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is to be deletion

to be deletion ?

richard m saenz

The rule of to be Deletion is a minor syntactic rule proposed to relate pairs of sentences such as the following:

1. a. I found Agnew to be boring.
 b. I found Agnew boring.
2. a. Humphrey considers Carter to be his major stumbling block.
 b. Humphrey considers Carter his major stumbling block.

The rule is meant to apply after Raising has applied for a class of Raising verbs which must be idiosyncratically marked for the rule. Borkin (1974) presents an excellent discussion of the rule's semantic and pragmatic effects; I should like to offer some reasons for believing that it cannot be a rule of syntax. The question, as with all deletion rules, is whether the supposedly deleted element was ever present in deep structure. I will discuss two cases which suggest that it was not.

Since to be Deletion must follow Raising, it must apply on the cycle of the Raising verb. Therefore the deleted to be would still be present on the cycle of the raising verb complement, and we would expect there Insertion to be able to apply on that cycle. However, we see in (3) and (4) that it cannot:

3.
 - a. John_i wants a man to be on the corner throughout the night.
 - b. John wants a man on the corner throughout the night.
 - c. John wants there to be a man on the corner throughout the night.
 - d.*John wants there a man on the corner throughout the night.
4.
 - a. NBC reported a revolution to be in progress in central Spain.
 - b. NBC reported a revolution in progress in central Spain.
 - c. NBC reported there to be a revolution in progress in central Spain.
 - d.*NBC reported there a revolution in progress in central Spain.

The fact that there Insertion cannot apply in the complement suggests that be is not present on that cycle. Since it cannot yet have been deleted by to be Deletion, this suggests that it was never in fact present.

The second argument involves the analysis of idioms which claims that the elements of an idiom are lexically inserted in deep structure all at one time (cf Jackendoff, 1975). Thus, a sentential idiom containing the verb be will necessarily contain it in deep structure. We see below that such verbs cannot be deleted in the context under discussion:

5.
 - a. Nixon expected the cat to be out of the bag by noon.
 - b.*Nixon expected the cat out of the bag by noon.
6.
 - a. Wood now considers the fat to be in the fire.
 - b.*Wood now considers the fat in the fire.
7.
 - a. Martha found the jig to be up.
 - b.*Martha found the jig up.

Notice, though, that these verbs can undergo other deletion rules:

8.
 - a. Steelworkers are revolting in Chicago and a storm \emptyset brewing in Gary.
 - b. Dean was on the stand Monday, and the cat \emptyset out of the bag by Thursday.
 - c. The jig is up and all bets \emptyset off.
9.
 - a. With the cat \emptyset out of the bag, we're all in trouble.
 - b. With the fat \emptyset in the fire, . . .
 - c. With the cards \emptyset on the table, . . .

We have seen that (a) there Insertion cannot apply to the structure in question when the verb be does not appear on the surface, and (b) when the verb be is necessarily generated, it must appear on the surface. These facts can be explained if we assume that, rather than a rule of deletion, the occurrence or non-occurrence of be on the surface is the result of optional generation in the base. The only theory I know of which allows

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for this is discussed in Langacker (1975), but it is far from universally accepted.

Finally, I would like to mention that if the above suggestion is correct, it casts serious doubt on a Passive transformation which inserts be, since in these constructions, the passive be optionally occurs:

10. a. I want some progress to be made on this proposal.
b. I want some progress made on this proposal.
11. a. The DA found his star witness to be terrified by the prospect
of testifying.
b. The DA found his star witness terrified by the prospect of
testifying.

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