A Dynamic View of the English Inversion Construction:
A First Approximation

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0. Introduction

This paper is a first attempt to explain the English Inversion Construction like the latter clause of each sentence in (1), where the italicized adjective phrase makes comparative reference to something that has preceded, from a point of view of grammatical dynamism as proposed by Kajita (1977, 1997).

(1) a. His answer was a disgrace; *equally regrettable* was his departure immediately afterwards.

b. Her face was stony and *even stonier* was the tone of her voice.

((1) a-b: Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1381)

In this paper, making good use of Tajima (1992)'s data, we focus on arguing that this type of the Inversion Construction will be derivatively introduced into English grammar under a kind of Conformity Principle. This principle ensures that certain derivative structures (nonexistent at an earlier stage of language acquisition) will be newly possible based on the corresponding basic structures in order to avoid clumsy information structure and thus accomplish better communication.

From such argument we suggest the general statement that (English) syntax is not always autonomous and can be extended for certain information-oriented reasons.

1. Data

Tajima (1992: 4-12) divides the relevant construction, according to the function of inverted (fronted) adjectives, into the following four main types:
(A) Thematic adjectives in comparative forms:

(2) His patients eat sunflower sprouts dressed with papaya and lime, and crepes wrapped around a mixture of sweet potatoes, chickpeas, carrots and roasted onions, all prepared by chef Jean M. Fullsack, formerly of New York’s Lutèce restaurant. As important as the food, however, is the way his patients learn to relish it, .... (Tajima 1992: 5 )

(3) If these gifts were not given it was taken as a sure sign that the man wished to end the relationship. More important than these gifts was the collective responsibility of the group of husbands. (Tajima 1992: 6 )

(4) The second unresolved problem is inflation, which is running at about 4 percent. Most ominous are statistics that show wage gains .... (Tajima 1992: 7 )

(B) Thematic adjectives that express comparison in other forms:

(5) If the verb alone does not accomplish this, then it has to be fortified, .... Fairly common is the use of a verb that represents .... (Tajima 1992: 7 )

(6) ... the corresponding delays only 0.1 second. Particularly interesting are the data of the last subject. (Tajima 1992: 8 )

(C) Thematic adjectives with adverbial phrases that indicate a relation between what has been already stated and what will be stated:

(7) Similarly, Cutler (1976), in a somewhat different context, has argued for a two-stage model sentence comprehension .... Implicit in both these statements is the idea that .... (Tajima 1992: 9 )

(8) The locatives have been fronted for a smoother text because contained in the locatives are items of given information .... (Tajima 1992: 9 )

(D) Thematic adjectives alone that express contrast or specify what has preceded:

(9) “A word to the wise,” he said slowly, shaking an emphatic finger, “is infuriating.” We all laughed, because he had fooled us, and because he was so right. Infuriating is just what it is.

(10) “They both did a lousy job. The way they backed into the news, you’d think they were ashamed of the deal they’d made.” Shameful was hardly
the word, but the arms deal did leave open some important questions.


Basically along this classification by Tajima (1992), we can readily give to the data of (1)-(10) the following additional examples:

(11) a. Just as surprising was his love for clothes.
    b. Equally difficult would be a solution to Russel’s paradox.
    c. More important has been the establishment of legal services.
    d. Most embarrassing of all was losing my keys.

(11) a-d: Emonds 1976: 35)

(12) Happiest to see her was her mother. (Rochemont and Culicover 1990: 1)

(13) a. If we succeed in describing the domain(s) invoked by a predication, we have not yet finished its characterization. Equally significant for semantic structure is the conventional imagery inherent to an expression’s meaning. (Langacker, Ronald W. (1991) “Cognitive Grammar,” in F. G. Droste and J. E. Joseph, eds. (1991) Linguistic Theory and Grammatical Description, John Benjamins Publishing Company: 280)

b. Consider body-part terms. Essential to the characterization of expressions like head, arm, and leg is the position of the profiled entity relative to the body as a whole, whose conception thus functions as their domain and immediate scope of predication. (Ibid.: 283)

2. An analysis

Now it is time for us to propose a dynamic analysis of the English Inversion Construction like (1)-(13). In order to do so we would like to take (1b) for example and consider how the sentence (Her face was stony and even stonier was the tone of her voice.) will be possible at a certain stage of the acquisition of English grammar.

First of all, suppose that there is an early stage of language acquisition where only the Subject-be-Predicative word order is possible like (14):

(14) a. Her face was stony.
b. The tone of her voice was stony.

Next, suppose that at a later stage there occurs some necessity for combining (14a) and (14b) into one sentence from a comparative point of view, and that there might "appear" a hypothetical compound sentence like (15):

15. Her face was stony and the tone of her voice was even stonier.

However, we should notice that the latter clause of the sentence is clumsy from the viewpoint of information structure mainly because the tone of her voice (new information and focus) comes first and even stonier (given information and theme) comes last. In other words, this clause does not conform to the general principle that information is presented from given information to new information.

Exactly at this stage, in order to avoid such informational clumsiness and accomplish better communication under Conformity Principle (a principle concerning grammatical dynamism), we require that the Inversion Construction in question be derivatively and newly introduced into English grammar. In this way, we come to have the following derivative and new sentence:

16. Her face was stony and even stonier was the tone of her voice.

Note that this inversion is informationally unmarked while it is grammatically marked. That is, it has been additively possible as forming normal communicative dynamism at the sacrifice of its grammatical markedness, as suggested in Sasaki (1996: 202-205).

If this argument is valid, we will suggest that (English) syntax be not always autonomous and can be extended for certain information-oriented reasons.

3. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, we should point out some residual problems of our analysis.

First, it leaves open the question of whether the relevant inversion will be derived by stylistic rules, as in Chomsky (1981), or by grammatical rules from D-structure to S-structure, as in Rochemont and Culicover (1990). (For further information of these two possibilities, see Takami (1995).) Furthermore, there may be a third possibility. In any case it is necessary to explicate the mode of
deriving the Inversion Construction. Second, for true explanation, we should elaborate the notion of Conformity Principle and related mechanisms from a dynamic point of view. Third, to make our analysis more valid, it is also necessary to seek supporting evidence from language acquisition and English history.

Keeping these problems in mind, I would like to write a more elaborate and extended version of this paper in the future.
References


Kajita, Masaru (1977) “Towards a Dynamic Model of Syntax,” SEL 5, 4-76.


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要約

動的言語理論から見た英語の倒置構文：
一つの試論

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本小論は、(1)の各文の後半部分に見られるような英語の倒置構文に対し、動的言語理論の立場から一つの分析を試みるものである。このような倒置構文における斜字体で示された形容詞句には、先行する節に対して何らかの比較を述べるという特徴がある。

(1) a. His answer was a disgrace; equally regrettable was his departure immediately afterwards.
b. Her face was stony and even stonier was the tone of her voice.
（Quirk et al. 1985: 1381）

本小論では、このような倒置構文が、ある種の適合性の原理のもと派生的に英文法に導入されるということに焦点を当てて論じる。この適合性の原理とは、情報構造上の不自然さを回避してよりよいコミュニケーションを達成するために、一定の派生的な構文（それ以前の習得段階では存在していないもの）が対応する基本的な構文に基づいて新たに可能となることを保障するものである。

このような議論から、（英語の）統語構造は必ずしも自立的であるわけではない、情報構造に由来する動機づけによって拡張される可能性があることを示唆する。

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