

Squibs and Discussion

ENVY: A FUNCTIONAL
ANALYSIS
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The verb *envy* can occur in a surface structure¹ followed by two NPs (that is, *envy* NP₁ NP₂), as in (1):

- (1) I envy John his good looks.

The second NP after *envy* can be a simple NP, as in (1), or any type of complex NP, either a relative clause (with a variety of types of targets) or a *rumor* clause:²

- (2) I envy John that girl who caresses him in class all the time.
(3) I envy John the way his mother treats him.
(4) I envy John the fact that he is able to go to Europe every year.

In this squib, attention will be restricted to sentences in which there is an overt NP in NP₂ that is coreferential with NP₁, because such sentences are the easiest to judge independent of their context.³

In general, it seems that there is little or no syntactic restriction on where in NP₂ this coreferent NP may occur,

¹ Whether this surface manifestation is a derived structure or essentially represents a deep structure configuration for this verb will not be of concern here. The phenomena to be considered remain interesting regardless of the derivation.

² These sentences with complex NPs are perhaps a shade lower in acceptability than ones with simple NPs. However, the main focus in this squib will be relative judgments between sentences of this type and not absolute designations of their acceptability.

³ It seems that all these *envy* sentences presuppose that there is something about NP₂ that is beneficial to NP₁ in some way. This can be made explicit by the context in which the sentence occurs. Thus, a sentence such as (i) is odd in isolation, except under the presupposition that the fact that Bill has a new Pontiac is beneficial to John, as shown by the context in (ii):

- (i) I envy John Bill's new Pontiac.
(ii) Bill lets John use all of his belongings freely; they're really the best of friends. *I certainly envy John Bill's new Pontiac--* he'll be able to use it all he wants.

A sentence such as (iii) requires no such context to be acceptable, though it does presuppose that having a new Pontiac is enviable for some reason.

- (iii) I envy John his new Pontiac.

both as to position and as to grammatical relation; in particular, it can be a subject in the complex NP, as in (4) above, and as in (5) and (6):

- (5) I envy John the way he can caress Sue during math class.
- (6) I envy John the fact that he always catches the most fish.

Also, it can be an object (of a verb or a preposition), as in (2) and (3) above, and as in (7) and (8):

- (7) I envy John the way Sue caresses him in public.
- (8) I envy John the gift which Sally gave (to) him for his birthday.

Furthermore, the coreferential NP can be at a considerable distance from NP₁:

- (9) I envy John the fact that there are lots of girls who are willing to volunteer to take care of him.

Despite this apparent freedom in the position and grammatical relation of this coreferential NP, even when the same verb is involved (compare (5) with (7)), there do exist sentence pairs that differ only in the position and grammatical relation of this coreferential NP but in which this difference matters for the acceptability of the sentences relative to each other. Consider, for example, the following:

- (10) a. I envy John the girl who he married.
b. ?*I envy John the girl who married him.
- (11) a. I envy John the fact that Betty could come up to him like that.
b. ?*I envy John the fact that he could come up to Betty like that.
- (12) a. I envy John the fact that he could go up to Betty like that.
b. ?*I envy John the fact that Betty could go up to him like that.

We must now consider the following question: Is there any way of explaining the contrasts of (10) through (12), or are they simply to be considered idiosyncratic facts about this *envy* construction?

In fact, there is an approach to explanation in syntax that allows for a straightforward characterization of the cause of these unexpected contrasts. It is the framework that has emerged in recent work, for example Kuno (1975), Kuno and Kaburaki (1975), and Kuno (1976), concerning the way in which *empathy* interacts with syntax. As defined by Kuno (1975, 321), the speaker's *empathy* refers to his

"attitude with respect to who, among speech event participants (the speaker and the hearer) and the participants of an event or state he describes, the speaker takes sides with". Three main principles govern the reflexes of empathy in syntax, as given by Kuno (1975, 321-322) and Kuno and Kaburaki (1975, 37):

(13) *Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci*

A single sentence cannot contain two or more conflicting foci of the speaker's empathy.

(14) *Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy*

It is easiest for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject; it is next easiest for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the object; . . . It is next to impossible for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the *by*-agentive:

Subject \geq Object \geq . . . \geq *By-Agentive*.

(15) *Speech-Act Participant Hierarchy*

It is easier for the speaker to empathize with himself (namely, to express his own point of view) than to empathize with someone else.

Thus, for example, passive sentences with first-person agents such as (16)

(16) ??Mary was hit by me.

are anomalous in isolation because "the speaker is expressing his own point of view (because it describes his own action), while he is empathizing with Mary rather than himself (because he has intentionally applied Passivization to elevate Mary to the topmost position, and to downgrade I to the lowest position in the Empathy Hierarchy)" (Kuno (1975, 322)). That is, there is a conflict between the empathy focus as defined in (14) and the one defined in (15)—it is this conflict that (13) is aimed at.

One final concept that is crucial to Kuno and Kaburaki's work on empathy is that of subject-oriented and object-oriented expressions. These are phrases that are oriented toward a particular NP (subject or object) in their empathy focus; that is, they force the speaker's empathy onto the subject or object. One such expression is the verb *marry*, for *X marry Y* is oriented toward X in its empathy focus, as shown by the oddness of (17a) compared to the acceptability of (17b):

(17) a. ??Mary married me on June 1, 1975.

b. I married Mary on June 1, 1975.

(17a) is odd because it violates the Ban on Conflicting

Empathy Foci (13); *marry* is subject-oriented, so only when the first-person pronoun, which refers to the speaker and thus is highest on the Speech Act Participant Hierarchy (15), is in subject position will the sentence be wholly well-formed. Similar expressions are the subject-oriented *go up to* and the object-oriented *come up to*:

- (18) a. I went up to John and told him to leave.
 b. ??John went up to me and told me to leave.
 (19) a. John came up to me and told me to leave.
 b. ??I came up to John and told him to leave.

With these notions in mind, we can turn again to the *envy* sentences of (10) through (12). The contrasts evident there can be explained by the following principle

- (20) In the structure *envy* NP₁ NP₂, the NP in NP₂ that is coreferent to NP₁ must be in a position to receive the speaker's empathy.

where our previous definition of *empathy* is operative, and subject to the principles in (13) through (15). This principle (20), along with the other empathy principles, explains the anomalous sentences of (10) through (12), which are repeated here:

- (10) b. ??I envy John the girl who married him.
 (11) b. ??I envy John the fact that he could come up to Betty like that.
 (12) b. ??I envy John the fact that Betty could go up to him like that.

In (10b), the coreferential NP is the object of the subject-oriented verb *marry*; therefore, it is not in a position to receive the speaker's empathy. Essentially what has happened is that (13), the Ban on Conflicting Empathy Foci, has been violated because the coreferential NP should receive the empathy; but instead the referent of *the girl*, the relative pronoun *who*, is the focus of the speaker's empathy. Similarly, in (11b), the coreferential NP is the subject of the object-oriented expression *come up to*, and in (12b), that NP is the object of the subject-oriented expression *go up to*; hence, in neither sentence is it in a position to be the focus of the speaker's empathy.

Thus the apparent idiosyncratic behavior of (10) through (12) can in fact be accounted for in terms of the principles governing the interaction of empathy with syntax. This in itself offers rather convincing support for the correctness of this functional approach to explanations of some apparently syntactic phenomena. And this support can be made even stronger, for the functional analysis of *envy*

predicts that any *envy* sentence of this type will be odd to some degree if the coreferential NP is not in a position to receive the empathy focus. Thus any expression that is not neutral with regard to its empathy focus should produce results similar to those of sentences (10) through (12). This, in fact, turns out to be the case.

Although the judgments are somewhat delicate, the contrasts that are predicted by the empathy principles for simple sentences are found also in *envy* sentences, for the appropriate expressions. For example, the phrase *X run into Y*, in the sense of 'encounter', is subject-oriented, so that (21a) is odd compared to (21b), as a result of the conflicting empathy foci:

- (21) a. ??John ran into me on the street yesterday.
b. I ran into John on the street yesterday.

We see then that principle (20) plus the empathy principles predict the contrast in (22); for, as object of *run into*, the coreferential NP will not be in a position to receive the speaker's empathy:

- (22) a. ??I envy John the girl who ran into him on the street yesterday.
b. I envy John the girl he ran into on the street yesterday.

Similarly, the expression *X's package from Y* is oriented toward *X* in its empathy focus, whereas *Y's package to X*, which describes the same event, is nonetheless oriented toward *Y*. Consider the following example:

- (23) a. ?Mary's package to me arrived just in time.
b. My package from Mary arrived just in time.

Again, given the nature of these expressions, principle (20) makes the correct prediction regarding the sentences of (24):

- (24) a. ?I envy John Mary's package to him.
b. I envy John his package from Mary.

Furthermore, principle (20) predicts that the coreferential NP in the NP₂ of *envy* sentences cannot be the agent in a passive sentence, because that position is not conducive to receiving the speaker's empathy, according to the Surface Structure Empathy Hierarchy (14). The unacceptability of sentence (16) with a first-person agent was explained along these lines. This prediction is borne out by the data, as shown by the following contrasts:

- (25) a. I envy John the fact that he discovered helium.

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- b. *?I envy John the fact that helium was discovered by him.
- (26) a. I envy John the nice clothes he buys.
b. *?I envy John the nice clothes that are bought by him.

It is important here that the NP in the *by*-phrase be unstressed; when it is stressed, as for example in contrastive situations, *envy* sentences in which a *by*-phrase contains the coreferential NP are acceptable:

- (27) I envy John the fact that it is students trained by him who get all the good jobs, while mine have to work in banks.

This fact, however, does not run counter to principle (20), for stressed NPs in *by*-phrases in general fall outside the scope of the empathy principles. Thus a first-person agent, when stressed, does not produce an anomalous sentence (compare (16)):

- (28) It is students who are trained by me who get all the good jobs.

The explanation given here for the contrasts of (10) through (12) therefore has strong predictive power. No other analysis that I am aware of gives as uniform an account of all these facts and is further able to make such predictions. The fact that this analysis makes crucial use of the concept of *empathy focus* is thus to be considered strong justification for the inclusion of this notion in linguistic theory.

References

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