

"English *for* as a wh-phrase"

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1.

The English complementizers *that* and *for* are usually taken to be elements that are externally merged high in the CP area. Kayne (2008; 2010) has argued, on the other hand, that complementizer *that* is better analyzed, not as a complementizer, but as a relative pronoun akin to *which*.

In a relative clause structure like:

(1) the book which they were reading
which is a (complex - cf. Leu (2008; 2015)) determiner that originates, along with *book*, in argument position, subsequently raising to a high Spec position:

(2) they were reading which book -->
which book they were reading <which book>

Book is then raised to the position of the 'head' of the relative. (Alternatively, *book* is independently merged as the head of the relative and the instance of *book* that is sister to *which* is deleted.)

To say that *that* in relative clauses is akin to *which* is to attribute to a relative clause structure like:

(3) the book that they were reading
a derivation in which *that* starts out as a (complex demonstrative - cf. Leu (2007)) determiner, together with the noun *book*, in argument position, and then raises:

(4) they were reading that book -->
that book they were reading <that book> --> (raising of *book*)
book that <book> they were reading <that book>

In this derivation, *that* is not externally merged in a high (or low) sentential position, and in that sense is not a complementizer in the standard sense of the term.

In the work just cited, I proposed in addition, in a way that goes back in part to Rosenbaum (1967), that sentential complements are a subtype of relative clause structure, and therefore that the *that* that introduces sentential complements in English is also not a complementizer, but rather a relative pronoun (i.e. a determiner whose associated noun has been raised or deleted) in the sense of (4) (with the difference that in what we call sentential complements the head of the relative is usually silent).

2. The question now is whether English *for*, in its complementizer-like occurrences, is to be analyzed in a way parallel to *that*. Clearly *for* is not itself a determiner in the exact sense in which *that* and *which* are determiners. Yet *for* introduces both relative clauses and sentential complements in a *that*-like fashion:

(5) Books for people to read at home can be borrowed from the library.

(6) For there to be another meeting would not be a good idea.

Even if *for* is not itself a determiner, we can envision a derivation for (5) and (6) that substantially mimics those of (2) and (4) if we take *for* to be a subpart of a determiner:

(7) people to read [X for] books at home -->

[X for] books people to read <X for books> at home -->

books [X for] <books> people to read <X for books> at home

In (7) the (complex) determiner that corresponds to *that* or *which* is '[X for]'.

The silent X in (7) is arguably a silent counterpart of *what*, which I will represent, using capital letters for silence, as WHAT:

(8) books WHAT for people to read at home

Transposition to (6), abstracting away from the silent head noun, yields:

(9) WHAT for there to be another meeting...

The presence of WHAT here is modeled on the widely occurring *was für* of German (and other Germanic languages), as discussed, for example, by Leu (2008; 2015):

(10) Was für ein Buch liest du? ('what for a book read you')

English does not allow this:

(11) *What for a book are you reading?

though dialectal English (e.g. in New England) sometimes does, at least with splitting (of a sort also seen in other Germanic):

(12) What did you buy for a car this year?

and standard English has the perhaps related:

(13) What are you having for lunch today?

(14) We're having chicken for lunch.

(15) What does he do for a living?

(16) What do you do for internet access when you're up in the mountains?

(17) What do you take him for, anyhow?

Cf. the similarity between the following examples:

(18) *Lunch we're having chicken for.

(19) *A car we bought a BMW for.

3. That the language faculty is capable of making silent WHAT available as in (8) and (9) is supported by those varieties of Italian that allow:

(20) Cosa dici? ('thing you-say')

which is an interrogative sentence with no visible *wh*-word. An immediately natural analysis of (20) is:

(21) CHE cosa dici

with a silent CHE ('what'), parallel to the also possible:

(22) Che cosa dici?

Further support for the existence of silent WHAT comes from Chomsky's (1977) proposal to relate the two sentences collapsed into:

(23) Mary isn't taller than (what) she was five years ago.

by having all varieties of English contain a *what* in such comparatives. Some dialectal English allows *what* to remain overt, while standard English requires it to delete (be silent).

Another type of silent WHAT is found in Italian sentences like:

(24) Penso sia giusto. ('I-think it-is right')

in which there is almost certainly a silent complementizer-like CHE ('what'), parallel to the one seen overtly in:

(25) Penso che sia giusto.

A somewhat similar Dutch example (though interrogative, and limited to root sentences) mentioned by van Craenenbroeck (2010, 265) is:

(26) Heb je nou gedaan? ('have you now done' = 'what have you done now')
again with a silent counterpart of (Dutch) *wat*, much as in (21).

English allows neither (21) nor (26). Yet some English allows:

(27) The thing is, is we're not ready yet.

with *what* seems like a superfluous *is*. Massam (1999, 338) suggests, for sentences of this sort, the possibility of a silent operator:

(28) WHAT the thing is, is...

which would make the 'extra' *is* unsurprising.

English very likely also has silent WHAT in sentences like:

(29) Where do they live, do you think?

insofar as (29) has no plausible direct link to the in fact impossible:

(30) *I think where they live.

Rather, (29) recalls, apart from the silence of WHAT, 'partial-wh' sentences of the German type.

Another striking case of silent WHAT and the one closest to the proposal in this talk comes from Norwegian, as discussed by Lohndal (2010) (whose sect. 4.1 notices the resemblance to interrogative *was...für*). It involves exclamatives containing no overt *wh*-word or other degree word, such as:

(31) For en tulling han er! ('for a fool he is')

which Lohndal argues to contain an unpronounced/silent *wh*-phrase (WHAT), as in:

(32) HVA for en tulling han er!

a proposal supported in turn by the existence of an overt counterpart of WHAT/HVA in some Northern Norwegian dialects:

(33) Ka for en idiot han var! ('what for an idiot he was')

4. From the perspective of this talk, standard Norwegian exclamatives of the (31)/(32) sort are much like English complementizer *for* in (8) and (9). In both cases *for* is accompanied by a silent WHAT/HVA. In both cases a pronounced *what/hva* is impossible. (On the other hand, I am not aware of any English dialect that would mimic (33) in allowing a counterpart of (8) or (9) with overt *what*, perhaps it is the exclamative character of (33) that is at issue.)

Norwegian (31)/(32) contains a noun *tulling* ('fool') following *for* that is modified by 'HVA for' in the same way that German *ein Buch* is modified by *was für* in (10) and dialectal English *a car* by *what...for* in (12). But there is no comparable noun visible in (8) or (9), repeated here:

(34) books WHAT for people to read at home

(35) WHAT for there to be another meeting...

This is immediately clear for (35), in which *for* is followed by expletive *there*. In (34), *for* is followed by *people*, but *people* in (34) is an independent subject DP not modified by 'WHAT for'.

The parallelism between English (34)/(35) and Norwegian (32) would thus be strengthened if the English examples contained a noun following *for*, too, as in:

(36) books WHAT for NOUN people to read at home

(37) WHAT for NOUN there to be another meeting...

In the first of these, the identity of the silent noun must be that of the head of the relative:

(38) books WHAT for BOOKS people to read at home

In the second of these, we might, thinking of Kayne (2008; 2010), think of:

(39) FACT WHAT for FACT there to be another meeting...

with a silent FACT as the head of the relative. This is particularly plausible for cases like:

(40) For John to have said that in public is absolutely unbelievable.

which are close to:

(41) (?)The fact that John should have said that in public is absolutely unbelievable.

(For irrealis cases like (39), one might consider POSSIBILITY in place of FACT.)

5. Taking what we call complementizer *for* to in fact be the one visible piece of a 'WHAT for FACT/POSSIBILITY' phrase, i.e. not to be a complementizer at all in anything like the standard sense of the term, leads to questions concerning certain properties of this *for* that I will now turn to.

Before doing that, let me just note that taking complementizer-like *for* to be (part of) a wh-phrase may allow linking the absence of such a *for* in Germanic languages other than English to the apparent absence in those languages of infinitival relatives containing an overt wh-phrase. The relevant fact is that only English, among the Germanic languages, seems to allow infinitival relatives like *a chair on which to sit down*. (Infinitival interrogatives like *We don't know which chair to use* are also absent from many Germanic languages, though present in Alemannic, without *zu* - cf. Brandner (2005).)

From this perspective, it must be the case that neither Dutch *om* nor German *um* in introducing infinitives corresponds to *for* (why and how *om* and *um* differ from each other needs to be looked into). They might instead correspond to one or another piece of the *in order* part of phrases like *in order for there to be another meeting*. (Romance complementizer-like *de/di* probably does not correspond to *for*, either, despite Romance languages often allowing infinitival relatives with an overt wh-phrase.)

Returning to the questions raised by the present analysis of *for*, one property that I have in mind has to do with the restriction of *for* to non-finite clauses:

(42) *a book for you can read

(43) *For John (will have) said that in public will be/is absolutely unbelievable.
This restriction, though, might best be formulated in another way:

(44) 'Complementizer' *for* is limited to appearing with *to*-infinitives.

This is so since *for* is excluded from gerunds, even though gerunds are non-finite:

(45) *For having another meeting would be a good idea.

and since *for* is excluded from introducing infinitives without *to*:

(46) a room for there *(to) be a meeting in

(47) The cold weather is making (*for) John feel sick.

as well as being excluded from introducing small clauses as in:

(48) They want (*for) you here by noon tomorrow.

The question now arises as to why (44) might hold. From the present perspective what comes to mind is the possibility that infinitival *to* plays a key role in licensing silent WHAT (which may be absent in (14), as well as in *?I was hoping for it back by next week*). If so, then (38) and (39) should perhaps be revised to:

(49) books for BOOKS people WHAT to read at home

(50) FACT for FACT there WHAT to be another meeting...

reflecting a derivation in which 'WHAT for BOOKS' and 'WHAT for FACT' would have passed through a licensing position associated with *to* before (stranding WHAT and) reaching their final landing site.

The next question would be why this English WHAT needs to be licensed by *to*, specifically (even in Belfast English, it appears - v. Henry (1995), who notes that a minority type of Belfast English has *I don't know where for to go* - perhaps with a non-interrogative WHAT and/or to partial wh). Possibly, there is some link to the fact that in non-finite contexts English wh-phrases require *to*:

(51) They have no idea what *(to) do.

(52) *They have no idea what doing.

(The fact that, unlike ordinary wh-phrases, 'WHAT *for*' is not possible in a finite context might be linked to the distribution of PRO.)

By taking *for* to be associated with WHAT, there also arises the possibility of a link between the absence in non-English Germanic of a complementizer-like *for* followed by a lexical subject, on the one hand, and the absence in non-English Germanic of infinitival relatives with an overt wh-phrase, on the other. (There is a point in common here with Sabel (2015); there might also be a link to English having *of* in *a pound of apples*, vs. other Germanic, in particular if *of* is or can be complementizer-like, as suggested by *that way of behaving*.)

The preceding suggested linkage amounts to saying that English *to* can act as a licenser for wh-phrases in a way that counterparts of *to* in other Germanic languages cannot. As for why that might hold, there might be a link in turn to the fact that within Germanic only English verbs show no infinitival suffix of any kind. (These comparative considerations support taking ECM of the *want*-type, which is also limited to English, within Germanic, to depend on a silent FOR.)

6. Taking 'complementizer' *for* to have an analysis as in (38) and (39) (or as in (49) and (50)), in which *for* is (part of) a modifier of BOOKS/FACT, makes it difficult to see how *for* could be Case-licensing the infinitival subject in the way that is standardly

assumed. (Landau (2006, 159) had cast doubt on that licensing for different reasons; cf. also McFadden (2012).)

The facts of English pronominal Case morphology do not provide support in any simple way for a Case-licensing role for *for*. But before getting into those facts, let me digress briefly to reflexives. Expectations would not be clear if *for* did assign accusative/objective Case to the following infinitival subject. Whereas if that infinitival subject is assigned nominative (in whatever fashion), we would certainly expect, thinking of Italian aux-to-C as in Rizzi (1982, chap. III), that a reflexive would be impossible as infinitival subject. To my ear, in particular if one controls for stress, and especially if one uses inanimates à la Charnavel and Sportiche (2016), a reflexive is in fact unacceptable:

(53) That table is (much) too heavy for it(*self) to be lifted by just one person.

(54) ?That new regulation allows for it(*self) to be disregarded in certain exceptional cases.

That the subject of a *for*-infinitive might have nominative Case is also supported by the fact that nominative forms of subject pronouns are sometimes moderately acceptable, as in:

(55) ?For John's son to lift that heavy box would be a lot easier than for he to. (With '...than for he/she/we/I to', examples can be found on Google.) In addition, I find a contrast with:

(56) *For John's son, lifting heavy boxes is easier than for he.

In other words, the (partial) availability of the nominative form in (55) is keyed to the infinitival structure, not simply to the presence of a *for*.

Furthermore, if *for* were really Case-licensing the following infinitival subject, one might expect the (colloquial) reduced form of the pronoun to be as acceptable as it is in:

(57) I bought it for them/'em yesterday.

Yet, at least for me, the following holds:

(58) For them/*'em to get the prize would really upset us.

Having a nominative subject of an infinitive is of course well-known from Italian aux-to-C sentences. Closer to English, West Flemish allows them in some cases, as discussed by Haegeman (1986). Other non-finite clauses also sometimes to some extent allow nominative subjects, e.g.:

(59) ?John is really angry at Mary, what with she having criticized his work in public like that.

Again there is a contrast with non-clausal cases:

(60) *John is really angry with/at she.

The standard view that *for* licenses objective Case on the following subject rests to a large extent on the fact that a pronominal subject preceded by *for* can always have the objective Case form. Yet we know, going back to Klima (1964), that contrasts like *he* vs. *him* in English do not match nominative vs. accusative/objective in any simple way, at least for many speakers:

(61) Of course that's me/*I.

Cf. also the colloquial:

(62) Him and his wife'll both be there.

I conclude that the possibility of the objective form in subject position, as in, say, (58) does not, in English, guarantee the presence of abstract objective Case (cf. Pesetsky and Torrego (2001, note 65)). If so, then (58) is compatible with *for* not Case-licensing the infinitival subject in English.

7. If *that* and now *for* are not complementizers in the classical sense, we need to ask why the language faculty would have turned its back on what seemed to be a straightforward analysis. Assume that Kayne (2013) is correct in arguing that projecting heads/labels are invariably silent. Then *that* and *for* could not be projecting heads at all. (Differing here from Pesetsky and Torrego's (2006) idea that *that* and *for* are (raised) instances of Tense, while agreeing with them that *that* and *for* are not instances of C.) But they could still, it would seem, be merged high in the sentential structure as Specs, preserving a substantial part of the original complementizer idea, going back to Bresnan (1972).

Consider, however, the following proposal:

(63) Spec positions in the CP phase (as opposed to the vP phase) cannot be filled by external merge.

If (63) is correct, then neither *that* nor *for* can be externally merged above vP at all.

In addition, if external merge to a Spec position within vP must yield "generalized argument structure", in Chomsky's (2008, 140) terms, then merging *that* or *for* alone into a Spec-within-vP position will almost certainly likewise be excluded. The only remaining possibility is to externally merge *that* or *for* within vP as part of a larger phrase (such as 'WHAT for NOUN'), as in the analysis sketched above.

The proposal in (63) is of course compatible with wh-movement and with focus movement to a high Spec position in the CP area as in Rizzi (1997). It is also compatible with a movement analysis of left dislocated phrases; for these, a second possibility compatible with (63) is the sentential reduction approach of Ott (2014).

As it is stated, (63) is not compatible with externally merging adverbs into Spec positions above vP, as in the case of the high adverbs discussed by Cinque (1999). An alternative for *frankly* would be to look toward Ross's (1970) performative analysis, despite the challenge posed by the following contrast:

(64) *How frankly is John not very smart?

(65) How frankly are you saying to me that John is not very smart?

Possibly, the silence of 'YOU SAY TO ME' in (64) is incompatible with wh-movement of the adverb.

For *unfortunately*, one might, thinking of (27)/(28) above, relate the following two sentences:

(66) Unfortunately, you're late.

(67) The unfortunate thing is, (is) you're late.

in which case, in a way partially similar to Ott (2014), *unfortunately* would not be in a high Spec position of the sentence *you're late* in (66) any more than *the unfortunate thing* is in (67). The impossibility of:

(68) *How unfortunately is he late?

might then (if *it* is kept aside) be related to:

(69) *How unfortunate a thing is, (is) he's late?

8. It is tempting to twin (63) with:

(70) Spec positions within the vP phase cannot be filled by internal merge. although this formulation is incompatible with Kayne (2002) on pronouns in general and with Hornstein (1999) on obligatory control. A revision compatible with both of these authors' proposals to allow movement into a theta position would be:

(71) Spec positions within the vP phase cannot be filled by local internal merge. (71) would require that 'local' be suitably defined; both (70) and (71) would require that objects not move from their initial merge position to a higher position that counts as being within vP.

Taken together with (63), either (70) or (71) enforces a kind of segregation between internal and external merge that recalls to some extent Chomsky's (2008, 140) discussion. The next step will be to ask why this specific sort of segregation should hold of the language faculty.

9. In conclusion, English *for* (like English *that*) is not a complementizer in the standard sense of the term. Nor, for principled reasons, could it be.

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