‘Easy’-Class Adjectives in Old English: A Constructional Approach

Author(s): Yook-Suk Chung and David Gamon

Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society: General Session and Parasession on The Role of Learnability in Grammatical Theory (1996), pp. 58-70

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/>.

The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

'Easy'-Class Adjectives in Old English: A Constructional Approach*

Yoon-Suk Chung and David Gamon
UC Berkeley

1. Introduction

Beginning with a treatment by Lees some 35 years ago, the status of sentences such as (1) and (2) has been a matter of considerable dispute in the transformational-generative tradition.

- (1) It is easy to please John
- (2) John is easy to please

A point of particular contention has been whether such sentences are to be viewed as semantically equivalent and transformationally related.

It has been observed that Old English (OE) has constructions parallel to those in (1) and (2); these are shown in (3) and (4).¹

(3) IC:

us is earfoðe to secgenne þa selcudān mæroða...
us-DAT is difficult to tell the little-known wonders
'(It) is difficult for us to relate the little-known wonders...'
(ÆHom M 14 (Ass8) 15)²

(4) TCC:

þas þing synt earfoðe on Englisc to secganne
these things are difficult in English to say
'These things are difficult to say in English'
(ByrM 1 (Crawford) 76.9)

Note that in (3), the predicative adjective earfoð 'difficult' has no nominative NP in its valence; the sentence-initial NP us 'us' is dative, and codes the experiencer of the difficulty predicated by earfoð; the clause to secgenne þa selcudān mæroða 'to relate the little-known wonders' is straightforwardly interpreted as the notional subject of the predicate earfoð. In (4), meanwhile, þas þing 'these things' is nominative, and triggers agreement with the verb synt 'are'; this matrix subject corresponds notionally to the object of the embedded verb to secganne 'to tell'.

In this paper, we will refer to data such as (3) as examples of the impersonal construction (IC), and to data such as (4) as examples of the 'tough' coinstantiation construction (TCC); when we want to refer to both types collectively, we will refer to 'tough' constructions (TCs). We will refer to adjectives which figure in the TCC as 'tough' predicates.

In a series of analyses of TCs in OE, van der Wurff (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b) has argued that, given their apparent truth-conditional equivalence, TCC and IC examples share a common derivational source to the extent that neither assigns a theta-role to the matrix subject position. In other words, (4) is proposed to derive from a source resembling (3) by a process of NP-movement, much like passive.

We would like to suggest that a more satisfying and unified analysis may be achieved by giving a central role to data elsewhere marginalized or even dismissed

as irrelevant to an understanding of the TCC. The kind of data we have in mind is illustrated in (5):

- (5) seo burg wæs ... swiðe fæger an to locianne
 the fort was ... very fair on to look
 'The fortress was very pretty to look upon' (Or 2 4.74.11)

Van der Wurff (vdW) considers examples like (5) to bear nothing more than a superficial resemblance to examples like (4). He justifies this view by pointing out that the embedded gap may correspond to a prepositional object with fæger and several other adjectives, resulting in preposition-stranding as in (5). With earfoð and certain other adjectives, on the other hand, any gap apparently must correspond to an accusative argument, as in (4).

In our analysis, by contrast, (5) transparently encodes the canonical semantics by which examples such as (4) are to be interpreted. Instead of viewing (4) and (5) in terms of fundamentally different predicate-types and essentially unrelated abstract structures, we view predicates such as fæger and earfoð as most naturally selecting stimulus arguments at different positions on the semantic continuum illustrated in (6), which in turn corresponds to different degrees of preference for participation in the TCC or IC.

(6) Stimulus types selected by 'tough' predicates

----->		
NP-type		Sentential-type
<u>fæger</u> 'pretty'	<u>wynsum</u> 'charming'	<u>lang(sum)</u> 'long'
<u>hluttur</u> 'clear'	<u>egeslic</u> 'dreadful'	<u>eað</u> 'easy'
<u>glæd</u> 'bright'	<u>wundorlic</u> 'wondrous'	<u>earfoð</u> 'hard'
<u>lustbær</u> 'delightful'		<u>god</u> 'good'
<u>myrig</u> 'pleasant'		

We will further argue that examples like (4) display a restriction on what may function as subject which is interpretable as the very sort of restriction associated with the assignment of a theta-role to the subject position.

We also disagree with vdW's interpretation of the facts of preposition-stranding in terms of a fundamental structural distinction between examples such as (4) and (5). Rather, the facts of preposition-stranding follow from different coinstantiation constraints imposed by different matrix predicates appearing in one and the same construction.

2. Analyses of van der Wurff and Demske-Neumann

We first present two formally-oriented analyses of OE TCs, those of vdW and Demske-Neumann (1994).

In the context of a GB-oriented analysis, vdW attempts to provide a structural motivation for the fact that one and the same predicate, e.g. earfoð 'difficult', may occur in either of the TCs. The first fact of relevance here is that, if we restrict our attention to a subset of predicates consisting of 'easy', 'difficult', and a handful of other semantically similar adjectives, TCC shares certain features with passive. For example, the nominative NP is invariably co-constructed with a 'gap' corresponding to an accusative argument, never to an oblique of any kind,

including prepositional objects. In OE passive, too, only accusatives may be 'promoted' to subject position. Thus, preposition-stranding is never attested with the OE passive. Unattested examples illustrating a violation of these constraints are presented in (7) and (8).

- (7) *seo worulde is eaðe on to wunigenne
the world is easy in to live
'The world is easy to live in'
- (8) *seo worulde wæs on gewunode
the world was in lived
'The world was lived in'

This parallelism, to vdW, implies a deeper structural parallelism between the passively-inflected verb and the so-called inflected to-infinitive embedded under the 'tough' predicate.

Recall the GB treatment of passive: the structural motivation for the movement of the embedded object NP to subject position is that the passive form of the verb, while assigning a theta-role to its internal argument, lacks the ability to assign structural case. This motivates movement of the internal argument to the thematically empty subject position, where it receives structural case from INFL.

For the TCC, vdW proposes that 'tough' predicates such as eaðe 'easy' may embed either of two types of clausal complement: a full S' complement, as in (9), or a reduced S complement lacking an INFL node, as in (10).

- (9) nis me earfoðe [_S to geþolianne þeodnes willan]
not-is me-DAT difficult to endure lord-GEN will
'(It) is not difficult for me to endure the Lord's will.'
(Guth A,B 1065)
- (10) þes traht is langsum eow [_S to gehyrenne]
this exposition is long you-DAT to hear
'This exposition is long for you to hear' (ÆCHom II, 41 308.138)

If the complement is S', the embedded verb case-marks its internal argument and no movement results. If the complement is S, the absence of an INFL node is claimed to prevent the verb from assigning case; the internal argument must therefore move to the thematically empty matrix subject position.

The most obvious problem with this analysis is the absence of any evidence for the structural distinction at issue, that is, between S' and S embedded complement clauses, apart from the single overt contrast which that distinction is meant to motivate.

In addition, vdW's approach to TCC examples, requiring as it does that the matrix subject position be thematically empty, necessitates a completely different analysis for any adjective-plus-infinitive collocation that shows any evidence for a thematically contentful subject position.

Demske-Neumann (DN), in a recent detailed historical study of English and German, offers an account by which the TCC arises diachronically out of the IC by a process of reanalysis of a topicalized embedded object as formal subject of the matrix predicate. This coincides with the reanalysis of the embedded infinitive from a verbal to an adjectival constituent; since adjectives can't assign structural case, movement to the thematically empty subject position satisfies the case-marking

requirement of the embedded internal argument, much as in vdW's account.

The problem, however, is that the facts fail to support DN's account in any way. Given her scenario, we would expect to find in OE examples of unambiguously non-nominative topicalized NPs corresponding to embedded objects. However, we do not, and she fails to provide any. Rather, any fronted dative nominal invariably corresponds to the matrix experiencer, not the embedded object, as in (3).

Another problem is that her analysis, like vdW's, implies the irrelevance of examples such as (5) in which the subject position seems transparently semantically contentful. In this respect, DN's analysis is similar to vdW's, although the details differ considerably. DN argues that, since we have nothing but negative evidence that a predicate such as *fæger* could *not* appear in the IC, even predicates which, like *fæger*, are unattested in that construction are to be assumed to have developed a TCC use out of an IC use.

3. Our analysis

3.1 'Pretty'-type predicates

The canonical examples of the TCC feature those matrix predicates which exclusively appear in this construction-type as opposed to the IC type, and are as in (11-15):

- (11) *fæger* 'pretty' (see (5))
- (12) *þa sæ þe ær wæs ... glæshlutru on to seonne*
the sea that earlier was clear.as.glass on to see
'The sea which earlier was...clear as glass to look upon' (Bo 6.14.11)
- (13) *...þeah heo ær gladu wære on to locienne*
though she before bright was on to look
'...though it [the sea] had just before been bright to look at' (Bo 6.14.12)
- (14) *þæs word sind lustbære to gehyrenne*
these words are delightful to hear
'These words are delightful to hear' (ÆCHom I, 8 130.15)
- (15) *hwiltidon heo is gesundful and myrige on to wunienne*
at times she is prosperous and pleasant on to live
'At times it [the world] is prosperous, and pleasant to live in'
(ÆCHom I, 12 182.33)

In these examples, the matrix nominative subject instantiates a stimulus, while the implicit experiencer is unexpressed. This subject coinstantiates the object of the embedded infinitive, which in (11-14) represents a stimulus. In (15), with *myrig* 'pleasant', the matrix subject coinstantiates an embedded prepositional object bearing a locative role.

3.2 'Good'-type predicates

Other examples, given in (16-18), display other roles in the embedded clause, such as content, source, or even temporal setting.

- (16) *seo menniscnes is wundorlic ymbe to smeagenne*
the incarnation is wondrous about to think
'The incarnation is wondrous to think about' (WHom 6 140)
- (17) *þa stanas sint ealle swiðe gode of to drincanne*

the stones are all very good from to drink
 'The stones are all very good to drink from' (Lch II(2) 64.3.2.)

- (18) he is eac god circan on to timbrane & eac scipes timber an to anginnan
 he is also good churches on to build & also ship-GEN timber on to begin
 'It [the sixth night's moon] is also good to build churches on and also
 to begin ship's timber on' (Prog 6.9 (Foerst) 6)

The predicates are semantically similar to those in (11-15) but nevertheless not fully canonical in a way we will explain in a moment. The only role-related restriction appears to be that the argument corresponding to the 'gap' be coherently conceptualizable as a stimulus with respect to the matrix clause. The adjunct-like status of the embedded infinitive is demonstrated by the fact that all these predicates are routinely used as predicative or attributive adjectives with no embedded infinitive:

- (19) þæs bec syndon swiðe rihtlice & fægre mid us
 these books are very righteous & beautiful with us
 'These books are very righteous and beautiful to us'
 (GDPred & 4(C) 42.329.8)
- (20) ...ac þe sæde swiðe lang spell & wundorlic
 but you told very long tale & wondrous
 '...but told you a very long and wonderful tale' (Bo 35.100.26)

What we are dealing with here, then, is a use marginally distinct from the regular predicative adjectival use but which features something extra--an elaborative adjunct clause which specifies the domain in which the predication holds. In some cases, e.g. (11-13), the predicate is already so specific in activating a visual domain that we can only imagine the elaborative adjunct clause to be largely redundant. With other predicates, such as 'good' or 'pleasant', the underspecification of the relevant domain results in a less redundant and, in this sense, less adjunct-like status for the embedded infinitival clause. Even with these predicates, however, use without an embedded infinitive is routine.

Some of these predicates differ from fæger and the other predicates in (11-15) in one important respect: they show some evidence of being predicable of a sentential subject. For example, (21-22) illustrate wundorlic 'wondrous', egeslic 'dreadful', god 'good', and wynsum 'charming' with a tensed that-clause or a pro-form referring to such a clause:

- (21) þuhte him þæt wundorlic and egeslic, þæt..
 seemed him-DAT that wondrous and dreadful that..
 'That seemed to him wonderful and dreadful, that...'
 (HomS 22 (CenDom 1 132))
- (22) eala þæt hit is god & wynsum þæt mon micelne welan hæbbe
 O that it is good & winsome that one many riches have
 'O! it is good and charming that one have many riches' (Bo 14.33.14)

One of these predicates, god 'good', also appears with an embedded infinitive, illustrated in (23):

- (23) hwilum bið god wærlice to miðanne his hieremonna scylda
 sometimes is good cautiously to hide his subjects' sins
 'Sometimes (it) is good cautiously to hide one's subjects' sins'
 (CP 21.151.8)

This, then, is the IC. We may understand the possibility of appearance in the IC in terms of less strict constraints imposed by the predicate on the nature of the required stimulus. While a specifically visual, physical stimulus-experiencer predicate like fæger is incompatible with the sort of abstract stimulus represented by a sentential subject, such a subject represents an acceptable stimulus with respect to a predicate such as 'good' or 'wondrous'.³

3.3 'Easy'-type predicates

Numerous examples of the IC are found when we move on to the predicates lang and langsum, both featuring a fair semantic range but provisionally translatable as 'long' or 'lengthy':

- (24) þeos race is swiðe langsum fulllice to gereccenne
 this exposition is very long fully to tell
 'This exposition is very lengthy to tell in full'
 (ÆLS (Julian & Basilissa) 139)

(24) illustrates the use of langsum in the TCC. In such examples, being 'long' or 'lengthy' is predicated of an NP coinstantiating a theme- or incremental theme-like object of an embedded predicate such as 'tell', 'number', or 'recount'. Given the inherent meaning of lang as 'long' with respect to space or time, we most frequently find lang predicated of or modifying such NPs as gebed 'prayer', spell 'story', or raçe 'narrative', i.e. temporally or spatially extended, frequently effected referents, as in (25):

- (25) ...sæde swiðe lang spell
 said very long story
 '...told a very long story' (Bo 35.100.26)
- (26) ...ac us is lang þæt eall to gereccanne
 but us-DAT is long that all to tell
 '...but (it) is lengthy for us to tell all that'
 (HomS 34 (PetersonVercHom 19)79)

(26) shows lang in the IC, with 'being long' or 'lengthy' selecting a sentential complement. The most satisfying translation into ModE seems to be one which straightforwardly conveys both the agentive and the bounded semantics of an accomplishment-type predication, e.g., for (26), 'It would take us a long time to tell all that.' We have no examples in which the sentential complement of lang(sum) is unbounded, e.g. intransitive with nothing but a locative-setting prepositional object, as in, say, 'is long to live in this world.'

Given that the embedded infinitive represents a bounded accomplishment-type predication, the subject NP in the TCC corresponds to the direct object of this predication, which would independently have lang(sum) felicitously predicated of it. Thus, 'is long to tell this story' entails the felicity of both 'this story is long' and

'this story is long to tell', and 'this story is long to tell' entails 'to tell this story is long'. It is, we think, significant that of all the adjectives in our collection and in the collection cited in vdW (1992a), none is distributed more evenly across the two constructions than lang(sum).

Thus far, our examples have included predicates such as fæger which vdW would exclude from his class of 'tough' predicates, as well as ones such as lang and langsum which he would include at least by virtue of their apparent restriction to coinstantiating a direct object. Fischer (1989:156), endorsing the view of such a bipartite division, points out that the 'pretty' group contains descriptive adjectives closely tied to the subject of the predicate. OE 'easy'-type adjectives, on the other hand, have what she calls 'a comment function... describ[ing] not just the subject but the combined activity of subject and infinitive'. We hope to have shown that such a clear segregation cannot be defended for the 'pretty'-type predicates.

What about the claim for the distinctness of an 'easy' class of predicates describing 'the combined activity of subject and infinitive'? Fischer offers (27) as an example of such a predicate, for which she claims that 'the selectional restrictions operating on the noun and adjective clash':

- (27) þa stanas ... bioð earfoðe to tedælenne
 the stones are difficult to divide
 'The stones ... are difficult to divide' (Bo. 34.92.22)

It is for adjectives semantically similar to earfoð that a 'movement' analysis has most often been proposed, and it is to this class that we now turn.

As a group, the predicates of the 'easy' semantic type display good distribution across both TCs; (28) and (29) illustrate uses with both the TCC and the IC:

- (28) þær is swyðe god eard, ac he is earfoðe us to begytenne
 there is very good earth but he is difficult us-DAT to get
 'The land is very good there, but it is difficult for us to obtain' (ÆHom 21 153)
- (29) nis eaðe to asecgenne þis landes earmða
 not-is easy to relate this-GEN land-GEN poverty
 '(It) is not easy to relate this land's poverty' (ChronE (Plummer) 1104.21)

There is one semantic feature which most clearly serves to group this class with lang as opposed to the 'pretty' class: all of the examples demand an intentional reading. In addition, a formal feature which serves to set off the 'easy' class of predicates from the 'pretty' class when occurring in the TCC is that the NP always coinstantiates what would be an accusative argument in the embedded clause.

Our explanation for these facts is as follows. First, the apparently invariable intentional semantics of the 'easy' examples is to be attributed to the matrix predicates themselves (eað, earfoð, etc.) rather than to either of the TCs, since, as we have seen, both the TCC and the IC are well attested with other predicates and with no semantics of intentionality. Consider the pair shown in (30) and (31), in which two forms of a verb meaning 'to see' are embedded under 'easy'-type and 'pretty'-type predicates respectively:

- (30) earðe is & wæter sint swiðe earfoðe to geseonne
 earth is and waters are very difficult to see
 'Earth and waters are very difficult to see' (Bo 33.81.2)
- (31) þa syndon swyðe fægere & lustsumlice on to seonne
 those are very fair & joyful on to see
 'Those are very beautiful and joyful to look upon' (Or 1 3.32.12)

Only with embedding under earfoð in example (30) do we get an intentional reading.

Next, we have to motivate the fact that only direct objects may be coinstantiated. Our explanation for this makes reference to three factors: one, the semantics independently associated with the TCC; two, the semantic feature of intentionality imposed by the 'easy'-type predicates; and three, the semantically-oriented conception of transitivity formulated in Hopper and Thompson (1980). We also presuppose the validity of those analyses, such as Plank (1981) and Fischer (1989), which attribute a transitivity-related semantic grounding to the OE case categories.

Recall that the TCC features a semantics whereby the adjective predicates a quality of the subject NP, with the embedded infinitive restricting the domain of that predication. The adjunct-like status of this embedded infinitive is directly correlated, holding contextual factors constant, with the degree to which the matrix predicate, or that predicate together with its nominative subject, already somehow activates the relevant domain. In the case of 'easy'-type predicates, the adjective is relatively underspecified with respect to that domain; all that it does specify is that the subject is 'easy' etc. with respect to some intentional act.

The insight which we feel to be relevant here is that direct objects, but not more peripherally-related arguments, are most appropriately conceptualized as the locus of the 'cost' of effort (in Nanni's (1978) terms) associated with an intentional act. If we interpret the 'cost' being 'logically' associated with the intentional act as a whole, then the direct object is most felicitously conceptualized as the metonymic representor of that intentional act. It is no coincidence, we contend, that a predicate which imposes high transitivity in one respect, that of intentionality, also imposes the requirement that the coinstantiated object argument be that which is prototypically associated with patient-like semantics. This, then, is expressed in the conventional restriction of coinstantiation to the direct object.

Another way of looking at this is to say that the more directly involved the non-subject participant is in the intentional act, the more the ease or difficulty of performing that act is perceived to be due to the nature of that participant. If an intentional act is experienced as exacting a high cost of effort, then the accusative argument is perceived as bearing responsibility for this cost to a greater degree than less directly involved arguments such as locative settings.

The restrictions placed on the coinstantiation relationship with 'easy'-type examples challenges the point of view that the subject position is semantically empty. Even if such examples are interpreted in terms of some kind of discrepancy between form and logic, there are principled restrictions on the kind of apparent logical discrepancy countenanced in the TCC with the 'easy' class of predicates--just as there are restrictions with the other predicates discussed here.

3.4. Construction Grammar representation

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{syn} \quad \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{cat} & \text{a} \\ \text{lex} & + \end{array} \right] \\ \text{sem} \quad \left[\dots \right] \\ \text{val} \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{ss} & \#1[] \\ \text{role} & \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{gf} & \text{subj} \\ \theta & \text{stim} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right], \\ \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{role} & \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{gf} & \text{obl} \\ \theta & \text{exp} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right], \\ \text{(fni)} \\ \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{ss} & \text{vp [to]} \\ \text{role} & \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{gf} & \text{comp} \\ \theta & \text{domain limitation} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{val} & \left\{ ([\text{cat p}] \ni) \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{ss} & \#1[\text{np}] \\ \text{role} & [\text{gf} \neg\text{subj}] \end{array} \right] \right\} \\ \text{(dni)} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right\} \end{array}$$

(33)

a.

inherit	TCC
sem	[int +]
val	{ [val { [role [gf obj]] }] }

b.

inherit	TCC
sem	[int -]

(32) represents the TCC. The upper left-hand corner represents that the adjective semantically heads the construction. The adjective takes three arguments in its valence, as represented in the curly brackets: the stimulus-subject, experiencer-oblique, and infinitival complement with a role of delimiting the domain of the predication relationship between the adjective and the matrix subject. The unification variable ' $\# 1$ $[]$ ' guarantees the coinstantiation of the matrix subject with a non-subject argument of the embedded verb, with the optionality of a prepositional governor of that non-subject indicated by parentheses. The fact that the oblique-experiencer induces a generic reading when omitted is captured by the ' $f(ree)$ $i(nstantiation)$ ' notation.⁵ The fact that the infinitival complement may be omitted under contextually-licensed construal is indicated by ' $d(efinite)$ $n(ull)$ $i(nstantiation)$ '.

Note that this abstract construction, which accommodates any 'tough' predicate, is 'bound' in the sense that it cannot license sentence tokens. It is inherited by two more specific constructions, (33a & b). In (33a), the [intentional+] semantic feature permits only those adjectives which impose a reading of intentionality on the embedded clause. This construction also restricts coinstantiation to a direct object in the embedded clause. (33b) accepts only those adjectives which fail to impose an intentional reading, and contributes no further coinstantiation restrictions than what is already indicated in the mother construction (32). In this way, the coinstantiation restriction exhibited by OE adjectives in the TCC is linked to the predicate's intentional semantics.

The IC is represented in (34), in which the subject of the adjective is specified as null, and the infinitival complement bears a stimulus role and is obligatorily expressed.

(34) Impersonal Construction

syn	[	cat	a	]
		lex	+	
sem	[	...		]
val	{	<div> <div>[</div> <div>ss</div> <div>[null]</div> <div>]</div> </div> <div> <div>[</div> <div>role</div> <div>[gf subj]</div> <div>]</div> </div>	,	
		<div> <div>[</div> <div>role</div> <div>[gf obl]</div> <div>]</div> </div> <div> <div>[</div> <div>θ</div> <div>exp</div> <div>]</div> </div>	,	
		(fni)		
		ss	vp [to]	
		role	[gf comp]	
			[θ stim]	
			]	
	}			

(35) represents the 'tough' predicate valence construction, which specifies that all 'tough' predicates have two arguments, with experiencer and stimulus roles respectively. Nothing so far would prevent any predicate matching this valence from appearing in either the TCC or IC.

(35) TOUGH Valence Construction

syn	[	cat	a	]
		lex	+	
sem	[	...		]
val	{	[role [θ exp]]	,	[role [θ stim]] }
lxm	TOUGH			

For example, [int -] 'good'-class predicates can appear in (33b) and (34), and [int +] 'easy'-class predicates can appear in (33a) and (34). However, recall that we need to prevent the unification of 'pretty'-class predicates with the IC. We handle this in construction (36).

(36) PRETTY Linking Construction

$$\text{val} \left\{ \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{ss} & \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{cat} & \text{n} \\ \text{max} & + \end{array} \right] \\ \text{role} & \left[\begin{array}{cc} \text{g}^f & \text{subj} \\ \theta & \text{stim} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \right\}$$

Given the specification that the predicate's subject bears a stimulus role, unification with the IC (which specifies a null subject) is blocked. No such linking construction is required for predicates of the 'easy' or 'good' class since the latter unify with both TCs.

4. Implications for Modern English

Finally, we would like to consider some of the implications of our analysis for ModE TCs. It is a well-known fact that, even with ModE examples of the TCC featuring a semantics of intentionality, there is no restriction of the coinstantiated argument to the direct object of the embedded verb.

- (37) a. He is difficult to get in touch with
b. This bridge is difficult to walk on

The formal restrictions argued in the context of OE to be motivated by semantics must, therefore, be considered within the context of the language involved. Recall that with respect to passive, too, ModE differs from OE in permitting a wider array of arguments to serve as input to promotion--despite the fact, as demonstrated by Rice (1987), that ModE passive remains sensitive to semantic transitivity. In the terms of our analysis, even though OE passive and the TCC are *not* coextensive in that the range of coinstantiated argument-types in the TCC is greater than the range of 'promotable' objects in passive, OE passive nevertheless featured a certain formal parallelism with the TCC with 'easy'-type predicates, and both constructions have changed in a somewhat parallel manner in that English has loosened its requirements on what counts as a 'transitive enough' predication to figure in both.

As a final comment, we would like to mention that we consider it gratifying to find in an early article of Bolinger's a kind of confirmation in a synchronic context of the insight into the TCs presented in a diachronic context here. In response to Lees' (1960) claim that 'He is hard to convince' is equivalent to, and shares a common derivational source with, 'It is hard to convince him', Bolinger comments:

For what we have here is, I think, another syntactic blend. The impersonal It is hard to convince him has wormed its way into the personal construction He is homely to look at, but not securely enough to permit a completely impersonal adjective to stand there as in *He is imperative to convince. It is no coincidence that the adjectives that do work in this position are ones that can as readily modify the subject as the action: He is nice to send = He is nice, Sending him is nice; He is all right to employ = He is all right, Employing him is all right....

(Bolinger 1961:373)

Bolinger's synchronic insight, that examples of the TCC with impersonal

counterparts are in fact interpreted in terms of the canonical semantics of a construction which is 'personal' in both its form and meaning, is, we hope to have shown, also a valid insight into the historical facts.

Endnotes

* The authors would like to extend their sincere thanks to Chuck Fillmore and Eve Sweetser for their insights into the subject matter investigated here, to Paul Kay for the preceding plus help in avoiding errors of logic and notation, and to Gary Holland for all of the preceding plus assistance beyond the call of duty in reducing a vast amount of material to a manageable size.

¹ OE also has a structure more closely parallel to (1), with *hit* 'it' appearing as formal subject. However, this 'it'-type construction has a marginal role in OE relative to its ModE formal analog: van der Wurff (1992a) counts 64 examples of the 'it'-type, as opposed to 465 examples of the IC, and 357 examples of the TCC.

² All citations feature the abbreviations used in Healey and Venezky (1980).

³ Intuitively, the non-visual-specific predicates *lustbær* 'delightful' and *myrig* 'pleasant' seem compatible with a sententially-coded stimulus. Lack of evidence for the participation of these predicates in the IC may be due to their infrequent overall attestation.

⁴ Due to space considerations, only the most crucial points of the notation are explained here; see Fillmore and Kay (to appear) for a more complete treatment.

⁵ The fact that the oblique experiencer coinstantiates the subject of the embedded clause would be handled by an independent abstract construction which licenses the object 'control' pattern in general.

REFERENCES

- Allen, Cynthia. 1980. Movement and deletion in Old English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 11.261-323.
- Bolinger, Dwight. 1961. Syntactic blends and other matters. *Language* 37.366-81.
- Demske-Neumann, Ulrike. 1994. *Modales Passiv und Tough Movement*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Fillmore, Charles and Paul Kay. To appear. *Construction Grammar*. Stanford: CSLI.
- Fischer, Olga. 1989. The origin and spread of the accusative and infinitive construction in English. *Folia Linguistica Historica* 8.143-217.
- Healey, A. di Paolo and R. L. Venezky. 1980. *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*. Toronto: Center for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto.
- Hopper, Paul and Sandra Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language* 56.251-99.
- Kay, Paul and Charles Fillmore. 1994. *Grammatical constructions and linguistic generalizations: the 'What's X doing Y?' construction*. Berkeley: University of California, MS.
- Lees, Robert B. 1960. Multiply ambiguous adjectival construction in English. *Language* 36.207-21.
- Nanni, D.L. 1978. *The 'easy' class of adjectives in English*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts dissertation.
- Plank, Frans. 1981. *Object cases in Old English: What do they encode?* Hannover: Technische Universität, MS.
- Rice, Sally. 1987. Towards a transitive prototype: evidence from some atypical English passives. *Berkeley Linguistics Society* 13. 422-34.
- Wurff, W. van der. 1987. Adjective plus infinitive in Old English. *Linguistics in*

the Netherlands 1987, ed. by F. Beukema and P. Coopmans, 233-42. Dordrecht: Foris.

_____. 1990a. The easy-to-please construction in Old and Middle English. Papers from the 5th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics, ed. by S. Adamson et al., 519-36. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

_____. 1990b. Diffusion and reanalysis in syntax. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam dissertation.

_____. 1992a. Another Old English impersonal: Some data. Evidence for Old English: Material and theoretical bases for reconstruction, ed. by F. Colman, 211-48. Edinburgh: John Donald.

_____. 1992b. Syntactic variability, borrowing, and innovation. *Diachronica* 9.61-85.