On the Structure of Adjectives with Infinitival Clauses*

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1. Introduction
In this paper, we will explore adjectives taking infinitival clauses, as shown below, and claim that the following three types of adjective can be classified into two groups from a purely structural viewpoint.

(1)  
a. Wise type (wise, clever, stupid, kind, ...) eg. John was clever to punish the dog.
    b. Easy type (easy, hard, difficult, tough ...) eg. John is hard to convince.
    c. Eager type (eager, anxious, reluctant, keen, ...) eg. Bill was eager to punish the dog.

Specifically, we propose that the Wise and Easy type adjective has an aP shell structure as in (2a), while the Eager type adjective has a simple AP structure as in (2b). We assume that in (2a), the infinitival clause occupies the complement position of A, and the subject occupies the specifier position of a as an external argument, whereas in (2b), the subject is an internal argument that occupies the position of complement of A and the infinitival clause is adjoined to the lexical AP (cf. Stowell 1991, Landau 2006).

(2)  
a. [aP John [AP A InfP]] (Wise type and Easy type adjectives)
    b. [AP [aP A John] InfP] (Eager type adjectives)

2. The Analysis
The existence of an external argument is a necessary condition for passivization (see

* This paper is a slightly revised version of the paper presented at the 63rd Tohoku English Literary Society, held at Tohoku Gakuin University on 23-24 November, 2008. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Yoshiaki Kaneko and Professor Etsuro Shima for their insightful comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to the participants at the conference and the members of the Department of English Linguistics at Tohoku University for their helpful comments. I have tortured Professor Max Phillips Jr., who has kindly acted as an informant, with judgment questions. My sincere apologies and thanks are due to him. I also thank Basil Cahusac de Caux for stylistic improvements. All remaining errors are mine.
Landau 2006). Since the subject of the Wise and Easy type adjective is an external argument, it is not so implausible that passivization applies to adjectives, and then, the infinitival clause, an internal argument, moves to the subject position.

(3) To punish the dog was clever/mean (of John).

(4) To convince John is hard (for Bill). (Yasui et al. (1976: 231))

If the above argument is correct, we can further predict that the expletive it is merged in the subject position, due to the fact that the infinitival clause in general does not need to be assigned Case.

(5) It was clever (of John) to punish the dog.

(6) It is hard (for Bill) to convince John. (Yasui et al. (1976: 231))

In contrast, the subject of the Eager type of adjective is an internal argument. Thus, passivization does not apply to the adjective and then, the adjective does not show the argument alternation that Wise and Easy type adjectives show.

(7) a.*To punish the dog was eager (of John).

b.*It was eager/reluctant of Bill to punish the dog. (Stowell (1991: 114))

The second argument for my proposal comes from the nominalization pattern. Chomsky (1986) suggests that the derived noun assigns inherent Case to its internal argument to which it assigns a theta-role. If so, it should be predicted that a noun derived from Wise and Easy type adjectives cannot assign inherent Case to the subject argument, because it is an external argument, whereas a noun derived from Eager type adjectives can, because it is an internal argument.

(8) a.*the cleverness of Bill to come over

b.*the hardness of Bill to convince

c. the reluctance of Bill to agree with you

3. Conclusion

We have proposed that the Wise and Easy type of adjective has an aP shell structure, while the Eager type of adjective has a simple aP structure. We have also shown that our proposal is supported by the empirical evidence in passivization and nominalization.
Works Cited