

Analysing the future *to-be*-construction: another case of small clause formation?

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ABSTRACT

The quest for symmetry is one that many generative syntacticians aim to pursue. One way in which symmetry between the nominal and sentential domain has been pointed out is via small clause formation. Various constructions have been analysed by means of such small clauses. This paper adds another construction to the list that can be analysed as such by investigating a novel construction: the future *to-be*-construction (e.g., “She is the bride-*to-be*”). Close examination of newly introduced data on this construction reveals that only small clauses, and not for example infinitival relative clauses, can account for the facts. Moreover, the in-depth discussion on the syntax of the future *to-be*-discussion opens new possibilities for future research.

1. A novel construction¹

Modification manifests itself in various ways cross-linguistically and has therefore been investigated extensively in the field of syntax. The main task for generative syntacticians, then, is to come up with theories and analyses to account for the constructions found, and to find (possible) symmetry in structures amidst the variation. Such symmetry has been pointed out by means of, for example, small clause formation (e.g., Balazs, 2012; Corver, 2009). Cross-categorial parallelism thus is a key factor of theory formation in generative syntax. Another crucial element is to analyse a novel phenomenon in light of previously examined phenomena. This has caused infinitival relative clauses to be analysed as preposition phrases (e.g., Hasegawa, 1998), on the one hand, and as reduced clauses on the other (e.g., Bhatt, 2000; Shlonsky & Soare, 2011). A similar lack of consensus can be found in the analysis of the adjective + infinitive construction. A closer look at the literature, however, suggests that adjectives cannot simply be clustered together and that each piece of data requires an individual analysis (e.g., Hicks, 2009; Nanni, 1980). Different classes of adjectives show just how diverse modification is and that a finish line of having analysed all constructions of modification is nowhere in sight. This becomes more visible when considering constructions of modification that have not yet been given but most certainly do need thorough examination. One of these constructions is the future *to-be*-construction² in which *to be* modifies an NP such that its interpretation changes. This construction is presented in (1):

- (1) She is the bride-*to-be*.

1 I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Norbert Corver for his help. He taught me that even the smallest constructions in natural language can allow for interesting research.

2 This term has been coined by me for reference purposes.

The current paper will take a close look at this construction and attempt to provide an insight in terms of its structure. More specifically, the current paper aims to shed light on the external and internal structure of the future *to-be*-construction and thereby provide a possible analysis of the syntax.

To investigate the future *to-be*-construction properly, the current paper is organised as follows. Section 2 investigates the literature to sketch a background for possible analyses of the *to-be*-construction. In section 3, the data is presented. Section 4 provides an in-depth analysis of the future *to-be*-construction. In section 5, I reflect on possible future research and provide the reader with concluding remarks.

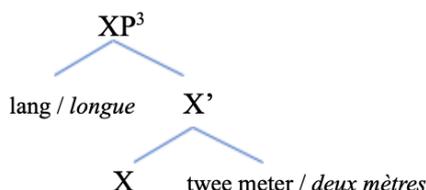
2. A history of symmetry and comparisons

2.1 Small clauses

The use of small clauses to account for certain constructions has existed for a relatively long time (Balazs, 2012). Ever since 1975, the make-up of small clauses has received a lot of attention; small clauses have been analysed as S, as S', but more recently as PrP (e.g., Bowers, 1993). It is thus no surprise that scholars have been using small clauses to analyse novel phenomena extensively. Despite there not being a general consensus on the make-up, small clauses enable subjects and predicates to start out in one constituent. More specifically, 'small clause' is a term that is used to refer to [NP XP] constructions where NP and XP are in a subject-predicate relationship. The XP, then, can be NP, PP or AP. The possibility of XP being a VP has not received much investigation, yet its existence has not been denied (Balazs, 2012, p. 28).

A study by Corver (2009) considered the syntax of measure phrases in terms of small clauses and the link between measure phrases and predicate nominals was revealed due to several shared properties (e.g., inability to be formed with strong quantifiers). An important observation here was that languages vary in terms of the behaviour of measure phrases (henceforth MP): the MP precedes the adjective and there is no linking element in languages such as Dutch, but in languages such as French the MP follows the adjective and there is a linking element. Nevertheless, the base pattern is presumed to be the same for all languages:

(2)



The cross-linguistic variation, then, is accounted for by predicate inversion in which the MP moves to a position higher than the adjective (e.g., Dutch “twee meter lang”), and optional additional remnant movement of the adjective (e.g. French

3 The first word is in Dutch, and the second word is in French. “Lang” and “longue” translate to the English word “long” and “twee meter” and “deux mètres” to “two meters”.

“longue de deux mètres”). These syntactic movements make it possible for the base pattern to be the same across languages. Important to mention here is that Corver (2009) does not define the specific category of XP in the small clause⁴ as well as the functional projection that heads the small clause; the focus is on the structure itself.

2.2 Infinitival relative clauses

The syntax of infinitival relative clauses has been a popular topic of discussion in the field of syntax (e.g., Bhatt, 2000; Hasegawa, 1998; Shlonsky & Soare, 2011). The sentences in (3) and (4) involve an infinitival relative clause (henceforth IRs):

(3) John bought a book [to read].

(4) John bought a book [for Bill to read].

(Hasegawa, 1998, p. 1)

Hasegawa (1998) analyses IRs as preposition phrases that are headed by a null preposition and take a CP as complement. The justification given for this analysis is that the behaviour of IRs seems to parallel that of PPs (cross-categorical parallelism): PPs often appear as post-noun modifiers which makes it “not unnatural” to analyse IRs as PPs, because IRs are also a kind of post-noun modifiers (Hasegawa, 1998, p. 8).

Even though he does not necessarily refute Hasegawa’s analysis, Bhatt (2000) proposes a different analysis of IRs. He emphasises that IRs do not form a unified class structurally. Bhatt (2012) distinguishes between subject infinitival relatives and non-subject infinitival relatives; a distinction that is disregarded by Hasegawa (1998)⁵. For the sake of the scope of the current paper, I will only briefly describe Bhatt’s (2000) analysis of subject infinitival relatives. Subject infinitival relatives⁶ are assimilated with reduced relative clauses by Bhatt (2000), but also by Shlonsky and Soare (2011) due to one key property. This property is that neither authors involve a CP projection (as opposed to non-subject infinitival relatives). Instead, a projection smaller than CP, namely the Participle Phrase (PrtP), is said to combine with the head NP through intersective modification. More specifically, the PrtP has a PRO subject that combines with the head NP. Indirectly, it thus seems like Bhatt (2000) analyses subject infinitival relatives as small clause constructions (with the PrtP being the small clause). This idea is supported by Williams (1975, as cited in Balazs, 2012) who used the term ‘small clause’ to refer to reduced clauses.

2.3 Types of adjectives

There are numerous adjectives in the English language. It is no wonder, then, that not all adjectives behave in a similar manner. This suggests that different types of adjectives can and should be distinguished (e.g. Hicks, 2009; Nanni, 1980).

4 This functional projection is not presented in the tree in (2).

5 This might, of course, not be on purpose. It is important to mention this, however, as it weakens Hasegawa’s proposal in my perspective.

6 For further information, I would like to point the reader to Bhatt (2012).

Nanni (1980) and Hicks (2009) both investigated the structure of constructions in which a certain type of adjective is combined with an infinitive. Nanni (1980) focused on *easy*-type adjectives as in (5) and Hicks (2009) on *tough*-constructions as in (6):

(5) That man is easy to please.
(Nanni, 1980, p. 568)

(6) Linguists are tough to please.
(Hicks, 2009, p. 535)

On the surface, the sentences in (5) and (6) seem to be quite similar with only the adjective differing. According to the literature, however, the structure underlying the sentences differs considerably. Sentence (6) is formed by means of so-called Tough Movement (TM) which is a transformation in which the complement object (“linguists”) shifts into the matrix subject position (Hicks, 2009). (6), then, starts out as (7) accordingly:

(7) It is tough to please linguists.

Although she does not completely rule out TM for (5)⁷, Nanni (1980) suggests in example (5) to have a non-transformational derivation instead. Moreover, she proposes that *easy to please* sequences are complex adjectives. At first, Complex Adjective Formation seems to be quite convincing, but the fact that no explanation whatsoever is given for the internal structure of the *easy*-type adjective + infinitive construction poses quite a big problem for the analysis.⁸ Nevertheless, Nanni (1980) and Hicks (2009) are important in the sense that one should also be critical to every new piece of data and should not be fooled by surface structure. It is important to keep an open mind when facing new phenomena and not to overgeneralise syntactic structures based on surface structures.

3. A presentation of data

The future *to-be*-construction has not yet been addressed by generative-linguistic literature. Therefore, the current paper attempts to present data on this construction as systematically as possible. As the following dataset is (mainly) based on my intuitions, I am responsible for any errors present. Sentence (1) presented the future *to-be*-construction and is repeated below as (8):

(8) She is the bride-to-be.

The construction, presented in (8), has been coined the “future *to-be*-construction” due to its semantic interpretation. This becomes clearer when sentence (8) is compared to sentence (9):

(9) She is the bride.

7 If this was her aim, she did not convincingly rule out TM in my opinion.

8 This was also pointed out by Hicks (2009).

In (9), the subject [she] is a bride (the predicate) at this very moment. In (8), the subject [she] is not yet a bride but will be in the near future; she *will* be the bride. The sentences in (8) and (9) differ minimally: the sole difference lies in the presence of *to be*. *To be*, when modifying an NP as in (8), alters the actual/current state of being to the near future. Considering the alteration in predication that it brings along with its presence, the construction in (8) is named, accordingly, the ‘future’ *to-be*-construction.

The construction seems to form a constituent with the NP that it modifies as can be seen in (10) – (12). (11), for example, shows constituency by means of movement (i.e., topicalization), whereas (12) shows that [to-be] cannot be separated from [bride] thereby also indicating constituency.

(10) They are the [brides-to-be].

(11) The [bride-to-be], she is.

(12) *To-be, she is the bride.

Moreover, the construction seems to be productive in the sense of modifying different NPs:

(13) He is the husband-to-be.

(14) She is his wife-to-be.

(15) She is the teacher-to-be.

(16) ?She is the singer-to-be.

To my knowledge, the construction is not productive in terms of which verbs can occur in the infinitive clause. Changing the verb ‘be’ into *any* other verb will change the meaning such that the state of being is no longer altered to the near future. The only verb that *could* behave similarly to *be* would be *become*, but as far as I know *to become* does not occur as a modifier.

Another interesting observation to be made on the future *to-be*-construction is that it can occur both pre-nominally and post-nominally; *to be* thus seems to be a pre-noun modifier as well as a post-noun modifier as can be seen in the examples below.

(17) She is the soon-to-be bride.

(18) They are the soon-to-be brides.

(19) *Bride, she is the soon-to-be.

As the sentences in (17) – (19) show, *to be* forms a constituent with the NP that it modifies regardless of its position (preceding or following the noun) in the linear order. Crucially, though, it seems *to be* is not be able to occur in prenominal position without *soon*:

(20) ???She is the to-be bride.

Lastly, the future *to-be*-construction does not allow *wh*-relative pronouns to appear in its clause:

(21) *She is the bride who to be.

4. An analysis

4.1 Easy?

As a starting point for analysing the novel future *to-be*-construction, it is wise to investigate comparable constructions that *have* been analysed and see if a similar analysis would work. At first glance, the sequence ‘soon-to-be’ in (17) seems to resemble the construction in sentence (22) in which an *easy*-type adjective is used:

(22) An easy-to-take laxative.

(Nanni, 1980, p. 573)

I could of course adapt Nanni’s (1980) analysis of *easy*-type adjectives and assume that *to be* is in fact a complex adjective of which the internal structure is unknown, but this would be an easy way out. Moreover, Nanni’s (1980) analysis of the sequence poses a problem for the *soon to be* sequence: the sequence in sentence (22) is said to also be able to occur post-nominally:

(23) This laxative is easy-to-take.

(24) *This bride is soon-to-be.

Sentence (24) shows that it is impossible to place *soon to be* post-nominally; *soon to be* cannot occur separately from the NP that it modifies. I therefore consider Nanni’s (1980) analysis not sufficient for the future *to-be*-construction.

4.2 IRs?

On top of the *easy*-type adjective infinitive construction, the future *to-be*-construction also looks a lot like an infinitival relative clause. To be more precise, the resemblance between the two is uncanny:

(25) The bride-to-be.

(26) The man to fix the sink.

(Bhatt, 2000, p. 14)

Both consist of an NP that is modified by a clause introduced by *to*. There are, however, two important differences. Firstly, [The man] functions as a subject in the *to*-clause whereas [The bride] functions as a predicate nominal⁹. Secondly, the *to*-clause in (25) can precede the NP as shown in (17) whereas the *to*-clause preceding the NP in (26) would result in an ungrammatical sentence:

(27) *The (*soon) to fix the sink man.

An analysis like IRs (e.g., Bhatt, 2000) is therefore also not be the most optimal one.

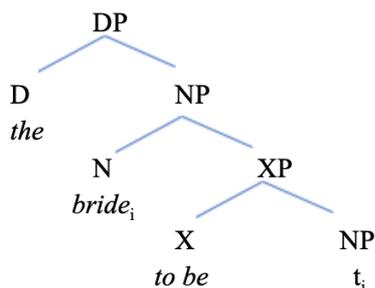
4.3 be-polysemy?

Another idea that has not been given any attention so far but should be mentioned is the potential polysemy of *be*. Polysemy would imply there to be different lexical entries of *be*, and perhaps *be* as in *to-be* modifiers could be considered a separate lexical entry. I consider this analysis to not be the right one for the future *to-be*-construction mainly because generative literature generally leans towards a *one-be*-approach (only *one* lexical entry). The idea behind this is that the semantic variability found is due to the structures that are involved and not due to *be*'s semantics. In fact, most authors in the generative framework even agree upon a key property of *be* being that it has no meaning at all; it is a functional element that links the major constituents of copular sentences.

4.4 A small analysis

A wise next step would be to look for cross-categorial symmetry. Therefore, I posit that the future *to-be*-construction should be investigated in terms of small clause formation. As was mentioned in Section 2, small clauses refer to [NP XP] constructions in which XP is NP, AP, or PP (Balazs, 2012). I will present the future *to-be*-construction by means of an XP unspecified for category to focus on what the structure would look like. More specifically, I will sketch the internal structure of the crucial sequence in sentence (8): [the bride-to-be]. Section 3 showed us that the sequence behaves like a constituent and that this constituent behaves 'nouny' (in a noun-like manner). Presumably, the sequence starts out with a small clause [NP XP] in which [bride] occupies the complement-position and is then selected by a DP:

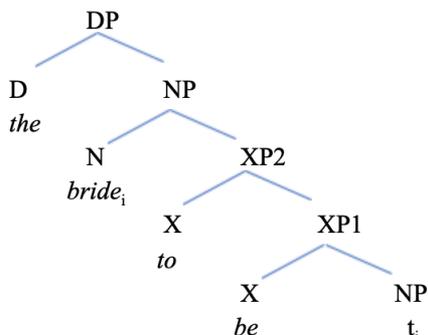
(28)



⁹ A construction that Hicks (2009) refers to as a Complement Object Deletion construction (COD).

The structure in (28) is not able to offer different positions for *to* and *be*. (28) thus, does not give us the full story yet. Thus, I propose, tentatively, the structure in (29) instead.

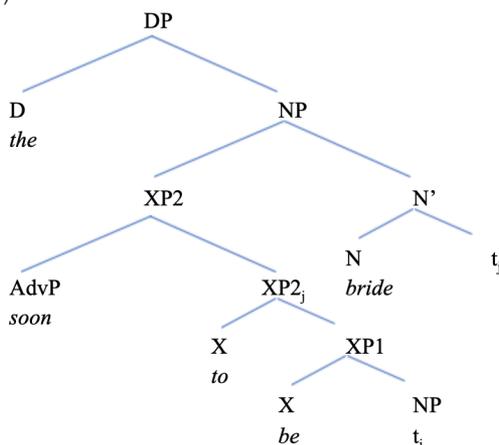
(29)



The noun in (29) selects [XP2 XP1] as its complement. It is important to note that XP2 is not headed by a CP. The reason for not projecting a CP on IP is because of the ungrammaticality *wh*-relative pronouns bring along to the construction as shown in (21). To avoid nouns from being able to select *any* XP2, I propose that XP2 should not carry any finiteness; XP2_[-FIN].

Assuming the structure in (29) is on the right path, how can it result in the sequence [the soon-to-be bride] as in sentence (17)? A large body of literature has suggested predicate inversion in small clauses (e.g., Corver, 2000; 2009). I therefore follow Corver (2009) and propose DP internal predicate displacement for *to be* which would result in the structure in (30). Note that *soon* is an adverb that adjoins the IP in its inverted position¹⁰.

(30)



10 Due to the scope of the paper, I leave behind the details of adding *soon* to the future *to-be*-construction. I therefore leave questions such as 'why can't *soon-to-be* occur post nominally?' to future research.

Even though the proposed structures in (29) and (30) are provisional, they do offer insight into the external position of *to be* in the sequence as well as into the internal structure of *to be* (namely [XP2 XP1]). Of course, an interesting question is what the category of XP1 and XP2 could be. NP, AP, and PP all seem quite unlikely. Since *to* is a non-finite marker and *be* is a verb, there is a possibility that XP2 could in fact be IP and XP1 a VP. Too little is known about the possibility of having IP and/or VP in small clause constructions, which is why further research on small clauses in general and on the construction under discussion is needed.

5. Reflection and conclusion

5.1 Future research

The dataset provided in the current paper is solely based on my intuitions. A good idea for future research would therefore be to send out a questionnaire to obtain detailed insights into the acceptability of the provided example sentences. Furthermore, a questionnaire could explore the productivity of the construction in terms of the NPs that it can modify.

To obtain a better understanding of the future *to-be*-construction, one should explore its history as this could tell us more about the specific use of the construction. Perhaps, the construction that we use nowadays started out as a bigger phrase with more information that has now been reduced to merely (*soon*) *to be*. It could also be that the future *to-be*-construction used to be available only as a prenominal or postnominal modifier rather than both. Corpus research therefore seems to be inevitable if one wishes to know more about the future *to-be*-construction.

For reasons of scope, the current paper did not look into the construction in other languages. As cross-linguistic variation has been proven to be valuable for the formation of analyses (e.g. Corver, 2009), examining the *to be* modifier in different languages could shed more light on the syntax. Whether the construction occurs in languages other than English, however, is not certain. This thus requires further research.

Lastly, there is a possibility that *soon to be* and *to be* do not result from the same structure. Although the current paper discussed these two as one construction, we might be dealing with two separate constructions that should be analysed individually. If this is the case, then this has major consequences for the current proposal of an analysis by means of small clauses. The postnominal *to be* could then be analysed as an IR as it was its prenominal counterpart that kept me from adopting an IR-analysis.

5.2 Conclusion

The current paper aimed to closely examine the future *to-be*-construction in terms of a syntactic structure and to provide an analysis accordingly. A theoretical background was sketched firstly to provide tools for analysing the novel construction. So far, no generative-linguistic literature on the current topic has been found and thus a dataset was provided based on my own intuitions. This dataset was investigated by means of the analyses and theories discussed in the theoretical background; *to be* was compared to the *easy-type* adjective + infinitive construction

and to IRs. The problems that these analyses brought along, however, led to an analysis based on small clause formation which transpired to be the most optimal analysis for the time being. The sequence [the bride-to-be] is analysed as an NP that selects [XP2 XP1] as its complement. To account for the reversed sequence, [the soon-to-be bride], predicate inversion is proposed; *to be* occurs prenominally because of movement. Future research is needed to gain further insight into the structure of the novel construction. The story on the *to be* modifier therefore is *to be* continued. ■

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