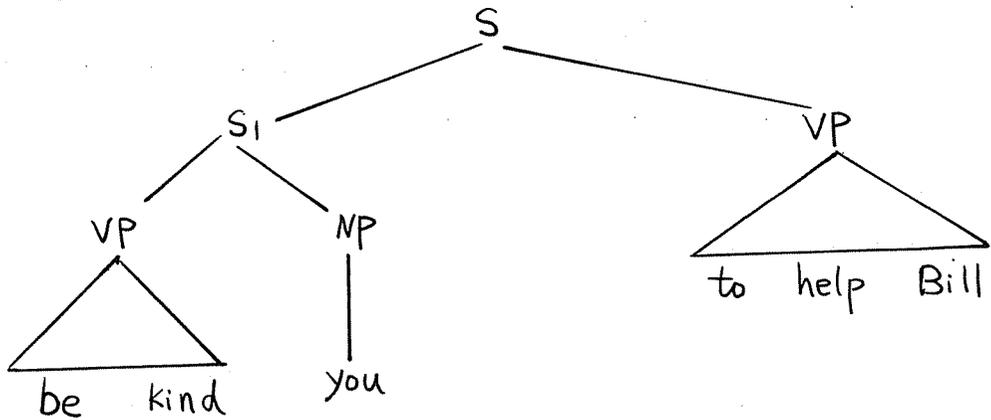
$$(8) \frac{\text{of}}{\text{prep.}} + \frac{(\text{you to help Bill})}{S2}$$

can not be accounted for. "You" in S1 should be antecedent to that in S2. The first sentence can be a causative proposition, whereas the latter is a resultative proposition. The former determines the following event to occur. Therefore, sentence (3) can be semantically interpreted as,

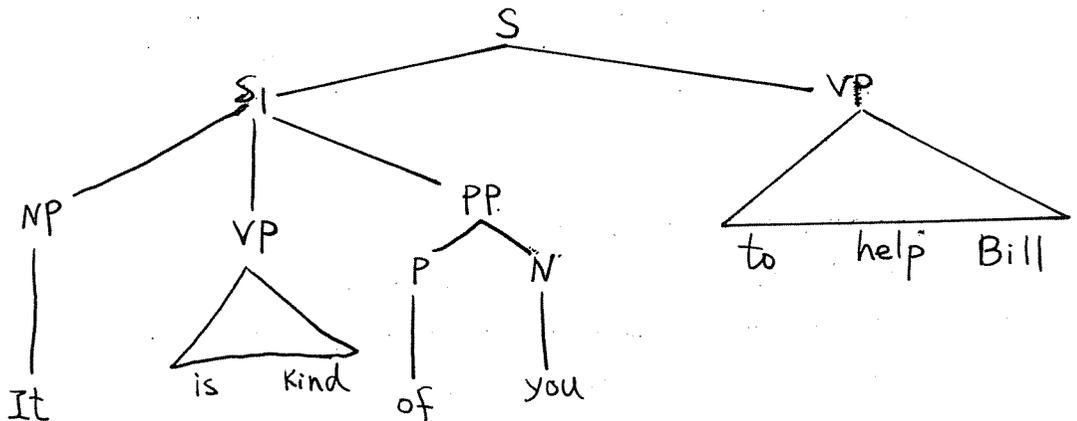
Because you are kind, you help Bill.

or, you are kind; hence you help Bill.

(iii) extraposition



(iv) it-insertion and prep-insertion



So far the underlying structures of both constructions have been demonstrated. In this section, some interesting points will be offered. For-to construction is very similar to that-cl. construction, since both underlying structures are sentential. Let's see the examples,

(9) It is difficult for John to understand Bill.

(10) It is difficult that John understands Bill.

However, only for-to construction can apply extraposition "nonsubject raising" -- a rule we refer to as Nonsubject Raising takes an NP to the right of the verbs in S2 and makes it the subject of S1, moving the rest of S2 to the right."<sup>6</sup>

(9) → (11) Bill is difficult for John to understand \_\_\_\_.

(10) → (12) \*Bill is difficult that John understands \_\_\_\_.

That-cl. is a tensed clause. For some speakers the gap cannot be located in a that-cl.. Interestingly, that-cl. and for-to do not share the same syntactic interpretation:

(13) That John is happy is obvious.

(14) It is obvious that John is happy.

(15) \*For John to be happy is obvious.

(16) \*It is obvious for John to be happy.

(17) For Mary to go to Europe this summer will be difficult.

(18) It will be difficult for Mary to go to Europe this summer.

(19) \*That Mary will go to Europe this summer will be difficult.

(20) \*It will be difficult that Mary will go to Europe this summer."<sup>7</sup>

In this short paper, I do not intend to go further about this issue. Another interesting observation is that adjectives existing in Type A or Type B are mutual exclusive; that is, they do not exist in both types, such as:

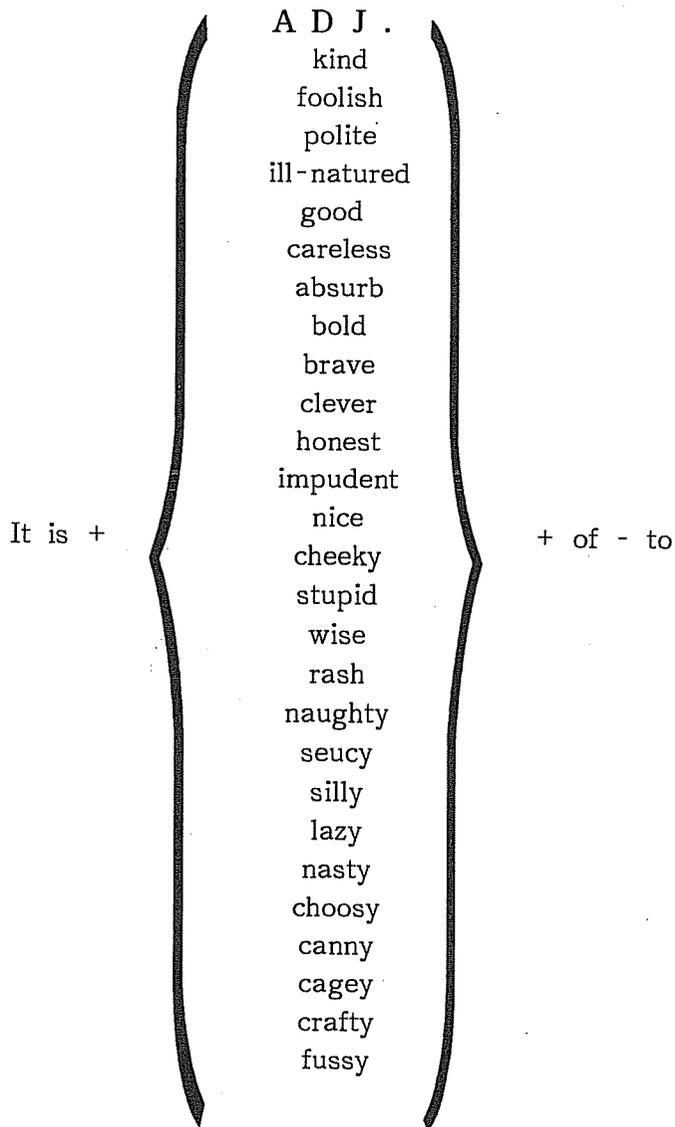
(21) \*It is silly for you to help Bill.

(22) \*It is difficult of you to help Bill.

The following adjectives exist in Type A only,

	A D J .	
	unusual	
	pleasant	
	difficult	
	necessary	
	important	
	easy	
	hard	
	hopeless	
	unlikely	
	futile	
	probable	
It is +	impossible	+ for - to
	advisable	
	legible	
	credible	
	adaptable	
	flexible	
	debatable	
	dispensable	
	fashionable	
	forrible	
	frustrating	
	interesting	
	amusing	

The following adjectives exist in Type B only:



To notice that some adjectives with negative implication only can occur but never its antonyms.

(23) It is careless of you to ...

(24)\*It is careful of you to ...

(25) It is ungrateful of you to ...

(26)\*It is gratefule of you to ...

However,

(27) It is thoughtful of you to ...

Besides, notice that there is a tendency that words with a suffix { -able } or { -ing } exist in Type A and { -y } suffix in Type B.

Quirk<sup>8</sup> constructs a battery of five criteria for the identification of English adjectives.

- A. The item can function in attributive position.
- B. The item can function in predicative position.
- C. The item can be premodified by the intensifier "very".
- D. The item can accept comparison.
- E. The item can function as direct object--a negative test.<sup>9</sup>

But the classification can not explain the distribution of each Type. It should need a semantic intrepation. Semantically speaking, adjectives in Type A are primarily used to modify a statement or a situation, whereas those in Type B are to modify personal disposition or inclination. Therefore, adjectives in Type A can be called "event adjectives:, and those in Type B "person abjectives".

## Notes

- 1 A.S.Hornby, Guide to Patterns and Usage in English ( London: Oxford University Press, 1975) P.143
- 2 Scott Soames and David M.Permultter, Syntactic Argumentation and the Structure of English (California: Califonis University Press, 1979) P.65
- 3 Paul Roberts, Modern grammar (New York: Harcurt, Bracr and World. Inc, 1967) P.345
- 4 George Lakoff, Irregularity in Syntax (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1970) P.130
- 5 Scott Soames and David M.Permultter, Syntactic Argumentation and struc- ture of English P.243
- 6 Ibid., P.241
- 7 Emmon and Bach ,Syntactic Theory (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winson Inc, 1973) P.153
- 8 Quirk et al, A Grammar of Contemporary English (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973)pp.232-33
- 9 Fu Yi-Chin, : English Adjectives and Their Chinese Equivalent: A Contrastive Analysis" 師大學報.Vo.25 (Taipei: Normal University Press, 1980) P.

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Emmon and Bach. Syntactic Theory. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1973.

Fu Yi-Chin. 師大學報. "Adjectives and Their Chinese Equivalent: A Contrastive Analysis" vo.25 Taipei: Normal University Press,1980.

Hornby, A.S. Guide to Patterns and Usages in English. London: Oxford University Press,1975.

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