UNSPEAKABLE SENTENCES: BOOK 1

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It is well known that comparative sentences may compare the extent to which two subjects manifest two different properties, as well as comparing the extent to which they manifest the same property. Therefore, in addition to types like (1), we find types like (2):

(1) John is as tall as Bíll is. (i.e. as tall as Bill is tall)
(2) John is as tall as Bill is fát.

When manifestations of a single property are being compared, it is ungrammatical for the property to be mentioned overtly in both clauses, regardless of whether it is referred to by two occurrences of a single lexical item, or by single occurrences of synonymous lexical items. Both (3) and (4) are ungrammatical:

(3) *John is as fat as Bill is fat.
(4) *John is as fat as Bill is obese.

These sentences of course become grammatical if the final adjective is deleted. Apparently, final adjectives in comparative constructions are subject to a "shape up or ship out" constraint; if they are not stressed, they must be deleted. There is a general destressing effect on second occurrences of anaphoric referring and attributive expressions, as illustrated in (5):

(5) a. I called my brother and I spent half an hour tálking to {him / the bum}.
b. *I called my brother and I spent half an hour talking to {hím / the búm}.
c. John is fat, and Hárry is {fat / obese} too.
d. *John is fat, and Harry is {fát / obése} too.

When this applies to comparative constructions, it subjects the final adjectives to this constraint.

Consider now sentences like (6), which have been discussed by Chomsky (1965) and McCawley (1968):

(6) *John is as sad_1 as that book is sad_2.

where sad_1 means 'experiencing sadness', and sad_2 means 'evoking sadness'. McCawley argued that no sentence of the form of (7):

(7) John is as sad as that book.

could be grammatical, since of the four conceivable derivations, three would violate selectional restrictions (John sad_1, book sad_1; John sad_2, book sad_2; John sad_2, book sad_1) and the fourth (John sad_1, book sad_2) would violate the identity

requirement which is necessary for deletion. Unfortunately, this does not explain why (6) could not be orally expressed as (8):

(8) John is as sad as that book is sád.

The meaning of (6) is not unexpressable in a single sentence; (9) for example, succeeds:

(9) John is as sad as that book is sáddening.

Apparently, the second of two items may not be stressed if they have the same phonological shape, even if they have distinct meanings.

This hypothesis is corroborated by the existence of other sentences which, while semantically impeccable, cannot be pronounced because of a conflict between "stress me" rules or conditions, and "don't stress me" or "destress me" conditions over the same items. An example is the following sentence, which actually occurred written in the Chicago *Sun-Times* last year:

(10) Lowered physical requirements set in motion machinery that put Taylor into jungle battles that left him scarred for life, and very nearly cost him his life.

Stress rules for noncontrasting predicates say "stress the final constituent of the verb phrase", i.e. the second occurrence of *life*. But the constraint on phonologically identical forms says that the second of such forms may not be stressed, and since the second occurrence of *life* in (10) is not anaphoric, no destressing rule or condition will remove the stress from it. The result is that it is in a sort of limbo as far as stress level is concerned. Notice that a sentence synonymous to (10), but with only one occurrence of *life*, is perfectly pronounceable:

(11) Lowered physical requirements set in motion machinery that put Taylor into jungle battles that left him scarred for life, and very nearly kílled him.

Further examples are provided by the well known sentences where idioms contrast with their literal meanings, e.g. (12), in the sense of (13):

(12) *The frog croaked and then Bill croaked.
(13) The frog went "brekekekex" and then Bill díed.

On Invited Inferences

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1. Conditional Perfection

(1) If John leans out of that window any further, he'll fall.

When confronted with sentences such as (1), students in