

This construction looks like a copy is optional

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Potsdam and Runner (2001), following Rogers (1974), distinguish between two copy-raising constructions in English. In genuine copy raising (GCR), a matrix DP is linked to a “copy” pronoun in the highest embedded subject position. In apparent copy raising (ACR), the associated pronominal copy is not the highest embedded subject.

- (1) a. Richard seems/looks/appears like/as if he is in trouble. *GCR*
b. Mary seems/looks/appears like/as if her job is going well. *ACR*

In certain English dialects, GCR exhibits the hallmarks of standard (non-copy) raising, while ACR does not. For example, only the former allows nonthematic arguments.

- (2) a. % There looks like there's gonna be a riot.
b. * There seems like John expects there to be an election.

Potsdam & Runner propose that GCR involves a non-movement A-chain, subject to standard locality conditions, while ACR involves simple coindexation between two thematic positions.

Discussing the proleptic object (PO) construction in Madurese and English, in which an embedded pronominal copy is linked to a matrix DP, Davies (2005) observes that despite their superficial similarities, GCR and PO constructions cannot be conflated. Thus, the pronominal copy in PO need not be a subject and the matrix DP must be thematic.

- (3) a. Sheryl thought about/of Tim that the police would never catch him.
b. Kelsey believed about the cat that it would be out of the bag. [literal]

On the basis of these and related facts, Davies concludes that PO constructions must be kept typologically distinct from GCR constructions. Nothing in Davies' study, however, argues against conflating PO and ACR constructions. This squib presents an argument that the two should nonetheless be kept distinct.

Heycock (1994) observes that ACR is possible even in the absence of an overt pronominal copy (contra Lappin 1984), although "it is of course clear that the matrix subject is interpreted as binding some "understood" position in the complement" (p. 292). However, even the latter condition is not necessary. Consider a situation where John watches TV in the other room, and all of a sudden rushes in, all pale and shaking. We can then utter (4a), with the intended reading (4b). Alternatively, we can use (4a) to mean (4c).

- (4) a. John looked like something terrible had happened.
b. John looked like *he just learned that* something terrible had happened.
c. John looked like something terrible had happened *to him*.

In fact, with enough contextual information, we may relate the *John* to the embedded event in any imaginable way. This is even clearer in (5), which could be uttered after hearing a long motivational speech by Mary.

(5) Mary sounded like there's nothing hard work and good faith can't solve.

Given that there is no identifiable syntactic “empty slot” in the complement that is saturated by the matrix subject, we may conclude (with Asudeh & Toivonen 2007) that the complement does not denote a semantic predicate, contra Lappin 1984 and Heycock 1994. Rather, it denotes a closed proposition, which, in turn, must be construable as capable of generating the perception event reported in the matrix clause (hence the oddness of, e.g., *John looked like Alexander had defeated the Persians*). Importantly, this is a pragmatic condition, susceptible to world-knowledge.

In contrast, the PO construction is not similarly liberal; a pronominal copy must be present in the complement. Compare (6a,b) with (4a) and (5).

- (6) a. We thought about John that something terrible had happened *(to him).
 b. * We believed about Mary that there's nothing hard work and good faith can't solve.

An natural way to understand this restriction is to view the PO predicate as a three place relation between a property (the complement) and two individuals (the matrix subject and the proleptic object), type $\langle\langle e, \langle s, t \rangle \rangle, \langle e, \langle e, \langle s, t \rangle \rangle \rangle\rangle$. The property denoted by the complement is predicated of the individual denoted by the proleptic object (in the subject's belief worlds).

Suppose that the clausal complement is turned into a predicate by merging it with a null operator (a λ -abstractor) that binds the pronominal copy. Then (6b) and the copy-less version

of (6a) will be ruled out as instances of vacuous quantification (cf. The Ban on Vacuous Quantification, BVQ, Chomsky 1982).¹

- (7) a. $\lambda x.\lambda w.$ something terrible had happened to x in w .
b. * $\lambda x.\lambda w.$ something terrible had happened in w .

The ACR predicate, on the other hand, denotes a two place relation between a proposition (the complement) and an individual (the matrix subject), type $\langle\langle s,t\rangle,\langle e,\langle s,t\rangle\rangle\rangle$. Since the complement denotes a proposition, no superfluous null operator is generated in (4a)/(5), explaining why a pronominal variable is not needed. This distinction in the semantic type of the complement confirms that ACR and PO constructions cannot be conflated.²

References

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¹ Or as violations of whatever principles underlie the BVQ (see Potts 2002 for the claim that the BVQ is redundant with independently needed pragmatic and syntactic constraints).

² In a subset of cases, a pronominal copy is required in ACR. These involve the uncommon scenario where the matrix subject cannot be construed as a thematic perceptual source of the ACR verb. For example, (i) involves hearing the noise, but (ii) does not involve hearing the house (rather, hearing a description of the house).

- i. That noise sounds like somebody's cleaning.
- ii. Your house sounds like nobody enjoys cleaning *(it).

Landau 2007 argues that lack of thematic status forces the matrix subject to be licensed by predication, hence the obligatory embedded copy (see Asudeh and Toivonen 2007a for a related but different view). However, even in these cases, the ACR verb denotes a relation with a proposition ("distributed" between the subject and the complement), unlike a PO verb, which uniformly denotes a relation with a property.